

Between Ashes and Hope

Chittagong Hill Tracts in the Blind Spot of Bangladesh Nationalism



Between Ashes and Hope

Chittagong Hill Tracts in the Blind Spot of Bangladesh Nationalism

Edited by

Naeem Mohaiemen

Translations & Additional Editing

Hana Shams Ahmed

Farah Mehreen Ahmad

Jyoti Rahman

Tazreena Sajjad

Photo Editor

Zaid Islam



Drishtipat Writers' Collective

This anthology © 2010 Drishtipat Writers' Collective, Bangladesh.
All rights reserved.

Texts © the authors. Images © the photographers.
Unless otherwise noted.

Photographs

Shahidul Alam

Naeem Mohaiemen

Brian Palmer

Ittukgula (Shuvasish) Chakma

Wasfia Nazreen

Tanvir Murad Topu

Hana Shams Ahmed

Samari Chakma

Jannatul Mawa

Momena Jalil

Cover Photo: Naeem Mohaiemen

Cover Correction: Arifur Rahman

Graphics: Khayrul Hasan

ISBN: 978-984-33-1982-1

Drishtipat Writers' Collective

www.drishtipat.org/dpwriters

dpwriters@drishtipat.org

Printed by

Arka, Dhaka

Price

Bangladesh: BDT 350

Rest of the World: US\$ 18



Drishtipat is a non-profit, non-partisan volunteer organization committed to safeguarding human rights in Bangladesh through action-oriented projects that provide direct assistance to those individuals whose voices are unheard. Drishtipat Writers' Collective (DWC) is a subsidiary organization of Drishtipat, whose projects include the blog Unheard Voices (www.unheardvoice.net/blog).

মানুষের জন্ম
manusher jonno

promoting human rights and good governance

Manusher Jonno Foundation is mandated to work in solidarity with poor and marginalized people to help them in gaining more control of their lives as well as creating an environment where both duty bearers and rights holders feel responsible to fulfill their respective obligations.



Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Setting the Frame	7
The Other Shahid Minar – Saydia Gulrukh	9
We Also Want to Live – Jui Chakma	11
This Land is Your Land – Farah Mehreen Ahmad	13
Adivasis and the Monarchs' Mind – Dipayan Khisa	15
Once We Were Heroes – Tazreena Sajjad	17
Untitled – Samari Chakma	19
The Case of National Minorities – Anu Muhammad	21
Indigenous Struggle In CHT – Jenneke Arens & Kirti Nishan Chakma	23
Peace in Our Time? (1715-1997) – Sagheer Faiz & Naeem Mohaiemen	26
Connecting Visible Dots (1997-2010) – Naeem Mohaiemen	31
Betraying a Treaty	35
The Dream That Turned Into a Day – Den Doha Jolai Tripura	37
Solution Impossible if Accord Bypassed – Abhoy Prakash Chakma	39
Ten Wasted Years – Brig Gen (Retd) Shahedul Anam Khan	41
Promises Pending – Kajalie Shehreen Islam	43
Status of Implementation – Mangal Kumar Chakma	47
Between Ashes and Hope – Naeem Mohaiemen	49
An Unquiet Violence	51
Manush Bachao – Jyoti Rahman	53
Ominous Signs in the Hills – Brig Gen (Retd) Shahedul Anam Khan	55
Budhdhapudi Chakma – Audity Falguni	57
Fire on the Mountain – Zafar Sobhan	59
Bangladesh Erupts in Ethnic Violence – Pinaki Roy	61
The Mahalchhari Incident – Meghna Guhathakurta	63
A History of Unsolved Disappearances	67
We Will Not Let Them Forget You – Hana Shams Ahmed	69
My Sister's Language – Shahidul Alam	71
We Owe it to Kalpana Chakma – Khushi Kabir	73
Resistance Politics in the Hills – Meghna Guhathakurta	74
Silence is Emblem Of Our Ethnic Chauvinism – Manosh Chowdhury	77

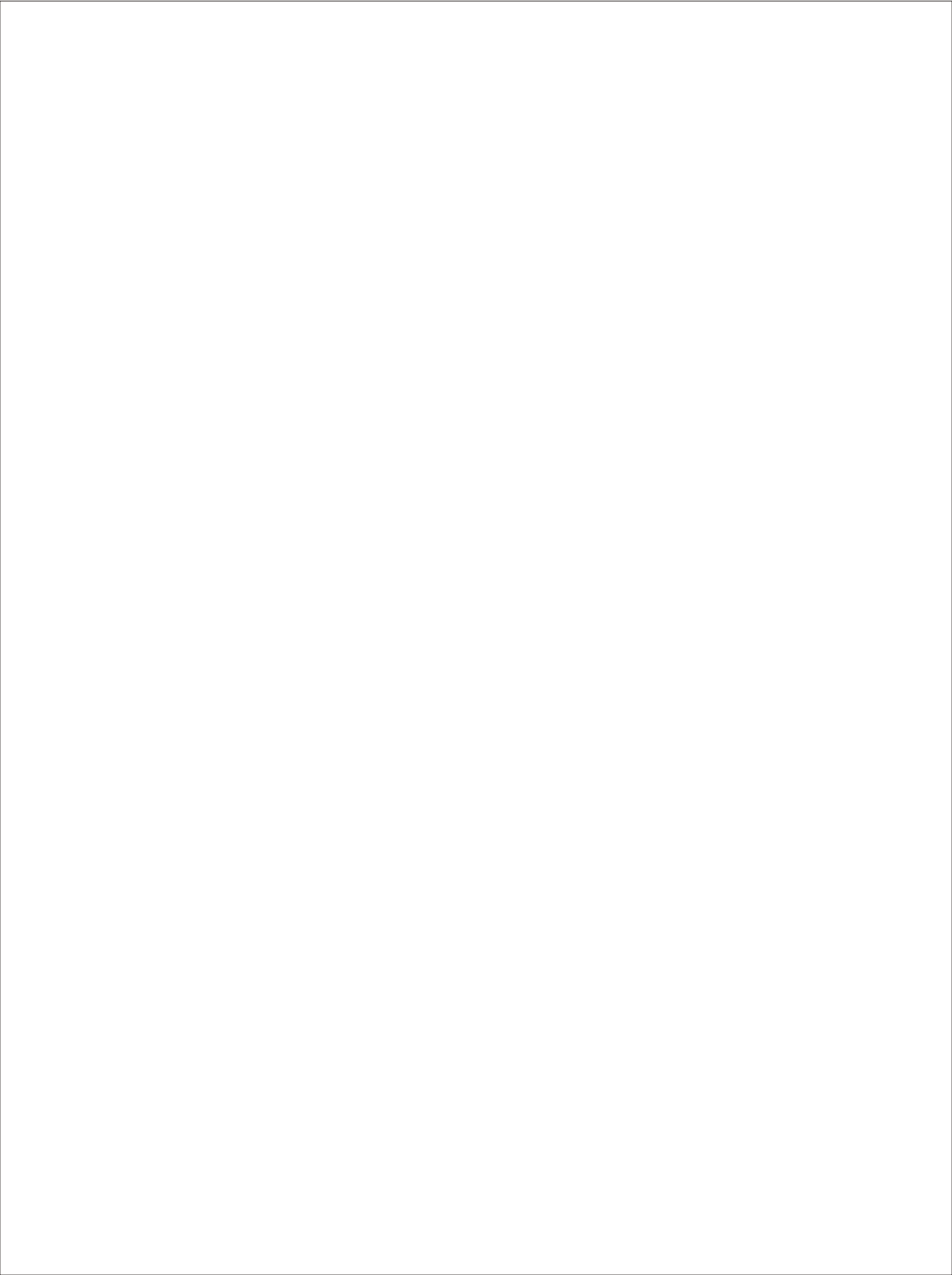
Collateral Damage of Development	79
Dammed or Damned? – Ainun Nishat & Mahfuz Ullah	81
Dams and Environmental Refugees – Saleem Samad	84
Indigenous People's Economy, Myths and Realities – Pradanendu Bikash Chakma	86
Impact of Development – Chandra Roy	89
Culture, Identity and Development – Prashanta Tripura	91
Politics of Development – Zobaida Nasreen & Masahiko Togawa	93
Collateral Damage of Development – Farida C. Khan	99
Whose Land is it Anyway	103
Land Survey, Last Nail in the Coffin – Priscilla Raj	105
UN Declaration and Land Crisis in CHT – Sontosh Bikash Tripura	107
Structural Roots of Violence in CHT – Bhumitra Chakma	109
Land Survey for Conflict Resolution? – Ashok Kumar Chakma	112
Resolving Land Disputes and Ethnic Conflicts – Shapan Adnan	114
What brings the IFC and MDBs to CHT Forests – Sudatta Bikash Tanchangya	120
Reserved Forests Complicate Land Issues – Philip Gain	122
Resisting Onslaught on Forest Commons in Post-Accord CHT – Devasish Roy	125
Settlers, Weapons of Mass Displacement	133
Broken Promises – Ziauddin Choudhury	135
Changing Context in the CHT – Meghna Guhathakurta	138
Righting a Historic Wrong – Air Commodore (Retd) Ishfaq Ilahi Choudhury	139
Nowhere People in Limbo	141
The Chakma Between Bangladesh and India – Deepak Singh	143
Migration and Indigenous Peoples – Binota Moy Dhamai	149
Displacement and Dislocation in CHT – Bina D'Costa	151
Trapped in Ekushey Paradox	155
Language Identity and State – Amena Mohsin	157
Matribhasha – Ilira Dewan	167
Languages Matter in Education – Mathura Bikash Tripura	169
Indigenous Language Maintenance – Arshi Dewan Roy	171
The Quota Debate – Jagaran Chakma	173
State of Education – Mong Shanoo Chowdhury	175

Invisibility, Violence and Erotic Fantasies	179
Women Invisible in CHT Accord – Chanchana Chakma	181
Insecurity of Indigenous Women – Sadeka Halim	183
Women in Hill Society – Ilira Dewan	190
Pristine "Fairies" and "Sexy Pahari Girls" – Biplob Rahman	192
Violence Against Indigenous Women – Ainoon Naher & Prashanta Tripura	194
"Terrorists" and Security Discourse	199
Political Problem Cannot be Viewed Through Military Lense – Faruk Wasif	201
Unidentified Terrorists in the Hills – Rahnuma Ahmed	204
Ethnically Singular Nationalist Narratives	207
Mass Media, CHT and Marginalization – Pavel Partha	209
Need for a Change in Perspective – Shaktipada Tripura	211
The Bengali Sense of Victimhood – Rahnuma Ahmed	213
Who Decides on Whose Identity? – Ashok Kumar Chakma	216
Ethnically Singular Nationalist Narratives – Rahnuma Ahmed	218
"Bangladesh Has No Indigenous People"	221
Identity Rights – Rupayan Dewan	223
Indigenous vs. Small Ethnic Group – Lelung Khumi	225
Who are Indigenous? – Aditya Kumar Dewan	227
ILO Conventions – Abhilash Tripura	229
Debating Zainal Abedin – Borendra Lal Tripura	231
De-colonising the National Imagination	235
Colonial Foundation of Pahari Ethnicity – Prashanta Tripura	237
Dulu Kumuri and Post-nationalist Histories – Kabita Chakma & Glen Hill	245
Using Architectural History to Invent a Nation – Kabita Chakma & Glen Hill	250
De-colonising the National Imagination – Rahnuma Ahmed	254
Author Biographies	263



Introduction





Editor's Note

At age fourteen, I was about the same height as the railing. The noise was tremendous, but over it, my uncle was giving a description of machinery. He had just been promoted to Brigadier and appointed chairman of Power Development Board; his engineer's curiosity was taken with hydroelectric power. I listened with attention – the machines were a technical marvel and I was dreaming of a science project back in school.

Until my father retired from Army Medical Corps, his postings were usually in Dhaka. Trips to Kaptai were not for work, but study tours or "nature trips", as members of an army family. Other thoughts didn't intrude: that we were at the edge of a civil war zone; or standing in a drowned world. This was 1983.

My high school years were a decade before the Accord. Jumma (Pahari) students were rare in the capital, and on the rare occasion of a sighting, classmates would call out, with the casual cruelty of youth, "*Eyy, Chinku.*" As I grew older, I started meeting Jumma activists, and I began visiting Chittagong Hill Tracts again, this time in their company, this time as a "civilian".

A chasm opened up: between the stories we grew up with, and the reality of the Jumma people's resistance movement. At home, there were arguments at the dinner table. I wondered if this was also a generational passage.

Why Hill Tracts, someone asked. *Deshe to onek shomoshya.* It's true, *deshe asholeo onek shomoshya.* But Chittagong Hill Tracts is the blind spot at the heart of Bengali (and Bangladeshi) nationalism. The bloody history of the hills delineates a continuing contradiction between our history of liberation from Pakistan (*Ekattur*), and our replication of that same hegemony (language, security, regional autonomy) on our Jumma citizens. Progressive Bengali activists present this conflict as linked only to a few post-71 regimes. But the reality, as documented in this book, is continuous expansion of an aggressive Bengali nationalism – one that encroaches, marginalises and displaces. A nation state that patronizes and brutalizes the "other" within its borders.

History is deleted and rewritten by victors. In 1997, the Jumma people's armed resistance came out of the jungle, surrendered weapons and demobilized. The other side, the Bangladesh state, did not fulfill their side of the agreement. Continued media agitprop about "insurgents", "miscreants", "foreign interference" and "who is indigenous" tries to drown out this reality with a wall of white noise. Confounding the contours of the conflict is the state strategy of using landless subaltern Bengali peasants as a weapon of ethnic displacement– a project that grants state actors the convenient shield of "both sides are landless" (even though only one side is backed by state funding, institutions and firepower).

Fabrications regarding the Jumma people's struggle are so insidious, they reveal the infrastructure and profit potential of Bengali racism. For some time now, we have been discussing the need to explore counter-narratives: Jumma voices, Bengali refuseniks, conscientious objectors. We hope this book will be one among many steps in that direction.

Naeem Mohaiemen, Drishtipat | naeem.mohaiemen@drishtipat.org

Publisher's Note

Drishtipat Writers' Collective (DWC) is a subsidiary organization of Drishtipat, a nonprofit, non-partisan volunteer organization committed to safeguarding human rights. Over the last few years, DWC has built up strong traction in Bangladesh.

The Collective's flagship 'new media' portal Unheard Voices (www.unheardvoice.net/blog) has been a leading Bangladesh-related blog. But DWC has been active in the traditional media as well, regularly producing journalistic and opinion pieces in leading Bangladeshi news media such as Prothom Alo, Daily Star, New Age, and BDNews24.com as well as international outlets such as The Guardian and Himal. DWC members also participate in current affairs programmes in local and international TV channels including Al-Jazeera, CNN and BBC. More recently, DWC has been functioning as an informal research organization, producing working papers and participating at conferences. Whether through the new media or more traditional channels, or by formal research papers or informal blog posts, DWC's focus is on creating a political, economic and social discourse that nurtures human rights in its broadest sense. That is, the Collective works towards a secular, democratic Bangladesh where even its most marginalised sections enjoy improved living standards.

In addition to generating articles by Collective members, DWC also attempts to "amplify" and highlight writing by other like minded researchers, journalists and columnists. For example, such write-ups are regularly featured in Unheard Voices. It is in this spirit of collective collaboration between DWC members and other progressive writers that this anthology is being published. Since the incredible outbreak of violence in Chittagong Hill Tracts in February of this year, the region has been thrust back into the national spotlight. It is gradually emerging in the national consciousness that a thirteen year old Peace Accord has not been implemented, and the indigenous people are still in extreme state of marginalisation. The mainstream discourse is grudgingly waking up to the very real risk that the culture of impunity and deprivation in the Hills can all-too-easily break into the plain land, threatening our very republic.

But this realisation also highlights the astounding level of misinformation present in the national rhetoric, as articulated in newspapers, television and radio. While there is excellent research on the region, it has mostly been circulated inside academia. Nuanced analysis on the region has been rare in the mainstream media. We felt it was important to assemble essays about CHT, in an easily accessible, widely available book. Lack of resources meant we could only include a small number of essays translated from Bengali. Hopefully that, and translating from various Jumma languages, can be taken up by other researchers and activists.

We want to see the Hills fully integrated into Bangladesh. We believe full implementation of the 1997 Peace Accord is essential for bringing lasting peace, stability and economic development to the region. We hope this small effort from Drishtipat and DWC can contribute to a national dialogue on Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Asif Saleh, Executive Director, Drishtipat | asif.saleh@drishtipat.org
Jyoti Rahman, Editor, Drishtipat Writers' Collective | jyoti.rahman@drishtipat.org

Partner's Note

Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF)'s understanding of 'good governance' refers to how power is exercised in managing the resources of the country. It refers to the relationship between the state institutions and its processes between the individual citizens, civil society and private sector. MJF's understanding of 'human rights' refers to legally enshrined claims set out in national and international documents that citizens can make on the government. It refers to the universal, indivisible and interdependent nature of rights and obligations of duty bearers to deliver those rights to the duty holders.

Manusher Jonno Foundation is mandated to work in solidarity with poor and marginalized people to help them in gaining more control of their lives as well as creating an environment where both duty bearers and rights holders feel responsible to fulfill their respective obligations. MJF is committed to creating a fairer world where people from different background are able to develop their full potentials. As governance is central to the success of all development initiatives, MJF strives to contribute in the process of improving governance and human rights in Bangladesh through providing financial and technical support to a variety of Civil Society Organizations. Through its initiatives, MJF taps the resources, opportunities and energies existing in society leading to louder voices from the grassroots to help address rights and governance issues.

Among MJF's many initiatives is our unit dedicated to working in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. From our four guiding principles, there are two that are particularly relevant to the ongoing problems in CHT due to delayed implementation of the 1997 Accord:

- Respecting cultural diversity and values of distinct groups
- Promoting interest of marginalized groups including ethnic and religious minorities

As part of our outreach regarding the CHT region, we are pleased to partner with Drishtipat in publishing this current anthology. Drishtipat Writers' Collective has worked to compile a collection of essays, including newspaper op-eds, critical analysis, and academic research. We have partnered with them to assist in the production and distribution of the book.

We hope this project will help restart dialogue regarding the ongoing problems of the Hill Tracts, and build a national consensus for full implementation of the 1997 Accord, as well as safeguards of the rights, culture, language, economic livelihood and national participation of the Adivasis of the CHT.

Shaheen Anam, Executive Director, Manusher Jonno Foundation | anams@manusher.org



Setting the Frame





The Other Shahid Minar

Saydia Gulrukh

As our bus entered Khagrachari Sadar, the graffiti on the wall caught my eye. I don't remember exactly the name of the school. It was a government high school. The main gate almost broken, but the boundary wall seemed recently painted. On this newly painted white wall were colorful images, of Shapla, Ilish, Doyel, and of course the Royal Bengal tiger. They grabbed my attention, because these flowers are not indigenous to the Hill Tracts. Sodorok, Bhat Jourha or Hurug, flowers common to Jumma land were not to be seen on the wall. Jumma children while fishing in the Chengi river catch Totteleng or Pinon Fada, not Hilsa fish. These were icons of Bengali culture, engraved on the landscape of CHT.

Since 1971, we have been absorbed in building a nation-state exclusively for Bengalis.

Our bus driver was trying to make up for the delay we had faced on the Chittagong road. He did not stop for long at the Khagrachari bus stop. I had been curious to find out if there were Chakma alphabets hidden in the crowd of Bangla barnamala on that wall, but there was no time. We barely managed to have a cup of tea. I was going to Baghaichari. It was the first time, after thirteen long years, that the Hill Women's Federation would be able to hold a public rally protesting Kalpana Chakma's abduction day (June 12, 2009) in her own home town. I wanted to attend the protest meeting. Baghaichari was another two hours from Khagrachari.

The changed cultural landscape became more evident as we drove deeper into the town. Around the Bazaar area, the smiling images of Bengali women on billboards, for Pepsodent toothpaste or Pride textile, made me wonder about the explicit and implicit ways in which Bengali presence is ensured in the CHT. Of course, there were more than just posters and billboard of products that are largely meant for Bengali consumers. There were political graffiti, slogans and counter slogans on the walls, written by members of Jana Sanghati Samiti (JSS) and United Peoples Democratic Front (UPDF). I found the images of Shapla, Doel and Pepsodent unsettling as they signified the increased marginality of all things Jumma.

A statue of late President Ziaur Rahman, standing awkwardly, somewhat disproportionate, waving at us, as we read the sign, "good bye Khagrachari." The pedestal on which the statute stood was covered with a colorful poster of some Awami League campaign. It had a portrait of the father of the nation, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. I wondered whether it would be possible for people in CHT to install a monument for Manabendra Narayan Larma. I saw his photograph in nearly every Jumma house that I visited. I saw calendars hanging on the wall with his photograph and his famous quote, "Under no definition or logic can a Chakma be a Bengali or a Bengali be a Chakma... As citizens of Bangladesh we are all Bangladeshis, but we also have a separate ethnic identity, which unfortunately the Awami League leaders do not want to understand." I saw small replicas of Shaheed Minar all over CHT, but I did not come across any public monument memorialising the political contribution of M.N. Larma.

The politics that unraveled in the CHT followed by Larma's launching of Parbattya Chattogram Jana Shonghati Shomiti (1972) is not a seamless narrative of heroism. His politics and position was contested by many Jumma people in the CHT, and later, he was killed by members of another faction of his own political organization. But, despite differences and contestation, he is accepted by Jumma people as the father of the Jumma nations. While the images of Shapla and Hilsa, the awkward

statue of Ziaur Rahman appeared to be a symbolic display of Bengali occupation, the calendars with Larma's portraits were silent tributes to his courage, they seemed to reiterate his demand for constitutional recognition of other ethnic groups, other than the Bengalis, which too, is an ethnic group, although we seem to forget that, since we ARE the nation.

The bus braked suddenly. It had stopped at Baghaichari Bazaar. I got off, and wandered off to the near-by tea stall for a cup of tea. A portrait of M.N. Larma hung on the rusted tin-wall. It said, "Jumma Jatir Janak Manabendra Narayan Larma (founding father of the Jumma Nationalities, Manabendra Narayan Larma)." Two fathers in one nation state? That is probably too much to ask.

A member of Hill Women's Federation was waiting at the bus stop. We took a rickshaw to the public gathering. The school yard was full and bursting at the seams, but people were still coming. There were posters of Kalpana Chakma. A big red banner demanded the punishment of those who had abducted her. Placards demanded an end to harassment by military personnel, an end to violence against women by both army and settler. I breathed a sigh of relief; I was saved from shameless displays of Bengali culture here. A friend whispered in my ear, that's Rupan Chakma's mother, in the front row. Rupan was studying in class six, in Rupkari Bahumukhi High School. After Kalpana's abduction, he became active in Pahari Chatra Parishad (PCP). Two weeks after her abduction (June 28, 1996), when civil and military authorities had been busy covering up their involvement, three Pahari organisations called a blockade, in Marishya, to protest her abduction. During the protest, police opened fire; Rupan was killed along with Monotosh, Shukesh and Shomorbijoy Chakma.

That evening, I went to Rupan's house. His mother told me about the nightmare she had the night before Rupan Chakma was killed. In her dream, she saw herself killing a dog mercilessly, with a dagger. She was full of anguish and an untold fear the next morning. She was unable to do anything, to concentrate on anything during the day. She had asked her elder son to go look for Rupan. As she spoke, she brought a photograph of Rupan. It was a studio photo, Rupan was sitting on a motor cycle. As she passed me the photograph bound in a wooden frame, she said, "It's been thirteen years, his face is fading." There are eye witnesses to Rupan's killing. I met them at the Rupakari High School playground. We sat in a circle. At the other end of the play ground stands a Shaheed Minar, this one commemorates the sacrifice of Rupan, Manotosh, Shukesh and Samarbijoy Chakma. They had all been students of this school when they had been killed. Rupan's friend began, "In those days, the PCP had student wings even at the school level, military harassment was an everyday matter. Rupan was not an active member, but he was a strong supporter of PCP. Kalpana's abduction was so unjust, so cruel, we thought we must do something. We just had to. I was there with him at the rally, it could have been me, I saw a Bengali settler snatch a rifle from a BDR, and he just began shooting." After a slight pause, he asked me, "What kind of administration allows an ordinary person, one who has no authority, to grab a weapon, and open fire on us, on unarmed civilians?" Even though I knew the answer, I still asked him, "Was there ever a police case, have you ever given your testimony?" He replied, "No. No one has asked me to testify."

Since 1971, we have been absorbed in building a nation-state exclusively for Bengalis. Our circle of grief reflects that. It excludes all others. We are unable to inhale the fragrance of any flowers but Shapla, Shaluk or Kathal chapa. Our hearts weep only for Bengali mothers, not for Rupan's mother. Today, on Independence Day, I want to remind our Bengali-self that there are other lives which need to be memorialised; that there are other Shaheed Minars too, awaiting jumma flowers.

Abbreviated from essay published in New Age, 26 March, 2010

We Also Want to Live

Jui Chakma

August 9 is World Indigenous Day. It is right around the corner. Every year indigenous people prepare to observe this day through various celebrations.

And how is she supposed to introduce herself to her friends? As an “ethnic minority”, or “khudro nri” in Bengali?

Jummobi is a student at Dhaka University. The indigenous students at the university have already begun brainstorming ideas, discussing possibilities, planning events – the gamut.

Over the past four years that she has been here, Jummobi had extensively partaken in these preparations. But this year, for some reason, she has no interest in participating. She has done nothing so far.

Jummobi is upset. Terribly upset. A dark cloud of dismay has overcome her. Every now and then she revisits the celebrations of the years gone by – thinking about the faces seen, the voices heard – especially those of prominent personalities. Everyone had hopes to share, promises to make, and solidarity to impart. Their words ring in her ear till this day. She remembers the memoranda in “Shanghati”: from the Prime Minister, leader of the opposition, and other people of weight. Brought out by the Adivasi Forum every year for this day.

In spite of all of this, Jummobi is distraught today. The pride she felt in being indigenous has been disrupted. Something is just not adding up. She participated in Chakma leader Raja Devashish Roy’s legal and human rights-centric discussion entitled “Bangladesh’s Indigenous Population’s ‘Indigenous’ Identity” at the National Press Club. The main premise of the discussion was why the ethnic minorities should be acknowledged as indigenous. There, Jummobi learned that recently the National Parliament has passed a bill entitled “Ethnic Minorities Cultural Institution Bill, 2010.” Based on this, Jummobi realized that, to the parliament, she is only a “minority”. She is finding it impossible to accept this name because as far as she knows, like all other people, she too has a rich history, culture and heritage. Then why is she being constricted within the parameters of “minority?”

She is also thinking about her friends. Some of them are of Gurkha, Banai, Munda, Patro, Rajbongshi and other ethnicities. They were not categorized as “ethnic minority” like her. They were not categorized at all. This bill does not acknowledge them. So what is their identity? Jummobi is unable to get to the bottom of this.

And how is she supposed to introduce herself to her friends? As an “ethnic minority”, or “khudro nri” in Bengali? But she has read in her social science books that ‘khudro’ means tiny, ‘nri’ means ‘people’ and ‘goshthi’ means ‘community’. So what does this make her? A minor person from a community of minorities?

She has never felt smaller.

**

Recently, she has had more than one reason to be disenchanted. She didn’t graduate with first division honors, while all her Bengali friends, who she used to study with, did. Jummobi cried a lot. Memories of her having to rush to be with her family when they were being tortured, while her friends

would spend hours in the library studying, haunt her. Thoughts of her family's helplessness taunt her. Realization of her community's desperation daunts her.

A week prior to her final examinations, Bagaichhari in Khagrachari Sadar saw an outbreak between the local indigenous people and the Bengali settlers. During the arson that started on February 19 2010, and had relapses on the 20th and 23rd, Jummobi's house, like many others, was burnt down. She remembers the horror and trauma that consumed her days in Dhaka at that time. She was unable to even touch a book then. All she could think about was her family. All she could do was call to get updates: Are they alive? Are they all right? Have they been able to flee to a safe distance?

Jummobi was desperate. She didn't know who to go to for consolation or where to go for solace. Many of her friends were going through the same. She wasn't alone in her experience. She was alone in her pain. Eventually it all ended and Jummobi's family ended up in a safe space. But their house was burnt to ashes. Jummobi's final examination was held a week later – on the scheduled date. Only she knows what her heart carried while she was writing in the exam hall.

Her life has changed a lot since that day. Her family is now financially paralyzed. What hasn't changed is how her eyes tear up every time she thinks about that time; how she still feels desperate and distraught. She wants to join her Bengali friends in their hearty laughter, in their music, in their life...

Translated by Farah Mehreen Ahmad; Bengali version published in Sanghati 2010, Bangladesh Adivasi Forum, Sanjeeb Drong ed.

This Land is Your Land

Farah Mehreen Ahmad

There are a few things I want to say to my peers.

Dost, we the “new-new,” don’t know much about our history other than the heroism of our relatives, the brutality of the hanadar bahini, some specific dates, some illustrious names and some songs.

To slap our friend who has a crush on his Chakma classmate and calls her “minority” behind her back as if that’s her name.

When we wear a Che t-shirt, he looks like Michael Jackson. Most of us haven’t read his biography. Most of us are unaware of his flaws. Yes, he had some. You’d know if you dug beyond the translation of “Hasta La Victoria Siempre.”

When we buy a t-shirt with “Joy Bangla” printed on it, we kind of know what it means. To us it resonates as something parallel to “carpe diem/noctem” or “veni, vidi, vici” sort of a deal or even a yin-yang tattoo.

History is not a thing of the past for us to relish on particular days. It is what we make every day, whether we know it or not – just by virtue of existing. When we were too busy being the Converse All-star, Old Navy hoodie and gaamchha clad ‘casually classy’ generation, Bengali settlers burnt down over 200 homes of Bangladeshis who don’t look like us. The army joined in and brush-fired, killing several of them. And we were here making history – once again with our silence.

We are going down in the books babe, as the one that didn’t speak up; as the one that when asked to attend a rally to protest said, “kintu dost, oita toh plan a chhiloni.” Sorry for the disruption bud, but I don’t think being subjected to this kind of atrocity oder “plan a chhilo.”

Some elders tell us this land really isn’t ours; that we don’t respect our history and are too west-bound and east-wounded; that we really don’t know what it means to be Bangladeshi since the desh was fed to us with a silver spoon. We resentfully worship the rubble we stand on, as if it’s all over; as if there is nothing else to fight.

But there is one more thing left to be defined though. We have that one more edge to etch that shows when we say “us” we mean “them” too. Why did we vote in 2008, in what was arguably the most monumental political event we witnessed in our two-decades-and-then-some old lives? I thought we took a few vows:

To not only chuckle when our friend laughingly tells us that his dad, an army officer, asked him to “stop acting like a bloody civilian” when he was disappointed, but be alarmed by how people who are paid to protect us, see us.

To be repulsed by their gunshots and read it as rokkhok morphing into homicidal tokkhoks, disrupting the silence we choose to bury those darn paharis under.

To not only high-five me when I tell you how I walked into the check-post to give that officer a piece of my mind for winking at me, but remember how you especially loved the part where I told him that he gets paid to protect me and I have the right to make him surrender his uniform if he makes me feel

vulnerable. Since playing poker is your favourite after-work past-time, can you see that same sentiment to the hills and raise it a thousand notches?

To not forget to notice the face some several inches above the pinon your sister was wondering where she could buy.

To notice the human being whose dancing feet you admiringly watched while saying “era kintu ektu Thai-der moton, na?”

To cringe at the patronizing generalization when the aunty asked for a Chakma cook because “ora khub sincere hoi” or a night-guard of the same because “ora khub teji hoi.” To burst this greedy and exploitative bubble of fantasy traits attributed to those who are forced to be third-class citizens for our needs and convenience, as if their sole purpose is to serve us – the Raj.

To slap our friend who has a crush on his Chakma classmate and calls her “minority” behind her back as if that’s her name, and allows his friends to do the same. “Dost, Minority’r shathe khub mojaye asos na?”

To not pervert “majority rule” to mean the rule of a power-tripping, vile and nonchalant majority, but the rule of a conscientious majority.

To put an end to those darn brackets – “foreign” ... “stranger” ... “unknown” ... “different” ... “them.”

To harness a Bangladesh that isn’t exclusively for Bengalis.

Can we vow to not allow evil to defecate all over our Home? Can we fix our radars to catch their corpses though we have skipped their lives? One of these days during one of those addas at one of those coffee joints, can we touch on their plight? Maybe just throw in a “dost, oi paharigulir na life a onek para ... purai bad buzz” for good measure?

UnheardVoice.net, March 2010

Adivasis and the Monarchs' Mind

Dipayan Khisa

Within the outline of Bangladesh, there reside various non-Bengali populations. If the demography is segmented, and the non-Bengali speaking populations are aggregated, then in comparison to the Bengali speaking population, they are not that many in numbers. Although, if the groups of non-Bengalis remain segmented, then there will be around 45 different groups. The predominance of numbers grants Bengalis the agency to monopolize sovereignty. They consider it their rightful privilege to attribute various appellations to others. In harnessing such patron-client relations, they have entitled other ethnicities such as Munda, Mandy, Sandal, Mama, Kais, etc. as 'potato,' or sub-nationals.

The ruling class will patronizingly say, "Ah! A perfectly innocent person is getting corrupted."

However, as a humanitarian gesture, some of these masters want to grant the sub-nationals a higher seat. In this effort they call them indigenous. Although, how much their attitude has changed with the change in name is yet to be researched. The ornate appellation is almost like a compensation for the lack of concern for their intrinsic needs such as political rights, economic freedom, etc. It is something to keep themselves occupied with.

The move to calling non-Bengalis 'indigenous' was also partially triggered by the United Nations' declaration of World Indigenous Day. NGOs have also played a substantial role in propagating the term adivasi/indigenous. We cannot however, overlook the monetary incentive associated with this. When donor currency started pouring in, and crashed into the sea of indigenous development efforts like waves, the ruling class made a 180 degree turn and started calling previously called sub-nationals, indigenous. This abrupt sympathy is actually just a means of catalyzing their access to money. The word indigenous is like their raw material.

The term 'indigenous' dilutes the nuanced identities of each of the ethnicities. That there are differences between a Baum and a Chakma or a Munda get swallowed by one term. To the ruling class, the word "indigenous" triggers an image of human-like living things which reside in forests, are usually half-naked and use wild plants and flowers to adorn their bodies. Validating this image has become a discourse for members of the ruling class, using films, research projects, etc. as tools. Some of them have also glued the prefix "Dr." before their names.

A lot of them morph into indomitable humanists. Within the comforts of their air-conditioned offices, members of the ruling class present a variety of research material exhibiting how extensive their knowledge is, how well-fed their intellectuality is. They finish off with a burp of satisfaction. The crux of the matter is that, the ruling class wants to present the indigenous people as inhabitants of Neanderthal. And they are largely successful. Through their films and photography, they want to portray indigenous people as stuck in the Middle Ages. If someone from any of the indigenous communities leaves their terrain and enters the mainstream through education or work, then the ruling class will patronizingly say, "Ah! A perfectly innocent person is getting corrupted."

If living in the wild, living as if we were still in the Middle Ages was all that wonderful, then why don't they themselves adopt this lifestyle? Of course they won't. The sole purpose of their discourse is to maintain the hierarchy. A Chakma Vice Chancellor of a University, a Munda President, a Mandi Election Commissioner, a Khasia Army Chief – these are all pain-inducing images for them. If

indigenous people start securing prestigious positions, then the ruling class' agenda of feeling powerful, feeling knowledgeable, will go to waste.

The ruling elites are completely daft to the actual lifestyles of the indigenous populations. Why just talk about the indigenous populations? Even among their own kind there is vast disparity between the masses and the classes. The classes are opportunists with whoever they are engaging with. At the face of existing economic disparities, we really need to fathom how some 'humanitarian' elites pretend to be friends with indigenous people. Does this mean the elites have been able to dilute class demarcations?

Their economic standing and the marginalization of the indigenous people tell a different story. Social sciences will have to start re-evaluating their understanding of human relations if friendship was actually possible between people standing on opposite ends of the economic spectrum. We will not for a second doubt the cooperation of the elite squad's gracious indigenous friends in this experiment.

The discourse these elites have created out of indigenous populations is a complete hoax. The argument that some people are perfectly alright with a primitive, science-free lifestyle is implausible. Every group wants to see itself as competent and competitive in a global arena. Indigenous lives will have to be improved by conquering knowledge.

Let's hope that World Indigenous Day will impart this aspiration to all indigenous populations in Bangladesh. This day is not about wearing elaborate costumes and putting up a show for sponsors and foreign donor agencies. Bringing this day in with rhythm of various instruments on the streets would only be legitimate if indigenous people are able to free themselves from all shackles. We should remember one more thing. Indigenous life is not one of festivities, it's one of oppression.

Even elite sympathizers won't bring progressive change to the lives of the Adivasis. There will be no savior to rescue and deliver their rights. This revolution will have to come through a process of self-emancipation. The foes and allies of this struggle were identified a long time ago. Sidhu-Kanu, Tebhaga, the Tonk Revolt, the struggle led by M. N. Larma, are all still relevant.

There is no unique definition for indigenous freedom. The struggle for the rights of Adivasis is tied in with the struggle for the rights of the labor class. Therefore, the elite-led discourse on indigenous lives is a means of fortifying the existing domination. Defeating this psyche and forwarding the cause of the working class will inevitably forward the cause of the Adivasis. Simultaneously, involvement in the many branches of science and technology will gradually remove them from a life of exclusion.

The indigenous people of this country will have to groom themselves to become global competitors. They will have to move away from a life of pity, sympathy and mercy, and take charge to become agents and stakeholders of human civilization.

Translated by Farah Mehreen Ahmad; Bengali original published in Rosebud, Chittagong, Basumitra Chakma ed., August 2009.

Once We Were Heroes

Tazreena Sajjad

"It is up to you, my Bengali and adivasi brothers and sisters, to save our country. It is your turn now." These were the words of adivasi Bir Bikram U.K. Ching speaking at a function in his honour. It was organised by Shuddhoi Muktijoddho, a private initiative created by Lt Col (Retd) Sajjad Ali Zahir, Bir Pratik, to honour the contributions of the adivasi community in the liberation of Bangladesh.

Nayek Subedar Bir Bikram U.K. Ching, serial number 175 under the gallantry award section, is listed as deceased.

U.K. Ching's journey from near obscurity to recognition is one that should give the nation pause. There is little information about his contributions in the war and hardly any documentation about this gallant hero in official records.

In the March 11, 2004, National Gazette, which claims to be the final list of all freedom fighters, Nayek Subedar Bir Bikram U.K. Ching, serial number 175 under the gallantry award section, is listed as deceased. It was through the efforts of Sajjad Ali Zahir and the support of the BDR that Mr. Ching was found to be alive, and willing to come to the city to attend an event in his honour thirty-seven years after receiving the medal for valour.

The most striking and powerful moment of the event was the recognition of eleven other adivasi muktijoddhas from Shakhipur and Gazipur, men who till today have not found their places in the history books of our liberation-- Lakkhan Chandra Barman, Parimal Chandra Kotch, Chandra Mohon Barman, Sona Toch Burman, Nipen Barman, Lakhyi Kanto Kotch, Ajit Chandra Barman, Jotin Chandra Kotch, Suresh Chandra Barman, Rabindra Chandra Barman and Jotindro Chandro Barman.

U.K. Ching's experience in the frontlines is a testament to his valour and his indomitable spirit in the quest for freedom. Now around seventy-five years old, he is still a feisty man with a sparkling sense of humour, which was manifest in the war stories he related. As a member of the EPR, he fought in many districts as a platoon commander.

He was noted for his courage, and the initiative he took for saving the lives of his Bengali comrades (he lost only three of his men in the nine months of war) and for rescuing many Bengali women from the hands of the Pakistani army.

For his courage, he was awarded one of the highest gallantry awards Bangladesh had to offer; for his ethnic identity, he is still waiting for recognition in the Constitution that became possible only through the sacrifices he and countless others made to create a new nation.

The event was organised to not only thank U.K. Ching for his contributions in the independence of the country, but also to serve as a reminder to its people that the freedom we enjoy is one that was brought about by not only Bengalis, but also non-Bengalis who did not hesitate to give up their homes, families, livelihoods, and in some cases their lives.

Muktijoddhas have asked for very little; their demand has always been that the country be built on the values of freedom, dignity and equality. Yet thirty-seven years into independence, the nation has

failed its children and the very ideals it was created for.

Successive governments have yet to recognise the role of non-Bengalis in the liberation struggle and have failed to protect, preserve and respect the rights of adivasi communities who are part and package of the diversity of this nation. They are still denied their right to land, language, and culture. They are denied their space in the Bangladeshi constitution, thereby being dismissed as people of no consequence.

It is a shame for Bengalis who fought so hard for their language, their right to autonomy, their culture and their freedom with the assistance of the adivasi communities, that they have failed the very people with whom they continue to share the water, air and land of this country. Till our adivasi brothers and sisters, neighbours and friends get their rightful position in this country, the struggle for liberation is not over.

A medal means very little if there is no understanding of its true value. Recognition is tainted if it is limited to honouring the contributions of only those of a particular ethnic group, however it is defined - by the colour of one's skin, one's language, one's culture. Freedom loses its meaning if one enjoys it at the expense of another.

U.K. Ching, and men and women like him who gave it their all for independence, did not ask for a medal nor for recognition. They fought along with their Bengali brothers and sisters because it was what they believed they should do during a time of severe crisis. In return, they did not expect the country they fought for to fail them again and again, such that today even their grandchildren continue to be forgotten, their land is grabbed through illegal settlements, and their resistance is silenced by violence and intimidation.

Recognising the dire circumstances in which U.K. Ching and his family now live in, Dr. Zafarullah of Gonoshastho Hospital and Dr. Hasan of Al Biruni Hospital have come forward offering free medical treatment; others have pledged to assist them in any way possible. Yet, such private initiatives cannot replace the role and responsibility of a national government that, in sheer callousness, listed a living hero as being dead.

The heroes of '71 expected more from the country they helped create; at the least, they did not expect to be forgotten. In the case of the adivasis, their contribution in the independence of this country has yet to be recognised, as is their right as equal citizens of this land. They are still waiting for the country to embrace them as its own.

Daily Star, June 1st, 2009

Untitled

Samari Chakma

11th April, 1979. Our biggest festival Biju was about to begin. All three hill districts try to prepare to the maximum for this, because it only comes once a year. All shopping was complete. 12th April is 'Ful Biju' (flower biju) and we were preparing to pick flowers at dawn.

The blood of so many Jumma over the years cannot go in vain. We will not let that happen.

We young ones waited for the morning to arrive, but when it came, it brought horror. The entire village was surrounded by soldiers. They began searching every house and beating up the young men they found. Our house woke up to terrified screams from neighboring homes. Soldiers entered our house shouting, "All the Shantibahini shalas come out right now".

The soldiers pushed us to the field of the Primary School. We saw that everyone in the village had been gathered. The men and women had been lined up separately. It was a dawn raid and now all the men were ordered to sit and face the rising sun. The women and children were told to face North. Young Jumma wearing College uniforms were taken into a school room, the elderly were taken into another room. The sound of beatings, followed by cries and groans now started floated towards us. Even at that age, I understood that fathers were being beaten. It was forbidden to make a sound, so our mothers were silently weeping. My mother kept asking, "Can you see your father?" But I could not see him in the group sitting on the field. Every time I shook my head, mother let a small cry escape. And then back to silence.

As the day went on, the sounds of pain and suffering intensified. Everyone was in a bad condition, especially young men. After sitting like this all day, we were finally freed in the late afternoon. But some young men suspected to be members of the Shanti Bahini (the original reason for the raid) were taken to the Army Camp. After returning home we met father and my older uncle, but the Army had taken away my younger uncle. The younger men were prime suspects, older relatives were thought to not have the stamina to be jungle guerillas. My father was lying on his chest. The soldiers had beaten him with sticks and boots, and it was impossible for him to lie down normally. It was a similar situation in every house. An uncle next door was bleeding from his palms, which had ripped open. The word 'Biju' had disappeared. After a few days, my uncle and others were finally released, physically and emotionally disabled for life. We still remember that day in 1979, every year, during Biju.

We grew up with these incidents. We had no trouble comprehending the country we were living in. The Shanti Bahini continued their battle, and the Army, when not able to capture them, imprisoned common Jumma. After two years, one day, news suddenly spread that the Shanti Bahini would carry out an attack on the nearby Army Camp. It was 1981. The people of the village started fleeing. We also fled one afternoon with another family. Since our father was still at work, we had to leave without him. My elder sister was dressed in her school uniform. Inside her schoolbag were clothes, dry food and matches. On top of these were school-books. If the Army stopped us, they would hopefully not understand that we were escaping. The older people dressed in ordinary Jumma clothes for the marketplace. It was a market day.

Hundreds started walking without knowing a destination. When it was time for dinner, we realized

that we had forgotten to bring rice. We gave the children the dry food we had brought, just to stop their crying. When we arrived at the next village, the people of the village panicked that soldiers would follow us, also started fleeing. The group kept getting larger, kept running from one place to the next. We took shelter in a small hill one night. All the children were scared of ghosts and in the morning, we woke with a strange feeling. We were whispering to each other that on this morning, the sun had risen from the North, instead of the East.

We had spent two nights eating handfuls of rice with salt and water. At night, only my brother and I would cry for father, mother kept her silence. After three days, an older uncle appeared with a sack of rice on his head. We were ecstatic, now we could eat rice with spinach. In the afternoon my father finally joined us. He had found the house empty after returning from work, understood what had happened, and started running. That day the Army finally found our group. We had to return to the village.

Then, the nature of persecution started changing. Instead of the Army doing things directly, the government brought Settler Bengalis from the plainlands. The reasons were completely political. Now as the level of persecution started increasing, we Paharis became more helpless. Our lands started becoming grabbed by Bengalis. We could do nothing against this hostile attack by the government.

May 1st, 1986. It was May Day and a public holiday. I was now a student of class 8. The previous evening, Settler Bengalis brought out a procession with a dead body. We learnt that the Shanti Bahini had killed some Bengalis. But we were not fearful, we thought they would only do a protest. But on May 1st, a few sympathetic Bengalis came and warned us not to leave the house-- there would be another procession with the dead body, this one more ferocious, there was trouble in the air. It was raining lightly all morning, we stayed home with doors and windows closed. Between 11 and 12 noon, our village was attacked in a planned manner. We fled in whatever way we could. Some ran to take refuge in the army camp, and others to the police camp.

At the police camp we faced a shock. It became clear that they had no feelings for us. Officers remained indifferent after hearing the news of the attack. Finally, after a long delay, the police and army arrived at the village, long after Bengalis had burnt down the houses. We also returned to our burning home. One of our uncles had suffered a knife attack, and then been tossed into the fire. We dragged his half-burnt body out. No help from the officers.

That night, the army began a security hunt. We learnt about the Panchori massacre on May 2d. So, Khagrachhari in the morning, Panchori in the evening. Carnage premeditated by the government. Birth had become fate. Now, finally, we know, no matter how much persecution happens, we have to continue working to save our identity. Until the day we establish our fundamental rights. We know that truth will finally prevail. The blood of so many Jumma over the years cannot go in vain. We will not let that happen. The state wants to vanish our Jumma nationality. They want the hills and land, but not the indigenous people. The army, police, VDP, settlers and some old Bengalis together increased the intensity of persecution. The Jumma became completely helpless. We were forced to stand up against this, and so we joined the struggle. Finally, I became an activist.

Dear reader, didn't I want a normal life, your normal life? To go to school, get a job, fall in love. Sometimes I want to call up a friend, go for a walk in the evening. Look up at the night sky. It has not happened in many years.

Translated by Hana Shams Ahmed, from "Paharer Ruddhokontho", Hill Women's Federation, 1996.

The Case of National Minorities

Anu Muhammad

In Bangladesh majority of the population is Bangla-speaking, Bengali. Only a little more than one percent of the population is the 'other' or 'tribal' or the 'national minorities'. There are more than 30 different ethnic groups in this one percent. Their number is more than 1.2 million in 1991, and allegedly the figure is underestimated. I prefer to use the term 'national minority' to indicate people of different language/culture/ethnicity, other than Bengali. In CHT, 'Jumma' identity is a recent construction. Pahari identity is another construction that developed in course of the struggle against the ruling class mostly composed of Bengalis from plain land.

Everywhere different reactionary forces take the space, terror and conspiracy take the lead in the process.

Population of different nationalities according to Pop. Census,1991

Race	Population
Bangshi	2112
Boam*	6978
Buna	13914
Chak*	2000
Chakma*	252986
Coach	12631
Garo	68210
Hajong	11477
Harijon	63
Khasia	13412
Kheyang*	2345
Khumi*	1241
Lushai*	662
Mahat/mahato	3534
Marma*	154216
Monipuri	24902
Munda/mundia	2112
Murang*	22178
Muro/mro*	3211
Pahari	1853
Pankhu/pankoo*	3227
Rajbangshi	5444
Rakhain	16932
Saontal	202744
Tanchenghya*	21057
Tipra*	1242
Tripura*	79772
Urang	11296
Uru/Urua/uria	2481
Others(?)	261746
Total	1205978

* Living mostly in the CHT. This is their ancestral home. Source: BBS, 1994.

Perception of the problem in Bengali Society

Apathetic. This is the majority of this country. They know almost nothing about the hill situation, and they feel they are not related to this problem. They are kept in dark or confusion on this issue, which is very relevant for understanding their own situation.

Hostile. Number of people in this category is very small but powerful, and they are the main force of the Bengali ruling class.

Sympathetic and Chauvinist. A significant part of Bengali middle class. Their mind set is determined by the dominant ideology to discriminate and rule 'others' with some 'concession'.

Aware and Respectful. Their number is few. They are mainly left political activists, and some human right activist sand a small fraction of Bengali intelligentsia including teacher, writers, lawyer, journalists.

Changes in attitudes in the fourth stream started taking place in the mid 80s when Pahari activists, mainly students, initiated contacts with Bengali progressive people and when Pahari Gono Parishad, Pahari Chatra Parishad and Hill Womens Federation started functioning in Dhaka and participated in national anti-autocratic struggle. The breakthrough came in 1992, when National Committee for Fundamental Rights in the CHT was formed in Dhaka, comprising of Bengali social and political activists who became aware of the situation specially after Logang massacre. The formation of the CHT committee played a key role to develop solidarity among Bengali and Pahari people. Increasing role of Pahari people in student, women and other issues of democratic movement played a vital role to develop this.

From the CHT conference in Dhaka, Bengali-Pahari groups united in endorsing following facts:

a. Bangladesh is not a country of Bengalis alone despite the fact that large majority of its population is Bengali, as Bangladesh is not a country of Muslims alone despite the fact that the large majority of its population is Muslim. There are other people of other national identities, other religious and believer-nonbeliever communities. This is a multinational, multibeliever country, and everybody irrespective of color, race, religion, gender has the same right in private and public sphere. This must be reflected in constitution, legal system, property system.

b. National problem cannot be solved by military or coercive means. Hatred to 'other' nations brings back bitter hatred. Everywhere different reactionary forces take the space, terror and conspiracy take the lead in the process. Other than a small number of beneficiaries from both 'majority and minority nation' everybody's sufferings intensify.

c. Initiative for solution of national issues and other related problems must come from within. Any lacking in these areas or any lingering of problems always help the enemies at home and abroad.

d. National problems and its solution is mainly a political question. This cannot be solved by mere legal means or foreign funded charity activities. In Bangladesh context, it is clear that the common issues of national minorities and Bengali majority oppressed people must be sorted out. The ruling class of Bangladesh must be challenged by the united efforts of large majority of people of the country, irrespective of language, culture and national identity.

Excerpted from Paper presented at regional seminar jointly organized by Bangladesh Economic Association and Department of Economics, Chittagong University, Chittagong, 1997.

Indigenous Struggle In CHT

Jenneke Arens & Kirti Nishan Chakma

In 1972 a delegation of the indigenous people, led by the late Chakma MP Manobendra Narayan Larma, requested autonomy for the CHT, retention of the 1900 Regulation, and a ban on the influx of Bengalis. However, Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who himself had led the Bengali people in the struggle for their own Bengali identity and culture, now failed to recognize the legitimacy of a similar demand from the indigenous peoples.

PCJSS reacted to the militarization and Bengalisation of the CHT by stepping up its armed actions.

He told them to forget their ethnic identities and to be "Bengalis." He also threatened to flood the area with Bengalis and military troops if the hill people insisted on sticking to their demands. Following Mujib's denial, the indigenous people formed the Parbatya Chottogram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS, or the Chittagong Hill Tracts People's United Party) in 1972, and a year later its armed wing, the Shanti Bahini (Peace Brigade). The PCJSS introduced the term "Jumma" as a collective name for the twelve different ethnic groups—referring to the traditional jhum ("swidden") cultivation practiced in the hills. Misinterpreting the legitimate demands of the PCJSS for recognition of their identity and protection of their rights, the Bangladesh government accused the PCJSS of being secessionist. The militarization of the CHT and large-scale settlement of Bengalis that Mujib had threatened, however, did not take place until after Sheikh Mujib and most of his family had been killed in a coup d'etat in 1975.

After General Ziaur Rahman ("Zia") came to power, the conflict between the indigenous people and the Bengali government turned from a democratic struggle into a low-intensity armed conflict. Zia ordered full militarization of the CHT and simultaneously development of the "backward tribal" area. Next to road construction and telecommunication, settlement programs of the indigenous population in model villages (similar to the "strategic hamlets" erected during the war in Vietnam) were carried out. The fact that the CHT Development Board, set up by Zia, was headed by the military commander in charge of the CHT illustrates that these development programs were an instrument of counterinsurgency. From 1976 the CHT became an area under military occupation and a training ground for counterinsurgency. Many army officers received training in the United States and the United Kingdom. The security forces controlled the administration, as well as all development programs.

The Indian government, worried about the military takeover in Bangladesh in 1975 (having lost its earlier influence over the Bangladesh government and fearing that the CHT might again become a hideout for insurgents from Northeast India), provided the PCJSS training and safe havens in the neighboring northeastern Indian state of Tripura. In late 1976, the Shanti Bahini carried out its first armed attack on a military outpost in the CHT.

In the name of counterinsurgency against the Shanti Bahini, the Bangladesh security forces perpetrated massive human-rights violations—massacres, killings, torture, rape, arson, forced relocation, forced marriages to Bengalis, and cultural and religious oppression of the indigenous people. In April 1979 the first of a series of massacres took place in Kanungopara, where reportedly the army killed 25 indigenous people and eighty houses were burnt down. In a second massacre on 25 March 1980, indigenous people in Kalampati/Kaukhali were forced to line up and then the army opened fire. Reports about the number of indigenous people killed in Kaukhali vary between 50 and 300. Young women were held by the army for days and raped. In the 1980s, 10 percent of the

indigenous population fled to neighboring India, and others fled to isolated jungle areas. More than ten major massacres have taken place between 1979 and 1993 in which an estimated 1,200 to 2,000 indigenous people have been killed. These and subsequent massacres formed part of the counterinsurgency strategy to drive out the indigenous population and settle Bengalis on their land. One of the army generals reportedly said in 1977: "We want the land, not the people."

Another main element in the counterinsurgency strategy was the settlement of some 400,000 landless Bengalis from the plains in the CHT between 1979 and 1985 under a secret government transmigration program. This dramatically changed the composition of the population: the percentage of Bengalis in the CHT rose from 26 percent in 1974 to 41 percent in 1981. Moreover, Bengalis illegally occupied indigenous people's land on a large scale. This further escalated the conflict. Land became one of the main sources of conflict between the indigenous people and Bengali settlers and the army. The PCJSS reacted to the militarization and Bengalisation of the CHT by stepping up its armed actions.

From 1983 the International Labour Organization (ILO) criticized the Bangladesh government annually for inadequate reporting with regard to ILO Convention 107 on Indigenous and Tribal Populations to which Bangladesh is a signatory. The CHT issue was also raised annually in the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations, and the Bangladesh government was questioned in the UN Human Rights Commission and the UN Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. In 1987, the PCJSS demanded the deployment of a UN Peace-Keeping Force and implementation of its demands for withdrawal of the security forces and the Bengali settlers under the auspices of the UN. The successive governments, however, ignored this demand. No foreigners were allowed in the CHT and news coming out of the CHT was heavily censored.

General Ershad who had come to power in a military coup in 1982, declared a general amnesty and a special five-year plan for the CHT after a split had occurred within the PCJSS in 1983 and Manobendra Larma, leader of the PCJSS, had been killed by the dissident faction. Manobendra's brother Jyotirindra Bodhipriya (Santu) Larma took over the leadership of the PCJSS. A large number of dissidents surrendered between 1983 and 1985. Repression and human-rights violations by the security forces in the CHT, however, continued as before. Some of the worst massacres took place in 1984 and 1986. Repressive measures restricted, for example, the freedom of movement and the selling and buying of essentials to prevent the delivery of supplies to the Shanti Bahini. The indigenous population was forcefully relocated in "model villages" (as a so-called rehabilitation measure to stop environmentally damaging jhum cultivation, but in fact to be better able to control them). Bengalis who could not be accommodated on the land that the fleeing and relocated indigenous people had left behind were settled in "cluster villages," usually next to a military camp where they served as a protective shield for the military. In defense of their rights and their land, the Shanti Bahini started carrying out attacks on Bengali settlers, trying to drive them out and prevent more settlers from coming to the CHT.

These rehabilitation schemes, as well as road construction and afforestation programs, were largely funded by the Asian Development Bank. A few other donors, such as UNICEF and UNDP, also funded "development" programs in the CHT. The Swedish and Australian governments pulled out of road construction and afforestation programs in the CHT in the early 1980s after the repressive government policies seeped to the outside world and it became clear that these programs were not at all in the interest of the indigenous peoples. Partly due to international pressure, negotiations between the respective governments and the PCJSS have taken place since 1985 without, however, coming to any agreement. The main demands of the PCJSS were regional autonomy and constitutional recognition of the Jumma identity; withdrawal of the army from the CHT; and removal of the Bengali settlers from the CHT.

In December 1990, General Ershad was ousted by a mass movement. In August 1992 the PCJSS unilaterally declared a cease-fire and from November 1992 several rounds of negotiations with the elected BNP government headed by Khaleda Zia were held, without any concrete results. Only in 1997 was a peace accord signed between the PCJSS and Sheikh Hasina's Awami League government that had won the national elections in 1996. Changes in the government in India were a factor in this as well. There were a few high-level meetings between the governments of Bangladesh and India, and India put pressure on the PCJSS to come to an agreement. The opposition parties led by the BNP and Bengali settlers opposed the accord as a sellout and campaigned fiercely against it.

On totally different grounds, a section of the indigenous people who had earlier supported the PCJSS rejected the accord on the grounds that the main demands of the Jumma peoples had not been fulfilled and declared their intention to continue the struggle for autonomy by democratic means. They formed the United Peoples Democratic Front (UPDF) in December 1998.

In 1996, the European Parliament had adopted an amendment to earmark part of the aid to Bangladesh "for the repatriation of Bengali settlers in the CHT back to the plains." Although the Bangladesh government had expressed its willingness to repatriate the Bengali settlers if funds were provided, according to the European Parliament, the government has so far failed to table any such proposal. The European Union and several other donor governments have made implementation of the peace accord conditional on funding development programs in the CHT.

The major part of the peace accord has yet to be implemented and the government elected in 2001 took several measures that are in violation of the accord. For instance, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia appointed herself as minister for CHT affairs and a Jumma representative only as deputy minister. The peace accord stipulates that the minister's post should be given to an indigenous representative from the CHT. Similarly, the government unilaterally appointed a Bengali settler and BNP MP, as chairman of the CHT Development Board, bypassing the indigenous MP as specified in the accord. BNP members have also been appointed unilaterally as chairmen of the three Hill District Councils. In a country that often becomes diametrically divided along lines of political affiliation, voices of moderation are one of the most precious things to be nurtured. And most would agree that it is the failure to listen to the voice of moderation of Manabendra Larma—recognition of the specific rights of the indigenous peoples of the CHT within the constitutional framework of the country—that led to the bloodshed of the past decades. If the root causes of the conflict are not properly addressed, any fault-line conflicts always have the potential to rekindle at any moment.

The accord signified an important and bold step toward conflict resolution through negotiation and peaceful means. It also demonstrated that the political process should be allowed to function in the CHT.

Abbreviated excerpt from chapter in "Searching for Peace in Central and South Asia: An Overview of Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Activities", edited by Monique Mekenkamp, Paul Van Tongeren, and Hans Van De Veen; European Centre for Conflict Prevention, the Hague, 2002.

Peace in Our Time? (1715-1997)

Sagheer Faiz & Naeem Mohaiemen

1715: Chakma king Jallal Khan establishes treaty with the Mughal Nawab.

1715-1760: CHT is independent kingdom, paying revenue from Cotton/Karpas to the Mughal Nawab. Hence the name “Karpas Region”.

1760-1780: CHT maintains independent kingdom status, but pays revenue to British rulers.

1777-1780: Chakma warriors fight the East India Company

1787: Chakma king Jan Baksh Khan pledges allegiance to East India Company. Chittagong Hill Tracts goes under control of the British. British pledge not to intervene in administrative affairs of the region. Hunter cites an 1829 regulation to say: “In 1829, Mr. Halhed, the Commissioner stated that the hill tribes were not British subjects but merely tributaries and that we recognized no right on our part to interfere with their internal arrangement.”

20 June, 1860: Notification No 3302 separates the hill area of Chittagong from Chittagong district and creates an independent district called Parbatya Chittagong.

1861: Parliament passes Indian Council Law. The Law recognizes the regulations passed by Governor General or local authorities with regards to areas outside the Law’s jurisdiction.

1870: Government Of India Act passed, allowing the Governor General to amend laws related to the “special areas”

1881: Chittagong Hill Tracts Police Regulation 1881 allows Hill Tracts people to form their own independent police force

1 May, 1900: Chittagong Hill Tracts Manual law passed. The area is given exemption from administration as an “Excluded Area” to help preserve minority “tribal” culture and heritage. CHT divided into Chakma, Bomang and Mong Circle. Headmen and Karbari to act as local administrators. Manual’s Regulation 34 bans non-hill people from buying or acquiring land in the area.

1920 - 1925: Manual revised to further enhance the safety of the Tribal people.

1935: India Rule Law ratifies and recognizes validity of CHT Regulation (1900).

17 August, 1947: As partition approaches, Mountbatten pressures Cyril Radcliffe to redraw his lines— over the Chittagong Hill Tracts and several Punjab districts. Radcliffe assigns CHT to Pakistan.

15-20 August, 1947: Chittagong Hill Tracts People’s Association expresses their doubt as to whether their rights will be preserved if they are assigned to a ‘muslim Pakistan’. The Association raises the Indian flag in the Rangamati District Administrator’s office. Some leaders of the Bomang Royal family also protest by raising the Burmese flag in Bandarban.

21 August, 1947: Baluch Regiment arrives in Chittagong Hill Tracts and forces protesters to lower Indian flag. The Regiment then raises the Pakistan flag. Tribal leaders Kamini Mohon Dewan and Sneha Kumar Chakma clash over whether Jumma rights will be protected in Pakistan. A large group that is fearful for their rights surrender their land and cross over into India.

1948: The new Pakistan government expresses suspicion over allegiance of Hill Tracts people, removing Chittagong Hill Tracts Police Regulation 1881. In fear of their safety, several thousand Jumma people seek refuge in India and Burma. Later, when the Indian and Burmese governments attempt to bring international pressure to take back the refugees, the Pakistan government agrees to abide by 1900 Chittagong Hill Tracts Manual Law.

1950: Violating Chittagong Hill Tracts Manual law, Pakistan government settles several hundred Muslim families in Nanaiachar, Longdu and Bandarban.

1956: Chittagong Hill Tracts Manual law 1900 is ratified in first constitution.

1962: The Pakistan government begins to take away Jumma control by replacing the phrase “separate ruled area” with “Tribal (Upajati) Area” and making major changes to the regulation.

1957-1962: Kaptai Hydro Electric Project Dam is built. 40% of agriculture land in CHT goes under. Thousands of Hill Tracts peoples become refugees.

1964: Hill Tracts peoples who lost their lands in the Kaptai Dam project are moved to Rehabilitation Areas. Dissatisfied with rehabilitation efforts, 50,000 families take refuge in India. Some of these refugees are later settled by the Indian government in Arunachal. The remainder settle in Tripura and other Indian states. Many are still in citizenship limbo today.

1971: Bangladesh liberation war begins. Major Ziaur Rahman and his troops escape to India via CHT, with help from Jumma in the area. Jumma fighters attempt to join Mukti Bahini, but are rebuffed in some regions by suspicious local commanders. In spite of this, hundreds of Jumma fight in the Mukti Bahini.

5 December, 1971: After Pakistani soldiers vacate Chittagong’s Panchori region, Bengali Mukti Joddhas kill 14 Jumma people. Authorities stop Jumma muktijoddhas when they attempt to intervene.

29 January, 1972: Newly independent Bangladesh’s leader, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, assures Chakma representatives that Chakmas would get their due share of government jobs.

15 February, 1972: Jumma Representatives hand over a 4-point manifesto to Sheikh Mujib, asking for autonomy for Chittagong Hill Tracts.

24 April, 1972: Manobendro Narayan Larma, member of the King’s council, presents the 4-point manifesto to the committee drafting the Bangladesh constitution. In a hyper-charged moment when Urdu speakers in the new country are under fire, the committee refuses to include any reference to Indigenous or any other non-Bengali people.

24 June, 1972: Larma forms a regional political party, the Chittagong Hill Tracts Solidarity Party, to champion the cause of regional autonomy.

13 February 1973: During a tour of the Hill Tracts, Sheikh Mujib reportedly says, “From today, there are no tribal sub-groups in Bangladesh; everyone is a Bengali.”

In the general elections of 1973, the Jumma Solidarity Party wins two seats in the Parliament for Larma and Chai Thowai Rowaza.

1975: Political earthquake after Sheikh Mujib’s assassination. Larma goes into hiding and the Solidarity Party creates an armed militant wing, the Shanti Bahini.

1976: General Ziaur Rahman creates Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board, with Area Commander of Chittagong Cantonment as Chairman. The Board begins to settle Bengali peasants in CHT. Chakma land is redistributed among Bengali settlers, and they also receive government loans to cover food expenses.

29 May 1977: The Shanti Bahini launches a lethal attack on the Army. In response, both the Army and Navy in the area are fortified, ratio of armed forces to CHT residents becomes 1:5.

26 December 1977: In a direct warning to Shanti Bahini and Chakmas, Chittagong Cantonment Area Commander Maj. Gen. Manzur announces, “We don’t want you. You can go off wherever you please. We just want your land.”

1979: Professor R.I. Chowdhury of Chittagong University leads a survey team to interview Jumma. On Kaptai Dam project, 93% say they were economically self-sufficient before the flooding.

25 March 1980: The Kalampati (Kaokhali) Massacre: the local Martial Law Commander convenes a Chakma meeting at a Buddhist temple. Officers open fire on the gathering, creating a death toll of almost 300. Bengalis attack Buddhist temples and Chakma residences in the area.

25 April 1980: In a press conference, MPs Upendra Lal Chakma, Shahjahan Shiraj and Rashed Khan Menon demand justice for Kalampati, and immediate inclusion of Jumma autonomy into the Bangladesh constitution.

29 July 1980: Following an earlier closed-door meeting with Jumma leaders, President Zia is quoted in the Guardian (UK) as saying “We are doing some wrong there. We are being unfair to the tribes. It is a political problem that is being dealt with by Police and Army action. Yet it can be settled politically very easily. We have no basis for taking over these lands and pushing these people into a corner. We should at least call a meeting of these tribal leaders and ask them their demands.”

December 1980: The Zia government, after light criticism of the Kalampati massacre, passes the Disturbed Area Bill, giving Chittagong Police Sub-Inspector and any Non-Commissioned Army Officers the right to shoot individuals suspected of illegal activities, and the right to raid any home suspected of storing weapons.

30 May 1981: Zia is assassinated in Chittagong in a coup led by Maj. Gen. Manzur.

5 February 1982: Led by the President’s Secretary on Tribal Affairs Subimol Dewan, Jumma and Bengali representatives meet with new President Abdus Sattar. Instead of positive steps, the Sattar government removes educational and occupational quotas created under Zia.

27 July 1982: After coming to power, General Ershad meets with Jumma leaders. He sends Chittagong Cantonment Area Commander Maj Gen Mannaf as his representative to Rangamati.

3 October 1983: Gen. Ershad proposes a package deal to resolve the Hill Tracts crisis. Meanwhile, a rift within the Solidarity Party leads to the assassination of Manabendro Narayan Larma by supporters of rival Priti Kumar Chakma.

1984: In their report to the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP), the Anti-Slavery Society of London criticizes the Bangladesh delegation’s report at previous year’s session--particularly the delegation’s claim “Bangladesh has no indigenous population”.

May 1985: Asian Conference On Religion And Peace (South Korea) presents report on “The crisis of the Chittagong Hill Tracts” which accuses Bangladesh of violating ILO Convention 107 on Tribal and Indigenous Populations.

21 October 1985: The 1st summit meeting between the Solidarity Party and the government takes place, with promise of further resolution at a 2d summit scheduled for Christmas. However, the 2d summit falls through and Bengali settlers continue to arrive.

2 August 1985: Bangladesh delegation to UN attacks London-based Anti-Slavery Society’s “baseless allegations” and “attempts to tarnish the image of Bangladesh”.

1986: First International Conference on Chittagong Hill Tracts held in Amsterdam.

2 June - 27 July 1986: Shantibahini launches two attacks on Bengali Settlers. In retaliation, Bengali settlers pillage local Jumma villages. Many Jumma flee to India’s Tripura. Meanwhile, the government claims there are 30,000 Bengali settlers, not 50,000 as reported by Jumma activists.

19 September 1987: Jumma leaders meet with Gen. Ershad and resolve to find a political solution. Ershad formulates a National Committee with Planning Minister A. K. Khondokar.

December 1987: CHT Commission is formed in Netherlands by UN International Working Group on Indigenous Affairs. Commission later brings out influential “Life Is Not Ours” report, which faults Bangladesh government for failing to enter Peace Talks with Jumma leaders.

17 December 1987 - 19 June 1988: No resolution is reached during four summit meetings between the government and the Solidarity Party. A 5-point manifesto for regional autonomy is rejected. Political solutions circumventing the autonomy issue are rejected by Solidarity Party.

8 August 1988: The Bagaichari Massacre: an attack on Jumma villages in retaliation for a Shanti Bahini attack on Army troops.

14 - 15 December 1988: The 6th summit meeting breaks down in spite of the Solidarity Party's compromise in changing the terminology from "regional" to "local" autonomy.

28 February 1989: A bill is passed to allow the creation of local governments in all three districts. These would be led by a "tribal" elected by all members of the Local Government Council.

4 May 1989: The Shanti Bahini launches an armed response to the local governments and their electoral process, leading to the assassination of Sub-District Committee Chairman Abdur Rashid Sarkar. In retaliation, settlers burn and attack Jumma villages. This incident is known as the Longdu Massacre. The military government takes over the electoral process, installing its own representatives.

July-August 1990: The UN Economic Social Council Commission on Human Rights reviews Chittagong Hill Tracts. The number of Jumma refugees in India is reported as 70,000.

6 December 1990: General Ershad is ousted by a mass uprising. In the ensuing melee, a Committee of Jumma students stage a press conference demanding the removal of the local governments.

10 April 1992: Bengali settler Kabir Ahmed is killed, allegedly for the attempted rape of a Jumma woman. In retaliation, settlers and authorities devastate the Chakma village of Logang, with a death toll of 300. A wave of international condemnation follows. In Japan, 130 NGOs and individuals form "Japan Committee on CHT Issues". Anti-Slavery International, Survival International and Amnesty International send protest letters to Bangladesh High Commission in UK. Khaleda Zia's government forms an inquiry committee.

22 April 1992: At Bangladesh Aid Consortium meeting in Paris, Finance Minister Saifur Rahman faces protests against Logang massacre by European human rights organizations.

May 1992: Amnesty International issues report on Logang and asks for inquiry on Jumma deaths.

19 May 1992: Bengali-Jumma violence escalates after Bengali settlers form 'Greater Chittagong Committee for Student Uprising'.

20 May 1992: Frustrated over government inaction over violence, Gautam Dewan, Chairman of Rangamati Local Government Council, resigns.

8 July 1992: Khaleda Zia government presents a bill in Parliament to increase the life-span of the local governments. Despite vehement opposition from Jumma members of the Awami League party, the bill passes.

10 July 1992: The government creates a Committee to resolve the CHT crisis, led by Minister Oli Ahmed. Leaders of the 3 local governments question Committee for not including elected MPs.

7 October 1992: Justice SH Khan's "Logang Disturbances Inquiry Commission" brings out a report blaming the Shanti Bahini for causing the Logang massacre. The report is criticized for biased findings. A sentence on Page 24, "[Bengali settlers] must raise their own security force, namely village defense party, who should be given arms and training for protection of the village", is seen as condoning Bengali violence against Jumma.

5 November 1992: Summit meeting with the Solidarity Party ends with no resolution.

17 November 1992: The Naniarchar massacre begins as a Jumma student protest is met by an army attack on the village of Naniarchar, with 90 jumma killed. Although an inquiry committee is formed, its report is not published.

10 December 1992: International Year of World's Indigenous People begins. A government Minister says, "Bangladesh has no indigenous people". The statement is condemned by Jumma leaders. Facing government inaction, NGOs organize "Indigenous Peoples Day".

March 1995: US State Department's "1994 Human Rights Report" reports that government settlement programs increased Bengalis in CHT from 3% in 1947 to 45% in 1994.

23 March 1995: 45 Bangladeshi intellectuals sign a statement accusing Bandarban Police of organizing attacks on Jumma students. They include Justice K.M. Sobhan, Dr. Kamal Hossain, Abdul Mannan Chowdhury, Dr. Humayun Azad, and Meghna Guhathakurta.

1996: Jumma People's Network of Asia Pacific Australia (JUMNAPA) publishes paper on militarization of Hill Tracts. According to this, there was 1 army officer for every 15 Jumma in 1994.

23 June 1996: The Awami League (AL), led by Sheikh Hasina, is elected for first time since Mujib's 1975 assassination. In CHT, AL members win seats through promises to work to ending the conflict. Post-election, there is consternation at government inaction. In a bid to gain attention, Shanti Bahini kills a group of 28 Bengali settlers

18 July 1996: Government estimate says 8,000 Jumma, soldiers and civilians have been killed to date. Jumma activists say the number is much higher.

30 September 1996: The Solidarity Party calls a one-month cease-fire. The government forms a National Committee with the aim of resolving the Chakma crisis.

1997: In the 3d update to "Life Is Not Ours" report, CHT Commission says "negotiations can be successful only if the traditional systems of land rights in CHT are acknowledged".

14 September 1997: After Bangladesh and India hold high level meetings, Indian government pressures Shanti Bahini to end fighting. PCJSS chairman Jyotirindriyo Bodhipriya Larma, alias Shantu Larma, flies into Dhaka for first time since beginning of insurgency to begin talks with government.

18 September 1997: After four days of talks, Larma announces a draft agreement to end the insurgency. Cease-fire is extended until Dec 31. A focal point disputes over land ownership.

14 October 1997: At a rally in Bogra, BNP leader Khaleda Zia accuses government of conspiring to "hand CHT over to India".

17 October 1997: PM Sheikh Hasina says: "We don't want our people, the citizens of a sovereign country, to stay as refugees in other countries."

26 November 1997: Parbattya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) begins seventh round of talks with National Committee on CHT (NCCHT) in Dhaka to finalize Peace Accord.

Sources:

Daily Star; Bhorer Kagoj; JaiJaiDin; US State Department; UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations; Refugee Studies Programme (University of Oxford); Center for World Indigenous Studies (Washington); "Genocide in Bangladesh"- Wolfgang Mey; Chittagong Hill Tracts Study Research Center (Engineering University, Dhaka); International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR); "No Land Rights in Bangladesh"- Colin Johnson; Ray (Dhaka Tribal Student Union, Biju Collection)- Biplab Chakma; Existence- Deshpriya Chakma (Dhaka Tribal Student Union); Topic: Chittagong Hill Tracts- Sidhartha Chakma (Nath Brothers); Stop Genocide in Chittagong Hill Tracts- Ogbongha Mohather (Calcutta); Life Is Not Ours- CHT Commission (Netherlands); "CHT: Militarization, Oppression the Hill Tribes"- Anti Slavery Society (London); Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board Report (1992-93); Upajathis Adivasis in Bangladesh- Surendra Lal Tripura (Ed. Hafiz R. Khan); Chittagong Hill Tracts: In search of Self-rule and Autonomy- Biplab Chakma (Pathak Shomabesh, 1997); Manabadhikar Shomonay Parishad; Jumma People's Network of Asia Pacific Australia; HIMAL (April 1997)

This timeline was published in Daily Star on November 26, 1997, on the day the final round of peace talks began. A week later, the 1997 CHT Accord was signed.

Connecting Visible Dots (1997-2010)

Naeem Mohaiemen

According to media reports, February-March saw the worst violence against Jumma (Pahari) people since the 1997 Peace Accord. However, the Mahalchari massacre (2006) was probably comparable in scale (10 villages attacked simultaneously). But since that happened under a BNP government that is vocally anti-Peace Accord, it was perhaps considered "normal" (the new normal). The latest anti-Jumma violence has a different resonance, as it is under an AL government whose election manifesto included implementation of the 1997 Accord.

In 2010, a memo orders that Jumma not be referred to as "Adivasi" or "indigenous" in any government documents.

A journalist friend asked me, "Tell me, what is the real story here?" What was the real story, I wondered. In 1997, I published (with Sagheer Faiz) a History of the CHT Conflict (Daily Star, 26/11/1997), during the week of Accord negotiations. I had not imagined I would have to return to that history, thirteen years later. But we are back here again, after a decade of missed opportunities in Chittagong Hill Tracts.

A Post Accord History

1997

The 1997 CHT Accord is signed between AL Government and the Shanti Bahini guerilla army. The Bahini lays down arms and demobilizes its soldiers. The Accord promises many things, including withdrawal of Army Camps, rehabilitation of Jumma (Pahari) who are internally displaced and external refugees during the war, resolution of land and other disputes between Jumma inhabitants and Bengali Settlers brought in during Zia and Ershad government, etc.

The nucleus of the Shanti Bahini's political wing stays as the political party PCJSS (Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti). Part of the Jumma leadership are dissatisfied with the 1997 Accord, particularly the lack of constitutional recognition to them as Adivasis. These groups form another political party, UPDF (United People's Democratic Front). Over the years, rivalry develops between UPDF and PCJSS, which is also aggravated by Bengali political forces that use this tension to delay implementing the Accord. In recent years, UPDF has shifted its opposition to the Accord--they now state that although the Accord is "flawed", they are ready to work within its framework. But as late as 2010, media outlets and government spokespeople continue to incorrectly describe UPDF as "anti-Accord", a characterization the UPDF contests.

1998-2001

BNP announces "long march" from Dhaka to Hill Tracts opposing the 1997 Accord and threatening to bring down AL. It is a calculated overture towards Bengali factions and state forces that are unhappy with the Accord. Jamaat e Islami joins the campaign.

Some small steps are taken as per the Accord (Regional Council and Land Commission set up, Land Commission law passed, Hill District Councils receive 19 of 36 promised functionalities). But on balance, AL does not implement the Accord, leaving most of the sensitive issues untouched. In addition, Land Commission Law is severely flawed, and Jumma spokespeople ask for 19 amendments.

2002-2005

AL is defeated at elections. BNP enters government in a coalition with Jamaat, with the latter taking control of two powerful ministries: Social Affairs (which controls NGOs) and Industries. BNP strategists identify religious and ethnic minority populations as pro-AL. In a calculated scare campaign, Hindu populations are targeted for revenge attacks by BNP cadres.

In CHT the BNP's strategy is to continue and accelerate the policy of 1970s and 1980s, displacing ethnic minority Jumma population with Bengali Settlers. In addition to land grabbing, Bengali Settlers systematically occupy all levels of administration. Jumma activists allege that the administration is engaged in "Islamicisation" and "Bengalicisation" of regional governance.

Although the Accord remains largely unimplemented, the fact of its signing allows entrance of NGOs into the region. Although their programs are modeled under post-conflict rebuilding programs (similar to regions such as East Timor), they are not allowed to work in "sensitive" areas. The NGOs are limited to working in education, agriculture, etc. Even with this limited scope, their work brings some (contested) economic development into Jumma communities. NGO employment also increases the creation of a professional, white-collar segment within Jumma population.

2006-2008

Violent pre-election confrontation between BNP and AL. A state of emergency is declared and an Army-supported "Caretaker Government" takes over. There is widespread arrest of politicians and activists from both parties. CHT region faces disproportionate amount of mass arrests. Legal aid groups file numerous cases to free arrested Jumma, and prevent their torture. In the plains region, Indigenous Garo activist Choles Ritchil (famed for opposing the Eco-Park) dies while in custody, raising an international hue and cry.

Bengali Settlers continue arson and attacks to displace Jumma. In one such case, groups of Jumma houses are burnt down in Sajek. There is sustained protest from civil society. In a pattern that is repeated, people who speak to visiting investigators are later persecuted by Settlers and local administration

In 2008, the country begins negotiations towards elections and a return to civilian governance. The country's mobile phone companies are allowed to operate in CHT for the first time, changing a decade long government ban for "security reasons". The Election Commission announces that neither of the two political parties representing Jumma - PCJSS and UPDF - will be allowed to compete in the elections, because they "only represent a region" and are not "national parties". Unable to field candidates, UPDF and PCJSS support independent candidates, but are prevented from campaigning. AL candidates win in all three districts.

2009-2010

AL enters office, buoyed by an election manifesto that includes, among other things, a promise to fully implement the 1997 Accord and to uphold the rights of ethnic minorities. However, two months later, the massacre at BDR headquarters is a major destabilizing incident.

The CHT Accord takes a back seat until winter, when its 12th anniversary arrives with fanfare. Unprecedented attention is given to the issue from government, NGOs, media and civil society. Pressure continues to build on the government to announce a timetable for implementation. At the same time, powerful Bengali economic groups which have benefited by grabbing huge tracts of land from Jumma in CHT, and profited from illegal timber felling and cross-border smuggling, group together under anti-Accord banners. Bengali Settler groups like Shama Odhikar, formed during BNP tenure and patronized by state forces, are well funded and lead agitations and racist campaigns

against the Jumma. No government action is taken, despite openly communal and racially motivated demonstrations, posters and other actions.

The AL government removes 35 temporary Army Camps from the region, in a symbolic gesture towards fulfilling the 1997 Accord. Although this represents a minuscule portion of total camps in the region (one newspaper estimates it be "around 10%"), the BNP demands that such withdrawals be halted. The BNP high command, decimated by a landslide defeat in the 2008 elections, starts to regroup on a platform of "wedge" issues. Opposition to the 1997 Accord is seen as one such issue, and there are efforts to again bring up allegations of "separatism", even though the Accord has no such provisions. BNP and Jamaat aligned lawyers continue legal cases in the High Court (one dating as far back as 2000), attempting to declare the 1997 Peace Accord "unconstitutional". In the final ruling, the court upholds the Accord, but declares Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council Act illegal.

Since 2002, one core platform of Bengali Settlers in CHT has been to dispute the description of the Jumma as "indigenous" or "Adivasi"-- since this term has legal ramifications, especially vis-à-vis land rights. During the BNP government, a Minister declared that "Bangladesh has no indigenous people". AL Foreign Minister Dr. Dipu Moni appears to reflect the earlier BNP minister's statement, when she says, "Bangladesh does not have any indigenous population. Bangladesh rather has several ethnic minorities and tribal population." In 2010, the CHT Affairs Ministry, headed by a Jumma minister, issues a memo ordering that Jumma not be referred to as "Adivasi" or "indigenous" in any government documents.

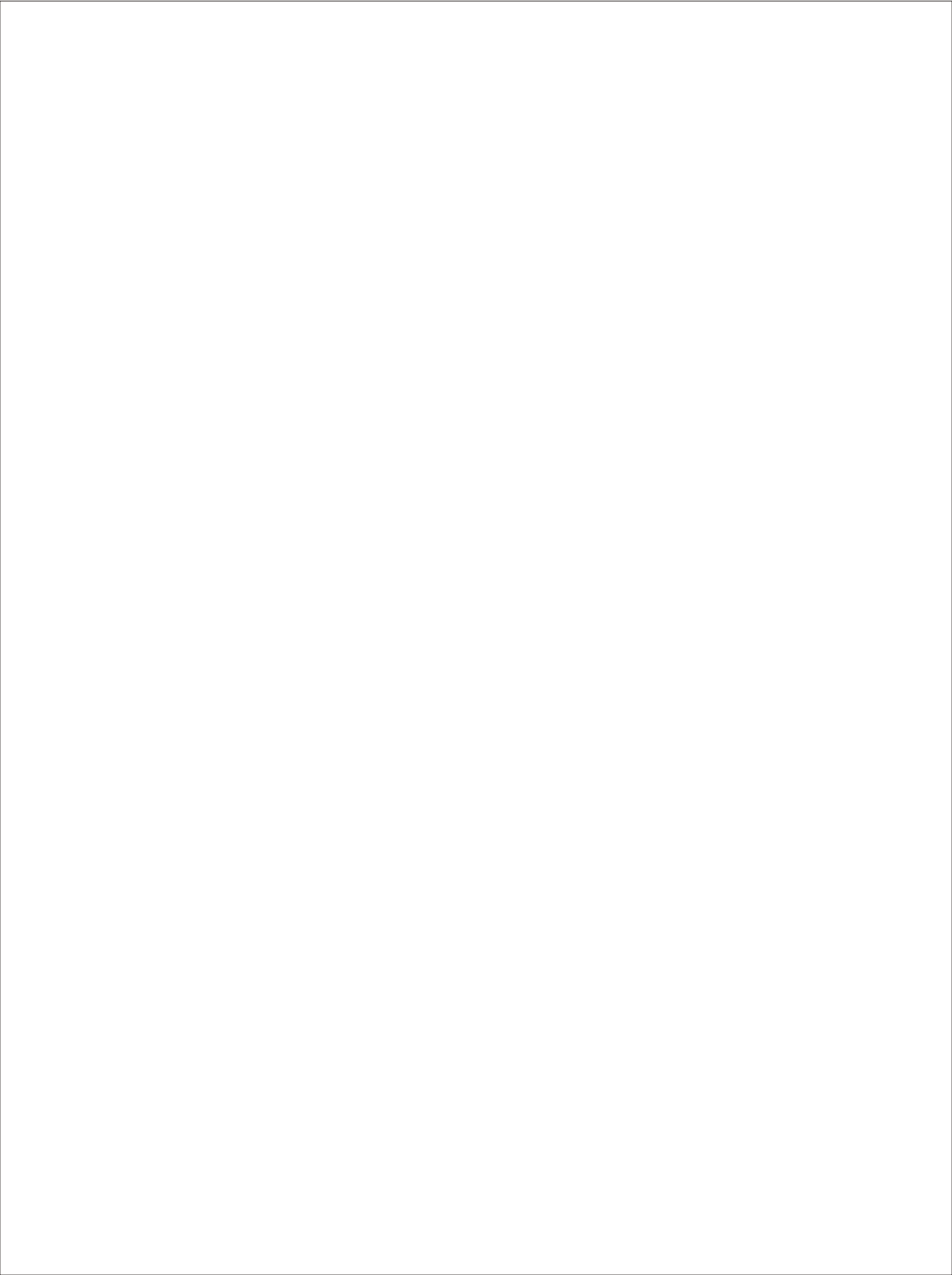
Government is asked repeatedly by civil society groups to announce a timetable for implementation. Meanwhile land grabbing continues in CHT, coupled with garish hyper-development linked to tourism development bodies-- all managed and run by Bengalis.

Jumma communities continue a boycott of local markets, in protest against Bengali land grabbing. Bengali Settlers carry out fresh attacks on Jumma in Sajek, which was also site of 2008 violence. The situation escalates when the Army fires on Jumma protesters. The official death toll is two Jumma dead, but there are claims that more Jumma bodies have "disappeared". A cascading wave of arson and physical attacks spread into areas in Khagrachari, and destroy many Jumma homes. A Bengali Settler, part of a mob that attacked a Marma village, is killed by villagers resisting the attack.

BNP comes out with statements that the violence proves Army Camps cannot be withdrawn from CHT. Jumma activists, including leaders of UPDF and JSS, argue in public media that the presence of the Army does not prevent violence-- in fact Bengali settlers feel emboldened by their presence to carry out anti-Jumma attacks. Bengali activists question role of administration and security forces, as violence continues in their direct physical presence. In several areas, BNP and AL aligned locals allegedly join forces to covertly support Bengali settlers.

Bhumitra Chakma publishes "Structural Roots of Violence in CHT" (EPW, 20/03/2010): "From the late 1970s, the Bangladeshi government has consistently pursued a policy of 'change the demography' in CHT." Raja Devasish Roy says in an interview (Daily Star, 2/4/2010): "We cannot forget the ethnic and religious affiliations behind the uniforms. Since all members of the army and police in the region are Bengalis, and there is Pahari-Bengali tension, there is a big risk of bias. What is needed is an ethnically mixed police force with special training, if necessary, to handle law and order problems."

Daily Star, April 16th, 2010



Betraying a Treaty





The Dream That Turned Into a Day

Den Doha Jolai Tripura

January, 1973. Having decided to forfeit my work with the Bandarban Mission to travel to the forest, I headed towards Kalajhiri Tripura in the Alikodom sub-district. Nasram Tripura, retired teacher, accompanied me. We reached Satish master's house around 8 p.m. on the biting cold night. As we sat around a fire to warm up and to warm up to each other, a young man showed up. We learnt later that he was a member of the Shanti Bahini. As we got further acquainted over dinner, we asked to meet his Commander. Without any hesitation, he agreed to take us the following morning.

**So is this what my two
suns represented? Had
the elders misinterpreted
my dream in 1973?
Reality is quite opposite.**

[1972 saw the beginning of armed rebellion in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Initially the operations were strictly institutional. Then, 1975 onwards, began recruitment of local youth, militia training, political classes, mass lines, etc.]

The following day we started off for an unknown destination. Two men, Shanti Bahini members, led the way. How perfidious the serenity of these mountains is! Braving the hilly roads felt like getting trained for a guerilla operation! We broke our journey for the night and reached our destination the following evening. Of course our guide, a Shanti Bahini member, informed others of our visit beforehand. We were asked to go to a Chakma area.

Upon reaching there we found ourselves at a wedding. This was the first time I experienced a Chakma wedding. Between festivities, we were introduced to the Commander. We didn't really get much of a chance to converse with him then. Wedding festivities over, we were taken to another Chakma area.

A few days later, the Commander informed that the political classes were about to begin. Decisions pertaining to aggregating young (male) participants, disseminating political ideas and ideology, militia training, etc. would all be made centrally. The training would continue from 9 a.m. till 4 or 5 p.m. At night, they would work with the elders to create mass awareness.

We would talk about these issues of awareness every day. I spoke about the communities other than Chakma. I asked the Commander:

"When the dynamics between the 13 ethnicities here will be horizontal, only then will they be able to approach agendas as a unified front. When they will be able to insert themselves into education and business institutions, and would have proved their competence in various fields, only then will the government allow this to be an autonomous state. What do you think?"

The Commander's reply was:

"This is a long-term process. This rebellion started with the government's rejection of M.N. Larma's demands that he had made in Parliament in 1972. The people need to be politically aware. People from all walks of life need to come forward."

One night, the Commander, Nasram Tripura and I went to sleep on heaps of rice. The Commander and I were short, so we were alright. Nasram Tripura had a hard time fitting himself in his "bed."

That night I had a dream. I dreamt of two suns side by side. I was staring at them. The sky was as bright as 9 a.m. Everyone around was astonished at this sight. When I actually woke up it was almost dawn. The three of us approached a group of elders sitting by a fire and smoking bamboo pipes (dunda) on this winter morning. Over breakfast, I told them about my dream. They had remarked, "A hi; Ama Dechh Abadeyai," meaning, we will get a free state."

If my dream materializes into reality, then this rebellion will be successful. The Commander shared his feelings and dealt out instructions. People got to work with double the enthusiasm.

Before we knew it, a month had passed. Nasram Tripura and I took our leave from the Commander. By the time we got to Thanchhi Bazaar from Alikodom, it was already evening. We took shelter at Nasram's father house in Mangmapara for a few days. We stayed there a few days and spent our evenings spreading the party's ideologies among the Tripura community. Later, I continued this work in the Kaptai area by myself. At the time, that area was under the Sarbahara Party. I had communicated with them too.

We have crossed over two decades now. We have seen many regime changes. We have seen a rift in the Janasanghati Party (shorties vs. lankies) between 1984-5, the consequence of which was M.N. Larma's brutal death. To prevent the party from becoming obsolete, Jyotirindro Bodhipriyo (Santu) Larma took charge.

We saw different regimes engage in different conversations with the Janasanghati Party. Then on 2 December, 1997, we saw the formulation of the CHT Peace Accord, signed between Awami League and Janasanghati Party.

The implementation of the accord is now on a deadlock. No one has the time to reflect on who the victors in these battles are.

So is this what my two suns represented? Had the elders misinterpreted my dream in 1973? Reality is quite the opposite.

Translated by Farah Mehreen Ahmad.

Solution Impossible if Accord Bypassed

Abhoy Prakash Chakma

I got a shiver reading the headline "Major plan to end violence and initiate development in the Chittagong Hill Tracts" (Daily Jugantor, 5 July 2010). I fail to understand the reasons behind the apparent move to resolve the political problem of the CHT while by-passing the widely hailed Accord whose full implementation was also an election promise.

No step is proposed to control activities of the ultra Bengali chauvinist organization 'Shama Adhikar Andolon'.

According to the reported news, an alleged government plan planning to end ethnic violence and for regional development includes: 1. Rehabilitation of Pahari and Bengali families affected by recent ethnic violence in Baghaihat and Khagrachari; 2. Creating alternative work for poppy cultivators; 3. Control the activities of UPDF; 4. Enhance the paramilitary and civilian forces; 5. Expedite the regional and district council elections; 6. Redraw the three district boundaries; and 7. Incorporate Baghaichari upazilla into Khagrachhari district. To implement these, a 'strategic management forum' --- composed of the CHT ministry, Home ministry, Forestry department, the circle chiefs and intelligence agencies, and headed by a minister or a Prime Minister's advisor --- will be formed. Under the plan, intelligence activities will be coordinated, civilian and paramilitary forces' capacity will be enhanced, activities of international agencies working in the region will be coordinated, and regional parties will have to become integrated into national politics.

While the proposed plan appears good, it's not practical. There is no indication of implementing the CHT Accord here. This proposal, if implemented, will add a new dimension to the CHT crisis.

Asking the military to rehabilitate the victims of the 19-22 February communal attacks, instead of ensuring the punishment of the perpetrators, will invite repetition of similar attacks. An investigation team from the CHT Commission visited the region on 18-22 June. In a letter to the Prime Minister, the team expressed concerns about these events --- human rights violation and the continued military control --- creating impediments to the implementation of the Accord and the region's democratization. The perpetrators and their collaborators informed the team of an imaginary story whereby the security forces couldn't mobilize rapidly because a group of Pahari miscreants burnt down a bridge. And yet, according to the investigative team's report, there was a military camp within minutes drive from the burnt Pahari village, and these are not near the above mentioned bridge. Settler Bengalis committed similar arson on 20 April 2008 as part of their ongoing land grabbing process. Ladumoni Chakma was a key person informing the Commission of the fear among the Paharis at that time --- he was killed shortly thereafter. There was no investigation, or at least any public report of one, about that event. These events keep being repeated, because there is no investigation nor punishment.

According to the reported plan, regional political parties are supposed to be integrated into mainstream politics through the registration process. The CHT has enjoyed distinct governance set up since the pre-Mughal days owing to its ethnic and geographic peculiarities. Its political conditions thus have to be analysed separately. Paharis formed political parties to attain their rights after failing to shake off centuries of oppression even after independence. While regional in scope, these parties are not against the constitution. Indigenous persons are also involved in the two major parties, including in the top positions of their district committees. Therefore, it is not wise to try to assimilate the regional parties into the political mainstream. The Paharis will lose their cultural distinction if they

don't have their own politics. And it is striking to see that no step is proposed to control the activities of the anti-Accord ultra Bengali chauvinist organization 'Shama Adhikar Andolon', even though they have been accused of repeatedly igniting communal violence.

It is a good sign that the proposal speaks of the much delayed elections to the district and regional councils. However, if the UNDP proposal of separate electorates for Paharis and Bengalis is implemented, there is a risk of further communal disharmony. Separate electorate will mean Bengali councilors will have no accountability to the Paharis, nor the Pahari members to the Bengalis. According to the District Council Act, the Election Commission will hold elections to the council 60 days prior to the expiry of its term. Despite being an independent constitutional body, it's not clear why the Election Commission hasn't held the district elections. Since there is no election, the government is forming ad hoc interim councils, making use of the Section 26A(4) of the Act. This section doesn't limit the number of times such ad hoc councils can be formed. Because they are not elected, these councilors are not accountable to the people. Rather, being composed of party members, these councils have become partisan bodies.

Many consider the electoral process to be an impediment to district elections. And this is about the qualification of the non-Paharis to be voters. According to the Section 17 of the Act, anyone permanently residing in the region can be voter for election to this body. The definition of a non-tribal permanent resident is one who is not a tribal, but who legally owns land in the region and resides at a specific address. In the name of equal rights, some settler Bengalis have been demanding this section. Others claim that this is against the constitution, and thus makes voter list impossible. However, this section is not against the constitution --- there is no contradiction between Sections 59 and 60 of the constitution and a voter list based on the current act. And the district councils are supported by the Sections 28 and 29 of the constitution. And if they are against the constitution, then how are these bodies running since 1989?

The magnanimity of dominant Bengalis will be expressed if a handful of posts are reserved for the Paharis. Without reservation, Paharis will not have any representation in the CHT. Even though they made up only 2.5% of total population of the region at the time of partition, by 1991 census Bengalis were 49% of the population. And no census is needed to ascertain that Bengalis outnumber Paharis. Without specific conditions to become voters, thousands of Bengalis could come from neighbouring districts and complicate the election process. Without reservation, Paharis will win no posts. Paharis have paid a heavy price for establishing these bodies. The geometry in the Bengali settler population is outpacing the arithmetic increase among the Paharis --- indigenous existence is now extinct.

The government that signed the Peace Accord cannot resolve the CHT crisis while bypassing the same accord. One fears whether some local or foreign vested quarters are coaxing the government into this. There is no alternative to the full implementation of the Accord for permanent peace.

Translated by Jyoti Rahman from Bengali version published in Jugantor, July 24th, 2010

Ten Wasted Years

Brig Gen (Retd) Shahedul Anam Khan

A decade has gone by, and we have very little to show insofar as the implementation of the major stipulations of the Peace Accord of December 2, 1997, between the Government of Bangladesh and the Parbattya Chattagram Jana Sangahati Samity (PCJSS), is concerned. Just as a point of clarification, the agreement was an "accord" and not a "treaty" as some refer to it.

Giving up arms and calling for a ceasefire was an act of wisdom motivated by a great degree of realpolitik.

It was resolved that the genuine anxiety of the hill people would be addressed in order to satisfy their aspirations to live as a separate (not independent) entity under the flag of Bangladesh, and to uphold political, social, cultural, educational, and economic rights, and expedite socioeconomic development process of all citizens in the CHT.

The original demand of self-rule was toned down, not to the satisfaction, though, of everybody amongst the tribal groups; nor have all the clauses of the Accord been acceptable to all the plains people. This was evident from two separate meetings held on December 2, which projected different views on the same issue

The answer to my query perhaps is not too difficult to seek. It would not be wrong to suggest that there has been a general lack of will of the governments that were in power during the ten years since the deal was formally agreed upon. In particular, those provisos that deal with the devolution of power have hit a snag. And that is what causes concern among the tribal people.

Every year since 1997, Mr. Larma, leader of one faction of the tribal groups that support the Accord, has been calling upon the government to fulfill its part of the obligation by implementing the various clauses; the calls were accompanied by threats of dire consequences. One cannot blame him for that since it is the only way that he can retain his credibility among his tribe as a leader, which he put on the line when he signed the agreement.

This year, the call was subdued. That does not mean that Mr. Larma has relented on his six-point demand that he made in 2004, nor given up entirely the option of taking to the hills with his band as an alternative, which he suggested in 2006 he might be compelled to do to force the issue upon the government.

I feel that the government must visualize Mr. Larma's position realistically and dispassionately. Giving up arms and calling for a ceasefire, that he did in 1992, was an act of wisdom motivated by a great degree of realpolitik.

The insurgency was losing steam no doubt, and the external support that Larma had relied upon for almost twenty years was also diminishing. And there was little guarantee, if at all, that such support would continue, particularly in the wake of the installation of a new government in Dhaka in 1996. Although many question whether the deal would have been at all possible without India letting the Shanti Bahini (SB) know that the option of arms was the least bit efficacious under the changed circumstances, one presumes that the changed reality was not lost upon the PCJSS leadership. Their position in 1996 was in some ways similar to what the LTTE in Sri Lanka found themselves in, post 9/11. Agreeing to sign the Accord was a strategically wise decision on the part of the PCJSS.

But his weakened bargaining position does not, in any way, diminish either the gravity or the relevance of the genuine grievances of the hill people. This fact had been acknowledged by all the past governments. This is amply evident in their efforts over the years leading up to the signing of the peace deal, including the regime of Gen Ershad, to resolve the CHT by embarking upon dialogues with the Shanti Bahini.

After a decade of the signing one must ask why there has been no progress in the implementation of the Accord. Except for some cosmetic actions during the three years of the AL rule, which must be given the credit for bringing about the agreement, and during the five years of the BNP's, which had rejected the deal out of hand as a "sell out" by the AL, since, according to them, the treaty impinged on the unitary nature of the state as laid down in the Constitution, very little of substance has been done to implement the Accord in its entirety.

The December 1997 deal, to some, was an act of one-upmanship by the AL. In retrospect, one feels that they would have done better to have taken the other parties on board and thrashed out the various clauses before inking the deal. That would perhaps have held all the parties to the moral obligation to see the deal through, whichever party was in power. As it is, it would be immoral for any party to soft-pedal on the self-serving plea that it was not they that had signed the compact. History bears evidence that all the major parties that had held the reins of the government had, at one time or another, involved the PCJSS in negotiations to resolve the issue.

One may well ask whether too much has been committed in the deal, which we are now not in a position to fulfill because of the various constitutional impedimenta. If that be the case, would anyone, particularly the hill people, be wrong in feeling that they have been let down, and the intention behind the whole exercise was anything but addressing of their genuine grievances?

We have wasted ten long years. We must not forget that the state had made commitments to a segment of its people. It is the obligation of the state to fulfill those. And as there is no one single architect of the deal, the ignominy of failure to see it through, as well the consequences that the country might face as a result, will have to be shouldered by all the major political parties.

What begs the question is, if there are constitutional barriers, the best thing would be to get experts to fix a way out. It would be in fitness of things to involve the PCJSS in further discussions to determine how the deal can be implemented without violating the constitution on the one hand and on the other the spirit of the deal itself. One hears about "reviewing" the accord. But any review can be justified only after concrete actions to implement all the provisions of the accord are seen to have been taken. That is not the case. Moreover, any "review" ought to be done by an elected government.

What I had said in these columns last year bears repetition. It is clear that the accord must be made acceptable to all concerned. The government must ensure that the apprehensions of the majority are allayed and any devolution of power does not go against the grain of natural justice and rights of a citizen. We must also fulfill the commitment made to the hill people. We can ill afford unrest in the CHT once again.

Daily Star, December 6th, 2007

Promises Pending

Kajalie Shehreen Islam

"Why is there so much fear in a free country?" asks Lalita Chakma, whose home was burnt down in the violence in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in late February. Lalita, a widow, tailors for a living. On the night of the violence, she had to flee her home with her three-year-old granddaughter, not knowing where to go, not knowing if she would face even more violence across the river. Her son, who she hoped would get an education, a job and look after her in her old age, could not sit for his SSC exams due to the violence. "Who will look after me now?" she asks. Lalita's story is only one of many written during the recent violence in the CHT, which left three people dead and 70 injured. Five hundred and sixty-three homes were set on fire, of which 434 homes in Baghaichhari and 63 homes in Khagrachhari belonged to adivasis. Similar violence occurred in the same area in Sajek, Rangamati less than two years ago. To many, the violence comes as no surprise. For many, fears of more violence in the future remain.

Since members of army and police in the region are Bengalis, and there is Pahari-Bengali tension, there is risk of bias.

"If a conflict remains unresolved, it will keep erupting," says Sultana Kamal, advocate of the Supreme Court, former advisor to the caretaker government and co-chairperson of the International CHT Commission. The conflict in the CHT centers around land, its ownership and occupation, says Kamal. There are competitive claims on the land with two parties claiming the same piece of land as their own. "Bengali settlers have been encouraged to think that it is government land, without actually determining whether the land was khas land. Land in the CHT was given away without consulting those who lived there -- this is against any law, convention, etc." says Kamal. According to Kamal, the conflict over land has not been seriously addressed. "The conflict has increased in recent times as both parties are going through a nervous state thinking about who the land will go to." "We also cannot dismiss doubts about the work of vested interest groups in the CHT and that they may have played a role in the conflict," says Kamal. "This includes businesses, civil society, NGOs and the army."

The Chairman of CHT Regional Council and former Commander of the insurgent group Shanti Bahini, Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma, better known as Shantu Larma, in an interview with Pinaki Roy, senior reporter of The Daily Star, claimed that the recent violence was not an isolated event. "It has been State policy since the Pakistan era to turn non-Muslim majority populated areas into Muslim-majority populated areas. The recent violence was a part of this continuous process, as was the army-backed settlement of four lakh Bengalis in the CHT during the reign of President Ziaur Rahman," says Larma. "Neither the Paharis nor Bengalis are to blame, it is the State which has brought them to a level of confrontation. If the government was truly sincere, these incidents would not have occurred. There is no security for the Jumma people in the CHT, no one knows when the next attack will occur."

Over 12 years into its signing, why has the CHT Accord not been implemented? Experts believe that there are problems within the Accord itself, which first need to be resolved. Amena Mohsin, Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka, believes that there are "seeds of discord" in the Accord. "Many critical issues have not been addressed, such as the settler issue," says Mohsin. "To begin with, the settlement programme was a mistake. But at the time it was taken as a counter-insurgency measure. Now, between 48 and 50 percent of the population in the CHT is Bengali. You cannot just withdraw them. You have to resettle them, whether in a different part

of the CHT or elsewhere. This is a politically sensitive issue but dialogue must be opened because without addressing this issue the Accord cannot be fully implemented. It is a national issue and must be dealt with as such, with both the government and opposition engaging in dialogue."

According to Sultana Kamal, the indecisive position of the government is problematic. "There are provisions in the Accord which will not be appreciated by Bengalis, there are also provisions that have not been whole-heartedly accepted by the indigenous people. But a compromise was being reached. Due to the delays, the unification between the indigenous groups too is fizzling out. The government has to be firm in starting the process of implementation of the Peace Accord," says Kamal. "It must be transparent and visibly taking steps for implementation so that people can take it into confidence. The atmosphere of insecurity in the CHT demands particular and urgent attention. We urge the government to solve the problem in the CHT by deciding on ways that are generally acceptable to all."

Ironically, much of the sense of insecurity in the CHT has been attributed to the role of the security forces, which has been widely debated for failing to protect the indigenous communities in the region. "The military is the last resort you take when conflict occurs," says Professor Imtiaz Ahmed. "To send it first thing to counter a conflict is an overkill. The current government is a political one, it has supporters from both Bengali and Pahari communities, it could have sent a voluntary force comprising members from both communities to help the security forces handle the conflict."

Prior to 2007, there were no Bengalis within the Sajek union except in the Bazar areas. Since then, there have been consistent allegations that the settling of Bengalis on roadside areas near Baghahat has been backed by the army. "The government should clarify this matter," says Raja Devasish Roy, Chief of the Chakma Circle. "If the allegation is not true, it should be made clear once and for all and have the name of the army cleared. If it is true, then it must be dealt with. The army cannot have its own policy separately from the government, and as far as the government is concerned, the CHT Accord is part of government policy, which must be abided by. The Accord does not allow such settlements."

"An army cannot run a society on a day-to-day basis," says Sultana Kamal. "It has a role along the borders, not inside the territory." The CHT is a strategic area for Bangladesh and the permanent cantonments will remain, but the temporary camps should be withdrawn as per the Accord, says Professor Amena Mohsin. "The Paharis do not look upon the army as their protectors, whereas the Bengalis do. The role of the army should not be made controversial; this is not good for the country, the military is an institution, or the common people. Rather, we can have peacekeeping forces which include indigenous people, which work for community building and maintaining peace in the CHT."

In the opinion of Raja Devasish Roy, the army is not trained, oriented or sensitised to deal with land disputes. "Also, we cannot forget the ethnic and religious affiliations behind the uniforms," says Roy. "Since all members of the army and police in the region are Bengalis, and there is Pahari-Bengali tension, there is a big risk of bias. What is needed is an ethnically mixed police force with special training, if necessary, to handle law and order problems. In areas with racial or communal tension, mixed police have been the best way to handle law and order, such as in neighbouring Tripura state in India, or even in cities like New York. It is not the job of the army to handle law and order, except, of course where organised and large-scale violence is targeted against the state and its citizens, which is not the case in the CHT, at least from the early 1990s to today."

The Land Commission's recent announcement about conducting a land survey in the CHT, too, has given rise to misgivings, especially among the adivasis. The land survey is supposed to be carried

out by the Land Survey Office under the Land Ministry; the job of the Commission is to resolve disputes, they claim. Also, a cadastral survey as declared by the Land Commission would record a piece of land as belonging to the person who holds a title deed. Adivasis, many of whom do not possess such documents, are afraid of losing their land. Shantu Larma, expressing his suspicion about such measures, claims the survey is simply a means of handing over the land to outsiders.

"According to the Accord, the ownership of land in the CHT must first be determined before a land survey is carried out. This is not being done," says Ranglai Mro, organising secretary of the Movement for the Protection of Forest and Land Rights in the CHT. "Even if it is, the adivasis fear that they may lose ownership of land as they do not all have documents to prove it. Those who fled from Khagrachhari and Rangamati to India during the insurgency have also not got back their land that was taken by Bengali settlers in their absence. Many adivasis are illiterate, others simply did not understand the significance of documents to prove ownership. We have traditional ownership of land based on trust. This must be recognised by the Land Commission."

"We are not clear about what the Land Commission is doing," says Sudotto Bikash Tchanchangya, general secretary of the Movement for the Protection of Forest and Land Rights in the CHT. "The Commission is a part of the Accord, not independent of it. It must function according to the provisions in the Accord. Nineteen recommendations were made suggesting amendments to the CHT Land Dispute Settlement Commission Act 2001 in accordance with the Accord. These have not been implemented." The tribal leaders who are members of the Commission, however, will not attend the meetings unless the 19 amendments are made, claiming that the Act is not in line with the Accord without those amendments.

In an effort to counter threats to the indigenous communities in Bangladesh, the CHT Accord of 1997 recognises the CHT as a 'tribal inhabited region', the overall development of which must be attained with its characteristics protected. With regards to the special status given to the CHT, as a Tribal Area, by the first Constitution of Pakistan in 1956 which was revoked in 1964, Raja Devasish Roy says that special status does not mean special rights. "It is only to ensure equality through some procedural differences. The Accord should not be seen as contradictory to the Constitution. The historical injustice suffered by the indigenous people must be undone."

"Due to the lack of basic healthcare and schools in the remoter parts of the CHT, the indigenous communities are deprived, resulting in de facto discrimination by the State," continues Roy. "The modern state must take measures to protect the indigenous people, who have been suffering from colonisation, exclusion and discrimination, sometimes by design and sometimes by default." Secularism was one of the fundamental principles of the 1972 Constitution. But secularism is not only about religion, it can be extended to language, culture, Roy points out. "We must take a deeper look at the Constitution and make it more multicultural."

In order to prevent conflict in any society, the civil society has a crucial role to play, says Professor Imtiaz Ahmed. "In the CHT, the whole social structure is based on a political society, based on rules, regulations, the security forces; there is no civil society. There is no university, which is essential for the preservation and development of language and culture, rights which the Paharis are deprived of. There are no recreational facilities which would bring the two communities together to build consent, to make them feel like they need each other. Social development is essential for lasting peace."

Reducing dependence on land and focusing on income-generating activities in the CHT may solve many of the problems there, notes Professor Amena Mohsin. "The culture of the indigenous people must be preserved and protected. Their traditional industries should be promoted. This is not to say

that they will not be involved in modern industry, but they must be given the confidence that they will not lose their identity if they do. Development will take place but it must be participatory. Also, we lack understanding about the situation of the indigenous communities. I think it should be included in our academic curriculum, in the form of cultural studies at the school level, in order to help us understand each other's cultures. It must be constitutionally recognised."

Self-determination of peoples, including indigenous peoples, is a basic tenet of international human rights law, as recognised, among others, in the Human Rights Covenants of 1966, to which Bangladesh is a party, says Raja Devasish Roy. "Self-determination does not necessarily mean independence. Of course it has to be exercised by respecting the territorial integrity of states."

"We want to be united with the rest of the country, not isolated, but the unity must not threaten our cultural identity and integrity," says Roy.

If anyone has anything to lose in the CHT, it is the indigenous people, who make up less than one percent of the population of Bangladesh. While the destruction of their homes and occupation of their land are the visible manifestations of the conflict, the greater, unseen danger lies in the loss of their cultural identity, and, in the case of the mainstream population, of the only cultural diversity that Bangladesh has.

Abbreviated from Daily Star Weekend Magazine, April 2d, 2010, Cover Story

Status of Implementation

Mangal Kumar Chakma

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Accord popularly known as CHT Peace Accord was signed between the Government of Bangladesh and the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS). The Accord recognizes the CHT as a tribal-inhabited region, and provides for establishment of a special administrative system for this region with a Regional Council and three Hill District Councils, resolution of land disputes in accordance with the Jumma peoples' traditional land rights, withdrawal of all temporary camps of armed forces (excluding BDR camps and 6 permanent cantonments) in order to promote democratization, rehabilitation of returnee Jumma refugees and internally displaced Jumma people, allocation of additional financial resources for the development of the region, and establishment of a CHT Affairs Ministry. It provides for transfer of powers to the Regional Council and the three Hill District Councils (HDCs).

"White-robed terrorism", extreme communalism and religious militancy cast a long shadow over the Hill Tracts.

Unfortunately, the Awami League government at that time did not proceed to implement the main provisions of the Accord, such as protection of the uniqueness of the CHT as a tribal inhabited region, establishment of land rights through resolution of land disputes, and introduction of a special administrative system through enforcement of the Regional Council Act and the three Hill District Council Acts. Narrow-minded and undemocratic political perspectives and attitudes of extreme communalism and Bengali nationalism acted as major obstacles. There were persistent elements within the government and the Awami League that created obstacles to implementation.

In fact, though the Regional Council Act and the three Hill District Council Acts were enacted, they were never properly enforced, so the special administrative system could never be made effective. The temporary camps of the armed forces were never withdrawn, but rather de facto military rule was imposed under the name of "Operation Uttoron." Though the Land Commission was formed, it was unable to resolve any land disputes, and the Land Commission Act was passed with provisions that were contradictory to the Accord. The Jumma refugees who returned from India and the internally displaced Jumma people were not rehabilitated, but rather, Bengali settlers were counted as internally displaced people and efforts were made to rehabilitate them in the Chittagong Hill Tracts in violation of the peace accord. The provision vesting the circle chiefs with exclusive powers to grant permanent resident certificates was not enforced, but rather the deputy commissioners were given the power to grant permanent resident certificates. Land leases previously given to non-permanent residents were not rescinded, but rather outsiders were given new leases in violation of the accord. Voter lists for the CHTs comprising only permanent residents were not prepared, but rather outsiders were included in the voter lists. The provision to grant employment to permanent residents of the CHTs with priority for Jumma people in all forms of civil service in the CHTs also was not enforced.

Next, the four party alliance government led by the ultra right wing anti-peace accord political party BNP came to power. Naturally this government moved to trample upon the accord by various means. There were increased moves to render ineffective the Regional Council and three Hill District Councils established under the special administrative system. "White-robed terrorism," extreme communalism and extreme religious militancy cast a long shadow over the Hill Tracts. Half a dozen barbarous attacks occurred such as the communal attack upon the Jumma people of Mahalchari in

2003. The extreme communalist and ultra-nationalist organization known as the so-called “Sama Odhikar Andolan (Equal Rights Movement),” founded under the leadership of BNP-affiliated MP Wadud Bhuiyan, received overt state patronage. Undermining the status of Hill Tracts as a Jumma inhabited region, the process of Bengali settlers’ forceful grabbing of Jumma lands intensified.

On January 11th, 2007, a "caretaker government" (CTG) came to power. This government arrested many indigenous leaders, filed malicious cases against them, expanded settlements for Bengali settlers, and intensified forceful land grabbing. In violation of the CHT peace accord, the CTG gave the G.O.C. of the 24th Infantry Division the post of chairman of the CHT Development Board in October 2008, and included non-local Bengali outsiders in the voter lists for the Chittagong Hill Tracts like the previous politically elected governments.

The Awami League promised in its 2008 election manifesto that it would fully implement the CHT Accord. However, since coming to power, the government took only few steps to reconstitute some committees and appointment of some posts. Expansion of settlements and forcible land grabbing by the Bengali settlers with the support of military and civil administration continue unabated in all the three districts of CHT. In February 2010, massive communal attack on Jumma villages (Baghahat of Sajek union) were made by Bengali settlers, with support of military.

Though more than 13 years have passed after signing of the Accord, most of the provisions, especially the main issues of the Accord, such as, preservation of tribal-inhabited characteristics of CHT region, effective enforcement of the three HDCs and CHT Regional Council Act, resolution of land disputes through Land Commission, rehabilitation of returnee Jumma refugees and internally Jumma displaced families, withdrawal of temporary camps of security forces and military administration, preparing voter list only with the permanent residents of CHT, rehabilitation of the Bengali settlers outside CHT, etc. have been left unimplemented.

Many powerful influences are standing in the way of implementation of the CHT Accord. The nation’s major political parties as well as bureaucratic, undemocratic, communalistic and discriminatory attitudes regarding the CHTs have worked as obstacles against the implementation of the accord. The role of the CHT Affairs Ministry also has not been positive with regard to implementation of the CHT Accord. To the extent that the ministry has played a role, it has for the most part been in opposition to implementation of the accord.

Another obstacle to the CHT Accord implementation process is the military deployed in the CHT, as well as government employees at the level of the three hill districts and the sub-district level. They in general do not wish for the CHT Peace Accord to be implemented. Though some of the military stationed in the CHT do support the accord, other powerful quarters can still be seen to be active in opposing the accord

A third obstacle to implementation of the accord is the presence of fundamentalist and extreme communal organizations. They are racist extremists targeting the Jumma by instigating communal riots, and particularly by forcefully grabbing their lands.

It will not be possible to implement the CHT Peace Accord unless these obstacles to the accord are removed. Implementation of the CHT Accord is the only way to achieve a lasting political solution to the CHT issue. The longer the implementation of the CHT accord is delayed, the more complex the CHT issue is likely to become.

Abbreviated from original essay.

Between Ashes and Hope

Naeem Mohaiemen

Buried under the *raja-raja* war over elections is news of the permanent *ulu-khagra*. In a list of political parties denied registration by the Caretaker Government: UPDF and PCJSS, the only two large political parties representing the Jumma people. Chittagong's regional paper *Shuprobhat Bangladesh* (27/10/08) first carried this news. Among mainstream newspapers, only *Ittefaq* (29/10/08) seems to have picked it up. And there the matter will peter out.

Less than zero, frozen out of bare life. My Vote is My Right, says the smart baseball cap on Dhaka streets. Not for everyone.

Meanwhile, a parallel effort is moving through the courts. A writ was filed in 2007 in the High Court by Advocate Md. Tajul Islam, a member of the Jamaat e Islami, challenging the constitutionality of the 1997 Accord. The writ, filed at a strategic moment, has already accomplished what may be its main objective— inclusion of Bengali settlers in the CHT voter list for the December 2008 national elections. In response to this petition, a Division Bench ruled in August 2007 that until the writ is disposed, the Election Commission should not differentiate between permanent and non-permanent residents in CHT while registering voters. This means that Bengali settlers can vote in the area — permanently dismantling the one-time numeric majority of the Paharis (Jumma), with lack of representation at all levels of administration and public life. This can be interpreted as undermining the 1997 Peace Accord and the Hill District Council Acts of 1989, which require that only permanent residents of the Hill Districts can be enlisted as voters. Bengali “elected” politicians can now decide the fate of Pahari people, undermining self-representation.

It is inside this context that we look at the EC's decision to deny registration to UPDF and PCJSS. It penalizes the Pahari people for participating in the “democratic process”, signaling they do not have the right to regional political parties, so better to merge with the “mainstream” (AL or BNP, pick your Bengali majoritarian politics). Among the reasons stated by EC, as reported by *Ittefaq*, they were rejected because they lack offices and committees in ten Zilas and fifty Upazilas. Chittagong Hill Tracts has a total of three Zilas, mathematical impossibilities are being set up as barriers to entry.

In a writ petition currently filed by Sara Hossain on behalf of United People's Democratic Front (UPDF), each of the EC's arguments for non-registration is refuted. The court eventually ruled in favor of Hossain's writ, but one government official still told me politely, “there is not enough time to reverse the decision.”

At a recent “progressive” event in support of baul statues (saving them from the hammer, remember that moment), hero speakers in gamchha got on stage and shouted “fascist forces be warned, we are all Bengalis, we are united.” We? Left anti-fascists replicate fascism, in oblivion of people other than Bengalis. From 1970s onwards, Adivasis have been force-fed a diet of “Be Bengali”, the song stays the same. Less than zero, frozen out of bare life, and now locked out of elections.

Courtesy of some EU election monitoring fund, a smart baseball cap started showing up on rickshawallahs. *My Vote is My Right*, says the visor. Well, hmm, Not for everyone.

**

In Dighinala, the lead Jumma speaker switches to Bangla after the initial Chakma greeting. As I film the crowd, I can see scattered Bengali faces. Later I ask one organizer if speaking Bangla is a way to appeal to Bengali voters. "Yes," he replies, "but don't forget, not all Paharis speak Chakma." Chakma, Marma and Tripura are the big presence at meetings, but the official records show eleven ethnic Jumma groups in Chittagong Hill Tracts.

In this last election week, jumping on the candidate's ramshackle *chaad-er gari* (moon car) jeep, with prodigious horse power on the up-slope, is the easiest way to get around. I had taken a ride with the vehicle of an independent candidate. As we move between locations, I note the language changing. In Panchori, Pujgang, Logang, Matiranga, the speeches are in Chakma. In Dighinala in Bengali, but in Mohalchori, where there is a large Bengali population, the speeches are in Chakma again. This time, there are no Bengalis in the audience. Unlike Dighinala, which has an older Bengali population mixed in with recent "Settlers", Mohalchori has seen vast amounts of Pahari land grabbed by Bengali settlers recently—tensions run high, and Jumma candidates don't expect Bengali votes.

The speeches are focused on implementation of the 1997 Accord and an end to militant Settler land-grabbing. The settlers are sometimes referred to as "onuprobeshkari", and Paharis frequently point to land alongside the road that was "a Pahari family, but the Settlers threw them out." The cloud of fear and anger is thick, but even so there are some (perhaps naively) optimistic notes. Dhiman Khisha, a candidate who withdrew his name in favor of a unity candidate, invoked Barack Obama ("America'r kalo manush") in his speeches.

In 2001, militant Bengali Settlers aggressively intimidated Pahari voters to stay away from polls (resulting in victory of BNP's Wadud Bhuyan, now jailed on corruption). Moni Swapan Dewan, another 2001 victor, is a figure pilloried in speeches. Elected MP from BNP, he became CHT Affairs Minister and was completely powerless. "I won't be Moni Swapan Dewan," says a speaker. The sentiment seems to be that neither AL nor BNP can deliver, only a regional Jumma party can. The ruling Bengali elite's interest in keeping both UPDF and JSS out of polls comes into sharper focus.

Numbers matter. In Khagrachari there are 337,000 registered voters, of whom 190,000 are Jumma, 117,000 Bengali (out of whom 37,000 are Hindu) and 30,000 are security forces. The numbers add up to a Jumma candidates victory, but this year the Jumma vote will get split between multiple candidates. Add to that voter intimidation, especially remote areas where the media cannot reach. Whenever convoys leave main sadars, the mobile networks go off. When we return hours later, there is news over SMS-- Bandarban DC has burned posters of independent candidate.

After 2001, violence against Jumma grew (non-Bengali and non-Muslim, in BNP eyes) and many fled to Dhaka and Chittagong. Now they are back, to vote. One speaker says "When election comes, we used to get scared. But this election is different, do not be scared, do not stay away." But at a night meeting, I hear organisers complain, "How can we work, we are threatened that our legs will be broken. If you lose, how will you protect us?" Many of the young men have masks on their faces, even in a private meeting. I ask my friend, and she whispers, "there are informers everywhere." Informers for who? The levers that control CHT reach into the centre of state machinery.

I'm remembering the young Jumma woman, who waved as I left the jeep. "Deka hobe bizoye" in halting Bangla.

Yes. I hope you get Bizoy. For you.

This essay is composite of pieces that appeared in Daily Star, December 1 and 23d, 2008

An Unquiet Violence





Manush Bachao Jyoti Rahman

Ethnic strife returned to the Chittagong Hill Tracts in late February, for the third time since the 1997 Accord. Regardless of who holds power in Dhaka – the Awami League, which signed the accord; the anti-accord Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), in power during a similar incident of violence in 2003; or army-backed technocrats, in power during the last incident, in 2008 – peace in the Hill Tracts remains elusive.

The chattering classes of Bangladesh see conspiracies in most things, and ethnic strife in the CHT is no exception.

The proximate cause of the latest round of violence is a road built in 2007 by the then-army-backed technocrat regime. Paharis (or Jumma, as the ethnic groups of the region are collectively known) had resisted this road for the previous 20 years, as they feared the road would mean more Bengali settlement and displacement of Paharis. In recent years, this exact fear seems to have been materialising. Despite Pahari protests (which resulted in arson attacks against the community in 2008), Bengali settlement had been continuing, and a conflagration had been imminent. In late February, arson attacks by the settlers resulted in the burning of an estimated 434 Pahari homes and 29 Bengali homes in Baghaichhari, and an estimated 58 Pahari homes and 29 Bengali homes in Khagrachhari. Meanwhile, this violence is alleged to have all taken place with the army and police as either silent observers or active supporters.

The chattering classes of Bangladesh have a tendency to see conspiracies in most things, and the ethnic strife in the CHT is no exception. Supporters of the ruling Awami League see this as an effort by the opposition to destabilise the government. Not to be outdone, supporters of the opposition BNP – which rejected the 1997 accord and preferred a military solution – claim that violence in the Hill Tracts is part of a larger ploy by regional and global powers to undermine Bangladesh's sovereignty. This is the same kind of conspiracy that the party campaigned against in the lead-up to the December 2008 elections, under the slogan 'Desh bachao, manush bachao' (Save the country, save the people). Indeed, conspiracy theorists on both sides of the political divide see the peoples of the CHT – Paharis and Bengalis alike – as pawns in a larger game, ignoring the much more mundane cause of the periodic outbreak of violence: the dispute over lands lost by Paharis over the past decades.

One such myth is that the recent closure of a few temporary army camps has created a state of lawlessness in the CHT. And yet, the latest violence started in an area that had an army camp, and soldiers were alleged supporters of the arsonists. Likewise, troops were present and involved during the 2003 and 2008 incidences. Still more alarming, no such violent outbreak has ever been reported in areas where no army camps are located, or where the camps have been shut down. Clearly, then, the absence of army camps has little to do with these violent episodes. Some pundits argue that army camps are needed to maintain law and order, and to prevent cross-border smuggling. But surely these should be the responsibility of the civilian law enforcement agency, and not the military.

The critics of the CHT peace process inevitably point to the insurgency waged by the militant group known as the Shanti Bahini, sometimes with Indian assistance, against Bangladesh for over two decades from the 1970s. Even as the situation in the Hill Tracts worsened, Bangladeshi nationalism as articulated by President Ziaur Rahman could have ameliorated the original grievance of the non-Bengali peoples. While initiating the policy of forced settlements, Zia might even have appreciated

(at least in the later years of his administration) the essentially political nature of the problem, which could not be solved militarily. Following a closed-door meeting with Pahari leaders in July 1980, he stated, “We are doing some wrong there. We are being unfair to the tribes. It is a political problem that is being dealt with by police and army action, yet it can be settled politically very easily.”

Whether that meeting could have marked a turnaround in policy will never be known, because Zia was assassinated within a year. Thereafter, his successors further escalated the conflict. The insurgency eventually ended with the 1997 CHT Accord, which calls for removal of the temporary military camps in CHT except for six cantonments (Dighinala, Ruma, Alikadam, Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban). Indeed, with six cantonments in three districts, even if the accord is implemented, the CHT will have a heavier military presence than any other area of the country. The agreement further allows for the deployment of the army, under civilian control, in case of a deterioration of law and order or natural disaster. That is, again, far from eroding Bangladesh’s sovereignty over the region – when the troops finally return to their barracks, the region will simply become like the rest of Bangladesh. Since the signing of the accord, the Shanti Bahini has surrendered its arms. Instead of secession, the Bahini’s political heirs – JSS and UPDF – now demand full implementation of the accord within the territorial integrity of Bangladesh.

Many critics claim that if the accord is implemented, Bengalis will not be able to live in the region. But in fact, there is nothing in the agreement to support this. Migration by peasants and farmers into the forests and uncultivated areas has been part of the history of the eastern Subcontinent for centuries. According to scholars, Bengali-speaking Muslims settled in much of today’s Bangladesh over the past millennia. This process, not always peaceful or without tragedy, is the setting of *Padma Nadeer Majhi* (The Boatman of the River Padma), the classic Bangla novel by Manik Bandyopadhyaya. The Hill Tracts region also witnessed a mass migration of Bengali farming communities. In 1872, Bengalis made up less than a fiftieth of the region’s population. By the time of Partition, this proportion had risen to about a tenth. Whereas the faster rise in Bengali population during those decades followed a centuries-old migration pattern, something dramatically different happened after 1979 when hundreds of thousands of landless Bengalis were forcibly settled in the Hill Tracts. Within just a few years, Paharis became minorities in their own land. According to the 1991 census (alleged to underestimate Bengali presence), Bengalis made up 52 percent of the population in Bandarban District, 51 percent in Khagrachhari and 44 percent in Rangamati. In this way, landless Bengalis unwittingly become collaborators in running a de facto colonial administration.

It is this forced settlement, and the consequent loss of land by Paharis, that is at the root of the region’s troubles today. Bengalis were given title deeds to land that had been owned by Paharis through traditional law for generations. Now, the Bengalis and Paharis have claims over the same pieces of land, one through illegal settlement and the other through customary land-ownership law, which the CHT Accord recognises. The 1997 accord envisages resolving land disputes through several mediums, including a specific commission, rehabilitation, a post-rehabilitation land survey, and transfer of authority over land management and administration to the Hill District Councils.

The critically important Land Commission has yet to begin work. However, this has not stopped the government from announcing a land survey in the area. The idea that such a survey will lead to peace seems to be the latest misperception among the authorities. On the contrary, it is clear that the prerequisites of the survey as per the accord – a functioning Land Commission, resolution of disputes, and rehabilitation – are yet to be met. As such, it is of critical importance that the proposed land survey does not seek to record land ownership until these disputes are first settled first.

Abbreviated from original essay published in HIMAL, Nepal, April 2010.

Ominous Signs in the Hills

Brig Gen (Retd) Shahedul Anam Khan

The recent clashes in Baghaichari in Rangamati and Khagrachari are not a law and order issue and would need more than investment of security forces to quell the situation. It has to do primarily with the way progress has been made in implementing the CHT Accord. It will be fair to say that in the 12 years of its signing till 2009, which includes more than four years of the AL rule, and the five years of the BNP's, except for some superficial actions, very little worth mention has been done.

Everything boils down to the question of why it has not been possible to execute all the points in the accord?

From time to time through this column we have been trying to underscore the dangers if the state did not, or could not, deliver completely and timely on its commitment to the people. And when there is inordinate delay or the main party resorts to subterfuge and excuses in fulfilling the provisos of an agreement disappointment is bound to manifest, and it does so in many forms. We Bengalis tend to forget the position we were in not long ago and what our reaction was to the Pakistan government not living up to its promises.

As for the current spate of violence in the area, there is very little doubt that whatever may be the immediate cause of the recent clashes, the Tribal-Bengali divide, as well as parochial positions on the Accord of different groups, has been exploited by the vested elements with ulterior motives. An unstable CHT perhaps serves their purpose.

What long years of lack of serious action in implementing a pledge does is that it gives time and means to those opposed to it to strengthen their position to derail the plans. And that is what the long 13 years interregnum, between signing of the agreement and now, has done. Those tribal groups opposed to the CHT Accord have got plenty of fodder to depict the non-fulfillment of the agreement, for whatever reasons, as lack of government's honesty in this regard. Likewise, the Bengalis opposed to the accord have been able to garner more support in the last 13 years for their cause.

What we see happening in the CHT is not only disturbing, it also portends sinister development in the area in the future, if not addressed immediately. Everything boils down to the question of why it has not been possible to execute all the points in the accord? What are the difficulties in implementing those and how can the impediments be removed. And in this regard I, for one, find it difficult to doubt the sincerity of a party that penned the accord, in implementing it.

The AL government since its assumption of office in January 2009 has taken substantive measures to start the process of implementation. However, it should be abundantly clear that all the provisions of the accord cannot be fulfilled overnight, like the work of the land commission, and some of the provisions may need a re-look at the constitution. And this is where the government has not been proactive enough, to identify the possible impediments and devise ways to overcome them.

We all have a stake in permanent peace in the hills. It must be admitted that both the parties in the accord have displayed great deal of flexibility in arriving at an understanding. The original demand of self-rule had been toned down by the PCJSS although not to the satisfaction of all the tribal groups; nor have all the clauses of the Accord been acceptable to all the plains people.

However, there are few things that influence positively on the Accord implementation. For one thing, no major political party is opposed to the idea of peace in the CHT, and given that the BNP, in spite of its call to scrap the Accord in 1997, having neither reviewed nor cancelled it during its term of office, has demonstrated its political obligation towards implementing the Accord.

The fact is that all the governments since 1985 had taken initiative for a political solution of the problem, and it just so happened that the regional and international security and geopolitical circumstances worked towards arriving at a compact in 1997. While nobody should claim exclusivity of the credit of the Peace Accord, on the contrary it would be to discredit of all if it were to fall through

One thing must be made abundantly clear to all which is that the solution does not lie in taking up arms, as some tribal student leaders were seen threatening to do recently, or by use of force. And if Mr. Shantu Larma has been threatening to take to the hills, from time to time since 2004, it is only to be expected because it his credibility as a leader that will be at stake if the compact falls through.

And it must be made clear too that there is no alternative but to implement the agreement. If there is need for a review, it should only be done with the participation of all the stakeholders. There is more than personal credibility that is at stake.

Daily Star, February 25th, 2010

Budhdhapudi Chakma

Audity Falguni

Most of us are now aware of the recent turmoil and bloodshed that took place in CHT. Despite all the statistics on casualties and political analyses published in various places, I have been most haunted by the photo of three mourning children of Budhdhapudi Chakma, a simple and young Jumma mother from a village in Baghaichari, who died in the attacks on the indigenous people on February 19 (reported in Prothom Alo, February 21).

The outcome of a blue print to challenge the government's decision to withdraw troops in phases from the CHT.

According to the report, the young mother's husband went out to work on the morning of the fateful day. When the Bengali settlers set fire to the Jumma houses of the Guchchagram of Baghaichari, Budhdhapudi along with her three children began fleeing for "safe" shelter. A bullet, however, struck her in the chest and the dying mother requested her children to run for their lives instead of wasting time in trying to save her.

It is impossible for one to measure the pain of these three young children. Can we blame them if they turn out to be "anti-Bengali" or "secessionist" later on in their lives?

A photograph published in The Daily Star (February 27) shows an indigenous woman trying to pick up rice from her burnt homestead. It nullifies all the so-called "development projects" in CHT carried out by hundreds of development organisations. Will there be no end to our mental agony in getting bombarded by different reports on how Jumma men and women in the ravaged hilly areas of Baghaichari are taking burnt bananas as their only meal?

According to official statistics, two persons died in the recent sporadic clashes between the Bengalis and the hill people in the Baghaichari carnage. The indigenous peoples and organisations involved claim that eight people died and six were missing. About 1,500 indigenous people have been made homeless as about 357 houses located in Rethkaba, Surunala, Jarulchhara, Hazachchara, Deepu Para, Dane Bhaibachchara, Bame Bhaibachchara, Gangaram Mukh, Naya Para, and Panbari villages have been allegedly gutted by Bengali settlers. Adivasis also set around 100 houses of the settlers on fire in retaliation.

Over two thousands adivasis are still hiding in the deep forests of Baghaichari. Two Buddhist temples and a church have been burnt to ashes. The entire episode seems to have commenced from boycotting of the daily market by indigenous people in protest against land grabbing by Bengali settlers, according to press reports. What will be the "image" of our nation across the world if such heinous incidents take place very near to army cantonments? Already, Amnesty International has called on the Bangladesh government to probe into the deaths caused allegedly by army firing.

As reported, the Bengali settlers further set fire to the procession carried out by the indigenous people on February 23. This procession was organised to protest the atrocities of February 19 in Baghaihat. The settlers are also alleged to have launched attacks on 37 indigenous households in the Khagrachari town. The indigenous people, as revenge, committed arson attack on 29 Bengali houses. Four journalists have been injured in these attacks. More than 100 Jumma people have been arrested and many others are still missing. Local Rab and army officers are reported to have arrested more than 100 indigenous people from different localities in Khagrachari on the morning of

February 24.

The hill people are afraid to go to the police stations or army check-posts to search for their missing relatives and dear ones. Amnesty International sources informed us that the Jumma people who rushed to hospitals for medical aid were also detained. The local administration and Bengali settlers are also barring the journalists or press representatives from visiting the vulnerable hilly spots on pretext of their safety. But, the human rights activists of the CHT region consider this to be an attempt to hide the real situation there.

Today, when we see photographs on the internet of demonstrations by expatriate Jumma people in London seeking for UN peacekeeping troops in CHT, the image of our nationhood is a little shaken. Our acceptability as a democratic state cannot enhance itself through news of demonstrations in New Delhi, Korea or Japan.

Amnesty International, in a recent statement, called on the Bangladesh government to carry out an impartial and independent investigation into these attacks to identify those who set the houses on fire and the army personnel who may have used excessive force, and bring those responsible to justice in a fair trial without resorting to death penalty. They asked the government to ensure that the indigenous detainees have access to lawyers of their own choice, can challenge the legality of their detention, have access to family visits and medical treatment, and are not at risk of torture.

Unfortunately, the attacks took place at a time when the party that had signed the CHT Accord of 1997, the Awami League, is the one in power. Some political analysts consider the Baghaichari carnage to be an evil conspiracy of the collaborator Jamat-e-Islami and its sister organisations to destabilise the government. This incident may be the outcome of a blue print to challenge the government's decision to withdraw army troops in phases from the CHT. Home Minister Sahara Khatun said that such atrocities could never happen in a truly democratic state and that the war criminals and fundamentalist circles had instigated them.

We hope that the government will be able to hold a very quick, fair and impartial probe into the incident, bring the criminals to book and redress the grievances and damages of the sufferers on either side, thus ensuring peace and stability in this repeatedly troubled region.

Daily Star, March 11th, 2010.

Fire on the Mountain

Zafar Sobhan

February 21. A red-letter day in Bangladeshi history. The day we Bangladeshis celebrate our language and cultural heritage. The day we remember the four martyrs cut down during the 1952 language movement that was the foundation stone in our struggle for self-determination and the formation of a national identity that culminated in independence in 1971.

Connection between our fetishistic glorification of Bangla language and short-shrift given to non-Bengali ethnic minorities.

How better to celebrate and commemorate this flowering of national identity than for Bengali settlers to attack Pahari villages in the Chittagong Hill Tracts on the eve of February 21, burning down 200 homes and going on a rampage that ended with at least two Paharis killed and countless others injured and arrested.

Of course the Chakmas and other ethnic minorities in the Hill Tracts and elsewhere in Bangladesh have never really been part of the national narrative. From day one (in fact, their mistreatment pre-dates independence) we have treated them like second-class citizens.

The 1997 peace treaty was supposed to resolve all the simmering tensions and the signing of the accord was a bold and long overdue act of leadership by the PM back during her first term in office. But the truth of the matter is that the treaty has never been implemented fully by successive governments and the hills have remained a tinderbox of tensions and resentment.

But make no mistake about it: in the battle for control between the Bengali settlers and the Paharis, there is a right and a wrong. It is the settlers who have a history of land-grabbing, who have unleashed a reign of terror in the Hill Tracts, and who are responsible for the lion's share of the violence. Certainly, there have been reprisal attacks on the settlers and certainly Paharis have committed atrocities of their own -- but let us call a spade a spade.

Since independence we have made no efforts to integrate our ethnic minorities into the national project. When he came to power in the mid-70s, military strong-man Ziaur Rahman went one step further, initiating a policy of encouraging ethnic Bengalis to settle in CHT in order to actively integrate their lands in CHT with the rest of the country.

Since then, militants waged a low-level insurgency until the 1997 peace treaty, but the insurgency was never widespread, never had much sympathy among the Pahari people, and never struck terror in the heart of the general population the way that more popular and ruthless insurgencies and movements have done elsewhere.

For the most part, Bangladesh's ethnic minorities have wanted only their democratic, human, and civil rights. If we had addressed their legitimate grievances, there would have been no insurgency, and if we implement the peace accord, we will have no reason to fear one in future. As recent events have shown, almost all of the unrest in CHT is triggered by attacks by Bengali settlers.

The government must seriously listen to and take concrete steps to address the legitimate grievances of the Paharis. For the local civilian administration and the armed forces to be unable to even keep Paharis safe in their own homes is, at the very least, a shameful dereliction of duty.

The proximity of the violence to February 21 forces one to ask: Is there some connection between our fetishistic glorification of the Bangla language and the short-shrift that non-Bengali ethnic minorities have received in independent Bangladesh?

It's possible. One of the ironies of independence, as historian Afsan Chowdhury once remarked to me, was that we fought a war of independence to create a secular, open, democratic society in which religious and ethnic minorities would have more freedom than in Pakistan.

In the end what we created was a state that has reduced religious and ethnic minorities to second-class citizens due to our linguistic, cultural, and ethnic chauvinism.

This would be more palatable if the chauvinism were a reflection of true pride in our identity and nation. But the truth is the opposite. We have opted for chauvinism and xenophobia in place of self-respect and patriotism as national characteristics. It is the worst of both worlds.

Less than 40 years ago, we fought a war so that as a people we would have the right to determine our own destiny. The price of self-determination is minority protection, and we owe to the nation's ethnic minorities the right to live as free and equal citizens of the republic.

We need to implement the 1997 CHT accord and we need to rein in the Bengali settlers. Crucially, we need to ensure that the army and the civilian administration protects the rights of all Bangladeshis in the Hill Tracts, not just those of the Bengalis.

If we fail in this endeavour and Bangladesh turns into a country with no place for ethnic and religious minorities, it is worth asking the question: Did we really fight a war of independence only to establish a nation for Muslim Bengalis? It would be a shame if it were true.

Daily Star, February 26th, 2010

Bangladesh Erupts in Ethnic Violence

Pinaki Roy

Thousands of indigenous people were left homeless as their shanty houses were burnt to ashes on February 19th and 20th. In the attacks, committed by members of the majority Bengali speaking population in the presence of law enforcers, two people including a woman were killed and more than 50 injured, while 357 houses were set ablaze across 11 villages.

Though Purnomaas Bhikkhu recites 'Sabbe Sotta Sukhita Honto', he does not foresee a peaceful situation.

The indigenous people from these villages are now hiding in the dense forest or have moved to other villages. They claim the attacks were an attempt to grab their land and properties.

Human rights worker Sathi Chakma visited Baghaichhari, where the arson took place, on March 2nd. She said the homeless people were living in fear in Baghaihaat. "Many are coming with relief. But the relief will matter nothing to them if they can't rebuild their houses soon," she said.

"The land where there were villages is barren now. The sooner they can build their houses the better, otherwise the Bengali settlers might grab their land." Sathi, who belongs to the indigenous community, said she strongly believed the attack was primarily a land grab.

Violence centering on land issues is nothing new in the CHT. It has been going on since 1978, when the government decided to settle Bengali speaking people in the CHT where indigenous communities including Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Bom, Murong, Chak and some other small groups were living traditionally. In 2008, Bengali speakers set fire to the villages of indigenous people in the same area, and grabbed indigenous land where 35 Bengali speaking families later built new houses. Since then, the indigenous community have been protesting and demanding the government give their land back.

Indigenous local Hridoy Chakma told journalists after the recent attacks that soldiers from nearby camps went to his house and demanded his land to extend their army camps. Ignoring his pleas, the army removed Hridoy from his land and later handed it over to Bengali speakers. The army dominates the hills, especially since the government of densely populated Bangladesh adopted its policy of settling landless Bengali speaking people in the CHT, which comprises a tenth of the country's total land mass.

The violence is no different this time round. Tension started in January when the indigenous people of Retkaba village in Baghaihat protested the taking of their land and submitted a memorandum to the government representative in Baghaichhari. They did not get their land back, and relations between Bengali speaking and indigenous people grew bitter. On February 19th, Bengali settlers attacked the Retkaba and Gangaraam Mukh villages in Baghaihat and torched 33 indigenous houses. The next day, the indigenous people protested the arson attacks on their houses. The military arrived and asked them to leave, then charged them with truncheons to disperse them.

A protester attacked an army sergeant with his machete, prompting the military to fire on the indigenous people. At least two people were killed on the spot including a woman, and some seven people were injured. An indigenous man who was at the scene and did not want to be named told us that after firing, the army together with the group of settlers set fire to almost all the adjacent villages

in the Gangaram Mukh area. More than 300 thatched and corrugated tin indigenous houses in 11 villages were burnt to ashes in intermittent attacks, allegedly launched by Bengali settlers.

On February 23rd the trouble spread to the town of Khagrachhari, where Bengali settlers torched the houses of indigenous people. The government moved to outlaw outside gatherings of more than four people, and a Bengali speaking youth, Anawar Hossain, was found dead at Adarshapara in Khagrachhari after setting fire to indigenous houses. Still tension remained in the area. The indigenous refugees could not go back to their villages even 12 days after the attacks, and have had to live off food rations sent by the government and NGOs.

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) is currently Bangladesh's main opposition party. Abdul Wadud Bhuiyan (left), a Khagrachhari lawmaker for the BNP from 2001 to 2006, is accused of provoking Bengali people to attack the indigenous community. A Bengali settler himself, Bhuiyan responded at a press conference in Dhaka that it was the government's supporters who attacked the indigenous people. Meanwhile Maniruzzaman Manir, the leader of the Parbatya Chattagram Sama Odhikar Andolan (PCSOA), an organisation of Bengalis in the CHT, claimed that the indigenous people were getting support from international communities and fighting the Bengali settlers. He demanded safety and security for Bengali speaking people in the hills.

But there is still a long way to go to implement the accord due to land disputes. The indigenous people want their land back while the Bengali speaking people say the government gave the land to them. There are thousands of such land disputes in the CHT.

Purnomaas Bhikku, a Buddhist monk who was in the area where the recent arson attacks took place, travelled around 400km from Baghahat to Dhaka to take part in a Buddhist monks' protest on February 28th. He said: "Such violent situations are taking part again and again. Now the hill people need a peaceful situation." Though Purnomaas Bhikkhu recites 'Sabbe Sotta Sukhita Honto' ('All the living entity be happy') everyday while praying, he does not foresee a peaceful situation in the hills.

Abbreviated from an essay Published on openDemocracy.net under Creative Commons.

The Mahalchhari Incident

Meghna Guhathakurta

On 24 August 2003, Rupom Mohajon, a settled Bengali resident of Babupara, was abducted and a demand for ransom was made. Local Bengali businessmen held meetings in the Babupara Bazaar demanding Rupom's immediate release. That meeting, held under the leadership of the local BNP leader Dewan Abul Kalam Azad and the banner of the 'Bengali Shommonoy Parishad' (Bengali Coordination Council), announced a strike and road blockade the next day. Later that afternoon, some of the businessmen apprehended the Chairman of Shindukchori Union Porishod, and beat him and held him overnight against his will.

There were eleven massacres of Hill people, the most known being at Longodu, Logang and Naniarchar.

By 26 August, a group of Bengalis assembled in the Bazaar area, and began to harass the Paharis who had come there to sell their wares, chasing them out. By this time, a number of soldiers had also joined them from the Army camp near the Bazaar. Several of the Bengalis attacked Binod Bihari Khisha, a former Union Parishad Chairman, with lathis (cane) as he sat in his shop. He was later taken to the Army Camp near the Bazaar, where he died. Several other Paharis were also assaulted. The army allegedly bayoneted Nidorshon Khisha, son of Binod Bihari Khisha, as he stood near his father. Another Pahari boy of Babupara, was also beaten while in custody at the Army camp situated between Babupara and Mahalchhari Bazaar.

The assembled Bengalis, accompanied by soldiers of the 21st East Bengal Regiment, then went into Babupara village. They looted the houses, poured petrol and kerosene onto them, setting them alight as they went. They also looted and set alight a private Buddhist temple in Babupara. From there, they proceeded to Rameshu Karbari Para and Saw Mill Para, again settling light to houses and looting them as they went. They then proceeded in engine-powered boats to several other villages. In addition to burning and looting houses, they assaulted several women and girls. The mob then swept into Tholipara, Kerengyanal and Durpojyanal. In each village, they looted houses, and then set them alight. In Kerengyanal village, several women were raped or sexually assaulted, an infant was killed.

Later that day, Paharis in Lemuchori and Noapara villages, to the north and on the road to Khagrachari, were attacked by a group of Bengali settlers from a nearby cluster village, Chongrachori. A Buddhist temple and several houses and shops were looted and torched. Several Paharis reported that these incidents occurred within a short time after the local MP, Abdul Wadud Bhuiyan, had travelled through the area en route to Mahalchhari, and that he had incited the local Bengalis to instigate this particular attack.

The persistence of militarization

During the period of 'insurgency', the CHT underwent total militarization. The army divided the region into three zones: white, green and red. The white zones, considered 'neutral', covered an area two miles adjacent to the Army Head Quarters and were jointly populated by Bengali settlers and Hill people. The green zones were the Bengali settlement areas. The red zones were the areas in the interior of forests populated by only Hill people where the military carried out its counter insurgency operations. In the name of counter insurgency, human rights violations included extra-judicial killings, torture, abduction, religious persecution, forced eviction, destruction of homes and properties, and wide-scale arrests and detention. There were eleven massacres of Hill people, the most known being at Longodu, Logang and Naniarchar. Although inquiry commissions and other

investigative processes were initiated following public protests, none of their findings ever saw the light of day. The military continued to enjoy impunity regarding allegations of human rights violations. The very limited withdrawal of the military camps (according to one source only 35 of the estimated 520 military are reported to have been dismantled) had contributed to the persistence of military hegemony in the region.

The politics of vote

At the time of the Accord, all three MPs of the region were from the then ruling Awami League and were of the indigenous population. In the first election since the Accord, in October 2001, a major upset occurred when the PCJSS, protesting the inclusion of non-permanent residents of the region as voters, withdrew from the polls. This factor, together with the UPDF's decision to contest the Khagrachari seat, split the vote of the indigenous people and threw open the door for BNP candidate Abdul Wadud Bhuiyan, himself a Bengali settler, to be voted in, predominantly by the Bengali settler population. As a consequence of his victory, Bhuiyan had become the first Bengali person to be an MP from the CHT. He also became the chairperson of the CHT Development Board, which has access to significant amounts of development funds. Government sponsored settlers in the CHT have therefore consolidated their position vis-a-vis the indigenous people, more so since they are no longer threatened by an active guerrilla force. Many of them rally around the banner of the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami, and have been vocal critics of the CHT Accord, alleging that it subjects them to discrimination vis-a-vis the Paharis.

The non-resolution of the settler issue

The success of the CHT peace process is dependent largely upon the resolution of land-related issues, which has been complicated by: (a) government sponsored settlements used as a counter-insurgency measure; and (b) the different perception of land and land ownership between Bengalis and hill people. In a land hungry situation with 0.29 acres per capita land in Bangladesh, the settlements proved popular with Bengalis, many of whom were themselves landless. But this myth of the "emptiness" of the CHT, compared to high density of population in the plainlands and the idea that Bengalis were settled in Government owned khas land, was seriously misconstrued. Research has established that the area of cultivable land in the Hills is very small. Only 3.2 % of CHT land was suitable for all purpose agriculture (A category land) while 15% was suitable for forestry and fruit gardens (B category land) and 77% suitable only for afforestation. More importantly, what the Government of Bangladesh calls 'khas' land is understood by the Hill people to be common land or land, which they use for traditional jhum (swidden) cultivation and forests.

A post-accord watershed

The Mohalchori incident was a watershed in the sense that this was the first time after the Accord that such an incident had taken place at such a large scale. The widespread extent of arson in all affected villages resulted in the burning and destruction of the majority of houses belonging to Hill people, as well as the incineration of coconut trees and water pumps. The incident caused thousands of people to be displaced from their homes and villages. The threat of false cases issued against those hill people who dared to protest means that a reign of terror continues to prevail across the area. This is effectively preventing young men (falsely implicated in cases) from returning home.

(1) Occupation of land: Many people in the affected villages were concerned and anxious that the ultimate effect of such incidents would be the occupation of the Hill people's land. Since their economic activity had been worst hit by this incident, many people would be forced to sell their lands at cheap prices or mortgage them in order to survive.

(2) Economic power targeted: Many of the villages affected are in low-lying land surrounded by the Chengi river, which is rich in fish and marine resources. Since Bengalis are generally considered to be skilful in fishing, the villagers think that Bengalis are anxious to occupy these lands on the waterfront. The villages are also in an area which produces only one Boro rice crop. Irrigation is therefore considered essential. The targeting of irrigation pumps in the richer households had caused deep uncertainty for the ensuing agricultural season.

(3) Divide and rule: Several Paharis told us that the Bengali Hindu households were considered to be 'old settlers' and therefore distinct from the predominantly Muslim settler population of the eighties. But in this incident the rioters and armed forces created a division between the Bengali Hindus and the Hill people. In Babupara, all the houses of the Hill people were burnt, and the only ones left standing were the three to four houses belonging to Bengali Hindus.

(4) Sexuality as an instrument of terror: Sexual aggression, which may culminate in rape, has been a common feature in incidents of community and state violence in South Asia. Women with whom we talked described their desperation as they were chased into the water and the jungle, their daughters hit by sharp instruments, their mothers beaten by heavy sticks. Many of these young women are afraid to come in front of strangers, especially Bengalis. Their participation in schools has decreased and their studies affected.

(5) Internal displacement and rehabilitation: Arson attacks of massive proportions made hundreds of people homeless and dislocated. Kerengyanala village was the furthest from Mahalchhari Thana and not a single house had been built for them by any authority since the incident. Other villages which are closer to Mahalchhari Thana and to the local Army Camp by Babupara Bazaar, including Babupara, or Saw Mill Para, now sport a number of newly constructed one-room bamboo huts with tin roofs which the Army had built for the affected people. In many cases, these huts were much smaller than the original homesteads which had been burnt down during the arson attack. People told us that they had heard that there was a 30 lakh taka budget sanctioned for this but that it had all finished. Others mentioned that UNDP officers had come to take measurements of their previous homesteads and that they expected that there would be further construction. Some of the affected families refused to accept the huts offered to them as it was much less than what was lost.

(6) Strengthening settler vote banks for the future: The politics of the vote bank had so far been used in Bangladesh to intimidate one's opponent's voters to the extent required to ensure one's own power base as well as enjoy the resources left behind. This had been the case during the national elections of October 2001 where Hindu voters in Hindu-concentrated areas of the south-west and the south had been threatened and put under heavy pressure by the BNP-led coalition to not to go to the polling booths since they were considered ardent voters of the Awami League. The dark side of electoral democracy, which had manifested itself in the election of October 2001, may just be making its way into the Hills too, thereby creating its own dynamics.

Abbreviated from " Ethnic Conflict in a Post-Accord Situation: the Case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh", presented at conference organized by the Dept. of Sociology, University of Mumbai, March 3 to 5, 2004.

A History of Unsolved Disappearances





We Will Not Let Them Forget You

Hana Shams Ahmed

She was only 22 years old, a very vocal woman activist. An activist from a community that is treated by the Bangladesh state as second-class citizens. Someone who did not fear the most venerated institution in our country. A combination of all these elements made her a chillingly vulnerable person, a target for "The Vanishing" (i.e. those who are made to disappear without a trace).

She had the potential to pierce the veil separating the people from their rulers. Therefore, she had to be disappeared.

The headlines in Daily Star and many other newspapers followed -- "DU students urge government to rescue Kalpana Chakma" (The Daily Star, July 1, 1996), "Mahila Parishad urges govt to rescue Kalpana" (The Daily Star, July 2, 1996), "Abduction of Kalpana, Home ministry probe demanded" (The Daily Star, July 5, 1996), "Int'l appeal for Kalpana's release" (The Daily Star, July 10, 1996), "HR bodies urge Home Ministry to rescue Kalpana" (The Daily Star, July 15, 1996), "Kalpana issue: 24 Infantry Div terms it a conspiracy against Army" (The Daily Star, July 24, 1996), "Where's Kalpana?" (The Daily Star, July 24, 1996). 13 years after her abduction, there is still no answer to the question "Where is Kalpana?"

In a report by Bangladesh Human Rights Commission (BHRC), executive director Advocate KM Huq Kaiser claimed, without giving any evidence, that Kalpana was actually living in Tripura, India (The Daily Star, July 9, 1996). The report also claimed that the army officer accused of leading the abduction was "busy doing other duties" at the time of the incident.

Those who compiled this questionable BHRC report never talked to the two main witnesses to the abduction, Kalpana's two brothers. Very soon, claims of sighting of yet another Kalpana Chakma turned up, in the form of Tripti Begum (The Daily Star, July 28, 1996) in Jhenidah. But this claim was also debunked.

While these false "sightings" were going on, and under increasing national and international pressure from human rights groups, the government was finally forced to form an enquiry committee in September 1996 to investigate the whereabouts of Kalpana. Interestingly, the report of the enquiry



committee was never made public, and remains as elusive as it was when it was handed over to the then government. The person(s) responsible for the alleged abduction continue to enjoy complete impunity under every political party that has come to power.

Although the Awami League was in power in 1996, and they seemed to have a very pro-CHT attitude, nothing positive ever came out of the investigations taken under their authority. According to the accounts given by her mother and brother, Kalpana was taken away in the very early hours of the morning of June 12, 1996. This was the day of the national elections, which was won for the first time by the Hasina-led Awami League government. With their 2008 re-election under a promise for a transparent judicial system, we can perhaps re-ignite a hope for justice.

The post-1996 government showed political acumen by signing the 1997 CHT Peace Accord the following year, and managing to end the guerrilla war in the region. Unfortunately, although Pahari guerrilla leader Shantu Larma did lay down arms and sign the treaty, most of the clauses in the treaty remain unfulfilled until today.

In its 2008 election manifesto, the AL has promised to fully implement the CHT Peace Accord, and Deputy Leader of the Parliament Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury was made chairperson of the national committee for implementation of the Accord.

Kalpana never witnessed the signing of the Peace Accord. Her life was cut short much too early. But while she lived, as Organising Secretary of the Hill Women's Federation (HWF), she actively fought for the rights of Pahari people. Sexual crimes against Bangladeshi women are high, but Pahari women have always been more vulnerable. The HWF was primarily formed to resist rape and sexual crimes against Pahari women.

Kalpana's diary, along with newspaper clippings and activists' articles, was published as a book 'Kalpana Chakma's Diary'. Her very articulate memoirs reveal the struggle of the Pahari people under government and military occupation. In her writings she reveals her tough opposition to the patriarchal society and her abhorrence of living under military and racial domination. She talks about equal participation of Bengali and Chakma men and women in the democratic political process. She describes how society has created a structure where a woman taking a stance is always seen as a disturbance.

Each year, on June 12, there are rallies, discussions and human chains to demand justice for Kalpana Chakma, and to call for implementation of the Peace Accord. This year will be similar, but will the protests be heard by the government, at last? Kalpana, at a very young age, had shown great political acumen and leadership qualities. She had the potential to pierce the veil separating the people from their rulers. Therefore, she had to be disappeared before she could make any "trouble." Her abductors were successful and were never punished. How much longer will we continue to let the perpetrators get away with this crime? It is still in our hands.

Daily Star, June 12th, 2009.

Photograph by Ittukgula Chakma: Kalpana Chakma at rally in Baghaichari, 19th November, 1994. The photograph was previously published in several national newspapers without attribution.

My Sister's Language

Shahidul Alam

His eyes flitted forward and back, and having surveyed the scene for possible danger, it stopped. The head stooped, and that was how he stayed. Crouched on the floor of a bus full of Bengalis, the Pahari (hill person) amongst us was living in occupied land. Keeping out of trouble was his best chance for survival.

A wrinkled old woman smoking a pipe and other photographic trophies were potential award winners.

It was only when the uniformed men with guns boarded the bus and prodded him that he raised his eyes. Scared, tired, hurt, angry eyes. But he knew enough to not express his anger. Meekly he obeyed the commands. His humiliation was also ours, but we did not complain. We were tourists in our own land, but the constitutional guarantees enshrined in our laws, while not fully respected anywhere, was particularly absent here. As well-connected Bengalis, we were far safer than he was. But the rules of occupation are never generous, and they had guns. They left. We breathed more easily. He continued his journey with his head bowed. I took no photographs.

Walking through Rangamati as Bengali tourists was a disconcerting feeling. Many of the Bengalis here were also poor. Displaced from their homes in far away places, they had been dumped here with promises of a happy life. Left to fend for themselves, they joined the power chain well above the Paharis, but very low down all the same.

At the top of the chain was the military. Then the wealthy Bengalis, the ones who made the deals, then came the Paharis who had sided with the government. The Bengali settlers (the poor ones anyway) were quite a bit further down. The Paharis never dared to reach for the rungs of that ladder.

Rangamati was still a beautiful place. The homes buried beneath the lake when the Kaptai Dam was built, the tropical rain forests that had been destroyed, the hill people who were forced to leave their ancestral land, were things that never made it to our history books. The Hill Tracts featured in the picturesque postcards and tourism ministry books and the well rehearsed cultural programmes in the government Tribal Centre.

Occasional photographers from the lowlands came to discover the 'authentic tribal lifestyle'. A bare chest woman bathing by a waterfall, backlit women with children strapped on their backs, a wrinkled old woman smoking a pipe and other photographic trophies were potential award winners.

As anticipated, the tiktikis (lit: geckos, local term for government spies, generally members of 'Special Branch') soon found us. They followed us everywhere. Asked stupid questions. Made notes. Questioned the people we had spoken to or visited. We consciously stayed away from friends. No point in getting them into trouble.

At a later visit, Drik's printer Nasir and I had gone to Bandorban. Amongst the photographs I'd taken on that trip was this one of a mother weaving. Perhaps I was repeating what the trophy hunters had done, but the poster above the window, part of a UNICEF blindness prevention campaign, had words that seemed poignant. "hai re kopal mondo, chokh thakite ondho". (oh what irony we find, we have eyes but are blind.)

My eyes had shown me the military operations in the hill tracts. The deer being taken to the major's

home. The all Bengali military. The timber being taken to the military camp. While we did see Paharis, carrying loads, and doing odd jobs, most of the shop owners were Bengali settlers. It was Bengalis who had access to the government. They who obtained the local contracts. Menial labour was generally, all that Paharis could aspire to.

Kalpana Chakma's abduction followed (12th June 1996). Friends got arrested. Some were released, but killed upon release. The violence continued, more murders, more rape, more displacement.

On 2nd December 1997 the newly elected Awami League (1996) signed the 'Peace Treaty' with Jana Samhati Samiti (JSS). This had led to divisions amongst the hill people. Many felt that the core concepts [i) Autonomy for the Chittagong Hill Tracts; ii) Withdrawal of the Bengali settlers; iii) Demilitarization of the Chittagong Hill Tracts.] were being compromised. Others were more pragmatic. Even those who questioned the signing of the treaty by JSS, despite their demands not having been met, recognise that peace in CHT is the ultimate goal, and that the land disputes that resulted from the government aided settlement of Bengalis was the core cause of the conflict.

The sole purpose of a nation's military is to protect the sovereignty of all of its citizens, not to suppress them. The need to protect a nation's borders cannot justify the forced eviction of people from their ancestral land. The disregard for even the commitments made, exposed the government's lack of sincerity to the peace deal. Imperfect though it may be, for those clinging to the flimsiest of promises, the treaty still held hope.

The irony of the military and the settlers – in the second term of the Awami League – choosing the month of February, to remind the Paharis of how brutal they could be, was not lost on the survivors of the massacre. Salauddin, Jabbar, Barkat, Rafiq and Salam had died in 1952 to protect our mother tongue. In February 2010 Pahari names joined the list of people who died for their mother tongue. But these different sounding names would never make it to that official list.

These were names that probably didn't exist anyway. Without rights to land, citizenship and protection of the state, they were second-class citizens at best, fugitives to be hunted, raped and killed at worst.

Matri bhasha (mother tongue), has a very different meaning when your mother is Pahari. Kalpana, I failed you as a brother, when they abducted you. I failed you as a friend, when they killed your brothers Mantosh, Samar, Shukesh and Rupan. I fail you now as a citizen, when my military and my government burn your villages, murder your families, take away your land. I fail you all as a human being, when you are prevented from laying flowers at the Shahid Minar in your village home. amar bhaier rokthe rangano, ekushey february. ami ki bhulite pari. This month, red with your warm blood. I cannot, will not, must not, ever forget.

Shahidul News, 28th February 2010.

We Owe it to Kalpana Chakma

Khushi Kabir

June 12, 1996. This was the day of the much-awaited national elections to form the new parliament. Under a caretaker government, formed in response to a movement after the questionable February elections, expectations were high. It was on this day, as the people went to cast their votes, that we were shaken with the news of the abduction of Kalpana Chakma.

The citizens of this country do not need to be taken into confidence, when it comes to the armed forces.

Kalpana Chakma, general secretary of the Hill Women's Federation, was abducted from her home by the military. In Bangladesh and internationally, the struggle of the CHT people and the role of the army in repressing them have been raised many times. Kalpana was an activist, someone who could not and would not be shut up by threats alone. She was an independent, strong-willed, politically aware young woman who had protested against atrocities taking place in the hill districts. Just a few days before her abduction, she had an altercation with a Lieutenant Ferdous, stationed in her area. It was this same Ferdous who allegedly abducted her.

Women's groups, citizens' groups protested. Activists immediately visited her home, met her family, people in the area. We held protests, formed human chains, sent petitions to relevant authorities, met with the three elected representatives from the CHT, all hill people themselves. Despite the fact that by now we had a democratically elected government, it seemed demanding accountability from the army was not yet on the cards.

We wait to see the day when such accountability can be ensured. The lieutenant probably remains in service and may have been given promotions. The military wheels turn secretly and silently to ensure protection to its own and distancing from civilians. The citizens of this country, Bangladesh, that won its independence through its people taking up arms to liberate themselves, do not need to be informed or taken into confidence, when it comes to the armed forces.

Rumours were floated stating that Kalpana was sighted in Tripura. Rumours that did not fool anyone. Till today, the case remains unresolved. A three-member committee was set up by the then Awami League government, comprising retired Justice Abdul Jalil, Professor Anupam Sen and the-then commissioner of the Chittagong division, who we were informed had submitted their report. Despite many petitions and demands, the report has never been made public.

Going through past records, we see that on the occasion of the 12th year of Kalpana's abduction, on June 12, 2008 our present foreign minister, along with others, demanded that the report be published and Kalpana's abduction case be taken up. The Awami League government is back in power. We are awaiting their role in making the report public and ensuring that Kalpana's case is taken up.

We owe it to the memory of Kalpana and her family, we owe it to the indigenous women and peoples of the CHT, we owe it to all marginalised peoples and their struggles, we owe it to ourselves and to our country.

New Age, June 12th, 2010.

Resistance Politics in the Hills

Meghna Guhathakurta

The failure of Bengali middle-class led organizations to engage with questions of ethnicity and nationality.

Systematic and pervasive military presence in the Hill Tracts had made Pahari (hill) women more conscious about their rights. This is borne out by vivid statements made by Kalpana Chakma in her diary, which was recovered by some journalists from her home after her disappearance. Parts of this diary were serially published in the Bengali Daily *Bhorer Kagoj* and much later the Hill Women's Federation brought it out along

with writings about her in the anthology "Kalpana Chakma's Diary" (2001).

Kalpana introduces her 'daily notebook' with the following lines: "Life means struggle and here are some important notes of a life full of struggle." In depicting the life of a woman in the CHT, she writes, "On the one hand, the woman faces the steam roller of rape, torture, sexual harassment, humiliation and conditions of helplessness inflicted by the military and Bengalis, on the other hand she faces the curse of social and sexual discrimination and a restricted lifestyle (from her own people – author's explanation)." However, Kalpana's understanding of oppression embraces all women of Bangladesh, ethnic and Bengali. She writes elsewhere "I think that the women of my country are the most oppressed." (Chakma, 2001).

That Kalpana Chakma was a frontline activist in the struggle for self-determination of the Pahari people is clear from her writing. In paying respect to the leader of their struggle, the Late Manabendra Narayan Larma, she writes as part of her speech on the occasion of his death anniversary, "..... 12 years has passed by. Every year, regardless of the 'combing eyes of the olive brigade' (the army), a memorial service is held, furtively, beneath a plum tree on a hilltop where thousands of students and public flock together to pay their respect. His name is celebrated from the hillsides to the jail... A leader dies, but new leadership emerges at the need of the hour. The struggle continues. It becomes more intense. Very inevitably so." (Chakma, 2001).

On another occasion, which commemorated the martyrs of the Naniarchar massacre (November, 1993), Kalpana stresses the need for the youth to shake off the inertia that has descended on them. Again, we see that her call is all-inclusive: she calls upon all students and she situates the students' movement in the larger context of the historical struggles of '52, '69, '71 and '90. She writes: "A section of our youth are without direction. In losing their creative force they are being turned into pawns in the hands of the Army and the Zilla Parishad. But we are part of the student's movement who had created '52, '69, '71. And '90!" This is an interesting claim to make especially since the movements mentioned above showed no signs of incorporating the demands of the hill people in their nationalist agendas (Mohsin, 1996). But if one looks at the time when this statement was made, 17th November 1995, then one can perhaps understand its significance. The country was at that time on the verge of a civil disobedience movement led by the main opposition parties in their demand for a caretaker government as an assurance of a free and fair election. The Pahari Organisations too therefore voiced their preference for the democratic process, which they saw as being part of the movements of '52, '68, '71 and '90. We thus see that despite the many allegations of treason or secession hurled at them, these Pahari organisations had expressed their partiality for a democratic struggle for self-determination within the confines of Bangladesh.

But for Kalpana Chakma, democracy does not merely mean free and fair elections. It means

participation in the political process and more specifically participation as a Chakma and a woman. She therefore stridently voices a critique of her own student movement, which remains male-dominated. She writes: "Despite the fact that women constitute half the population, they are not taken seriously in any movement for social change. As an example one can point out that the numerous demands voiced during the current movement, even the ten-point demand of the Chhatro Shongram Parishad does not speak specifically of problems faced by the woman! Many conscious men seem to think that such problems are not important enough to be dealt with at this hour. Therefore the issue of woman's emancipation has remained neglected in agendas for class struggle and political change (Chakma,2001). Kalpana's observations are not the first of their kind in the history of social change nor is it likely to be the last. One is rather uncannily reminded of words which the brave freedom fighter of Chittagong. Pritilata Wadeddar wrote in her last statement to the world before she died in combat against the British " The discrimination between men and women in the struggle for our liberation had wounded me. If my brothers can go to war to liberate our motherland, then why can our sisters not do so?" (Dastidar,1956:114).

The Movement for Kalpana

The movement which campaigned to bring the issue of Kalpana Chakma's abduction into the national and international arena was spearheaded primarily by the coalition of Pahari organisations: the Hill Women's Federation, Pahari Chattra Parishad and Pahari Gono Parishad but also involved sympathisers from the left, human rights and women rights activists with whom the former group worked closely with at least in Dhaka. Mention has been made of the resistance politics of the Pahari (Hill) Organisations especially the Hill Women's Federation of which Kalpana Chakma was Organisation Secretary.

The CHT issue has remained a delicate and touchy one for the Bengali middle-class, even after the polity of Bangladesh had attained a formal democratic character. Human rights violations have remained the concern of a handful of lawyers, academics and human rights activists and left party workers and students. Many Pahari activists complain that civil society organisations are reluctant to take up frontline activity. The National Committee for the Protection of Fundamental Rights was formed in 1991 as an advocacy organisation for both Pahari and Bengali scholars and activists.

Recently however, the Hill Tracts issue has also been receiving the attention of the women's movement as was reflected in the Kalpana Chakma case. The women's movement too had been and still is largely development oriented and the issue of women's rights as human rights proliferated among organisations as an instrument of development (Guhathakurta,1996). Women's organisations registered as NGOs were limited by their manifestos that prevented them from actively getting involved in political situations. However, recently the movement has been getting more 'political' i.e. taking up issues, which had direct repercussions on the state. Women's organisations and NGOs formed a common platform, the Sammilita Nari Shomaj that enabled them to bypass the limitations of their organisational agendas and protest the rape and murder of 14 year old Yasmin from a broader platform. Even after the Yasmin incident, the Sammilita Nari Shomaj continued to protest state violence against women, later on taking up the Kalpana Chakma case.

It may be mentioned that the HWF had participated in the March 8th 1994 rally of the women's movement with their slogan Autonomy for Peace. They also went to the NGO Forum of the Women's Conference in Beijing in 1995 with the same slogan. However although the National Preparatory Committee Towards Beijing, NGO Forum '95 constituted a separate task force on indigenous women, barely two lines were included on the topic in the summary of the official NGO report. This reflected the hesitation on the part of some NGOs to deal with an issue, which had become a matter of political controversy. On the other hand, the movement, which rallied behind Kalpana Chakma

was exceptional to the extent that many human rights and women's organisations demonstrated on the streets and joined hands with the Left and Trade Union activists in protesting the kidnapping in unambiguous terms. This may have been possible due to the more relaxed atmosphere following the coming to power of a government who had specific electoral promises about the CHT.

The above movement also demonstrates the failure of Bengali middle-class led organizations to engage with questions of ethnicity and more seriously nationality. After the CHT accord has been signed, while celebrating 8th march, International Woman's Day, the same Sammalita Nari Shomaj which has campaigned actively for Kalpana Chakma, turned on a group of indigenous women representing the Hill Women's Federation who had brought with them a banner saying that their struggle shall stop only with autonomy! The organizers of Shammilito Nari Shomaj asked the HWF members to put down their banner as the slogan was "too political"! What had the women's movement learnt from its engagement with the Kalpana Chakma issue? It seemed that they had rallied their support to HWF on the basis of a very abstract construction of human rights without looking at the specificity of politics in which this rights was based on. This specificity entailed taking a hard look at notions of citizenship, nation, national self-determination and ethnicity. The hard realities which Kalpana Chakma faced as a woman of her community taught her more about these things than all the fancy words deliberated at the Beijing Conference, which she could not attend because she did not have enough money to pay for her registration. (Guhathakurta, 2000).

Kalpana Chakma in an article talked of their vision of a peaceful world: "We want a society where men and women would enjoy equal rights. Also where one class of people would not exploit another class of people or where one community will not be able to dominate and abuse another community" (Chakma, 2001).

References:

- Akhter, S. (1996) Kalpana Chakma Udhao Keno? (Why has Kalpana Chakma Disappeared?) in Bhorer Kagoj, 17 July.
- Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK) (1996) ASK Bulletin, September.
- Bangladesh Garo Chattra Shongothon, Leaflet distributed for demanding justice for the rape and murder of Garo domestic worker, Levina Howie, 25th August 1999, Dhaka.
- Bhorer Kagoj, (1996) 24th August
- Bhorer Kagoj (1996) 16th May.
- Bhorer Kagoj (1996) 22nd May
- Chakma, K. (1996) Kalpana Chakma's Diary, published serially in Bhorer Kagoj, 24th July, 29th September and 6th October.
- Daily Star, The, (1994) sub editorial report, January.
- Daily Star, The (1995) 5th September.
- Dastidar, P. (1956) Birkannya Pritilata, Dhaka, Nabaproskash Bhobon.
- Guhathakurta, M. (1985) Gender Violence in Bangladesh: The Role of the State, in the Journal of Social Studies, no.30.
- Hill Women's Federation (HWF) (1995) Leaflet distributed in NGO Forum, Beijing.
- Memorandum to the Home Minister presented by 12 organisations, 14.7.96
- Mohsin, A. (1996) The Nationalist State and the Chittagong Hill Tracts 1971-1994 in the Journal of Social Studies, no.74.

Abbreviated excerpt from an essay published in Cultural Dynamics journal

Silence is Emblem Of Our Ethnic Chauvinism

Manosh Chowdhury

Five years have passed since Kalpana was abducted. The subject has been discussed so much in the intervening period that there is a generally accepted picture of the abduction and its aftermath, even if this picture is not comfortable to us -- the members of the majority ethnicity. As such, the question of silence is, at one level, rather inappropriate. But I don't want to view silence as just a lack of conversation about the subject.

She was vocal and we are silent, this is a major paradox. And in a sense these two are linked structurally.

Rather, I explicitly want to note that many human rights and some women's organization in Bangladesh did initiate, until a certain time, various steps demanding justice for Kalpana's abduction. And all the discussions and write-ups in the print media on the issue are a direct result of these initiatives. My intention is to understand the complex nature of the silence amidst the activities of the majority ethnicity. And that silence is really a derailment of the real agenda. It is a kind of senselessness when it's difficult to determine what is to be done --- particularly given the realization that perhaps no activism will bring back Kalpana.

But the subject of my thesis is based on a rather different political importance. It is, in fact, more important than asking after so many years whether Kalpana is still alive. Her abduction, and then disappearance, and then the impunity with which the abductors have stayed above justice --- these are the issues related with the political question. And the questions are of the oppressed ethnicities, the subordinate gender, the state and military's ferocity, and the resistance fighter's social existence. And thus the implied and understood silence is the killer of these questions. And that's why it's important to understand the root of the senselessness.

We, the ruling ethnicity, came to know Kalpana through her abduction. It's important to remember that. Given the existing violence against the subordinate gender --- particularly against the women of different ethnicities and oppressed classes --- in this state, our unfortunate reality is that it is difficult to remember her abduction separately. The reason we couldn't forget her --- at least for a while --- is because Kalpana was a vocal and brave woman. And we started learning that story. The Hill Womens Federation, of which she was the organizational secretary, was only an ordinary way of knowing her. Far more important was her trait of protesting vocally. By presenting her life story repeatedly, her comrades have taught us this.

The silence of the majority ethnicity, and the dominant gender, is evident by the fact that we cannot recognize brave women, particularly of different ethnicity. But Kalpana wasn't silent. She was vocal. It is depicted in every page of her diary. And they are enough to know her. She was vocal and we are silent, this is a major paradox. And in a sense these two are linked structurally. She was punished precisely because she protested vocally. And brave women can be punished precisely because we, the majority ethnicity and the dominant gender, are silent on average. This silence clears the path to sacrificing other brave ones.

The current silence on Kalpana is, as noted, a derailment of the real agenda. But then it is also the case that it is not about one individual Kalpana Chakma. This is about the struggle of the Pahari people, the struggle of ethnic peoples against the nation state, the struggle of women, the struggle of the oppressed people. The crisis of derailed agenda being discussed can be seen in two broad ways. One way we can understand the derailed agenda is through the much-hyped 1997 Peace Accord.

Most of the majority ethnicity's chattering classes were so taken with the propaganda that they failed to even comprehend that majoritarianism will have to be confronted continuously. They started viewing the Accord as such an achievement for the Pahari people that they believed the said people had nothing else to ask. Amid the complacency and self-congratulations, the possibility of the Accord being dishonoured by the state was completely overlooked. This lack of empathy towards the aspirations of the Pahari or other ethnicities is an extreme chauvinism of the majority. The Kalpana issue is now submerged under this chauvinism. It is significant that when the Hill Women's Federation tried to demand that the report of the enquiry on the abduction be published, the majority opinion-makers didn't appear to be concerned.

The second way the agenda has been derailed is even more complicated. While we are noting it later, this actually happened first. This is about the creation of the self-identity of the elite class of the state and redefining its relations with the state. And here I want to identify the activity of the civil society in the 1990s. These activities limited the scope of various struggles. And through these activities, a much more liquid and looser definition of the state has emerged. However, instead of weakening it, this has strengthened the state. This is because the state is not just discussion and explanation, but also a web of relations, including its civil-military bureaucracy. Nor has the power of the ordinary people increased, even though they are being seen as empowered while remaining powerless.

This is an important change because it has allowed urban middle class political activists and analysts to find themselves on a new stage. But this new stage has assisted in a loss of the agenda from the middle class stage. This hesitation is not just about Kalpana. This is the question of identifying the marginal condition and facing it politically. A crude indication is the participation of the retired army officers in the civil society. Participation is more than just sitting and talking in a meeting. The real issue is the acceptance of these army officers, or the legitimacy of their opinions. The new civil society activism is giving that legitimacy. Therefore, the agenda of an activist who identifies with that civil society cannot include the abduction of Kalpana --- that is, the confrontation with the state's violence. This is much more than about an individual officer's personal conduct. And that's why the derailment of the agenda is important. It should be clarified that the learnt silence about Kalpana Chakma is really born of ethnic chauvinism. Oppressed ethnicity cannot derail the agenda this way.

Translated by Jyoti Rahman; originally published in "The Diary of Kalpana", Hill Womens Federation, 2001.

Collateral Damage of Development



Dammed or Damned?

Ainun Nishat & Mahfuz Ullah

It is the Kaptai dam again. Debates are brewing about the proposed plan to raise the water level of the reservoir or lake in a bid to increase electricity production by 120 megawatts and the issues raised against the proposal demands serious considerations. The 670 metres long and about 46 metres high dam was completed in six years and was inaugurated on March 30, 1962. The Hill people, according to newspaper reports, are claiming that with a rise of five feet in water level about 30,000 acres of cultivable land would go under water. This has brought back the memories of the 1960s, when the dam was commissioned submerging 54,000 acres or about 40 per cent of the total cultivable land in the region. The original Rangamati town, including the palace of the Raja, went into the lake created by the dam. It swallowed the homes of 18,000 families rendering about 100,000 people homeless, who were about 25 per cent of the total population of the locality. And the biggest human exodus of the area, called Bara Parang (meaning exodus) in Chakma language, still haunts. Turned into developmental refugees, the Hill people migrated to India and the subsequent story of dissension, armed uprising and negotiated settlement are all known to everyone.

Dams displaced 40-80 million people while diversions of courses affected 60 per cent of the world's rivers.

Large dams were constructed as one of the most important tools for water resources management during the 20th century. From the 1930s to the 1970s, construction of large dams was synonymous with development, progress and modernisation. The situation reached a point when in the 1970s on average two or three large dams were commissioned each day somewhere in the world. The immediate benefits of large dams, like production of electricity, food security, job creation, expansion of infrastructures, warranted their construction. Global investment in large dams is estimated at more than two trillion US dollars. About 45,000 large dams across the globe have played a significant role in harnessing water resources for food production, energy generation, navigation, recreational purpose, flood control, and industrial and domestic water supply. Present estimates suggest that some 30-40 per cent of world's irrigated land now relies on dams and that dams generate 19 per cent of world electricity. But the benefits soon turned into curse and construction of large dams became a matter of public concern because of their impacts on people, and ecosystem. The local adverse impacts of large dams soon turned into a global debate. Estimates show that dams have displaced some 40-80 million people while diversions of courses have affected 60 per cent of the world's rivers.

A number of global reports have documented the dramatic impact of human-induced water withdrawals from the lakes, rivers and ground aquifers. Total annual freshwater withdrawals today are estimated at 3,800 cubic kilometres— twice as much as just 50 years ago. Besides, there are questions of impacts on communities and environment. Incidentally, social, environmental, governance and compliance aspects have been ignored in decision-making about the construction of a dam in the past. The World Commission on Dams (WCD) observed that, “efforts to date to counter the ecosystem impacts of large dams have met with limited success. Pervasive and systematic failure to assess the range of potential negative impacts and implement adequate mitigation, resettlement and development programmes for the displaced, and the failure to account for the consequences of large dams for downstream livelihoods have led to the impoverishment and suffering of millions. Since the environmental and social costs of large dams have been poorly accounted for in economic terms, the true profitability of these schemes remains elusive.”

Based on the findings of the WCD Report let us examine the recent proposal to raise the water level of the Kaptai Lake. The proposal to construct Kaptai dam, like many others, initially envisaged five types of benefits. These were hydropower generation, irrigation and drainage, flood control, enhancement of navigability of the river and boosting forestry of resources harvesting. Later, fish culture in the lake was added to the list of benefits. And recreational benefits could be added to the list. These benefits have been achieved to a significant level but the benefits from irrigation and drainage has not been realised. But adverse affects of the Kaptai Lake have not been taken seriously by the planners, as is manifested by the proposal to raise the water level of the artificial lake.

Following the construction of the Kaptai dam and filling up of the reservoir into a man-made lake there was an acute shortage of cultivable land in the region. As part of the original rehabilitation plan, the government allotted land to the displaced families in the low-lying areas of Langdu, Barkal and Baghaichari thanas for resettlement. The Kaptai Lake took about two years (1960-61) to take its final shape. In the second year when the low-lying areas of the thanas mentioned were inundated the rehabilitated people became homeless for a second time in a year and they decided to migrate to India. The government tried to resist the exodus and carefully monitored their movements. In a bid to outwit the government, the affected people resorted to various tactics. Some of them left their houses at night keeping the lanterns burning so it was assumed the residents were still in their houses. These people first migrated to the Mizoram, Tripura and Assam States of India. Later, they were transferred to Arunachal Pradesh.

Presently, the water level of the lake is maintained at 25 metres above Mean Sea Level (MSL) up to June 1. The water is stored during the monsoon when heavy rainfall and onrush of water from the upstream reaches of the Karnaphuli take place and the lake is filled up to designed high water level. The maximum reservoir level is 33.5 metres above MSL. The water is released from the reservoir during the wet season through a 227-meter long spillway only when there is excess of rushing water into the lake that can damage the stability of the dam. Some water is discharged into the Karnaphuli River round the year as electricity is produced using the head of water. At the end of monsoon season, the supply of water from the upper catchment dwindles down to trickles and the level of water in the reservoir drops as discharge from its storage continues for power generation. So, the fringe land gradually emerges above water with recession of water line and cultivation on such lands becomes possible. Availability of land largely depends on the fall of the water level in the lake. According to an estimate, a total of 36,000 acres of fringe land around the lake are cultivated in dry months when water level drops from full reservoir level of 33.2 metres above MSL to 25. Of them, 2,000 acres stretch from 27 to 30 metres, 6,000 acres from 30 to 32 metres, 22,000 acres from 32 to 35 metres and the remaining 6,000 acres from 35 to 38 metres from the lake's dry season waterline.

It is not clear what changes have been envisaged in design as well as in operational pattern of the Kaptai project in the recent proposal. It is known that the dry season water level will be raised. Will the height of the dam be raised? Possibly the answer is no. Then, will the maximum reservoir level be increased? Again the answer may be no. Otherwise the stability of the dam may be questioned. Then how the water level during the dry season will be raised needs to be understood. Then one will be able to quantify the area of land that presently comes under cultivation in pre- monsoon season will be lost due to submergence.

Apart from uprooting thousands of people, the Kaptai project has also created other adverse impacts. These include: changes in the occupational structure, loss of forest resources (a staggering 75 square kilometres of reserve forest area and another 600 square kilometres of unclassified forest areas went into the lake), decline in wildlife and cattle, scarcity of safe drinking water. According to the Chittagong Hill Tracts District Gazetteer 1975, the lake devoured a total of 54,000 acres under

cultivation and clearing the forests reclaimed 21,522 acres of cultivable land. In the Kasalong Reserve Forest under Baghaichari Thana alone, 100 square kilometres of forests were destroyed to reclaim 10,000 acres for farming. The fish cultivation in the Kaptai Lake has also affected the local variety. According to statistics available, during 1965-66, the share of Ruhi, Katla, Mrigel and Kalibaus and other fishes in the total fish population of the lake was 78 per cent. In 1993, the share reduced to a meagre 2.36 per cent. On the other hand, in 1992-93, Tilapia's share went up to 19.55 percent. The wild beasts, which once freely roamed the jungles of the area, included elephants, sambar, monkeys, wild boars, wild dogs, black leopards, gayal, etc. There were also many species of birds and reptiles. Most of these animals and beasts are now extinct.

Today, there exists a varied range of options for delivering water and electricity services. There is considerable scope for improving performance of the dam's hydropower generation units. The WCD report argues "as a development choice, the selection of large dams often served as a focal point for the interests and aspirations of politicians, centralised government agencies, international aid donors and the dam-building industry, and did not provide for a comprehensive evaluation of available alternatives. Involvement from civil society varied with the degree of debate and openness to political discourse in a country. However, the WCD Global Review documents a frequent failure to recognise affected people and empower them to participate in the process. In some cases, the opportunity for corruption provided by dams as large-scale infrastructure projects further distorted decision-making."

All these accusations are also valid in the case of Kaptai dam. A Chittagong University study shows 69 per cent of the Chakmas felt that the dam created food and financial problems for them, 69 per cent complained of inadequate government help for rehabilitation, 58 per cent were disheartened as it did not provide any meaningful job opportunities and 93 per cent felt that their economic condition had been better before the construction of the dam. The affected people had no role in the planning process nor were they consulted about the relocation or rehabilitation programme. And the engineering services and construction work were done by International Engineering Company (IECO) and Utah International Inc. respectively, both of the United States. One may argue that in the 1950s, when the Kaptai project was taken up, the importance of local people's participation in planning process was not given due emphasis. One may claim that environmental impact assessments were not a known component of professional practice in those days. One may further argue that social impact assessment is a recent requirement in project planning process. One may point out that consideration for ecological and bio-diversity conservation is of recent origin. But such claims are not valid any more. These are essential requirements of planning process under the present policy as well as legal regimes in force in Bangladesh. Recently formulated Water Policy as well as the regulations under the Environmental Act of 1995 demand that these analyses are done properly. Time has come that Bangladesh introduces the practice of holding open and free public hearing for all major and controversial projects.

Abbreviated from Daily Star, December 22d, 2000

Dams and Environmental Refugees

Saleem Samad

Foreign consultants assumed that the hill people would move away to another hill and need not be resettled.

Possibly the first ever "environmental refugees" in this part of the world was caused by a huge hydroelectric project in Chittagong Hill Tracts (Samad, 12 November 1994, Environmental refugees of CHT, Pg 2). The socio-economic condition of one-fourth population of the hill people was affected by the construction of the hydro project.

The Kaptai Dam (popularly known) inundated 253 square miles, including 10 square miles of reserved forest. Nearly 54,000 acres of plough land that was about 40 per cent of the district's total cultivable area submerged under the biggest human-made reservoir named Kaptai lake. Homesteads of 18,000 families; approximately 100,000 people were displaced from their hearths and homes of which 70 per cent were ethnic Chakma community (Bangladesh District Gazetteers: Chittagong Hill Tracts, 1975, Dhaka, Chapter VI, Economic Condition, Page-126). The population of CHT in 1961 was 385,079, according to national census.

The Karnaphuli Multi-Purpose Project submerged 40% of the rice bowl of the hill forest and displaced several sections of the indigenous population. Perhaps 40,000 "environmental refugees" migrated to India (Mizoram, Tripura, Assam and Arunachal) and another 20,000 migrated to Burma. Today many of them are in northeast India. Citizens neither of India, nor Bangladesh.

In the aid-game of "Green Revolution" to produce more food and industrialisation, the US government built a hydro project damming the Karnaphuli river. The American company selected by USAID studied neither the social nor disaster impact. The "green revolution" was biased towards farmers and elites residing in the plain land.

The rehabilitation programme was inadequate and half-hearted. A government publication however claims rehabilitation, resettlement and adequate compensation to the displaced hill people. "[I]n consideration of the backwardness of the tribal people of this district as for the sacrifice that they made for good of the rest of the country, government took up the responsibility to compensate and rehabilitate the displaced persons. A majority of the displaced families have been rehabilitated on the upper reaches of rivers Kassalong and Chengi and also a certain percentage has been rehabilitated in other non-submerged areas of Bandarban and Ramgarh subdivision (now district). The rehabilitation scheme envisages the economic rehabilitation of the people on a sound basis." (ibid, Page-126)

The government publication (ibid, Page-88) however admits that the hydro project caused negative impact on the agriculture (damaging 40% of cultivable land) and economy. The average jhum (slash and burns agriculture practice) cycle before inundation by Karnaphuli valley was 7 to 10 years or even 20 to 25 years, which did not cause serious deterioration to the fertility of the land. But submerging of jhum lands has been mainly responsible for the shortening of the cycle to 3 to 5 years. This has resulted in declining soil fertility, low yields from jhum land, and quick erosion and consequent soil degradation.

The ethnic minorities were not consulted before the hydroelectric project was built, nor their resettlement and compensation was adequately met. In the subsequent years, their anger about

Kaptai Dam turned violent, as they demanded self-rule in Chittagong Hill Tracts. The military regimes since 1975 compounded matters, forcibly settled nearly 400,000 landless peasants from the plainland into the hill forests.

Kaptai was a "killing dam", as some describe the hydroelectric project. Constraints of budget allocation discouraged rehabilitation of majority of the displaced population. The largest concentration of the rehabilitated persons was at Kassalong, where the reserved forest had been deforested and the plainland was made available to them (ibid, Page-88). "The tribal sacrifice for the project was not duly compensated," says Ali Haider Khan. Then a young relief officer responsible for the displaced hill people, later Divisional Commissioner of Chittagong, he expressed this view to this writer in 1980.

The government of Pakistan resettled the displaced hill people with inadequate budget, at a certain height, determined by the dam project engineers. When the hydroelectric project came into effect in 1962, the water level submerged most of the resettled hill people. The American hydrologists calculated the wrong height of water rise inside the catchment, which is the picturesque Kaptai Lake.

To the amazement of many, the US consultants and Pakistan government officials recorded in the document that the ethnic minorities are nomads and practice "jhum" (slash and burn agriculture). They explained that the nomadic ethnic communities migrate after each five or seven years cycle from one hill to another. Therefore, it will be a difficult task to rehabilitate or resettle the "nomadic" hill people at a permanent place. Nonetheless, the question of resettlement or rehabilitation does not arise. The foreign consultants assumed that the hill people would move away to another hill for "jhum" and need not be resettled.

Abbreviated from essay published in Dams.org

Indigenous People's Economy, Myths and Realities

Pradanendu Bikash Chakma

Bengalis hold relatively higher forms of production relations in almost all the sectors of the CHT economy.

The economy of the people (particularly the indigenous peoples) is mostly based on agriculture. According to Land Revenue Administration Report of 1965-66, the total area of the CHT was 32,59,520 acres, the total cropped area was 2,23,002 acres, and the net cropped area being only 1,30,000 acres. That means, less than seven percent of the land in CHT is suitable for cultivation.[1] The amount of land for plough cultivation is even

less. The construction of Kaptai Dam in the early sixties, which submerged 54,000 acres or 40 percent of the most fertile plough lands of the CHT, added to the already existing land crisis in the CHT.

The topography and soil condition of the CHT made the people resort to Jum cultivation. Besides Jum, plough cultivation is also practiced by the indigenous people in the plainlands, mostly in the river valleys. Previously, Jum not only provided enough food to feed families, but also created surplus.[2] But the situation is quite different now. The CHT, once a food surplus area, has now turned into food deficit area.[3] The old observation, "Misery, undernourishment and starvation, a well-known feature in Bengal plains, did not exist in the hills." [4], is no longer true.

After the Kaptai dam, some indigenous people, mostly living in and around the reservoir area, took to fruits gardening as a source of their livelihood. Some even took to fishing, previously an unappreciated occupation to the indigenous people. The fruit gardeners did not fare too badly during the initial years.[5] But later they could not maintain the trend due to deteriorating soil condition and lack of adequate marketing facilities.

Problems of Population Growth

In Bangladesh, more than 121 million (in 1995) people are squeezed into an area of 1,47,570 sq. kilometers.[6] Until the seventies, the rate of population growth in the CHT was almost similar to the one in all of Bangladesh. But between 1974 and 1981, the growth rate became abnormally high. During this period, while the population growth rate in Bangladesh was about 18 percent, it was 47 percent in the CHT. This abnormal growth in population in the CHT has been caused due to government sponsored, planned in-migration of Bengali settlers from the plains. The ratio of indigenous and Bengali population in the CHT was 91:9 in 1951 and 88:12 in 1961. But in 1981 the ratio became 59:41.[7] There are reports that during 1960-1987 (mostly during late seventies and early eighties) about 580,000 Bengalis were settled in the CHT under state sponsored settlement programmes.[8] The planned settlement of Bengalis has caused enormous harm to the already miserable economic condition of the indigenous people. The land crisis became more acute (forceful dispossession of indigenous peoples' land was a regular phenomenon) and the occupational structure of the indigenous peoples also changed. Classified into two major categories of occupation, Agriculture and Non-agriculture, it was found that in 1961 about 87 percent of the total working force in the CHT was engaged in agriculture and it came down to 59 percent by 1981.[9] Historically, the indigenous peoples are agriculturists. The sudden change in occupation (without having time and facilities to pursue other occupations) made many indigenous people 'fish-out of water'.

Effects of Commercialism

Historical and geographical conditions made indigenous people in CHT less conversant with modern trade and commerce. Earlier, because of their traditional right to land and abundance of forest resources, the indigenous peoples did not have to depend on the market for making livelihood. They depended on the market only for purchase of a few items such as salt, dry fish, agricultural appliances, etc. They used to barter their surplus agricultural and forest products in exchange for these items from Bengali traders.

The advent of commercialism in the CHT brought in more negative than positive impact on the economy of the indigenous peoples. Firstly, the commercial trickeries were unknown to them and even by nature they disliked these. Secondly, they were somewhat ignorant about the concept of private property and commercial value of land and other properties. Thirdly, and most importantly, they were (and still are) victims of unscrupulous businessmen. As in the past, trade and commerce in the CHT is absolutely controlled by Bengali traders from the plains. They hold top business and commercial positions and most of the shops in the market and commercial places are owned by them.[10] They have established near monopolies in wholesale and retail trades, in credit and in transport and other service sectors. One would hardly find any indigenous person holding top commercial and business positions. Thus, the Bengalis hold relatively higher forms of production relations in almost all the sectors of the CHT economy. Because of this advantage and because of the natural operation of market forces, the Bengalis will continue to exploit their innocent indigenous brethren. The common concept of the rich becoming richer (implying the Bengalis) and the poor becoming poorer (implying the indigenous peoples) under the market economy seems to be inevitable in the CHT, unless remedial measures are taken immediately.

Effects of Industrialization

The state of industrialization in the CHT is low even by Bangladesh standard. However, the CHT holds some key industries like Karnafuli Paper and Rayon Mills, Kaptai Hydro-electric Project, Wooden and Timber Factory, Boat Building Industrial Corporation, Dockyards, Aziz Industries, etc. But, most of the employees/workers in these industries are imported from outside the CHT. At one stage of normal operation, the Karnafuli Paper Mill employed only 14 hillmen out of the total labour force of 3,290 persons.[11] The picture is almost same with respect to other industries. Until recently the largest hydroelectric project in Kaptai supplied electricity to Chittagong and other places of Bangladesh, keeping in dark almost the entire CHT. "Every house of the tribesmen is so to say a small factory of one variety or the other".[12]-- though indigenous peoples possess the skills of various crafts (weaving, pottery, cane works, dyeing, woodworks, etc), few of them find jobs in related state-owned and other large-scale industries. The benefits of industrialization to the indigenous peoples can be stated as "the state sponsored exploitation of natural resources (hydro-electricity, timber, natural oil, gas, etc.) without regard to the interest of local population".[13]

Effects of Development Projects

Governments undertook various development initiatives in the CHT. The reality shows, the indigenous peoples could not enjoy the fruits of such development projects. In fact, in many cases, the development initiatives produced counter effects to the real economic well being of the indigenous peoples. The horticulture development project in the early sixties turned out to be a failure (because of lack of adequate supervision and marketing support) as the local producers got much less than the market price from their produces. The ADB sponsored road development project, aimed at improving people's access to markets and reducing indigenous peoples' cultural and economic isolation, brought little benefit for the indigenous peoples. Instead, it benefited the Bengalis in two ways. Firstly, as marketing was monopolised by them, the benefits automatically accrued to them. Secondly, the improved road communication made it easier for the Bengali settlers

to migrate into the CHT. Until recently, the top positions of the CHT Development Board were held by outsiders who were either less concerned about the nature of the indigenous peoples' problems, or were less interested to solve such problems. The local people had little chance to participate in and affect the policy decisions of the Board. The forest development programme benefited the corrupt Bengali officials and the unscrupulous businessmen on the one hand, and indiscriminately destroyed the forest resources and ecology of the CHT on the other. The recent attempt to bring more areas under reserve forest would also go against the indigenous peoples. There are numerous examples of development projects inflicting more harm than positively contributing to the economic welfare of the indigenous peoples.[14]

Conclusion

The economic condition of the indigenous peoples is far from being satisfactory. Man-made crises are mainly responsible for this. With the signing of the peace accord last year, an ideal opportunity has been created now to take positive measures in the direction of improving the over all economy of the CHT and the common people's lot. In order to ensure economic welfare of the common people I would suggest the following measures: Restoration of land rights previously enjoyed by the indigenous peoples and other permanent residents of the CHT; Proper rehabilitation of the returnees from India and other internally displaced people; Creation of special provisions (both protectionist and promotional measures) for ensuring greater participation of the indigenous peoples in trade and commerce; Creation of more job opportunities for the indigenous peoples in the government and non-government sectors, and creation of opportunities for self-employment; Protection and promotion of indigenous peoples' art, crafts and establishment of more vocational schools in the CHT; Encouragement for formation and functioning of various trade and professional bodies and co-operatives in the CHT; Expansion of the existing quota system for the indigenous students in the various technical and higher educational institutions of the country; Establishment of a business school in the CHT for higher business education.

Notes

1. Also see Raja Devasish Roy, 'Colonization, Marginalization and disempowerment of indigenous peoples in the Chittagong Hill tracts, Bangladesh; Will there be a reversal of the trend?', a paper presented in a seminar on 'Bangladesh: peoples Struggles (1971-1996), held between 18-20 October, 1996 in Montreal, Canada.
2. Khisa, A. L., Shifting cultivation in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Dacca, 1963 (p. 71).
3. Shelly, M. R. (ed.), The Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh: The Untold Story, CDR, B. Dhaka, December, 1992, (p. 64).
4. Mey, Wolfgang (ed), Genocide in Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh, Copenhagen 1984 (pp. 81-82).
5. Raja Devasish Roy, 'Land rights of the indigenous peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts', in the Bulletin, 1993 Year of the Indigenous People, Dhaka, December, 1993 (p. 16).
6. Hossain, S.M., 'Population Growth and Structure', in Population and Development, MOHFW, GOB, Dhaka, 1996 (p. 61).
7. Chakma, P.B., 'Chittagong Hill Tracts and its Development', in the Bangladesh Journal of Buddhist Studies, vol. 111, no. 1, Dhaka, May, 1986; also see Raja, op.cit. (1996).
8. Barkat, A. and Huda, S. 'Politico-Economic Essence of Ethnic Conflicts in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, in the Dhaka University Studies, Part-D, December, 1988(p. 113).
9. Barkat, A. and Huda, S, op.cit.
10. Dewan, A., Class and Ethnicity in the Hills of Bangladesh, McGill University, Canada, 1979.
11. Ishaq, M. (ed.), Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh District Gazetteers, Dacca, 1975 (p. 139).
12. Ishaq, M. (ed.), op.cit. (p. 159).
13. Mey, Wolfgang, op.cit. (p. 31).
14. For detail see, Barkat, A. and Huda, S. op.cit., and Mey, Wolfgang, op.cit.

Presented at Conference on Development in the Chittagong Hill Tracts held in December 1998 at Tribal Cultural Institute Auditorium, Rangamati.

Impact of Development

Chandra Roy

The major issue in the CHT is land. Land is the economic resource base for the indigenous peoples, which they are dependent on for their economic and cultural survival. The rate at which the indigenous peoples are being divested of their lands in the CHT is alarming. This is the result of projects and programmes carried out in the name of development and modernization. After having already lost much of their land because of the Kaptai dam, the indigenous peoples then had their lands taken from them, (often forcibly and generally illegally) to be given to Bengali settler families. Naturally, this situation had repercussions that led to confrontations and violence as some of the settlers had been provided with arms – ostensibly for their protection. With the heavy military presence in the Hill Tracts and the lack of institutional protection accorded to the indigenous peoples, reports of violent attacks against the indigenous peoples by the settlers in collaboration with the security forces continued to increase.

Micro-credit schemes are alien to the indigenous culture, and can lead to a dependency on the monetary economy.

Another major concern is that the settlers are being included on the CHT voter lists as ‘permanent residents’ in the CHT; this will effectively make their hold, and presence, in the region more firmly entrenched. The Government continues to provide food and other rations and benefits to the settlers to ensure their continued presence in the Hill Tracts. It is questionable as to how many would continue to live in the Hill Tracts without such benefits, especially with its inhospitable terrain, and the resentment of them by the local inhabitants. None of the indigenous peoples are provided with any such assistance, including the refugees who have returned from India on the premise of an agreed repatriation package. Most of them remain homeless and in temporary shelters.

A Peace Accord was signed in December 1997 between the Government and the PCJSS. It provides elements for strengthening indigenous management of the region through institutional mechanisms such as an apex Regional Council, three District Councils (established in 1989), and a Land Commission. As a result of the regenerated attention on the Hill Tracts, and the flow of funds to the region, a number of national NGOs are also active in the CHT. They are engaged in implementing projects, most of which are settler-oriented. Of the few that are targeted at the indigenous peoples, they hardly take into account the special characteristics of the indigenous peoples, rather they apply the same approach as in other areas of Bangladesh. This has damaging effects on the indigenous peoples society and culture, for example micro-credit schemes are alien to the indigenous culture, and can lead to a dependency on the monetary economy.

The indigenous peoples also have their own organizations and have formed the Hill Tracts NGO Forum as an umbrella organization. However, the indigenous peoples’ organizations face a major hurdle in accessing funds and other resources as this requires registration with the national NGO bureau, which has been unreceptive to indigenous organizations. As such, very few have the necessary accreditation to enter into cooperation agreements with international donors and funders.

Concerned that the development agencies would not take the needs and concerns of the indigenous peoples fully into account in implementing activities in the Hill Tracts, the indigenous peoples formulated a declaration to guide development activities in the Hill Tracts in December 1998. It was called the Rangamati Declaration and was adopted at a conference on “Development in the Chittagong Hill Tracts”. The declaration stressed that a speedy implementation of the CHT Peace

Accord of 1997 is a priority and that all development activities should be implemented in consultation with the Regional Council. The following emerge as key elements to be taken into account when carrying out development activities:

Development Priorities: Any development in indigenous areas should strive to be in accordance with the development priorities of the indigenous peoples. As such, it is important for the donors and organizations to engage in a joint exercise with the indigenous peoples in order to ensure that there is agreement on the priorities for development before commencing any activities in the area. There may be a time lapse between project formulation and implementation, and situations evolve constantly. Therefore, it is important to include mechanisms to adjust to the dynamics of the situation, should the need arise.

Participation: It is essential to include the indigenous peoples and their representatives and organizations in all processes of the project. This includes the initial needs assessment, which outlines the guidelines for project support, the project implementation and project review.

Ownership: It is important that the indigenous peoples are involved at all stages, which helps to build confidence and capacity and leads to ownership in the project. This will in turn make the results sustainable once the project has ceased operations.

Consultations: The indigenous peoples should be consulted at all stages, and their opinions taken into account, in order for a project to be participatory and democratic.

Socio-political context: The historic as well as current socio-political context provides good indicators for potential areas of contention and sensitivity. These should be studied, assessed, and taken into account in the implementation of the project. This provides an opportunity to identify and resolve potential problem areas prior to commencing operations.

Cultural Characteristics: The culture of indigenous peoples is often under threat. As such indigenous peoples view cultural protection in all its different expressions as essential to their survival. Any development activity occurring in indigenous areas should not only be culturally sensitive, but also encourage and support indigenous culture and traditions.

Rights-based approach: International instruments and policies provide guidelines and frameworks to ensure indigenous rights are not undermined but protected. In this context, ratified conventions provide common grounds and can serve as indicators of assessment.

Creativity: In working with indigenous peoples, a creative approach is needed. Strategies that worked in other areas are not always appropriate. Each intervention has to be tailored to the specifics of each situation as no two are the same and each geographic area or peoples have their own inherent characteristics and distinctions. Indigenous organizations often do not have access to financial, administrative and technical resources in order to operate effectively.

Constructive Engagement: Commitment to indigenous issues should be long term engagements, otherwise it can lead to ad hoc and piecemeal interventions, which are not sustainable in the long run. Interventions should be entered into with a spirit of mutual respect and constructive engagement.

Abbreviated from "Impact of Development in the Chittagong Hill Tracts: Ways Forward", presented at 4th Forum for Development Cooperation with Indigenous Peoples, University of Tromsø, 2003.

Culture, Identity and Development

Prashanta Tripura

I heard someone from the CHT say, "We lived without development for over two decades, so we can do without it for another few years." The caution and patience that the statement suggests would be justified in the long run if the people of the CHT begin to ask themselves: What does it mean for us to be a Pahari or a Bengali, a Chakma or a Jumma, a Marma woman or a Bawm man, an educated Chak or a Mru jum-cultivator, and so

I have other identities as well: I am a Pahari, a Bangladeshi, a man of certain age and social standing, and so on.

on? The answers to these questions are by no means as straightforward as they seem. I am a Tripura by birth. But I did not, could not, automatically fit myself into this 'vessel' of identity to which I was born. As I grew up, I had to develop--through my interaction with family members and other relatives as well as many other categories of people in my village, at school, at the marketplace, and so on--my own sense of what it meant to a Tripura. And over time, I began to realise that what being a Tripura meant to me was not always the same as what it meant to others around me. Moreover, my own interpretation of my Tripura identity has changed over time. And I have other identities as well: I am a Pahari, a Bangladeshi, a man of certain age and social standing, and so on. Now how do such various layers and dimensions of identity relate to one's economic and political aspirations and views of the kind of identity he or she wants to pass on to the next generation? This is a complex question, which I can only touch upon.

Let me try to address the above question by offering a hypothetical case study drawn from my personal experiences and observations. Imagine a Tripura boy growing up in the 1960s and '70s in a village located next to a market-cum-administrative centre where all the traders and shopkeepers and most of the government personnel were Bengalis. At home and in his own village, he interacted with relatives and friends who spoke Kokborok (Tripuri). But at school, he was shy because he could not yet speak Bengali very fluently. His shyness was further intensified when one day a teacher humiliated him by mistaking his difficulties in expressing his thoughts in Bengali for a lack of aptitude. There he was also intimidated by a few Chakma boys, who bullied him and made fun of him for being a Tripura and a sissy. He began to dislike school, and maintained a distance from the marketplace and the government office buildings. The only place where he felt at home was his own village. Although many of the boys of his age in his village did not go to school, he saw them as friends whom he liked to play sports with and whom he could converse with fluently.

Our Tripura boy, however, gradually learnt to distinguish himself from other Tripuras he saw around him. He saw them as poor, illiterate, ignorant, superstitious and so on-- in short, 'underdeveloped.' He dreamt that one day he would do something for their development. Some of his Chakma friends also had similar thoughts, which they shared with one another. Together, they used to dream of becoming doctors, engineers, magistrates, pilots, and so on. But soon many of them changed their minds as an armed conflict engulfed the whole region. Many of them wanted to join the Shanti Bahini, and they did. One day, after being beaten by a Bengali soldier, the Tripura boy also thought of joining this guerrilla organisation. Did he....?

I want to leave my story incomplete and return to the present. More than a year has passed since the Peace Accord was signed. While the implementation of the accord drags on at present, one hopes that it will be completed some day. If this process ends well, then in the near future we are likely to see a greater number of 'tribal' people occupying important positions in various institutions and

organisations responsible for formulating policies, plans and regulations that will shape the future of the CHT. Suppose the Tripura boy of the story above, now a grown-up man, is one of these individuals. He used to dislike schools, markets and government offices. So if he is put in charge of any such institution, how will his past experiences influence the way in which he would like to run and develop it? One hopes that he would try to make these institutions more accommodating, and more open and responsive to the kinds of people he grew up with. But as long as he views such people as ignorant, superstitious and inferior to him, he is not likely to achieve the results that he may think he wants. Instead, he is likely to repeat the same kinds of 'mistakes' that others before him-- Bengalis, Punjabis and the British alike--have made.

I would like to end this brief discussion by posing some questions to ourselves. In various cultural programmes, there are dances and songs in which one would get a glimpse of the rich cultural diversity of the CHT. But what is the extent to which such performances represent the circumstances and the dreams and aspirations of all classes of people? The performance of dances or songs in which jum-cultivators are depicted in an idealised setting does not necessarily conform to the historical experiences of contemporary jum-cultivators. It seems that for many urban Jummas, the quest for identity is confined to such symbolic and romanticised reconstruction of a way of life that they themselves have left behind and will never return to. On the other hand, there are still many people in the CHT for whom jum continues to be important as a principal means of subsistence. So the questions that I would like to pose are as follows: How much do we educated urban Jummas know about the conditions under which today's jum-cultivators live? What are their futures? And so long as they want to continue to practise jum, how can it be ensured that they look like the happy people that we see depicted on-stage?

Bibliography

- Chambers, Robert (1983) *Rural Development: Putting the Last First*. London: Longman.
- (1994) Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA): Challenges, Potentials and Paradigm. *World Development*, 22(10):1437-1454
- Escobar, Arturo (1995) *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Frank, Andre Gunder (1969) *Latin America: Underdevelopment and Revolution*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Hobart, Mark, ed. (1993) *An Anthropological Critique of Development: The Growth of Ignorance*. London: Routledge.
- Long, Norman and Ann Long (1992) *Battlefields of Knowledge: The Interlocking of Theory and Practice in Social Research and Development*. London: Routledge.
- Muhammad, Anu (1997) Aggression of "Development" and the Hill Economy. The Case of Development and the National Minorities in the CHT. Paper presented at the seminar on "Hill Economy and Environment: Development Issues of the Chittagong Hill Tracts," organised jointly by Bangladesh Economic Association and the Department of Economics, Chittagong University, Chittagong, March 1, 1997.
- Naher, Ainoon (1996) *Gender, Religion and Rural Development in Bangladesh*. Unpublished MA dissertation in Social Anthropology, University of Sussex.
- Pottier, J., ed. (1993) *Practising Development*. London: Routledge.
- Rahnema, Majid and Victoria Bawtree (1997) *The Post-Development Reader*. Dhaka: University Press Limited.
- Warren, Michael D. et al., eds. (1995) *The Cultural Dimension of Development: Indigenous Knowledge Systems*. London: Intermediate Technology Publications.

Abbreviated from Tripura, P. (1998) Culture, Identity and Development in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. In Discourse: A Journal of Policy Studies, Vol. 2, No. 2, Dhaka: Institute for Development Policy Analysis and Advocacy at Proshika.

Politics of Development

Zobaida Nasreen & Masahiko Togawa

To understand the development discourse of the state in CHT, we need to pay attention to the ways in which the state legitimizes its intervention. CHT is a landscape, a repository of environmental service and an economic resource base for Bengali settlers. These are some of the representations and symbolic constructions through which the politics and managerial practices are justified. Such a representation is clearly observed in the activities of the structured organization of the state, Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board (CHTDB). Their dominance represents the power of the state.

Worsening ecological imbalance in environment of CHT is deeply rooted in so-called 'development' programs.

Table-1: Changing Trend of Ethnic Composition in Chittagong Hill Tracts (1872 to 1991)

Year	Pahari	Bengali	Total
1872	61,957 (98.27%)	1,097 (1.73%)	63,054 (100%)
1901	1,13,074 (92.81%)	8,762 (7.19%)	1,21,836 (100%)
1959	2,60,517 (90.39%)	27,171 (9.61%)	2,87,688 (100%)
1981	4,41,796 (59.17%)	3,04,873 (40.83%)	7,46,669 (100%)
1991	5,00,190 (51.34%)	4,74,255 (48.66%)	9,74,445 (100%)

Source: Shurawardi (1995:38)

We explain the cultural discourse of the state by examining the development programs under taken by the state and donor agencies in the name of the well being of ethnic minorities.

The first direct assault of the British Colonial state on the economic life of the CHT people was on their mode of production. The British asserted that 'Jhum which was the characteristic form of agriculture in the CHT, was a 'primitive' method of agriculture; it entailed long fallow periods, which were considered to be a waste of resources by the British (Mohsin: 1997). They attempted to replace it by plough cultivation because it is economically more profitable and is considered to be technologically superior as well. Since the partition of India and the Independence of Bangladesh, a similar dichotomy is still being used not only for the 'divide rule policy' but also for the 'effects of truth'. This discourse was termed by Van Schendel (1992) as 'tribalism' and is akin to Edward Said's notion of 'orientalism'. As 'orientalism' represents the 'orient', 'tribalism' presumes that all tribes share characteristics that are fundamentally different from and sometimes even opposite to those of civilized people. As Van Schendel (1992) argues:

"Principal among these are 'childish' qualities that betray a lack of socialization immoderately emotional behavior (revelry, sensuality, extravagance, cruelty, fear of the supernatural), and natively (credulity, in the capacity to plan for the future)".

Pakistan Period (1947-1971)

Pakistan government set up a paper mill at Chandraghona in CHT in 1953 with a loan taken from World Bank. Three-fourth of the loan was spent for importing machineries from Europe and America. The rest was spent for constructing mills and residence for the employees (Govt. of Bangladesh: 1971). The mill created more than ten thousand jobs. But only 10-20 'pahari' people got jobs in the paper mill as lower class employees. The 'pahari' people were used to cut bamboos from deep forest. Government earned foreign currency by exporting paper. But local 'pahari' people lost their land as government acquired for constructing the mill.

Before setting up this mill, this area was inhabited by the Marma. They were evicted from this area without their consent. Now, 100% of the inhabitants of this area are Bengali. These Bengali people were migrated to this place after setting up paper mill (Chowdhury et al, 1979). As part of development plan of Pakistan government, a hydroelectric dam was constructed at Kaptai village in Rangamati district in 1960. A vast reservoir of some 550 square miles which inundated most of the fertile Karnafuli valley and a large part of the Chengi, Kassalong and Maini valley which were famous for lush paddy fields and vegetable gardens.

However, even before the construction of the Kaptai Dam, there was not sufficient cultivable land for the CHT population. The construction of Karnafuli reservoir aggravated the issue even further. The project uprooted about 100,000 people mostly Chakma (one ethnic group) that accounted for more than a quarter of the total population of the CHT and inundated more than 54,000 acres or 40 percent of the best plough lands of the CHT. In exchange, an inadequate amount of monetary compensation was paid out and at best one-third of the lost land was replaced. A large number of frustrated Chakma farmers migrated to India where they still remain as refugees.

In 1964, the government of Pakistan made a contact with a Canadian company, called 'Forestal Forestry and Engineering International Limited' (Forestal) to survey the soil and topography of the land surface of the CHT. The Forestal experts warned that the area of land available for economically sound was very scarce indeed and recommended that the uncultivated hillside land should be used extensively and in a planned manner for fruit gardening and forestation. They encouraged the hill people to make the gardening instead of 'Jhum' and especially on rubber cultivation and teak plantation. The plantation of these plants is profitable. But it created land degradation and soil erosion. Till now, rubber plantation destroys the forest. The forestation rate is now 3.36%. So it will create lack of sufficient oxygen for human being very soon (Chakma and Hill: 1995).

Before independence of Bangladesh, an earth satellite center was set up at Betbunia in CHT. The construction of this center began with donation of Canada International Development Agency (CIDA). It Politics of Development in CHT in Bangladesh 103 was finished after the independence of Bangladesh (Islam: 1978). This satellite center again displaced the people of the Marma community. Behind this project, the politics of international capital was active. Television manufacturing companies of Canada aimed at capturing the market of Bangladesh. As a result of this plan, the dominant elite class of Bangladesh was benefited.

Bangladesh Period (1971-)

Government with the declaration of ordinance 77 in 1976 established Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board (CHTDB). From the formation of this Board to 1983, the divisional commissioner of Chittagong division was appointed as the chairman of this board. Then General Officer Commanding (G.O.C.) of Chittagong Cantonment was appointed in the same post. Now the ruling party M.P is the chairman of CHTDB. The consultative committee of the board consists of three circle-chiefs (The Bengal Government had divided the CHT into three circles on 1 September 1881. The three circles were: the Chakma circle of 1658 sq. miles; the Bomang circle of 1444 sq. miles and the Mong circle of 653 sq. miles) and a few of local leaders. But they do not have any power to direct the activities of the board. The chairman is the supreme authority, directing all the activities of the board according to the plan of the Government with the help of civil and military bureaucrats. In this connection some remarks from the report of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission can be quoted:

The CHTDB was established in 1976 by the late president Ziaur Rahman to fight the Shanti Bahini. It is a purely political organization to bribe the tribal. Loans are given for private purpose, to business and tribal leaders. They are showpieces of the Government. Yes, it is mostly a political bribe to tribal leaders to buy them off so that they would not help the Shanti Bahini' (Mey: 1991).

For government interest, CHTDB has invested a huge amount of money in communication sector (Table-2). In 1992-93 fiscal year, 4 kilometers road was constructed from Matiranga Boroser Bazar in Khagrachari District to Borosera Army Camp. Here a question arises that whose interest is being emphasized in the development program of CHTDB.

When the 'plough cultivation program' initiated by government in CHT was accused for the destruction of cultural tradition of the hill community, government established Tribal Cultural Center to preserve (according to government explanation) the culture of the hill community. Susamay Chakma, in charge of the center in Khagrachari district said, "Sarkar hadaay, sangskriti alo naach, geet. Museum bonebaak niyoto aachhi. naach, geet dhari rakhibak jaade haator na jaay." (According to Government, culture is the matter of dance, song. To preserve it, government will set up a museum. The ornaments of dance, musical instruments and other things will be kept in the museum. In this way, the culture of ethnic communities will be preserved).

The Resettlement Program

In 1979, the Government made a drastic and ill-advised change to the land law of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Through an amendment to rule 34 (1) of the CHT Manual the Government maintained most of the provisions of the earlier legislation, but with one important omission, namely, the restrictions with regard to settlement of Chittagong Hill Tracts land to outsiders. In addition, the hastily grafted amendment also did away with the definition of 'non-Hillman resident' the legal term used to identify resident Bengalis of the Chittagong Hill Tracts who were entitled to some of the privileges reserved specially for the indigenous hill people.

If we now look at the ratio of land in relation to the CHT population in the 1970s, i.e., before the settlers were brought in, and then look at the requirements for just the first to several batches of settlers that eventually came to the CHT, we get a very dismal picture indeed. There simply were no paddy lands that were not already under the plough.

Under the resettlement program, the poor and landless people from different parts of Bangladesh have been migrated to the hill districts. The fight for land thus begins. The poor Bengali and 'pahari' people are involved into a conflict in the issue of private ownership of land. For this ownership, market is essential. Those who control the production system, also control the market system. Now in Khagrachari, the dominant Bengali controls it. Since plough cultivation is adopted as the production system, the Bengali controls it. Under this process of severe competition, the distribution of class and professional status of 'pahari' people has been changed remarkably.

After the resettlement program, the number of Bengali people in CHT has been increasing and this indirectly influenced the local language of the ethnic communities. The dominance of Bengali language is seen not only in the official activities in CHT but also in other areas of life of people. The Bengali people of Khagrachari changed the names of various places, which were named earlier in Chakma, Marma and Tripura language. In some cases, religious dominance of Bengali Muslim has importance in naming some places. Earlier the name of the district of 'Khagrachari' was 'Khakrachara' in Chakma language. 'Khakra' means the seed of one kind of tree. Later, the name was changed under the influence of Bengali domination. The nationalist dominance in the alteration of names can easily be understood.

Changing the Names of Various Places of Khagrachari

Previous name	Present name.
Bangal Kathi* (Divided into 2 parts)	Shantinagarö, Muslim Para**
Pankheyoya Para (Divided into 4 parts)	Milonpurö, Pankhaiyaparaö, Kallanpurö, Madampurö
Khagrapur ¥	Islampur**
C.N.B Tila*	Kadampurö
Kamal Chari*	Battollaö
KhabongPuizza*	Khabong Paria ??
Khagrachari Bill*	Anandapurö
Majon Para* (Divided into 2 parts)	Mahajan Paraö, Narikalcharaö
Kawali Mura*	Kathali Paraö
Comilla Tila*	Ambaganö
Kanoongo Para ?	Mohamadpur**
Uttada Chari ?	Rasulpur**
Pa-ong Kabari Para ?	Fatemanagar**
Tai Kusum ?	Kalapani Charaö
Tai Bagla*	Tai Paglaö
Para Kalak ?	Lambaparaö

Source: (Nasreen:2000)

*= Chakma name, ? = Marma name, ¥ = Tripura name, ö = Bengali name, ** = Islamic name, ö = Mixed with Noakhali District dialectics, ?? = Distorted form of original language.

The resettlement program not only created language domination but also created land problem and religious domination in CHT. With the help of militarization, resettled Bengali became more powerful. Furthermore, the people whom the state program settled, most of whom are Muslim, created religious domination in the CHT. The number of mosques is increasing dramatically. There was one mosque in Khagrachari district in 1971, in 1982 it was 5 and in 2000 it was 20 (Source: field work).

Food for Work Program

Although the degradation of the forest in the CHT is acknowledged, the underlying causes of this degradation are completely ignored by the national government. Attempts continue to be made to attribute blame for the destruction of the environment onto indigenous groups practicing traditional 'Jhum' cultivation. Referring to 'Jhum' cultivation, a Bangladesh government official has stated that 'Jhum' means destruction of the forest.' In contradiction to this claim, there is evidence that the worsening ecological imbalance in the environment of CHT in last three decades is deeply rooted in so-called 'development' programs such as those for 'jungle clearing' and 'logging'. Loffler's report observes that the ecological imbalance has not resulted from 'Jhum' cultivation:

"My first idea that this deplorable state might be the result of 'Jhumming' was soon thrown into doubt when I saw hill people slashing meager remnants of vegetation and burning the hillsides. In some cases at least this 'jungle clearing' as it is called, may be covered by the 'for work program' paid by USAID-imported food for work that has the inevitable effect of making barren and unsuitable for productive use the very hills on which, formally, the hill farmers produced all they needed for making a living..." (Loffler's Report: 1991 as quoted in Chakma & Hill: 1995).

'Food for Work' development programs, subsidized by foreign aid, and where the 'work' consists of 'jungle clearing' introduces a pattern, which will be repeated in subsequent development projects.

Conclusion

Development projects are legitimized by definitions of poverty and development which effectively devalue the subsistence practices of the target indigenous group, making its restructuring toward some western model of a technologically advanced market based economy seem laudable. The project is subtly empowered by the legitimacy of a market economic paradigm. The authority implementing the development process then introduces their agenda into the structure of the legitimized project. In CHT the development project is implemented with the authority of the government and the power of the military. The additional agenda embedded in development projects include dislocation and intimidation of the indigenous community and entrenchment of strategic situation by forest clearing around military camps (Chakma & Hill: 1995).

During British period, the state controlled the ethnic communities through Bengali middlemen. From Pakistan period the state started controlling the ethnic communities directly under the banner of various development projects. Development discourse has been working as a cultural discourse of the state because the ethnic communities have been losing their own cultural identities due to unfriendly development activities. The beneficiaries of CHTDB development programs are not the ethnic people, but the Bengali people and military forces. The indirect exercise of power of state under the banner of development program puts into question the ethnic identity of the indigenous communities.

References

- Ahmed, A. (1992), *In Theory, Classes, Nations, Literature*, London, Oxford University Press.
- Alam, N.S.M., and Akhtar, R. (1990), *Problems of Ethnic Identity and National Integration: A Case Study from Chittagong Hill Tracts*. The Jahagirnagar Review, Part 2, Social Science, Vol. 13 and 14.
- Anderson, B.ed (1991), *Imagined Communities*, London, Verso.
- Banks, M. (1997), *Ethnicity, Anthropological Construction*, London, Routledge.
- Background of Jummas CHT(2002),www.angelfire.com accessed on March 24, 2002.
- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (1991), *Population Census*, Statistics Division, Ministry of Planning, Dhaka
- Bessaiget, P. (1958), *Tribesmen of the Chittagong Hill Tracts*. Dacca: Asiatic Society.
- Bhaumik S., Guhathakurta, M., Chaudhury, S. B. Roy (1997), *Living on the Edge*, SA Forum For Human Rights.
- Chakma, S. (1986), *Prosongo Parbattya Chhattagram (In Bengali)*, Calcutta: Nath Bros.
- Chowdhury, R.I., et al. (1979), *Tribal Leadership and Political Integration: A Case Study of Chakma and Mong of Chittagong Hill Tracts*, Chittagong, University of Chittagong, Faculty of Social Science.
- Committee of Revenue (1784), *Proceedings of Committee of Revenue*, (translated from Persian by J Buller), May 6, Bengal.
- Dewan, A, K. (1990), *Class and Ethnicity in Chittagong Hill Tracts*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, McGill, Canada.
- Doshi, S.L., (1990), *Tribal Ethnicity, Class and Integration*, Jaipur, Rawat Publication,
- Esteva, G. (1993), *Development*, W. Sachs ed, *The Development Dictionary*, London, Zed Books Ltd.
- Foucault M. (1972), *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, London, Routledge.
- (1981), *The Order of Discourse*, T.Meleod and Y,K, Paul eds, *Untying the Text*, London, Routledge..
- Hobsbawm, F.J. (1990), *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*, Cambridge University Press.
- Hossain, G. (1991), *Civil Military in Bangladesh: A Comparative study*, Dhaka, Academic Publishers.
- Hunter, W.W., (1876), *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, Vol.6 Chittagong Hill Tracts, Chittagong, Noakhali, Tipperah. London, Trubner.
- Huq, M, M. (1992), *Changing Nature of Dominant Social Forces and Interventions in the Chittagong Hill Tracts*, *The Journal of Social Studies*, Center for Social Studies, University of Dhaka, No. 56. Dhaka.
- (1988), *Planning and Development of the CHT Development Board*. *Development Review*. 1 (2),
- Hutchinson, R.H.S (1909), *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers*, CHT, Allahbad: Pioneer Press.
- , (1906), *An Account of the Chittagong Hill Tracts*, Calcutta, Bengal Secretariat Book Depot.
- Islam, N (1978) *The Karnafull Project*, Public Administration, University of Dacca, 3 (2), Dacca.
- Life is not Ours: Volume-1, 2 (1991, 1994)*, Land and Human Rights in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, CHTC
- Lewin, T.H., (1972), *A Fly on the Wheels or How I Helped to Govern India*. London, Constable.
- , (1870), *Wild Races of South Eastern India*, London, Allen.

- , (1869), *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong Hill and the Dwellers Therein, with Comparative Vocabularies of the Hill Dialects*, Calcutta, Bengal Printing company, Ltd.
- Machenzie, A. (1884), *History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the Northeast Frontier of Bengal*. Calcutta: Home Office Department Press.
- Mey, W. (1984), *Genocide in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh*. IWGIA Document No.51. Copenhagen.
- Mohsin, A. (1997), *The Politics of Nationalism: The Case of Chittagong Hill Tracts*, Dhaka, UPL.
- Mohsin, A. and Ahmed I (1996), *Modernity, Alienation and the Environment: The Experience of the Hill People*, Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, December, Dhaka.
- Nasreen, Z. (2000), *Rastraw, Jatiotabad O Protirod*, M.S.S Thesis, Department of Anthropology, University of Jahangirnagar, Savar, Dhaka
- Roy, R. D. (1994), *Land Rights of the Indigenous People of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Land, Volume-1*, Dhaka, ALRD, p-59.
- (1995), *land Rights, Land Use and Indigenous Peoples in the Chittagong Hill Tracts*, in *Bangladesh Land Forest and Forest People*, edited by Philip Gain, Dhaka, Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD).
- Said E (1978), *Orientalism*, New York, Vintage Books: A Division of Random House.
- Schendel, W. V. (1992), *The Invention of the 'Jummas': State Formation and Ethnicity in Southeastern Bangladesh*. *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol.26. Part.1. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Shurawardi, B.H., (1995), *Parbottya Chattogramer Arthonoitak Abokatham: Akti Parjalochona*, (in Bengali), *Vision (A Magazine)*, Published on the Occasion of Baushabi Celebration in June)
- The Constitution of Peoples Republic of Bangladesh*, (1972) Dacca, Govt. of Bangladesh
- Tripura, P. (1992a), *Colonial Barriers to Integration in the Chittagong Hill Tracts; Bangladesh and SAARC: Issues, Perspectives and Outlooks*, edited by Iftekharuzzaman and Imtiaz Ahmed, Dhaka, Academic Publishers.
- (1992) 'Colonial Foundation of Pahari Ethnicity,' *The Journal of Social Studies*, Number-58, Centre for Social Studies, University of Dhaka. Dhaka, p-2.
- UNPO (2002), *Chittagong Hill Tracts, Unrepresented Nation and Peoples Organization*, The Hague, The Netherlands.
- Watson H, S. (1977), *Nation and States: An Inquiry into The Origin of nations and the politics of nationalism*, Boulder, Western Press.
- Zaman, M., Q. (1984), *Tribal Issues and National Integration: Chittagong Hill Tracts Case*, Qureshi, M,S eds *Tribal Cultures in Bangladesh*, Institute of Bangladesh Studies.
- , (1982). *Crisis in Chittagong Hill Tracts, Ethnicity and Integration*. EPW. January, Oxford University Press.

Abbreviated from thesis submission.

Collateral Damage of Development

Farida C. Khan

Development policy in Bangladesh renders infrastructure, communication, and transportation networks subservient to the demands of industrialization and urban-based modernization. There is an explicit understanding that incorporating modern technology in agriculture, rapid industrialization, and greater urbanization would allow Bangladesh to “take off” and lead to an economic growth that Bangladeshis could be proud of. Donors lay out the latest global best practices in development and the government follows donor advice, the two being married in a comfortable exchange of funds and compliance.

While development allocations for the region have increased, social relations in the area have not improved.

However, the rhetoric of development has continually failed to address the issues of sustainable use of resources or environmental preservation. The result has been extensive water pollution, destruction of biodiversity, unsustainable urbanization and rural to urban migration especially in Dhaka. Furthermore, in the quest for economic growth, the state has looked to areas where population is sparse and natural resources are plenty. Chittagong is home to the Chakma, Marma, Lushai, Tripura, Bawm, Mru and many others are commonly referred to as hill people or Pahari. The Paharis constitute only 2.5% of the population of Bangladesh. They are linguistically, culturally and ethnically different from Bengali population. The population density in the Hill Tracts is under 100 people per sq. km, less than a tenth of most of areas of the nation, rendering it “uninhabited” in the development policy discourse. The government’s development policies in these areas have resulted in the substantive displacement of hill peoples in Chittagong from their traditional lands.

In 1951, under the guidance of the Chief Engineer of Irrigation, the government of Pakistan selected a site for a dam on the river Karnaphuli in the Hill Tracts. The first unit of the Karnaphuli hydroelectric power station began its operation in 1962. It is still the main hydroelectric power source in Bangladesh with installed capacity of 230 MW. The Kaptai lake, which is a reservoir of 1,400 kilometers was created, displacing about an estimated 70,000 to 90,000 Paharis, mostly Chakmas. Today, hydroelectric power constitutes only 3.4% of the fuels used for power generation, natural gas being the primary fuel. Seventy six percent of power is used for domestic purposes, mostly in urban areas. The Karnaphuli plant and the Kaptai lake have had little benefits for the hill people. No electricity is provided for most of the settlements inhabited by the Paharis. On the other hand, the area of farmland lost under the reservoir accounted for 54,000 acres or two-fifths of that in the region.

The people displaced received little compensation, mostly in the form of inferior quality land that amounted to a third of the land lost. The Kaptai dam continues to flood paddy lands in the upper reaches of the Karnaphuli river and its tributaries during every monsoon. About half of the displaced people took refuge in the neighboring Indian states of Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura. During this time, in-migration of Bengali farmers also increased. Ultimately, the project accentuated the polarities between urban and rural as well the differences between Bengalis and the Paharis. In 1953, the Pakistan government set up a World Bank financed paper mill at Chandraghona. While most of the loan was spent on importing machinery, the rest went for constructing mills and residence for the ten thousand employees that would be needed for this project. These jobs went to Bengalis who cleared bamboo forests at such an unsustainable rate that the local Marma lost their land and moved out to other areas, while Bengalis were settled in and around the mill.

In 1976, The Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board (CHTDB) was formed with a view to “boost the socio-economic uplift of the region” by declaring it a “special economic zone”. The military government at that time created a special presidential-led Cabinet Committee for the Hill Tracts and the military closely supervised the development program that was carried out. The first five-year CHTDB plan was funded through foreign aid and, as claimed by the JSS, about 80% of it was spent on infrastructure projects such as roads, bridges, electricity, and telecommunications that were designed to benefit the Bangladesh Defense Forces (BDF). The CHTDB plan was formulated and financed with the assistance of various international agencies such as the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA), Forestal, Asian Development Bank, and Australian Development Assistance Bureau.

In the early 1970s, Bengali settlers made up about 11% of the total population of the Hill Tracts. By 1981, they were 41%, and by 1991, almost 49%. This rapid encroachment on indigenous lands by Bengalis was backed by the military and justified using the argument that the hills were lying idle and should be exploited for national development. New migrants were brought under army protection, leading to a further exodus of hill peoples to Tripura. They were given identity cards, food rations, cattle, roof tins, and title deeds to land, each family being allotted 5 acres of hillside land, 2.5 acres of paddy land, and 4 acres of ‘mixed’ land. This provided ample incentive for more migrants to move in. The combination of in-migration and military presence led to the creation of the Shanti Bahini (peacekeeping forces), an armed group composed of various Paharis, mostly Chakma. This led to what has been dubbed outright war or genocide during the 1980s and 1990s.

While the development plan provided for various educational and health projects, rehabilitation of landless indigenous peasants, reserved seats in higher educational institutions, and had clauses which would favor indigenous contractors, various accounts run against the plausibility that much of this was implemented. For instance, one account says that Bengalis owned the best agricultural land, held the top administrative, commercial, and business positions, and that all shops in the markets were run by Bengali businessmen, and traders from other areas of Bangladesh. Not a single Pahari was found to own or run a shop in the markets. An eyewitness account by a western national revealed that:

“There is a hidden understanding among the Bengali businessmen that they will not buy vegetables, fruits, etc. from the hill people above a certain fixed value, which is much lower than the market price. Hill people can only sell their vegetables to local Bengali businessmen. The businessmen who come from outside Bandarban cannot buy vegetables directly from the hill people.”

In December 1997, a peace agreement was signed by the Prime Minister’s office and the Parbatya Chattagram Jama Sanghati Samity (PCJSS), a representative of various indigenous groups in the Hill Tracts. The rehabilitation of displaced persons was a significant element of the accord but although most of the refugees returned from Tripura in India, it is unclear how many of the hill people and Bengalis displaced by the Kaptai dam were actually rehabilitated. Land disputes remain a common problem. Bengali settlers usually have proper documentation on land ownership but hill people do not. A large number of displaced people still live in reserved forest areas in the deep interior of Rangamati and Khagrachhari. Most of the refugees who were repatriated from India live in makeshift camps housed at different government institutions in the districts with little food aid from the government. They lack food, water, medical treatment, education, sanitation and other amenities, forcing them to shift their habitat so that they can support themselves. They also face the threat of eviction from forest officials on a regular basis. Neither the district administration nor the taskforce on CHT refugee has accurate statistics on the number of displaced people.

While development allocations for the region have increased, social relations in the area have not improved, with the impending possibility of a violent conflict. Spurts of violence among Bengali

settlers, the army, and the hill people are reported frequently. For years arms flowed into this area because of the war between the Bangladeshi army and Shanti Bahini. The provisions of the treaty were that these arms were to be surrendered and the army presence would be reduced. However, there was no time frame given for the withdrawal of the army and while it is slowly being withdrawn, the police force in the area has been strengthened. Sufficient arms still remain so that periodic clashes and injuries are reported.

Forest resources remain an important issue in the Hill Tracts' regional development. The Chittagong Hill Tracts is home to one of the largest reserve forest areas in Bangladesh. The annual deforestation in the country is 3.3 percent, one of the highest in South Asia. While large areas have been affected by in-migration of landless peasants, logging gangs have carried operations done under sanction of the Bangladesh Forest Industries Development Corporation (BFIDC) have aggravated the situation. Saw mills have reportedly come up since 1999, with trucks carrying timber to the traders and the mills. Hill people and settlers carry logs and firewood on their backs to these trucks, receiving nominal prices for their loads. Teak and rain trees are particularly high in demand and thousands of cubic feet of timber are reportedly finding their way to different parts of the country. The Forestry Master Plan of 1993 recommended that government logging operations in the natural forests should continue until 2023. This would lead to a virtual disappearance of the natural forests. The rate at which natural forests are being converted to teak, pulpwood, or rubber plantations has also increased. Much of this is done with international sponsors such as the Asian Development Bank. Consequences include destruction of bio-diversity, soil erosion and air pollution. Illegal extraction of rocks from the hills is another problem. Such extraction triggers landslides and also increases flooding.

The signing of gas contracts and extraction are issues as well. If the regional government does not have adequate participation, benefits from mining will go to large foreign companies and government officials rather than to the local population. Mining involves environmental hazards and may not receive the ready endorsement of the Regional Council and local representatives.

There have also been recent reports that the upazila administration in Bandarban is illegally grabbing land belonging to Marma and Bawm communities in the name of tourism development centers. Surveyors have designated 40 acres of land as tourist spots. The tourism plans have not been made with consultation with the Hills District Commission.

Several non-governmental agencies have started micro-credit programs in the region in order to help alleviate the poverty situation. However, given that cash economy is not prevalent in some parts of the Hill Tracts and it is not certain whether such economic activities are sustainable. Instead, there is a huge possibility that without requisite marketing and the ability to generate cash with certainty, many hill people may become trapped in indebtedness.

Despite the lack of social provisions such as public health and education in the Hill Tracts, this region is seen as compliant source of revenue extraction by the state. The policy of treating the habitats of indigenous peoples as sites for unsustainable economic exploitation could ultimately lead to violent insurgencies that may undermine the project of sustainable economic growth.

Abbreviated from "(dis)Locating the Chittagong Hilltracts in the Development of Bangladesh", Journal of Bangladesh Studies, Vol 4, No. 1



Whose Land is it Anyway





Land Survey, Last Nail in the Coffin

Priscilla Raj

Satyaban Chakma has three acres of land in the Bhushanchhara mouja (Holding Number R-168). His brother Kanduijya Chakma has five acres of land in the same mouja (Holding Number R-54). These 12 acres of plots were registered in 1974. The brothers fled to the jungle, after 110 Paharis were killed on May 31st, 1984 by the 26 Bengal Regiment, 17 BDR Battalion and Bengali settlers in Barakal. They returned to the region after the 1997 Accord. As there was nobody on their plot, they started rice and other farming there immediately. Then in 2006, three Bengalis filed cases claiming ownership of the land. As per the law, the Deputy Commissioner, Rangamati, asked both sides to stay away from the land pending resolution of the dispute. In reality, while the Pahari families could no longer visit the land, the other side continued to use the plots.

A few pieces of papers are all thousands of Paharis have as far as rights to their ancestral land.

Meanwhile, Sadeq Ali bought three acres from Khalilur Rahman in 2008. According to him, Khalil got the land from the government in 1982-83 (Holding Number R-787, Mouja 148, Bhushanchhara). It turns out that this plot is part of what was registered to Kanduijya Chakma. That is, the same plot of land registered to Satyaban and Kanduijya in 1974 was re-registered to Khalil and others in 1982-83, and Khalil had sold it on to others. Such double registry and re-selling of Pahari land to other Bengalis are not isolated incidents-- it happens across the CHT. While one hoped that the 1997 Accord would have put an end to such disputes, this has not been the case. For example, about 1,200 people fled to India from Bhushanchhara during the insurgency, and while almost all of them returned after the Accord, only a handful of them could reclaim their land, and even those are now mired in lawsuits.

The land dispute was at the centre of pre-Accord negotiations. Jana Sanghati Samity wanted a political settlement based on repatriation of the Bengali settlers to the plains. This was to be followed by resolution of other land issues. This was rejected by the then Awami League government. The compromise was the Land Commission, which was to be headed by a retired Supreme Court judge and composed of three Circle Chiefs of the region and three Hill district chairmen. The Commission was supposed to resolve thousands of disputes one by one.

The Land Commission hardly got started during the four post-Accord AL years. As BNP-Jamaat were against the Accord, implementation of the Accord remained on hold under them. While the Commission was resurrected after the AL returned to power, its newly appointed chairman, Justice Khademul Islam Chowdhury, is acting in clear violation of the Accord. Recently, he has asked the CHT and Land Ministries to conduct a land survey of the region.

The Accord clearly states that a land survey will occur only after the refugees who returned from India and internally displaced persons are fully rehabilitated and the Pahari landless have received land. It is self-evident that if a survey is done before the disputes are resolved, those possessing the land, often illegally, are likely to be duly recognized as owners. The three Circle Chiefs have written to the Commission Chairmen stating the above, and claiming that he was acting unilaterally without consulting them.

And now the final question, which is really the primary question. With regards to the Paharis, the

attitude of BNP-Jamaat is clear, but what does the Awami League want? While foreign donors are willing to assist with repatriation of the Bengali settlers, the AL is dead against it -- indicating its real attitude. It appears that they are more interested in grabbing land under the cloak of securing the border and maintaining national security.

Writing the last paragraph, I wonder whether the title is wrong. A few pieces of papers are all thousands of Paharis have as far as rights to their ancestral land. That land has been in possession of others for two or three decades now. They petition ministers-legislators-researchers-journalist-anyone willing to listen with these pieces of papers. No one has done anything with these petitions. So, this land survey will probably not change anything in reality, except hitting the last nail on the coffin of Pahari aspirations.

But then again, hasn't that nail been hit long ago?

Translated by Jyoti Rahman; abbreviated from essay published in BdNews24, July 28th, 2010.

UN Declaration and Land Crisis in CHT

Sontosh Bikash Tripura

When the UN declared the Indigenous Peoples Day and Decade, Indigenous peoples comprising 45 ethnic groups, found a common venue to raise their demands in Bangladesh. Since then, indigenous peoples have been celebrating 9th August as International Indigenous Peoples Day. Bangladesh government has enacted Indigenous Peoples rights in the Laws and Policy, and has shown positive attitude towards the ratification of UN and other international human rights instruments, including the ILO Convention No. 107, International Convention for Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Convention of the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, International Convention of Economic Social and Cultural Rights, International Convention of Civil and Political Rights etc. on the above laws are safeguard to the protection of the indigenous peoples rights. Furthermore, the adoption of UN Declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples on 13th September in 2007 is a major breakthrough to claim their rights. This followed more than twenty years of discussion within the UN systems. Indigenous representatives played a key role in the development of this declaration.

UN Declaration and other human rights instruments pave the way to implement the CHT Accord.

Under the Article 41 of the UN Declaration: "The organs and specialized agencies of the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organization shall contribute to the full realization of the provisions of this Declaration through the mobilization, inter alia, of financial cooperation and technical assistance. Ways and means of ensuring participation of indigenous peoples on issues affecting them shall be established." Furthermore it has emphasized the role of UN agencies and other bodies: "The United Nations, its bodies, including the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and specialized agencies, including at the country level, and States shall promote respect for and full application of the provisions of this Declaration and follow up the effectiveness of this Declaration."

Based on this the fundamental issues such as non-implementation of the CHT Accord, recognition of land rights and the military deployment along with other issues have a pivotal provision under the UN Declaration. Regarding military deployment, in the Declaration have stated in Article 30(1) as "Military activities shall not take place in the lands or territories of indigenous peoples, unless justified by a significant threat to relevant public interest or otherwise freely agreed with or requested by the indigenous peoples concerned." Regarding the implementation of the Accord it has stated as in article 37 of UN declaration which states: 'Indigenous peoples have the right to the recognition, observance and enforcement of treaties, agreements concluded with States or their successors and to have States honor respect such treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements.' Moreover, regarding on the land rights in the Article 26(1) states, "indigenous people have the right to the lands territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired". The responsibilities of States have clearly stated in the same Article as, "States shall give legal recognition and protection to these lands, territories and resources. Such recognition shall be conducted with due respect to the customs, traditions and land tenure systems of the indigenous peoples concerned."

In 1901, British police officer Snyed Hutchinson estimated that 109,360 people out of the total population of 124,760 were dependent on jum cultivation, while only 11,000 people practiced plough cultivation despite the British government sanctioning a special budget since 1869 for promotion of plough cultivation in CHT. Snyed Hutchinson found it doubtful that a sufficient quantity of lands

suitable for the cultivation of wet rice was available to support the entire CHT population:

“There is certainly a very great amount of land that can be reclaimed, but this is not necessarily (being?) Suitable for rice cultivation.” [Hutchinson, R.H.Snyed: Chittagong Hill Tracts, Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers, 1909]

A survey conducted in 1967 showed that “about 190,000 acres are being cultivated by about 475,000 persons, which means a density of 1,600 persons per square mile of cultivated land. The emptiness of the Hill Tracts is therefore a myth.” [Schendel, Willem Van et. al: The Chittagong Hill Tracts: Living in Borderland, 2001]

Due to the topography of the CHT, there is very little farmland available to cultivate on a viable and sustainable basis (an assessment found that only 3.2% or 76,466 acres of land in the area was suitable for wet-rice cultivation; Tripura, Prashanto and Harun, Abantee: Parbattya Chattagramme Jhumchase, 2003). While the highlands can be used for other forms of cultivation, such as horticulture, tree and bamboo farming, and for the traditional jum or swidden cultivation, the sharp inclines of the slopes and the presence of marketing problems (horticulture and tree-farming being directly dependent on market sales) make it difficult for the highlands to sustain a very large population that is dependent upon cultivation as the primary means of livelihood [Roy, Devasish: The Land Question and the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord]. Furthermore, land has been occupied or transformed since the colonial period, which is still continuing. The causes of land scarcity in CHT include creation of the reserve forest in 1880s (25 percent of total land size), 40 percent cultivable land submersion under Kaptai Hydroelectric Dam in 1960s. The indigenous people displaced by Kaptai dam were never rehabilitated, and the subsequent settlement of Bengalis from the plain has aggravated the crisis.

Therefore resolving the land dispute, and rehabilitating the internally displaced indigenous people, is necessary to resolve the violent conflict in the region-- all of which are linked to implementation of the CHT Accord. Indigenous people's rights to land use and ownership need to be through international legal instruments. The population settlement program in the CHT is the viable example in relation with the ICERD. The provisions of ICERD (ratified in 1979) by Bangladesh government have clearly defined racial discrimination in Article 1(1) as: ‘...any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, color, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other of public life’.

Thus UN Declaration and other human rights instruments pave the way to implement the CHT Accord. There is no alternative for ethnic coexistence. As well as the commitment of the Accord, Bangladesh government would fulfill international legal obligations.

References

- Hutchinson, R.H. Snyed, 1909: Chittagong Hill Tracts, Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers, pioneer press, Allahabad
- Roy, Devasish, 2009, Report of Committee of Experts of ILO.
- Roy, Devasish, 2000, The Land Question and the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord, Published in Victoria Tauli Corpuz et al (eds.), “The Chittagong Hill Tracts: The Road to a Lasting Peace, Tebtebba Foundation, Baguio City, Philippines Schendel, Willem Van et. Al, 2001 The Chittagong Hill Tracts: Living in Borderland, The university press limited Tripura, Prashanto and Harun, Abantee, 2003 Parbattya Chattagramme Jhumchase, SEHD, Dhaka Tripura, Sontosh, 2008 Blaming Jhum, Denying Jhumia, Tromso University, Norway

Structural Roots of Violence in CHT

Bhumitra Chakma

A regional political party - Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS) (United Peoples Organization of the Chittagong Hill Tracts), was formed in the early 1970s in reaction to GoB's assimilationist policy. In the 1973 general elections, the PCJSS candidate, M.N. Larma, was elected to represent the CHT people in the national parliament. In parliament, he repeatedly demanded constitutional recognition of the separate identities of the indigenous communities. When the demand went unheeded, the PCJSS organised a guerrilla force, Shanti Bahini (Peace Force), in the mid-1970s to pursue regional autonomy. Armed clashes soon ensued between this Shanti Bahini and the Bangladesh armed forces that continued till the signing of a peace accord in December 1997. In the interim years, violence took structural root in the CHT.

Bengali settlement not only altered the demographic of CHT, it also expedited process of ethnic cleansing.

Militarisation and Massacres

As soon as armed clashes began, GoB militarised the region by deploying 115,000 military personnel – one soldier for five to six hill persons (Levene 1999: 354). In the 1980s, the CHT was, effectively, turned into a large military garrison. As a result of this militarisation of the region, attack on indigenous villages and detention, torture, disappearance and killing of the Hill People became almost routine occurrences. From the late 1970s onward, the armed forces also started massacres as a policy instrument. On 15 October 1979, government forces massacred unarmed villagers in Mubachari, the first large scale killing in the CHT (Samad 1980), and Amnesty International reported more such massacres in the subsequent years committed jointly by the military and the Bengali settlers (Amnesty International 1986). The Kaukhali massacre on 25 March 1980 (ironically it was on this day that Pakistani forces had first attacked unarmed Bengalis in 1) surpassed, according to Chittagong University academic Hayat Hossein (1986), “all previous records of brutalities” committed against indigenous people. This was confirmed by fact-finding team of Upendra Lal Chakma, Shahjahan Siraj, and Rashed Khan Menon. The consistent pattern of these massacres in the 1970s and 1980s were the crossing of the Rubicon from a “genocidal process” to “active genocide” (Levene 1999: 359).

Massacres in the Chittagong Hill Tracts

Place	Date	Death
Mubachari	15 October 1979	number unknown
Kaukhali-Kalampati	25 March 1980	200-300
Barkal	31 May 1984	110
Panchari	1 May 1986	number unknown
Matiranga	May 1986	70
Commillatilla/Taindong	18-19 May 1986	200
Hirachar, Sarbotoli, K'chari, Pablakhali	8-10 August 1988	over 100
Longudu	4 May 1989	over 30
Malya	2 February 1992	30
Logang	10 April 1992	138
Naniarchar	17 November 1993	100

Sources: CHT Commission, *Life is Not Ours*, May 1991 and updates; Amnesty International, *Bangladesh: Unlawful Killings and Torture in the Chittagong Hill Tracts*, London: Amnesty International, 1986; Mohsin, *The Politics of Nationalism*

Policy of Demographic Change

From the late 1970s, the Bangladeshi government has consistently pursued a policy of “change the demography” in the CHT. The only objective of this policy appears to be to outnumber the indigenous people in their own land. Eviction from their homes and lands, and massacres were the most prominent measures of this broad approach pursued by the armed forces in collusion with the Bengali settlers.

From this period, the government began to settle Bengalis in the CHT and planned to provide five acres of hilly land, four acres of mixed land and 2.5 acres of paddy land to each settler family (Anti-Slavery Society 1984: 71-73). How vigorously the government pursued the policy can be observed in the rapid change of the CHT’s demographic structure. The following table highlights this:

CHT Population: Hill and non-Hill People (1872-Present)

Year	Hill People (#)	Hill (%)	Non-Hill People(#)	Non-Hill (%)
1872	61,957	98.26	1,097	1.74
1901	116,063	92.98	8,762	7.02
1951	261,538	90.91	26,150	9.09
1956	300,000	90.91	30,000	9.09
1981	455,000	61.07	290,000	38.93
1991	501,144	51.43	473,301	48.57
2001	*	*	*	*

SOURCE: S. Adnan, *Migration, Land Alienation and Ethnic Conflict: Causes of Poverty in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*, Dhaka: Research and Advisory Service, 2004, p. 15.

*Curiously the 2001 Census does not provide a figure categorising hill people and Bengalis in the CHT

The Bengali settlement programme not only quickly altered the demographic character of the CHT, it also expedited the process of ethnic cleansing. Indeed, ethnic cleansing was ingrained in the GoB’s policy, because without evicting the indigenous people from their lands it was simply not possible to settle Bengalis in the CHT. Between 1980 and early 1984, according to *The Guardian* (March 6, 1984), 400,000 Bengalis were settled in the CHT. Assuming 4 persons in a family, it means that about 100,000 families were brought during this period. If each family was to be given 5 acres of hilly land, 4 acres of “mixed” land and 2.5 acres of paddy land as planned, then following amounts of land were necessary:

Hilly land:	100,000X5 acres	= 500,000 acres
“Mixed” land:	100,000X4 acres	= 400,000 acres
Paddy land:	100,000X2.5 acres	= 250,000 acres

But the trouble was that the amount of land that was necessary to settle the new immigrants was simply unavailable in the CHT, as Shapan Adnan's research shows.

Bengali settlement continued after 1984 and indeed continues till date. The government brought Bengalis for settlement in the CHT in large numbers but certainly could not provide the amount of land it promised to each settler family because of unavailability of cultivable land. Hence, what the settlers simply did was that they began to grab the lands of the indigenous people (for details on this, see Roy 1997: 167-208; Adnan 2004). And in this effort they got active support from the Bangladesh armed forces. Eviction, terrorization and massacres in the CHT were part of this process. In the

1980s, terrorization led about 50,000 indigenous people to become refugees in India and Bengali settlers grabbed the lands left by them. Put simply, without grabbing the lands of the indigenous people it was not possible to settle any outsider in the CHT.

The intermittent eruption of violence in the CHT is the direct result of GoB's policy of Bengali settlement. It is now structurally ingrained. Unless this structural root of violence is addressed it is unlikely that durable peace will return to the CHT. A peace accord was signed between the GoB and the PCJSS in December 1997. In the last 13 years this accord has not delivered the intended peace in the CHT. Rather violence has reappeared continuously in the region. One of the key reasons for this is that the accord failed to address the structural cause of the problem in the CHT – settlement of Bengalis and their usurpation of indigenous land. Without addressing this, it is a simple equation that the peace accord will not only falter; the CHT will experience more violence and bloodshed in the years to come. And the process of ethnocide will continue.

References

- ACHR (Asian Centre for Human Rights) (2010): Bangladesh: IPS Massacred for Land Grab, 23 February; accessed at: <http://www.achrweb.org/reports/bangla/CHT012010.pdf>
- Adnan, S. (2004): Migration, Land Alienation and Conflict: Causes of Poverty in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, Research and Advisory Service, Dhaka.
- al-Ahsan, S A and B Chakma (1989): "Problems of National Integration in Bangladesh: The Chittagong Hill Tracts", Asian Survey, vol. 29, no. 10, pp. 959-70.
- Amnesty International (1986): Bangladesh: Unlawful Killing and Torture in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Amnesty International, London.
- Anti-Slavery Society (1994): The Chittagong Hill Tracts: Militarisation, Oppression, and the Hill Tribe, Anti-Slavery Society Publication, London.
- CHT (Chittagong Hill Tracts) Commission (1997, 2000): Life Is Not Ours: Land and Human Rights in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh, International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, Copenhagen.
- Hosseini, H. (1986): "Problem of National Integration in Bangladesh" in Bangladesh: History and Culture, Vol. 1, S R Chakravarty and V Narain (ed.) (New Delhi: South Asia Publishers).
- Levene, M (1999): "The Chittagong Hill Tracts: A Case Study in the Political Economy of 'Creeping' Genocide," Third World Quarterly, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 339-69.
- Ministry of Law (1972): The Constitution of The People's Republic of Bangladesh, Government of Bangladesh, Dhaka.
- Mohsin, A (1999): The Politics of Nationalism: The Case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh (Dhaka: University Press Limited).
- (2003): The Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh: On the Difficult Road to Peace (London: Lynne Rienner).
- Roy, R D (1997): "The Population Transfer Programme of 1980s and the Land Rights of the Indigenous Peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts" in Living on the Edge: Essays on the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Subir Bhaumik, Meghna Guhathakurtha and Sabbyachasi Basu Ray Chaudhury (ed.), Calcutta Research Group, Kolkata, pp. 167-208.
- Samad, S (1980): "What is Happening in the Chittagong Hill Tracts?" (in Bengali), Robbar, 22 June.

Economic & Political Weekly, India, March 20th, 2010.

Land Survey for Conflict Resolution?

Ashok Kumar Chakma

We are afraid that if these questions are not addressed carefully, Land Commission might end in a fiasco.

In the wake of the violent conflicts in Khagrachari and Baghahat, Rezaul Karim, the minister for land, expressed his view that there was no alternative to land survey for resolving land disputes in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. In the same vein, after the first meeting held in August 2009, Khademul Islam Chowdhury, chairman of the CHT Land Commission on Settlement of Land Disputes, also underscored the importance of land survey as the first step to

resolution of land disputes. He declared that land survey would start very soon.

Following this declaration by two influential persons of the government, land survey seems to be a top priority of the government in dealing with the land disputes.

Therefore, before kicking off land survey, we would like to ask the government and the CHT Land Commission a few questions.

Are you going to carry out land survey in compliance with the CHT Accord? How can land survey help in resolving land disputes? Does the Land Commission have consensus on the standards or criteria to demarcate boundaries for ensuring customary land ownership of indigenous communities?

We are afraid that if these questions, among others, are not addressed carefully, all attempts of the Land Commission might end in a fiasco.

Political will of the government is essential in finding a pragmatic solution to the land problem. Therefore, the first and foremost responsibility of the government and the Land Commission is to create a broad-based political consensus on the modalities of the Land Commission's work. The CHT Accord, not land survey, should be the guiding principle in this regard. The government and the Land Commission should consider a few issues with due importance.

First, neither the government nor the Land Commission's chairman should declare land survey unilaterally; otherwise it might have many ramifications that may not be helpful for trust building. According to the CHT Accord (Section 2 of Gha) the government has a prerogative to consult the CHT Regional Council before starting land survey. The government must respect it.

Second, there are inconsistencies between the CHT Accord and the Land Commission's Act. Because of these inconsistencies, the Land Commission could not function during the former AL and BNP tenures. To make the Land Commission fully operative, the government does not have any other option but to remove the inconsistencies in the Land Commission's Act without delay.

Third, rehabilitating the internally displaced persons (IDP) and returnee indigenous refugees is one of the most important provisions of the CHT Accord. As per the CHT Accord (Section 2 of Gha), land survey cannot be carried out without rehabilitation of IDPs and returnee refugees.

Fourth, how to negotiate the contradictions between the concepts of the customary land rights and khas lands? Local laws of the CHT deny the concept of khas land, as indigenous communities follow

the customary rules to determine land ownership, which is supported by the CHT Accord. Therefore, the Land Commission has a mandate to resolve land disputes on the basis of existing laws, customs and systems of the CHT. Does the Land Commission have an understanding of "existing laws, customs and systems" of CHT?

Fifth, what will be the working relation between the Land Commission and the government, especially the ministry of land, while carrying out land survey in CHT? As per the Bhumi-Khatian (Parbattya Chattagram) Ordinance, 1984, the main objective of land survey is to prepare Mouza maps and bhumi khatians, or amending the records in bhumi khatians. What will be the parameters of preparing bhumi-khatians or demarcating the boundaries of lands? In other words, will the government take the "existing laws, customs and systems" of CHT into account as recommended by the Land Commission while carrying out land survey? If the answer is "no," the Land Commission might not be able to utilise the outputs of land survey for resolving land disputes.

Sixth, land survey is a bureaucratic and time-consuming exercise. If the Land Commission has to wait until the final output of the survey, it may not achieve its objectives. Alternatively, the Land Commission might consider starting its work in a specific upazila on pilot basis. It can deal with the issues on "case by case" basis, and the lessons learnt from this "case management" can be replicated in other areas of the CHT.

Seventh, land survey alone cannot be a means of resolving the land disputes. To support the work of the Land Commission, it is essential to strengthen other ancillary CHT institutions -- the CHT Regional Council, Hill District Councils, and the Task Force on Rehabilitation of Returnee Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons. As per the commitments of the CHT Accord, the government must empower the Hill Councils by devolving powers to them so that they can discharge services to the people.

Eighth, effective coordination and support between the civil and military administrations are necessary. The government must make sure that the army plays an impartial role and does not associate itself with the politically sensitive settlement program of the Bengali settlers. At the same time, the government might consider forming a mixed police force to assist the civil administration in keeping law and order in CHT.

Finally, it is needless to say that resolution of land disputes is an ethical and political exercise. Indigenous peoples are politically too marginalised to influence the top decision-making process of the government. Therefore, we ask the government and the Land Commission not to take a unilateral decision with regards to land survey. The government must respect the CHT Accord and have patience to listen to the CHT people for creating an inclusive environment.

Daily Star, March 14th, 2010

Resolving Land Disputes and Ethnic Conflicts

Shapan Adnan

Continuing failure to deal with land question is likely to fuel renewed political instability and ethnic conflict.

Alienation of the common and private lands of the Hill peoples constitutes one of the most significant factors generating poverty and destitution among them. Furthermore, unless issues related to the forcible and illegal occupation of Pahari lands are resolved, there is unlikely to be any durable solution to the ethnic conflict in the CHT. Consequently, policies are required not only for the restitution of the Pahari lands that have been already taken over, but also for preventing any further loss of their lands in the future.

Mechanisms of Land Loss Affecting the Hill Peoples

Appropriation of the private and common lands of the Hill peoples by others provides the prime instance of the expropriation of their assets. It has also been the single most critical factor leading to their impoverishment, generating the prime basis of ethnic conflict in the CHT. A very wide range of mechanisms has been at work in the alienation of their lands. Notable amongst these has been the forcible eviction of Paharis from their lands and homesteads by the security forces during the period of counter-insurgency, followed by the reallocation or illegal occupation of these by Bengali settlers. Even after transmigration of settlers was phased out, the lands of the Hill peoples of the CHT have continued to be alienated by a range of mechanisms. Bengali in-migrants, trader-moneylenders and non-residents have continued to take over Pahari lands by force, fraud or manipulation.

Furthermore, thousands of acres of the common lands of the Hill peoples have been handed over by the civil administration to non-resident members of the Bengali political and commercial elite as private leaseholds for rubber plantations, fruit-gardens, horticulture, etc. This complex form of 'redistributive' expropriation has involved the initial 'enclosure' of the common lands of Paharis by the state in order to convert these into private holdings of privileged individuals and families. The Hill peoples have also been deprived of common lands, formerly used by the whole community, when these have been taken over and converted into the private property or leaseholds of particular members of their own communities. There have been instances of traditional Pahari office-holders, such as the village Karbari and Headmen, being involved in the transfer of rights to common lands, either to themselves or to Bengali settlers. An opportunist section of the Pahari elite has made personal gains from these forms of private appropriation of the common lands of the Hill peoples.

In view of these considerations, a range of policy options is put forward below that might serve to resolve disputes arising from the illegal occupation of Pahari lands and thereby reduce the intensity of the factors generating ethnic conflict in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Moratorium on further acquisition of Pahari lands

A complete moratorium should be imposed on further acquisition of the private and common lands of the Paharis by others, inclusive of Bengali settlers and non-residents, the Forest Department, the security forces and other agencies of the state, as well as development projects. The moratorium should not be lifted until all pending land conflicts in the CHT have been resolved and the resultant land rights have been officially recorded through a survey and registration process that is acceptable to the Hill peoples. Such a process would be greatly facilitated by the effective operation of the Land Commission as per the 1997 CHT Peace Accord. If acquisition of land in the CHT by various agencies cannot be entirely stopped, then a 'second best' policy option would be to impose a ceiling on the maximum amount of land that can be so acquired.

Plugging Legal and Administrative Loopholes

It is imperative that necessary revision of legal and administrative procedures is undertaken by the concerned authorities in order to plug the loopholes through which alienation of Pahari lands has been taking place. All existing laws and regulations pertaining to the CHT should be amended, wherever necessary, to make these consistent with the clauses related to restrictions on land settlement, transfer, leases, etc., as specified in the Peace Accord, and subsequently incorporated in the 1998 HDC Acts. The CHT Regulation of 1900 should be suitably amended to limit the absolute powers on land rights exercised by the district administration under the Deputy Commissioner (DC). The legal and administrative loopholes that have enabled particular DCs to act unilaterally and transfer Pahari lands to others, without obtaining the approval of the concerned HDC, should be closed down. The government must act immediately to restrain any DC in the CHT who continues to flout the restrictions on unilateral granting of land leases and settlements without the consent of the HDC, in violation of the Peace Accord and the 1998 HDC Acts. All land settlements and leases that have been already granted unilaterally by the district administration (the DC office), in violation of the HDC Acts of 1998, should be revoked forthwith.

It is also necessary to take suitable measures to stop appropriation of Pahari lands by settlers making use of mechanisms that exploit the ignorance and unfamiliarity of the Hill peoples with land transfer and registration procedures. The awareness of common Paharis about relevant laws, procedures, and mechanisms of land alienation should be increased by concerned public interest agencies, people's organizations and NGOs. This would also serve to break the monopoly of knowledge about land rights and transfer procedures, utilized by Bengali interest groups, corrupt officials as well as an unscrupulous section of Headmen and Karbaris to make private gains through transfer of rights on Pahari lands. Concerned public interest agencies, people's organizations and NGOs should provide necessary legal aid to Paharis whose lands have been illegally occupied and/or come under such threats.

Asserting and Establishing the Legal Rights of the Hill Peoples to Land

As Raja Devasish Roy has noted in respect to the system of landed property prevailing in the CHT, even if a particular plot of land is not registered in the name of any individual or group, this does not necessarily mean that it is khas or state-owned [Roy 1997c: 192-193]. In fact, such plots could well be parts of the homestead area, jum lands, grazing lands, fringe lands, or common village forests of the Hill peoples. Consequently, it is imperative that these land rights are formally asserted and established, particularly given the tendency of government officials and settlers to uncritically treat all such lands in the CHT as khas or state-owned. The Hill peoples and their representatives should explore all possible judicial, political and administrative avenues to assert and formally establish the land rights to which they are entitled, in accordance with the CHT Regulation of 1900 and other prevalent laws.

The state should formally acknowledge the property rights on those categories of lands that individual Hill persons may own, possess and utilize without written permission or documents of registration, as per the CHT Regulation. The typical practice of many government officials to treat all Pahari lands as khas (state-owned) needs to be challenged legally and publicly.

Restitution of Illegally Occupied Pahari Lands

The crucial significance of restituting the forcibly and/or illegally occupied lands of the Hill peoples cannot be overemphasized. Such an outcome might at least partially rectify the takeover of their private and common lands by Bengali settlers, private plantation operators as well as agencies of the state. Policy measures restoring access to their lands would also enable the Hill peoples to climb out of poverty and destitution. Not least, restitution of their alienated lands would also help to restore the

faith of the Hill peoples in the political order and legal institutions of Bangladesh. In particular, the various types of Pahari lands forcibly occupied by settlers, the security forces, and other agencies of the state should be restored to them, as per relevant clauses of the Peace Accord. These should include restitution of the plough and the 'fringe' lands forcibly taken over from Paharis by Bengali settlers over the years.

Policy-makers should give due consideration to well-thought out proposals by Raja Devasish Roy and Rajkumari Kalindi Roy, concerning the legal modalities of restoring the occupied lands of the Hill peoples as well as providing due compensation to the Bengali settlers displaced in the process [Roy 1997c: 200-202; and R.C.K. Roy 1996: 131-133]. If and when attempts are made to reconstitute alienated lands to the concerned Paharis, there is likely to be resistance from the present occupiers of such lands, leading to overt or covert social conflict. The occupiers of Pahari lands in the CHT are mainly Bengali settlers and residents, followed by a smaller proportion of Paharis. Policy-makers should anticipate and take necessary measures to deal with the probable intensification of inter-ethnic conflicts when attempts are made to reconstitute the alienated lands of the Hill peoples.

The Land Commission

The Peace Accord of 1997 explicitly stipulated that a Land Commission would be set up to resolve conflicts over land in the CHT. The Commission was expected to provide rapid resolution of disputes pertaining to the occupation of the lands of the repatriated Pahari refugees, as well as to revoke the ownership titles of all lands that had been illegally settled or occupied to date.[1] However, the lack of adequate political will on the part of the government has meant that the Commission, despite being formally established, has not yet been enabled to operate effectively. While an Act for the Land Commission was hurriedly published in July 2001, its contents remain flawed (see below).[2] In fact, six years after the signing of the Peace Accord, the promised Land Commission remains stillborn and ineffective (as of December 2003).

Land Commission Act of 2001

The clauses of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Land Disputes Resolution Commission Act 2001 differ substantially from the concerned articles of the Peace Accord signed in 1997. It is therefore imperative to rectify this Act in order to remove these discrepancies. The Act should be amended to remove the arbitrary limits set on the scope of the Land Commission's scrutiny, by restricting it to the disputed lands of only the Pahari refugees repatriated on the basis of the 20-point agreement of 9 March, 1997.[3] Instead, as per the Peace Accord, the Act should empower the Commission to deal with conflicts related to the lands of all Pahari refugees from the CHT – dating back at least to those repatriated under the 16-point agreement of 1992 with the government of Bangladesh.

As stipulated in the Peace Accord, the Act should explicitly empower the Land Commission to deal with conflicts related to the illegally occupied 'fringe lands' of the Paharis, despite any possible opposition from the civil administration and settler interests.[4] As per the Peace Accord, the Act should explicitly specify that the Land Commission will resolve land conflicts in accordance with the customary laws, traditions and procedures of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (emphasis added).[5]

The Act should be amended to remove the concentration of all powers of the Land Commission in the hands of its Chairman. Instead, decision-making power should be distributed in a balanced manner among all its members. As specified in the Peace Accord, the members of the commission include the concerned Circle Chief/s, the Chairman (or representative) of the Regional Council, and the Chairman of the concerned Hill District Council/s. The amended Act should ensure that all of these members (or their authorized representatives) have a fair and balanced say in the conduct and decision-making of the Land Commission.

Effective Operation of the Land Commission

The Land Commission should aim at the systematic identification of the cases of illegal occupation of Pahari lands through fair and impersonal legal procedures. Indeed, the legacy of the transmigration programme makes it likely that land conflicts in the CHT will continue to be endemic during the foreseeable future. It would thus make eminent sense for the government to transform the Land Commission into a permanent or semi-permanent institution with judicial status [Roy 1997b: 7]. It is unlikely that the Land Commission, with its present top-heavy composition, would be able to work effectively to resolve the numerous cases that are likely to be submitted for its consideration [Roy 1997b: 7]. Consequently, a more practical arrangement would be for the Land Commission to delegate its day-to-day operational activities to a Secretariat, or even several Sub-Commissions. The Commission itself could then operate in a supervisory capacity. To speed up the process, the procedure of 'class suits' should be initiated, so that all cases with common features can be considered and decided upon together, rather than having to be dealt with individually [Roy 1997b].

Placement of cases to the Land Commission (and other judicial bodies) in terms of class actions could be facilitated by building up computerized data-bases in which information on all instances of illegal occupation of Pahari lands is stored and classified for quick retrieval. Specifically, it will be necessary for the Commission to take account of Pahari practices that are embedded in a largely oral tradition, with unwritten agreements regarding the allocation and management of land in community-based activities such as jum cultivation.

The Land Commission should be prepared to give a fair hearing to Pahari refugees and internally displaced persons who may no longer have proper documents related to their former lands because of the vicissitudes of war, exile and repeated uprooting. The effectiveness of the Commission would be facilitated by consultation with traditional experts on the customary laws and land rights of each of the Pahari groups of the CHT. These specialists should be involved in suitable capacities to provide due technical support to the Land Commission. The Land Commission should give due weight to alternative sources of information on the land rights of the Hill peoples, such as the tauzi documents prepared by the Karbari and the Headman for collecting jum tax.

Wherever necessary, the Land Commission should call upon the expertise of local Headmen and Karbaris to obtain and cross-check information regarding forcible occupation and conflicts related to Pahari lands. Indeed, these traditional office-holders of Pahari society are likely to have detailed records and knowledge of land rights in their respective localities, which may not be available elsewhere. However, such consultation would have to be conducted with care, since a section of the Pahari Headmen and Karbaris in the CHT is known to have been involved in the private appropriation, or illegal transfer, of the common lands of their own communities.

Recognition of the customary and traditional land rights of the Hill peoples

As noted above, the Peace Accord specifies that the Land Commission will take account of the customary laws, local traditions and procedures of the CHT when carrying out its activities.[6] In order to make this operationally feasible, however, due recognition must be given to the customary norms and traditional practices of the Hill peoples concerning possession and use of lands, so that such rights may be invoked and enforced through established legal and judicial procedures.[7]

It is essential to initiate a participatory consultation process, aimed at giving formal recognition to the customary and traditional land rights of the various Pahari groups with the CHT. This should be done with care and sensitivity, on the basis of extensive and open consultations with the representatives of each of the distinct Pahari ethnic groups, whether large or small, since there are variations in customary land rights among them. This consultative process can be initiated and implemented by

the organizations of the Hill peoples themselves. They may be supported and provided with technical assistance by concerned NGOs and public interest organizations. The overall process may be coordinated by the Regional Council.

As per the Peace Accord, settlements of all lands given to non-local individuals for rubber and other plantations should be cancelled if these have not been properly utilized for over ten years.[8] The duration of non-utilization to trigger the cancellation of leases should be reduced from 10 years to 5 years. Many of the private leaseholds for rubber and other commercial plantations were established on the erstwhile common lands of the Hill peoples, which were unilaterally expropriated by the state and reallocated to elite individuals and families. Consequently, the lands becoming available after cancellation of these plantation leases should not be simply taken over by the state or local government. Instead, such lands should be returned to the concerned Pahari communities that had used them formerly. If it proves impossible to return them to the original users for technical reasons, then such lands should be re-allocated to other groups of landless Paharis, as per provision of the Peace Accord.[9]

Computerized databases on illegally occupied Pahari lands

Data on the illegal takeover of Pahari lands by force, fraud or manipulation, as well as subsequent disputes and conflicts, should be collected from all parts of the CHT and collated into computerized databases. This activity can be initiated by concerned people's organizations amongst the Paharis themselves, without waiting for any external agency. Technical and financial support to such initiatives by Pahari groups should be provided by concerned public interest organizations and NGOs from home and abroad. In particular, such assistance may enable the implementing organizations to acquire and operate the necessary computer equipment, accessories and training facilities.

The information to be collected from Paharis whose lands have been illegally occupied for the computerized databases should cover all aspects relevant for the purposes of identification and recovery. These include the names of the concerned individuals, their fathers' names, the location and amount of land involved (e.g. the mouza and khatian numbers), the name and relevant details of the illegal occupiers, the date and methods of occupation of land, etc. Our fieldwork experience suggests that such sensitive information can be obtained from affected Paharis only by those whom they can trust, rather than disinterested employees of the government or private survey organizations. It is therefore recommended that the data collection on illegally occupied lands should be undertaken by organizations and activists of the concerned Pahari groups or NGOs trusted by the Hill peoples.

The data obtained on the alienation of Pahari lands should be stored and classified suitably for retrieval by broad categories that could provide the basis for the submission of 'class suits' to the Land Commission and other judicial bodies. The information stored in this computerized database could also be made available judiciously to national and international policymakers, the media, as well as advocacy networks and campaigns concerned with restoration of the rights of Paharis to their illegally occupied lands.

Significance of Securing the Land Rights of the Hill Peoples

Despite the signing of the Peace Accord, the illegal appropriation of Pahari lands by force, fraud and manipulation has been continuing unabated, as reported to us during fieldwork in the CHT. At the same time, no substantive step has been taken to fulfill the promises of the Peace Accord in terms of the restitution of lands to displaced Paharis. Nor have the conflicts over their illegally occupied lands been resolved through the activation and effective functioning of the Land Commission. These

outcomes have generated widespread disillusionment and frustration among the Hill peoples and their leadership about the credibility of the implementation of the Peace Accord. Consequently, continuing failure to deal with the land question is most likely to fuel the prospects of renewed political instability and ethnic conflict in the CHT. The likelihood of such outcomes is evident from the occurrence of inter-ethnic conflicts and violence over landed property during the post-Accord period. The need for dealing urgently with the land disputes and conflicts of the CHT cannot be overstressed.

Notes

1. GoB & PCJSS [1997: 11-12]. Articles Gha-4 to Gha-6.
2. GoB [2001].
3. Cf. PCJSS [2002: 37].
4. GoB & PCJSS [1997: 11], Article Gha-4.
5. GoB & PCJSS [1997: 12], Article Gha-6-Kha.
6. GoB & PCJSS [1997: 12], Article Gha-6-Kha.
7. Roy [1997b: 7]. According to Raja Devasish Roy, the recognition of the customary and traditional rights would be preferable to their codification.
8. GoB & PCJSS [1997], Section Gha, Clause 8, Roy [1998d: 12], and PCJSS [2002: 39-40].
9. GoB & PCJSS [1997], Section Gha, Clauses 3 and 8. See also PCJSS [2002: 36].

References

- Brauns, Claus-Dieter & Löffler, Lorenz G., 1990, *Mru: Hill People on the Border of Bangladesh*, Birkhauser Verlag, Basel, Boston and Berlin.
- Chakma, Kabita, and Hume, Ina, 1998, *Returnee Jumma Refugees in the CHT*, A report by the Jumma Peoples Network of the Asia-Pacific, Australia, December 1998, (mimeo).
- GoB (Government of Bangladesh), 2001, *The Chittagong Hill Tracts Land Disputes Resolution Commission Act 2001* (passed in July 2001), (in Bengali).
- GoB & PCJSS, 1997, *Accord between the Committee Set Up by the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and the Parbatya Chattogram Jana Samhati Samiti*, Dhaka, 2 December, 1997, (mimeo; in Bengali).
- Löffler, L.G., 1991, *Ecology and Human Rights: Two papers on the CHT*, Bangladesh, 1991, Zurich, (mimeo).
- Mohsin, Amena, 1997, *The Politics of Nationalism: The Case of the CHT*, Bangladesh, The University Press Limited, Dhaka.
- PCJSS (Parbatya Chattogram Jana Samhati Samity), 2002, *JSS' Statement on the Implementation of the 'CHT Accord'*, Rangamati, PCJSS Central Office, Information and Publicity Department, 2 December 2002, 48p (in Bengali).
- Roy, Raja Devasish, 1997b, *Legal and Administrative Reforms for the Political Empowerment of Indigenous Peoples in Bangladesh*, Paper presented at the National Adivasi Round Table Conference, Dhaka, 18-20 December, 1997, (mimeo).
- Roy, Raja Devasish, 1997c, "The Population Transfer Programme of 1980s and the Land Rights of the Indigenous Peoples of the CHT," pp. 167-208 in Bhaumik et. al. (eds), 1997, *Living on the Edge: Essays on the CHT*, Kathmandu, South Asia Forum for Human Rights.
- Roy, Raja Devasish, 1998d, *Sustainable and Equitable Resource Management in the CHT*, Paper presented at the conference on "Development in the CHT", held at Rangamati on 18-19 December, 1998, (mimeo).
- Roy, Rajkumari Chandra Kalindi (R.C.K.), 1996, *Land Rights of the Indigenous Peoples of the CHT*, NORAD/ Jumma Peoples Network in Europe (JUPNET).
- Shelley, Mizanur Rahman (ed), 1992, *The CHT of Bangladesh: The Untold Story*, Centre for Development Research, Bangladesh (CDRB), Dhaka.
- Sopher, David E., 1963, "Population Dislocation in the Chittagong Hills", *The Geographical Review*, Vol. LIII, No. 3, July, 1963, pp. 337-362.

Abbreviated excerpt from Shapan Adnan, Migration, Land Alienation and Ethnic Conflict: Causes of Poverty in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, Dhaka: Research and Advisory Services, 2004.

What brings the IFC and MDBs to CHT Forests

Sudatta Bikash Tanchangya

This anti-people practice has intensified now in this department, main agency for implementing forestry sector programme.

The three decades of armed conflict between the ethnic minorities of the CHT and the Bangladesh government left the region almost impossible for large investments. For example, Shell Oil, an international petroleum extracting company launched an exploration for oil and gas in the region and finally withdrew when two of their staff were kidnapped. However, the huge natural resources including minerals and the forest always

kept the CHT an attraction for international investors. An atmosphere was inevitably needed in this region for safe investments for IFCs (International Finance Corporations) and MDBs (Multilateral Development Banks) to exploit the huge resources in the CHT region.

After the Peace Accord had been signed in 1997, a flow of investments started into the CHT in different forms. The explorations of mineral exploitation started. Both national and international NGOs started their activities and the largest sector-wise investment in the CHT started. Taking a critical look into these investments, the ever deteriorating situation of the hill people and the inconsistencies of the peace accord highly suggest that the Accord had not been signed to establish the rights of the traditional inhabitants of the CHT. The Accord in effect has been used as an eyewash solution for the conflicts of the region so that the MDB and IFCs can make their entrance into this area to exploit its resources. At the moment the largest investments of IFCs and MDBs in the CHT are in the forestry sector.

The Forest Department (FD) in this subcontinent was found in 1870 to systematize the control and exploitation of forest resources. The forest resources of the CHT are administratively divided into three categories: i. Reserved Forests (RF) ii. Protected Forests (PF) and iii. Unclassed State Forests (USF). The FD enjoys full control over the RFs extending over 1977. 43 square kms. PFs extending over 87.21 square kms is controlled jointly by the FD and the district administration. The USF (6215.90 square kms) is managed entirely by the district administration. The activities being carried out in the CHT forestry sector are closely related with other similar activities both at the international and national level. These include: Tropical Forestry Action Plan (TFAP) undertaken jointly by FAO and UNDP of United Nations and the World Bank in 1980; Forestry Master Plan funded by ADB (in Bangladesh) in 1982; National Forestry Policies funded by ADB (in Bangladesh) in 1982; Thana A forestations and Nursery Development project in 1987.

Although TFAP had been undertaken for the protection of the tropical forests around the world, it has miserably failed to do so. The plan failed to address the underlying causes of forest destruction and was heavily criticized for having actually led to further deforestation. The three plans, policies and projects mentioned above undertaken in Bangladesh are closely linked with the TFAP. These attempts have also been seriously accused of causing the same sort of damages to the forests of the country and denying the rights of the forest dependent communities over forest resources.

Since its establishment one of the Forest Department's major activities was to bring more forest lands under the RF by means of which the exclusive control of the government was established over the forestry resources. At the same time the communities living in this forest had been increasingly denied of their rights over the forest resources. This anti-people practice has even more intensified

now in this department, which is still the main agency for implementing the forestry sector programs undertaken by the government.

A new phase started in the CHT in the early 1990s to establish exclusive control of the FD over more forest lands denying the rights of its traditional inhabitants. Since 1992 about 218 thousand acres of forest lands were brought under the RF(A). The types of land brought under the RF include registered lands on private ownership, customary lands on which ethnic people are living for generations, community managed forests, lands on which Kaptai Lake victims were settled etc. This meant the eviction of people living in these lands, losing of their present and future cultivable land, losing access to the forest resources and destruction of the cohesion of community life. All these activities are funded explicitly by the MDBs. Although the pronounced aim of making these lands RF is preventing deforestation, plantation and protection of the bio-diversity, in reality only the reverse is happening. While the timber dealers joined hands with the famously corrupt FD officials in rapidly stripping off the forests of its last resources, a very limited variety are planted in the forests most of which are pulpwood species.

To fortify the FD so that there are no objections from its victim communities and other groups can affect it, the Forest Act 1927 has been amended in 2000 with grant and expert assistance from ADB. Introduction of Social Forestry programme and Social Forestry Rules to facilitate its implementation have been added to other objectives of the amended Forest Act. Social Forestry has been planned for the whole of Bangladesh including the CHT, the details of which reveal that it is neither social, nor forestry. Under this particular programme, management of the forests lies exclusively with the FD. The crudest side of this newly formulated social forestry is that the FD has been empowered at such a level where the community has virtually become their slaves. Thus the land increasingly brought under the Reserved Forests, the amended Forest Act and the Social Forestry are deepening the plights of the people of the CHT. The ethnic communities living for centuries in the forests, managing and depending upon the forest resources are the worst victims of these programs and strategies funded and promoted by the IFCs and MDBs.

Since 1992 the ethnic people of the CHT have been protesting against these programs. Until then, the war situation of the region prevented strong protest against the activities of the FD. A Committee for the Protection of Forest and Land Rights in the CHT was formed, which has now renamed itself the Movement for the Protection of Forest and Land Rights in the CHT. As a result of protests and dialogues at different levels, the final declaration of the RFs of the land, implementation of the amended Forest Act and the social forestry regulations has been postponed, while ADB has decided to hold off its finances implementing the forestry programs in this region.

In the decade-long struggle to retain their rights over the forest resources, the ethnic communities of the CHT have had on their side, many individual activists, organizations of different ethnic communities of the country around and several organizations have been working on forest and environmental issues. While this supports came from the plains and the CHT, we still wait for response from the mainstream and local political parties of the country.

Pohor Jangal, Tanchangya Education-Literature-Culture publication, August 9th, 2008

Reserved Forests Complicate Land Issues

Philip Gain

Our lands are being reserved for pulpwood and timber. This is a trick of Forest Department to dispossess us.

Sangthuima (24) and Thuisangma (20), two Khyang sisters in a remote village in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) have had almost all of their three-acre croplands notified as reserved forests. Their homesteads have also been notified as reserved forests. They have implicitly become illegal on their own land where they and their forefathers have lived for centuries. The two sisters inherited the land from their father, Teng Hla Pru and the land is still recorded in his name. Being dispossessed of their

croplands, the two sisters have now become head-loaders and day laborers. In the reserved forest areas it is very tough to collect fuel wood and other forest produces. Caught with a dao or an axe-- the common instruments in the hands of hill people-- in a reserved forest, one may face forest cases.

Aggrieved and frightened, Sangthuima and Thuisangma, looked pale and remained almost silent when we tried to know the details. As we left they climbed on their thatched-roofed Khyang house constructed on a platform made of bamboo and wood. The others of the same hamlet—Baro Kukkachhari Para in 335 Dhanuchhari Mouza of No.1 Gilachhari Union in Rajasthali Thana in Rangamati district—face the same fate. Their croplands and homesteads have been notified as reserved. As we entered the village, many, working in the courtyard, went back into their houses. Those standing on the platforms in front of houses moved away when we positioned our camera.

One obvious impact of the reserved forest expansion is the disappearance of the Khyang families from the area. The Khyang people, who numbered 2,343 in 1991, find it difficult to cope with the changed situation as a result of reserved forest expansion up to their garden land and homesteads. As we moved to Arachhari Headman Para (Dhanuchhari Mouza), the headman Hlathwai Khyang informed us that all of the 33 families in the village are Khyang. Before there were about 60 Khyang families in the village. The families have disappeared because of harassment and forest cases especially after the expansion of the reserved forests. According to his information, of 3,969.98 acres in his Mouza 3,889.31 acres are reserved forests and 139.72 acres are registered land, which include 55 acres registered to 11 families (forest villagers)— five acres each. Headman Hlathwai Khyang and others informed us that Dhanuchhari Para, Korbanchhari Para, New Zealand Para, Madan Karbari Para, Moniong Karbari Para and Bara Kukkachhari Para of Dhanuchhari Mouza are today inhabited by only 180 families and most of them are Khyang.

Why and where have all these families gone? “The plantation activities and conversion of the jum land, garden land and homesteads into reserved forests have chased them out of their traditional homeland and pushed them upward where they can look forward to practising their traditional economic activities for a living,” says Arun Laibresaw in Arachhari Headman Para. Headman Hlathwai Khyang said that in his Mouza the local people have applied for registration of around 700 acres of land in the DC’s Office. The settlement of those lands, classified by the Forest Department as Unclassed State Forest (USF), has been stopped since 1989. This alarms the Khyang and leads them to disappear.

The ethnic communities have lived in the CHT for centuries. Most of them normally do not have title deeds for their jum land or even for their homesteads. Each ethnic family is also entitled to 30 decimals without registration. Without customary rights being fully recognized, a huge percentage of people from among the ethnic communities in the CHT practically becomes rootless.

Expansion of reserved forests by notifications and restriction on jum cultivation have made life extremely difficult for these communities. In reserved forest access of the local people is very limited. Approximately 24% of the CHT are reserved forests—this excludes recently declared reserved forests, which has instigated a big clamor in the CHT. “The Khyang people are most affected by the plantation activities of the Forest Department (FD). Almost the entire Khyang population of the CHT has been affected,” says Raja Devasish Roy.

In Dhanuchhari Mouza, the Khyang can no longer practice jum. Without jum, the subsistence economy of the Khyang people is totally ruined. “We used to produce all our food items in jum fields. Jum cultivation has been stopped since 1976 because of expansion of pulpwood plantation and reserved forests. We can now produce little food. We have to buy food, which is expensive for us, and we have to walk longer distances to buy food. We are now in a tough struggle to survive,” says Aung Saw Khyang of Arachhari Headman Para. “The simple and quiet Khyang people are not used to the environment created by the expansion of reserved forests up to their homesteads and restriction on jum cultivation. So hundreds of families have disappeared and many others prepare to leave,” says Arun Libresaw.

Expansion of reserved forests by notifications under the Forest Act has instigated a big tumult in the CHT. According to a memorandum submitted to the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) on behalf of the hill people and signed by 163 hill persons including Raja Devasish Roy, Goutam Dewan, and Sudatta Bikash Tanchangya, 2,17,790.3 acres of land from 83 Mouzas in three hill districts have been notified reserved forests between 1990 and 1998. Of these 1,40,341.31 acres have been finally notified reserved forests. The memorandum was submitted on September 10, 1998 under the auspices of a new body called, the Committee for the Protection of Forests and Land Rights in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. However, Syed Margub Morshed, secretary for the Ministry of Environment and Forest told BBC Radio in an interview that 2,08,148 acres have been primarily notified as reserved forest of which 116,883 acres have been finally notified.

The hill people in general and the leaders complain that the government has arbitrarily reserved the jum lands, croplands, orchards, homesteads and land registered in the Deputy Commissioner’s office. Now in a changed situation, particularly after the peace treaty signed between the insurgents and the government and return of the refugees, the hill people have started to organize and protest against expansion of reserved forests on their lands. Leaders of the Committee for Protection of Forests and Land Rights in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and a few hundred headmen, Karbaris, common ethnic people from different ethnic identities and a few Bengalis got together in Bandarban to form the district committee and discuss the issues relating to the expansion of reserved forest. They demonstrated their rage against reserving what they call their lands. They complained that the Forest Department and other concerned government offices used many tricks and pressure to expand reserved forests on their lands.

According to Raja Devasish’s account, the land affected by the reservation include “private lands registered in the office of the deputy commissioner; private homesteads of hill-people under rule 50 of the CHT Regulation; forest commons over which the hill-people have rights to forest produce in accordance with the Forest Act, the Forest Transit Rules, the CHT Regulation, Long User and prescriptive rights, etc.; grazing lands over which the hill-people have rights of pasture in accordance with the CHT regulation and local rules, customs and practices; and lands in the process of registration in the office of the deputy commissioner.” And “tens of thousands of people in all of the three districts—hill people and ethnic Bengali residents who were displaced by the Kaptai Dam in 1960; almost the entire population of the indigenous Khyang people; and hill people who were rehabilitated under government-run afforestation and agriculture projects of the Forest Department,

the BADC and the CHT Development Board—have been affected,” says the Chakma Chief. Sudatta Bikash Tanchangya estimates the affected people at 200,000.

In some places in Rajasthali Thana local people made horrendous allegations to this reporter. The headman of Kukkachhari Mouza (in Rajasthali Thana), Mishu Marma complained that in her Mouza the land size is 666 acres; but officially 722 acres have been reserved in 1984/85 and trees such as Acacia, Gamar, Kadam have been planted. “In our Mouza we all have become illegal residents. Out of 30 Khyang families in my Mouza 23 have disappeared. Of 600 families in my Mouza, 200 have virtually become refugees. The others still live here because we still cultivate some lands and live on our homesteads, which have also been declared reserved forests,” said Mishu on October 17, 1998. Gyan Bikash Tanchangya of Rajasthali Thana Sadar complained that the Pulpwood Plantation Division of Kaptai forcibly planted pulpwood trees on five acres of his land (in Rajasthali Thana) in 1980s. He registered this land in 334 Kukkachhari Mouza of Ghilachhari Union in Rajasthali Thana in mid 1980s. The division had forcibly planted pulpwood on many others’ lands, complained Gyan Bikash. Advocate Dinonath Tanchangya, Gyan Bikash’s son complained, “In 1995 officials from the division began harvesting trees they had planted without consulting the local people who assert claims on the land.” Probhat Kumar Tanchangya, son of Minunath Tanchangya, registered 5 acres of land in 335 Dhanuchhari Mouza in Rajasthali Thana in the 1980s in which he planted timber trees, teak and gamar. Now after many years of hard labor Probhat’s trees have begun to mature and he wants to harvest some timber. Recently, he had almost completed the process of procuring a “jote permit” for harvesting 948 cft teak and 500 cft fuelwood with the approval of the district forest committee. The DC’s office had requested the DFO (Pulpwood) of Rangamati in a letter dated June 6, 1997 to issue “jote permit” to Probhat Kumar. To his great disappointment, the DFO refused to issue the much desired “jote permit” and told him that his land was now reserved forest.

The leaders of the Committee for the Protection of Forests and Land Rights, CHT and the local communities hold that they are never against reserved forests but they are strongly opposed to creation of reserved forests on their private lands, homesteads and private forests. Sudatta Bikash Tanchangya, secretary of the committee accuses, “Our lands are being reserved for pulpwood and timber. This is a trick of the Forest Department to dispossess us of our lands.” According to the hill peoples’ committee, much of the land discussed was only notified reserved after the peace accord signed. “This is contrary to the peace treaty signed between the Jana Sanghati Samiti and the government,” said Goutam Dewan, convener of the Committee for the Protection of Forests and Land Rights, CHT.

According to Deputy Commissioner Shah Alam, Cadastral Survey (CS) is another important factor for resolving the land problem in the CHT. “Unless the Cadastral Survey takes place the settlement of land problems will linger,” says the DC. Everybody recognizes that the land problem is at the center of all CHT dilemmas. “Proper resolution of the land problems is the precondition of lasting peace and progress in the CHT,” is quoted in the memorandum of hill people. There are, of course, other issues like changing ecology of the CHT due to pulpwood plantations with Acacia and Gamar, monoculture of rubber and teak, Eucalyptus plantation in places and loss of wildlife biodiversity. The hill people have been under so much pressure for decades due to insurgency, militarization, wrong development initiatives and numerically enormous Bengali population around them, that they still have to fight hard to establish their land rights while many important issues remain totally unattended.

Abbreviated from original essay published in Earth Touch, SEHD, October 19th, 1999.

Resisting Onslaught on Forest Commons in Post-Accord CHT

Devasish Roy

The euphoria over the 1997 truce was short-lived not only due to non-implementation, but also due to the continuance of other basic social, economic and developmental problems that had remained suppressed during the conflict, but had now begun to surface anew, with added complications. These problems are closely interlinked with the broad processes of privatization, trade, and “development”, which may have benefited a small number of indigenous people, who may be regarded as the ‘elite’, but their number has never been large. For example, a large section of inhabitants of the relatively “remote” areas, especially those with no formal titles to land, have continued to be largely ignored by development planners. They therefore either remain as marginalized as before, or are being subjected to ever more complicated patterns of trade and politics over lands and resources (such as having to take up tobacco farming at the expense of food crops).

Similar arbitrarily invented legal fictions were also invoked by colonial and post-colonial states of South Asia.

The major conflicts during the internal war (1973-1997) were largely oriented around competition for control over and access to lands and other natural resources, pitting indigenous communities against government-sponsored non-indigenous settlers, or against state agencies seeking energy or industrial timber. In the post-Accord arena, competition over resources also started to involve a growing number of ‘stakeholders’ who had been largely invisible, if not exactly marginal before, and who have come out as open actors only after the signing of the accord. The list includes external investors, multilateral development banks, bilateral development or “donor” agencies of OECD governments, and development-related institutions with local, national or international ties. Therefore, indigenous communities have to now deal with a much more complex interplay of economic and developmental forces with little or no experience, knowledge or preparation. The end of the organized conflict has also hastened the pace of integration of the region’s economy into the national economy, which is itself getting more and more integrated into the global market economy. This is also leading, among other things, to the decline of traditional occupations, and traditional patterns of natural resource management (Roy, 2000a).

Partly due to the continued militarization of the region and partly due to right-wing lobbies within the succeeding governments until today, the human rights situation in the CHT has continued to decline so much that most political activists have spent a great deal of time, effort and energy in dealing with these matters, at the expense of attention to land and resource-related matters. Therefore, local community-based organizations and social organizations have stepped in to work alongside the concerned communities to protect their traditional land and resource rights.

New relations between CHT ‘civil’ society and national and international human rights, environment-oriented (including Climate Change) and developmental organizations continue to be formed, and old ones strengthened. On occasion, externally-conceived development paradigms and programmes of large corporate-style quasi-banking NGOs and micro-credit lending institutions – being largely oriented around programmes to disburse loans to the rural poor, and now to the urban poor as well - seemed to accelerate the process of monetization and marketization, rather than bringing in the sort of development or rights implementation that the CHT communities sought. Common property and traditional resource rights never were, nor still are, matters of high interest for these institutions. The CHT people’s experiences with ‘development’ had seldom been happy, on

account of dislocation, disruption, and involuntary resettlement, caused by hydro-electric dams, collective farms and “ideal” villages formed under military auspices (Tripura, 2000).

In the post-Accord period, a growing number of national and international organizations and agencies have been vying with each other to do “reconstructionist” and “peace-building” work in the CHT. Similarly, socially active CHT residents began to demand and carve out a larger-than-before slice of the pie of NGO-led “development”. At a parallel level, the post-Accord period also saw many CHT activists strengthening their human rights links with NGOs and indigenous peoples’ organizations from different parts of the world. In this complex interplay of multiple actors, “stakeholders” and processes, the people of this region are beginning to realize that the protection of their basic rights, including traditional resource rights of its indigenous peoples, will call for far more sophisticated strategies than are currently being employed by them or on their behalf.

The defense of traditional resource rights is all the more challenging in the CHT because of the plurality of the geophysical, cultural, social, legal, administrative and legal dimensions involved. The CHT is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious/spiritual and multi-cultural society. It is a major meeting point of South Asia and Southeast Asia. Here part-subsistence-oriented communities co-exist with timber traders, and the writs of the national government, regional indigenous authorities and traditional chiefs and elders vie with one another. It is a partially autonomous system with division of responsibilities between elected, traditional and bureaucratic authorities. It is an example of a legally and juridically pluralistic system - albeit in a formally ‘unitary’, as opposed to a ‘federal’, system – in which national laws co-exist with formalized regional laws (based upon the colonial-time CHT Regulation of 1900 or the 1997 Accord) and customary laws regulated largely by traditional chiefs and headmen (Roy, 2000b, Roy, 2007, Roy, 2008).

The Status of Customary Law

Unlike most industrialized countries, most countries in South Asia - as in many other former British colonies - have been quite accommodative of legal pluralism when it concerns personal laws based upon religion or ethnicity, dealing with such matters as marriage, inheritance, family law matters, etc. Bangladesh is no exception to this trend. Therefore, the customary personal laws of the indigenous peoples of the country are generally recognized, and respected (e.g., *Aung Shwe Prue Chowdhury vs. Kyaw Sain Prue Chowdhury & Others*). In contrast, the Bangladeshi juridical system has not been so accommodative of the traditional resource rights of its indigenous peoples (Roy, 2004b: 124).

The tradition-oriented resource rights of the indigenous peoples of the Hill Tracts are largely based upon customs, practices and usages, usually of ancient origin, but also including those of relatively recent times. These include rights over forests, communal lands used for swidden (shifting) cultivation, and rights over grazing lands, grasslands, wild game, and water bodies, amongst others (Roy, 2004b, pp. 126, 127). Some of these rights have been formally acknowledged by statutes, and, by administrative rules, guidelines and orders that have the force of law. Among the clearest formal recognition of such custom-based traditional resource rights is to be found in the post-Accord CHT Land Disputes Resolution Commission Act of 2001 that provides for the establishment of a commission to adjudicate on land-related disputes in the region. The commission includes among its members the chairpersons of the three district councils, the chairperson of the CHT Regional Council, and the three hill chiefs, and is obliged, as provided by law, to take into account the “customs, practices and usages” of the region.

Another statute that directly acknowledges customary law is the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation (Amendment) Act of 2003, which has reformed the judicial system in the CHT and transferred authority over the administration of civil and criminal justice, hitherto vested upon civil administration

bureaucrats, to judicial officers of the Ministry of Justice. This law obliges the judicial officers of the new court system ('District Judge' and 'Joint District Judge', for example) to decide cases "in accordance with the laws, customs and usages of the district concerned", but to exclude "the cases arising out of the family laws and customary laws of the tribes of the districts, which shall be triable by the Mauza Headmen and Circle Chiefs".

Thus we see that, in a general way, law unequivocally recognizes some traditional rights, while others remain partially recognized, while yet others remain totally unacknowledged. One trend, however, is quite clear: traditional resource rights are nowhere near as well protected as customary personal laws. In the case of personal laws, the state or private interests have no direct stake. In the case of traditional resource rights, on the other hand, the state and private interests do have a stake: the more they can deny legitimacy to the traditional rights of indigenous peoples or other rural communities concerned, the stronger is their likelihood to use or appropriate it. The infamous doctrine of Terra Nullius ("nobody's lands") – legal fiction that the land in Australia was "nobody's land" prior to the arrival of the colonists – represents the nadir of such "legal gymnastics" (Roy, 1994:13). Similar arbitrarily invented legal fictions were also invoked by colonial and post-colonial states in many other parts of South and Southeast Asia (Lynch & Talbott, 1995:34-49).

Mauza Commons, State Reserves & "New" Reserves

Indigenous peoples' efforts in protecting their traditional resource rights over their lands, especially those that they regard as their commons, are analysed here in the context of three distinct categories of lands. Two of these are forested lands, and are regarded as common property by indigenous communities, irrespective of their formal legal classification. The other category includes both common property held under customary law, and other lands held by individuals. The first category involves the small 'mauza reserves' or village forest commons that are managed by indigenous village communities. These lands are still largely unregulated and may be considered to suffer somewhat from policy neglect of the government. The second category concerns the state reserved forest lands, which are administered solely by the national Department of Forest, which is still largely a quasi-police type body that is oriented around administrative, rather than, extension services, drawing upon a system dating back to colonial period in the 19th century. The third category concerns areas from various legal and geo-physical categories that the government regards as "new reserved forests", ownership and possession of which is contested between village communities (especially of indigenous peoples) and the aforesaid Forest Department. In some cases there are formally registered hillside plots with orchards or plantations raised by local farmers, in others there are homesteads under quasi-formal customary title, and in yet others, there are no formal titles but long periods of uninterrupted use and occupation instead. If the formal gazettal process is completed, the formal ownership of and control over most of these lands would vest in the Forest Department, which would then include them within "social forestry" or "participatory forestry" schemes to create new tree plantations.

About a quarter of the CHT is regarded as "reserved forest" and is directly administered by the Forest Department. The rest of the region, generally known as the mauza-circle areas, also contains some forest and grazing lands. The natural resources of these areas are primarily managed by mauza headmen, who may be regarded as the real pivots of the CHT rural administration. The 380 odd headmen of the region are directly responsible to one of the three traditional hill chiefs, and concurrently, to the national government's district and sub-district officers. Post-Accord legislation also vests supervisory authority over the headmen upon the three hill district councils, and indirectly, the CHT Regional Council. However, this new supervisory role of the regional and district councils is yet to be seen to be substantively exercised in practice. A literal and narrow construction of the concerned statutes would suggest that the government's district officer (known as the deputy

commissioner) wields more formal authority over the headmen than any other local official or institution, having powers to both appoint and dismiss the headmen. However, the same law also obliges the district officer to act “in consultation with the chief concerned”.

All of the three hill chiefs and the vast majority of the headmen are of indigenous origin, and their offices are more or less hereditary, passing on to male heirs of the previous incumbents (with some notable exceptions). In contrast, almost all of the sub-district and district functionaries are of non-indigenous origin, seconded from the national civil service. The three hill district councils and the CHT Regional Council each have a two-thirds indigenous majority, and indigenous chairpersons to head them, a requirement provided by law. At the moment, the aforesaid four councils are membered and chaired by government appointees, but ultimately, elections for the same are to be held, with the local indigenous people and “non-tribal” permanent residents comprising the electorate.

The Mauza Forests & Government Policy

The most important densely forested parts of the mauza-circle areas (which exclude the Forest Department-run reserved forests) are the forest commons that are generally known as “mauza reserves”, a phrase coined during British rule. These small naturally grown or regenerated forests are traditionally managed, protected and utilised by village communities under the traditional leadership of the mauza headmen and village karbaries (traditional elders). This tradition of forest management has been partially acknowledged in the CHT Regulation of 1900 - the main legal instrument for the administration of the region - and ancillary executive orders of the district administrations dating from the 1930s to the 1960s (Roy and Halim, 2001b). However, the law stops short of either unequivocally acknowledging the concerned communities’ tenurial rights over these commons, or of providing effective safeguards against their alienation and privatization, with some notable exceptions (such as section 64 of the Hill District Councils Acts of 1989, which recognize the authority of the councils’ over land administration in the region).

The National Forest Policy of 1979 and the Asian Development Bank-supported Forestry Master Plan of 1994 substantively favour industry-oriented plantations over naturally grown or regenerated forests, although some lip service is provided to cosmetic humanitarian and environmental concerns. Accordingly, projects have concentrated on raising rubber and timber plantations on the one hand, and on strengthening the policing functions of the Forest Department on the other. In the latter case, forest-dwelling or forest-adjacent communities were not involved at all. In the case of the plantations, local communities were usually involved, but only because they provided the crucial and cheap physical labour without which the land clearing, planting and tending could not be done. The projects were variably styled as “social forestry”, “participatory forestry”, “community forestry”, “collective farms” or otherwise. The wage labourers were usually granted minor facilities and styled as “beneficiaries”, but were never allowed major decision-making powers (Roy & Gain, 1999, Roy & Halim, 2001a, Roy, 2000b).

Major Challenges of the Mauza Communities

Among the major challenges and difficulties faced by the mauza communities is the continuous threat of privatization posed by their absence of formal title over their forest commons. Efforts of these communities to organize and mobilize themselves and to strengthen their forest commons rights have been severely weakened because of their social, political and economic marginality, and the time and effort necessary to struggle on a daily basis to meet their basic livelihood needs. Therefore, external offers of organizational support are generally welcomed, provided the communities trust the people or organization concerned. However, while such support may be of crucial benefit to the villagers, long-term measures to strengthen their tenurial rights might yet prove be extremely difficult in the absence of legislative and policy changes at high levels, something that might require sustained lobbying.

It may be wise for the community concerned to diversify its networking alliances to also include political groups, in addition to social organizations and NGOs. This is especially important since discriminatory surveillance activities of the government in recent years have sometimes made it extremely trying for local development and social organizations, such as the organization Taungya, to work freely in sectors that overlapped with some activities related to basic human rights. All such organizations that receive funds from foreign sources are answerable to the Office of the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Home Affairs, and are obliged to take great care regarding human rights-related work in the CHT that is liable to be regarded as objectionably “political”, “sensitive”, or even “seditious”, unto the period of the current Awami league-led government.

Another major challenge faced by these communities is with regard to their day-to-day social and economic problems. At the moment, Taungya (funded by DANIDA) is helping facilitate problem-solving exercises of a few select mauza reserve communities through formal and informal meetings, awareness raising and training programmes. However, it is well to realize that Taungya cannot continue its VCF project work indefinitely. What would happen, for example, if at some time in the near future Taungya discontinued its work due to funding constraints or other difficulties? What would then happen to the communities? Would they by then have developed a relationship of “dependence” upon Taungya that ultimately affected their self-dependent practices? Therefore, a major strategy priority for these communities could be to form an alliance or front composed of representatives from different mauza forest communities from all parts of the Hill Tracts.

The Reserved Forest Communities Assert their Rights

In some reserved forest areas, the indigenous people were able to exercise their voting rights and participate in local council elections for the first time only as late as 2003, almost half a century after their relatives in the mauza-circle (non-reserved Forest) areas of the CHT had acquired franchise rights! And this seemed to please neither the local Forest Department officials nor the local army officials posted near the new councilor's village. The question of their land rights and oppressive situations have been raised in various fora by Taungya and its networking allies, including the Forest and Land Rights Movement (Roy & Halim, 2001a). It has been argued that the traditional communal and custom-based land rights of the indigenous peoples cannot be extinguished by the 1927 Forest law, since custom is recognized both in the national constitution and in the CHT Regulation of 1900 (that screens and regulates the application of all laws to the CHT region, including the Forest Act of 1972 itself) (Roy, 2004b). However, in ultimately securing the adequate formal recognition of such customary rights, there are probably few practical alternatives to strengthening the organizational capacities and networking and lobbying alliances of these communities.

In the long run, however, it is unlikely that substantial progress can be achieved by reserved forest communities regarding the strengthening of their land and resource rights merely through such efforts as awareness-raising and organizational strengthening. This is because most of these communities are socially and economically extremely marginalized and disadvantaged, due, among other reasons, to their settlements' “remote” locations. Therefore, unless and until concrete measures are taken to help them access public health services, market their produce, have improved road communications (in a guarded manner), raise elusive capital through easy-term farm and business loans (rather than extortively high micro credit interest rates), and prevent oppressive money-lending practices, even if these communities were to become quite aware about governance, development and basic human rights, they would still not go very far in achieving their land and political rights if they still had to spend a great deal of time and attention to securing their basic livelihood needs. Therefore, accessing the aforesaid welfare services may be as important as to help make the communities aware about their basic legal rights (Sutter, 2000). Attention to such welfare needs is also important due to the long periods of state-neglect and discriminatory development

policies of successive governments since the colonial period. It is a matter of conjecture whether the present journey of Bangladeshi state to its 1972 moorings, as directed by the Supreme Courts through 5th Amendment case, including socialism as a pillar of state policy, will have any impact on past trends.

Until recently, the Forest Department appointed “headmen” within the reserved forests (not to be confused with the more influential mauza headmen in the mauza-circle areas) appeared to hold the most influential leadership positions in the concerned areas, apart from the elected chairpersons and members of the small union council areas (where the union council system has been extended). There is little doubt that the elected community leaders have been able to voice the concerns about their people with much more force than the Forest Department-appointed “headmen”. This is largely because these Forest headmen have to depend upon the Department to retain their offices, and moreover, even they cannot call their own homesteads their own land.

Despite expert advice to de-reserve numerous very small reserves that were difficult to manage (Webb & Roberts, 1976), the Forest Department has instead chosen to increase its area of reserved forests. Thus, ever since the colonial period, a sense of territoriality and expansionism guided the Department, whose legacies are yet to be discarded. Even though we now live in a democratic society where ownership of the state's properties is ostensibly vested upon the people.

National and Supra-National Influences

It is important, in particular, for the indigenous people and their allies to minutely study the national Forest Policy and the Forestry Master Plan, and the colonialist Forest Act of 1927, and to continue to lobby for amendments as necessary. Despite their difficulties, the strengthened CHT self-government system no doubt has a larger say than before in helping steer relevant government policy, at least by acting as a watchdog in vetting nationally proposed schemes, projects and programmes. Thus it is extremely important to bring about a close and positive working relationship between organizations working with the Forest communities and regional political groups. Moreover, as a matter of tactic, it is well to remember that the situation varies between the reserved forest areas and other areas. The former still continue to remain as colonial enclaves, since the 1997 CHT Accord did not directly address the issue of the indigenous peoples’ rights over these stolen commons. Therefore, the writ of the customary resource rights system will no doubt continue to be rejected by Forest Department officials in the case of the old reserved forests (and the new reserves), and will therefore require greater attention for concerned activists.

Among other factors that traditional resource rights defenders in the CHT need to account for are supra-national influences upon the trade and aid-dependent political economy of Bangladesh, including the phenomena of privatization and marketization. Multilateral development institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF, and the Asian Development Bank - who continue to play a vital role in fiscal and developmental policy-making in Bangladesh – will no doubt also have a strong influence upon the state of traditional resource rights (Roy, 2007). Unfortunately, the Forestry and Indigenous Peoples policies of the World Bank and those of the Asian Development Bank do not favour the strengthening of indigenous peoples’ customary rights. The World Bank’s stand on these rights of indigenous peoples was apparent in its support to the controversial Tropical Forestry Action Plan (Minority Rights Group, 1999) and in its revision of its Indigenous Peoples policy (OD 4.20) and its replacement by a new policy (OP/BP.4.10). As for the Asian Development Bank, its proactive role in helping formulate the Forestry Master Plan of Bangladesh and in amending the 1927 Forest law, in addition to providing loans for controversial Forestry Sector projects, have clearly demonstrated its real and potential negative impacts on environmentally sound forestry and indigenous peoples’ rights (Roy, 2002a; Roy & Halim, 2001a, Roy, 2005, Roy, 2007). Its new safeguard provisions in its

policy on Indigenous Peoples and Involuntary Resettlement are arguably more progressive than before but still far from being respectful of indigenous rights in accordance with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2007.

The situation of traditional resource rights of indigenous peoples in the Chittagong Hill Tracts will also depend, to a great extent, on other existing and emerging international standards and processes including those on trade (WTO), and on intellectual property rights (WIPO), apart from the Indigenous Peoples and how other safeguard policies of the World Bank and its regional partners (Asian Development Bank, African Development Bank, Inter-American Development Bank) are implemented. Other crucial factors that will influence the situation of traditional resource rights of the indigenous peoples of the CHT are the nature of the implementation or non-implementation of relevant international treaties. These include the ILO Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Populations (No 107 of 1957), the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the “human rights” treaties (the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), all of which have been ratified by Bangladesh. Among these, the ILO Convention No. 107 and the Biodiversity Convention are the most directly related to traditional resource rights (Roy, 2009). The ILO Convention No. 107 stands out, along with its less integrationist and more progressive successor, the Convention No. 169, not only as the only multi-partite international treaties on the subject of indigenous peoples, but also on account of their strong measures on collective land rights, and safeguard measures against land-alienation.

Among the provisions of the Biodiversity Convention that have a direct bearing upon traditional resource rights of indigenous peoples, are article 8(j), that deals with the protection of relevant traditional knowledge systems of indigenous peoples (and that of “local communities”) and the equitable sharing of their benefits, and article 10(c), which attempts to protect and encourage the appropriate traditional use of biological resources. Another crucial tool for indigenous peoples worldwide, including those in Bangladesh, is the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples that was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2007. The Declaration contains many crucial provisions on indigenous peoples’ collective and individual rights, including traditional rights over forests and other commons, and other crucial rights, including self-determination and autonomy, right to the observance of treaties and agreements, right to fair and quick disposal of disputes, restitution of alienated lands, juridical systems and customary law, language and culture, development, freedom from militarization, and most importantly, the peremptory norm of non-discrimination. Several governments that voted against the Declaration or abstained from voting – during its adoption within the UN system – have since changed their position (such as New Zealand and Australia) or are considering doing so (such as Canada and USA).

The Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, in her message on International Indigenous Peoples Day expressed her support towards the implementation of the Declaration, as did the Law Minister of Bangladesh (while participating in the International Indigenous Peoples Day celebrations in Dhaka on 9 August, 2010). Similarly, the Government of Bangladesh is known to be considering acceding to ILO Convention No. 169 (Roy, 2009). The overall atmosphere is changing, towards the better. But that is merely to do with legal provisions. Implementation is another matter. And in countries like Bangladesh, implementation is as big a challenge as legal reforms.

Bibliography

- Adnan, Shapan, 2004. Migration, Alienation and Ethnic Conflict: Causes of Poverty in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, Research & Advisory Services, Dhaka. IWGIA, 2004. The Indigenous World: 2002-2003, Copenhagen.
- Larma, Jyotirindra Bodhipriyo, 2003. The CHT and its Solution, paper presented at the Regional Training Program organized by UNITAR at Chiang Mai, Thailand on 7-12 April, 2003.
- Lynch, J, Owen, and Kirk Talbot, 1995. Balancing Acts: Community Based Forest Management National Law in Asia and the Pacific, World Resource Institute.
- Minority Rights Group International, 1999. Forests and Indigenous Peoples of Asia, Report No. 98/4, London, 1999.
- Mohsin, Amena, 2003. The Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh: On the Difficult Road to Peace, International Peace Academy Occasional Paper Series, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, London.
- Roy, Raja Devasish, 2009. The ILO Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Populations, 1957 and the Laws of Bangladesh: A Comparative Review, Project to Promote ILO Policy on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples and ILO Office, Dhaka, Bangladesh, July, 2009.
- _____, 2008. The Chittagong Hill Tracts "Peace" Accord: Whose Peace? in Danilo Geiger (ed, Frontier Encounters: Indigenous Communities and Settlers in Asia and Latin America, International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (Copenhagen), pp. 483-532.
- _____, 2007. Impact of ADB-funded projects upon Indigenous Peoples in Asia: The Case of the Rural Development Project in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh (study commissioned by the Regional Initiative for Indigenous Peoples (RIIP), UNDP Regional Centre, Bangkok, as part of a series of case studies on the impact of projects funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) upon indigenous peoples in Asia).
- _____, 2005. "The Asian Development Bank's Indigenous Peoples' Policy and its Impact upon Indigenous Peoples of Asia, paper presented at the Regional Training on Indigenous Peoples' Rights and Development, Baguio City, Philippines by the Regional Indigenous Peoples' Programme (RIIP) at UNDP, Philippines on 3-7 November, 2005.
- _____, 2004a. Background Study on the Chittagong Hill Tracts Land Situation, CARE-Bangladesh, Rangamati.
- _____, 2004b. Challenges for Juridical Pluralism and Customary Laws of Indigenous Peoples: The Case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh in Chandra K. Roy (ed), "Defending Diversity: Case Studies", The Saami Council, Swedish Section (re-published, Arizona Journal of International and Comparative Law, Vol. 21, No. 1, Spring, 2004).
- _____, 2003. The Discordant Accord: Challenges towards the Implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord of 1997, in The Journal of Social Studies, "100th Issue: Perspectives on Peace: Visions and Realities", Centre for Social Studies, Dhaka April-June, 2003, pp. 4-57.
- _____, 2002a. Perspectives of Indigenous Peoples on the Review of the Asian Development Bank's Forest Policy, paper presented at the "Regional Workshop on Review of the Asian Development Bank's Forestry Policy", organized by the Asian Development Bank in Manila, Philippines on 14-15 February, 2002.
- _____, 2002b. Land and Forest Rights in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, "Talking Points", 4/02, International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), June, 2002.
- _____, 2000a. Occupations and Economy in Transition: A Case Study of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, in "Traditional Occupations of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples", ILO, Geneva, pp. 73-122.
- _____, 2000b. Administration, in Philip Gain (ed.), "The Chittagong Hill Tracts: Life and Nature at Risk", SEHD, Dhaka, pp.43-57.
- _____, 1994. Land Rights of the Indigenous Peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Shamsul Huda (ed.), "Land: A Journal of the Practitioners, Development and Research Activists", Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 11-25, Dhaka, February, 1994.
- Roy, Raja Devasish & Sadeka Halim, 2001a. A Critique to the Forest (Amendment) Act of 2000 and the (draft) Social Forestry Rules of 2000 in Philip Gain (ed.), "The Forest (Amendment) Act, 2000 and the (draft) Social Forestry Rules, 2000: A Critique", SEHD, Dhaka, pp. 5-45.
- _____, 2001b. Valuing Village Commons in Forestry: A Case from the Chittagong Hill Tracts, in "Chittagong Hill Tracts: State of the Environment", edited by Quamrul Islam Chowdhury, Forum of Environmental Journalists of Bangladesh (FEJB), Dhaka, September, 2001. Re-published in Roy, Raja Devasish & Philip Gain, 1999. Indigenous Peoples and Forests in Bangladesh in Minority Rights Group International (ed), "Forests and Indigenous Peoples of Asia", Report No. 98/4, London, 1999.
- Sutter, Phil, 2000. Livelihood Security in the Chittagong Hill Tracts: Findings from a Rural Assessment undertaken by CARE-Bangladesh, Dhaka.
- Taungya, 2003. Second Quarterly Report on Project for the Protection of Village Common Forests in the CHT, November, 2003.
- Tripura, Prashanta, 2000. Culture, Identity and Development, in Philip Gain (ed), "Chittagong Hill Tracts: Life and Nature at Risk", SEHD, Dhaka, pp. 97-105.
- Webb, W.E. & R. Roberts, 1976. Reconnaissance Mission to the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh: Report on Forestry Sector, Vol. 2, Asian Development Bank, May 1976.
- Wessendorf, Kathrin (ed), 2001. Challenging Politics: Indigenous Peoples' Experiences with Political Parties and Elections, International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) Document No. 104, Copenhagen.

Abbreviated from paper presented at 10th Biennial Conference of International Association for the Study of Common Property (IASCP), held in Oaxaca, Mexico, August, 2004.

Settlers, Weapons of Mass Displacement





Broken Promises

Ziauddin Choudhury

A treaty, in the minds of our people, is an eternal word. Events often make it seem expedient to depart from the pledged word, but we are conscious that the first departure creates a logic for the second departure, until there is nothing left of the word.
—Declaration of Indian Purpose (1961) American Indian Chicago Conference

In 1962, the US developed a system of resettlement and population security that became known as the strategic hamlet program.

In late 1979, probably around October, I was asked by the Chittagong divisional commissioner at the time to attend a meeting in his chamber at the commissioner's residence. Meetings at the divisional commissioner's residence were not unusual and I never asked what the topic of the meeting was. When I arrived at the bungalow I found the deputy commissioner of Chittagong Hill Tracts there as well. As soon as I entered the meeting room, the doors were closed, with only three of us there. Without much ado, the commissioner broke open the subject of the meeting, but with a request that the matter remain, at least temporarily, within the four walls of the room. The subject was relocating people affected by erosion in Sandwip and Kutubdia to the CHT.

The news startled me. The erosion of Sandwip and Kutubdia, along with the neighbouring Hatyia Island in Noakhali, had been going on for years, with hundreds of people losing their homesteads. The affected people had been moving inland without much government support. We in the district administration had been coping with the affected people's requests to help in whatever way we could. Initially, it pleased me to learn that the government was directing its attention to this problem, but relocating these people to the CHT? What about the CHT regulations that govern and restrict non-hill people settlements in that district? Answering my questions, the commissioner simply stated that the government had decided that people of the islands who had lost their homes to erosion would be settled in designated areas of the hill tracts. The deputy commissioner of the CHT had identified the areas of relocation. I was required to find volunteers from the displaced people of the islands, who would later be transported to the designated areas in the hill tracts. They would be given cash and housing materials to construct their new homes.

The news was astounding! I could not believe that we were participating in a plan to destroy the very foundation of a regulation that the government had been following, at least officially, for last so many decades.

It was not like there weren't Bengali settlements in the hill tracts prior to 1979; but there had never been a massive transplantation of people to the area. The Bengali population had been steadily increasing, particularly after war of liberation. Officially these settlements required permission from the deputy commissioner, with limitations on leases for land holding. But even with these restrictions, the non-hill population had been rising due to the growth in trade with the main land, land grabbing, and often-illegal settlement in the forestlands at the connivance of government officials.

However, I was very disturbed that we would be shipping loads of non-hill people to the tribal areas and thus officially flouting a regulation that had governed the area for such a long period. I was particularly surprised that this plan was being thought of at a time when the government was battling an insurgency in the hill tracts that had been going on for three years. How could we think of transporting civilians to the mouth of this Vesuvius? I was told that the government had already

drawn up and agreed upon this plan to counter the insurgency. The settlers would provide a base of local support to the law enforcing agencies in their counter-insurgency operations.

I told the divisional commissioner that I would let him know about our participation in the “settlement program” as he put it. A few days later I informed him that there were no volunteers from my district who wanted to settle in the hill tracts, and that Chittagong district should be kept out of the program. Little did I know that it mattered little whether I agreed with the program or not; it would be implemented with or without me.

The commissioner said nothing to me about the program after that, but I knew he was under strict instructions from President Ziaur Rahman to make the program a success. I would learn a month later from the sub-divisional officer of Cox’s Bazar that the commissioner had personally conducted a meeting of local UP chairmen from Sandwip and Kutubdia and had asked for a list of volunteers to settle in the hill tracts. In similar manner the district authorities in Noakhali and Comilla were also asked to send lists of volunteers for settlement. I could not make this an act of defiance any longer; as I knew well that I could not stop this politically motivated operation, even if I were to leave the government.

Starting from the end of 1979 and through 1980, hundreds of families from the coastal areas of Chittagong and Noakhali, and river erosion affected areas of Chandpur would be transported by the truckload to the hill tracts. The first settlements would be in areas closer to Chittagong district, and then to the more interior parts of the hill tracts. The families would be housed in make shift camps first, and there after they would be given housing materials and cash. They would also be given land for cultivation under the land lease laws. They were located in what became known as cluster villages under the watchful eyes of the army and armed police battalion, who would camp nearby. (The armed police battalion had been deployed in the hill tracts since 1976, to support the army in containing the insurgency.)

The whole operation of Bengali settlement in the cluster villages was conducted under the guidance of the army. As the commander of the counter insurgency operation in the CHT, the GOC of Chittagong, Maj. General Manzoor had a major role in planning and executing the settlement operation. It is interesting to note that in this operation the army was following the US counter insurgency model in Vietnam. In 1962, the US had developed a system of resettlement and population security that would eventually become known as the strategic hamlet program. In Vietnam, strategic hamlets would consist of villages consolidated and reshaped to create a defensible perimeter. The peasants themselves would be given weapons and trained in self-defense. Moreover, the strategic hamlets would not be isolated; instead, they would function as a network. The hamlets were to be used as an administrative tool to institute reforms and improve the peasants’ lives economically, politically, socially, and culturally.

In their zeal to implement the strategic village concept, and urgency to build some kind of local support base to contain the insurgency, the planners forgot the lessons of Vietnam. In South Vietnam, the government was moving local people from their homes to the outskirts of the village to create a defense perimeter against Viet Cong guerillas. This involved moving local people within their known territory, not transplanting people from one geographic area to another. Even then the program failed because most people did not want to be moved, and were reluctant to take up arms against their own people. In the CHT the settlers were not only unwelcome to the insurgents, but also to the local people. The only friends that they had were the law enforcement authorities; but they could not guard them twenty-four hours a day.

Credit goes to the relocated people for their courage and grit, but it is only because they were homeless that they volunteered to be bussed to such a harsh environment for resettlement. They would soon find out that their fate was worse than what they had originally bargained for.

The first attack on a Bengali settlement happened a few months after the settlement in an area not too far from Kaptai. In a brazen attack after dark, the insurgents killed several settlers, burnt the newly built thatched-houses, and drove hundreds of men, women and children out of the “strategic village” to Rangunia in Chittagong. As deputy commissioner of Chittagong I had the misfortune of witnessing these refugees, and offered them what little relief I could. Again they were huddled in makeshift camps, and taken back to the hill tracts under police security.

Unfortunately, the “settlement operation” would not be stopped by this setback or the many other insurgent attacks that would follow in other parts of the region. The Shanti Bahini militants easily garnered support for their insurgency from the locals, because the entire program of “forced settlement” was an anathema to them. As retribution the army and the armed police battalion would undertake combing operations in the surrounding villages, further alienating the local population and baiting the insurgents to perpetrate even bolder acts. These acts of insurgency and counterinsurgency would dog the hills for two full decades.

I thought things would simmer down after the signing of the peace accord. I thought that our political leaders who were opposed to this accord would finally come to realise the value of preserving and promoting amity between the majority population and our ethnic minorities. To my sadness, however, I find that in the name of national solidarity and sovereignty these so-called leaders seem bent on fomenting suspicion and sowing the seeds of division in the hill tracts. Instead of allaying fears of subjugation, destruction of culture, and forced assimilation of the minorities, they are encouraging the reappearance of the same ideological forces that led to the predicament in the hill tracts.

Bangladesh is tiny for such an overwhelmingly large population. I understand why there would be a mad rush for open space in every direction. However, in doing so we have to learn and educate our people in respecting rights of others to life, property, and culture. Respect for rights and liberties of other human beings are an integral part of nationhood. The sooner our leaders inculcate these feelings and impart this training on their followers, the better it’ll be for everyone who lives in Bangladesh.

Forum Magazine, April 2010

Changing Context in the CHT

Meghna Guhathakurta

If you give them settlement they will accept it, and anyone who gives them food security, will have their loyalty.

The first change in CHT in recent years is the population balance between Bengalis and indigenous people. It has become a region where Bengalis exist almost in equal numbers. The towns and market areas are controlled largely by Bengali traders. In recent years, settler Bengalis are more organized. This has often been as a result of the backing given to them in the form of the Shomo Odhikar Andolon or in more urban centres in the form of

occupational groups of the tertiary sector like van owners samitis, who are mostly Bengali and whose leadership stems from AL, BNP and Jamaat e Islami.

Organizations such as 'Shomo Adhikar Andolon' to a certain extent have drawn support from the army, from the BNP, and some vested interests. But this is not consistently the case everywhere. In Khagrachari and Rangamati, it seems that they were structured from outside. You have to note here that there is a difference between the settlers in rural areas and in the urban areas in CHT. In the rural areas the settlers are mostly very poor as a result they can be told anything. If you give them settlement they will accept it, and anyone who gives them food security or any other basic ways of surviving, will have their loyalty. But in the urban areas, there has been a subtle change over the years. If you look at who is controlling the market in the urban areas, hardly any hill people bases exist. If you look at Shomo Adhikar Andolon leaders, who met our researchers in Bandarban, they are all presidents or general secretaries of van or rickshawala cooperatives. They belong to the tertiary sectors, from which this equality argument is being manifested, as it is they who are thinking of the next generation. Their children need to be educated in the same colleges and universities as the indigenous peoples, and that is why they want 50:50 share in quotas.

Although there has been an embargo on land leased to individuals in recent years, a huge number of lands have been leased for plantations, cantonments etc. on the plea that it is for development purpose. As a result many settlements of indigenous people have been evicted and displaced in the process. Conflict between the people and the leasing parties have led to much bloodshed and rancour. In CHT Accord there is a provision about lands that have been given lease for rubber or any other prospective cultivation-- if these lands remain unused for 10 years, the lease is to be terminated. For example in 3 upazillas of Bandarban, 40 thousand acre land is on lease to 'high class' people, 'top' bureaucrats, army officials, ranking civilians, etc. Whenever there is any dialogue regarding CHT Peace Accord, these groups create obstacles to prevent the Accord from being implemented so that they do not lose their lease.

The post-Accord era have been characterized by institutions set up by CHT Accord e.g. MoCHTA, the Regional Council etc. These institutions have not been operating in their full capacities because of the non-implementation of the CHT Accord. Another characteristic of development in the Hills in the post-accord era has been the influx of development aid, the generation of local/NGOs, and the extension of national NGO operations in the area. This has brought a lot of external interest to the hill people, a fact which is often encouraged by indigenous people, but discouraged by political parties such as the BNP and Jamaat as well as the military, as that would erode some of their monopoly over activities in the hills.

Excerpt from a paper presented in Rangamati, January 25th, 2009; hosted by UNDP.

Righting a Historic Wrong

Air Commodore (Retd) Ishfaq Ilahi Choudhury

Bengali migration into the CHT had started even before the emergence of Bangladesh. According to the 1951 census, there were only 9 percent Bengalis in CHT. This changed over the years with the gradual development of communication and expansion of trade and commerce; what started as a trickle soon became a deluge. With the commissioning of the Kaptai Dam in 1962, most of the scarce agricultural land in the CHT went under water. While the landless farmers were given some money as compensation, there was no agricultural land available for the affected people. Thus, a large number of indigenous people lost their source of livelihood and became internal refugees.

Given some incentives, a sizeable proportion of Bengali settlers would prefer a return to the plains.

Today, Kaptai as a source of power generation (220 MW max) is not vital in the national context. However, it remains vital as a flood management installation for the areas downstream, especially for Chittagong. Therefore, while the people of the plains see Kaptai as a boon, the hill people see it as something that ruined their life forever.

We cannot undo the Kaptai project, although some development experts suggested just that -- undo the project, take down the dam and give the land back to the owners. They argued that the economic and political gain of 772 sq. km of fertile land returned to the original owners would offset the loss of 220 MW of electricity that the project now generates. However, this is not feasible because Kaptai Dam remains vital as a flood control measure. What then can we do to mitigate the grievances of the indigenous people?

In addition to gradual migration of Bengalis into the hills, there was planned settlement of poor landless Bengalis in the so-called guchha gram (clustered village). The issue of these settled Bengali migrants had been the most serious bone of contention between the two sides. Migration was a favoured policy of two military rulers -- Presidents Ziaur Rahman and H.M. Ershad (1975-1986).

Although the stated purpose was to rehabilitate poor landless people and make them economically active, it caused a demographic shift and gave rise to many social problems. Over the last three decades, these settlers have lived in makeshift camps as refugees. They depend on government ration for their survival. Some were given land high up on the hills or deep in the canyons, which, for these plain people, was unreachable and also economically not viable. There was little land available for distribution anyway.

Moreover, many of these people were not farmers, and giving a piece of land to someone does not make him a farmer; farming needs professional training, experience and hard work. There was little incentive for the settlers to work as long as free government ration was available.

From a sociological point of view, the idea of creating a community out of randomly collected people from different districts is preposterous. The concept of the guchha gram failed even in the plains, what to speak of the hills. A Bangladeshi village is a natural community grown over centuries, where generations of villagers are tied to the community in marital, commercial and hierarchical ties.

The people in the camps have no social ties, are often divided along regional lines and have very little cultural and recreational activities. The only thing that has a fast growth is the population. The number of children running around in any camp draws one's attention; most families have 5-6 children. More children means more ration, thus, the system encourages population growth rather than curbing it. There are hardly any schools, but there has been a proliferation of Quomi Madrassas and mosques financed by Islamic charities from around the world.

These migrants, coupled with other Bengalis who have settled in the CHT, have so enormously changed the demographic pattern that the Bengalis are now a majority in some areas and nearly 49 percent overall. The indigenous population who are ethnically, religiously, culturally and linguistically different from the majority community are like foreigners in their own land.

What we need to do now is to return and rehabilitate the Bengali settlers to their ancestral hearth and homes. However, most of them are landless, whose homesteads have been lost due to river erosion or sold due to extreme poverty. Most settlers yearn for a return to their native places. Indeed, many have maintained links with their villages and sometimes visit their relatives back home.

Given some incentives, a sizeable proportion of Bengali settlers would prefer a return to the plains. Those who have nowhere to go may be moved to some of the industrial zones in the country, and seek employment there.

It is argued by people in responsible positions that as a citizen of the state one has the right to settle anywhere in Bangladesh; tribal area should be no exception. However, one should not forget that there are special rules about tribal lands throughout the world. Governments everywhere make special legislations to protect and preserve the way of life of the indigenous people.

We cannot allow the indigenous culture and civilisation to be inundated by the onslaught of the majority Bengali culture, just like we do not want our Bengali culture to be swept away by the onslaught of Indian or English culture.

Even though there are 876 persons/sq.mile in Bangladesh whereas it is 78 persons/sq.mile in the CHT, the pressure on agricultural land is as acute in CHT as in the plains. We need to, therefore, recognise that military dominated, unrepresentative governments in the past made an ill-fated move that needs to be corrected now.

We need to encourage a resettlement of Bengali settlers. Those who want to return home or return to the plains may be encouraged to do so. They may be retrained for employment in industries and service sectors. Those who wish to return to agriculture may be rehabilitated in various chars or in the newly emerging islands in the Bay of Bengal.

If we could take out of CHT even a portion of the camp people, we would be righting a historic wrong done in the past. A little generosity by the majority community would go a long way towards healing the wound that had been festering for three decades.

Excerpted from original essay, Daily Star, March 18th, 2010

Nowhere People in Limbo



The Chakma Between Bangladesh and India

Deepak Singh

I was a non-Bengali-speaking Buddhist in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), now a part of Bangladesh. Prior to 14 August 1947, I was a British subject. On 14 August I became a citizen of the state of Pakistan. In 1971 the Chakmas in CHT became citizens of Bangladesh, while those of us living in India as refugees became stateless people, as Bangladesh did not recognise us as its citizens and the Indian state had not granted us citizenship. We have thus never had the opportunity to determine our own identity, which is responsible for our continuing plight as stateless peoples. How long will it go on like this? (Sumoti Ranjan Talukdar, Jyotsnapur Village, Changlang District, Arunachal Pradesh)

Deportation of 'foreign nationals', including the Chakma refugees, has always been on the top of the agenda.

The presence of Chakmas on our land poses a direct threat to our survival. We do not object to their demand for citizenship, but to the prospect of their permanent settlement on our land. We are against the Indian government's move to treat the Chakma refugees at par with us, the indigenous Arunachalis, which at once will nullify our unique status in the State. We apprehend this to be part of a larger design on the part of the Indian state to deindigenise and disempower the indigenous peoples. (Nabam Jollow, Former President, All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union, Itanagar)

The Assamese and the tribals are humane and practical people who will not insist on the summary eviction of bonafide settlers. The rehabilitation of refugees is, however, a national responsibility and they are entitled to expect that, if commitments have been made regarding their acceptance, the burden of their settlement should fall equally on the country as a whole and not only on those states that happen to be contiguous to Bangladesh. It is, moreover, unjust that those very regions that have been defined in the Constitution as requiring special safeguards for their economic and social survival should be subjected to population pressures which, if not restrained, can only result in their cultural annihilation. (Rustomji 1983)

The Buddhist Chakma are theoretically 'outsiders', but they have come fleeing religious and economic persecution in their native Bangladesh [East Pakistan]. Their conflict with the Arunachali 'insiders' is thus, as Elwin would have recognized, a struggle of right against right. (Guha 1999)

If the nation is an 'imagined community', as the famously acknowledged thesis of Benedict Anderson suggests and the state is an embodiment of the nation, then there are several communities which have been historically denied such a freedom of imagination. We focus on two such communities, among several others in South Asia, which continue to remain outside the purview of state-orchestrated nationhood. These are the ethnic non-Bengali Buddhist Chakmas from the CHT living as stateless refugees in the northeast Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh and the actually hosting communities of varied ethnic indigenous peoples of the state.

The Nowhere People

Like Sumoti Ranjan Talukdar, thousands of other Chakma refugees in Arunachal Pradesh find themselves in the midst of uncertainty and hopelessness (Sanyal 1995). Historically denied an opportunity to determine their own identity, and physically dissociated from their very source of citizenship, they continue to strive for a political identity of their own. Ironically, the political identity of the Chakma refugees as East Pakistanis got transformed into a new identity as stateless people while in exile in India with the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971. Over the years, their exilic status has precluded them access to civil and political rights in India even though they have legitimate claims to Indian citizenship as per the existing laws and norms. What has changed indeed, despite their unwillingness and reluctance, is the question of their political identity.

From being a subject population during the colonial rule like their counterparts in other parts of undivided India, and despite legitimately qualifying to be considered co-nationals, they have been reduced to the status of 'nowhere' people without any hope of ever redeeming their lost selves. The prospect of effecting 'disalienation' of their lost selves, a term used and popularised by Fanon, appears quite bleak in the absence of any viable constituency willing to own them (1952/1967). As victims of the arbitrary and irrational logic of partition of the subcontinent, they continue to remain stateless without a semblance of any humane existence.

The Chequered History Of Chakmas

Rarely has there been an instance of social and political exclusion in the history of modern South Asia when a group of people has been so consistently denied the opportunity to exercise one of their most basic and universally recognised fundamental human rights, that is, the right to self-determination. When the Chakmas expressed their desire to become Indian citizens in 1947, they instead found themselves as Pakistani nationals in complete defiance of the very logic of partition of the subcontinent. Furthermore, while the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent sovereign state in 1971 did renew their hopes of fulfilling their political aspirations, they soon discovered that there was no autonomous politico-cultural space for them in what was an overwhelmingly Muslim dominant society. Mujibur Rahman's rejection of Chakmas' autonomy plea on the basis of their ethnicity was, if anything, an early indication of aggressive Bengali nationalism that they were to witness in its myriad forms in future.

The Bangladeshi state, much like the centralized Pakistani state before it, resorted to the all too common approach of suppression and oppression of dissent in its pursuit to homogenise and assimilate the ethnic minorities within the larger Bengaliised nationalist frame. It may be significant to note in this context that while the Bangladeshi state went overboard in coercing its national ethnic minorities in the CHT into submission, it has never actually owned the Chakmas who took refuge in India in 1964 on the ground that Bangladesh could not be held responsible for the doings of its predecessor, that is East Pakistan, as it came into existence only at a much later stage after Chakmas' actual exodus to India.

This has put the Chakmas in a peculiar situation, as the very source of their citizenship (East Pakistan) has long ceased to exist, and the new inheritor state of Bangladesh has in effect derecognised them by not even acknowledging them as its own people in its Constitution. Much to their woes, the Indian state's reassurances to duly grant them citizenship over the last four and a half decades has meant little to them, while they continue to remain outside the purview of protection of any national state. What is even more puzzling is the fact that they were resettled in a region of India which happens to enjoy an unique status under the Indian federal arrangement where even Indian citizens cannot move about freely owing to specific restrictions on outsiders right since the colonial period. Arunachal Pradesh, which was then known as NEFA (North Eastern Frontier Agency) and was centrally administered, continues to be in the throes of a raging controversy because of some of the specific laws governing the state which debar even bona fide Indian citizens to move into the state without fulfilling certain formalities like obtaining prior permission (for example, the Inner Line Permit) of the state government under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act of 1873.

Not only were [the Chakmas] not consulted about the Kaptai dam, they were [also] not compensated either financially or with other land' leaving them with no option, but to cross over into India, for 'there was no other obvious land to offer to these sedentary rice-growing farmers; only a vastly oversubscribed residual forest area where jhuming [shifting cultivation] was proving unsustainable' (Levene 1999: 350). What is more, the issue of 'Kaptai oustees' has also not been able to attract the kind of attention, both popular and scholarly, which is generally accorded to such people today. The

boundary, legally or illegally, who are unwelcome and often asked or forced to leave.' That the Chakmas fit into Weiner's category of unwanted migrants is borne out by the fact that they have of late become a bone of contention between the governments in the centre and the state, and by the accompanying fact that the indigenous peoples deeply resent their continuing presence.

The need to identify Chakma refugees within the analytical framework formulated by Weiner arises mainly because of three reasons. One, there is a growing realisation among students of refugee studies that the term 'refugee' cannot be treated as a generic category, for it has different connotations in different contexts (Zolberg et al. 1989: vii). Two, there is a general consensus among scholars that '... different types of social conflicts give rise to different types of refugee flows. The patterns of conflict are themselves related to more general economic and political conditions, prevailing not only in the countries from which the refugees originate, but also in the world at large' (Ibid.: vi). Finally, we believe that treating them as merely environmental refugees or development victims indicates a seriously flawed conceptual position that needs to be rectified.

Chakma Diaspora in Northeast India

Little did the Chakmas know when they sought refuge in India in 1964 that they would soon be the nowhere people. They were Pakistani nationals when they took refuge and continued to remain so at least on paper till 1971 when they suddenly found themselves without a state. East Pakistan had ceased to exist and the newly created Bangladesh did not own them up. The refusal by the successive Bangladeshi regimes to own them and non-grant of citizenship status by the Indian government in more than four decades of their stay in Arunachal Pradesh is what has made the Chakmas stateless people with no access to any civil or political rights whatsoever.

Moreover, the Indian state too has so far not done anything substantive to end their statelessness. Despite expression of concern by the Indian government at the inclusion of CHT in East Pakistan in 1947 and explicit reassurances in 1964 that they would be granted Indian citizenship, the Chakmas have continued to languish in a state of statelessness in the more than four decades of their refugeehood. Interestingly, the Indian government has not even formally acknowledged their refugee status despite the length of their stay, a theme that will be taken up a little later.

Except for a miniscule number of 1497 who were recently granted voting rights by the Election Commission of India in 2004, the rest of the refugee population of a whopping 65,000 continue to be refugees even though they have legitimate claims to Indian citizenship under the existing Indian laws. Moreover, of all the refugee groups not only in India but in the whole of South Asia, the Chakma refugees in Arunachal are amongst the lesser known even after having lived in India for more than 40 years as stateless peoples. Unfortunately, this is not because they do not deserve to be known, but because the region in which they were settled has never occupied any priority in the Indian 'nationalist' imagination. Of all the places in India, they were resettled in the then NEFA during 1964–69 precisely because it was perceived to be least threatening in the 'national' scheme of things. In the absence of any organised or autonomous internal political voice at the time of their settlement, the Indian federal government rode roughshod over the wishes of the indigenous peoples of NEFA, which was directly ruled, from New Delhi.

It is noteworthy in this regard that in the absence of any accurate figure on their total number, the same figure of 65,000 is repeatedly quoted in all accounts of the issue since the early 1990s, including this study. The authenticity of this figure, however, seems plausible as it was quoted by the Chakmas themselves in a memorandum submitted to the Rajya Sabha Committee on Petition in the mid-1990s. The petition was jointly submitted by Snehadini Talukdar of Mizoram and Subimal Chakma of Delhi each representing the case of the Chakmas of Mizoram and Arunachal,

respectively. It was in this memorandum that the two leaders had cited the population of the Chakmas in the two states at 80,000 and 65,000, respectively. Ever since then, the figure of 65,000 has become oftquoted, continuing till date irrespective of a lapse of more than a decade in between. The figure for Arunachal is, however, strongly contested by the AAPSU in Arunachal which believes it has far exceeded the one lakh mark by now. As the present president of AAPSU recently observed: 'These refugees numbering around two lakhs had already encroached Namdapha National Park destroying its fragileness and indulged in anti-social activities through "Shanti Bahini"', a militant organisation formed among them' (Shillong Times 2007).

It was only in the early 1990s that the Chakma issue came to national limelight with the AAPSU issuing 'quit notices', threatening them to leave the state since they were not citizens of India. This was widely reported in mainstream dailies thereby attracting the attention of both the national elites and the public at large (Chakma 1994b; H.K. Singh 1994; Sen 1994; Special Correspondent 1994; Times of India 1994a; Telegraph 1994a; University Today 1994). Subsequent developments over the issue and the resultant politicisation by the political parties of the state further enhanced its visibility both at the national and international levels. Interestingly, in spite of all the media coverage of the issue and its increasing publicity at such a scale, no executive notification has yet been issued by the Indian federal government declaring them 'refugees'. The power of granting asylum and declaring a particular group of people as 'refugees' in India is solely vested in the Indian federal government, as the Union Parliament alone has the right to deal with the subject of citizenship, naturalization and aliens.

Interestingly, the de facto manner in which the Chakmas have come to be treated as refugees is a rather recent phenomenon. The 9 January 1996 verdict of the Supreme Court in the *National Human Rights Commission v. State of Arunachal Pradesh and Another* was the first official acknowledgement of their status as refugees. This was soon followed by the publication of the Hundred and Fifth Report of the Rajya Sabha Committee on Petition the following year, which too endorsed the refugee status of the Chakmas of Arunachal. No other court verdict before 1996 whether of the Supreme Court or of the Gauhati High Court had recognised such a status for the Chakma people. Although the Indian federal government did use the term and mention these people as 'refugees' in the early 1990s under the P.V. Narshima Rao government, during the proceedings in the Indian Parliament when the issue was raised by the Members of Parliament from Arunachal Pradesh in the wake of the AAPSU-led anti-Chakma movement, it had never before considered them so and had almost treated it as a closed chapter.

Had the AAPSU-led movement not attained the feverish pitch it did in the early 1990s, the issue of political identity of the Chakmas would have never attracted the kind of attention it actually did from some of the highest decision making bodies in the country. It is a different matter, however, that the issue of the deportation of 'foreign nationals', including the Chakma refugees, has always been on the top of the agenda of this student body since the early 1970s. This is particularly significant in the light of the fact that this was a period in which the anti-foreigner issue in Northeast India had not yet become part of the popular discourse. Ironically enough, the rise of the anti-foreigner movement in Arunachal is invariably viewed as an outcome of the popular mass movement against foreigners in Assam that shook both the state government and the centre alike in the early 1980s. The reason for this could well be that until the early 1980s the news of protest against the Chakma foreigners in Arunachal by AAPSU was never reported. Hence, most of the news which started surfacing in the early 1980s treated it as an offshoot of the Assam agitation against foreigners (Business Standard 1982; Indian Express 1980; Gupta 1982). As reported in Indian Express (1980): 'The "foreign nationals" issue, at present rocking most North-Eastern States, is spilling over to Arunachal Pradesh with thousands of refugees from riot torn Assam and Meghalaya seeking refuge here.' The same

newspaper reported a growing nexus between the AASU and AAPSU a couple of years later:

Not only did the AAPSU hold its Press conference in Gauhati with the AASU assistance, it also held its executive meeting in North Lakhimpur.... Even sources close to AASU, however, do not look forward to long-term cooperation with the AAPSU though it is considered expedient to use the organisation for the time being to pressurise the central government. (Gupta 1982)

As also reported in Business Standard (1982):

Taking a cue from the All Assam Students' Union (AASU), a newly formed firebrand students' body in Arunachal Pradesh "All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union" (AAPSU) organized the demonstrations and bandh. Like AASU the "foreigners" are the main obsession with the AAPSU. Topping the four-point charter of demands of the AAPSU is the strident call of "expulsion" of the Tibetan and Chakma tribal refugees who settled in phases in the union territory in early sixties".

The same perception is shared by others as well:

In [1982], the All-Assam Students' Union (AASU) started an agitation in Assam against foreign nationals and had taken the shape of a widespread mass movement. This Students' movement in Assam inspired the AAPSU greatly and it gave support to the Assam agitation by launching its movement in 1982 demanding the deportation of Bangladeshis from the state besides pressing the Arunachal government to accept its demands. The more or less identical problems faced by the two students organisations of the two states on the immigrants and foreign nationals issues had thus established a concord between the AAPSU and AASU. (Prasad 2007: 1374)

Finally, a comparative account of the diasporic Chakmas in different states of Northeast India clearly reveals the nature and extent of their marginalization in exile. Astonishingly, despite the extent of their fragmented identities, there is no demonstrable evidence to suggest that they are engaged in any meaningful collective political project to shape a common future in diaspora. Far from it, a survey of the modes of self-definitions employed by them during the fieldwork for this study clearly revealed that they rarely share their collective experiences and aspirations in terms of a diasporic entity. As a consequence, there is no semblance of any common purpose, let alone unity and solidarity, among them. This is primarily so because of the very different contexts in which they came to India and the entirely different sets of concerns which they are currently faced with. Interestingly however, there is a widespread, albeit subtle, realisation among them that any generalised collective identification of their concerns is neither possible nor desirable, as it might unnecessarily complicate and unsettle their existing legal status. However, what is indeed common among them is an element of palpable perplexity and determined unwillingness to identify themselves with the land of their past—the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh. This is not difficult to understand given their rather prolonged stay in India, particularly in Mizoram and Tripura, where they are acknowledged as Indian citizens, and even in Arunachal where they do have a legitimate claim to Indian citizenship under the various provisions of the Indian Citizenship Act.

Abbreviated excerpt from 'Stateless in South Asia: The Chakmas Between Bangladesh and India', Deepak Singh, Sage Press, New Delhi, and New India Foundation, Bangalore, 2010.

Migration and Indigenous Peoples

Binota Moy Dhamai

There are more than 45 Indigenous communities in Bangladesh. Sometimes they are also known as adivasi or 'aboriginal'. The government prefers the term "tribals" in official documents, although some legal documents also sometimes refer to them as aboriginals or indigenous hillmen or indigenous tribes. The term 'Jumma' is widely used in the CHT to refer to the indigenous peoples who live in the CHT. According to the official census of 1991, the total number of indigenous (officially "tribal") people in Bangladesh was 1,205,978. However, these figures are gross underestimates. The largest concentration of indigenous peoples in Bangladesh is found in the southeastern border region of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). The CHT is the only region in the country with an indigenous majority. It has an extensive semi-autonomous administrative structure that has no parallel in other parts of Bangladesh.

Many ethnic Bengalis refuse to serve food and drinks to indigenous persons in rural hostels and restaurants.

Land dispossession is a problem faced by indigenous peoples in all parts of Bangladesh, but the process of dispossession has varied from place to place. In the CHT, apart from land dispossession caused by the Kaptai Dam and forestry projects, indigenous people have also lost their lands through fraudulent and coercive acts by non-indigenous settlers, and the resettlement of non-indigenous settlers through a government sponsored programme that was started in 1979.

Land dispossession in the other areas (except CHT) is perhaps the most acute in northwestern Bangladesh. In numerous cases land grabbing was also accompanied by acts of arson and murder on the part of non-indigenous people. In the same region unscrupulous non-indigenous people have used the Vested Property Act to seize indigenous people's lands. Land grabbing has also taken place in the southern and southeastern coastal plains and the Rakhaing indigenous people had petitioned the prime minister on several occasions to restrict transfer of IPs lands to others.

Social discrimination operates at various levels and in various ways. Even where measures are undertaken by government agencies (and to a lesser extent, by NGOs) for indigenous peoples, the proposed beneficiaries are seldom consulted prior to the formulation of development projects or in the process of implementation. Major decision-making powers and financial authority are retained by the ministries based in the national capital. In northwestern Bangladesh, the social discrimination faced by indigenous people is so severe that many ethnic Bengalis refuse to serve food and drinks to indigenous persons in rural hostels and restaurants.

In 1960, in the name of industrial development, the Pakistan government built the Kaptai hydroelectric project on the Karnafuli River in the heartland of the indigenous Jumma people. This flooded 1,036 sq. km of lands and submerged 54% (54,000 acre) of the best arable land and also displaced about 100,000 Jumma people from their ancestral homes. Among these some 40,000 Jumma were forced to migrate into India and about 20,000 other Jumma (Pahari) had to take refuge in Myanmar. The Kaptai dam damaged the agro-based main economy of the CHT and brought about a permanent disintegration of the Jumma people on one hand, and also led to the encroachment of Bengali Muslim population in the region in large numbers.

During the armed conflict, particularly since 1979, the government officially started to settle Bengali's from the plain districts in the CHT to outnumber the indigenous Jumma people and for

using them (Bengali settlers) as human shield. The government declared that each Bengali settler family would be given 7.5 acres of lands and ration for unlimited period. Indeed, no cultivable land was vacant for settlement, so the Bengali settlers started to forcibly occupy the land of indigenous Jumma people. This created a legacy of violence, rape, loot, murder, arson, abduction and forcible conversion, sacrilege of religion and forcible occupation of Jummas' land and property as well as gross violation of human rights for more than two decades. Thousands of Jumma people were ousted from their own hearth and home. Of these, about seventy thousand Jumma took shelter in India as refugees, and hundred thousand took refuge in deep forests within the country.

In 1997, under the 16 & 20 points packages programme agreement with the Bangladesh government and the Refugee leaders, 12,222 families return to Bangladesh from India. But 9,780 families of repatriated Jumma refugees have not received their land, orchards, gardens or homesteads. 3,055 families still live in inhuman condition in the schools. On the other hand, the Bengali settlers are regularly obtaining rations from the government, but the repatriate Jumma do not get this opportunity. Even the repatriated Jumma refugees survive half-fed for six months, having one square meal daily.

Jumma Indigenous Peoples Refugees are still living as refugees in their homeland, and seeking a proper judgment to end their either current status. Particularly, the UNHCR can play a vital role for the well being of the affected Jumma peoples– both returnee refugees from India, and internal refugee due to the unstable situation. The UNPFII, as a body for Indigenous Peoples should recommend to the UN agencies and the Bangladesh state to respect the rights of CHT indigenous peoples. The international humanitarian bodies must play a vital role for CHT Jumma indigenous peoples survival with dignity.

As members of Indigenous community of Bangladesh, we put these following recommendations for future actions: Recognition in the Bangladesh Constitution to Indigenous people, Demilitarize the Indigenous Peoples region, Ensure the ancestral land rights of Indigenous people, Implement ILO 107 and ratify ILO 169, Properly implement of the CHT Accord.

Abbreviated from Presentation at the Expert Workshop on Indigenous Peoples and Migration; April, 2006. International Office for Migration (IOM) and the Secretariat of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII).

Displacement and Dislocation in CHT

Bina D'Costa

The most important distinguishing factor between a refugee and an internally displaced person (IDP) is cross border movement. Unlike refugees, who cross the international border for fear of persecution, IDPs do not cross a border. There is very limited legal protection offered to IDPs due to this unique context, as the state itself is the perpetrator of violence instead of providing protection to the IDPs. The United Nation's working definition of the internally displaced is, '...persons who have been forced to flee their home suddenly or unexpectedly in large numbers, as a result of armed conflict, internal strife, systematic violations of human rights or natural or man-made disasters, and who are within the territory of their own country'. Another report by Janie Hampton, the editor of IDP: A Global Survey states, 'Unlike refugees who cross international borders, those who stay within their own country must rely upon their own governments to uphold their civil and human rights. If the state chooses not to invite external assistance, then the international community has limited options to protect these people. In many countries, it is the government or its military forces that have caused the displacement or prevent access to their citizens.' Numbers of IDPs from the region are unfortunately growing, and reasons include armed conflict (Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Burma, Iraq), environmental disasters (Indonesia, Burma, China), construction of dams (China, India, Bangladesh), industrialisation, famine and economic upheavals (the Philippines, Cambodia).

The janus faced narrative of nation building has taken over everything that is sacred.

Internal displacement of the Adivasi people in Bangladesh is the result of post-colonial nationbuilding and identity conflict. Because of their traditional practice of shifting cultivation they are also collectively referred as 'Jumma' people. This self-identification is also used by various CHT political communities to frame their own Adivasi/Jumma nationbuilding strategies. The CHT has geo-political and strategic significance for Bangladesh and South Asian security due to its location and proximity to India and Burma, and the porosity of the border; its richness in commercial natural resources; and historical, political and social contexts that constitute the communities of the CHT as the 'other' (in times of conflict also internal enemy) within a Bangladeshi state. A low-intensity conflict that is deeply embedded in the struggle over land and existence in the CHT has contributed to massive internal displacement over the years

The Construction of the Kaptai Dam

While the long-term benefits from the construction of Kaptai Dam in order to generate hydro-electricity in 1962 should not be underestimated, the massive dislocation caused by this decision; the seeds of conflict that it sowed; the militarisation of the region and its effect on the society; and the huge economic costs of the conflict in the CHT should not be ignored either. It flooded 54,000 acres area and displaced 100,000 people, most of whom were Chakmas (IDMC Report, 2006). According to Amnesty International, more than 40,000 Chakmas left for Arunachal Pradesh in India, where a majority still remain as stateless persons. The construction of the dam led to the initial crisis of internal displacement, loss of control over natural resources, threats of forced assimilation, construction of non-permanent army camps, and oppression by the Bangladeshi state and an armed insurgency. As a counter-insurgency strategy, the government relocated over 400,000 Bengalis to the region between 1979 and 1983. Many of the Chakmas crossed the border to Mizoram and Tripura. By 1983, nearly 40,000 Chakmas had arrived in Mizoram and by May, 1986 another 50,000 Chakmas had taken shelter in five refugee camps in Tripura.

There are no accurate statistics on conflict-induced displacement in CHT. The Government task force on internal displacement stated in 2000 that there were 90,208 Adivasi and 38,156 Bengali families or 500,000-555,000 people. Ironically, the Bangladesh government also considers the Bengali settlers displaced. NGOs, Bangladeshi scholars and indigenous leaders argue that this figure is inaccurate. Amnesty International estimated that 60,000 Adivasis were internally displaced between August 1975 and August 1992.

The Accord of Dissonance

The 1997 Peace Accord was internationally considered a successful case of conflict resolution, but it involved no third-party mediation or direct intervention by international actors, nor was civil society involved in the peace process. These factors contributed to the weakness of the Accord. IDMC suggests that by December, 2009, there were still around 300 military camps in the region. Vast power inequalities between the state (and the armed forces) and the Adivasi communities made it impossible to achieve peace and stability in the region. Following the Peace Accord, the Indian government forcefully repatriated 65,000 Chakma refugees from Tripura. Many of the families, upon their return found their homes occupied by Bengali settlers and properties appropriated either by army or local administration. They became internally displaced.

Various international and national human rights organisations pointed out human rights violations of the displaced Adivasi communities. For example, the CHT human rights groups alleged that many of their leaders have been arrested and imprisoned during the state of emergency that was declared in Bangladesh in January, 2007. On the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Accord, the London-based Survival International (SI), a worldwide support group for indigenous people, stated that violence, land grabbing and intimidation have still continued in the region and have been a major source of displacement. One example was the displacement of the Mru people. The Mru, one of the Adivasi communities, rely on their land as their only source of survival. 750 Mru (or Mro) families were either evicted from their land or were forced to flee from their home and moved to remote villages of the Bandarban Hill District of the CHT in December 2006. After protesting against the eviction of his people from their land to make way for an army training centre, one of the leader of the Mru people and the Chairman of Sulaok Union Parishad in Bandarban, Ranglai Mro, was arrested and it was alleged that he was tortured. He was charged with possessing illegal firearms and sentenced to 17 years in jail in July. It was alleged that the charges were invented in retaliation for his defense of the Mru's rights to their land. While Ranglai Mro was eventually freed in 2009, this case demonstrates that intimidation still continues even after the Accord was signed, and intense fear of the state is still very real even after the rhetoric of peacebuilding by the state.

The situation remains volatile even after the election of the Awami League in 2008. Both the BNP and the military elite repeatedly advocate that the state has to maintain a strong military presence in the area because of the risk of transnational crime networks operating in some of the impenetrable areas, illegal movement of people, drugs, arms and other goods on the porous borderland and potential armed insurgency. As a consequence, it is not only the military, but the functions of the police and border patrol have been increased over the years in the CHT.

Loyal or Disloyal People?

In December, 2007, Bangladesh issued an official statement that rejected the allegations of continuing abuse of rights of Adivasis in the CHT as false and baseless and stated they enjoy more privileges than other citizens. A senior official of the Ministry of CHT Affairs was quoted in the media: 'The allegation of any violence against the Adivasi is totally false. We have found no evidence of it'. The attack on 14 villages under Sajek Union in 2010 and the government's subsequent refusal to

allow access to the area is a recent example of the state's extreme sensitivity, regardless of the change of government, when it comes to CHT. The displaced and dislocated people are subjected to torture, violence and intimidation with little or no justification. When members of the Adivasi community are taken into custody for breaking the law, they receive harsher punishment than the Bengalis. A significant aspect of their persecution continues to be land grabbing.

The other deeper issue is the discourse of citizenship that questions the status of Adivasis as 'good' citizens: whether Adivasis are loyal Bangladeshis who deserve to have the equal right to belong to the nation. The state repeatedly invokes its moral authority through the lens of national security and state sovereignty in dealing with the Adivasis. While civil society does not always draw upon the paradoxical history in its advocacy campaign for the rights of indigenous people in the CHT, law enforcement authorities justify their severe treatments of the Adivasis based on this 'good' citizens model. For them, disloyalty to the idea of a Bangladeshi statehood is demonstrated by the Adivasi communities, such as when the armed resistance started in the Hills in the late 1970s.

This is very similar to the Burmese military regime and some of its Rakhine population's arguments about the Rohingyas as disloyal people who also opted for a separate homeland for themselves, and whose citizenship was eventually taken away from them. Unlike the Rohingyas, who could be forcefully evicted because they became effectively stateless due to a change in the Burmese Citizenship Act, for the Adivasi community in the CHT the situation is more complex.

The status of protection that was granted by the British to the indigenous people in the Hills is unique and saved them from the fate of the Rohingyas across the border. Many members of the government are also sympathetic to the Adivasi causes. However, when members of the law enforcement authorities are posted in the CHT, they are confronted by differences- in physical features, lifestyle, culture and religion; but 'disloyalty' is the key protagonist. Many remember the history, and for many it is indeed an 'us versus them' situation. If the Adivasis could prove that they are law-abiding 'good citizens' then they are less likely to be treated like 'aliens' or non-citizens. However, for the dislocated Adivasi, civil disobedience is never a question of breaking the law, rather advocating for her or his rights as a member of the indigenous community that exists beyond the idea of a Bangladeshi state. When Adivasi communities demonstrate for their rights to land it becomes a political statement for the whole community. Such actions have lost their private or individual claim. Adivasi causes are inherently public and are the subject of an intimate violence constantly produced and reproduced by the state-Adivasi dynamic. The gruesome violence, abduction and killings that occur here, the fire that burns houses and sacred spaces such as temples, are all elements of the spectacle of violence that has two different kinds of audiences—the Bengalis and the Adivasis. The demonstrations that take place on the streets or in the bazaars, and in the presence of the media, the NGOs and the activists, all are part of this public spectacle of violence in the place called 'the Hills'. The janus-faced narrative of nationbuilding has taken over everything that is sacred. How can this dislocation be ever resolved?

This excerpt is from D'Costa, Bina, 'Strangers within our Borders: Human in(security) and Identity Politics in South Asia', paper first presented at the Social Science Research Council Border Workshop, Dubai, 2008.

Trapped in Ekushey Paradox



Language Identity and State

Amena Mohsin

During the course of my field work for my doctoral thesis in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), an elderly and much respected person of the area had posed the following question to me, “why do you Bengalis call us upa-jati (literal translation is sub-nation, but otherwise tribe), we have a language, culture, religion and land of our own. We may be few in numbers but we are not sub of any group, we may be a small nation but not a sub-nation. The term upa-jati is not even existent in our language; this is a Bengali terminology, why do you want to impose your notions and categories upon us. We are an egalitarian people, please don’t impose your notions of hierarchy upon us, these are alien to us”. Indeed I had no reply to his query and observation, which was a protest and rejection at the same time. But the implications and substance of what he had said to me had haunted me ever since. I have often wondered how the notions and categories of a dominant culture have marginalized and negated the cultures and lives of minorities. Language indeed has played an important role in the construction of these categories and thereby marginalization.

Ironically, Bangladesh has one of the most hegemonic and chauvinistic language policies.

Taking cognisance of the importance of language, UNESCO on November 17, 1999 has declared 21st February as the International Mother Language Day. It maintained that languages are the most powerful instruments of preserving and developing our tangible and intangible heritage; and called upon the states to “encourage linguistic diversity and multilingual education for the development of fuller awareness of linguistic and cultural traditions throughout the world and to inspire solidarity based on understanding, tolerance and dialogue”.^[1] Incidentally Bangladesh had taken the initiative for the above resolution, and the declaration did recognise the unprecedented sacrifice made by Bangladesh for the cause of mother language on 21 February 1952. Yet, ironically, Bangladesh has one of the most hegemonic and chauvinistic language policies. The state identifies itself with Bangla or Bengali and has imposed its own notions and categories of identification, development and education upon its non-Bengali population^[2].

The Ethnic set-up

Bangladesh is home to about 27 ethnic communities. Controversy, however, exists as to the exact number of ethnic groups in Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Census Report 1991 puts the number to 29.^[3] But Khaleque^[4] quite rightly points out that in the Census Report in two instances, the same group has been listed as two separate ethnic groups. This suggests that there are at least 27 ethnic groups in Bangladesh. Members of the different ethnic communities, however, maintain that there are more than 45 different ethnic groups in Bangladesh, but the census report does not take the variations into account in order to project Bangladesh as an overwhelmingly Bengali nation.^[5] According to the census of 1991, the ethnic population of Bangladesh is 1.2 million, which constitutes 1.13 per cent of the total population of Bangladesh. Gaps however exist between the official figures and private estimates. Maloney^[6] has pointed out that according to the Monthly Statistical Bulletin of Bangladesh [March 1991] the ethnic population in the five districts in Rajshahi division was 62,000, but various Christian missions in private censuses found the number to be double. Members of these communities also dispute the official figures and see it as a government mechanism to establish them as numerical minorities.

The ethnic communities of Bangladesh can be divided into two groups based on their geographical

habitats: the Plains group and the Hill group. The plains groups live along the borders of the north-west, north and north-east of the country. For instance, the ethnic groups like the Koch, Munda, Oraon, Paharia, Rajbongshi and Saontal have been traditionally living in certain parts of Bogra, Dinajpur, Kushtia, Pabna, Rajshahi and Rangpur districts in the northern border. The greater Sylhet district in the northeastern border is the traditional area of Khasi, Manipuri, Pathor and Tipra community. The Garo, Koch and Hajong people live in Mymensingh and Jamalpur districts in the northern borders and in Tangail[7] district in the north central region. Besides scattered settlements of different ethnic people are found in Barisal, Comilla, Dhaka, Faridpur, Khulna, Patuakhali and other districts of Bangladesh.

The ethnic people of the Hill group live in the southeastern part of the country i.e., the CHT. The inhabitants of this group again live in two distinct ecological zones: the ridge-top and the valley. The Chakmas, Marmas and Tripuras are valley living people; while the Khamis, Mro, Lushai, Banjogeas, Kukis, Tanchangya, Chak and Riang live on the ridges of the hills. The table below shows the linguistic and religious groupings of the ethnic communities. One however has to be mindful of the paucity of recent written sources on these issues, therefore not all the communities could be included in the table.[8]

Languages Spoken

Ethnicity	Language spoken	Religion
Chakma	Corrupt form of Bengali, Indo-Aryan	Buddhism
Marma	Mixture of Burmese and Rakhaine	Tibeto-Burman group
Tripura	Cockborok, Bodo group	Buddhism
Tanchangya	Similar to Chakmas, Indo-Aryan	Buddhism
Khami	Kuki-chin group	Buddhism, certain rites of animism
Mro	Tibeto-Burman group	Animism
Bawm	Kuki-chin group	Christianity
Kheyang	Kuki-chin group	Buddhism
Pankhoas	Kuki-chin group	Christianity
Chak	Tibeto-Burman group	Buddhism
Lushai	Kuki-chin group	Christianity\animism
Garo	Bodo group	Songsarek\Christianity
Saontal	Offshoot of Kol\Mundari	Animism\Christianity
Khasi	Austroasiatic	Animism
Manipuri	Meithei	Hinduism (Vaisnavite division)
Paharia	Dravidian	Christianity, own w/ Hindu admixtures
Rakhaine	Rakhaine, Bhot-Brahmo category	Buddhism
Rajbongshi	Bodo group (lost), corrupt form of Bengali	Hinduism\Islam
Koch	Bodo group	Oraon Kurukh,Sadri
Hajong	Bodo group	Animism\Christianity
Mahat	Shadri	Hinduism
		MundaMunda

Bengali & Non-Bengali Relationship

The relationship between the Bengalis and the non-Bengali population of the state is historically marked by distrust, animosity and a certain degree of ambiguity. During the colonial period the state had intervened in favour of the minorities and had established various protective laws like the Chittagong Hill Tracts Manual 1900, that restricted the movement and settlement of Bengalis into the

area and imposed restrictions on land transfers from the Hill people to the Bengalis. The Adivashis of the plains were similarly protected by the Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act of 1908. Thus during the colonial period the interaction between the Bengalis and the ethnic communities remained at a minimal, but the element of mistrust was there due to the land factor.

The Bangladesh state has however intervened in favour of Bengalis and has undermined the minorities. In the CHT the government adopted a deliberate policy of Bengali settlement by amending the CHT Manual. From 1979 to 1984 40,000 Bengalis were settled in the CHT through a government sponsored plan of Bengali settlement.[9] These people have been settled by ejecting the Hill people from their traditional lands. The government maintains that Bengalis have been settled in khas or government owned land; but to the Hill people these are their communal land that belongs to them, their ancestors and to spirits. Land is sacrosanct to the Hill people, which is not to be commodified. The gap in perceptions between the state and the Hill people obviously is an indicator of the failure of the state to understand and respect the culture of its minorities. The Bengalis are also in control of the trade and commerce of the area. The feeling of animosity exacerbated during the two decades of insurgency in the region when the area came under military control. The region witnessed numerous cases of human rights violations and rapes of women. To the Hill people the Bengalis therefore appear as greedy, unscrupulous land grabbers and rapists. The extent of their distrust can be understood by a lullaby that the Hill women sing to their babies. In Bengali there is a popular lullaby that says that, at nightfall when the world became quiet and the baby went to sleep the Borgis (dacoits) came to the village. The Hill people have translated this in their own languages and significantly enough they have substituted the word Borgi with Bengali. A child in the Hills thereby grows up distrusting and fearing the Bengalis.

Language and the State

Language occupies a central position in the construction of nationhood of the Bengalis. The state predicates itself on the linguistic and cultural identity of its dominant majority Bengali population. The nomenclature Bangladesh, literally translates itself as the land of the Bengali speaking people. The state thus has a distinct identity as well as bias. The latter has its roots in the construction of Bengali nationalism as it evolved within the state of Pakistan. Language, more specifically a common language for the entire population of the state was considered to be an essential part of nation-building and not surprisingly this language had to be reflective of Islamic traditions. In this context Urdu written in the Arabic-Persian script was considered to be the product of Hindu-Muslim and the attendant Persian-Hindu contact during the days of Muslim rule. It had become exclusively associated with Muslims and their culture in India. While Bengali (spoken in East Pakistan) written in Nagri script, similar to that of Sanskrit was identified with Hinduism. Accordingly Jinnah declared (in English) in Dhaka in March 1948:

Let me make it very clear to you that the state language of Pakistan is going to be Urdu and no other language ... without one language no nation can remain tied up solidly together and function.[10]

A religious orientation was given to the same by Liaqat Ali Khan, the first Prime Minister of Pakistan. He stated:

... the defense of Bengali language in front of Urdu, is against the laws of Islam.[11]

In 1949 the Central Minister for Education openly proposed the introduction of Arabic script for Bengali. It was argued that:

Not only Bengali literature, even the Bengali alphabet is full of idolatry. Each Bengali letter is associated with this or that god or goddess of Hindu pantheon ... Pakistan and Devanagari script cannot co-exist. It looks like defending the frontier of Pakistan with Bharati soldiers!... To ensure a bright and great future for the Bengali language it must be linked with the Holy Quran ... Hence the necessity and importance of Arabic script.[12]

To resist the imposition of an alien language and cultural identity upon themselves, the Bengalis counterpoised it by a secular nationalism with language and culture as its core. Urdu was looked upon not only as a language but a politics, a politics of hegemony and domination aimed at destroying the cultural identity of the Bengalis. Thus Bengali language was adopted as a counter weapon to fight this hegemony. Language thus acquired an immensely political and emotive connotation for the Bengalis. On 21st February 1952 the police opened fire in Dhaka on students who were protesting the imposition of the Urdu language resulting in the death of four. The day henceforward became a day of national glory and celebration for the Bengalis. It is celebrated as a day of martyrdom as well as victory. Bengali language thus became the basis as well as symbol of Bengali nationalism. From the demands of linguistic and cultural autonomy, the Bengalis later moved to economic and political autonomy culminating in the independence of Bangladesh in 1971.

The nine-month long liberation war remained identified with Bengali. On 26 March 1971 the Secretary General of the district Awami League of Chittagong read out the declaration of independence. He called on the Bengalis, not the people of Bangladesh, to resist the Pakistani forces. Mention may also be made of the first speech of the first Prime Minister, Tajuddin Ahmed of the government-in-exile of Bangladesh:

You have shown that a new Bengali nation has been born amidst the ruins of battlefield ... whilst we remain true to our heritage Bengalis have shown that they are also a warrior people (emphasis added).[13]

It is important to point out here that the Garos, Saontals, Hajongs and Tripuras had also participated in the war along side the Bengalis. "Amar Sonar Bangla Ami Tomae Bhalobashi" (O my golden Bengal I love thee), a highly patriotic song by the Bengali noble laureate Rabindranath Tagore was adopted as the national anthem of Bangladesh. Bangla, of course was used by the poet in a territorial sense, but Bangla is also a cultural and linguistic identity. The non-Bengali population of the state thereby could not identify themselves with the nationalist movement and the liberation war of the state that remained overtly Bengali.

This identification with Bengali continued within the independent state of Bangladesh. True to the spirit of the nationalist movement the new state predicated itself on the ideals of Bengali nationalism, as defined by Article 9 of the constitution:

The unity and solidarity of the Bengali nation, which deriving its identity from its language and culture, attained sovereign and independent Bangladesh through a united and determined struggle in the war of independence, shall be the basis of Bengali nationalism.[14]

Having identified itself constitutionally with one cultural group, the state embarked quite aggressively on an assimilative path. Article 3 declared Bengali to be the official language of the state and the medium of instruction. Through Article 6 Part 1 of the constitution the citizens of Bangladesh were to be known as Bengalis. The idea was to have one language, one culture and one nation. Manobendra Narayan Larma, the lone representative not only from the CHT, but also the only non-Bengali member of the then parliament refused to endorse this constitution:

You cannot impose your national identity on others. I am a Chakma not a Bengali. I am a citizen of Bangladesh, Bangladeshi. You are also Bangladeshi but your national identity is Bengali ... they (Hill People) can never become Bengali.[15]

The Bengali political elite blinded and mesmerized by its victory was too arrogant to understand or even recognize the implications and logic of Larma's contentions, who had walked out of the parliament in protest. The insensitivity and arrogance of the Bengali political elite is reflected in the statement of the Deputy Leader of the House, Syed Nazrul Islam, following Larma's walkout:

I request him (Larma) to come to the House to perform his responsibilities, to turn this resolution of Bengali nationalism and nationhood into a success. I hope that he will accept this opportunity to identify himself and his people as Bengalis.[16]

It is indeed an irony that a people who had fought against the politics of hegemony of the Pakistan state using language and culture as its tool, themselves turned into hegemon and attempted to impose their own language and culture upon other identities. The state thus created its own politicised ethnic minorities within a year of its independence. Manobendra Narayan Larma had by then formed the PCJSS, the political platform for the Hill people. An armed wing the Shanti Bahini (Peace Forces) was subsequently added to it. For the next two and a half decade the state was to witness an armed insurgency in the CHT.

The state consciously adopted measures to develop Bengali language. Bengali was adopted as the medium of instruction in all government academic institutions. It is also the medium of official correspondence within the state. There is no state policy for the protection or promotion of the other languages within the state. There have been no official attempts to give instructions to the ethnic minorities in their own languages even at the primary levels. The road markers, nameplates, signboards, car plate numbers are all written in Bengali. The moment a foreigner enters Bangladesh, she/he would take it to be a land of Bengali speaking people only, whereas officially there are 27 ethnic groups in Bangladesh with their own languages and cultures. No reflection of those is found in the streets of Bangladesh unless one takes a trip to the CHT. This indeed is a sad reflection on the state of ethnic affairs in Bangladesh.

The state also consciously promotes the national culture i.e., the Bengali culture. Article 23 of the Constitution states:

The state shall adopt measures to conserve the cultural traditions and heritage of the people, and so to foster and improve the national language, literature and the arts that all sections of the people are afforded the opportunity to contribute towards and to participate in the enrichment of the national culture (emphasis added).[17]

It is thus evident that the constitution recognises the people as one people i.e., the Bengali people. At the national level a Bangla Academy has been set up to promote the development of Bengali language and culture. Programmes marking the hallmarks of Bengali culture are celebrated with much fanfare. The days are observed as National holidays. The Pohela Boishakh, marking the Bengali New Year, Ekushey February (21st February), marking the Martyrs Day are instances of the above. In fact the entire month of February is celebrated as a month for the promotion of Bengali language and culture. Month long Book fairs are organised. These emphasise the publications in the Bengali language (though these days English books published in Bangladesh are also displayed). Cultural programmes are held in the nooks and corners of Bangladesh depicting the glory of Bengali language, culture and its history. Most of these programmes are sponsored and promoted by the state. The state of Bangladesh in its present form indeed appears to be the imagined community of the Bengalis.

The state has set up some tribal institutes at the district levels. But these institutes are catered towards the promotion of a tourist culture. All their publications are in the Bengali language. No serious attempts have been made by these institutes to promote the local languages and cultures; rather the tourist culture is a distortion of the local culture. This is strongly resented by the local people. The electronic media, radio and television, have their programmes in Bengali language. At times programmes on the different 'tribes' of Bangladesh are telecast on the television. But the programmes are presented in the Bengali language, only the songs are performed in the local language. The ethnic people allege that the programmes are catered to the needs of the Bengali

people and do not reflect their culture. A Hill student of Dhaka University pointed this out to me by referring to a bamboo dance from the CHT. According to him, the dance used to be performed at the death of pregnant women, so there is an element of sadness and grief in it, but in the television, performers perform it with smiling faces. He insisted that the performers smile because they are supposed to appear pleasant on the television since the programmes are supposedly for 'entertainment'.

The academic curriculum also reflects the State bias towards Bengali. Article 17 Clause A of the Constitution calls for the establishment of a uniform system of education. Uniformity in the context of Bangladesh is understandable as the state promotes a particular language and culture. The histories, cultures and lives of the ethnic communities are totally absent from these curriculums. The books provided by the National textbooks Board narrate the glory of Bengali heroes, its culture and history. The consequence is not only the hindrance of diversity; but also and more dangerously so, the silencing of many voices and the creation of a High culture within the state; while the rest are relegated to the periphery and the other languages are referred to as dialects.

The shift from Bengali to Bangladeshi nationalism after the political changes in 1975 did not in any way change the state policy towards Bengali language or culture. Bangladeshi nationalism only incorporated Islamic ideals to the contours of nationalism and replaced the state principle of secularism with absolute faith and trust in the Almighty Allah. In 1988 Islam was declared as the state religion of Bangladesh (Article 2 Clause A of the Constitution) with the provision that other religions may be practised in peace and harmony in the Republic.[18] These changes further marginalized the ethnic communities as they were now turned into religious minorities as well.

It is a matter of fact that no regime in Bangladesh has made any concessions or space for the ethnic minorities. The state constitution declares Bangladesh to be a culturally homogenous state. The BNP regime had refused to observe 1993 as the Year of the Indigenous people, as declared by the UN. Its position was that there were no indigenous people in Bangladesh. Sheikh Hasina, then the Leader of Opposition, had extended support to the indigenous people's cause. After assuming power however, the party's position changed. Now Sheikh Hasina maintains that there are some Nritattik jonogoshi in Bangladesh. It is a very ambiguous term, the nearest English equivalent being ethnographic people. There thus is complete consensus among the Bengali political elite on the question of Bengali hegemony and the nature of state; the occasional variations in position are for the sake of opposition only. The state's identification with one linguistic and cultural community has disempowered the other ethnic communities and has marginalized them. But this marginalization has helped them to construct their own identities and thereby reassert and empower themselves.

Language and the politics of Disempowerment

Raja Devasish Roy, the Chakma chief quite rightly points out that Bengali is a very powerful language, it does not need any state protection or promotion; it is the other languages that needs protection and promotion but the state is doing the contrary. He further points out that in case of religion there is a protective device that other religions may be practised in peace and harmony, but no such clause exists in case of language. He indeed echoes the sentiments of the ethnic communities when he describes the state constitution as a repressive and hegemonic one.[19]

Bengali being the medium of instruction certainly puts the non-Bengali population of the state at a disadvantage. Students of these communities allege that they find it difficult to compete with the students whose mother tongue is Bengali. The dropout rate among the students of these communities is also very high. In in-depth personal interviews of eleven outstanding students of different communities studying in the top ranking academic institutions of the country, the author

found that all of them had suffered from inferiority complex during their childhood because of their different pronunciation and accent. They were teased by their fellow students so they were shy to speak out in the class. They all felt that they could have done much better if they had their primary education in their mother tongue.[20] The schools as well as the teachers expect the students to conform to certain conventional norms and patterns that the students from the other communities find difficult to adapt to. An informal survey carried out in 1996 at Dhaka University in the departments of Anthropology, English, History, Library Science and Sociology found that out of a total of 3,012 students only 23 belonged to ethnic minorities. The figure indeed is reflective of the dismal state of affairs!

The students also feel depressed at the state of their own languages that are often referred to as dialects in the mainstream discourse. They feel alienated when they don't see their own history, their lives, or any role models of their communities in the national curriculum. The Garos and Saontals had fought in the liberation war of Bangladesh, yet no recognition has been given to the same. The Hill people had also participated in the liberation war. During the course of my own research I found that in the CHT 400 women were raped by the Pakistan army and their collaborators but no recognition has been given to the above. The discourse on the liberation war is absolutely silent about the sacrifices and contributions of the different ethnic communities.

Language is responsible in two major ways for the economic marginalization of the ethnic people. These are the inability of the ethnic people to understand or communicate in Bengali language; the inability or refusal of the state to understand or accommodate the economic modes associated with cultures different from the mainstream.

In case of the former mention may be made of land alienation of the different communities like the Garos or Mundas. They have lost most of their land to Bengali mahajans (moneylenders). During the lean seasons they borrow money from the latter. Their inability to communicate in Bengali make them put their thumb stamps on documents that in many instances charge exorbitant interest rates, sometimes as high as 400 percent in a year or demand their land in return. Consequently many of them have become landless. The ethnic people also allege that the official language being Bengali, they face tremendous problems in the courts where they often have to go for land settlement disputes. These difficulties discourage them from taking resort to legal measures as well.

Forests constitute an integral part of the lives of the Hill people of CHT and the Garo community. Today, they have been dispossessed from these resources as the state has taken over most of the forests as Reserved Forests (RF). Language barriers have again played a major role behind their alienation from these resources. This has been due to their inability to understand the Bengali language and secondly the state's refusal to understand their language and culture of association with the forests. One may refer to the process of conversion of community forests into RF. There is a process of announcements and appeal. However, the local people in many instances don't understand the language and are unaware of the legal procedures since the latter are often not in tune with their cultural mores.[21]

The state regards lands that do not have ownership deeds as government owned land; while the concept of private ownership is quite alien to people practising jhum mode of cultivation. Communal ownership of land is at the basis of their community living and cultural mores. Not only land and forests have been acquired but a ban has been put on jhum cultivation as well. Consequently, many had to take to plough cultivation while others became 'landless', a phenomenon unknown in the Hills before. This has affected the cultural basis of their lives. The societies have lost their egalitarian basis and are moving towards stratified ones based on the concept of private ownership of property. Since

the signing of the CHT Peace Accord many NGOs have moved into the region. Their activities are failing to yield much positive results because the Hill people are not yet fully acculturated to the notion of gender segregation of work. Community basis of work through jhum in which men and women participate as equal partners is still central to their work ethics.[22]

The Garos who consider themselves as ‘children of forests’ have also been affected likewise. It is a matrilineal society, but with the gradual alienation of land and the introduction of private property the society is moving towards a patrilineal one. Since many of them are still dependent on forest resources so the women try to get into the forests to collect resources. But in many instances they are caught by the security personnel guarding these forests, and in order to save themselves most often they have to give in to the physical desires of the latter.[23]

The Politics of Empowerment

In the CHT the PCJSS has constructed the identity of Jumma nationalism. Taking its seeds from jhum cultivation the PCJSS claimed that the Hill ecology has set them apart from the Bengalis of the plainland. The Bengalis used the term Jumma to denote the Hill people in a negative way; the PCJSS had deliberately invoked this term to imbibe the Hill people with a sense of pride in their own past and present, for jhum as pointed out earlier is not only a mode of cultivation but also a way of life. Language had played a very important role in this construction as there are certain symbols and traditions in the Hills that can be translated only through their language. It is important to point out here that though each Hill group has its own language but a pidgin Chittagonian is the lingua franca in the Hills. Jumma nationalism thereby stands as a counter hegemony tool .

At another level each generic group in the Hills is also engaged in the construction of its own identity along its own linguistic lines. This on the one hand is to counter the dominance of the dominant cultures in the HT itself, for instance the Chakmas, Tripuras and the Marmas constitute about 85 percent of the Hill population of the Hills. On the other hand it allows them to maintain the cultural diversity of the Hills. The process of cultural exclusiveness is reflected in two major ways, firstly in the naming of newborns. Previously the Hill people used to name their children with Bengali names, now there is a tendency to name the newborns in their own language. This not only distinguishes them from Bengalis but also from the other cultural groups in the Hills as well. Secondly, the Hill groups are engaged in the construction of alphabets for their respective languages. Alphabets, or more precisely the form in which the alphabets might be written has a special significance for the Hill people. It denotes the politics of the region. There is almost a total rejection of Bangla. [24]

Groups and Alphabets

Name of Group	Form of alphabets
Chakma	Burmese\Arakanese, has similarity with Marma alphabets
Marma	Burmese\Arakanese (Rakhaine) alphabets
Tangchangya	Has similarity with Chakma alphabets
Bawm	Roman\English alphabets
Lushai	Roman\English alphabets (similar to Bawm alphabets)
Pankhoa	Roman\English alphabets (similar to Bawm alphabets)
Mro	15-16 years ago, Menley Mro constructed Mro alphabets
Khumi	Mro alphabets
Tripura	Previously Bangla alphabets now Roman\English alphabets
Chak	Borrows from Burmese/Arakanese /Marma alphabets from Myanmar
Kheyang	Has not evolved any alphabets as yet

The formulations indeed are a reflection of the assertiveness of the identities of the Hill people. In this context Prashanta Tripura an eminent anthropologist from the region has quite rightly pointed out that only a Hill person who has had to live under the dominance of the Bangla language all his/her life can understand the significance of these alphabets. For the Hill people the alphabets are symbols of their identity and autonomy and they have a life and dynamics of their own.[25]

The ethnic communities in the plains have also resisted the state assimilative policies. These protests take place at various levels and acquire various forms. At the individual level they identify themselves with their own generic names, for instance in an interview carried out by this author among 100 Garos and 100 Saontals of the Dhaka and Rajshahi Divisions in August 1999, 90 percent of the Garo respondents see themselves as Garos within the state of Bangladesh; in the case of the Saontals the number is 85 percent. But at a collective level they see themselves as Adivashis. The status of Adivashis, they believe would force the state to recognise their customary rights over land and forests. They resist the ideas of Bengali\Bangladeshi nationalism as they identify these with Bengali culture, language and Islam. But they do perceive themselves as Bangladeshi citizens; in this context they frequently refer to their role in the liberation war of Bangladesh. By their resistance to cultural assimilation and making the distinction between citizenship and nationality they are taking a conscious political stand. The Adivashis of the plains while recognising the importance of written language have not as yet endeavoured to form their own written alphabets. Of late, however, the Garos are attempting to form their own alphabets in Roman alphabets. There is a strong feeling among the other communities as well of the need to develop their own written languages. This they believe is vital for the survival of their languages, which they consider to be the core of their identity.

This year on the occasion of the celebrations of the Eikushey, the students of the different ethnic groups studying in Dhaka had for the first time brought out processions and chanted slogans in their own languages on Dhaka University premises. This indeed is a forceful and creative assertion of their distinctiveness. As pointed out earlier the UNESCO declaration has at least open up spaces within the civil society.

Towards A Citizen-State

The Language policy of the state is but a reflection of the hegemonic nature of the state. The Bangladesh state has clearly identified itself with the dominant community. The state nationalist ideology, its development ethos and cultural policies are a reflection of this identity. The analysis above has shown the resistance and refusal of the non-Bengali community to identify itself with the state imposed identity. Boundaries have been drawn between the Bengali and non-Bengali community of the state, and between the state and the non-Bengalis. The assimilative policy of the state has only resulted in exclusions, violence and polarisation. In order to come out of state hegemony a holistic approach has to be taken. The Bangladesh polity has to accept the fact that a singular, culturally homogenous population is not necessarily the basis of a state; rather there can be several culturally homogenous communities within a state. In other words the state would seek its unity through common citizenship, and at the same time the cultural identities of the different groups would also be retained. This it is argued here would do away with the threat of Bengali hegemony.

All this requires a major shift in our approach to 'governmentality' and also 'state'. But what is most encouraging and indicative of the forthcoming change is that a space is being created within the civil society for the imperative for such a change. It is hoped and expected that this space and force would ultimately compel the political society to acknowledge the reality and the necessity for change towards a humane society- a society where language is used as a means of communication and understanding, not one of rupturing communications and building barriers. The Bengali as well as

the non-Bengali civil society must join hands in this endeavour.

References

1. Ct. from the UNESCO Resolution, The Independent, Dhaka, 21.2.2000.
2. The paper does not include the Bihari community as the issue of their citizenship is still a disputed matter between Bangladesh and Pakistan.
3. Bangladesh Census Report, 1991, V. 1. Analytical Report, Dhaka Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Govt. of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh, 1994, pp. 195-198.
4. Kibriaul Khaleque, "Ethnic Communities of Bangladesh," in Philip Gain ed. Bangladesh Land Forest and Forest People, SEHD, Dhaka, 1995, p. 7. 5. This has been stated to the author by the Garo, Oraon students of Dhaka University.
6. C. T. Maloney, "Tribes of Bangladesh and Synthesis of Bengali Culture", in M. S. Qureshi ed. Tribal Cultures, p. 8.
7. Kibria, "Ethnic Communities", 1995, p. 13.
8. The table has been compiled from the following sources (a) T.H. Lewin, The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the Dwellers Therein, with Comparative Vocabularies of the Hill Dialects, Calcutta, Bengal Printing Company Ltd., 1869; (b) G.A. Grierson, Linguistic Survey of India: Bengal (Lower Provinces), Calcutta, 1898; (c) Herbert Risley, Tribes and Castes of Bengal: Ethnographic Glossary, Vol. 1, Calcutta, 1891; (d) W.W. Hunter, A Statistical Account of Bengal. Vol. 6. CHT, Chittagong, Noakhali, Tipperah, Hill Tipperah, London, 1876; (e) E.T. Dalton, Tribal History of Eastern India, Calcutta, 1872; (f) R.H.S. Hutchinson, Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers, CHT, Allahabad, 1909; (g) Robert Shafer, Classification of the Sino-Tibetan Languages, Word, No. 19, 1955; (h) Maloney, op.cit; (i) Lucien Bernot, Ethnic Groups of CHT, in Pierre Bessaiget ed. Social Research in East Pakistan, Dhaka, 1964 (j) Shugata Chakma, Parbattya Chattagramer Upajati O Sanskriti (The tribes and culture of CHT), Rangamati, 1993; (k) Abdus Sattar, In the Sylvan Shadows, Dhaka, 1983; (l) Major Playfair, The Garos, London, 1909; (m) Subhash Jengcham, Bangladesher Garo Shomprodae (The Garo community of Bangladesh), Dhaka, 1994; (n) P.R.T. Gurdon, The Khasis, Delhi, 1975; (o) Qureshi, op.cit; (p) Father Stephen G. Gomes, The Paharias, Dhaka, 1988; (q) Mostafa Mojid, Patuakhalir Rakhaine Upajati (The Rakhaine tribes of Patuakhali), Dhaka, 1992.
9. The Guardian, 6.3.1984.
10. Jamiluddin Ahmad, ed. Speeches and writings of Mr Jinnah, Vol. 2. Lahore, 1964, p.490.
11. Safiqul Islam, Failure in State-Building: The Case of Pakistan, Asian Profile, 1984, p. 585.
12. Anisuzzaman, Creativity, Reality and Identity, Dhaka, ICBS, 1993, p.107.
13. Bangladesh Documents, Ministry of External Affairs, Govt. of India, New Delhi, 1971, p.83.
14. The Constitution of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh. Govt. of Bangladesh, 1972, p. 5.
15. Parliament Debates, Govt. of Bangladesh, 1972 p. 452.
16. Ibid, p. 461.
17. Constitution of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh (as amended up to 30 April 1996), Govt. of Bangladesh, 1996, p. 16.
18. Constitution of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh, Govt. of Bangladesh, 1994, p. 6.
19. These were to the author in a personal interview on 9.3.2000
20. These interviews were taken in April 2000, and the students belong to the Garo, Saontal, Hajong, Chakma, Marma, Tanchangya, Tripura communities.
21. Earth Touch, SEHD, Dhaka, Oct. 1999.
22. Anthropology of Macro and Micro Development in CHT: A Critical Review, Ahmed F.H. Choudhury & Farid uddin Ahamed. Paper presented in a national seminar on "Tribal Culture and Development" organised by the Institute of Applied Anthropology, Dhaka, from 14-16 April, 2000.
23. Bangla Bazar, 5.12.1999.
24. Fariduddin Ahamed, Ethnic and Cultural Identity, Paper presented at a workshop on Chittagong Hill Tracts, organised by BRAC, in Dhaka from October 19-23, 1999.
25. Proshanta Tripura, Bhasha, Horof O Jatiyota: Tripura Jonogoshtr Obhiggota (Language, alphabets and nationality: The experience of the Tripura community), Prothom Alo, 21.2.2000

Abbreviated excerpt from an essay originally published in "Fighting Words: Language Policy and Ethnic Relations in Asia", Michael E. Brown and Sumit Ganguly ed., MIT Press, 2003.

Matribhasha

Ilira Dewan

Let me begin with a short story. Putul Chakma and her aunt are sitting together at a table in the evening to study under the light of a hurricane. Putul is a first grade student and her aunt studies in college. All of sudden Putul asks for her books from her aunt. Her aunt asks her how many books she wants. One? No. Two? No. Then how many? In reply Putul says “bekguli” [Chakma word, meaning “all of them”]. Like “bekguli” there are various words of everyday usage that adivasi children find difficult to deal with when they first start going to school. There, they have to memorize Bangla words and sentences in full. When lessons are being taught children imitate the teacher aloud in class. Their primary education is handcuffed in this way solely in Bangla. The words that this child has learned at home spontaneously, does not come to any use. The child starts to feel helpless at school. She finds it difficult to even relay her most important thoughts to people in Bangla. She can’t ask any questions. But if she could speak in her mother tongue, i.e. in Chakma, it would have been possible for her to ask a lot of questions. As a result her education remains incomplete. She has no other option but to memorize everything.

The words that this child has learned at home, spontaneously, does not come to any use.

Language is a medium of expressing ones views. One’s mother language is the medium through which a child sows the seeds of intellect into her tender mind. But even though adivasi children speak in Bangla, they are inherently more comfortable in expressing themselves in their mother tongue. If children had the right to gain education and express themselves in their own language they would grow up to be more eager and self-assured.

It is absolutely essential to impart education in a child’s mother tongue in order to nurture her intelligence. It is every child’s fundamental right to get educated in her mother tongue. Unfortunately, most adivasi children drop out of primary school simply because of they are unable to adjust to the language. The education department along with the government must come forward to bridge this language barrier and ensure education for all adivasi children. Apart from appointing local teachers in schools in areas that are adivasi-intensive, non-adivasi teachers should have to take orientation courses in the local language. The non-adivasi teachers should also be able to partake education in the local language to these tender children.

The government has unfortunately not taken any steps to preserve and develop the language of the minorities of this country. The tribal cultural institutes in the three hill districts, Cox’s Bazaar and Birishiri have been converted to ‘showcase’ organizations. Although there is some research in Rangamati, there is not much work going on elsewhere. These organizations only seem to have been preserved for embellishment purposes – for indigenous people to dance and sing on the parade grounds on the national Independence Day and to entertain the interest of foreign guests. We know about Dhaka University’s Department of Linguistics and the Institute of Modern Languages. I have not heard of any lessons being taught on languages of minorities in the Linguistics Department. On the other hand the Institute of Modern Languages is conducted in a completely business-oriented way. There are Bangla language lessons for foreigners and English, Japanese, Korean, French and various other foreign languages for Bangladeshis. I am not against learning any foreign languages. But my question is, why are we expressing so much eagerness to learn the language and culture of foreign countries when we have no interest in preserving and developing the languages and cultures of minority communities within our own country?

Bangladesh has earned international recognition for having fought for its mother language. But within the country many languages are disappearing because of lack of preservation and the hold of the dominant language, Bangla. Many of these languages don't have any alphabets but those that do need to be preserved on a very high priority. Alternative steps should be taken to also preserve those languages that don't have alphabets. At present there are some non-government organizations that are education adivasi children in their mother language. But they need government support to make them last and increase their reach. We are thinking of developing an international mother language institute, but we do not see any efforts to preserve the languages that are being lost in our own country. This is very sad and frustrating.

It needs to be investigated what steps have been taken to develop the quality of the education of minorities in all the education policies that have been adopted so far. Although it is mentioned in the District Council Act amended according to the CHT Accord, that primary education must be conducted in one's mother language, it has never been implemented.

The adivasis have a long history of struggle against the British. There is the Chakma Movement (1777-1787), which is known as the 'Carpas Movement'. The Chakma Queen Kalindi, during her entire reign actively struggled against the British (1844-1873). Besides, there was also the struggle of the Saotals in the Tebhaga Movement. Unfortunately, instead of including these positive stories about the adivasis, stories of what adivasis wear and eat are part of the academia, which produces a negative image of adivasis amongst the common people.

There is no alternative to teaching in one's mother language at the primary level. A child's intelligence can be nurtured fast and her confidence raised if she learns in her mother language. Poet Rabindranath Tagore has said, "The mother language must first be woven into our fabric, and then the English language learnt".

The adivasis of this country are still waiting for the weaving of their mother language..

Translated by Hana Shams Ahmed, Bengali original published in Prothom Alo, February 21st, 2009.

Languages Matter in Education

Mathura Bikash Tripura

'It is necessary to provide education to adivasi/ethnic minority people with a curriculum that allows learning in their own language at primary level.' (Unlocking the Potential - National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction, PRS, 2005)

Bangla is formally used in teaching process, no other languages are allowed to be used in the classes.

Let me start with the experience of my own life. I took more than seven years to understand the lessons of the textbooks as these were written in Bangla, the national language of Bangladesh. I used to memorize the lessons from grade one to seven without understanding any meaning of the lessons as other Indigenous children do. From the grade six I started my struggle of understanding Bangla, while I came out from my village to the district headquarters to go to high school. I could not differentiate between the local Chittagonian dialect and Bangla up to grade eight. At grade eight, we had a lesson of playing drama. Taking part at the drama I understood the use of actual Bangla and gradually started understanding the meanings of lessons.'

Article 28 of the Constitution, prohibits discrimination on the grounds of race, religion, and place of birth. There are more than 45 Indigenous nationalities in Bangladesh with major concentration in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. We have 11 linguistic groups in the Chittagong Tracts, which are officially recorded as Bawm, Chak, Chakma, Khyang, Khumi, Lusai, Marma, Mro, Pangkhua, Tanchangya and Tripura. There are also some microscopic ethnic groups in the CHTs like the Santals, the Assamese, the Nepalese and so on. For decades due to political instability, facilities of development of the area were limited; the area remained virtually isolated from the rest of the country and the inhabitants were deprived from the benefit of development. The historical CHT Accord of 1997 has opened up the opportunities for developmental initiatives in the area.

It is estimated that 55.5% of indigenous children in the 6-10 years age group in Bangladesh are not enrolled in school, which is well below national averages (ADB 2001). The drop out rate of ethnic minority children is also much higher than the estimated national rate. Because, most of the Indigenous children enter primary school not knowing any Bangla, or very little. One of the most difficult obstacles to educational access faced by the CHT Indigenous children is that of language diversity. The CHT children, especially those living in the most remote locations cannot speak or understand Bangla, yet, within the schools both the textbooks and the medium of instruction are in Bangla. As a result, their school performance is hampered in many ways: enrolment is reduced, attendance is irregular, the dropout rate is high, and achievement is extremely low. Under these conditions the natural mental growth and creativity of the children are also greatly constrained. (Durnnian, 2007)

Though the government agreed to mother tongue primary education in the 1997 Peace Accord (Article 33 b) and in the recent national education policy, it has made no efforts to implement such education in the CHT to date. Primary education is a transferred department to the Hill District Councils, under the relevant clauses of the CHT Accord (1997). But the councils are not able to implement mother tongue education without clear guidance and permission from the concerned ministry.

Bangla is formally used in teaching process, no other languages are allowed to be used in the classes. A recent study shown that some teachers rated about 15% informally use Indigenous

languages in teaching process to explain the lessons. Some 13% teachers use both languages to explain the contents of books to the students (Sikder and Tripura 2008). Others use fully Bangla for explaining the lessons. Among the respondent teachers, 81% believe that primary education in mother tongue of respective children has multidimensional affects to the education of children. 70% among them opined that they face difficulty to explain the contents of books to the students because of language barriers as most of the students do not understand Bangla (Sikder and Tripura 2008).

About 63% students among the respondents face difficulty in understanding the contents of books, and 72% students believe that the language of instruction and language and context of curriculum should be in their own mother tongue (Sikder and Tripura 2008).

The most recent progress in education sector in Bangladesh is the formulation of National Education Policy. This policy recognizes the rights of Indigenous children to learn in their own mother tongue up to the Primary level. The challenges for Indigenous children in accessing and completing a quality education in Bangladesh are- language barriers, limited access to education, irrelevant and poor quality and the discrepancy of the national system with the local contexts and conditions. These issues are also identified by the government studies especially by the study of MoPME in 2006, which produced a policy document under PEDPII entitling 'Primary Education Situational Analysis, Strategies and Action Plan for Mainstreaming Tribal Children' (MoPME, 2006).

Bangladesh has many positive policy documents, which support the quality inclusive education for the indigenous children. In order to achieve the goal to ensure education for all by 2015, there should be a positive effort to bring forward the issues of Indigenous Peoples. Mother tongue based Multilingual Education and other relevant efforts may enforce the achievement of the goals of PEDPII and PRSP, and eventually the goals of Millennium Declaration. There is no alternative of inclusive effort in the development of the nation. The nation should bring forward the issues of the Indigenous Peoples in every development efforts of the country. Indigenous children should be taught in their own language and within their own cultural environment. As the Government of Bangladesh is committed to 'make primary education compulsory and available free to all' (Article 28, UNCRC).

Abbreviated from paper presented in February 2009 at UNESCO Headquarters, Paris.

Indigenous Language Maintenance

Arshi Dewan Roy

When representing the people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region, both Western and Bengali people have consistently stressed the connotations of primitiveness and the language is perceived to be evidence of that primitivity. Some indigenous people themselves started to believe these dominant discourses and they do not recognize the need for language preservation. I am discussing here the language attrition of my native Chakma language. Even though the language is still spoken, it may become threatened because it is not taught in schools and it is undergoing tremendous transformation. Language shift to the dominant language is occurring since many of the original Chakma words are being replaced by Bengali words.

The middle class, conscious of status, speaks Bengali and disassociates from indigenous roots.

Speaking the Chakma language enables a 'search for a collective' identity and gives a sense of belonging among our people. This language enables us to give names to relations among kin, to roles and responsibilities among family members, and to ties with the broader clan group. There are no English or Bengali words for these specific relationships because the social and family life is different. If the language is destroyed, there will be a breakdown of these relationships, culture, and the indigenous way of life. Keeping the language alive is a matter of survival because language embodies our worldviews and how we define ourselves. There is a sense of urgency on my part to hold on to my indigenous language because of my own struggles to maintain the language.

I have observed that many indigenous families, in Canada and Bangladesh, abandon their traditional way of life in order to integrate in the larger society by moving to urban areas and becoming heavily influenced by Bengali language and culture. The middle class, conscious of social status, speaks Bengali and disassociates themselves from their indigenous roots. Children are also discouraged to speak their language in order to pursue higher education. Some of the changes in the languages have come about both due to changes in occupational patterns, social interaction with non-indigenous people and the influences of the national and international media. The skills required for reading and writing have practically disappeared since few people know how to use the ancient scripts and there is no support from the government for indigenous people to initiate their own educational system. Another problem is the curriculum of the government schools, where the medium of instruction is Bengali exclusively in registered and most non-registered schools.

There are two alternatives for the indigenous students: to assimilate themselves to the Bengali mainstream or feel alienated by it. This alienation from Bengali society is not a good option for their survival since it will not improve their social status or education level. The feeling of being excluded from the mainstream society is inevitable because indigenous people are a small minority who are often discriminated in schools. The indigenous minority speakers often accept the subjugation of the majority, and language shifts often occur under these stressful socio-economic circumstances, where there is no realistic option but to give in.

There needs to be a self-conscious effort toward reconstruction of indigenous identity by mobilizing socially, culturally, economically, and politically to overcome their exclusion and marginalization (Hall, Stuart. "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities", 1997). Alternative education programs based on indigenous content may provide an opportunity to review existing traditional

knowledge and pass it on to others in contemporary context. Therefore, the notions of 'emergent cultures' allows for the possibility that individuals and groups make strategic choices within cultures and about culture (Clifford James, *Indigenous Articulation*, 2001). The people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts will need to generate and articulate their own ideas as to what kind of development they want. The most integral part of indigenous traditions, societal practices, and customs are the various indigenous languages and knowledge that contain those traditions and customs.

Threats to culture are also threats to unique perspectives on life and loss of knowledge. The rapid disappearance of remote cultures is part of a larger global trend since human societies have always interacted and changed. The case of the Chakma language is similar to the other indigenous groups around the world who are facing problems of exclusion and linguistic colonization. Governments try to eradicate these languages since retaining native languages can foster resistance to state authority.

Learning a mother language first does not hinder school performance, rather it enhances it (Romaine, 2000), but some parents still believe that they must abandon their traditional language in order to make their children successful. My research shows that indigenous language deterioration is happening more rapidly to those who are scattered in big cities away from their communities where there are a greater number of native speakers. Ultimately, the preservation of a language has as much to do with the number of people who can still speak it, and the resources available, as it does with the determination to promote it. In the efforts of 'reversing language shift', language and identity socialization of children must take place in home and community. Elders need to interact with younger groups (Fishman, Joshua A. *Can Threatened Languages Be Saved? Reversing Language Shift, Revisited*, 2001) and actively promote native language teaching by assisting the development of language nests and organize community-focused meetings or seminars about language revitalization issues.

Aggressive promotion of language, sometimes coupled with political activism, can ensure the survival of some native languages. The indigenous people themselves must actively promote the language at home, in their communities and schools. For an indigenous person in Canada, trying to reconnect with my roots, speaking my own Chakma language reinforces who I am, where I come from and enables me to connect with the people in my homeland.

Abbreviated from original essay.

The Quota Debate

Jagaran Chakma

It is beyond doubt that education is the instrument of development. In Bangladesh, there is a shortage of higher education institutions, and places in them, relative to the demand. As a result, there is a fierce competition for admission to these institutions. There are very few indigenous students who can survive the competition. These students are disadvantaged in terms of socio-economic circumstances relative to the mainstream population. If the current trend continues, then the indigenous students will fall further behind in terms of higher education. This is why there are quotas for indigenous students in higher education.

There is usually no indigenous representation in the bodies that decide on the quotas.

About 60 per cent of the farmland of the Paharis was lost during the construction of the Kaptai dam. As agriculture was the foundation of the Pahari economy, this turned the indigenous people into destitutes. They turned to education as the only means of survival. Despite the severe lack of transport or communication infrastructure in the Hills, conscious indigenous people sought out education. As a result, particularly the Chakmas are now relatively better educated.

The idea of the quotas is to assist the marginalized sections of the community so that they can be in equal standing with the advance populace. Quotas are prevalent not only in the third world but also in developed countries. The quota system is an effective step for equitable development. However, the number of places reserved for the Paharis in higher education is not sufficient. Altogether, 325 places are reserved for the indigenous peoples. And some of these reserved places are for Bengalis of the Hill region.

There is usually no indigenous representation in the bodies that decide on the quotas. In the past, when the Hill Tracts region was unstable, the army completely controlled quotas, selecting students who were to receive admission. Loyalty to the army, rather than merit, often decided selection. This had an adverse impact on the indigenous lives.

The small number of indigenous people who has received higher education has been contributing to their own community, and indeed to the whole nation. Those families who are relatively advanced economically have been benefiting from the quota. The result is that families of those who have achieved relatively high posts in government or non-government sectors have been strengthening their position in the society.

In recent times, students in higher education have been mostly coming from affluent families. This is because of the increased cost of education. There are many meritorious indigenous students whose parents cannot bear the cost of education in Dhaka or Chittagong. If the government is sincere about advancing higher education amongst the indigenous peoples, then two types of policies are needed. Firstly, the quotas should be means-tested for only the poor indigenous students. Secondly, a university should be established in the Hill region.

After coming to power in 1996, with the backdrop of the Peace Accord, the Awami League government initiated the process for a science and technology university in Rangamati. Various steps including the appropriation of land were completed. However, the subsequent BNP

government cancelled the project. Allegedly, some Pahari leaders didn't support the establishment of the university in the region. And yet, even educators sympathetic to the BNP-led alliance couldn't support the cancellation of Rangamati University of Science and Technology.

While the number of places reserved for the indigenous students in the higher institutions should increase, it is also important to establish a university in the Hill region. This will allow poorer students to gain higher education. It doesn't appear that there will be a shortage of funding for such a university. Surely the donors will assist, particularly if at least half the places in this university are reserved for indigenous students. It appears that the impediment here is sincerity on the government's side.

Section 19(1) of the Constitution asks the Republic to ensure equality of opportunity for all citizens. Section 28(3) prohibits discrimination in higher education on the basis of religion, ethnicity, gender or birth. But all the constitutional guarantees mean nothing if they are not followed.

Rights are enforced for those who struggle for them. And the struggle is dependent on awareness, which relies on education. For the indigenous people, there is no alternative to education. It is the moral responsibility of the mainstream populace of a country that its marginalized minorities are given an equal footing. That's why it's important to ensure, if necessary through special assistance, that indigenous peoples have access to higher education.

Translated by Jyoti Rahman; abbreviated from Bengali original published in Mukto Prokash, Massline Media Centre.

State of Education

Mong Shanoo Chowdhury

Bangladesh inherited the British educational set-up, which was designed to produce secretarial staffs for British India with no major change in content. The same system without any modification in its structure has been put to use in the CHT. Moreover, the delivery system of education in the CHT has been shaped to meet the mental and spiritual needs of the majority Bengali community-- therefore this does little for those whose ethnic aspirations and needs differ from Bengalis due to differences in ethnicity, culture, language, religion and customary practices. The textbooks published by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) for primary and secondary educations fail to evoke the imagination of the indigenous pupils.

The uneasy and insecure situation following armed clashes robbed the educational environment.

Educational administration in the CHT, despite the region's contrasting ethnicity, language and culture is the same as elsewhere in Bangladesh. The only exception is that the management of primary education in the CHT lies with the Hill District Councils (HDC). But the present HDCs are nominated ones-- they have no accountability to the people and generally lack the urge to assert themselves emphatically. For instance, MoCHTA in one of its circulars issued on 31.01.2006 instructed the HDCs to maintain 67:33 ratio for tribal and non-tribal respectively while appointing teachers in the primary schools. But, the HDCs in the three hill district capitulated to the local political pressure dominated by the Bengali people.

Education in the CHT is offered both at the government and non-government level. But the major burden of providing education at all levels lies with the non-government sector, which is about 90% according to one estimate. Educational institutions under Money Payment Order (MPO) can somehow pull through as they can count on the government contribution towards the teacher's salary. But those institutions outside MPO continue to languish for want of fund. Setting up of an educational institution in the CHT is hard to come by due to a government rule that requires title deeds for land on which the proposed educational institution will be established. Indigenous peoples customarily do not hold title deeds for hilly lands.

Differences Among Indigenous Communities

Chakmas are the leading ethnic group to have been able to gain access to education, with comparatively highest literacy rate (55%) among the indigenous communities, to be followed in inappropriate proportion in terms of percentage by ethnic Tripuras (30%) and Marmas (20%) respectively. The literacy rate of other ethnic groups is as follows: Tanchaungya-31%, and khyang-14%. It has been observed that economic hardships acted as stimulus, in case of Chakmas and Tripuras, to go for education as the provider of livelihood opportunities. When the Kaptai Hydro-electric project submerged hundreds of acres of land belonging to Chakmas in the heartland of Chakma Circle, livelihood uncertainty invaded their mind and they found no other option but to go for education as the only avenue which could help them to look for livelihood support.

The same is the case with the Tripuras. Unlike Chakmas and Marmas who are mostly flat land cultivators, Tripuras are predominantly jhumeas and mainly live on jhum cultivation and harvesting forest products. Jhum cultivation paid in the past when surrounding forest was dense and deep. But now jhuming, as it is practiced now, can no longer support a family for more than 2-3 months in a year.

A realization has dawned on them that education can be the only means that is capable of providing them with livelihood options.

Marma community, on the other, was an old, tradition bound society and landed rural gentry enjoying relative economic solvency, which crumbled in the face of advancing modern consumerism. Marma households, especially in the Mong Circle way back in the sixties of the twentieth century, used to hold enough plough land to support a decent life when monetized economy and modern consumerism were not conspicuous. This made them easy-going and they were given to pleasure. For the young members of the Marma family it was a kind of punishment to them to keep confined to the four walls of a class room. They could understand very little of what was being taught in the class as they could hardly follow Bengali. All these factors kept them away from education.

Chakmas, by now, are relatively educated and are employed in different services. This attracted the Marmas. But income from land cultivation is not enough to buy goods. They could not get a job either as they had little education. So they started selling their lands at cheap prices to meet consumption needs. In three decades, many Marmas were reduced to landless lot. Landless and with no education, Marmas, the second highest in population among the indigenous communities, have few avenues for improvement.

There are other ethnically small communities like Khumi, Khyang, Tanchangya, Mro etc who are lagging behind in literacy. This can be attributed to lack of general awareness and the remoteness of their habitation in geographically marginalized areas with poor infra-structure. Compared to the small size of population the literacy rate is comparatively high among the Chaks (51.2% and Bawms 64.29-Hassal '99). Christianity to which the Bawms subscribe contributed in creating a passion for education among them while the Chaks were pressed by economic urgency to opt for education.

It is believed that some 60,000 people are living in the government reserve forest. These people took shelter there after they lost their lands to the Bengali settlers. Once owners of land are now roaming landless in the forest with fear of further eviction constantly haunting them. There are thousands of schools going children with these people. In order for a school to be registered (for MPO and other governmental support) or to be taken over by the government, the land concerned must be registered. This is not possible in reserved forests, since according to the National Forest Policy, reserved forest land cannot be converted to non-forest use without the express consent of the GOB.

Temple Based Education

In the remote past indigenous children, particularly those who belonged to Marma community, used to have their education in the temples or monasteries, locally known as 'Kyang'. Historically, temples or monasteries developed to cater to the needs of spiritual accomplishment for the priests. But gradually these monasteries, turned into thriving seats of learning where learners, young and old, thronged together. Education imparted in these 'Kyangs' was quasi-religious in nature. It was also mandatory for the young boarders in the 'Kyangs' to participate in the farming activities to learn for them the art of cultivation. Some of the 'Kyangs' were also known for providing training on carpentry, herbal treatment, astrology etc over and above religious education. It is also known that these centers did not discriminate against admitting children belonging to communities other than Marma.

Some of the renowned religious schools were located at Chingmrong, Mahamuni, Rajasthali, Rwangchari Buddhist Temples. There were traces of 20 such religious schools all over the CHT up to 1951. But temple based education was gradually replaced by modern education. It is to be noted that the temple-based education did not cease to continue immediately after education in its modern

shape, prevalent in the then British India, was extended to CHT. Previously, the temple-based education focused on lessons that were religious in content or had religious undertone/bias. Such a situation prevailed until the advent of modern education with a promise of employment lit up the minds of the people.

Today the temple-based education centers in the traditional or conventional sense are, by and large, not found in the CHT. But in recent times we come across some educational centers, which flourished around monasteries. These centers do no longer impart religious education as they did in the past nor many of them are engaged any longer in teaching reading and writing skill in own mother tongue. Rather, these monastery-centric educational institutions are largely and basically engaged in giving mainstream education.

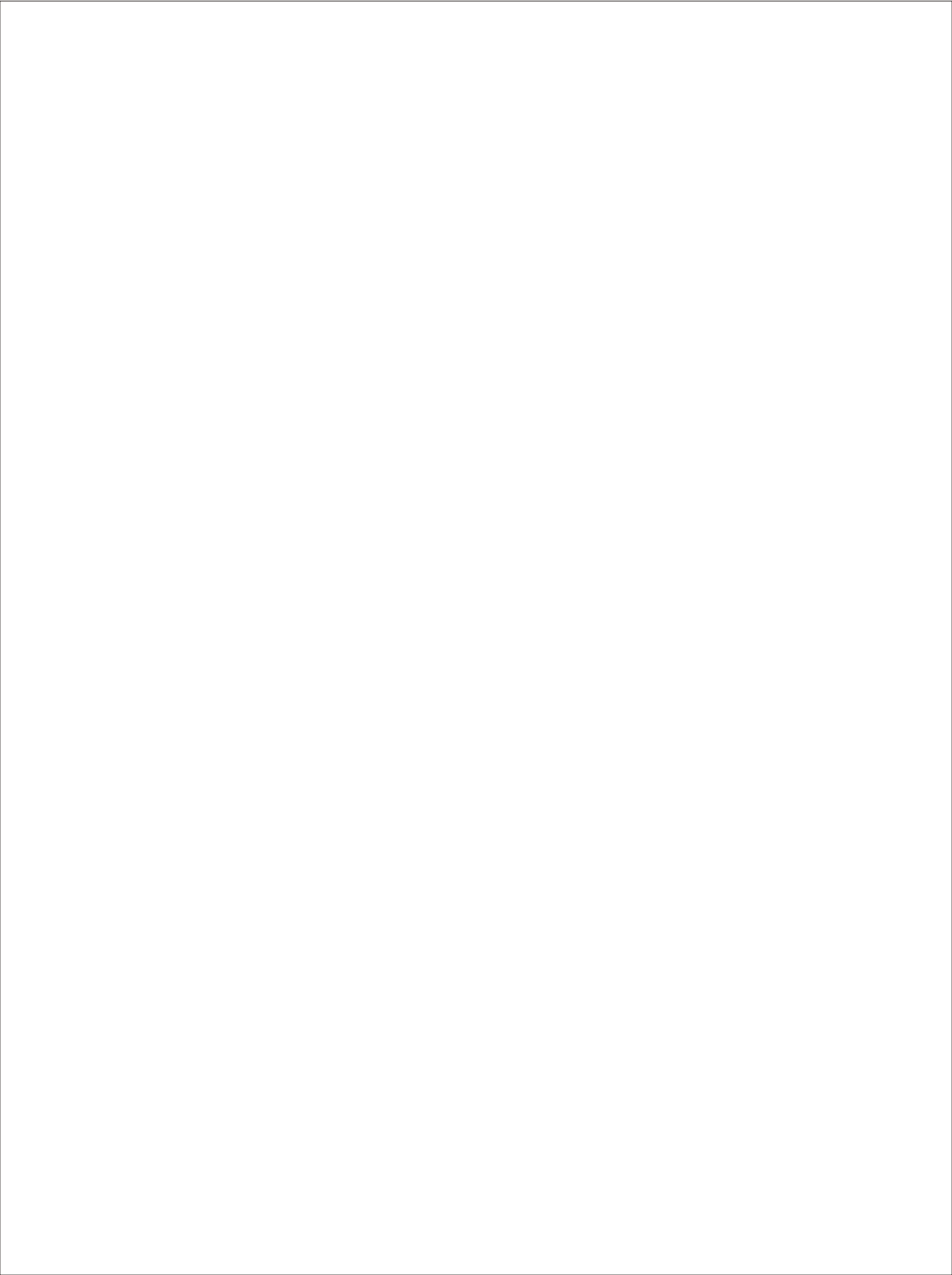
Conclusion

It is a hundred years since Rangamati Boarding School started functioning, But the progress in education was pulled up during the period from 1970 till 1997 due to fluid political situation. The uneasy and insecure situation following the armed clashes between the guerillas and the security forces robbed the educational institutions of the normal educational environment. Intermittent skirmishes between the government forces and the guerillas sent more than 60 thousand indigenous peoples across the border as refugees. Children belonging to more than ninety thousand indigenous families who took refuge in the reserved forest were deprived from the access to education. In addition, rural schools in the hills, due to a number of constraints, naturally failed to furnish quality education to the young learners who also do not have the opportunity to get exposed to the opportunity to gain empirical knowledge to enrich their practical understanding.

It is not uncommon to find many heads of families in the CHT around 45 years of age to be capable of reading and writing, quite number of them completed secondary course, a few of them even passed the S.S.C examination. Most among them, especially in the remote areas, are extremely poor with little skill to bank on for enhanced family earnings. Education has failed to serve its purpose with these people. Around 73% of them are landless having no cultivable lands of their own.

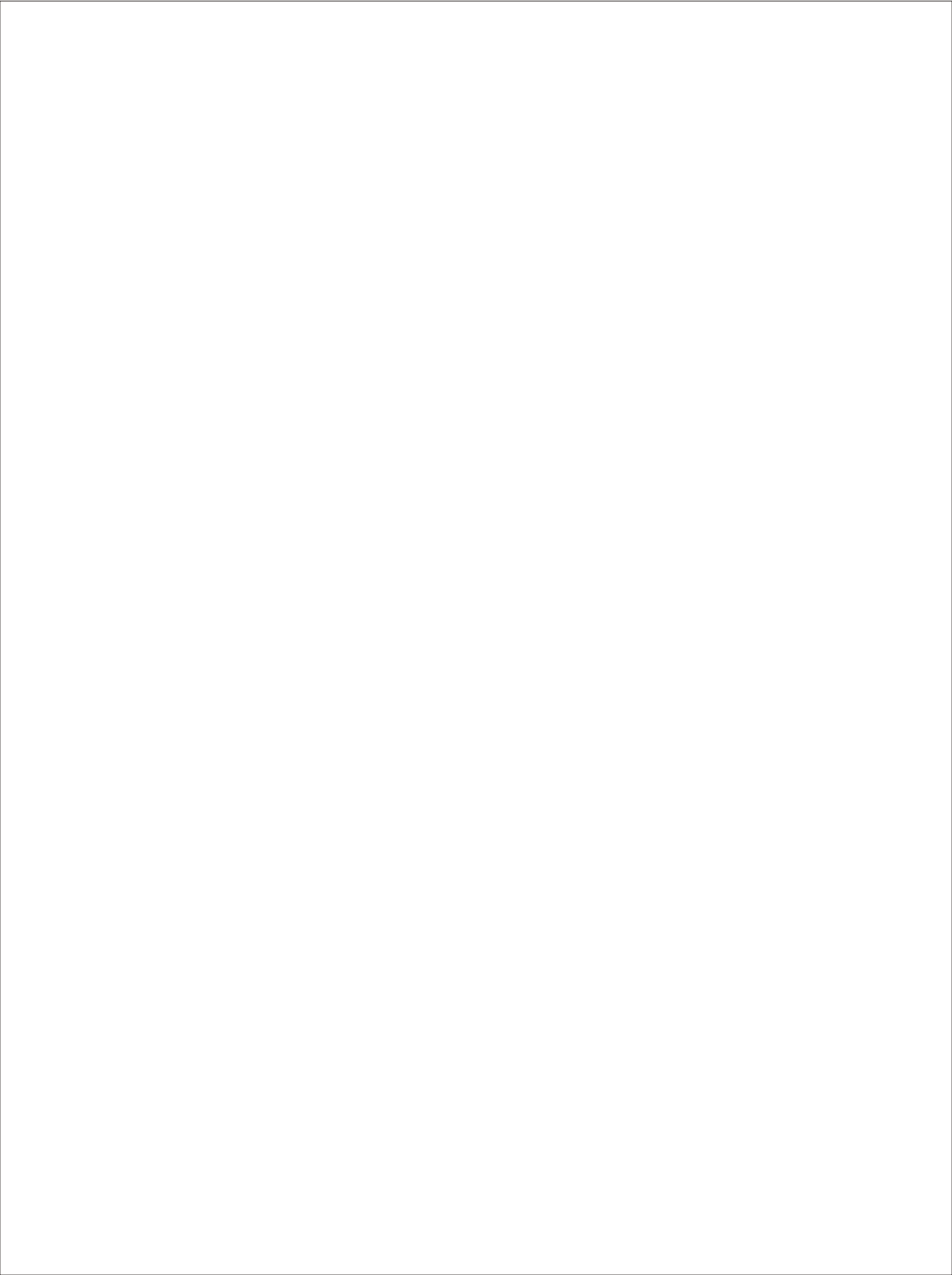
It is not only literacy, but the competency of education that has to be delivered in the CHT if this region, unique in its mountainous terrain and ethnic diversity, is to be pushed through sustainable development. There has been much written about peace, stability, equal rights but very little about education, a vitally indispensable component for harmonious development. The indigenous ethnic minorities in the CHT want their children to be properly educated, to find their rightful position in the mainstream society. An educational policy with a secular vision can guide the nation to that goal.

Abbreviated from "Present state of Education in CHT", Centre for Indigenous Peoples' Development, 2008.



Invisibility, Violence and Erotic Fantasies





Women Invisible in CHT Accord

Chanchana Chakma

Given that the constitution does not acknowledge indigenous populations, the exploitation, oppression, neglect and deprivation from basic human rights is a lot deeper and more widespread on indigenous women in comparison to Bengali women. For decades Jumma women have been subjected to tribal rules and regulations, neglect and subjugation, and as in every patriarchal society, Jumma women have also been at the receiving end of various discrepancies. In spite of women being held in relatively higher esteem in Jumma societies, and despite having social security and playing a proactive role in the economy, women's equality, equity, political rights and empowerment in several other areas are still minimal.

When the Jumma self-government campaign began, hundreds of women were subjected to sexual violence.

What is of most concern is that the consequence of no state recognition of their existence in terms of their national and ethnic identity, they are also victims of oppression by mainstream Bengalis. A segment of aggressively nationalistic and fundamentalist Bengali ruling elites make Jumma women fall prey to violence such as rape, murder, kidnapping, religious conversion, and other forms of terrorism. Violence is usually executed by politically motivated settlers, security forces, a section of political and economic leaders, and government employees based in the CHT. They are aided, or at least shielded by state apparatus that exclude non-Bengalis.

Post-liberation in 1971, when the Jumma self-government campaign began, hundreds of women were subjected to sexual violence and kidnapping. Allegedly, the rape of approximately 500 women were either conducted by, or supported by the ruling class between 1985-95. What is aggravating the oppression of Jumma women is the failure to implement the CHT Peace Accord. Post-Accord, it has been alleged that between 1998 and 2008, approximately 20 Jumma women have been raped. In 2009, there were more incidents of rape, sexual harassment and murder of Jumma women. It should also be mentioned here that over the past 12 years, there have been 9 organised attacks by Bengali settlers to occupy Jumma-inhabited lands. Hundreds of innocent lost were murdered, injured and uprooted from their homes during these attacks. On January 19, 2009, a Bengali police officer allegedly raped a 13 year old Jumma girl.

A combined force of a conservative society that hosts undemocratic and racist attitudes, and a state-conducted neglect and oppression, is paralyzing the Jumma women's empowerment. A people, who are deprived of rights and systematically oppressed cannot have liberated and respected women. For this reason, the ethnic oppression dispatched by the Bangladeshi ruling class and fundamentally racist segments are the biggest obstructions to Jumma women's claim over rights and social progress.

The Peace Accord created a premise for democratic rule in the CHT to be established, as well as enabling permanent inhabitants to establish self-governance and the eradication of the historical discrepancy, neglect and oppression of the people. As it stands, not only will the empowerment process of Jumma women remain at a standstill until the CHT Peace Accord is implemented, but their basic human and constitutional rights will also remain quarantined. Of course the rights of the Jumma women cannot be restricted to the boundaries of this accord. Instead, this accord can do the ground-work for widening the scope for establishing the progress of the broader Jumma society,

establishing rights of Jumma women, and eventually leading towards their overall emancipation. In order to put a halt to ethnic oppression and establishing rights of Jumma women, it is crucial to implement the peace accord.

Generally, the political participation of Jumma women is not widespread. Even after the Peace Accord, there has been to substantial progress in the political participation of indigenous women. In spite of having reserved seats for women in regional political institutions, there really has not been a fulfillment of the spots. This is primarily because there haven't been elections in the tri-district parisads. There have been no elections after the 1992 tenure expired. Therefore, Jumma women have inevitably been excluded has representatives in these institutions.

Although there are reserved seats for women in the National Parliament, even after signing the Peace Accord, no seats have been reserved specifically for Jumma women. Till date, Jumma women have not had the opportunity to serve as representatives in any of the seats reserved for women. On February 28, 2002, Parbottyo Chattyagram Mahila Samiti appealed to the Prime Minister to reserve seats for one representative for each of the three hill districts. To push this further, a press conference was also organized on 24 March, 2002, at the National Press Club in Dhaka. That demand is yet to be fulfilled.

Women's participation in local government was enabled by passing a law that pressed for reserved seats. However, this law did not make special provision for indigenous women, so indigenous women continue to remain underrepresented on a Union Parisad level. Even though the National Women's Development Policy was amended twice after the CHT Accord of 1997, the Accord and the indigenous women's unique situation was not brought under its consideration. The rights of the indigenous pahari women were not separately considered in the policy although indigenous women are the most marginalized section of the country's society.

The indigenous communities have unique characteristics in their social, cultural, ethnic, economic, political, land and wealth management aspects, which are far different from the majority community. Indigenous pahari women, on the one hand, are casualties of communalism and ethnic persecution and on the other hand are victims of their own patriarchal social system. That is why indigenous women are twice as vulnerable to harassment and persecution as the country's majority women community. Unfortunately the situation of these twice as vulnerable indigenous women has been completely disregarded in the country's national women's development policy.

In this situation I want to place a few demands to the government and civil society to take the necessary, effective steps on behalf of CHT's Jumma women; Immediately declare a roadmap for implementation of CHT Accord and take effective steps to implement it; Immediately give indigenous people constitutional recognition; Immediately take steps to have reserved seats for Jumma women in the national parliament and local government; Take steps so that no more Jumma women are murdered, raped, kidnapped or become victims of sexual harassment.

Translated by Hana Shams Ahmed & Farah Mehreen Ahmad; abbreviated from original essay.

Insecurity of Indigenous Women

Sadeka Halim

In the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region in southeastern Bangladesh, the situation of violation of human rights of women was especially bad during the internal conflict (1973-1997) that saw government security forces fighting a guerilla army composed of indigenous people from the CHT. In some respects, it could be regarded as an “ethnic” conflict, since the combatants were generally divided along ethnic lines, with the government forces being composed of ethnic Bengalis, while the guerillas were of indigenous or “Pahari” origin. This period coincided with heavy militarisation of the area, population transfer of landless Bengali peasants into the region, and ethnic riots putting indigenous people against Bengali settlers. Since women (and especially women from indigenous groups) constituted the most vulnerable section of the population, they suffered in ways that did not affect the men; including rape, molestation and sexual harassment.

In such situations, these people do not wish to cooperate in a criminal case against a fellow Bengali.

In situations of conflict and oppression, it is usually women who bear the worst impacts. The CHT was no exception to this. The indigenous women suffered, both as women, and as members of a minority group. Many of these incidents have been documented by international human rights organizations, including Amnesty International. Quite apart from this, CHT women are also subjected to other incidents of violation of their rights, including domestic violence, sexual and verbal harassment by Bengali settlers and security personnel, displacement by various “development” programmes, etc.

The 1997 Accord termed as gendered

The accord has been termed as a gendered agreement (Mohsin, 2003:53). Many hill women worked and risked their lives as informants, and got molested, abused and raped by the military. Despite adverse situation the hill women played very important role in the struggle during that period. The women extended their active support and cooperation especially in terms of disseminating information and carrying letters and other secret documents for the fighters. However these women’s contribution remained invisible. In the interim RC of the CHT, only 3 out of 22 members are women and their role in decision-making is yet not felt strongly. While in the case of the interim hill district councils, not one of the 6 members of each district council is a woman, barring the chairperson of the Bandarban Hill District Council. (Halim, 2002:138)

Many women resisted various oppressive state and military actions, a case in point being Kalpana Chakma, organizing secretary of the Hill Women’s Federation (HWF), which had been demanding the right to self-determination for the hill people under the rubric of Jumma nationalism. She was abducted on 12 June, 1996 from her home and was never heard of again. However, the Accord makes no reference to the human rights violations committed in the CHT.

Various roles played by indigenous women during the insurgency period were neither nationally rewarded nor received any formal recognition from their own communities; There is no provision for providing compensation to the affected women of violence nor is there any mention of rehabilitation or counseling of the raped women. Furthermore, Bangladesh is a signatory to the International Criminal Court (ICC) convention and declares rape as a crime against humanity. Moreover, the Government of Bangladesh has officially demanded an apology from Pakistan for the human rights

violations, and particularly for rape committed against Bengali women by the Pakistani military during the independence war of 1971 (Mohsin, 2003:55). Thus the absence of provisions on this aspect of human rights seems to be at odds with the Government of Bangladesh's international face on human rights.

Indigenous women's role in the insurgency remains invisible. As mentioned by one social worker from CHT, In the struggle Hill women had commendable important roles and sacrificed lots for the country as well for the Jumma nation; but their contribution has not been judged yet; and while surrendering the arms only two women were enlisted in the whole list of surrendering troops. At least the number should have been 50. The leadership not only left them out from the list but also left out those women who had played different roles in the movement. (Bijoy Ketan Chakma, Social Worker, Rangamati) A woman leader also gives similar comments:

It is an endless story if we talk about the contribution, life struggle of those women who fell prey to inhuman torture, rape; whose male members of the families were killed during the struggle and are still remaining under the custody of the Bangladesh Army. (Umey Mong, Woman Leader)

Although many political leaders informally acknowledged the Hill women's important role during the insurgency; they never formally recognized this role. Thus the masculinist perception in terms of recognizing indigenous women's role is further reflected to a certain extent in the composition of the interim RC as mentioned earlier.

Militarisation and presence of Bengali settlers

The armed insurgency in the Hill Districts in the early 70s affected indigenous women in various ways. The hostile environment affected their daily activities like collecting fuel, fodder, looking after children etc. The conflict situation caused many people/women, men and children to flee to India and large numbers to be displaced internally. Many indigenous families became separated and women headed many households. For these women who were left without male members the public and private dichotomy did not exist. These women had to take the responsibilities of the public sphere, which was traditionally considered a man's sphere that was off limits to women. These women were in a constant struggle, juggling between the household responsibilities and protecting themselves from the ongoing war. Those indigenous girls who were in schools had to drop a year or two. Village schools were especially affected as the military used many schoolhouses as camps (Guhathakurta, 2000).

It has been reported that during the insurgency period many indigenous women of the CHT were raped (Guhathakurta, 2000; Malanes,2000; Mohsin, 2002;) As pointed out by Mohsin (2002), rape has been used as an instrument of war against the purity and authenticity of indigenous identity. Indigenous women were targeted because they were regarded as the biological bearers of their peoples and communities. Similar evidence has been reported in terms of violence committed against indigenous and minority women in Burma, where state-sanctioned violence is one of the most serious threats towards women's well being, especially in the indigenous peoples' areas. This violence is directed at the population at large, as with forced labour, forced relocation, and also directed specifically at women. Humiliation of and violence against women has been documented repeatedly as a tool used to terrorize communities (Stothard, 2000:29).

Militarization, which still continues in the CHT, in the name of keeping peace in the region, is resulting in much misery of innocent people, both men and women. Before the end of organized warfare in the CHT, many instances of rape of indigenous women by security personnel were widely reported, if discreetly. The cessation of hostilities may have decreased the risk of such sexual offences, but such risk has not been removed completely. In fact, the cessation of war has led to higher mobility of women, which, ironically enough, subjects them to risks of being raped or harassed by security

personnel. Although the 1997 Accord provides for the dismantling of military camps (except for some specified large garrisons), this provision is still be implemented in substance by the Government of Bangladesh. Therefore, large numbers of army and other security personnel are still present in the rural areas of the CHT, where indigenous women move about to collect water, fuel and fodder. Thus, the risks of rape and sexual harassment of indigenous women are still substantial.

Furthermore, state-sponsored Bengali in-migration (1979-1984) not only led to the displacement of the hill people in the CHT but also created security problems for them, for both the men and the women. For instance, hill women from the remote areas used to visit bazar areas that are dominated by Bengali people. Some of the interviewed women mentioned that in most cases of market transactions they are deprived of the actual price of the farm produce by unscrupulous Bengali traders and middlemen. On many occasions, not only were women given unfairly low prices by the Bengali shop owners (all male), but also ridiculed by them (Halim, 2002). As in the case of security forces, instances of rape and violence against indigenous women by the state-sponsored Bengali settlers also took place during the insurgency period. However, such instances seem to have risen in the post-conflict period. This may be because the settlers, who were mostly confined in military-protected "cluster villages" before are now far more mobile because of the end of the guerilla war. Despite the CHT Accord that was signed in 1997, indigenous women in the CHT continue to be sexually and verbally harassed and assaulted by security personnel and Bengali settlers. In general, survivors of sexual violence face not only the physical impact of violence, but are also psychologically traumatized. In the rare cases where the affected women do have courage to speak out and file complaints against military/para-military/police/para-police perpetrators, women may encounter further threats. More often, however, the perpetrators face no consequences and those who report the crimes are further harassed.

It has been reported that because of the existence of 'Operation Uttoron' - a euphemism by the military for regarding the CHT as if it were a war zone - de facto military administration continues in the CHT, and indigenous people are prevented from seeking justice where security personnel are perpetrating such crimes against indigenous women. It is argued that conflict and militarization strengthens the masculinised ethos. The research finding reveals that in the post-accord period, CHT society has become more violent and criminalized. The adverse impact is reflected in the use of drugs and arms. Indigenous women reported that they not only feel insecure by the Bengali settlers but insecure from their own men as well (Mohsin, 2002).

Consequences of sexual violence

It could be asserted that in the militarised situation, hill women constitute the most vulnerable section of the CHT population. The case studies show that all the cases of human rights abuse share some things in common. In almost all the cases, the violence and sufferings of the violated women had to be carried through in the period after the signing of the CHT Accord of 1997, signed by the Government of Bangladesh and the PCJSS. The Hill people hoped that the peace accord would bring an end to all forms of human rights violation in the region, but that was not to happen. The form of human rights violation has changed, but its occurrence still continues, especially against women.

The case studies in general, reveal that all these women who encountered rape, not only suffered physical injuries but also social stigma. In cases where women were brave enough to go through medical treatment with assistance from HWF and others and file complaints against the accused, a small amount of money is occasionally given to the family as happened with a Tanchangya woman in Khagrachari district to stop processing the case further. More often it is seen that the perpetrators face no consequences and those who report the crimes are often harassed.

While on the subject of the raped women's role in the incident and the question of stigma attached to victims of rape, especially those victimized by security personnel and such "outsiders", it is important to bear in mind that there are both similarities and differences between how the matter is looked at in the plains and in the CHT. As regards Bengali society within the CHT and urban-dwelling hill people, the differences between the CHT and the plains regions are perhaps very little, if any. However, among rural hill society, although there are social pressures on rape victims, the pressure is much less severe. At least, where marriage opportunities of the rape victims is concerned, it is not usually as difficult as in the plains. For example, one of the Tripura women who was raped in Matiranga, in Khagrachari district and had remained unmarried for some time is now reported to have got married. (Source: Senior Tripura Woman Leader wishing to remain anonymous). This does not necessarily suggest that rape victims among the hill suffer any the less psychologically, but that hill society, at least in the rural areas, is much more humanitarian and has a richer heritage of social rehabilitative mechanisms that seem to have died away, or are less pronounced, in other places.

When the aforesaid women sought justice, the local legal bodies and others concerned do not generally provide any assistance to these women except HWF. It could be argued that it is these women, not the perpetrators of violence, who are suffering. The socio-psychological impact of torture, molestation, abuse and rape on the Hill women cannot be ignored. It is very difficult to make generalizations about the socio-psychological impact of various crimes committed against women. The effects and trauma are not always immediately visible, and their long-term implications for the individual and society at large are difficult to calculate. The interaction with these affected women reveals that insecurity caused by attacks from Bengali settlers and the military is possibly creating mental trauma from which it will be difficult for the affected persons to ever fully recover.

Resistance

On 21 February 1975, the 'Parbatyo Chattagram Mohila Samity' (CHT Women Society) was formed. This was then part of the Central Committee of the JSS. During that period each village had a branch of this Mohila Samity, which was known as 'Mohila Panchayet'. The task of this Samity was basically to raise awareness among the women, provide ideas about the struggle, organize political schooling, inspire women on how to contribute in the struggle or provide psycho-moral support as women and so on.

Around 1977-78, a women's regiment of the JSS was formed. About 150 women were given arms training who spontaneously joined the struggle in the underground. However, in 1983, the regiment was disbanded following the civil war of the JSS and the combing operation ordered by the government. Most of those women remained in the underground, being wives of the party activists and the rest returned to their respective villages. Most of these women were educated. Later on, in the aftermath of Langadu massacre of 1989, when the HWF was formed, indigenous women started participating in the democratic movements alongside the Pahari Chhatra Parishad (Hill Students Council) and tried to highlight the issues concerning oppression of hill women.

Kalpna Chakma. Kalpna and her abduction resulted in a nation-wide movement and the national and international press brought the gender issue to the forefront of the struggle. A protest strike was organized by the joint coalition of the Pahari Gono Parishad (PGP), Pahari Chhatra Parishad (PCP) and HWF in the Hill Tracts. This also received the sympathy and support from the left, human rights and women's rights activists located in the capital city.

At present, the Hill Women's Federation (HWF) is one of the lead organizations that works alongside the other CHT groups for "self determination" and sees the women of the CHT as a distinct constituency in their struggle for "self determination." (Guhathakurta, 2000). Despite their attempts

to get justice for the affected women; HWF are yet to be successful to high degree. Moreover, in none of the social movements in the CHT have indigenous women's presence been taken seriously for social and political change. (Halim, 2000; Halim 2003 b)

Is justice a far cry for the Hill women?

It is also important to note that the CHT Regional Council, local administrative bodies, and civil society did not, or could not, take any effective measures to redress the violence that is being committed against the hill women by security personnel and Bengali settlers. In fact, there was no real initiative for rehabilitation or justice in the case of the women who were massively oppressed and raped by soldiers and other security personnel. As put by Umey Mong, a woman leader:

The basic fact is that the issue was not given due emphasis starting from the party (JSS) and civil society as well as the whole community. What I feel is that the civil society had more responsibilities than the party to extend cooperation and support towards these helpless women socially, psychologically and economically. The civil society did not take any step towards this end. Rather, Mohila Samity provided them with psychological and other social supports and cooperation.

Civil society in the CHT expressed their inability to intervene during the insurgency period, and particularly in the eighties, when such incidences were taking place at an alarming level. According to human rights and political activists of the CHT, the situation then was so oppressive that no one dared share their political opinion or criticize the security forces for fear of reprisals. However, it is ironic that even after the peace accord was signed, and the conflict between the hill guerillas and the security forces was brought to an end, the effort given by human rights and political activists to resist these atrocities against the Hill women and to bring the perpetrators to justice seems to be quite inadequate. As in the words of NGO and Social activists:

We are fully aware of the cases of oppression, torture and rape of Hill women by the Bangladesh army and the Bengali settlers. We could not collect information; however, we always try to keep ourselves informed about the incidences. (Santimoy Chakma and Manas Kumar Chakma, Rangamati)

Shantu Larma sees the violence committed against the Hill women during insurgency, particularly rape, as an instrument of counterinsurgency. He feels that the RC cannot take any effective measures to prevent such occurrences as the RC itself is struggling to exercise its authority in an effective manner as an autonomous council of the entire CHT region. In terms of dealing with the rape and other incidences of human rights violation committed against women, he emphasized on the need to exercise "political autonomy" by all the concerned CHT bodies. According to Larma, all the institutions are dominated by Bengalis, including police, BDR, Bangladesh Army and other law enforcing agencies. He further pointed out that those responsible for conducting inquiries when crimes against women are committed are in most case Bengalis, Even most of the doctors who write reports in hospitals, and even the lawyers concerned, are usually Bengalis. In such situations, these people do not wish to cooperate in a criminal case against a fellow Bengali. Even in the few cases when indigenous lawyers tried to help the affected women, they could not do much, due to what he said was the "hegemonic" influence of the Bengalis. It is for the aforesaid reasons that the Kalpana Chakma case remains unresolved, Larma added.

It is not difficult to see that the RC has its limitations in exercising its authority. It does not have any direct authority – as empowered by law and necessary regulations and memoranda – do anything to bring the offenders of the concerned crimes to justice. Furthermore, the peace accord has made no provisions for the proper rehabilitation of the rape victims. Therefore, one cannot be very optimistic of the role of the Regional Council and other local institutions in terms of upholding the status of indigenous women as regards their physical safety and security in the very near future.

Among the political groups, it seems that the JSS has been unable to effectively address the issue of violence and rape against the indigenous women as pointed out by Umei Mong and some female / male activists of the CHT. The UPDF has formally recorded its stand on equality between men and women as one of its major objectives. It too has taken some steps to try to file cases against perpetrators of violence against women, but it too has been unable to prevent violence against indigenous women, including rape. Occasionally, some assistance has been rendered by JSS and UPDF to victims of violence against women, but that is not institutional support. Moreover, CHT society sees it as the issue of women themselves, as pointed out by Bijoy Ketan Chakma. If the women could come forward, men would have supported them. However, earlier it has been pointed that the Hill women face socio-economic and political barriers to participate in any movements. This is well reflected in the writings of Kalpana Chakma as she depicts the life of indigenous women in CHT,

“On the one hand (the woman faces) the stream roller of rape, torture, sexual harassment, humiliation and helplessness inflicted by the military and Bengalis, and on the other hand, she faces the curse of social and sexual discrimination,” (cited in Guhathakurta, 2001:91).

Kalpana Chakma believed that both indigenous men and women should come forward to challenge the social, religious and political structures in order to emancipate the indigenous women. Indigenous women, unlike their counterparts in the rural areas of the plains, have the freedom to be mobile. However, this freedom should certainly not be confused with genuine autonomy. Cultural values such as old age, sex and relative importance attached to the productive roles of indigenous men and women determine their position in the family and within the community (Halim, 2002:95-105).

Further, as mentioned earlier, indigenous women are not politically represented in an adequate manner, and thus their demands to be able to exercise equal right remain largely unfulfilled. Further, as mentioned earlier, the representation of women in the RC and district councils remains very low. Larma mentioned in his interview that he is not in favour of increasing the number of reserved women seats in the RC. Rather, he felt that the emphasis should be on educating and sensitizing the male members in terms of women's issues. However, female activists are demanding an increase of seats in the RC and the district councils. Many are saying that more women should be encouraged to contest in the open seats where they have no restrictions. Similarly, many indigenous women feel that their representation among the traditional office of the headmen should also be higher.

Moreover, the hill women cited economic inabilities as a major cause behind the hill women not being in a position to politically mobilize any movements, or to participate in the democratic processes in a substantive manner. The customary laws and traditional values have guided the inheritance systems of the indigenous people.

Among the major obstacles preventing proper measures to address the human rights issues of women are under-representation of indigenous women in political bodies and local and regional councils, and the lack of funds necessary for mobilization drives. However, it would seem that the above factors themselves cannot explain the reluctance of large sections of the CHT political leaders and civil society to put matters on various forms of violence against indigenous women, especially rape, high on their agenda of action. Thus, the reasons behind such perspectives are most likely rooted in other causes. It is a matter of conjecture whether this is partly due to the insignificant number of indigenous women a leader in high political positions and the subconscious biases of the male-led political leadership through years or decades of conditioning under patriarchy. Perhaps one of the more problematic areas in this regard is the separation of the hill women's problem from the hill peoples' struggle to have autonomy, as pointed out by the JSS president Shantu Larma. Therefore, the above findings support the arguments provided by Brownmiller (1975), Mac Kinnon (1989) and

Pettman (1996) that peacetime violence is not treated as a collective problem as wartime violence is. Moreover, it is well to remember that patriarchal ideologies continue to dominate CHT society.

Conclusion: What is to be done?

It is clear from the discussion that the situation of indigenous women is complex. Indigenous women's situation is not going to improve until and unless initiatives are taken from the national level and by the indigenous institutions, civil society and through the programmes which are being developed acknowledging indigenous peoples socio, cultural and economic context.

On the other hand, the indigenous women's movement is still in its infancy. These organizations (HWF, Garo Indigenous Michik Association, and others) have long way to go and struggle against various odds including the patriarchal attitude of their own indigenous leaders to establish their rights. Gender equality does not imply that women want to become men. The struggle is to have the women's voice and aspirations to be heard. For several decades social conditioning and cultural values have formed the role, function, and position of women. Therefore, the gender equity struggle has to reconstruct the role, function, and position of women.

References

- Brownmiller, Susan.(1975), *Against our Will: Men, Women and rape*, New York: Fawcett Columbine. Enloe, Cynthia.(2000), *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives*,. University of California Press.
- Chakma, Susmita.(2001), "Inheritance & Customary Laws," Annex to Social Dimension Report, ADB, 13 February.
- Guhathakurta, Meghna.(2000), *Women's Survival and Resistance*, in Philip Gain (ed.), *The Chittagong Hill Tracts and nature at Risk*, Society for Environment and Human Development(SEHD), Dhaka.
- Halim, Sadeka.(2003 a), "Insecurity of Indigenous Women: A Case from Chittagong Hill Tracts," in *Ensure The Security of Indigenous Women, Solidarity*, Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples Forum.
- .(2003 b), *Gender specific Human Rights Violation In Bangladesh*, in *Role of NGO in Effective Implementation of PFA and CEDAW in Bangladesh*, NGO Coalition on Beijing Plus Five (NCBP), Women for Women, A Research and Study Group, Dhaka, Bangladesh.
- .(2002), *Human Rights and The Indigenous Women, A Case Study from CHT*, in *State of Human Rights in Bangladesh Women's Perspective*, Women for Women, A Research and Study Group, Dhaka, Bangladesh.
- .(2001), *Empowerment of Women: A Way Forward*, paper presented in a conference organized by Bangladesh Social and Economic Forum, Unnayan Parishad, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2001 Bangladesh.
- Human Rights in Bangladesh, 1999 Ain O Salish Kendro*, (ASK) Dhaka, 2000.
- Hansen, Lene.(2001). *Gender, Nation and rape, Bosnia and the Construction of Security*, in *International Feminist Journal of Politics*,3:1 April, 55-75, Routledge .
- MacKinnon, Catherine A.(1989), *Toward a Feminist theory of the State*, Cambridge, MA:Harvard university Press. Malanes, Maurice. (2000), *A Human Rights Situationer: Suffer The Women and Children in the Chittagong Hill Tracts*, in *The Chittagong Hill Tracts : The Road to a Lasting Peace*, Tebteba Foundation, Inc. Baguio City, Philippines. Mohsin, Amena.(2003), *The Chittagong Hill Tracts Bangladesh, On the Difficult Road to Peace*, International Peace Academy Occasional Series, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, London.
- .(2002), "Security of Indigenous women of Bangladesh, FOWSIA dialogue series (Forum on Women in Security and International Affairs) sponsored by Bangladesh Freedom Foundation. Moser, O.N., Caroline.(2001), *The Gendered Continuum of Violence and Conflict, An Operational Framework*, in Caroline O.N. Moser (eds.) *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors, Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence*, Kali for women, New Delhi. Pettma, Jan Jindy.(1996), *Worlding Women: A Feminist International Politics*, London:Routledge, .
- Roy, Devasish, Raja.(2000), *Salient Features of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord of 1997*,in *The Chittagong Hill Tracts: The Road to a Lasting Peace*, Tebtebba Foundation, Inc. Baguio City, Philippines.
- .(2003), *The Discordant Accord: Challenges to the post* accord peace process in the Chittagong Hill Tracts*, Bangladesh, paper presented at Kreddha;International Peace Council for States, People and Minorities & Centre UNESCO de Catalunya(May 8-14), Sitges/Barcelona. Stothard, Debbie.(2000), *Atrocities Against Indigenous Women in Burma*, in *Indigenous Affairs, International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs*, No.3-July, Copenhagen, Denmark,.
- Turshen, Meredith(2001), *The Political Economy of Rape An Analysis of Systematic Rape and Sexual Abuse of Women During Armed Conflict in Africa* in Caroline O.N. Moser (eds.) *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors, Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence*, Kali for women, New Delhi.

Abbreviated from "Denial of Rights and Justice: Indigenous women in Bangladesh", Haksar Memorial Vol. IV, Peace and Development, Center for Research in Rural and Industrial Development, Chandigarh, India, 2007.

Women in Hill Society

Ilira Dewan

CHT Mahila Samiti was organised to create not only radical cadres, but also to create radical family structure.

Since the signing of the 1997 Peace Accord, it has become easier to study the Hill region. While opinions differ on the place of Pahari women in the Hill Tracts, the sociopolitical and socioeconomic contributions of and impediments faced by them have not been discussed much. This piece covers various facets, including women's literacy and social contributions, of the role and place of women in the Hill society since the Raj days.

Modern education commenced in the Chittagong Hill Tracts in the mid-19th century. The British established a boarding school, the first in the region, in 1863 in Chandraghona, where Burmese, Chakma, English and Bangla were taught. The school was moved to Rangamati in 1869, and came to be known as Rangamati Government Boarding School. It became a secondary school in 1873, and higher secondary in 1891. Through this school, modern education gradually gathered pace in the region, particularly among the Chakma.

The Chakma had recognised the benefit of female literacy by the early 20th century. At that time, 44 Chakma women are known to have been able to read Chakma and Bangla. Four of them were literate in both. For example, Sarjubala and Shoroshibala, daughters of one Indrajoy Dewan, are recorded to have passed with merit lower and higher primary exams (source: Chakma jati, Satish Chandra Ghosh, 1909). That is, female literacy in the region started at the beginning of the 20th century. However, at the beginning of the 21st century, the picture is much bleaker. The female literacy rate in the CHT is only 18.34%, much lower than the national average.

We have seen that as civilisations evolve, societies change, but the place of women seldom change. The Pahari social systems of the region are no exception to traditional patriarchy and domination of women. Here too, society is viewed through male prism. A girl is raised not naturally but socially as a woman. In addition to child birth and rearing, Pahari women are involved in all aspects of production in the family. But they have no right to their children. In fact, sometimes even the offerings to the homestead goddess are not shared with the female child because she would leave the family through marriage one day!

The most surprising thing here is that the material interest leads a mother to act in a masculine manner. That is, it is the notion of 'women are only mothers and wives who look after the household' that needs discrediting.

As mentioned above, Pahari women participate in all household production, inside and out of home. However, while women work just as hard as men in, say, the farm, the economic power of the family resides with the male. In the household work, women work for free, while in the labour market, their wage is lower. Without economic freedom, they have a minor role in family decision-making.

On the other hand, female presence outside of home is an age old Pahari tradition. As such, relative to neighbouring societies, Pahari women are relatively free to venture out — that is, the purdah system hasn't stifled them. And this has also made the Pahari mentality relatively liberal. As a result, rapes and sexual abuses are relatively rare in the Pahari society.

Pahari women are most marginalised as far as inheritance is concerned. In the Pahari society, males

have a monopoly on inheritance. Since the formal inheritance laws don't recognise any rights for women, whether they inherit any property depends solely on the discretion of their male relatives. That said, in the Bomang Circle, Marma women receive a third of the property, though Marma women of the Chakma and Mong circle are denied even this. Essentially, it is the customary inheritance laws that are the biggest impediment to female inheritance rights.

In addition to a lack of inheritance rights, Pahari women have no guardianship or parental rights over their children. In addition, the customary administrative roles are the sole domain of men. For example, the son of a king will be a king, and the headman's son will replace him. If there is no son, other relatives or clansmen can get the title, but no daughter can.

Women are marginalised even in the religious sphere. Even though women are more involved in religious rituals, they are relegated below men. For example, female monks are asked to follow the advice of their male peers, and must apologise in case of conflict regardless of the cause. In addition, women were denied entry to monasteries because apparently they would bring impurity to work and prayer. (Source: Pitritantrik Chakma shomaj bebosthay narir obosthan, Gyan Bikash Chakma and Farzana Naeem).

That said, despite the patriarchal nature of the society, Pahari women have time and again demonstrated the capacity to lead. After her husband Jaan Buksh Khan died in 1932, Chakma queen Kalindi ruled for three decades to 1874. And in present time, women are participating in the local government, including as chairpersons of union parishads.

Female participation in politics became noticeable in the post-liberation era. Although limited initially, gradually Pahari women became politically aware. The CHT Mahila Samiti was organised in the mid-1980s to create not only radical cadres, but also to create radical family structure. In the 1990s, Hill Women's Federation was founded among the tertiary students. Initially limited to social issues, this has now become the sole women's right organisation for the region's women.

While the Peace Accord envisages female participation in the regional administration, since the Hill districts are still administered by interim councils, such participation is yet to be realised.

Societies change. Therefore male attitude to women must change too. In the 21st century, we must leave old ideas behind. This makes social reforms absolutely necessary. Equal rights to property, compulsory marriage registration, ensuring female participation in family decision-making — these need to happen soon. And to integrate the Pahari women into the national mainstream, National Women Development Policy needs to include specific clauses related to indigenous women.

Translated by Jyoti Rahman; Bengali version published in Bhumibarta (ALRD).

Pristine "Fairies" and "Sexy Pahari Girls"

Biplob Rahman

You have reflected the lecherous exoticism with which the Bengali majority has been viewing Jumma women.

Dear Pallab, seeing your write-up in a *Dainik Samakal* supplement, my first reaction was to pull out the paper and read it in one go. I have been reading your travel stories in Samakal for quite a while now. You have the soul of a traveler. The simplicity of your words and your fervent view of nature pull me.

I am however finding it difficult to digest your write-up on the Marma community's new year celebration, "Sangrai," at Chitmorom ("Chitmoromer Pahare Myamachinger Shonge Dekha Hoye Gelo," Shoili, April 2006), due to the perspective from which it has been presented.

My discontentment is not with the language, subject matter or even the overall theme of your essay, but my morose disappointment lies in how you, my dear friend Pallab, have reflected the lecherous exoticism with which the Bengali majority has been viewing Jumma women for about a hundred years now. It is not your voice I disagree with, it's your lense that I reject.

Dear Pallab, we Bengalis have always suffered from an incorrigible romanticism when it comes to the indigenous Paharis; especially Pahari women. I suppose one reason behind this is that Pahari women are as pristine as the nature that surrounds them (like "fairies" as you put it). So I suppose virgin fantasies show us the immense possibility of corrupting them.

If you revisit the history of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, you will see that this eye-candy of a landscape -- the hills, the greenery and the waterfalls -- is tainted with mass murders, mass rapes, tyranny and neglect. I am sure you remember Kalpana Chakma. What became of the vanished female leader, I hope Pallab, you can easily deduce.

Apart from the war-mongered history of the CHT, be it in other low-lands or high-lands inhabited by indigenous people, do we not see a similar picture? Land-grabbing, language-snatching, religion-stomping, women-violating -- aren't these all components of a long-term widespread conspiracy of strangulating indigenous populations to death and destruction?

I request you to carefully peruse the presentation of indigenous people in Bengali and Hindi films of the 60s, or even just scan through some of the tele-dramas. Please especially note the way the women are presented.

The perception being disseminated is that indigenous people are wild, uncivilized and cannibalistic. A typical plot of such motion picture(s) would start off with a suave 'babushaab' (gentleman) traveling for either business or pleasure. There begins his music-laden, dance-trodden, rain-soaked, alcohol-drenched love story with a wild tribal queen. Naturally, the rest of the green-treading, jungle-braving community gets infuriated. And then ... etc. etc.

Pallab, dear Pallab, sevens years ago Kalaura's Khasia inhabited hill trembled with a roar against eco-tourism, a.k.a. eco-park. On that very day, a young Garo man had forsaken his life for the same cause, but in Modhupur.

At that time, renowned Khasi leader Anil Yang Yum had remarked to me, “Parjatan (Tourism) is going to destroy our village, our trees and beetle-leaf cultivation, our women. Not as a leader, but as a man of the hills, I will resist them. I don’t want urbanization, concrete structures, roads, electricity, television or films. I want to live in my land, for decades. Freely.”

I don’t know how well I have been able to present my case to you. After all, the parameters of my ability to explain are also constricted, right?

What I was saying is that after reading your essay, lowland inhabiting +well-educated +first class citizens+ civilized people might very well assume that our hills are infested with lovesick fairies! They dance a welcome to Sangrai rains. Afterwards, I am sure, it can then be said “Sangrai paani is so funny” (Sangrai water is so funny). They will assume beauty-queens like Myamaching will dial their number at the wink of an eye and flirtatiously ask, “Who’s this?”

The incentive for those arriving in CHT, in addition to all the financial benefits of land grabbing, is the fantasy of uninhibited consumption of ‘sexy Chakma girls.’

Bearing all these in mind, I am extremely sorry for being unable to accept your essay.

Concluding here. Stay well. Stay in love.

Translated by Farah Mehreen Ahmad; abbreviated from original essay published in "Reporter er Diary: Paharer Pothe Pothe", Biplob Rahman, Pathsutro Publications, 2009.

Violence Against Indigenous Women

Ainoon Naher & Prashanta Tripura

Intensification of masculine ethos, with women treated as symbols of collective purity and honor.

The fact that the constitution of Bangladesh remains silent about the existence of ethnic minorities with distinctive identities, cultures and languages is a good indication of the marginal status of the indigenous peoples of Bangladesh. This silence or omission is also often mirrored in mainstream historical narratives or media representations of the emergence of Bangladesh as a nation-state.

For example, the Independence Day Special supplement of the *New Age*, an English daily, carried a lead article by the editor of the paper with the title, “The promises of liberation war and the League’s rainbow coalition” (Kabir 2009). This article, or other articles and interviews included in the supplement, however, mainly depicted the Liberation war as a movement for, by and of Bengalis. And there was no mention as to whether, or to what extent, the indigenous people formed part of the rainbow coalition. This oversight is even more interesting as the Independence Day Special edition of the same daily also brought out a special issue of its weekly magazine (*Extra*) that carried a cover-story featuring a Khasia female freedom fighter. Although this particular freedom fighter was not originally Bangladeshi by birth, many indigenous people indeed took active part in the Liberation war. Yet to speak of it exclusively in terms of Bengali nationalism only serves to hide from view the fact that indigenous people too have been an integral part of this country.

Against the backdrop of widespread violation of the rights of the indigenous people in Bangladesh (Naher and Tripura 1994), we find that indigenous women in particular have often borne the brunt of all the oppression and violence. For example, according to an account provided by an indigenous woman leader from the CHT, during the period from independence (December 1971) till 1994, a total of 6000 hill people, including many women, were killed through massacres and various other incidents, while a total of 2500 indigenous women were raped (Mong 2002:45). With regard to the rapes, what is significant is that most of them were reportedly committed by security personnel who also happen to be Bengali. As Mohsin (2002:39) notes, according to a report of the CHT Commission, “between 1991 and 1993 over 94 per cent of the rape cases of the Hill women were by the security personnel. Over 40 per cent of these women were under eighteen years of age.” She also makes the important observation that “the CHT peace accord has made no provision for the rehabilitation of the rape victims” (ibid).

Generally, as an increasing number of indigenous people become uprooted from their ancestral lands, they have to search for new means of livelihood, exposing indigenous women to new forms of vulnerabilities in the countryside as well as in urban areas. Different incidents of abduction and rape of indigenous women who have migrated to urban areas from places such as the greater Mymensingh-Tangail region are part of this trend. It may be noted that indigenous women also face systematic discrimination in wage, as is particularly the case in North Bengal (cf. Nasreen 2003, 2005:106-107). While a growing number of indigenous women face discrimination and violence outside their homes in the countryside as well as in urban areas, they do not necessarily find safe havens in their own homes or communities. Instead, there too they may face an increasing trend of gender-based violence that is partly the result of the anger and frustration of their dispossessed and oppressed men folks. This latter trend, however, remain inadequately researched, understood or even acknowledged (cf. Rashid 2005:54).

Indigenous women's experiences of violence

While detailed information on intra-community and domestic violence against indigenous women is hard to come by, some non-governmental women's organizations have started addressing and documenting such incidents. Samples of cases collected from KMKS, an NGO based in Khagrachari, indicate that indigenous women in the CHT face different forms of violence, ranging from physical abuse by husbands to rapes. In most cases, however, the victims are not allowed, nor do they have the means, to seek justice as per the law of the country. Instead, they have to remain content with arbitration by traditional or elected local leaders. In one such case, involving the rape of a 14 year old Chakma girl by a group of four Chakma men in a remote Upazila of Rangamati in 2007, the report filed for the Durbar network notes:

After the incident, the victim's father and relatives approached the local Headman, Karbari [traditional village leader] and [Union Parishad] members to discuss the matter verbally, but since this was a case of rape and one that involved members of the same ethnic group, all concerned suggested that the matter should be arbitrated locally. After a lot of debate and discussion, the Headman settled the matter in exchange of Taka 6000 [presumably paid to the victim's family].

A very similar incident that took place in an Upazila in Khagrachari district in the same year was reportedly settled in a similar manner by local leaders said to be affiliated with a local political party. Allegedly, the major portion of the fines imposed on the three perpetrators involved were retained by the leaders themselves, while the victim and her family only received small sums of money. At the end of the report filed in relation to this case, the following observation is made:

In the CHT, conflicts between indigenous persons, including disputes involving women, are arbitrated by members of UPDF or JSS [local political parties operating in the CHT]. Nobody is allowed to go to the courts. In particular, they are the ones who settle cases involving [violence against] women, and local people are forced to accept their verdicts.

The reported stance of the indigenous leaders, if true, may partly stem from a desire on their part to exert or retain male control over women in their communities. Moreover, their stance may also be partly explained by the fact that in the CHT, members of the law-enforcing agencies themselves have been implicated in many incidents of rape of indigenous women.

Although allegations of rapes of indigenous women by security personnel in the CHT have almost never been acknowledged or investigated officially, given similar trends observed in different parts of the world, there is little doubt that such incidents have indeed occurred. Although Bangladesh itself emerged after a nine-month long Liberation War that involved countless acts of killings and rapes by the Pakistani forces and their collaborators, it is ironic that the indigenous people of the CHT would suffer similar fates at the hands of Bangladeshi security forces soon after independence. Such developments, however, are hardly surprising and conform to historical trends observed on numerous occasions. As Amena Mohsin (2002:39; see also, Grech 1993) remarks, while discussing the alleged rapes of indigenous women by security personnel in the CHT: Rape has been used as an instrument of war. By violating a woman, not only her body is violated but the 'other' is also violated. The 'purity' and 'authenticity' of the nation so integral to it, is put under threat, since within the parlance of the nationalist discourse women are considered to be the biological bearers of the nation.

Significantly, rapes of indigenous women by Bengali security personnel in the early 1970s have been cited as one of the main reasons that made the birth of the Shanti Bahini, the armed wing of the Jana Sanghati Samity that waged an armed struggle for regional autonomy, inevitable (Khisha 1996). The irony is that the long armed campaign of the Shanti Bahini resulted into more heavy-handed measures by successive governments, leading to, among other things, many more incidents of rapes of indigenous women by security forces.

One of the consequences of ethnic conflicts and nationalist movements is the internalization and intensification of masculine ethos, with women becoming increasingly treated as symbols of collective purity and honor. Such linkages are examined in the context of specific societies in a book edited by Moghadam (1994). Referring to Anderson's (1983) seminal work on nationalism, she argues that although Anderson does not deal with issues of gender or sexuality, he makes a simple but profound suggestion that nationalism is best viewed not as an ideology but as akin to kinship and religion. This perspective helps explain why, in so many contemporary political movements, women are assigned the role of bearer of cultural values, carriers of traditions, and symbols of the community. She writes:

If the nation is an extended family writ large, then women's role is to carry out the tasks of nurturance and reproduction. If the nation is defined as a religious entity, then the appropriate models of womanhood are to be found in scripture. Nationhood has been recast in these terms in the latter part of the twentieth century, and this has distinct implications for feminism as an emancipatory project. Women become the revered objects of the collective act of redemption, and the role models for the new nationalist patriarchal family (1994:4).

Indigenous women stand up against violence

It may be noted that it was largely the end of military rule in Bangladesh in 1991—which created some space for democratic forms of protest—that made it possible for voices of protest and resistance from among the indigenous women activists to be heard widely. One excellent example of this new development was the publication of a book of poems by Kabita Chakma (1992), with the title *Joli no udhim kittei*, meaning, literally, “Why shall I not flare up in (protest)” and translated as “Why shall I not resist!” (Guhathakurta, 2000:85):

Why shall I not resist!
Can they do as they please—
Turn settlements into barren land
Dense forests into deserts
Mornings into evening
Fruition into barrenness

Why shall I not resist?
Can they do as they please—
Estrange us from the land of our birth
Enslave our women
Blind our vision
Put an end to creation.

Neglect and humiliation causes anger
The blood surges through my veins
Breaking barriers at every stroke,
The fury of youth pierces the sea of consciousness.

—I become my own whole self
Why shall I not resist!

Politically, the spirit of such resistance by indigenous women was embodied by an organization called Hill Women's Federation (HWF) that came into being between 1989 –1991 (ibid:83). The alleged abduction of Kalpana Chakma, the organizing secretary of HWF, from her village by a military officer in June 1996 “spearheaded a nation-wide movement and national press coverage that was to bring the gender issue into the forefront of the [indigenous people's] struggle” (ibid:90; see also Guhathakurta 1997, 2009). Kalpana represented a new generation of indigenous women activists who would not shy away from raising uncomfortable questions in their own communities.

Below are two examples of this trend. The first one is a translation of a poem, written in Kokborok, by a Tripura woman (Tripura 1997:35):

When I pass by this woman's house, I hear her crying.
They are poor, and her husband is addicted to alcohol.
Her father-in-law is lame, and the mother-in-law blind.
She puts up with all hardships silently, yet she gets all the blame.
Her in-laws blame her for not being able to check his addiction.
But if she asks her husband to refrain from drinking, he gets angry.
He beats her up if he cannot get his drink even for a day.
My question to her in-laws: "What is the fault of the woman"?

The second example is also a translation, this time of a segment of an article, by a Chakma woman who also raises a 'burning question' regarding gender inequality in her society (Chakma 1392:1-2):

In a Chakma household dependent on jum cultivation, a woman has to simultaneously play the roles of wife, mother, co-worker and income-earner. She has to perform various functions, starting from giving birth to children and taking care of them to other domestic chores, working in jum fields alongside her husband, weaving during her 'leisure', and so on. If her husband happens to be lazy and alcoholic, then her life becomes really hard. Not only does she have to earn a living, but she also has to endure abuses by her drunken husband. Considering all this, a Chakma jumia woman is really a most unfortunate creature. . . . Such oppression of women in Chakma society has been going on for ages. It seems as though Chakma women have accepted this state of affairs as their fate. But will this go on for ages to come? This is a burning question of our times.

Conclusion

Kalpna Chakma was keenly aware of the multiple forms of inequalities that indigenous women had to fight against. She left behind a diary (Chakma 2001) that is full of her reflections on the condition of women in general and of indigenous women in particular. In depicting the life of an indigenous woman in the CHT, she wrote (translation as quoted in Guhathakurta 2000:91):

On the one hand [she faces] the steam roller of rape, torture, sexual harassment, humiliation and helplessness inflicted by the military and Bengalis, and on the other hand, she faces the curse of social and sexual discrimination [in her own community]

Kalpna Chakma was also keenly aware that an indigenous woman's struggle for freedom from discrimination and violence must start from a process of self-realization about her own condition, but without necessarily at the expense of anyone else's freedom. She wrote (translation as quoted in Guhathakurta 2000:91):

When a caged bird wants to be free, does it mean that she wants freedom for herself alone? Does it also mean one must necessarily imprison those who are already free? I think it is natural to expect the caged bird to be angry with those who imprisoned her. But if she understands that she has been imprisoned in a cage and that cage is not her rightful place, then she has every right to claim the freedom of the skies.

As we have argued, attempts to understand and address violence against indigenous women must start by taking into account their own perspectives, strategies, and subjectivities. And as indicated in the passage from Kalpna Chakma's diary quoted above, an indigenous woman may not want freedom from violence and oppression for her alone. Put another way, her emancipation would also mean a more just society, a more equitable economy, and a stronger state that promotes and defends the rights of all citizens, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, religion or any other such factors.

References

- Anderson, Benedict (1983) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. Verso.
- Burling, Robbins (1997) *The Strong Women of Modhupur*. Dhaka: UPL.
- Chakma, Kabita (1992) *Joli No Udhim Kittei*. Dhaka: Nari Grantha Prokashona.
- Chakma, Kalpana (2001) *Kalpana Chakmar Diary [The Diary of Kalpana Chakma]*. Dhaka: Shrabon.
- Chakma, Nancy (1392 [Bangla year]) *Nari chitra: Chakma samaj*. In *Existente*, Issue No. 4 (Bijhu edition). Dhaka: Tribal Students Union.
- Dannecker, Petra (2002) *Between Conformity and Resistance: Women Garment Workers in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: UPL.
- D'Costa, Bina (2005) *Gender inequality and rights of women*. In *Human Rights in Bangladesh 2004*, ed. Hameeda Hossain. Dhaka: Ain o Salish Kendra.
- Gardner, Katy and Lewis, David (1996) *Anthropology, Development and the Post-Modern Challenge*. London: Pluto Press.
- Gardner, Katy (1998) *Women and Islamic Revivalism in a Bangladeshi Community*. In *Appropriating Gender: Women's Activism and Politicized Religion in South Asia*, ed. P. Jeffery and A. Basu. London: Routledge.
- Grech, Joyoti (1993) *Ours is a Beautiful Country: Military Rape as a Means of Counter Insurgency by the Bangladesh State Against the Women of the Emerging Jumma Nation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh*. Unpublished MA dissertation, Area Studies (South Asia), University of London.
- GOB [Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh] (2008) *Jatiyo Nari Unnayan Neeti*. Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, GOB, February 2008.
- Guhathakurta, Meghna (1997) *Sahingsata o nipiron: nari andolaner prakria*. Samaj Nirikshon, Vol. 66.
- (2000) *Women's survival and resistance*. In *The Chittagong Hill Tracts: Life and Nature at Risk*, ed. P. Gain, Dhaka: SEHD
- (2009) *Minorities, migration and national identity in Bangladesh: Negotiating power*. In *The Journal of Social Studies*, No. 121. Dhaka: Centre for Social Studies.
- Hester, Marianne, Liz Kelly and Jill Radford (1996) *Introduction. Women, Violence and Male Power: Feminist activism, research and practice*, ed. M. Hester, L. Kelly and J. Radford. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Kabir, Nurul (2009) *The promises of liberation war and the League's rainbow coalition*. In *The New Age, Independence Day Special*, march 26, 2009, pp.S1-S2.
- Kelly, Liz and Jill Radford (1996) *'Nothing really happened': the invalidation of women's experiences of sexual violence*. In *Women, Violence and Male Power*, ed. M. Hester, L. Kelly and J. Radford, Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Khisha, Pradipta (1996) *Parbotyo chattagramer shomosya*. Dhaka: Sahitya Prokash
- Leacock, Eleanor (1972) *Introduction. The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, by F. Engels, ed. E. Leacock. New York: International Publishers.
- Moghadam, Valentine M., ed. (1994) *Identity Politics and Women: Cultural Reassertions and Feminisms in International Perspective*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Mohsin, Amena (2002) *Security of Indigenous Women*. In *Bangladeshe adivasi narir nirapotta [FOWSIA dialogue series]*. Dhaka: Forum on Women in Security and International Affairs.
- Molyneux, Maxine (1981) *Women in Socialist Societies: Problems of Theory and Practice*. In "Of Marriage and the Market", ed. Kate Young, Carol Wolkowitz, Roslyn McCullagh
- Mong, Ume (2002) *Bangladesher adivasi narider nirapotta: parbotyo chattagramer adivasi pahari nari*. [Security of indigenous women of Bangladesh: Hill women of the CHT] In *Bangladeshe adivasi narir nirapotta [Security of Indigenous Women in Bangladesh]*. Dhaka: Forum on Women in Security and International Affairs (FOWSIA).
- Moore, Henrietta (1994) *The problem of explaining violence in the social sciences*. In *Sex and Violence*, ed. P. Harvey & P. Gow, London: Routledge.
- Naher, Ainoon and Prashanta Tripura (1994) *Indigenous people and human rights in Bangladesh*. In *The Financial Express [published in two issues]*, May 13 and 20, 1994
- Nasreen, Zobaida (2003) *The three-way marginality of indigenous women in Bangladesh*. In *Endangered Offspring of the Soil*. Dhaka: Research and Development Collective.
- (2005) *Case of ethnic communities*. In *Human Rights in Bangladesh 2004*, ed. Hameeda Hossain. Dhaka: Ain o Salish Kendra.
- Sacks, Karen (1975) *Engels revisited: women, the organization of production, and private property*. In *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayne R Reiter. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Scott, James (1985) *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Siddiqi, Dina M. (2006) *One step forward, two steps back? Women's rights in 2005*. In *Human Rights in Bangladesh 2005*, ed. Hameeda Hossain. Dhaka: Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK).
- Tripura, Lipika (1997) *Hamjwk*. In *Hilly Waves: A Quarterly Literary Magazine of the CHT*. January – March 1997. Dhaka.

Abbreviated from Naher, A. & Tripura, P. (2009) "Understanding Violence Against Indigenous Women in Bangladesh", in The Journal of Social Studies, No. 123

"Terrorists" and Security Discourse



Political Problem Cannot be Viewed Through Military Lense

Faruk Wasif

The violent flame of Baghaichhari village has reached Khagrachhari town in the past few days. Two Pahari bodies have been recovered from Baghaichhari; five to eight have been reportedly killed. And a Bengali has been reported dead in Khagrachhari. The fire has not only consumed hundreds of Pahari homes, the green shoot of peace planted by the Hill Accord has also been blistered. Hence, the worry is not only about the life and property of the Paharis and Bengalis, but the very possibility of a durable peace in the Chittagong Hill Tracts is now under serious question. The Cabinet has discussed that the troubles in the Hills might have been instigated by conspirators. And the opposition BNP has said the withdrawal of troops was a mistake by the government. These are valuable thoughts.

No discussion will be complete without analyzing the trilateral attack of state, market and development.

But the *Prothom Alo* cites the Rangamati police super Massudul Hassan as saying that fire was exchanged by the army and the Paharis over land disputes. This makes it clear that who fired, and who were killed. So we ask the opposition, if the troops really had been withdrawn, then how did they magically arrive in the scene to chase away the Paharis through their firepower?

Since the current government has come to power, a few temporary army camps have been withdrawn from the CHT. Even then, there are more troops in the region than would be warranted under normal conditions. And they were present in the blood-soaked incidents of Baghaichhari. Therefore, the government may well look for the dark hands of plotters in the fog, but unless steps are taken against those directly involved in the incidents, it will appear as eyewash.

The Pahari people have sought justice for years. Other than the capital Dhaka, there is no region in Bangladesh where migrants from elsewhere has taken so much control over property and the economy. Had something like this happened anywhere else, there would have been anti-migrant movements. But Paharis are now minority in the CHT! Bengalis were only 9% of the CHT population in 1947. By 1991, Bengalis made up 52% of Bandarban, 51% of Khagrachhari, and 44% of Rangamati. And these estimates may be under representing Bengalis. In reality, Bengalis now surpass the Paharis in the region.

And this had begun under the late president Ziaur Rahman, when the landless from across the country had been forcibly settled in the Hill districts. And this process of scaring off the locals and replacing them with forced migrants is still continuing. And this hasn't been done out of any empathy or responsibility for the landless. If that were the case, we would have seen land redistribution across the country. Rather, the forced settlement has happened out of a notion that the Paharis are a security risk.

What can be a more obsolete thought than the notion that the local people of a region pose a security risk to that very region? And yet, this thought persists in order to maintain a maladministration and dominance.

Turning the Paharis into minority results in two things: first, it makes is easy to control them; and second, the forced settlers, out of their own self-interest, support the establishment. Landless

Bengalis have been forcibly settled in the region to assist the army in running a colonial administration. Bangladeshis have never accepted army rule in the plain land. But the CHT has been under army rule for decades. Operation Uttaran has replaced Operation Dabanal. The army rule can be justified as long as there is no peace. And no government publishes the share of budget that goes into maintaining this army rule. Clearly the tax of poor Bengalis is spent on ruling the poor Pahari through guns.

The BNP-Jamaat alliance is the biggest supporter of this army rule. According to them, without the army presence, the CHT will secede from Bangladesh. But the Paharis are asking for the rights to their land, not independence. This fear mongering may meet BNP's partisan ends, but the people of Bangladesh will gain nothing from this. If to seek to free the land of one's ancestors from illegal occupation is a secession movement, then all land related court cases are part of secession conspiracy. In the CHT, land is synonymous with peace. Once the Paharis have the right to their land, there should be no other impediment to Pahari-Bengali peaceful coexistence.

The state cannot be partial. All citizens of Bangladesh have equal rights. Bangladesh is not only for Bengalis. It is for all the peoples of this politically constituted land. And to ensure political unity under this state, Bengalis and Paharis don't have to give up their identities. What is needed is that everyone's equal rights are guaranteed. To create one rule for the Bengalis and another for the Paharis will force the latter to believe that this state is not for them. Ironically, by asking for the rights to the state, the Pahari leaders are acknowledging the supremacy of the Bangladeshi state.

Through the Accord, the rebels have effectively accepted allegiance to the Bangladeshi state, constitution and government. To not implement that Accord now only means to betray them, to push them to violence. There is no shortage of people to instigate violence. But why is the Home Minister Sahara Khatun echoing them by saying 'if necessary, the government will consider redeploying troops'? Is there not an extra troops presence in the Hills already? One might wonder whether the whole incident was instigated to make the Home Minister say exactly this.

The main achievement or the failure of the political leadership of Bangladesh when it comes to the CHT is to turn a political problem into a military one. The 1997 Peace Accord ended the military conflict through a political settlement. And this is still the best way forward.

But after the Baghachhari incidence, BNP's call for troops redeployment, and the Home Minister's tough talk, it appears that force will again supersede politics. And those hankering for this are adept at playing games with people's lives. And if this clever idea of new deployment came from the government itself, then they are in the wrong path. After all, it was the Awami League that proved through the Accord that a political problem could be solved politically. And the delays notwithstanding, the resolution was taking place.

The Shanti Bahini surrendered arms and returned to constitutional politics. After that, the imperative was to end the land disputes through the Land Commission as promised in the Accord. Once the land disputes were resolved, the rest was trivial. Therefore, to leave the Land Commission ineffective is suicidal for the state and government of Bangladesh.

The Bangladeshi state should not play ethnic and sectarian games. By playing that game, the Pakistani state has been sinking since 1947. Ethnic violence is plaguing a large part of India. Bangladesh, the result of a national liberation movement, must not make the mistake of ethnic games. All citizens of this state are in the same raft. If there is a hole in the raft the rest of the raft will be safe --- to believe this is to be in fool's paradise.

Epilogue

From the beginning, the Paharis have faced three aggressions --- Bengali Muslim settlement, militarization, and an anti-environment development process that is indifferent to ethnicity.

The ADB financed Urban Governance and Infrastructure Improvement Project (UGIP) is one such project. The project has two components: strengthen the municipalities and build urban infrastructure. Currently, three Bengali settlers have been elected chairmen of the three municipalities. The ADB works with them, including giving grants, to enhance local government institutions. However, strengthening this kind of majoritarian representation, or the use of administration alien to Pahari social structure, can only deepen the domination of a foreign money supported Bengali middle class that is skilled at using administrative rules and laws.

Under the abovementioned project, a road named Kaptai-Rangamati Link Road has been built with ADB assistance. This 56km road was built by cutting down forests and hills. As soon as the road was built, rubber and teak plantation started cropping up under Bengali ownership beside it. The bus and other vehicles on this road will also be Bengali owned --- the Pahari capital is not old enough to sustain major business (there is a well-entrenched Bengali monopoly in wood and transport sectors). And then there is land grab by Bengalis on both sides of the road.

This road will carry the army, Bengali settlers, and market/business. Thus, 'development' is expanding Bengali Muslim settlement, militarization, and profit-based economy. Gainers are the Bengali settlers, and they are the human shield and civilian guards of the elite Bengali investors and the military. And there is also a small group of Paharis coming up as the native elite. This is how the collaboration of the state and international financing agencies is taking marginalization of the Pahari peoples to a new height. In an interview with the current author published in the Daily Prothom Alo last year, Swapan Adnan, an economist and a member of the CHT Commission, explained the state's role this way:

I... [L]and is going to rubber or teak plantation in the Chittagong's hill areas. However, it's not the market that is acquiring the land from the indigenous peoples. Land is being leased through state agencies. This was done in a large scale from 1979 through to the 1980s. And this hasn't fully stopped even in the current decade. Bandarban district administration has evicted indigenous people and leased their land to powerful Bengalis under illegal terms. The market comes into play after the state forcibly acquires the land. For example, suppose an individual gets some plot for a ranch in the CHT. Now he wants adjoining plots. He tries to coax and coerce the indigenous owners. But they don't want to sell. Then he tells them that this land has been recorded as belonging to him, and thus he can take them to the court as squatters. At this point, they have no choice but to sell --- they know that they are not going to go far through the courts. Here, the state has done the initial grab, and then the market came to fore. A group of Paharis who are grabbing reserved land for the entire community for themselves is also coming up in parallel.

When the Peace Accord was signed or the Land Commission was formed, it was promised that upon complaint, land would be returned and then through a survey the government would institutionalize the people's rights over the land that has been returned. But has that happened? Instead of redistributing the land through state intervention, capitalization of land has in fact accelerated further."

This is why no discussion on the Hills crisis will be complete without analyzing the trilateral attack of the state, the market and development.

Translated by Jyoti Rahman; originally published in Prothom Alo, February 26th, 2010. Epilogue written for this anthology, July 31st, 2010.

Unidentified Terrorists in the Hills

Rahnuma Ahmed

Bengali settlement is a thng of the past. It sounds nice, the only problem is that it isn't true.

"Some external terrorists from outside Sajek have set these fires. There is no conflict between Bengalis and Paharis in this area. Those who set the fire don't want the current communal harmony between Bengalis and Paharis to stay intact. Since they want to create a terrorist center in this area, they try to keep both sides agitated." - Major Kabir, second-in-command, Baghaihat zone (Fact Finding Team 1. Moshrefa Mishu et al., Report on 20th April Incident at Sajek Union.)

Bengali settlement in times of Emergency

By nearly all accounts, Bengali settlement in the Chittagong Hill Tracts has accelerated. It has intensified. Why?

Discovering the truth is never an easy task. More so, in times of Emergency. But our rulers forget, not everyone submits. 'A happy slave is the biggest threat to freedom,' says a postcard on my wall. Fortunately, the peoples of this land, neither Bengalis nor Adivasis, have submitted. Never fully. Or, for long.

Five victims of Sajek -- Pahari villagers -- have come forward. They spoke out at a press conference in Dhaka, on 27 April 2008. Two separate Fact Finding Committees, consisting of writers, teachers, lawyers, student leaders and activists, human rights activists, left leaders, journalists, women's group activists -- visited the affected villages in Sajek, Rangamati. They spoke to Paharis and Bengalis. To settlers and civilians, to army personnel. They spoke to Paharis who had sought refuge in temples and forests after the arson attacks of April 20. Some still sleeping under open skies. They spoke to settler Bengalis too. To those who had taken refuge in the local market. To another settler, who had sought and found refuge in the nearby army camp itself. Those in the market were also being looked after by the army.

Binoy Chakma, a Pahari victim, had said at the press conference, nearly ninety percent of the villagers of Purbo Para, Gongaram Mukh, Retkaba, Baibacchora, the four Pahari villages that were burnt down, originally belonged to Longodu, Borkol, and Dighinala. But we were forced to leave our homes, said Binoy, because of army and settler attacks. Life in Baghaicchori, under Sajek union, was not easy. Army presence was continuous. It was stifling. But we managed. We managed to lead peaceful lives, to eke out modest livings. Things changed, however, with the declaration of Emergency, said Binoy. Warrant Officer Haroon told us, army posts will be built here. But later, small huts were built instead, in our land and garden. The settlers built them, the army helped. We had set aside land for building a Buddhist temple, they took that away too. We protested, but they threatened us. Indra Chakma's pineapple garden in Retkaba was destroyed. Ali, a settler, forcibly built a house on Indra's land. Indra resisted, Ali and the soldiers dragged him to the army camp. If you protest again, they said, we'll slaughter you like a sacrificial cow. There were other injustices, too. Rat infestation had left us with little food; the UNDP gave rice for 1,500 families. It was the UP Chairman L Thangar's duty to distribute, 20 kgs for each family. But he gave only 8-10 kgs to each Pahari family. When we asked him, he said, he had army instructions.

One of the Fact Finding Committee's reports corroborates Binoy's account,

"..since 11 January 2007, the process of Bengali settlers grabbing Pahari land has accelerated." It also

says, land grabbing and Pahari eviction is taking place under army supervision. A weekly review of the Asian Centre for Human Rights (23 April 2008) reports similar trends, "Since the imposition of the State of Emergency, the implantation of illegal plain settlers has intensified with the direct involvement of Bangladesh army."

Between 1979 and 1983, Bangladesh's military rulers sponsored migration of Bengali settlers into the CHT. An estimated 500,000 plains settlers were provided land grants, cash and rations. As is clear from the Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission report, *Life is not ours* (1991), the programme of turning Paharis into a minority was not made public then. Government representatives had repeatedly denied the existence of such a plan.

What does one hear now? Bengali settlement in the CHT is a thing of the past. The 1980s, yes, that was the settlement era. It was a mistake. The military rulers failed to realise it was a political problem, it should not be dealt with by force. Things are very different now. Now you may find some Bengalis going to CHT, they are following their family members. That is not settlement. How can one stop that? It sounds nice, the only problem is that it isn't true. Settlement is still active. It seems to be at a final stage. Ina Hume, a daughter of the Hills, and a careful observer of military repression wrote in 2005, a new road has been built from Baghahat to Sajek. It borders the Mizoram hills of north-east India. She adds, there have been reports that the Bangladesh Army is involved in settling a further 10,000 Bengali families in the Kassalong Reserve Forest in Sajek. The writers of *Life is not ours* had noted, Pakistan, and later, the Bangladesh government had been uneasy about the borders with India and Burma being inhabited by a majority of the hill peoples. The Sajek incident, it seems, was destined to occur.

Need I say that the proposed settlement of Bengali families in the Kassalong Reserve Forest is in direct negation of the 1997 Peace Accord? Or, that the construction of the Baghahat-Sajek road by the Bangladesh Army Engineer Construction Battalion, in the Kassalong Reserve Forest, clearly violates the Forest Act of 1927, and Bangladesh Forest (Amendment) Act, 2000?

Four stakes vs. Pahari homes

Most media reports in the Bangladesh press have stressed that losses occurred on both sides. Most reports mentioned that a larger number of Bengali homes were razed to the ground.

The Fact Finding Committee reports have been invaluable in providing a truer account of what happened. The report of the Fact Finding Committee led by Sara Hossain contains vivid descriptions of what Paharis lost as a result of the attacks. A middle-aged Chakma villager of Balurghat Para had told Committee members, 'our rice, clothes, pots-pans-plates have all been burnt. School books, birth registration certificates, and SSC certificates, they 're all totally burnt.' Several eyewitnesses, and victims had said that their valuables were looted first, the houses set on fire later. A Daney Bhaibachora villager who had been interviewed had said, 'The people who were setting things alight, they first took out from our homes, the TVs, beds, wardrobes, whatever they found, they looted, and at the end they torched the houses. Those who set the houses alight. They took everything.' A Chakma woman had added, 'I've heard that a TV was found in the Bengali Para. The Army has said that they will return the TV'.

The other Committee report, the one led by Moshrefa Mishu, is also invaluable. It fleshes out what the Bengalis settlers lost. According to the writers, Bengali settler houses are temporary shelters. They consist of four stakes (*khuti*) pegged to the ground. There are hundreds of such homes in the Dui Tila area. They write, we spoke to Bengali inhabitants, who told us that they live here for short periods only. The report says land grants to Bengali families are parcelled into smaller pieces meant for habitation, close to army camps, and larger pieces, located in far-away places.

The Report states:

"..most Bengalis have two houses... Dighinala and Lichu Bagan are 12 kilometres apart...We interviewed settlers who told us that they had received 4 acres and 1/70th land in Lichubagan, and the remaining 1/30th land on Betcchari."

The writers go on, it was the same in Dui Tila and Chongracchori. Settlers told us, they had 1/30th of an acre here, the rest, 4 acres and 1/70th land in distant mountainous areas.

Communal harmony: A myth in the making?

After the Sajek incident, both high military officials in Dhaka, and those lower in the rung, in the Hill Tracts, like the Major quoted above, have spoken of the communal harmony that exists in the Hill Tracts, that incidents like the Sajek arson attack threaten. These will not be tolerated, we have been told. A group of "external terrorists," described by some as "unidentified terrorists," is out to destroy peace and development efforts in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The army has affirmed that such incidents will not be tolerated, that peace and communal harmony must be maintained at all costs.

Such affirmations ignore history. It makes nothing of tales of massacre perpetrated by Bengali settlers and security forces. To mention some: Logang cluster village massacre, Khagrachori 10 April 1992. Naniarchar Bazar massacre, Rangamati, 17 November 1993. Malya massacre, Langadu upazilla, 1992. It ignores instances of communal riots such as the Bhuacchari incident, April-May 2003.

Other Sajeks will occur, I guess, if we do not face up to the truth. Even in times of emergency.

New Age, April 12th, 2008

Ethnically Singular Nationalist Narratives



Mass Media, CHT and Marginalization

Pavel Partha

The Chittagong Hill Tracts has always been a "special branch" in our mainstream national sketch. More than the geographic paradigm, the egalitarian lifestyle of the population living in the region, places them as "others" in our national zeitgeist. It is this lifestyle, that has since colonial times, been bearing the brunt of authoritarian zest. Muscle-flexing tactics may have changed over time, but several elements - anomalous law and order, olive bravery, illegal market capture, bengali settlers, "development" rampage - have remained constant exhibiting a robust patriarchal Bangla politics. Along a parallel credo, the evolution of mass media in Bangladesh has also demarcated CHT as an "other area," inhabited by "other kinds of people."

**Jungle braving,
"changbang" speaking,
terrifying, primitive and
occasionally naked
people.**

During the cell-phone boom in Bangladesh, service providers propagated claims such as "Bangladesh Banglalinked" or "countrywide network" in spite of not having extended their network to the CHT. Their map of Bangladesh had no room Bandarban, Khagrachari and Rangamati, which combine to form for the country's largest agricultural area. It was out of the way. This technological and commercial deprivation of CHT under the bleak guise of "security reasons" lasted long, and of course, went unchallenged. Eventually, when the blue Grameenphone logo invaded spaces between greenery and joom huts, they made a point to remind us that they had in fact come an extra mile: "We have come this far, to help you stay close." Previously, they were all over the country, and now they have spread over some extra inches. Are these inches beyond? By insinuating "extra," they registered their presence in the CHT as a socially responsible endeavour in our subconscious. In spite of this heartfelt, stamina-wrenching sacrifice, the question remains as to how close they have managed to, or even wanted to, come to the blood drench the CHT. Regardless, the mass media finds it impossible to spread its wings without these corporate advertisements.

Does the Mass Media Amass Paharis?

Chakma. Marma. Baum. Tripura. Lusai. Pankho. Khumi. Mro. Chak. Tongchongya. Mijo. Kuki. Assam. Nepali. Santal. Maitai Manipuri. Khyang. Many names, one bracket. This bracket indiscriminately, but evenly, slathers a fistful of ignorant generalizations to all within - flat-nosed, jungle-braving, snakes-frogs-and-everything-in-between-eating, "changbang"-speaking, forestry-destroying, joom-cultivating, occult-worshipping, simple, terrifying, primitive and occasionally naked people. Oh, and of course they keep wanting to separate the hill tracts from the rest of Bangladesh, so innocent Bangladeshis sacrifice their own lives to keep them in order. This is the picture of hill tracts in the mainstream psyche. The mass media has so far not only been unable to negate this image, but is rather found echoing it.

When establishing the "Kaptai Hydroelectric Power Plant" called for a joom land to be submerged in the "Rangamatta Hornophuli" (Rangamati Karnaphuli) displacing 100,000 people in 1962, the mass media made no noise against this atrocity. The media did not accommodate the desperation of the area's people and biodiversity but rather presented or was made to present concurrence with the state's actions. Similarly, when truckloads of impoverished Bengalis were sent to hill tracts from Mymensingh and the North Bengal, the sentiments and opinions of the displaced - both the local indigenous populations and the inserted bengalis found no space in the media. Till 1990, the media did not acknowledge CHT's struggle for autonomy. After the Logang massacre, when the entire CHT

population took to the streets pitching their lives to the state's guns, our mass media finally managed to muster up some courage to question our national oppression agenda.

Post 1990, CHT-centric media endeavours revealed how meticulous the surveillance over this region was and how much this interfered with and decided the course of the politics of visibility and representation. International Year for Indigenous People (1993), International Day for Indigenous People (9th August, every year), Kalpana Chakma's kidnapping, CHT Peace Accord (1997), donor agencies' sensitive and "customized" development interventions, Bangla researchers are CHT consultants, widespread multinational corporation endorsed tourism, special forum for indigenous populations at the United Nations are all contributing to further segregation of CHT, by constantly registering the region in our psyche as 'special.'

Eventually, when the Hill Tracts start to get more attention and space in the mass media, the colonial rendering of the region did not come to a halt. The lingo starts shifting from "tribal" to "indigenous" in an attempt to exert pretend progressiveness. Meanwhile some agencies, with a prophetic zeal, make 'voice-of-all' sort of attempts by talking about the "gradual loss of Baum culture," "Mro girls' sadness" and propagating other generic messages. Simultaneously, donor agencies dish out heaps of money to photograph 'almost naked' Mro women, which only legitimize the patronizing eroticization of these "others."

At present there are about 120 daily newspapers, 300 weekly newspapers, several television channels and a number of radio stations in the Bangladeshi mass media, where the marginal space for CHT is obvious. Where the airport boasts of Banglalink ads exhibiting pictures of dancing indigenous women and smiling tea-estate workers, we cannot really expect the plight of these people to be addressed.

In 1936, under the editorial guidance of Chakma queen Binita Ray, CHT's first newspaper "Goirika" was published. Following that few other newspapers and newsletters were published. The public wanted to use these papers as platforms for talking about their plight, but at the face of stringent and convoluted national politics, these publications did not succeed in countering colonialism.

Currently, there are several publications that come out of both Bandarban and Rangamati in their local language(s), but the key question is, would a pahari voice find space in local publications where their cries would not be curtailed? The major economic activity in the hills is joom cultivation, but the mass media never presents joom from the perspective of people who depend on it. Leasing hills, deforestation for rubber cultivation with donor money, hill trade of the influential, intrusion of corporate tourism, illegal tobacco cultivation, etc. are some of the few layers of the overall subjugation of the region. But there is no trace of the active participation, no sign of bravery on the mass media's part, although the role of the mass media should be just that - to reflect the plight of the mass it is supposed to be the media for; to stand in solidarity. Where we are talking about declassifying people, the media is obligated to play a critical role in taking a stance against colonization - as an ally.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts wants to see the mass media as an integral part of their lives; not as a crutch helping colonial ethos find strong grounds.

Translated by Farah Mehreen Ahmad, abbreviated from original essay in Bengali which appeared in "Madhyam" (Media), Tushar Abdullah ed., 2010.

Need for a Change in Perspective

Shaktipada Tripura

An often heard comment is: if the adivasis of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) can own property anywhere in Bangladesh, why can't the Bengalis of the plainlands own property in the CHT? As a citizen, one has both rights and responsibilities. As a citizen one cannot exercise a right that denies the rights of others. Today we can see that in some areas in Bangladesh, languages of some of the adivasi communities has become extinct. For example, the languages and traditional wear of the Tripura community in Chandpur and the Barman-Coach communities in Gazipur can longer be found. Many years ago, these people had already lost their lands. The Khang community in CHT are already losing their language.

Many in power want to see CHT as a Muslim area. The ghost of Pakistan seems to predominate.

For this reason, different countries in the world have introduced special laws in their respective constitutions, governments and administrations to protect the languages, cultures and existence of their indigenous minorities. In South Asia, India and Nepal have already created special arrangements for the protection of the languages and cultures of their indigenous communities. During the British rule, there were existing laws to protect the interests of adivasi communities in the CHT, Garo Hills, Borguna and in Potuakhali. These laws also existed in the constitution of Pakistan's in 1956 and 1962. However, post-1962 the Pakistan administration eliminated the special provisions to protect the rights of the adivasi communities.

In the Indian states of Kashmir, Mizoram, Arunachal, Meghalaya, amongst others, there are special laws for the protection of adivasi communities. Non-residents of these protected states are prohibited from buying and owning land in those areas. In fact, citizens of the other states in India have to seek special permission of the state governments of Mizoram and Arunachal to enter those states. Compared to India or Nepal, adivasi communities in Bangladesh have fewer rights. Even in the CHT Peace Accord, the adivasi communities still did not get access to as many rights, compared to those of in India and Nepal. During the signing of the Peace Accord, some influential figures in the country had propagated that if the Peace Treaty was signed, the entire CHT up to Feni would be lost to India. Some quarters argue that under the CHT treaty, too many rights have been granted to the adivasis. If this was true, why are the adivasis of the CHT continuing to lose their land a decade later? Why are adivasi women subjected to rape? Why are there still attacks on adivasi communities?

In the future, if the adivasi communities in the Hills become a minority, then there will be an overall negative impact on their economy, cultures, society and their politics. This trend will mean that the cultures and languages of the adivasi people in Chandpur and Gazipur will be lost like that of the communities in the CHT. Their unique existence will one day become extinct. Many in power would want such a scenario to unfold in the CHT. They want to see CHT as a Muslim area. They want the whole of Bangladesh to be a Muslim country. The ghost of Pakistan seems to predominate the mindset of these people. Pakistan's rulers had always wanted Pakistan to be an Islamic state. That is why they did not want to recognize Bangla as the state language. With the goal of wanting to make CHT a Muslim area, those in power at that time resettled many Muslims coming from India in different parts of CHT.

It is unfortunate that from the time of the coalition government, those inside and even outside had been conspiring against the interests of the adivasi people. We observe that even under the current

government, a letter was issued by the CHT Ministry quoting the letter of the previous coalition government, stating that the adivasis of CHT cannot be called adivasis and will have to be called 'upojati'. The officials in the Ministry showed total disregard to the election manifesto of the ruling party, government rules, policies, notifications and directives of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. One wonders how such officials get the courage to embarrass and create a serious problem for the government.

It must be acknowledged now that both in the language movement of 1952 and in the liberation war of 1971, the adivasis of this country made incredible sacrifices and significant contributions. Many adivasis lost their lives as freedom fighters. Many adivasi women were raped. The Bengali people know what the intentions of the ruling class can be. Whether they were the ruling authority during the Pakistani period or during the British times, their character was the same. The way the Pakistani ruling elite oppressed the ordinary people, the Bengalis and the adivasis then, the current ruling elite is oppressing the ordinary masses and the adivasis. The adivasis of this country are the victims of a cultural encroachment. They are the victims of land grabs. Everyone is aware who are responsible for land confiscation and cultural encroachment.

Many people believe that recognizing adivasis as the indigenous people of the land means accepting that the Bengalis are not the original people of this area. The issue is not about who are the 'original' people, or who came here first. United Nations Special Rapporteur for the Indigenous People Erica I. Daes and Special Rapporteur Jose Martinez and experts have defined unique categories regarding indigenous communities. These include (1) the internal feuds of indigenous areas need to be settled by their own laws and not by the laws of the state; (2) to make the existing laws functional, traditional rituals must be consulted; (3) recognition of the fact that indigenous have a spiritual relationship with their own land and culture; (4) recognition of pluralistic religious practices; (5) preservation of traditional practices; (6) indigenous communities are to be involved in the national government.

One must remember that the Bengalis have a rich cultural heritage and have a freedom-loving spirit. It is also important to remember that the adivasis played a vital role in contributing to the richness of the Bengali language and culture. In the Middle Ages, the Arakan and Tripura maharajas played a historical role in protecting and spreading the Bengali language. The maharaja of Tripura recognized Bengali as the state language. These issues need to be remembered and these lessons need to be learned from our history.

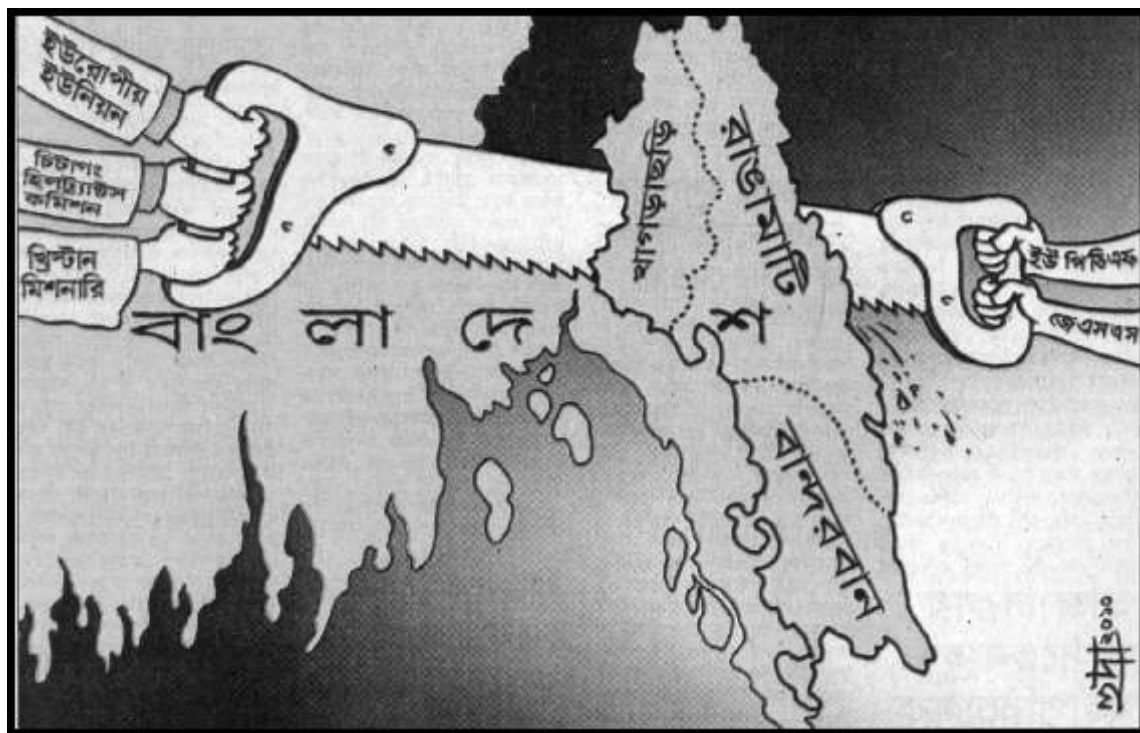
Translated by Tazreena Sajjad; Bengali original published in Sanghati 2010.

The Bengali Sense of Victimhood

Rahnuma Ahmed

A cartoon had caught my eye. Published in a Bengali national daily, soon after the recurring incidents of ethnic violence in Rangamati and Khagrachhari in February this year, it shows a map of the south-eastern part of the country. The land mass is coloured a sea-green. The letters forming the word 'Bangladesh' are printed in black. An iridescent grey shades off into black in parts-- it presumably represents, but indistinguishably so, both Indian territory and the Bay of Bengal's waters.

Why are there no Bengalis in the cartoon? The victim myth would have become unsustainable.



It shows the Chittagong Hill Tracts—with the districts of Khagrachhori, Rangamati and Bandarban clearly marked out—being sawn off by arms clutching wooden handles, fixed to both ends of the saw. To the right side of the cartoon, extending into Bangladesh as it were, are two arms, while on the left, three. The arms on the left side of the map are clothed. The first two hands reach out of their coat-covered shirt-sleeves. Clothed. Civil. The last one juts out of what seems to be a clerical coat-sleeve. The topmost coat-sleeve has 'European Union' written on it. The second, 'Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission.' And the third, 'Christian missionary.' Both arms to the right are bare. Uncovered. One has 'UPDF' (United Peoples Democratic Front) scrawled on it, while the other, 'JSS' (presumably referring to the PCJSS, Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti). No clothes. Barbaric.

A nation besieged by enemies within and without. The cartoon thereby evokes a sense of crisis. Fear. Anxiety.

It is, I thought to myself, a perfect example of all that which bedevils the nation nearly forty years after independence. There are many signifiers. There are both presences, and absences. Those present-- and named-- are the enemies. These foes are both internal, and external, to the nation. They are out to destroy the nation. To sever its limb. Only those present (in the cartoon) wield power, and malevolently so.

The Bengalis are absent. It is this absence which captures very well, I think, how Bengalis increasingly prefer to portray themselves when confronted with their power as ethnically dominant, and overwhelmingly so, within this nation. The act of absencing makes Bengalis appear powerless. As a victim, one who is defined in the dictionary as,

a helpless person somebody who experiences misfortune and feels helpless to remedy it

[victimhood] fall victim to somebody or something, to be affected, harmed, or deceived by somebody or something

Bengalis are the victims of regional and international machinations. Of forces who are infinitely more powerful. Forces external to the nation, with whom bad elements within the nation, the 'tribals,' have ganged up.

I cannot help but think, how would the cartoonist have portrayed 1971? East Pakistan, being cut asunder by, who? Aided by, who? But of course, let me add, when I compare the situation in the CHT at present to the situation confronting Pakistan in 1971, I do not do so from any ulterior motive of advocating a break-up, or secession, or any such thing. I do it because ekattur has taught me that to survive as a nation, one must not only be able to accommodate cultural differences, but to welcome them. That what the centres of power label a 'conspiracy' is most likely, a political problem, one that must be resolved politically, never, ever, through the deployment of brute force. That genuine attempts must be made to undo historical wrongs. Before it is too late.

That lives matter. That homes matter. That justice matters.

I muse to myself, why are there no Bengalis in the cartoon? Probably because however hard one tries to depict them innocently, the very labels, 'government,' 'army,' 'police,' 'settlers,' are heavily-laden with power. With Bengali power, and historically so. The nation's history is built on ethnic domination. It is one that continues in the historical present. I muse to myself, the cartoonist must have realised that putting in Bengalis just wouldn't do. The victim myth would have become unsustainable. That it would be better leave them out. Altogether.

But the absence has been made present through other means. Very distinctively so. The letters printed on the land mass. Bangladesh. Bangla+desh, the land of the Bengalis. A literal rendering. It homogenises differences among Bengalis, differences to do with class, gender, religion, regional, linguistic (many Sylhetis think of themselves as Sylhetis and not Bengalis), historical. And among indigenous peoples too, Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Santal, Bawm, Tanchangya, Rakhain, Garo, Lushai, and many others. The construction of a Bengali sameness becomes an ethnic norm, one to which others must aspire. Must wish to belong.

Soon after independence, we had been too heady to grasp the wisdom that lay behind Manabendra Narayan Larma's words, "Under no definition or logic can a Chakma be a Bengali or a Bengali be a Chakma... As citizens of Bangladesh we are all Bangladeshis, but we also have a separate ethnic identity, which unfortunately the Awami League leaders [the then-ruling party] do not want to

understand." The change that Ziaur Rahman had effected after coming to power had to do with nationality, with national belonging—'Bangladeshis' instead of 'Bengalis,' the latter had been held to be universally applicable for all citizens regardless of their ethnic belonging. It was a technical correction, having been accompanied by the military occupation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. By death and destruction. By rape. By the settlement of landless Bengalis on pahari land. It led to the flight of indigenous peoples in large numbers, to neighboring India where they sought refuge.

In order to portray 'the' Bengali as victim, the cartoonist must suppress the Bengali presence. That, surely is interesting? Bengali writers however, are more forthcoming. Some claim, Bengalis are indigenous, have been so for centuries, or better still, since time immemorial. It is the paharis, who are settlers. The 'tribal' rulers are exploiters. Hilly people are extremists. They did not take up arms to resist Bengali oppression, to regain cultural autonomy, but because they are.. have always been.. for many centuries.. bandits and criminals. They abduct and kidnap Bengalis.

Others write, some foreign NGOs have ulterior motives. They want the army to withdraw before amicable relations have been restored between paharis and Bengalis. Foreign forces, such as the European Union, some foreign members of the CHT Commission, have become active "under cover" of the Peace Treaty (1997). There are plans afoot to sever the CHT from Bangladesh, to re-make it on the lines of a Christian East Timor. Bengali settlers are being slaughtered. Their houses are being razed to the ground. Even military personnel are being attacked. Muslims are being prevented from entering their mosques. From praying. A large conspiracy is in the offing.

Can such paranoid ramblings, whether depicted visually through cartoons or written out in articles, counter imperial politics? Concerns over national sovereignty are real, are justified in these times when US-led imperial terror, one in which western European nations are fully complicit, has been unleashed worldwide.

To save the nation, a genuine leap of imagination is needed. One which does not confuse the roles of 'perpetrator' and 'victim.'

Published in New Age April 5, 2010

Who Decides on Whose Identity?

Ashok Kumar Chakma

Why do the civil-military bureaucrats intend to impose an identity on indigenous peoples?

A few days back, under the signature of a deputy secretary of the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs (MoCHTA) a letter was issued regarding the use of the terms "tribal" (upojati) and "indigenous" (adivasi). The deputy commissioners (DC), superintendents of police (SP) and upazila nirbahi officers (UNO) in three Hill Districts were requested to undertake measures for keeping law and order and harmony among all

communities in the hill region.

The letter also expresses some concerns over the use of the term adivasi instead of tribal by the indigenous leaders, intellectuals and media people. First, by identifying themselves as adivasi, some indigenous people are carrying out propaganda against the Bengali settlers. Second, once they are recognised as adivasi, they will have the right to enjoy all rights guaranteed by United Nations and might create pressure on the government of Bangladesh at an international level. Third, recognition as adivasi will pave the way for establishing "autonomy" for indigenous peoples in the future. Thus, recognition might tell upon communal harmony in the hilly region. What is the objective of this letter? Are the concerns or allegations expressed in the letter well-founded?

Raja Devasish Roy, the Chakma Circle Chief, in his inaugural speech during the Headmen's Association's conference in Khagrachari, said that the letter by MoCHTA on the reservation of using adivasi was without merit as the constitution of Bangladesh did not say anything about tribal or adivasi (Prothom Alo, Feb 13).

Upajati or adivasi, who will decide on the question of identity? Why do the civil-military bureaucrats intend to impose an identity on indigenous peoples? They must understand that the term "indigenous" is not new in Bangladesh. Many laws, such as CHT Regulation 1900; income tax laws; the Forest Act 1927; and the State Acquisition and Tenancy (Amendment) Act 2004 uses the terms "indigenous hillmen" or "aboriginal."

The ILO Convention 169, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), among others, recognise the indigenous rights at the international level. These conventions have been passed as global standards for protection and promotion of indigenous rights across the world. Bangladesh being a state party to the United Nations cannot ignore this reality. In addition, by its constitutional obligation, Bangladesh is bound to respect international laws and standards (Article 25).

Thus, for Bangladesh to deny the indigenous rights will be tantamount to living in a fools' paradise in this globalised age. The government might instead undertake measures for constitutional recognition of indigenous peoples, by which it could gain international acclamation.

The last point of the MoCHTA letter is concerned with autonomy, but it did not clarify what it meant by autonomy. However, as a common citizen, I understand autonomy in relation to decentralisation of power from the centre to the periphery. To address this issue we have got the CHT Accord 1997, which could be considered as one of the best models in conflict resolution without third-party involvement.

Despite differences on the question of implementation of the CHT Accord, it is a constructive arrangement between the government and indigenous peoples in CHT. To implement it in letter and spirit, mutual trust and respect must come from both sides -- indigenous and non-indigenous people. However, indigenous peoples expect a liberal and positive attitude from the majority non-indigenous people, including civil-military bureaucrats.

By the way, indigenous people are not for disintegration. From the very beginning they wanted to be recognised by the constitution of country; but the government imposed "Bengali" identity on them through the constitution instead. We have witnessed the fallout of that for more than three decades in CHT.

Finally, we got the CHT Accord; however, the aspiration for constitutional recognition as indigenous peoples has not been fulfilled yet. We indigenous peoples do not want imposed identity. We assert our identity as adivasis, and this is our human right. The state must respect and recognise this right.

Daily Star, February 24th, 2010

Ethnically Singular Nationalist Narratives

Rahnuma Ahmed

Bengali intellectuals could begin by re-writing their nationalist narratives. Making them inclusionary.

'We won the nation, it is ours' just about sums up the Bengali perspective on liberation, one that is historically inaccurate given the sacrifices of hill peoples and other ethnic peoples during 1971. An inaccuracy that does not detract the nation's intellectuals, its poets and novelists, teachers and writers, playwrights and journalists from excluding 'those' ethnic others from the stories of courage which they weave and re-weave

every December, every February and March, to connect us, to our collective past.

The Failure of Bengali Intellectuals

'Like the Shahid Minar, the Bangla Academy too, is one of the symbols of the language movement.' I agree. Absolutely, I said. I was one of the discussants on Manzur-e-Mowla's paper, 'Bangla Academy: Bhubishshote Jemon Dekhte Chai' (Bangla Academy: As one wishes to see it in future), at a programme which was part of Bangla Academy's month long celebrations commemorating the language movement. It was the 26th of February this year.

What I had forgotten to add was that, at the other symbol of the language movement this year, i.e., at the Shahid Minar, at exactly the same time, no language movement celebrations were taking place. Instead, protestors—both Bengalis and Jummas, but also, other Bangladeshis too—had gathered to condemn the recurring incidents of ethnic violence in Baghaicchari, (Rangamati), and in Mohajonpara, Milanpur, Madhupur, Shatbaiyapara (Khagracchari) in February this year. I did not forget to add however, this year's Ekushey February was reddened with pahari blood. It shames me.

The founders of Bangla Academy, Manzur-e-Mowla pointed out in his paper, had envisioned it as a research institute. This was one of the other sentences that I picked out, saying that I wanted to tease out its implications for me. By research I understand the production of new knowledge, but also, new ways of seeing that which one assumes to be already known. Both kinds of knowledge is generated by the efforts of researchers and writers, by the activities of intellectuals. The chiefly two-party political system which Bangladesh has come to enjoy since the overthrow of president Ershad, extends to the production of knowledge too. This is most unfortunate. The country may be independent but its intellectuals aren't, the intellectuals either belong to the BNP, or to the AL, they frame what they think, what they say according to the dictates of the party that they belong to. In his presentation Manzur-e-Mowla had mentioned that the Fellows of Bangla Academy should not be those who had been opposed to the independence of Bangladesh. I fully agree, I would only like to push his observation a bit further. The Fellows of Bangla Academy should be truly independent, they should not be durbar intellectuals who bow and scrape before politicians, whose thinking follows the party political line.

I had said, I think that when we speak of these matters we should also take the help of theoretical discussions, such as, let's say the ideas of Edward Said who had said, there is an urgent need to keep two things separate, on the one hand, the practice and function of the intellectual, and on the other, politics. Combining intellectual practice and functions with political ambitions is dangerous. It is deadly. I added, and I think we can also benefit from Noam Chomsky's theoretical ideas, to do with manufacturing consent. I think we should keep these in our head when we speak of the kind of Bangla Academy that we would like to see in future, so that we can examine and analyse the role of

intellectuals here, also, to be able to ask intellectuals how they see their own roles, whether they see their own function as manufacturing consent for the rulers. What if this leads to betraying the dreams and aspirations of the common people? Surely, it is up to the intellectuals to caution people, and vested quarters against pocketing the independence struggle for corporate gains? Against turning the language movement into a purely Bengali event? Yes, we had fought for our mother tongue, and yes, it has achieved international recognition, but that is because people the world over are attached to their own mother tongue, and it is these attachment, these feelings that have led them to sympathise with us. That is why 21 February has won international recognition. But we must ask ourselves whether we have learnt to respect the spirit of the language movement, or whether the language movement, Bangla bhasha, and Bengali nationhood, which were once rallying cries against oppression, have become tools of oppression themselves. When the Shaotals of Bangladesh sing ora amar mukher bhasha kaira nite chaey (they want to snatch away our mother tongue), they mean `us' Bengalis. Surely that is a matter of shame?

When Manzur-e-Mowla says, `Bangla Academy Bangladesher shob manusher protishthan,' I wish I could agree with him. But it's not true. It belongs only to the Bengalis, not to all. Not to Bangladeshis.

Later I caught myself thinking, but the Shahid Minar is. After all, that is where people had gathered to protest at the injustices against those who were left out of the national dream.

The challenges that lie ahead of Bangla Academy are greater. It remains to be seen whether Bengali intellectuals will rise up to meet the challenge.

`Warring factions,' and imperial politics, I had written. But the world has changed since.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts is often spoken of as a zone of ethnic conflict, with different warring factions: the Bangladesh government (led by whichever party happens to be in power). the Bangladesh military, PCJSS (Parbotto Chottogram Jana Shanghati Samiti), UPDF (United Peoples Democratic Front), the Bengali settlers. Conflicts which prevent the furthering of development agendas which will benefit all, especially its older inhabitants, the jummas. Which will assist in securing human rights for all. Will promote harmony, peace and justice. On the face of it, there is nothing with which any one in their right minds would disagree.

But what I find disconcerting is the inability to raise equally searching questions about those who represent CHT and its politics in such a manner. I was reading the European Union's press statement regarding the recent incidents in the CHT and trying to remember whether I had seen them issue any statement about Guantanamo. Or Abu Ghuraib. Did they? Had they? Instead, if I remember correctly, most of these European nations had joined the US in the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, had opposed the will of their own people through doing so, hadn't they?

But then, all the more reason, I cannot help but think, to put our own house in order. A Bangla Academy for all, a nation for all. And, this being the month of March, Bengali intellectuals could begin by re-writing their nationalist narratives. Making them inclusionary.

Execrpted from original essay published in New Age, March 8th, 2010.

"Bangladesh has no Indigenous People"



Identity Rights

Rupayan Dewan

The colonial term 'tribal' or 'Upajati' is strongly enforced in official documents. Of course, in some rare cases Adivasi/indigenous words are also used and uttered, but; finally it is not recognised though the CHT Regulation, 1900 (1 of 1900) and some other related legal instruments still recognise the term 'Indigenous Hillman' to mean the mongoloid indigenous peoples of CHT. 'Pahari', the Bengali meaning of 'Hillman' is also a commonly accepted term by both Govt. and IPs. The term 'tribal' is considered as degrading and colonial. The leftists use the terms 'ethnic minority' and 'microscopic nationality'.

M N Larma wept in private, and did not open the door of his room at the MP hostel.

The birth of Permanent Forum of IPs at the highest level of UN, yearly celebration of International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, and different activities under the 1st and 2nd decades of indigenous peoples has made the term 'Indigenous Peoples' very popular among the IPs. The civil society and media have also been strongly advocating 'Adivasi' and 'Indigenous People'. Some international agencies have also adopted their IP policies. The Government and some Bengali intellectuals strongly oppose the indigenous term, as they consider that it gives ethnic minorities absolute rights over a geographical area and this facilitates land loss or eviction of Bengalis. Last year the Bangladesh Government maintained abstention during voting for the ILO Convention 169. But, India surprised IPs and human rights activists by voting in favour of it though she has been vehemently opposing this convention for many years.

M.N. Larma, the founder of PCJSS and a popular parliamentarian in Bangladesh (1972-75), had proposed 'Bangladeshi' against 'Bengali', on the question of citizenship of Bangladesh citizenry. But his appeal for non-Bengali peoples could not melt the hearts of 'democratic and socialist' treasury benchers in October 1972, during the Constitution framing debates. He wept in private, and did not open the door of his room at the MP hostel. When he finally opened it, he could not speak, but I saw the tear drops on his cheek. We had waited for about one and half hour, but he could only say

"Today Bangabandhu has wiped out our ethnic identity from the history of mankind."

In the beginning of the eighties an interesting feature in CHT has been the consolidation of ten indigenous hill peoples into one distinctive political and territorial identity- the 'Jumma' Nation, to oppose the extreme Bengali chauvinism. This resulted in emergence of a consolidated ethnic nationalism in the south eastern periphery. This is for Jumma survival. The term 'Jumma' derives from the word 'Jum', a slash and burn method of cultivation, or a plot of this Jum field, and also meant for mountains. The Chittagonians, Bengali dwellers of neighbouring Chittagong district use 'Jumma' to mean the Chakmas, and this term used to be considered derogatory. However, they also used the word 'Jum' to mean CHT or land of highlanders. Among Chittagonians, if someone asks a person's whereabouts, a common reply can be "Jumot geye" (He has gone to Jum.), i.e. he has gone to the mountains/hills, meaning CHT.

Dr. Tone Bleie of Norway, in his book "Tribal Peoples, Nationalism and the Human Rights Challenge, The Adivasis of Bangladesh" describes CHT Indigenous people as "the original inhabitants (known internationally as the Jummas) of Chittagong Hill Tracts".

This achievement i.e., the establishment of the 'Jumma' concept has been possible through internal

advocacy and external campaign by PCJSS; however, it could not make the Government agree to christen CHT as 'Jummland', a demand put forward on 14th December, 1988[JSS' five point charter of demands], as the government anticipated some evil omen in this term.

By contrast, present Mizoram, former Lushai Hills District, received status in 1952 under the 6th Schedule and was christened Mizo Hills District in 1954. This was after the demand of the Mizos. This status was later upgraded to Union Territory in 1972 with the new name Mizoram. Finally, it received Statehood on 20th February, 1987 as a result of Mizoram Accord signed on June 30, 1986. It is interesting that with the upgrading to UT, there has been birth of three District Councils for the Chakmas, Pawis and Lakhers in southern Mizoram since 2nd April 1972 out of the womb of Pawi-Lakher Regional Council. ["The Chakmas, Life and Struggle", S. P. Talukdar, Gian Publishing House, Delhi, 1988.] Of course, there had been the Pawi-Lakher Regional Council, the lowest tier of autonomy in India for Pawis, Lakhers and the Chakmas in 1953.

The Mizo, a consolidated political and territorial term involving 31 ethnic mongoloid peoples has emerged from feelings of exclusion. Same had happened with the CHT peoples resulting in the birthing of 'Jumma Nation' in 1972. This identity strengthened after the negative response of Government to a high profile delegation from CHT, followed by massive atrocities and militarization. For the Mizos, a positive resolution to their search for self-representation was possible as there are four tiers of autonomy in India's federal character. It could not happen in Bangladesh because of extremely centralised unitary character of the state, ignorance about CHT and mindset of politocracy and bureaucracy.

We can find the identification of communities and their listing began at an early period of our history, with Manu. Listings in British colonial period in the sub-continent began on an extensive scale through the census of 1881, while it was first started in CHT in 1871.[Hutchinson, "An Account of the Chittagong Hill Tracts", 1906] But, CHT needs a formal move to record actual names with appropriate spellings in Bengali and English and their numbers with the official recognition of the terms Jumma and indigenous identities. This will be an act to honour ethnic peoples and their culture, tradition and political rights. In this process the Chakmas will have the scope to decide on their identity- Chakma, Changma or Tsangma. Similarly, the Lushais may also decide to be known as Lusei or Lushei, the way Murungs have started writing Mro in their own term. This can also be seen with the Garos in greater Mymensingh, a name given by outsiders against their own term- Mandi. The appropriate term of ethnic identity should be people's own choice, not imposed.

India has ratified ILO Convention 169 and the new Prime Minister of Australia begs pardon in the Parliament from his IPs for sheer injustice done to them by his forefathers. The new millennium is for tolerance, mutual respect and engagement to make the mother earth livable for all. Time has come to change the old dogmatic ideas and mindsets. Thus, the unnoticed, unrepresented and excluded peoples can get a chance to see a ray of hope for their survival and prosperity in the country. And this should not be considered through compassion but through recognition of rights of IPs, their rights to national resources and state power. It is possible with only a democratic leadership that has vision and respect for other peoples.

Abbreviated from essay published in "Swaranika, Bizu Utsab- 2008".

Indigenous vs. Small Ethnic Group

Lelung Khumi

Today, even the term 'Indigenous' is becoming a paradoxical identity within Bangladesh, after the Bangladesh government has systematically constructed the noun phrase 'small ethnic group'. A few months back, the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHTs) Affairs issued a secret letter ordering all government officials- deputy commissioners (DC), superintendents of police (SP) and upazila nirbahi officers (UNO) of CHTs - to use the term 'tribe' instead of 'indigenous'. I have heard many indigenous people saying that government officials in CHTs are asking people to use the term 'upajati' (tribe) in formal occasions and governmental administrative documents. I have even witnessed that a foreigner was asked not to use the term 'indigenous' by a mid-level bureaucrat.

The question and concern arises why the term 'indigenous' is so sensitive to the government.

Few months after the original letter issued by the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs on using the term 'tribe', the Bangladesh government passed a bill of 'Small Ethnic Group Cultural Institute Law, 2010' at the Parliament of Bangladesh in April. Following the bill, all "Tribal Cultural Institutes" in the indigenous inhabited areas of Chittagong Hill Tracts, Cox's bazar and North-western part of Bangladesh were directed to use the term 'Small Ethnic Group Cultural Institute' instead of 'Tribal Cultural Institute'.

On the eve of the bill of 'Small Ethnic Group Cultural Institute Law, 2010', our Foreign Minister Dr Dipu Moni said "Bangladesh does not have any Indigenous population" but has "several ethnic minorities and tribal population" in a meeting with Renata Lok Dessallien, the outgoing UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative. Similarly, a government representative of Bangladesh made the same claim at the 9th United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York in April, 2010 on behalf of the Bangladesh government.

Observing the bold claims on the identity of the indigenous people in Bangladesh, the question and concern arises why the term 'indigenous' is so sensitive to the government. A decade ago, the terms 'indigenous', 'tribe', 'small ethnic group' 'pahari' and 'jumma' were interchangeably used by people from all walks of life regardless of their race, class, religion and gender. The terms 'indigenous' 'tribe' and 'jumma' are mainly used by the indigenous people of Bangladesh consciously or unconsciously to identify themselves without any major concern. To the best of my knowledge, however, some well-aware indigenous people, some liberal and leftist politicians and academics, especially some anthropologists and sociologists have consciously tried to avoid the term 'tribe' (upajati) because this term is considered destructive to one's self respect or dignity for many indigenous people of Bangladesh.

Before the bill of "Small Ethnic Group Cultural Institute Law, 2010" was passed at the Parliament, some anthropologists and sociologists from the University of Dhaka and Jahangirnagar University, and some other intellectual bodies attended a discussion with Parliament members where the Speaker of the Parliament sought important advice on many things including the different terms mentioned above. However, the proposed term of 'indigenous' by the academics was avoided rather imposed the noun phrase of 'small ethnic group' by the non- academic policy makers! We, the indigenous people, would be very keen to learn valid reasons as to why the term 'indigenous' had been avoided by the all policy makers, albeit the academics proposed to use the term 'indigenous'.

We also wonder why some indigenous leaders and indigenous Parliament members were not invited at the decision making level of the discussion!

If we look back at the use of the term 'indigenous', we can clearly see the term 'indigenous' was used in the CHT Regulation 1900, income tax laws, the Forest Act 1927 and the State Acquisition and Tenancy (Amendment) Act 2004. Now the question is why the Bangladesh government has made the term so slippery and confusing to many people, albeit the widespread use of the term for over hundred years!! Our Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina herself has used the term 'indigenous' in her previous messages on the 'International Day of the World's Indigenous People'. Hence, our Foreign Minister Dr. Dipu Moni and many other politicians, diplomatic, academics and intellectual bodies have used the term 'indigenous' in their messages, speeches and in many indigenous social and political occasions.

When they used it in those occasions and messages, did they use the term 'indigenous' consciously or unconsciously? If the answer is yes, they used it consciously, then why did they make up their minds to pass the bill of 'Small Ethnic Group Cultural Institute Law, 2010' at the Parliament? Is the term 'indigenous' a threat to the non-indigenous people of Chittagong Hill Tracts or is there a fear of complying with some international laws- the ILO Convention 169, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples? Or, have our politicians been simply brainwashed by some bureaucrats who are against the term 'indigenous'?

While the Bangladesh government representative was delivering his speech at the 9th UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues claiming that "Bangladesh does not have any indigenous people, but some tribal people"; he was reminded by Mr. Hassan Ib Balkassm, Forum expert from Morocco, that "it is up to native and tribal people to decide for themselves whether they are indigenous to a particular region". Similarly, Ms. Tauli-Corpuz, Forum member from the Philippines, also told the government representative that "there were laws recognising the term 'indigenous', including the 1900 CHT Regulation, which referred to indigenous people". In line with the two Forum experts from Morocco and the Philippines, I would like to present my personal arguments over the term 'Indigenous'. It is seen that the indigenous people of Bangladesh have taken up a particular position as 'Indigenous' not 'tribes' (upajati) of their identification in response to the government's claims. Lack of the recognition of our preferred identity may result in more critical issues.

The term 'tribe' (upajati) has also become a racial term within the nation state of Bangladesh as this term is considered to be humiliating, insulting, offensive and disrespectful to many indigenous people. I strongly believe that I have rights to decide who I am and how I want people to call me. I do not simply want to cover up my identity by putting the Marma or the Chakma's identities on top of my Khumi identity. This reality similarly goes to the government's claim on our indigenous identity in Bangladesh. The term 'indigenous' we carry in our blood, and cannot be replaced by any government's policies, ever.

"Reng", Banajogichara Kishor Kishori Kolyan Samity, Banarupa, Rangamati; August 9th, 2010.

Who are Indigenous?

Aditya Kumar Dewan

Most recently, a debate has emerged among government officials, journalists, academics and politicians on the question of indigeneity of indigenous peoples in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). They argue that the current ethnic groups living in the CHT are not indigenous to the CHT. They claim that they came from somewhere else, mainly pointing to Arakan of Burma.

Today, indigenous peoples in Bangladesh are not passive, as their backs are against the wall.

The concept of indigenous is applicable to those populations who live in a given place or territory for a long period of time (i.e. for centuries or thousands of years). In this sense, the population of Bangladesh, including the CHT groups are indigenous to Bangladesh. The concept of indigenous peoples is a very recent phenomenon. According to the United Nations (UN) definition, the indigenous peoples are existing descendents of the original inhabitants in a given territory who have been reduced to minority status today due to invasion, conquest, colonization, settlement and other means by the people coming from overseas. This definition is applicable only to the indigenous peoples living in Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific Rim Islands, and the North and South America (also called New World).

The Europeans, since the discovery of the Americas by Christopher Columbus of Spain in 1492, reduced the inhabitants of the New World population into minority status through conquest and colonization. The indigenous peoples of these continents are variously known to the non-indigenous people as Indians, Natives, Amerindians, autochthones, Aborigines, Fourth World, First Nations, First Peoples and so on. This definition is not directly applicable to the indigenous peoples living in developing countries of the world. Due to this reason, the Chinese and the Indian Government for example refused to accept this definition. They argue that we are all indigenous to our land and we have not come from overseas or conquered the people. They maintained that they have rather ethnic groups called tribal people, scheduled tribes, national minorities, etc.

Because of this definitional limitation and scope, the United Nations has drafted a second definition of indigenous peoples applicable to the indigenous peoples living in developing countries. Three criteria are used to identify the indigenous peoples: (1) the people who relatively live in isolated regions from the mainstream population; (2) they have been able to preserve their language, culture and identity without much impact from the outside world due to their relative isolation; and (3) finally, they are not familiar with the state structure such as police, administration, courts, army or modern market system. Basically, they are kin-based societies who mostly owe allegiance to their lineage chiefs, clan chiefs and tribal chiefs where power is not centralized and lacks coercive power.

Thus, the CHT ethnic groups are indigenous peoples in the CHT from the point of view of the second definition of the UN. They have been (not now) relatively isolated for a long time from the mainstream Bengali population of Bangladesh. They have been able to maintain their distinct cultural and ethnic identity because of their relative isolation from the people living in the plains of Bangladesh. All socio-economic and political relationships within a group (also between the groups) is based on kinship. And finally, all three chiefs in the CHT carried out their socio-economic and political functions through their lineage chiefs and clan chiefs.

No one knows who had first lived in the CHT because of the absence of recorded (both written and

archaeological) evidence. We primarily have oral traditions through legends and stories describing migrations, inter-tribal feuding, raids and expeditions. In fact, the history of all non-western societies, including the indigenous peoples started with the history of European colonization of the non-European world. During colonization period, the colonial administrators, missionaries, traders, adventurers left vivid descriptions on the colonial subject population. We find documented records on the CHT region only from the old colonial documents and descriptions left by colonial administrators such as T.H. Lewin and other European writers. The colonial records show that the CHT was populated by a dozen indigenous groups who have distinctive cultures, languages and identities. The region of the Chittagong Hill Tracts appeared on the first map of Bengal made by Joao Baptista Lavanha in about 1550. The map shows a settlement called Chacomas in the area inhabited by one of the indigenous groups now known as the Chakmas as early as the sixteenth century (van Schendel, Willem, Wolfgang Mey & Aditya Kumar Dewan. 2000. *The Chittagong Hill Tracts: Living in a Borderland*. Bangkok: White Lotus press, p.18).

Therefore, the CHT ethnic groups can make legitimate claim that they are the indigenous inhabitants of the CHT and no non-indigenous people had ever lived in the CHT before them. The non-indigenous people began to settle in the CHT only from the beginning of colonial administration, not before 1860 when the CHT was created as a separate district (within greater Bengal) with the status of an excluded area.

The recent emergence of this debate is more political and ideological to deny the obligation of the government to recognize the rights of indigenous peoples in the CHT. Over the past ten years, there have been many resolutions and declarations on indigenous peoples rights at the UN and international level. However, Bangladesh Government most recently identified the CHT ethnic groups and other indigenous groups in Bangladesh as "Chotta Nrigosti" (small nationalities), not indigenous groups. Some academics and journalists also refused to call them indigenous and many attempts have been made to distort the real history of the CHT. There are hidden objectives behind all these denials to keep the indigenous people marginalized. They fear that the use the term "indigenous people " may oblige the government to recognize and respect the rights of people the CHT in accordance to the UN definition of rights of the Indigenous peoples.

Today, indigenous peoples in Bangladesh are not passive, as their backs are against the wall. They led an armed struggle for regional autonomy and signed a peace agreement with the Government of Bangladesh in 1997. However, the Peace Accord has not been fully implemented and many critical issues such as land rights has remained unresolved. For this broken promise (Peace Accord), the CHT indigenous peoples are now fighting back to assert their rights (full implementation of peace accord). They are campaigning at the national and international level by using the media, protest demonstrations around the world, court challenges and making alliances with national and other international human rights organizations.

ILO Conventions

Abhilash Kanti Tripura

The International Labour Organisation was the first intergovernmental organization to address indigenous peoples' rights. The ILO has been working with indigenous and tribal peoples since the 1920s, in recognition of their particular vulnerability and marginalization. This was initially in the context of forced labour among plantation workers in former colonies in Latin America. The prevalence of this problem in different parts of the world led to the adoption of the first of the ILO's fundamental human rights instruments, Forced Labour Convention (No. 29) in 1930. It was while following implementation of this Convention that the ILO realized that indigenous peoples' issues needed to be addressed in specific ways. In 1952, the 'Andean Indian Programme' was born, comprising of an integrated programme for regional development, which lasted for 20 years and ultimately involved several countries, UN agencies and, for the first time, indigenous peoples themselves. The initiation of the Andean Indian Programme motivated the ILO to take a deeper look at the situation of indigenous peoples worldwide, beginning with a detailed study published in 1953 to catalogue the living and working conditions of these peoples around the world.

These two conventions remain the only legally binding international statements of the rights of these peoples.

In the context of the Andean Indian Programme, the other UN system organizations turned to the ILO and asked it to develop an international convention on the subject. During the flurry of human rights activity which characterized the post World War period, the ILO began work on what would become the Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, 1957 (No. 107). This seminal Convention, adopted with the active participation of the rest of the UN system, remained unique in international law until the adoption of its replacement Convention, No.169, by the ILO in 1989. Together, these two conventions remain the only legally binding, comprehensive international statements of the rights of these peoples and of States' obligations towards them. Convention No. 107 was revised and updated in 1989, with the adoption of the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (Convention No. 169). The revised convention represented a change in approach - away from the integrationist and paternalistic approach of the earlier Convention, towards an acknowledgement of indigenous and tribal peoples' distinct cultures and ways of life. In particular, Convention No. 169 recognised the right of indigenous and tribal peoples to determine their own path of development.

Convention No. 107 and Convention No. 169

Convention No. 107 is a broad development instrument, covering a wide range of issues such as land; recruitment and conditions of employment; vocational training, handicrafts and rural industries; social security and health; and education and means of communication. Particularly the provisions of Convention No. 107 with regards to land, territories and resources have a wide coverage and are similar to those of Convention No.169. Convention No. 107 was ratified by 27 countries. However, as mentioned above, it has an integrationist approach that reflects the prevailing development discourse at the time of its adoption. During the 1970s, when the UN began to examine the situation of indigenous and tribal peoples in more detail, and when indigenous peoples began to be more visible at the international level, the approach of Convention No. 107 was questioned. A group of experts convened in 1986 by the Governing Body of the ILO concluded that "the integrationist approach of the Convention was obsolete and that its application was detrimental in the modern world"[www.pro169.org]. Following this, the Convention was revised during 1988 - 1989, and

Convention No. 169 was adopted in 1989. Since the adoption of Convention No. 169, Convention No. 107 is no longer open for ratification, but remains binding on countries which have yet to ratify Convention No. 169 (this includes Bangladesh).

To date, Convention No.169 remains the only legally binding international instrument open for ratification, which deals specifically with the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples. Today, it has been ratified by 22 countries (including Bangladesh's neighboring country, Nepal), but is setting standards far beyond the ratifications, as a global reference point for the discussion and definition of indigenous peoples' rights. Convention No.169 is a comprehensive instrument, which covers a wide range of issues, including land rights, access to natural resources, health, education, vocational training, conditions of employment and contacts across borders. The fundamental concepts of Convention No. 169 are consultation and participation, implying that indigenous peoples have the right to be consulted and to participate in policy, legislative, administrative and development processes that affect them, and to decide their own priorities for development. The other basic principles of ILO Convention No. 169 are self-identification; non-discrimination; special measures; recognition of the cultural and other specificities of indigenous and tribal peoples; right to decide priorities for development.

ILO's programme in Bangladesh

The Government of Bangladesh (GoB) ratified the ILO Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Populations (Convention No. 107) in 1972 as a sign of commitment towards the country's indigenous and tribal populations. The convention still has potential to be used as an instrument for dialogue and as a framework for addressing indigenous peoples' development in Bangladesh. The ILO is systematically monitoring implementation of Convention No.107 and engaging in dialogue with the government on pending issues, which include, among others, ratification of C169; implementation of important elements of the CHT Peace Accord; socioeconomic development of indigenous peoples; adopting and implementing the proposed National Indigenous People's Policy; appropriate collaboration and participation of the indigenous communities in the design and implementation of measures affecting them; legislative developments related to the convention; proper functioning of CHT Land Commission; land rights of plains indigenous people; rehabilitation of returned refugees and internally displaced persons; and rights to Jum cultivation etc.

The current government has stated its commitment to promote and protect indigenous peoples' rights, including ratification of ILO Convention No. 169, as evident from the new Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). Against this backdrop and in accordance with its policy on strengthening application of ratified conventions through technical cooperation, the ILO, with the support of DANIDA and the European Commission, is continuing its efforts to build capacities on indigenous and tribal peoples' issues in Bangladesh, focusing on rights and good practices in cooperation with the Government.

The key activities focus on capacity building of government, indigenous peoples and civil society actors; awareness-raising campaigning for the ratification of ILO Convention No. 169; and exploring ways to improve communication channels between government institutions and indigenous peoples, so that effective solutions can be found to address their needs. ILO hopes that the integrated approach of capacity building and advocacy will promote mutual understanding and a shared sense of value for the culture and rights of indigenous peoples among policy makers and other citizens of Bangladesh, which will ultimately enhance democracy, social harmony and long-term peace in the country.

Published in Sanghati 2010.

Debating Zainal Abedin

Borendra Lal Tripura

Though the progressive section of Bengali community has positively responded to the appeal of identifying us as "Indigenous", the conservative section of the society is fiercely opposing the appeal, which is evident from the reactions of Mohammed Zainal Abedin (2006) and Mohammad Humayun Kabir (2006). Hecllo (1972) said that "a policy may usefully be considered as a course of action or inaction rather than specific decisions or actions". The inaction of Bangladesh government since the declaration of world indigenous decade denotes the state policy. It has been revealed vividly through the television interviews of government ministers and the abstention of Bangladesh from voting in adoption of UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. I will try to unpack the misconceptions of the conservative section by analysing a text by Zainal Abedin.

Many kings inscribed their coins with Arabic. How does it show that Chakma kings are subordinate to Bengal?

In "CHT tribes are not 'Adivashis'", Mohammed Zainal Abedin appears to be looking for the meaning of 'aborigine' in dictionaries to prove his argument. Dictionary-meanings relevant to ethnicities are rooted in the colonial views of the early 17th century. I am citing the definition of 'indigenous people' as envisaged by the UN, ILO, World Bank and International Law:

The terms "indigenous peoples," "indigenous ethnic minorities," and "tribal groups" are used to describe social groups that share similar characteristics, namely a social and cultural identity that is distinct from dominant groups in society. United Nations human rights bodies, ILO, the World Bank and International Law apply four criteria to distinguish indigenous peoples: (a) indigenous peoples usually live within (or maintain attachments to) geographically distinct ancestral territories; (b) they tend to maintain distinct social, economic, and political institutions within their territories; (c) they typically aspire to remain distinct culturally, geographically and institutionally rather than assimilate fully into national society; and (d) they self-identify as indigenous or tribal.

Despite common characteristics, there does not exist any single accepted definition of indigenous peoples that captures their diversity. Self-identification as indigenous is usually regarded as a fundamental criterion, sometimes in combination with other variables such as "language spoken," and "geographic location or concentration."

Zainal Abedin emphasized the arrival and conquest of Muslims in Bengal in the year 1204. Subsequently, he raises the question, "Did Chakma or other tribes reach CHT before 1204?" He further tries to contend that ancient 'Horical Region' was a part of Bengal and CHT is that Horical Region. In fact, CHT was never a part of ancient Bengal. It was incorporated into Bengal only in 1860 by the then British government. According to Brauns and Loffler (1990) "the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) was first colonized, not by a kingdom or empire from the neighbouring plains, but by British imperialists" (p. 27). Willem van Schendel, Wolfgang Mey & Dewan (2001) stated, "In 1860 the British occupied it and made it a district of their colony of British India. It is they who named it 'Chittagong Hill tracts' (Parbotyo Chottogram In Bengali) (p. 19). The same evidence is also found in Chakraborty (1977), Hutchinson (1978) and Devashish Roy (2002). Ishaq (1975), Serajuddin (1968) and Chakraborty (1977) stated that the British East India Company had converted the major chiefdoms and tribal confederacies of the region into British tributaries in 1787 through signing an agreement between the Chakma Raja Jan Bux Khan and the British Governor General, Lord Cornwallis after a decade-long guerrilla warfare. This region was named as Chittagong Hill Tracts in 1860, by the British Indian government 'due to its proximity to' Chittagong (Brauns and Loffler, 1990). Thus it was

for the first ever time CHT was enjoined to the then Bengal. Abedin has further claimed that

“All the Chakma kings showed their total allegiance to the Muslim rulers of Delhi.....loyalty and allegiance to Muslim rulers.....Rajas during the Muslim period were their subordinate.”

Subsequently, he argues that CHT people were subordinate to Bengal Shuviders.

Abedin also cites Sugata Chakma, who stated,

“The Tripura state of today's India is the original home of the Bangladeshi Tripuras. Their ancestors migrated to CHT for secured life when their opponents rooted them out from Tripura. However, some of them entered CHT in search of food” (Sugata Chakma: p. 57, cited in Zainal Abedin, 2006).

However, there was no geographically demarcated CHT before 1860, so how could the ‘ancestors’ of Tripura people come to CHT? Possibly Abedin wanted to argue that Tripura people came to Chakma Kingdom. If this was the claim, I contend that the present boundary of Chakma circle (Rangamati Hill District and some parts of Dighinala Upojela of Khagrachari Hill District) was the border of ancient Chakma Kingdom. So coming of Tripura people to a territory (the present Khagrachari) is only a move (if they actually moved) from the present day Tripura State to its adjoining territory, which was neither a part of Chakma Kingdom nor ‘No Man’s Land’.

It is well known that Tripura King, Dhorma Manikkya visited Dighinala, outside Chakma Kingdom. He dug a big dighi (pond) there for the subjects living in the surrounding places. In addition, the adjoining regions such as Nowakhali, Chandpur, Comilla and parts of Chittagong District were territories of Tripura Kingdom. For historical evidence, one can examine the documents of landownership of this region before 1947. We can also visit Comilla Town Hall, where the picture and scripture of Tripura King are still preserved as its founder. (See also Sandys, 1915 and Singho, 1897). The ancient map of Tripura Kingdom also covers the whole area of present Bangladesh up to Sundarban. Some Tripura villages still exist in Faridpur, Chandpur, Sylhet, Hobigonj, Comilla, and Chittagong as a residue of ancient Tripura inhabitants. Sandys stated,

“The Tripura is the only ruling dynasty that has an era of its own. It dates from 590 AD, when Rajah Bira Raj Hamtorfa.....extended his conquests beyond the Ganges” (Cited in Tripura, 2005, p.69).

The same evidence is also found in Singho (1897). This historical evidence implies that the border of Tripura Kingdom was spread unto the Ganges before 590 AD and it has been further extended beyond the Ganges by King Hamtorfa. It clearly proves that we are indigenous people of Bangladesh. Tripura people have been living in the same land; only the kings (rulers) and border have changed. But Zainal Abedin declares that “For Bangladesh they are settlers and we are ready to accept them as tribes, not as ‘adivashis’?” Elsewhere, he quotes Verghes (1996) as an attempt to claim that Bengali people are the ‘adivasi’ of CHT saying, “The CHT tribes migrated into the area between the 16th and 19th centuries with the Bengali settlements along the Chittagong coastal land” (p.374). Historical information clearly shows the historical precedence of the settlement of CHT people in CHT. Bengali people only started living in the coastal area of Chittagong within that period, whereas the CHT people started living in CHT (which was not a part of Bengal before 1860). Very few Bengali people moved to CHT in mid 20th century, as the census of 1941 shows 1.5% Bengali people in CHT.

Abedin argues, “Muslim did not capture the region from the tribals”. He also mentioned that Chakma king “even voluntarily inscribed the Arabic term ‘Allah-hu Rabbi’ in their coins”. On the basis of this inscription, he claimed that Chakmas are subordinate to them. It is a common process that different religions expanded and contracted in different historical periods. Many kings loved Islam and inscribed their coins with Arabic term. How does it show that Chakma kings are subordinate to Bengal?

Zainal Abedin further argues that as Chakma language has close linguistic relationship with Bangla, so they may have been subjects of the Bengal territory. On the same principle, should Assam also be included into Bengal, since Assamese has linguistic ties with Bengali. In the medieval period, lords and kings used to prefer speaking in a language different from the commoners. Bengali was used as the official language by many Tripura kings. This may also be the case with Chakmas-- influenced by Bangla, following the royal family.

It has been a long practice in Bangladesh to identify ethnic minority peoples as 'Upojati' (tribes), which is derogatory. Zainal Abedin offers, "For Bangladesh they are settlers and we are ready to accept them as tribes, not as 'adivasi'". This is the only thing he could offer to the ethnic minority people of CHT in his essay. Zainal Abedin rejects the CHT Regulation Act, 1900, claiming that it was framed by 'alien' government'. As per this principles, he should reject all the laws of Bangladesh, because the judicial, civil and criminal laws including land reform and ownership and education are based on the 'alien's frame'. Contrary to his own notion, he does possess a high respect for the 'alien' Afghan rulers, who invaded Delhi. Finally, Abedin advocates abolishing the 'ornamental' designation of 'Rajas', and 'voiding' the 1997 Accord.

In 1992, the prime minister of Australia, Paul Keating, called for the nation to adopt 'productive diversity' in terms of cultural and linguistic pluralism. Cope and Kalantzis (1997) argue that "the concepts of Productive Diversity are based on the negotiation of differences, valuing differences and cross-cultural negotiation." They have further explained, "Pluralism as a principle of social order represents a new ethos of citizenship, from the micropolitics of team membership, to corporate citizenship, to citizenship of multicultural nation, to global citizenship". It is human nature to fight for recognition of identity and culture, for accessing resource and prosperity. Governments must deal with the issue of diversity positively with a sense of civility, humanity, modernity and in the light of international enlightenment, not with 'old style nationalism'.

Bibliography

- Brauns, C.D. and Loffler, L.G. (1990), *Mru: Hill People the Border of Bangladesh*. Birkhauser Verlag, Basel.
- Chakroborty, R. L. (1977), *Chakma Resistance to early British Rule*. In *Bangladesh Historical Studies: Journal of the Bangladesh Itihaas Samiti.*, Vol. II, pp. 133-156.
- Cope, B. & Kalantzis, M. (1997), *Productive Diversity*. NSW: Pluto Press Australia Limited.
- Hecló, H. (1972), *Review Article: Policy Analysis*. In *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 83-108.
- Humayun Kabir, Mohammad (2006),
- Hutchinson, R. H. S. (1978), *The Chittagong Hill Tract*, Vivek Publishing House, Delhi.
- ILO Convention, 1959
- Ishaq, Muhammed (1975), *Bangladesh District Gazetteers: Chittagong Hill Tracts*, Ministry of Cabinet Affairs, Dhaka.
- Singho, K. C. (1897), *Tripurar Itihas (The History of Tripura)*, Agartola: Rajmala Prakashan.
- Roy, Raja Devashish (2002), *Indigenous Rights in Bangladesh*
- Sandys, E.F. (1915), *History of Tripura*. Agartola, India.
- Serajuddin, A. M. (1968), *The Rajas of the Chittagong Hill Tracts and their Relations with the Mughals and the East India Company in the Eighteenth Century*. In *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Pakistan*, Vol. 8, No. 2.
- Tripura, Provangshu (2005), *Khagrachari Jelar Itihas (The History of Khagrachari District)*. Chittagong
- UNDP and Indigenous Peoples: *A Practice Note on Engagement*
- Willem van Schendel, Wolfgang Mey & Aditya Kumar Dewan (2001), "Living in a Borderland" UPL, Dhaka.
- Zainal Abedin, M. (2006), *CHT tribes are not 'Adivashis' in Bangladesh* in *Thomas Pine's Corner (Online Journal)*. Accessed on August 10, 2007

Adapted from an essay published in Journal of Contemporary CHT and Indigenous Peoples Online, November 30, 2007

De-colonising the National Imagination



Colonial Foundation of Pahari Ethnicity

Prashanta Tripura

In 1869, Captain T. H. Lewin, the first Deputy Commissioner of the Chittagong Hill Tracts and also one of the first ethnographers of the area, wrote [1]: Among a simple people like our hill men there is no...desire [for excessive wealth]; their nomadic life precludes any great accumulation of wealth, and they enjoy perfect social equality.

Naturally, colonialism came to be seen as leading the whole world to higher stages of civilization.

Lewin may have overstated the simple, egalitarian nature of pre-colonial social life in the Hill Tracts, but he was certainly right in speaking of 'our hill men'. As an idealized type of humans, the 'hill men' were an invention; they existed not so much in any real time and place as in the imagination of the British. Of course, the 'hill men' of the British corresponds to the people of the Hill Tracts who identify themselves, and are identified by others, as 'Pahari' (i.e. hill people) or 'tribal'. Their existence is real enough. But this does not mean that these Paharis always constituted a single category of people in the past. My argument in this paper is that Pahari ethnicity was constructed during the British colonial period.

In British India, the term 'hill men' referred to all the 'tribal' peoples living in the hill tracts bordering Assam and Bengal. These 'hill tribes' included groups such as the 'Nagas' and the 'Kukis' who used to carry out predatory raids in the plains to capture slaves, women and heads (as trophies). When the British came to rule India, the 'headhunters' managed to capture not only a few heads from among the colonial intruders, but also the imagination of a great many of them. The revulsion and outrage that the 'savages' aroused in the British soon gave way to an image of the former as the Children of Nature. Of course, not all the hill men were headhunters, but they were savages all the same in the eyes of the British, and in due time, they were elevated to the status of Rousseau's Noble Savage. Thus Lewin wrote of the 'Chittagong Hill Tribes':[2]

There is much that is loveable about them. They are very simple, and honest, and merry; but they have no sympathy with anything above the level of their bodily wants....[I]f these people could be taught to live according to Nature in its higher sense,...this would be the wisest and the grandest ideal.

Clearly, we can see that the category 'hill men' was constructed not so much with a view to place the people so designated in a proper historical and cultural context, but to have them serve as objects in a European discourse that went back at least to the eighteenth century (Rousseau's Noble Savage).[3]

British views of the 'hill men' were also influenced by nineteenth century evolutionist thinking, as can be seen, for example, by Lewin's reference to Maine's Ancient Law[4]. Accordingly, compared to the people of the plains—the 'Hindus', the 'Bengalis' etc.—the 'hill men' were seen to be at a lower stage of cultural evolution. As such, the 'hill men' marked the boundary of the Indian civilization, of the Hindu caste system, of the pre-British empire of the Mughals, and so on. Again, no truly historical perspective was adopted towards the 'hill men', who simply served as a prop for the British in their ethnocentric attitudes towards the colonized majority of the plains. When the Indians (or the Hindus or the Muslims or the Bengalis) came to articulate their nationalist aspirations, they largely accepted British categories of ethnic differentiation. That the Paharis or the 'tribal' people of the Hill Tracts cannot identify with the Bengalis today, or vice versa, is usually attributed to British 'divide and rule' policies. In order to divide, however, what the British had to do was, first of all, to classify. The real legacy of colonialism is that colonialist classificatory schemes continue to be meaningful to date,

and perhaps more so than before. At least, that is the case with the Pahari/Bengali (or tribal/non-tribal) dichotomy that we confront in the Hill Tracts today.

In what follows, I discuss more fully some of the basic issues that relate to the colonial foundation of Pahari ethnicity. First, 'Pahari' and 'tribal' are synonymous terms; in this context, the implications that the notion of tribe has had for the societies so designated need to be examined. Secondly, as already indicated, categories such as 'hill men' or 'hill tribe' were meaningful not only in terms of a general Western discourse on the nature of human society, but also in terms of how Indian society and history in particular were viewed in this discourse; this latter aspect of the discourse will be dealt with more fully in this paper. Thirdly, I will discuss how the British ignored certain theoretical as well as empirical inconsistencies in their construction of the category 'hill men'/'hill tribe'. Finally, I will show how British discourse has altered the boundaries of ethnic differentiation for the 'hill men' of the Hill Tracts, and for the Bengalis as well.

Evolutionism, Colonialism, and the Notion of Tribe

In common usage the word 'tribe' has various meanings and connotations. But even as a technical term, as used in anthropology, it has never been defined precisely. Because, no matter how one defines it, in the real world, one is always confronted with the problem of determining where one tribe ends and another begins. Nonetheless, the concept of tribal society, whether clearly formulated or not, is applied by almost every anthropologist and by scholars in other disciplines. A tribal society is generally understood to be one in which social, political and economic relations are organized around kinship[5]. By definition, tribal societies do not live under state organization, and this is the primary feature that distinguishes them from 'peasants'[6]. This conceptualization forms part of the accepted view of human social evolution. It is the view that before the emergence of the earliest states—or civilizations as they are more popularly called—in a few isolated areas of the world, human beings everywhere were organized into small bands of hunter-gatherers or into larger tribal units of shifting cultivators and pastoralists. With the emergence and expansion of state-organized societies, tribal people everywhere began to be incorporated into, or displaced/exterminated by this new type of society, unless, of course, they themselves were to make a transition to the advanced evolutionary stage.

This view of human social evolution became most clearly articulated by Euro-American theoreticians of the nineteenth century such as Lewis Henry Morgan, who wrote the well-known (via Engels) book *Ancient Society*. Knowledge about 'ancient' or 'primitive' societies was actually knowledge about contemporary 'tribal' societies that Europeans came in direct contact with following their worldwide colonial expansion. In the nexus of knowledge and power, Europe's colonial expansion had by now come to be seen as the unfolding of an inevitable evolutionary process; the societies that they colonized were below and behind them in various stages of cultural evolution, the 'tribal' societies being at the very bottom. Naturally, colonialism came to be seen as leading the whole world to higher stages of civilization; Europeans went around the world not only or even primarily for exploiting the resources in areas inhabited by less advanced peoples, but they had a moral mission: to civilize the natives, to show them the way to progress.

Not that there were no contending views regarding the nature of human society and history. Marx and Engels, among others, saw the State as an instrument of oppression most evolved in its capitalist form. But they harbored no illusion as to the viability of the tribal societies against the onslaught of the more evolved ones. If existing tribal societies showed many elements of the ideal society, their survival could not be guaranteed against the march of history. Thus the communists could not worry about the fate of the remnants of 'primitive communist' societies; their political task was to try to transform the whole world into post-capitalist communist societies. (This transformation

would not take place simply as the act of evolution, but of revolution, in which human agents would seek to shape their own history.) Marx and his followers no doubt saw European colonial expansion as bringing about a global system of exploitation, but in order to bring this system down, all societies needed to go through capitalism. 'Tribal' societies thus came to be seen as pre-capitalist societies, or at best, as incipient forms of feudalism. Their subjugation by states, whether capitalist or not, was mandated by history.

Thus the incorporation of 'tribal' peoples in colonial empires took place without any serious practical or ideological difficulties, except for the weak resistance the 'tribal' peoples themselves offered. It was inevitable that the various 'hill tribes' living near Assam and Bengal would in time become subjects of British India, and thus citizens of the post-colonial states of Pakistan (Bangladesh) and India.

The Tribal/Non-Tribal Dichotomy in British Discourse

In British India, the category 'hill tribe' did not simply entail applying the notion of tribal society to people living in the hills. It was part of a larger constellation of colonialist ideas, images and categories that formed the British 'Orientalist'[7] discourse on Indian society and history. In this discourse the category 'hill tribe' (or more generally 'tribal') was contrasted with various 'non-tribal' categories, e.g. 'caste', 'Hindu', 'Indian', 'Bengali' and so on. Just as 'communalism' was a major theme in the British discourse on India, the tribal/non-tribal dichotomy became an important one. Coupled with the theory—myth rather—of Aryan invasion, this dichotomy served to produce a clearly racist interpretation of how the complex ethnic make-up of the subcontinent had come about. In this view, 'Indo-European' speaking 'Aryan' races came in successive waves to the subcontinent and over time formed the upper strata of the Hindu caste system; native races formed the lower strata; but there were also those who resisted being incorporated into the caste system, or simply remained outside of it due to 'isolation'—the 'tribal' people. Many of the 'hill tribes' were 'Tibeto-Burman' speaking "Mongoloid" 'immigrants' who had managed to live in relative isolation from the societies of the plains.

It appears that it was difficult for the British to think and see beyond what experience of their own colonial expansion had been. They were the last wave of the Aryan invaders! Even though they came to the sub-continent as Vaisyas (i.e. merchants) first, they would soon rule over it as Kshatriyas (i.e. royals), and as Brahmins (priests/scholars) as well. British and other European scholars would soon uncover India's forgotten glories of the past and re-write the known history of the inglorious present. In fact Europeans as a whole were now ruling—as Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas—over the Shudras of the world. They even had their untouchables, the 'Negroes'.* They had certainly brought many tribal societies under their rule, if they had not always displaced, or even exterminated, them. The British must have felt that they represented a higher and purer type of caste than the Hindus and Muslims they came to rule. Even if many Indians were to turn into 'Brown Englishmen' later, they were still to remain inferior replicas of the British, because at least skin color could not be changed.

On the surface, however, the caste system became a major sign of the state of moral degradation in which the British viewed the Indians to be. In contrast to the people of the plains, the 'hill tribes', especially groups such as the Nagas, were seen as displaying many fine attributes, such as "courage and cheerfulness, their magnificent physique, truthfulness and independence, their absence of servility and lack of caste." [8] While in the plains the British were busy adopting policies designed to eradicate many social evils, in the hills they were concerned about how to preserve the good qualities they saw in the hill men. Thus, in the foreword to an ethnography on the Nagas, Henry Balfour of Oxford declared: [9] The Nagas, with their fine physique, intelligence, and considerable

potentialities, are worth preserving and capable of improvement if a process of gradual successive changes be adopted, and if they are allowed to absorb the ideas of higher culture in small doses whose effects may be cumulative [Emphasis added].

The emphasis on physical features and notions of 'improvement'/'higher culture' reflect the mixture of racist and evolutionist thinking that was prevalent among European scholars in the nineteenth century. Now, though the Nagas were not preserved literally, they were to become pickled in the ethnographic present of the ahistorical descriptions of them that would be written by administrator-ethnographers. The Nagas and the other hill tribes were essentially 'people without history'[10]. Government-initiated ethnographies would present them as isolates, as if they lived in time capsules without being affected by historical forces, not even by the colonial encounter itself that made such descriptions possible in the first place.

While colonial administrators did not try to preserve the people of the hills against the influence they themselves were exerting, they felt that these simple and vulnerable people needed protection against the 'corrupting influence' of the plains. The British became the champion of the hill men's concerns; they knew what their subjects liked and disliked. Thus Lewin wrote: "The hill men like neither the plains nor their inhabitants." [11] That he himself disliked the plainsmen is clear in his own words:[12]

A title of the care and beneficence expended upon the Hindoo would make of these hill races a noble and enlightened people. They have until lately been totally neglected, and yet a word of kindness, one sympathizing expression, and their hearts are open to you. My great and distinctive feeling with them has been that they were my fellow-creatures, men and women like myself: with the Bengallee I have never been in accord. [Emphasis added.]

Why this discord with the Bengalis? It seems that it was the Bengalis, at least their elite segments including the 'Babus', who were, or had become, more like the British. But perhaps the fact that a large number of the Bengalis were peasants who toiled for the empire prevented Lewin from being able to think of them as his fellow creatures.

Anomalies: Peasants and Slaves

Although the hill men were generally seen to be simple, honest and egalitarian people—thus distinct from the people of the plains whose moral worth was more dubious—not all of them fit this ideal picture. Lewin particularly singled out the Tripuras as an exception: "[They] are the only hill people...among whom I have met with meanness and lying—the only people whose savagery is unredeemed by simplicity and manly independence." [13] While Lewin did not cite any instance of meanness or lying, it is clear where his low esteem for the Tripuras came from: "The Tipperah [Tripura], where he is brought into contact with, or under the influence of, the Bengallee, easily acquire their worst vices and superstitions, losing at the same time the leading characteristic of primitive men—the love of truth" [14]. Lewin did not like the Bengalis, therefore it was only natural for him not to think too highly of the Tripuras either, who in his view had come under the corrupt influence of the Bengalis.

The Tripuras indeed have had close interaction with the Bengalis for at least five centuries, ever since the sanskritized* Manikya rulers of the Kingdom of Tripura welcomed a large number of high caste Bengali Hindus in their realm [15]. Lewin described the Tripuras he saw in the Fenny valley of the Hill Tracts as belonging to the 'great Nowuttea [Noatia] clan.' [16] This 'clan', however, was no clan at all. Rather, it was one of the five divisions into which the 'tribal' (Tripura or Tipra) subjects of the Manikya rulers came to be classed. Of these five divisions, the Puran Tipras were closely associated with the royal family; the Jamatias constituted the 'fighting caste' of the kingdom; the Noatias, on the other

hand, were mainly jumial peasants divided into a large number of loosely organized kin groups; the Riangs were also mainly peasants, but lineage organization seems to have been stronger among them, and they had also produced some heroic warriors in the kingdom's history; the fifth division, the Halams, consisted of various 'tribes' who are supposed to be of 'Kuki'* origin, but many of them speak the Tripuri language (Kokborok) today.

Like the Tripuras, the Chakmas—the largest 'tribe' of the Hill Tracts—too display signs of having been in close cultural contact with, among others, the Bengalis, as is reflected in their language. Their socio-political organization in pre-colonial period seems to have been shaped by interaction with the Kingdoms of Tripura and Arakan, and by Mughal influences. Likewise, the history of the Marmas is closely linked to Arakan and Burma. Both these groups professed Buddhism when the British came to rule them. They also possessed some literacy. All such facts were known to Lewin, but he tried to stick to a homogeneous 'Children of Nature' representation of the 'hill men.' In a highly instructive manner, after a year of the publication of *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the Dwellers Therein* (published in 1869 from Calcutta), Lewin changed the title of his book to *Wild Races of South-Eastern India* (published in 1870 from London). The idea of the wild races was no doubt a colonial fantasy. Such a category of people ought to have existed, so they might as well be invented. Thus the Chakmas, the Marmas, the Tripuras and others turned into 'wild races', though they were hardly worthy of such a romantic designation.

Actually, even the 'wilder' groups (the headhunters) were not deserving of the Children of Nature image which was more readily applied to them. The fact that some of them used to employ slaves to work on their jum fields does not certainly confirm Lewin's assessment that the hill men enjoyed perfect social equality. In order to uphold the image of simple, egalitarian social life of the hill men, the British downplayed all instances of inequality, and at the same time, emphasized the democratic nature of village government found among some Naga groups, and generalized it for all the 'hill tribes.' The Naga example here reminds one of Plato's Republic, because the 'democratic' Nagas too apparently owned slaves prior to colonial rule.[17] The slave-owning headhunters, however, did not simply prey on the more civilized communities, but they also entered into military alliances with the latter from time to time.

It is in such a context that Morton Fried critiques the notion of tribe[18]. According to him, most societies that are reported as tribal societies in the ethnographic literature are not really representative of a pre-state mode of social organization, but rather, reflect adaptation to state societies. The British administrators, however, could not have possibly dwelt over such theoretical issues, and glossing over the anomalies, they lumped together a diverse group of societies under the rubric 'tribal' or 'hill men.' Administrative policies for governing these people were supposedly guided by what the British thought were the essential characteristics of them—primitive, simple, honest, vulnerable; thus the paternalistic policy of 'protective insulation' was adopted. However, one wonders whether in adopting such a policy the British were not also motivated by a desire to protect the boundaries of their empire. During the Second World War, at least, the Nagas, having been befriended by the British, helped the latter in trying to stop the Japanese thrust to Kohima, the capital of the present-day Nagaland.[19]

As for the claim that the British tried to keep much of the 'tribal' principles of self-government intact, it starts to dissolve under close scrutiny. For example, for the Tripuras living in the Mong Circle (roughly equivalent to present-day Khagrachari district), where they were the overwhelming majority when the circle was created, they could hardly accept the British-appointed hereditary Marma chiefs as their own because no kinship/ethnic ties bound them. What British administrative policies really did was that among the 'tribal' people, a land-owning class was created, whereas the rest were reduced

into rent-paying peasants. Such facts are not compatible with the image of the classless egalitarian society that Lewin's hill men were supposed to stand for.

The Shift of Ethnic Boundaries

However problematic the categories 'tribal' or 'hill men' may be from a historical or anthropological perspective, it is obvious that they are no longer simply a matter of British imagination. In the Hill Tracts today, two terms, Pahari ('hill people') and 'tribal,' are used to designate the collective ethnic identity of Chakmas, Marmas, Tripuras etc. vis-à-vis the Bengalis. That 'Pahari' denotes an ethnic category is obvious enough. But it is not difficult to see that 'tribal' also functions more as an ethnic/racial label than as an anthropological concept. For example, when someone tells me that I look like a tribal, what he or she means is that I look like somebody who comes from the Hill Tracts. Of course, the anthropologist in me could respond jokingly to such an assertion by saying, "Yes, you are right! But how could you tell by just looking at me that my social, economic and political relations with other people are guided mainly by kinship; that I don't live in a state; that I am pre-literate, pre-capitalist; that I live in the Neolithic period, and that I am just about to collect your head as a trophy?" Nonetheless, there is no denying the fact that the term 'tribal' is used by both Paharis and Bengalis alike as a meaningful category of ethnic differentiation in present-day Hill Tracts. While 'tribal' and 'Pahari' are coterminous and interchangeable, the latter is preferred by a growing number of Paharis as well as Bengalis since it lacks some of the pejorative connotations of the former. There is also a third label, the term 'Jumma' as employed by the Jana Sanghati Samiti, that has for some time vied with the other two for general currency.* Curiously, the term 'non-tribal' is more frequently used to refer to the Bengalis than the name 'Bengali' itself. Perhaps this practice reflects a collective attempt on the part of the Bengalis to de-emphasize the 'communal' nuance that the Pahari/Bengali dichotomy carries with it. Those who prefer the term 'tribal' and 'non-tribal' perhaps also wish to deny the Paharis a separate identity apart from the Bengalis. Of course, neither of the pair really helps in this regard.

The significant thing about the tribal/non-tribal or Pahari/Bengali differentiation is that it had not existed, at least not in the same form, before the British introduced the categories 'hill men' or 'tribal'. For example, to designate 'other people', the Tripuras use the expression 'Wanjwi-Shikam', which literally translates as 'Bengalis and Kukis'. What this suggests is that the Tripuras in the past felt no closer affinity to the 'Kukis' than to the 'Bengalis'. Similarly, the Bawms speak of 'Kornu-Vaipa', literally, 'Bengali women and Tripura men' to designate their category of 'other people'[20] (I cannot explain why different gender suffixes are used in this particular way here). Now, to complete the picture, Lewin reports that even the Bengalis (of Chittagong) made a distinction between two classes of 'hill men': "The friendly tribes living close along the Chittagong District border [are called] Joomahs [i.e. jumia, literally jum-cultivator, to which the Chakma word 'Jumma' is related], and all other hill men, more especially if unable to speak the vernacular of Bengal, are distinguished as Kookies." [21] This classification is no longer used by the Bengalis today, who are more likely to think of all the tribal people—no matter how well they speak Bengali—as belonging in the same category of not-so-friendly Shanti Bahini (former armed wing of the Jana Sanghati Samiti) supporters. On the other hand, while groups such as the Tripuras and Bawms both still maintain an ethnic distance from the Bengalis, they no longer do the same with respect to each other, at least not when they speak of 'We the tribal people (or Paharis).' When Lewin presented 'his' hill men as a single category of people, he was well aware that "none of them appear to have any general term for all the hill dwellers." [22] The British categories 'hill men' and 'tribal' more than fulfilled this 'inadequacy.' But one wonders whether the tribal/non-tribal (i.e. Pahari/Bengali) boundary would have carried any meaning today had the British not altered the ways in which different groups articulated their identities in relation to one another.

Conclusion

In 1906, Hutchinson, one of Lewin's successors as an administrator of the Hill Tracts, expressed his concern about the future of the hill men in the following terms:[23] The dark and silent forests, at present the home of the elephant and tiger, will be succeeded by fields of smiling corn. But with this change the Hillman, with his simple ways and curious customs, will also disappear, and the charm and innocence of his present life will be a dream of the past. That this fate will finally overtake the Hill Tracts I have not the slightest doubt, for the changes and progress of the last few years are in themselves an indication of what is to come. It seems well, therefore, to collect while we may all available data as to the manners and customs of these interesting people ere, with the resistless march of evolution, they merge forth and become identified with the people of the plains.

Despite the simplistic colonialist notions, Hutchinson did correctly forecast many of the changes that would take place in the Hill Tracts since he ruled it. But he was completely mistaken in thinking that the hill men would "merge forth and become identified with the people of the plains." If anything, the Paharis have diverged greatly from the Bengalis since the British, having drawn the Pahari/Bengali line of division, left the scene. Of course, objectively speaking, cultural interaction between the Paharis and the Bengalis must have increased manifold, but the politically unequal nature of this interaction has only reinforced the gulf of social and psychological distance that separates the two categories of people.

The problem facing us is primarily a political one. But it seems to me that it is no less important a task for the Paharis and Bengalis to seriously examine many colonialist categories and notions by which they think about their identities and about the differences between them. That the categories 'Pahari' (hill men) and 'tribal' are products of British colonialist discourse may by now seem clear enough, but a corollary of this is that the categories 'Bengali' or 'Bangladeshi' may also be bound by the same historical forces. In order for us to free ourselves from such restrictive power of history, we must examine even our 'scientific' categories of classification. For example, we 'know' that most of the 'tribal' groups of the Hill Tracts speak 'Tibeto-Burman' languages; that they are of 'Mongoloid' origin, etc. But what do these mean?

Let us consider language first. According to the standard system of classifying languages into different 'families,' Tripuri (Kokborok) and Bengali apparently have no genealogical relationship with each other. One is Tibeto-Burman / Sino-Tibetan, the other is Indo-European. But this kind of classification is based mainly on the study of a select body of words (a core vocabulary), on the basis of which hypothetical proto- or parent-languages are postulated, and thus, the relationship between different branches of a family determined. However, there are other ways of classifying languages. Thus when we look at the level of syntax and morphology, we will find that Bengali and Tripuri have many similarities. In this sense they are very close to each other, closer indeed than the relation that either of them has with many languages belonging to its own 'family'.

As for the racial category 'Mongoloid', we can see where it came from. Europeans got their idea of what a 'Mongoloid' looked like from their encounters with the Mongols, whom they saw as 'yellow monkeys with slanted eyes'; the Chinese, a 'Mongoloid' people, on the other hand, described the Mongol invaders they faced as 'red-faced hairy barbarians' in their chronicles.[24] Clearly, the Mongols themselves did not always look 'Mongoloid' enough because their men picked up wives from wherever they went. The problem that arises here is not whether there are no differences of physical features among humans, obviously there are; the problem is the notion of a 'pure' type. Different human groups have been interbreeding with one another throughout history, thus the assumption of there being or having been some original pure races was merely part of the Europeans' racist ideology. Yet we continue to see the Paharis as Mongoloids, and the Bengalis as a

'mixture' of different races. In reality, many Paharis look a lot like Bengalis, and there are also many Bengalis who could pass as Paharis.

The question as to where the 'tribal' people came from is also heard quite often. It has some political significance if we consider the fact that the question of where the Bengalis came from is not usually raised, at least not with the same frequency. If we go back long enough in human pre-history, every group came from somewhere else. At any rate, what is important is the fact that the Paharis are living in the Hill Tracts, as they have been doing for a long time, although some wonder if they will in the future. Some of the 'tribal' groups were in fact far more spread out in the past in what is now Bangladesh. For example, as recently as the first half of the twentieth century, many Tripuras lived in places as far away as Dhaka, Tangail and Faridpur. The question that arises here is not where they came from, but where they all went.

All these issues are important because they influence how we imagine who we are, who we were, and who we want to be. If we want to imagine the 'imagined community'[25] of the nation-state of Bangladesh in such a way that the Paharis feel at home, and that the Pahari/Bengali differences do not translate into bloody conflicts, then we must begin to decolonize our received notions of who we are, our sociologies, and our histories. This is a task both the Paharis and the Bengalis need to take up in earnest.

References

1. Lewin, Thomas H., *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the Dwellers Therein*. Calcutta: Bengal Printing Co. Ltd., 1869, p. 116
2. *Ibid*, p.115
3. Diamond, Stanley, *Anthropology in Question*. In Dell Hymes (ed.) *Reinventing Anthropology*. New York: Vintage Books, 1974
4. Lewin, *op. cit.*, pp.27-28
5. Sahlins, Marshall, *Tribesmen*. Englewood-Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1968.
6. Wolf, Eric, *Peasants*. Englewood-Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1966.
7. Said, Edward, *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.
8. Sir Charles Pawsey, quoted in N. Maxwell, *India, the Nagas and the North East*. Minority Rights Group Report No. 17. London: MRG, 1980, p.3
9. Mills, J. P., *The Ao Nagas*, London: MacMillan & Co., 1926, p. xxii
10. Wolf, Eric, *Europe and the People Without History*. Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1982.
11. Lewin, *op. cit.*, p.27
12. *Ibid*, p. 118
13. *Ibid*, p.76
14. *Ibid*, p.86
15. Sarma, Ramanimohan, *Political History of Tripura*. Calcutta: Puthipatra, 1987, p. 45
16. Lewin, *op. cit.*, p. 85
17. Mills, *op. cit.*
18. Fried, Morton, *The Notion of Tribe*. 1975
19. Maxwell, *op. cit.*, p. 4
20. Probir Tripura, the author's brother, who is fluent in Bawm, provided this information.
21. Lewin, *op. cit.*, p. 28
22. *Ibid*.
23. Hutchinson, R. H. S. *Account of the Chittagong Hill Tracts*. Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1906, p. 201
24. De Vos, George, *Class Lecture, Course: Ethnic Interaction*. University of California, Berkeley. 1988
25. Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso. 1983.

Paper originally published in The Journal of Social Studies, Dhaka, No. 58, 1992, pp. 1-16

Dulu Kumuri and Post-nationalist Histories

Kabita Chakma & Glen Hill

In 2005 a rare event occurred. A motion picture was released that was produced, directed and acted by indigenous people from the Chittagong Hill Tracts, and told a customary tale from one of the indigenous communities. Although the film, entitled *Dulu Kumuri*, was a very low budget, rather over-acted, piece of cinema, it has now been estimated to have been viewed by over 200,000 thousand people in Bangladesh and India. Films about the Chittagong Hill Tracts are uncommon. A film by the indigenous people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, telling their own story, is unique.

Outcome that confirms Roland Barthes' thesis of diminished importance of the intentions of the author.

This paper does not take the film itself as its theme, but instead uses its appearance on the cultural landscape of the Chittagong Hill Tracts as a springboard to initiate a discussion of the related but wider issue of nationalism, in a global context now described by many commentators as post-nationalist.

The 2005 film made in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, re-enacts the folk tale of the abduction of a young woman, Dulu Kumuri, by a hawk (chil or chile) and the efforts of her 7 brothers to find and return her to the family home. The film is set on traditional 'Jum' land in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Jum is the slash and burn farming method of the Chittagong Hill Tracts around which the life-world of its indigenous peoples once revolved. It is very different to plough farming practised by Bengalis on the generally flat plains of Bangladesh. Recognising this as a focal point of difference, Bengalis disparagingly referred to the 12 ethnic groups living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts who practiced Jum cultivation as 'Jummas'. The term Jumma has now been adopted with some pride as a signifier of unity between the otherwise culturally diverse indigenous groups living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.



In the story, Dulu Kumuri, the youngest, and most spoiled child in the family, lives in the Jum house with her seven brothers and her sister-in-law (bhujji), the wife of the eldest brother. The film portrays indigenous people enjoying life, engaging in traditional food gathering, hunting and fishing alongside a range of leisure activities including playing customary games (ghile khaaraa and shaamuk khaaraa), composing songs (ubagiit), and playing traditional instruments (the khengarang, a form of mouth organ). The life evoked is idyllic — mixing fun, jokes and teasing among the brothers, sister and sister-in-law, with a sense of caring for each other— an inevitably stark contrast to the contemporary condition of fear and military oppression.

Once, when the seven brothers are away on a traditional safari (kaartton, usually to collect bamboo or timber building materials, medicine and other resources from the depths of the forest), Dulu Kumuri's sister-in-law beseeches a high-flying hawk who is carrying a piece of dry fish (aangar maach, a small shark, which is a delicacy for the Jummas particularly living in the high mountains far away from the sea) to exchange the fish for Dulu Kumuri, who is lazily playing ghile khaaraa (a game involving the throwing of a large seed) in the front yard of the jum house. The sister-in-law panics

when she finds that Dulu Kumuri has actually disappeared. The sister-in-law searches for her throughout the village, but without success. When the brothers return from the safari she sends them to look for Dulu Kumuri. After an exhaustive search deep in the forest, and after consulting with a traditional clairvoyant (baidya), the brothers finally locate Dulu Kumuri in the hawk's nest, atop a tall tree. The brothers build a ladder, joining bamboo upon bamboo, to reach the nest, and Dulu Kumuri is finally rescued.

When the eldest brother learns about his wife's bargain with the hawk he becomes furious. But Dulu Kumuri together with her six other brothers help to make peace between the couple. Dulu Kumuri and the brothers forgive the sister-in-law and the extended family moves beyond the dreadful event, bringing a happy conclusion to the story.

When interviewed, the writer-director of *Dulu Kumuri* stated that he had not intended the film to carry any contemporary political message. In an outcome that confirms Roland Barthes' thesis of the diminished importance of the intentions of the author in the meaning of any text, the majority of viewers of the film, who are indigenous, are inevitably reminded of the many abductions now carried out in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, often by security forces, and especially of the high profile abduction of Kalpana Chakma.

In his writing on the Chittagong Hill Tracts, eminent historian Willem van Schendel, demonstrates how two nationalist narratives have dominated history writing in modern Bangladesh. The first deals with the 'struggle for Bengali Nationhood.' It creates, celebrates and naturalises an ethnic category, the Bengali, and traces its tortuous rise to power and self-esteem. The second is the 'Emancipation of the Muslim,' which does the same for a religious category. Today, the big debates in Bangladesh swirl around these two narratives and how they impinge on individual and group identities, the state, and the destiny of Bangladesh society.

Van Schendel explains that these two varieties of Bangladeshi history writing have concealed other possible histories, because 'the intensity of these debates has made it easy to ignore, marginalise and suppress other accounts of the history of Bangladesh.' In what appears to be an alignment with the so-called 'post-modern' critique of meta-narratives and the call for their displacement, or at least subversion, by more complex micro-narratives, van Schendel argues that, Today emancipatory narratives of the nation are being questioned, not only in Bangladesh, but all over the world: it is high time for us to explore the multitude of alternative histories that these narratives have covered up.

To this end, van Schendel proposes that the history of the Chittagong Hill Tracts can offer many alternative stories which de-centre nationalist history writing about Bangladesh. However, van Schendel contests that current narrative constructions of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, rather than offering transgressive micro-narratives, instead constitute yet another meta-narrative intended to counter (but in effect reproduce) the two dominant Bengali meta-narratives. In this case, the category of 'indigenous' is being deployed to construct a unified identity.

Dominant representations have stressed the binary opposites of both nationalist and developmentalist discourse, and have used markers such as 'tribal,' 'primitive' and 'backward' to deny the people of the Chittagong hills a 'modern' voice. In reaction, writers and politicians from the Chittagong hills as well as outsiders writing about the area have increasingly adopted indigenist positions that echo the same oppositional thinking. The 'indigenous' is represented as an internally unified category in opposition to an equally monolithic nation from which it is excluded. In this way a new nation-of-intent, known to many as the Jumma nation, was created.

A transgressive micro-history, of the sort called for by van Schendel, that does have the potential to complicate, and cut across, dominant narratives (both Bengali nationalist and indigenist), might have been the story of the co-operation among Bengali and indigenous women human rights activists both before and after the kidnapping of Kalpana Chakma in 1997.

In the years prior to Kalpana's kidnapping, solidarity was developing between Bengladeshi women's organizations, constituted largely by middle-class Bengali women, and the indigenous women activists belonging to the Chittagong Hill Tracts Hill Women's Federation. In March 1994, the Hill Women's Federation, with their slogan 'Autonomy for Peace,' joined the stage of a rally of the national women's movement to celebrate International Women's Day. As an outcome of this cooperation, the Hill Women's Federation joined the national NGO committee preparing for the 4th UN Conference on Women in Beijing. The Hill Women's Federation decided that the military oppression of Jumma women must be highlighted at the NGO forum of the UN Conference in Beijing. In the period immediately after Kalpana's abduction, strong cooperation developed between middle-class Bengali women and indigenous women of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in their protests against the lack of action over the abduction. 'Shommilita Nari Shomaj' (literally meaning United Women's Society), a coalition of mainstream Bengali women's organizations including human rights organizations, development oriented organizations, women activists from the Left, trade unions, lawyers, academics and students, joined with the women of the Hill Women's Federation to protest on the streets of Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh.

Unfortunately, both the story of co-operation around the UN Conference on Women and the story of co-operation in the wake of Kalpana's kidnapping ended in division. Importantly the fault lines that opened within the women's groups were invariably around differences between Bengali and indigenous positions. In the case of the UN Conference on Women, the indigenous women from the Chittagong Hill Tracts felt that their primary concern of sexual oppression of indigenous Chittagong Hill Tracts women by the military was entirely written out of the final set of issues presented at Beijing. The co-operation broke down after the signing of the 1997 Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord with 'Shommilita Nari Shomaj' divided over the Agreement: one supporting the Accord with the other opposing it. Guhathakurata states that, in relation to nationalism and militarisation, 'there is no possibility of a dialogue between the HWF [Hill Women's Federation] and the mainstream women's movement.'

The impediments that arise in attempting to follow the post-nationalist call for the undermining of dominant nationalist narratives, highlight an inconsistency within the 'post-' discourses more generally. On the one hand, post-modernist and post-structuralist discourse encourages the de-centring of hegemonic narratives, and the re-inscription of alternative, often previously suppressed, narratives. On the other hand, post-modernist and post-structuralist discourse also undermines the possibility of individual agency. We are, for example, no longer seen to be in control of language: our complete immersion in language means that language, in a sense, controls us. This therefore brings into question the degree of agency we have to dismiss nationalist narratives, and 'construct,' or 're-inscribe' new alternative narratives.

To understand the complexity of the issue, the notion of 'interpretive communities' is useful. Older sociological models assume that there is sufficient similarity among the members of a group to allow the claim that they will interpret the world in a similar way. Thus a particular class or demographic might be considered to share a particular world-view. As outlined by Stanley Fish, the notion of 'interpretive communities' undermines this picture. Put simply, an interpretive community is a community that shares a particular interpretation in a particular context. In this view, we are seen to

belong to multiple interpretive communities. For example, in the context of being a mother, we may interpret some issue relating to mothering in a similar way to a particular set of other mothers — thus we form an interpretive community in that context. However, in the context of being an indigenous person, we may interpret another issue that relates to indigeneity in a particular way, leading to an interpretive alignment with a different community (which need not overlap with the previous community of mothers). Thus, rather than being conceived as a fixed 'self' with stable values that organise our interpretations of the world, we might instead see ourselves as a fluid set of interpretive positions, leading to continual realignments with different others, to form ever new interpretive communities.

The notion of interpretive communities offers initial support for the post-nationalist call to re-inscribe a multitude of alternative histories over dominant nationalist narratives. Clearly, different stories could be told from the perspective of multiple interpretive communities. Whether they are stories from the perspective of gender, class, ethnicity, or any set of shared practices, the complexity would arise from the fact that with each new story the individuals constituting that particular interpretive community would shift. Thus there could be no dominant alignment of a particular group of individuals, as the individuals in the group would be re-constituted with every new interpretive position. The story of the initial cooperation among women from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds leading up to the 1995 Beijing conference and after the Kalpana kidnapping evidences one such transient interpretive alignment.

But the concept of interpretive communities intimates more complexity than the post-nationalist position. The interpretive communities we fall into are not qualitatively equal. Our interpretive alignment into a community in respect of our enjoyment of a particular food is not equal to our interpretive position over mothering, or our interpretive position over a war being fought in our lands. Thought of in this way, it is evident that one interpretive context might not simply outweigh others, it might begin to inflect them all. Thus war becomes a context that can affect our ability to mother or to eat. This is the case in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, where all other interpretive positions that gather together in making up a life, are negatively impacted by one dominant interpretive context, that of military occupation and human rights violations.

Amena Mohsin dismisses the current unity of the indigenous peoples as fragile, as it 'consists of 13 different ethnic groups. As such they lack the common cultural and social denominators viz., common language, religion, culture, social norms and customs, history and so on that may mark them off as a single national or cultural entity...' If any unity does exist, Mohsin argues, it is a response to 'the perceived hegemony of the Bengali state.' What remains veiled in such a description is that the 'hegemony of the Bengali state' manifests as genocide, transmigration and land theft on a massive scale. While agreeing with Mohsin that nationalism underlies the situation, it is argued here that there is a high degree of unity now evident among indigenous peoples in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and that this unity is directly proportional to the scale of the human rights violations in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. In response to the contention that there is no basis for this unity, it is contested that the tangible impact of the militarised subjugation has inflected all other interpretive positions of the indigenous Hill dwellers, leading to the suppression of difference and the privileging of those aspects which they already shared in common — a shared co-existence in the Hill Tracts over many centuries, a shared traditional Jum farming culture, a shared non-Bengali heritage, and, more recently, a shared oppression.

While some regions of the world, particularly parts of Europe, might be said to have moved toward a condition of post-nationalism, other parts, including Bangladesh, remain bogged in the mire of nationalism. This leads us to question whether it is as yet possible to write post-nationalist histories in

the context of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, where nationalist militarisation continues to inflect all possible histories. The film, *Dulu Kumuri*, has no outward connection to the current militarised context of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Nevertheless, because the film is unavoidably viewed by its indigenous audience through the omnipresent veil of militarisation, it evokes stark reminders of the current context: the abduction in the folk tale is a dark reflection of contemporary abductions, the depiction of the traditional life-world of the Jum farms is both a reminder of the common bond that unites the indigenous communities of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, and a nostalgic reminder of the destruction of that traditional way of life by militarised oppression.

Those writers who claim Jumma unity is a constructed category, depend upon the unarticulated premise that individuals actually have the agency to construct such categories. The corollary is that we could therefore choose to construct different histories. What this fails to understand is that the unity of the Jummas, and the narratives of that unity, have 'emerged' from their historical context, rather than simply being inscribed over them[30]. It could be said that the coming to presence of the commonalities that ground Jumma unity is the result of force (of oppression) being applied to natural, but previously undisclosed, cleavages. This description aligns with Martin Heidegger's view that truth is disclosed, not created. And while the Chittagong Hill Tracts does indeed have the potential to disclose many truths, many diverse histories, such post-nationalist histories can perhaps only emerge when the threat to existence posed by nationalist militarisation has passed.

Bibliography

- Tarun Kumar Chakma, *Dulu Kumuri*, Rangamati: Jum Aesthetics Council, 2005.
- Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, essays selected and tr. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977). Willem van Schendel, Wolfgang Mey and Aditya Kumar Dewan, *The Chittagong Hill Tracts: Living in a Borderland*, (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 2000)
- Meghna Guhathakurata, 'Women's Narratives from the Chittagong Hill Tracts', in *Women, War and Peace in South Asia: Beyond Victimhood to Agency*, ed. Rita Manchanda, (New Delhi: Sage Publications/South Asia Forum for Human Rights, 2001),
- Meghna Guhathakurata, 'Overcoming Otherness and Building Trust: The Kalpana Chakma Case', in *Living on the Edge: Essays on the Chittagong Hill Tracts*, ed. Subir Bhaumik et. al. (South Asia Forum for Human Rights, 1997)
- Stanley Eugene Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change Rhetoric and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989). Amena Mohsin, *The Politics of Nationalism: The Case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh*, (Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 1997)
- Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings: Second Edition, Revised and Expanded*, ed. David Farrell Krell, (New York: Harper Collins, 1993).

Abbreviated from Glen Hill and Kabita Chakma, "Writing Post-nationalist Histories Within the Walls of Nationalism: The Case of Indigenous People of the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh", The Journal of the Oriental Society of Australia (JOSA), Vol. 39-40, 2007-08

Using Architectural History to Invent a Nation

Kabita Chakma & Glen Hill

There is an implication that the Chakma peoples' roots pre-date the Islamicization of India by the Mughals.

This essay examines the traditional house form of the ethnically and culturally unique peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. It attempts to show how the house form is participating in the deliberate construction of an 'indigenous identity'. The paper problematises its own role in this process of identity construction, thereby raising the question of whether there is a legitimate place for 'prejudice' in architectural histories.

This essay arrives from the intersection of two research interests. The first is an interest in the traditional architecture of the indigenous peoples of a remote forested area of the Indian subcontinent called the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The second area of interest is the change that is occurring in contemporary architectural historiography, particularly in the wake of the so-called 'interpretive turn' in the wider discipline of history.[1] Of specific interest is the recognition that all historical writing is (necessarily) political, or, as Gadamer might argue, that prejudice allows the very possibility of (historical) interpretation.[2] If historical research and writing recognises that it can no longer hide behind a pretext of objectivity or neutrality, the question that then arises is: how can we admit this recognition in (and into) our architectural histories?

It will become evident that the architectural research we are carrying out in the Chittagong Hill Tracts is part of a political movement to construct an indigenous identity where, it might be argued, there was once no such identity.

Background to the Chittagong Hill Tracts and its Peoples

The Chittagong Hill Tracts are located in the southeastern corner of what is now the state of Bangladesh. Its hilly terrain is part of the long mountain range that extends from the base of the Himalayas in China, through India and Bangladesh, and into Burma/Myanmar. The Chittagong Hill Tracts constitute about 10% of the land area of Bangladesh,[3] but its population is less than 1% of the total population of Bangladesh (estimated at about 120 million). The Chittagong Hill Tracts are inhabited by people belonging to at least twelve groups.[4] They speak a variety of languages and dialects. They are adherents to a range of religions. And they have a diversity of social and cultural practices and forms.

Perhaps more important than the differences among its inhabitants is the difference the inhabitants of the Chittagong Hill Tracts now perceive between themselves and the Bengali majority in Bangladesh. The peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts are racially different to the Bengalis.[5] The majority of Bangladeshi Bengalis are Muslims, whereas the peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts include Buddhists, Hindus, Animists and Christians. The Bengalis have social and cultural forms associated with the plain land, particularly plainland agriculture, whereas the peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts have social and cultural forms that are linked to a life in the forested hills.

Historically, the Chittagong Hill Tracts have been the site of struggle. From the latter half of the nineteenth century onward, this struggle was against the domination of British Imperial colonizers. In recent decades the Chittagong Hill Tracts have been the site of struggle between the 'national' interests of the Bengali majority and the sectional interests of the inhabitants of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Dispossession, political domination, and economic exploitation of the people of the

Chittagong Hill Tracts led to an armed struggle for autonomy, a struggle that has only partially abated with the signing of a peace treaty in December 1997[6].

There has been only limited research carried out on the Chittagong Hill Tracts and its peoples. Where access was once limited by remoteness, it has more recently been limited by government restrictions arising from the intense militarisation of the area[7]. Only with the signing of the peace treaty and the partial lifting of the restrictions has research of the type we are undertaking been made possible.

Research on the architecture of the Chittagong Hill Tracts has been especially limited. A brief entry is contained in the recent *Encyclopedia of Vernacular Architecture of the World*[8]. Reference is made to the architecture of the hill tracts in a number of historical biographies, gazetteers and ethnographic studies in both English and Bengali[9]. Most of these are, however, relatively brief. There are two exceptions: a 1965 article from *The Oriental Geographer* which aims to describe and classify house types of three major 'tribes' in the Chittagong Hill Tracts;[10] and an ethnographic study of the Mru (one of the twelve groups from the hill tracts) which contains a chapter on the arrangement, layout and construction of their houses.[11] But as would be expected from the fora of their presentation, they tend toward a more ethnographic than architectural orientation.

Constructing an Indigenous Identity

In one of the most insightful pieces of sociological research on the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Willem Van Schendel argues that the identity of the peoples of the hill tracts is a socio-cultural 'invention'. [12] This invented identity is shown to be neither simple, nor stable, and has had at least three historical manifestations: a Burmese inflected identity, a Bengali inflected identity, and an Indigenous identity.

Van Schendel points out that, traditionally, the twelve groups inhabiting the hill tracts never had any particular sense of unity. Captain T. H. Lewin's 1870 report on the Chittagong Hill Tracts reinforces this view with his observation that none of the groups 'appear to have any general term for hill dwellers'. [13]

Because of the historical and trade connections linked to their geographic location (being sandwiched between India, Bangladesh and Burma), Van Schendel argues that 'the hill people had access to two competing models of state society and culture: the South Asian (represented by its Bengali variant) and the Southeast Asian (in the form of its Burmese/Arakanese variant)'. [14] These models have been variously adopted by different groups in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (for example, the Marma have drawn more strongly on the Burmese model, while the Tripura have drawn more strongly on the Bengali model), and the models have been more or less emphasised at different periods.

Prior to British annexation of the area now known as the Chittagong Hill Tracts in 1860, the hill people were, according to Van Schendel, 'free agents who were feared by the plains people for their independence and military prowess'. [15] In this pre-colonial period the hill people were influenced by both the Burmese cultural model, and the Bengali cultural model. For example, the Chakma group (of particular significance to this study as Chakma architecture is the main focus of the research) had strong Burmese Buddhist elements in their religious practice, [16] and in their religious architecture. [17] However the Chakma language was not of Burmese origin. Rather, it shares the same Indo-Aryan roots as Bengali and numerous other Indian languages. [18]

The modes of authority that operated in the hill tracts in the pre-colonial period also paralleled those operating in the Burmese state. As in Burma, kinship relations underpinned the chief's power, and

taxes were demanded on the basis of this personal following.[19] This differed from the territorially based system of authority used in the plainlands of Bengal. Clearly, the territorially based system was suited to the settled cultivation practices of the plainlands. Because the hill people practised a form of migratory, slash and burn agriculture and had no sense of ownership of the land (which they viewed as a common resource) the kinship system of authority was more suitable.[20]

With British colonial annexation, the 'Chittagong Hills Tracts' were officially demarcated and therefore came to exist where no such unified entity had existed before. As a result of the annexation, the Bengali cultural model gained far greater prominence in the hill tracts. The traditional chiefs were made responsible for tax collection in defined territorial areas within the newly articulated Chittagong Hill Tracts.[21] In this way land based systems of authority began to undermine the Burmese model of kinship.

Van Schendel argues that the sudden move toward the Bengali model was so strong that it dismayed the British administration:

Bengali mores gradually came to be the standard against which the cultural and social life of the people of the Chittagong hills was judged. A process of legal and commercial 'Bengalization' of the hills set in with such force that British officials began to worry about it.[22]

The British administration reacted to this perceived problem by declaring the Chittagong Hill Tracts an excluded area, a radical move particularly directed toward preventing the migration of Bengalis into the hill tracts.[23] While this could possibly be interpreted as an attempt to protect the interests of hill people from Bengalization, it is far more likely that it was intended to protect the commercial interests of the British and allow direct exploitation of the hill tracts without competition.

Further steps taken by the British accentuated the process of marginalization and subordination of the hill people. The British claimed ownership of all lands in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and created a category of 'reserve forests'. Traditional migratory slash and burn cultivation, known locally as jum cultivation, was outlawed in the newly gazetted reserve forests. This policy of exclusion was one part of a deliberate attempt to replace jum culture with settled plough culture, which, it was believed, would be more economically productive. But at the same time that hill people were being excluded from their traditional lands, the British administration was attempting to encourage European interests to establish plantations, particularly tea plantations, on the best land.[24]

The cumulative outcome of the colonizer's strategies was that the hill people 'had become minorities who had restricted rights in the territory that they had been assigned and were powerless outside it.'[25] Paradoxically, Van Schendel points out that the period of British administration was also a time of relative peace, and that the necessity of self-sufficiency allowed the hill people to enjoy reasonable living conditions.[26]

The rule of the British Raj in the Indian subcontinent ended in 1947. As part of the tumultuous process of partitioning India into Hindu and Muslim dominated states, the Chittagong Hill Tracts were made part of East Pakistan, even though they had no significant Muslim population. The resource potential of the hill tracts was of great interest to the newly created Muslim state. In 1959 work began on harvesting the water resources of the hill tracts with the construction of an enormous hydro-electric facility. The lake that was created resulted in the relocation of one quarter of the population of the hill tracts and submerged a great deal of its fertile land.[27]

In 1971, after a nine month war, East Pakistan broke away from West Pakistan and the republic of Bangladesh came into being. The new Bangladesh government perceived the hill tracts as underpopulated, and the hill people as culturally backward. Partly because they saw it as a way of

overcoming the overpopulation and deprivation of Bengalis in the plainlands, and partly because they believed it would bring cultural benefits to the hill people, the new government opened up the hill tracts and initiated a process of mass transmigration of poor plainland Bengalis.[28]

The threat of inundation by plainland Bengalis led to growing resistance by the hill people. An environment of spirally militarization ensued. Bengali settlers were provided with arms and the deployment of the Bangladesh armed forces in the hill tracts escalated. The hill people organised themselves politically and militarily, plunging the hill tracts into full scale guerilla war. In 1992 the Chittagong Hill Tracts was reported to be the most militarized area on Earth.[29] As a result of the process of transmigration about 50% of the population of the hill tracts is now constituted by Bengali settlers.[30]

According to Van Schendel, the threat of losing their land and resources and being overwhelmed by plainland Bengalis, marked the beginning of a new phase in the construction of the identity of the hill people. The Bengali cultural model was rejected and the hill groups began to build a new, shared identity where no unified identity had previously existed. This identity was, and continues to be, constructed as much on the ground of shared difference to a perceived other, as it is on any commonalities between the groups themselves. Thus while the hill people do not share a single common religion, they are not Muslims. And while they do not share a single language, their first language is not Bengali. What they do perceive themselves as sharing is a common history of exploitation and a bond with hill tracts.

This common bond with the hill tracts gathers around the concept of jum. A term that refers to both the act of migratory swidden cultivation and the lands that are thus cultivated, jum now marks a shared way of life in the hills that is totally unlike the life-world of the settled Bengali cultivators of the plainland. Jumma, the once pejorative corruption of jum that was used by outsiders to describe the people of the hill tracts, has now been adopted with some pride by the hill people to signify their common identity. Even though (or perhaps, because) jum cultivation is becoming less common due to the long and deliberate campaigns of exclusion and coercion to abandon the practice, jum culture has become a potent sign of unity in the face of the other.

The hill peoples' new self-identity is not a return to the old Burmese model. Rather it is a deliberate attempt to construct a new indigenous model. From the 1980's onward alliances were forged with the burgeoning international indigenous and human rights movements,[31] and a concerted effort was made to work within the umbrella of the United Nations, particularly through the International Working Group on Indigenous Populations.

Architecture and Identity

As part of the current research task, we are studying the traditional Chittagong Hill Tract's house type known as the 'platform house'. Our focus is the variant made by the Chakma group, the most populous of the twelve hill groups. While this house type might appear similar to some Burmese and Southeast Asian house forms, we are pursuing evidence that it instead manifests the principles of the long Indian Hindu-Buddhist architectural tradition.

The platform house is the traditional house form of all of the twelve hill groups. While each of the groups have their own identifiable form of the platform house, they all nevertheless belong to a quite distinct and recognisable generic type — markedly different from the house forms of the plainlands and many of the more recent hybrid house forms appearing in the growing townships.

The most striking feature of the platform house is, as the name suggests, the raised bamboo platform that forms the living areas, verandahs and work-decks of the house. The height of the platform, which is supported on diagonally-braced timber or bamboo stilts, varies among the

different hill groups and the differing terrain. In the Chakma platform house for example the platform is generally between 0.9m - 1.8m above the ground. Probably because of the steeper terrain, the platform of the Mru house is often noticeably higher.[32]

The most significant differences among the platform houses of the different hill groups are the orientation and size of the houses, and the type and layout of the living spaces, verandahs and work-decks. Chakma platform houses are most commonly orientated east toward the rising



(L) Chakma House (R) Mru House

sun,[33] whereas the Tripura platform houses may face every direction except west, as the western orientation is reserved for the 'house for the dead'. [34] In terms of size, the Chakma platform house is for example generally smaller than the Mru platform house. It must however be remembered that the house size itself may vary within each group. For example a Chakma platform house for a large extended family would normally be larger than a house for a smaller family. In terms of layout, the arrangement of the verandahs, work-decks and rooms of the platform house varies among the hill groups.[35] For example, the Chakma, Marma and Tripura platform houses generally appear to have a larger number of smaller rooms for more specialised functions, whereas the Lushai,[36] Pankho,[37] Khumi,[38] and Mru[39] platform houses have a smaller number of much larger multi-functional rooms (common sleeping areas and common living and cooking areas for instance).

Construction materials for all platform house types are drawn from the immediate forest. In Chakma platform houses the larger column and beam members of the frame are generally timber. The smaller framing members and the wall and floor linings are generally bamboo. The thongs that are used to lash the framing members together are also made from split bamboo. The pitched roof is covered with either sun grass, kuruk leaf or bamboo leaf. Stress on forest resources has now seriously depleted building material supplies. Bamboo resources appear to be particularly affected, with the result that the maintenance and rebuilding of platform houses is now reported to occur less regularly.[40]

The form of the platform house is very much a manifestation of the life-world of the practices of jum cultivation. But as earlier indicated, the practice of jum cultivation is, for many reasons, becoming more rare. A history of exclusion from the forests, forced relocation, insurgency, shortage of construction resources, together with the impact of development and the movement to the larger townships, have all contributed to the abandonment of jum practices. As a result the platform house type is also becoming rare, and is now generally found only in the remoter villages and forests. Regardless of its rarity, among the hill people themselves the platform house form remains immediately recognisable. In terms of Van Schendel's observations about the way the hill people are now actively constructing their indigenous identity, it is of great interest to see how this local architectural form is making a (thus far unrecognised) contribution to this continuing process of identity building. It would appear that the platform house is being actively deployed as a signifier of the newly found unity among the hill peoples.

In various media the image of the platform house is now being employed by the hill people as a marker of both their common bond with the hills, and their more recently developed bond with each

other. An intricate scale model of the platform house (in its Chakma variant) is the centrepiece of the permanent exhibition at the Tribal Cultural Institute, the premier site for communicating the public image of hill peoples' culture. The image of the platform house has also appeared on the cover of literature whose content in some way relates to the interests of all the hill groups.[41] The Chakma Raja (chief), who is working to represent the interests of the hill groups in international indigenous fora, is currently reconstructing a platform house close to the major township of Rangamati as the centrepiece of a recreational area for his local, national and international guests.[42] And in April 1999 a platform house was constructed as the focal point of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Indigenous Peoples Cultural Festival.[43] The last is particularly interesting as the festival was intended to showcase the culture of all of the tribal groups under a common indigenous umbrella. To reflect this, the platform house was deliberately made to appear as a generic form, rather than being identifiable with any specific hill group.[44]

The image of the platform house seems a particularly appropriate signifier of the shared indigenous identity of the hill people: all groups have a form of the platform house; it is a unique form which is very different to Bengali house forms;[45] its layout embodies the life-world of the traditional jum cultivator which is very different to the plainland Bengali life-world; it marks a particular relation to the land which is treated as a shared resource rather than the subject of individual ownership; it is built from resources that are harvested from the forest and are unobtainable in other environments; it is thus a signifier of shared dependence on the forest; and it marks a history of cultural oppression which was particularly directed against jum cultivation practices.

The Politics of Architectural History

In the contemporary context of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the image of the platform house is not just an architectural image. The architecture has become a sign of political resistance. For both internal and external political reasons the Bangladesh government refuse to accept that the peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts are indigenous.[46] To do so would not only diminish the government's right to exploit the resources of the hill tracts, but may also oblige them to adhere to many international treaties on indigenous and human rights. For those very reasons the hill peoples are of course keen to reinforce their indigenous identity, and the image of the platform house is contributing to that political intent.

Our research understands its political dimension. As discussed we are researching the Chakma variant of the platform house, and exploring its link to the long Indian Hindu-Buddhist tradition. If such a link is demonstrated, the political implications are clear. Firstly there is an implication that the Chakma peoples' roots pre-date the Islamicization of India by the Mughals. This would imply a moral right to the lands of the hill tracts that is greater than that claimed by the (Islamic) government. Secondly, by stressing connections back to the Indian tradition rather than the Burmese tradition our research is implicitly rejecting those 'histories' which claim that the Chakma group crossed over from Burma relatively recently (perhaps within the last 500 years)[47] This would again lend support to the hill peoples' claim to indigenous status.[48]

To date evidence from the research project is supporting the thesis that the traditional Chakma platform house does manifest the principles of the Indian Hindu-Buddhist tradition. This evidence is found in the rituals of construction, the symbolism of the forms, the myths associated with the house, and the language describing aspects of the house — all of which link to the Indian Hindu-Buddhist tradition. This does not however prevent our self-reflection and (perhaps) niggling unease over the prejudices grounding our research.

But if there is unease over our research approach it probably arises from some remnant of a

traditional historiographic ethos. Traditional historiography assumed the possibility of an objective and neutral historical stance. Postmodernism has however exposed this as a myth. As Brenda Marshall succinctly explains, History in the postmodern moment...asks: Whose history gets told? In whose name? For what purpose?[49]

If, as Gadamer would seem to imply, prejudice is unavoidable in historical interpretation — indeed, that prejudice is necessary for the very possibility of interpretation[50] — then how do we cope with this necessary prejudice in our historical research? And how do we prevent the 'necessary prejudice' of history turning this research into the construction of a 'mere fiction' (as a radical postmodern historian such as Hayden White might be happy to describe it)?[51] To allow that the architectural history we are pursuing in the Chittagong Hill Tracts is mere fiction would be self-defeating, as it immediately blunts the political edge that our architectural history might otherwise have.

The answer for us is found in those postmodern accounts that reject the notion that there is a single Truth, without at the same time rejecting the possibility of truth itself. In other words, accounts that allow the possibility of multiple interpretations, but also insist that these interpretations are not 'mere constructions' and can in themselves be truthful. The Heideggerian account, for example, allows that there can be many truths in many contexts — that the (apparently) same thing might allow many different, but equally truthful, interpretations.[52] This account rejects old models of 'truth as correspondence' and 'truth as coherence' and instead posits a notion of 'truth as disclosure.'[53] In this account it is the willingness (or resistance) of the materiality of the evidence to 'reveal itself' that can be the only adequate determination of truth.

If we recognise, as Heidegger does, that our 'prejudice' is our 'context of interpretation', then it is only by having 'a context' that interpretation is made possible. For the research we are undertaking it is important to us that we have disclosed (as far as that is possible)[54] the prejudice, or context, that grounds our particular interpretation of the platform house. In the same movement we are able to hope that what we are disclosing about the platform house is not a mere construction, but a truth in terms of that context. Importantly, this does not discount the possibility that the 'platform house' may be capable of sustaining many other truths from many other perspectives.

Notes:

1. See for example, Georg Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge*, Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1997; Keith Jenkins, *On 'What is History?': From Carr and Elton to Rorty and White*, London and New York: Routledge, 1995; Keith Jenkins (ed), *The Postmodern History Reader*, London and New York: Routledge, 1997; Barbara Norman, 'A Postmodern Endeavour: From History as Representation of 'the Past' to Historical Thinking,' *Curriculum Studies* 28, 6 (1996):713-23; Mark Poster, *Cultural History and Postmodernity: Disciplinary Readings and Challenges*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997; Victoria Bonnell and Lynn Hunt (eds) *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999; Marta Calas and Linda Smircich, 'Past Postmodernism? Reflections and Tentative Directions,' *Academy of Management Review*, 24, 4 (Oct 1999):649; Mark Pluciennik, 'Archaeological Narratives and Other Ways of Telling,' *Current Anthropology*, 40, 5 (Dec 1999):653.

2. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, translated by G. Barden, J. Cumming, London: Sheed and Ward, 1975.

3. The area of CHT is 13,181 sq. km.

4. Willem Van Schendel, 'The Invention of the 'Jummas': State Formation and Ethnicity in Southeastern Bangladesh,' *Modern Asian Studies* 26, 1 (1992):95-128.

The twelve groups, listed alphabetically, are the Bawm, Chak (or Sak), Chakma, Khumi, Khyang, Lushai, Marma, Mru (or Mro), Mrung (or Riang), Pangkho (or Pangkhua), Tanchangya, and Tripura (or Tippera). There is some debate over the exact number of groups in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The controversy arises from two factors. Firstly, there are a considerable number of closely related groups that are sometimes considered as one group. For example, the Mrung (or Riang) is considered by some to be a sub-group of the Tripura, the Usui a sub-group of the Tripura, the Tanchangya a sub-group of the Chakma, and the Dainak (or Doingnak) a sub-group of the Tanchangya or Chakma.

To confuse the issue further the different groups refer to the various groups by different names. For example the Tripuras are referred to as 'Mrung' by the Marma and 'Tuikuk' by the Lushai. 5. Van Schendel, 'The Invention of the Jummas,' p. 122.

6. For details of the peace treaty see Nooh-Ul-Alam Lenin, Jum Pahare Shantir Jharnadhara: Oitihasik Parbatya Chattogram Shantichukti (Springflow of Peace in Jum Hills: Historic CHT Accord), Dhaka: Ganopokashan, 1998.
7. Two different explanations are given for this ban. The government maintains it was to protect foreigners from physical danger and kidnapping by the local guerilla groups. The hill peoples claim that it was to prevent information about the atrocities being carried out by the military and Bengali paramilitary reaching the outside world.
8. Paul Oliver (ed), Encyclopedia of Vernacular Architecture of the World, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 926–927.
9. T. H. Lewin, The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the Dwellers Therein, 1869 (1996 Bengali edition), pp. 39-40, 62, 73; T. H. Lewin, Wild Races of South-Eastern India, London: Wm H. Allen and Co., 1870, pp. 56-59; T. H. Lewin, A Fly on the Wheel, London: Constable & Company Ltd., 1912, p. 235; W. W. Hunter, A Statistical Account of Bengal, vol. VI, Delhi: D K Publishing House (Indian edition), 1973, (Trubner & Co., London, 1876), pp. 54-55, 69-70; R. H. Sneyd Hutchinson, Chittagong Hill Tracts, Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers, Allahabad: Pioneer Press, 1909, pp. 25-26; Pierre Bessaignet, Tribesmen of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Asiatic Society of Pakistan Publications, No. 11, 1958; David E. Sopher, 'The Swidden/ wet-rice transition zone in the Chittagong Hills,' Annals of the Association of American Geographers, 54, 1 (1964): 107–126; Muhammad Ishaq (ed.), Bangladesh District Gazetteers: Chittagong Hill Tracts, Dacca: Bangladesh Government Press, 1975; Alimur Rahman, Social Development in a Tribal Society: A Socio-Economic Profile of the Northern Valleys in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Dacca: UNICEF & IBA, 1982, pp. 73-74; S. P. Talukdar, Chakmas: An Embattled Tribe, New Delhi: Uppal Publishing House, 1994, pp. 23-26; Prem N. Sharma (ed), A Compilation of Indigenous Technology Knowledge for Upland Watershed Management in Bangladesh, Dhaka: Forest Department, 1998, pp. 45–46. Bengali texts include: Sugata Chakma, Chakma Pariciti (An Introduction to the Chakmas), Rangamati: Bargang Publication, 1983, p. 77; Sugata Chakma, Bangladesher Upajati (Tribals of Bangladesh), Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1986, pp. 21-22; Sugata Chakma, Parbatya Chattagramer Upajati O Sanskriti (Tribals of the Chittagong Hill Tracts and their Culture), Rangamati: Dhira Khisa Chakma Publisher, 1993, pp. 33, 41-42, 90; Jafar Ahmad Hanafi, Upajatiya Nandan sanskriti (Tribal Aesthetic Culture), Dhaka: Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, 1993, pp. 86-97; Surendra Lal Tripura, Parbatya Chattagramer Prakriti O Sanskriti (Nature and Cultures of the Chittagong Hill Tracts), Rangamati: Tribal Cultural Institute, 1994, pp. 50–51, 74, 118-119, 132-133, 182 & 184.
10. Karim F. Khan and S. Islam Choudhuri, Some Tribal Houses Types of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, The Oriental Geographer, Dacca: The East Pakistan Geographical Society, (January 1965): pp. 17 – 32.
11. Claus-Dieter Brauns and Lorenz G. Löffler, Mru: Hill people on the Border of Bangladesh, Basel: Birkhauser Verlag, 1990.
12. - 16. Van Schendel, 'The Invention of the Jummas'.
17. From field research. For example the Buddhist temple, Bana Bihar, at Raj Bari, Rangamati, demonstrates Burmese formal and decorative features. Indeed, Buddhist temples in the Chittagong hill Tracts were often constructed by Burmese tradespeople and technicians (Karigar).
18. The Chakma language is akin to the Pali, Prakrit and Assamese languages. Although the Chakma language is similar to Bengali, many researchers were puzzled by the Chakma scripts, as they have similarities with Burmese and Arakanese scripts. Many researchers therefore suggested that the Chakma scripts derived from the Burmese. However, while Chakma scripts have a similarity with the Burmese and Arakanese scripts they are not from the same family. Chakma and Assamese scripts, which are from the same family, are vowel dominated whereas Burmese and Arakanese scripts are consonant dominated. See Chakma, Chakma Pariciti, p. 44; Ashok Kumar Dewan, Chakma Jatir Itihas Bichar, vol. 2, Calcutta: Bodhicariya Sabha, 1993, p. 17; Bankim Chandra Chakma, Chakma Jati O Samasamaik Itihas, Rangamati: Bankim Chandra Chakma distributor, 1996, p. 33.
19. Van Schendel, 'The Invention of the Jummas', p. 108.
20. While the agriculture is migratory the locations of the villages are permanent. See Rajkumari Chandra Kalindi Roy, Land Rights of the Indigenous Peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh, Jumma Peoples Network in Europe, 1996, pp. 24-25.
21. - 26. Van Schendel, 'The Invention of the Jummas'
27. For an account of the creation of the lake and its impact see David E. Sopher, 'Population Dislocation in the Chittagong Hills,' The Geographical Review, LIII, 3, (1963): 337-362; Harikishore Chakma et. al., Bara Parang (The Great Exodus): The Tale of the Development Refugees of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Dhaka: Centre for Sustainable Development, 1995.
28. Van Schendel, 'The Invention of the Jummas', p. 117
29. The Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission, Life is Not Ours: Land and Human Rights in the Chittagong Hill Tracts Bangladesh, Copenhagen: IWGA, March 1992.
30. In 1872 the percentage of non-hill people in the Chittagong Hill Tracts was 2%, in 1901 7%, in 1951 9%, in 1981 41%, and in 1991 49%. Raja Devashish Roy, Colonization, Marginalization and Disempowerment of Indigenous Peoples in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh: Will There be a Reversal of the Trend? International Conference on Bangladesh (1971-1996) Peoples' Struggles, at Montreal, 18-20 October 1996.
31. Groups which the hill peoples making connections with include Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP), Asian Indigenous Women's Network (AIWN), Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation (UNPO), UN Commission on Human Rights and its Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, UN Commission on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), International Labour Organization, Amnesty International, Survival International, International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), Antislavery Society, and the Minority Rights Group. 32. Tripura, Chattagramer Prakriti O Sanskriti, p. 118, claims Mru houses have a platform that is between 9-12 ft from the ground. But this seems inconsistent with the extensive photographic evidence provided in Brauns, Mru, which shows are far greater range of heights.
33. Where for geographic reasons the house cannot face east, there are other cultural restrictions on the direction the house

may face. Such restrictions on orientation may vary according to the different Chakma clan (goza) and sub-clan (gutthi or dagi). For example, the Borbo goza, Farad dagi has a taboo against facing the south.

34. Miniature house built for the 'spirit' of the recently deceased. Khan, 'Some Tribal Houses Types of the Chittagong Hill Tracts,' p. 20.

35. Generalisations like this are complicated by the differences within the groups, and the fact that planning appears to be changing — whether an impact of recent upheavals, or part of long process of change.

36. Tripura, Parbatya Chattagramer Prakriti O Sanskriti, pp. 132-133.

37. Chakma, Parbatya Chattagramer Upajati O Sanskriti, p. 90.

38. Hunter, A Statistical Account of Bengal, p. 54.

39. Brauns, Mru, pp.66ff.

40. Brauns, Mru, p. 66.

41. See for example, Chakma, Parbatya Chattagramer Upajati O Sanskriti; and B. L. Tripura et. al. (eds), Nua Jingkani, Rangamati: Moanoghar Sishusadan, 1996.

42. Van Schendel raises concern that Chakmas may come to dominate the identity of the evolving 'Jumma nation'. This same possibility is evident in the use of the platform house, where the image of the Chakma variant may come to dominate. Van Schendel, 'The Invention of the Jummas'.

43. Organised by the Jum Aesthetic Council (Banarupa, Rangamati), with logistical support provided by the Tribal Cultural Institute (Vedvedi, Rangamati).

44. Interview with Mrittika Chakma and Sukheshawr Chakma of the Jum Aesthetic Council, December 1999. Also, telephone interview with Supriya Talukdar, the Director of the Tribal Cultural Institute in Rangamati, August 2000. 45. While the platform house is of light materials raised on stilts above the variable hilly terrain, the typical traditional Bengali plough cultivator's house form is built directly on the flat ground of the plainland on an earth plinth. And while the platform house is appears as a single architectural unit in the landscape, the Bengali house is generally multiple units arranged around a central courtyard.

46. Many pieces of national legislation relating to the CHT refer to its people as indigenous. See for example, Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation 1 of 1900 (Rule 4, 6, 34, 45 and 50); Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, National Board of Revenue, Application of the Income Tax Act, 1922, Memo C. No. 4 (6) Kac - 5/77/589 dated 4.9.1980; Act No. 12 Of 1995, a law enacted by the Parliament of Bangladesh. More recently, the Bangladesh government appears to have changed its position regarding the recognition of the indigenous status of the peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. In 1986 the government confirmed to the United Nations that there were indigenous people in the country (see UN Document No. E/CN.4/Sub.2/1986/7/Add. 1, Vol. II, p. 15). But since 1993 (the United Nations declared 'Year of Indigenous People') the representatives of the Bangladesh government have refused to recognise the existence of any indigenous peoples in many international fora, including the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations, and the on-going drafting process of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The government also refused to celebrate the Year of Indigenous People in Bangladesh. When the indigenous peoples of Bangladesh celebrated it of their own initiative, Sheikh Hasina Wazed, then leader of the opposition, wrote a solidarity message and attended the festival as the chief guest. However, when she became Prime Minister, Seikh Hasina Wazed also refused to use the descriptor 'indigenous' for the peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord, which was signed by the Prime Minister Seikh Hasina Wazed, reinforces the word 'tribal' instead of indigenous to denote the CHT peoples peoples. See Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord, 2 December 1997. For more details see Roy, Land Rights of the Indigenous Peoples, pp. 4-6.

47. Various historical accounts contained in Sattar, op. cit. Adding new account, Husain, without providing any historical reference, states that 'Most of the tribal people moved into this land [CHT] from areas now in Myanmar (former Burma) during the period from the 15th to the mid-nineteenth centuries. The tribes belonging to the Kuki group were the earliest to settle, and the Chakmas came much later.' Husain, Syed Anwar, 1999, War and Peace in the Chittagong Hill Tracts: Retrospect and Prospect, Dhaka: Agamee Prakashani, p. 5.

48. This of course does not prove they are indigenous, but holds open the possibility that they have a much longer history of association with the region than the Bengali and nineteenth century English histories would allow.

49. Jenkins, On 'What is History?', p. 38.

50. Gadamer, Truth and Method.

51. Hayden White, Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nine-teenth Century Europe, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974.

52. See for example Dreyfus' account of Heidegger's notion of truth. H. Dreyfus, Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division 1. Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1991, p. 251 ff. See also Glen Hill, 'Architectural History Research after Postmodernism', Architectural Theory Review, Forthcoming.

53. J. DiCenso, Hermeneutics and the Disclosure of Truth: A Study of the Work of Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990.

54. Heidegger argues that it is never possible to fully disclose the understanding that grounds interpretations. Heidegger, Being and Time.

Reprinted with permission from Formulation Fabrication: the Architecture of History, Wellington, New Zealand, 2000

De-colonising the National Imagination

Rahnuma Ahmed

I see no reason not to be worried.

For we have, over the years, begun mimicking our erstwhile Pakistani rulers when it comes to explaining what went wrong in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

A refusal to understand this means opening us to the allegation of whether our nationalism is their colonisation.

The 'tribals' want to secede. They want to breakup the nation. The loyalty of the 'tribals' has always been suspect, in 1947, they didn't want to join Pakistan, they had wanted to be part of India. The Shanti Bahini was aided and abetted by anti-Bangladesh forces outside. It is an Indian conspiracy to destabilise the country. Agreeing to the 'tribal' demand for autonomy diminishes the sovereignty of the Bangladesh state.

And what had our Pakistani rulers said, both before, and during, 1971?

The Bengalis want to secede. It's an Indian conspiracy. Our mortal enemy India, wants to break up Pakistan. These Bengalis began agitating from the word go, first they wanted their own language, 1949, 1952, and then, from 60s onwards, they began demanding regional autonomy. Those in the Mukti Bahini are India's paid agents. The Bengali Muslims are Hindus, anyway. They listen to Rabindra sangeet, the women wear saris, they put teep on their forehead. Agreeing to the Bengali demand for autonomy will be a threat to the sovereignty of the state of Pakistan.

There are other reasons to be worried, too.

There are some similarities in the responses of both sets of rulers: a militaristic response. In the case of ekattur (our liberation war), this was accompanied by Lieutenant General Tikka Khan's declaration, 'I want the land, not its people.' Tikka was the architect of Operation Searchlight, launched on the night of 25th March 1971. We will always remember him as the Butcher of Bengal. A military commander, deluded into thinking that his efforts would save the nation.

The Awami League government had initiated and eventually signed a peace treaty with the PCJSS (Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti) in 1997. A few weeks after the signing of the Treaty, Khaleda Zia, as leader of the opposition, had declared: it will lead to the setting up of a parallel government. Others said, it was signed to please the Indian government. Writ petitions have been filed since, challenging the validity of the Peace Treaty. During a recent court hearing, the petitioners listed some of the reasons: the former chief whip of Parliament had no authority to sign the Treaty. He was not authorised by the President. A treaty can only be signed between two governments, the CHT people are not only not a government (!), they are "controlled by an Indian intelligence agency." They are not indigenous to the land, "they" are settlers etc., etc. (New Age, 17 March 2010).

As things stand, some may think that the Awami League, by virtue of having initiated and signed the Peace Treaty, want peace in the hills, while the BNP (and its bed-fellow, the Jamaat), doesn't want peace in the hills. There may be some truth in it.

But there's more truth in what Bhumitra Chakma, a Jumma academic who teaches politics at the university of Hull, says: the recent attacks, on 19 and 20 February 2010, carried out by Bengali settlers in Baghaichari, backed by the armed forces prove yet again that unless the Bangladesh

state addresses the structural roots of violence, the "cycle of violence" will continue (Economic and Political Weekly, 20 March 2010).

"At the core of the problem," writes Chakma, is the Bangladesh government's "politically-motivated Bengali settlement policy" aimed at changing the "demographic character of the CHT, which inevitably leads to clashes over land."

The Bengali settlement policy, in my mind, was diabolical. By selecting "landless" Bengalis, it seemed that the military government was concerned about the futures of those who are poor, it helped hide the fact that their landlessness and abject poverty made them more amenable to military direction and control; that, as far as the military leadership was concerned, they were civilian subalterns/canon fodder. The settlement policy whipped up populist sentiments in the rest of Bangladesh: 'If someone from the CHT can settle in Rangpur, if he can buy land there, why can't someone from Rangpur go and live and work in the CHT? It's one country, after all.'

The settlement policy seeped into public discourse, it helped re-define Bengali nationalism on territorial lines—as all nationalism is bound to be—but the new sense of territory/ nationalism was not of the resisting kind, of the kind that grows out of an urge for self-defense (like 1971), but one which encroached.

I am persuaded that this newly developing form of nationalism was distinct to the nationalism of the Mujib era (1972-1975). When Sheikh Mujib had exhorted the indigenous peoples "to forget their ethnic identities," to merge with "Bengali nationalism," what lay behind his words was a heady cultural arrogance, deeply entwined with feelings of racial superiority.

Bengali nationalism as encroaching, in a territorial sense, one which could be implemented through the planned deployment of coercive power, came later. After 1975.

I am inclined to think that it was at this historical moment that we i.e., the Bengalis as a nation—began to sound like our erstwhile rulers.

The latter, according to us, were colonisers.

Colonial orientation to land, and its people

One of the greatest liberal philosophers John Locke, analysed English colonialism in America in terms of his theory of man and society. I present Locke's arguments below, based on a discussion by Bhikhu Parekh (The Decolonization of Imagination, 1995).

Locke had argued that since the American Indians roamed freely over the land and did not enclose it, since they used it as one would use a common land, but without any property in it, it was not their land. That the land was free, empty, vacant, wild. It could be taken over without their consent. The Indians of course knew which land was theirs and which was their neighbours, but this was not acceptable to Locke who only recognised the European sense of enclosure.

However, there were native Indians living by the coastline, who did enclose their land. English settlers were covetous of these lands, they wanted these lands for themselves as it would help them avoid the hard labour of clearing the land. They argued that the native Indian practice of letting the soil regenerate its fertility, to let the compost rot for three years, meant that the natives did not make "rational use" of it. Locke agreed with them. Even enclosed land, he said, if it lay without being gathered, was to be "looked on as Waste, and might be the Possession of any other."

Some Indians, however, not only enclosed the land, they also cultivated it. But they were still considered guilty of wasting the land because they produced not even one-hundredth of what the English could produce. The trouble with Indians was, according to Locke, they had "very few desires," they were "easily contented." Since the English could exploit the land better, "they had a much better claim to the land." It was the duty and the right of the English to replace the natives, and, as long as the principle of equality was adhered to, no native should starve, nor should she or he be denied their share of the earth's proceeds, English colonisation was infinitely more preferable. It increased the inconveniences of life. It lowered prices. It created employment.

The culture of indigenous peoples the world over, as has been noted by many political theorists, is inextricable from their culture. Take away their land, and you take away their culture. Land in the Chittagong Hill Tracts belongs to the paharis. It is their land. A refusal to understand this means opening us to the allegation of whether our nationalism is their colonisation.

Bhumitra Chakma speaks of the "cycle of violence." It is a cycle that is embedded in larger cycles. Nationalism. Colonialism.

My Bengali sense of freedom surely cannot be paid for by the blood of others?

A genuine leap of the national imagination

George Manuel, Secwepemc chief from the interior of British Columbia (Canada), indigenous activist and political visionary whose work on behalf of indigenous peoples spans the globe, writes: When we come to a new fork in an old road we continue to follow the route with which we are familiar, even though wholly different, even better avenues might open up before us. The failure to heed (the) plea for a new approach to ..[Bengali-pahari] relations is a failure of imagination. The greatest barrier to recognition of aboriginal rights does not lie with the courts, the law, or even the present administration. Such recognition necessitates the re-evaluation of assumptions, both about [Bangladesh] and its history and about [Jumma] people and our culture... Real recognition of our presence and humanity would require a genuine reconsideration of so many people's role in [Bangladeshi] society that it would amount to a genuine leap of imagination. (Cited by Paulette Regan, Canada, 20 January 2005, by making the replacements in square brackets I have taken a liberty for which I hope I'll be forgiven).

Are Bengalis capable of making a genuine leap of imagination? However hard, however difficult, we must. For the sake of the nation. For the sake of *ekattur*.

New Age, March 26th, 2010

Author Biographies



Shapan Adnan was educated at the University of Cambridge and the University of Sussex. He has been a faculty member of the National University of Singapore, the University of Dhaka and the University of Chittagong. He will take up a visiting research fellowship at the University of Oxford during academic year 2010-11. His research topics including agrarian structure and capitalist development, domination and resistance among the peasantry, indigenous peoples and ethnic conflict, critiques of development and flood control and water management projects, as well as socio-demographic determinants of fertility and migration. Shapan Adnan's publications include several books, notably "Migration, Land Alienation and Ethnic Conflict: Causes of Poverty in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh". He is a member of the International CHT Commission (chtcommission.org).

Farah Mehreen Ahmad is a social worker, writer, freelance consultant and interpreter. Her work with BRAC's SoFEA (Social and Financial Empowerment of Adolescents) program includes rural youth advocacy and strategic social communication. She writes essays, poetry and fiction addressing "shadow citizens" – focusing on gender, sexuality and children's issues. She is a guest columnist for Popular Anthropology Magazine's "Herstory-Womyn's Studies" section. Previously, she assisted in projects on needs assessment for palliative care in Bangladesh (Dr. Roghieh Dehghan, Kings College, London), HIV/AIDS awareness in urban-local government (Euro Health Groups), regulatory reform of administrative barriers (IFC-SEDF), sexual abuse of children in urban slums (BRAC Human Rights and Advocacy Unit and Breaking the Silence), etc. She was employed at the Center for Languages at BRAC University, where she taught basic critical thinking and writing to undergraduate students, Development English for Professionals (DEVPRO) to BRAC managers, and writing crash courses to top-tier SSC/HSC students from economically marginalized families (Medhabikash). She is a member of Drishtipat Writers' Collective (DWC).

Hana Shams Ahmed is the coordinator of the International CHT Commission and an independent journalist. She was formerly the Assistant Editor of FORUM, the monthly news magazine of The Daily Star. Prior to that she worked as a Feature Writer for THE STAR, weekly magazine of The Daily Star, from 2000-2008. Her investigative reports focus on gender, labour, migrant and minority rights. Her reports include cover stories on Bangladeshi migrant workers, citizenship legal limbo of camp-based Urdu-speaking minorities, sexual harassment at nation's top universities, abuse of domestic workers, medical negligence at private hospitals, etc. She has also written for Women's Feature Services (wfsnews.org), Himal and altnmuslim.com. Hana was selected as an 'Asia 21 Young Leader' delegate from Bangladesh by Asia Society, New York. She is a graduate of the University of Westminster, London, with a Post Graduate Diploma in International Journalism. She is a member of Drishtipat Writers' Collective (DWC).

Rahnuma Ahmed is an anthropologist who taught at Jahangirnagar University, in the department of Government and Politics, and later, in the Anthropology department. This was the first anthropology department in Bangladesh, and she was its founder chairperson. Teaching was her lifeblood but she left it after 18 years, to become a writer. She has co-authored "Nribigyaner Prothom Path: Samaj O Sanskriti" (Fundamentals of Anthropology: Society and Culture, 2003), and has put together, and translated (from English to Bangla) a volume of interviews and essays, "Islami Chintar Punorpothon: Shomokalin Musolman Buddhijibider Shongram" (Reinterpreting Islam: The Struggles of Contemporary Muslim Intellectuals, 2006). She is one of the founder-members of Drik Picture Library, is a columnist of New Age, and lives in Dhaka.

Shahidul Alam obtained a PhD in chemistry at London University. He took up photojournalism through documenting the people's struggle to remove General Ershad. Alam was president of the Bangladesh Photographic Society and set up Drik Picture Library, Pathshala school of Photography,

Chobi Mela festival, Majority World agency and South Asian Media Academy. Honorary fellow of the Royal Photographic Society and visiting professor at Sunderland University, Alam is the only person of colour to have chaired the World Press Photo jury. His work has been exhibited in the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Royal Albert Hall in London, the Georges Pompidou Centre in Paris and the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Arts. He has lectured in Harvard, Stanford and UCLA universities in the US, and in Oxford University in the UK. He is a member of the advisory board of the National Geographic Society Photography Program. His current work "Crossfire" is on extra judicial killings in Bangladesh.

Jenneke Arens lived in Bangladesh from 1973 to 1975 and did a village study on power relations between poor and rich peasants, and the position of women. She is co-author of the book "Jhagrapur: Poor Peasants and Women in a Village in Bangladesh" (1977). Her experience in Bangladesh has had a great influence on her life and she has been involved in solidarity work as a member of the Bangladesh Group Netherlands since its establishment in 1979. She is one of the initiators of the Organising Committee Chittagong Hill Tracts Campaign (OCCHTC), which organised the first international conference on the CHT in Amsterdam in 1986. The OCCHTC and the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA, based in Copenhagen) jointly established the international CHT Commission in 1990. The Commission brought out its report "Life is Not Ours: Land and Human Rights in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh" in 1991 and four updates (1992, 1994, 1997, 2000). Jenneke Arens is at present Advisor to the re-established International CHT Commission.

Abhoy Prakash Chakma began to write columns in the daily newspapers since 1996, first at Bhorer Kagoj, then Prothom Alo and also the Weekly Jai Jai Din. Currently he writes at The Daily Jugantor and The Daily Samakal. His writing focuses on CHT affairs. He is a graduate of Rangamati College, under Chittagong University. By profession, he is a trader and also a social worker. He was elected president twice of the central committee of Indigenous Forest Farmers and Timber Merchant Association of Rangamati, one of the largest organizations of the CHT region.

Ashok Kumar Chakma is a Masters student of Development Practice (Advanced) in Planning for Social Development at the University of Queensland, Australia. He did his MSS and BSS (Hon's) in Economics at the University of Dhaka. After completion of his studies at the University of Dhaka, he has been involved in social research and community development for last seven years at BARCIK, Dhaka and Trinamul Unnayan Sangstha (TUS), Khagrachari. His areas of research interest are community planning, engagement and governance, environment, indigenous rights and development.

Bhumitra Chakma lectures in war and security studies at the University of Hull, UK. Previously he taught at University of Dhaka (International Relations) and the University of Adelaide. He graduated from University of Dhaka, and received MA from International University of Japan and PhD from University of Queensland. He is author of the books "Pakistan's Nuclear Weapons" (Routledge), "Strategic Dynamics and Nuclear Weapons Proliferation in South Asia" (Peter Lang) and the forthcoming "South Asia's Nuclear Security" (Routledge). His essays include "South Asia's Realist Fascination and the Alternatives" (Contemporary Security Policy), "Assessing the 1997 Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord" (Asian Profile), "Pakistani Missiles: Explaining Procurement and Strategic Implications" (Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies), "Explaining India's Nuclearisation Process" (Modern Asian Studies, Cambridge), "A Diagnostic Study of the Ministry of CHT Affairs" (with Imtiaz Ahmed, Amena Mohsin; Identity, Culture and Politics: an afro-asian dialogue), "Problems of National Integration in Bangladesh: The Chittagong Hill Tracts" (Syed Aziz-al-Ahsan; Asian Survey), "Refugees: The Experience of Bangladesh" (Refugees and Their Right to

Communicate), "The Myth of Nation Building and Security of Bangladesh" (with Amena Mohsin; Bangladesh and SAARC), and "Post-Colonial State and Minorities: Ethnocide in the Chittagong Hill Tracts" (Commonwealth and Comparative Politics).

Chanchana Chakma is organizing secretary of Hill Womens Federation. She represents Bangladesh Durbar Network in Chittagong, working on issues of violence against women. She is also a member of Bangkok-based Asian Youth Climate Change, and is currently working on opening a Bangladesh branch of this organization. She is a volunteer with Kapaeeng Foundation. Chanchana graduated in Sociology from Eden College and received a Bangladesh Mohila Parishad award for working on Adivasi women's rights. She has contributed essays to Jagoron (remembering Kalpana), Joom, and Kotha journals.

Jagaran Chakma is currently a reporter at The Independent newspaper. He previously worked as a Senior Program Officer at Mass-line Media Center (MMC), a media based NGO. He has a publication on LGSP (Local Government Support Project) which is being used as manual in 4498 unions. He also worked on Pahari Language news programmes on Bangladesh Betar (Radio) in Chittagong. Jagaran has an MA from University of Chittagong and an MBA from Southeast University.

Jui Chakma is currently a Masters candidate in Social Welfare at Dhaka University. She studied at Agrabad Mohila College, Chittagong and St Scholastica Girls High School, Chittagong. She has competed in inter-college sports meets in the javelin event. She is a volunteer for Bangladesh Adivasi Forum, Kapaeeng Foundation, International Mother Language Lovers Club and Bangladesh Indigenous Debate Federation. She has written essays for Joom, Adivasi Forum Newsletter and Sanghati.

Kabita Chakma is the Coordinator of the CHT Jumma Peoples Network of the Asia Pacific and the Human Rights Coordinator of the CHT Indigenous Jumma Association Australia. She is also a community adviser to BODHI, a charity organization in Australia. She has a Bachelors Degree in Architecture from BUET, Dhaka and a Masters Degree in Architecture from the University of Sydney. She has been working as a guest lecturer and tutor at the School of Design, University of Technology (UTS), Sydney.

Kirti Nishan Chakma is a development specialist, currently working as Programme officer at DANIDA. He was formerly Deputy Director for UNDP's Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Facility, Programme Coordinator for ADAB and also Consultant for Asian Development Bank. His volunteer activities included CEO of Moanophool Trust, member of International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR), International Networks of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) and Founding member of Bangladesh Indigenous & Hill Peoples Association for Advancement (BIHPAA). He graduated from Universite Catholique de Lyon (Human Rights) and Groupe Ecole Superieure de Commerce de Lyon (Management) in France. He was a Management Trainee at Coopers & Lybrand (now Price Waterhouse Coopers) in Paris, before beginning work in areas of human rights and development.

Mangal Kumar Chakma is Secretary for Information and Publicity of PCJSS. He joined PCJSS in 1988, when it was an underground resistance movement, and was Member of the Central Committee since 1995. He is Founder member of the JAC (Jum Aesthetics Council) in Rangamati. He is also the past Chairman of TRINAMUL Unnayan Sangstha and Vice chairman of HTNF (Hill Tracts NGO Forum). He is co-author of 'Chakmar Pattham Shiksha', a primer of Chakma language and scripts published from Chittagong University. He has worked as Consultant with UNDP and as assessment team member with ICIMOD. He attended UNITAR Training Programme "Enhance the

Conflict Prevention and Peace-building Capacities of Minority and Indigenous Peoples Representatives" in Switzerland: He has a Post Graduate degree in Economics.

Pradanendu Bikash Chakma is Professor of Management Studies, Faculty of Business studies, at Dhaka University since 1978. He graduated in Management from Chittagong University, and received his PhD from Gujrat University, Ahmedabad. He has published essays on banking sector, women entrepreneurship, health sector, and other subjects in various journals. He has consulted on development projects, including research projects at UNDP's CHTDF.

Samari Chakma has been active in organizing Jumma women and young activists for over a decade. She was General Secretary and later President of Hill Women's Federation-- the organization formerly run by Kalpana Chakma prior to her abduction. She co-edited "The Diary of Kalpana Chakma" and "Paharer Ruddhokontho", an anthology of essays about and inspired by Kalpana Chakma (both published by Hill Women's Federation). She has attended the Second South Asia Regional Meeting of International Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of the Tropical Forests in Guwahati, and Workshop on Human Rights, Asian Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Network (AITPN), in Delhi. She is currently at a private university, studying to be a lawyer.

Air Commodore (Retd) Ishfaq Ilahi Choudhury ndc, psc was commissioned in the erstwhile Pakistan Air Force in 1968. He is a 1983 graduate of the Defense Services Command and Staff College (DSCSC), Mirpur and graduated from the Air Command and Staff College (ACSC), USA in 1992. He attended National Defense College (NDC), Bangladesh in 1999 and later served as a Senior Directing Staff (Air) there. He obtained a 1st Class in Masters in Defense Studies (MDS) and completed M. Phil in Security Studies from the National University, Bangladesh. Air Cdre Ishfaq writes regularly in professional journals and lectures in military training institutes. His papers have been included in books published by BISS and BEI. He is an Academic Advisor to the NDC and external examiner for its M Phil programme. He is currently a member of a Core-Group formed under BISS-BEI and Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies (APCSS), Honolulu to frame a strategy to "Improve Governance and National Security in Bangladesh". Air Cdre Ishfaq is currently Registrar, BRAC University. His areas of interests are defense and geo-strategic issues, terrorism and religious extremism.

Ziauddin M. Choudhury worked as Deputy Commissioner of Chittagong in 1978-81. A member of the former Civil Service of Pakistan he served the government from 1968-82, and thereafter joined the World Bank where he continues to work. Prior to working in Chittagong, Ziauddin Choudhury worked as Special Assistant in Prime Minister's Secretariat in 1972, Private Secretary to Minister A.H.M.Kamaruzzaman (1972-74, 75), and Deputy Commissioner of Noakhali (1975-78). He also worked as Sub-divisional Officer in Munshiganj and Manikganj in 1971. Ziauddin Choudhury studied in the University of Dhaka, Punjab University (Lahore), Cornell University (NY), and American University (Washington DC). He currently lives in Maryland, USA

Manosh Chowdhury is an anthropologist, media-critic and fiction and essay writer. He teaches social anthropology at Jahangirnagar University and received doctorate from an international development school of Japan. He has co-authored and co-edited seven academic books, written many articles and has a range of research/academic interests -- popular culture, state, inequality, critical theory, consumerism, globalization, literary expressions, public-discourses, news industry, contemporary cultural hubs and corporations. He has also taught many undergraduate courses in different disciplines, including literature, business studies, computer science, philosophy, photojournalism and lately media studies. CHT has been a focus of his academic interest, as well as activist work, most recently as part of the 2008 fact-finding mission to investigate Sajek violence. He

has published three short-story books: *KaakGriho* [CrowHome], *Aainate Nijer Mukhta* [One's Own Face in the Mirror] and *MoynaTodontoHeen Ekti Mrityu* [A Death without Postmortem] and is finalizing two more manuscripts. He is joint executive editor of *Depart* magazine.

Mong Shanoo Chowdhury received his MA in Economics in 1969 from Dhaka University. He has been teaching since 1973, first at Rangamati Government College, then Sandweep Government College and finally at Government City College, Chittagong, until retirement in 2004. He has done research projects for UNDP, Tebtebba Foundation (Philippines), Caritas, Association of Social Advancement and ALRD. He currently works as a Consultant with Green Hill, and is also a member of the Citizens Committee.

Bina D'Costa is a peace and conflict specialist located at the Australian National University. She has contributed to various projects in Afghanistan, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan and India, and worked as a consultant for the UNRISD (United Nations Research in Social Development), AUSAID, and DfID (Department for International Development, UK). She is a member of Drishtipat Writers' Collective (DWC).

Binota Moy Dhamai works at the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) in Thailand. In Bangladesh he worked as the Assistant General Secretary of Bangladesh Adivasi Forum Forum, AGS of the Bangladesh Indigenous Students Action Forum, and as GS of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Hill Students Council (PCP). He participated in the Universal Periodic Review under the Human Rights Council at the UN in Geneva and also attended informal meeting of 2007 Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP) that resulted in the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP).

Aditya Kumar Dewan currently teaches in the department of Sociology & Anthropology, Concordia University, Montreal. He is also a faculty member in the Department of Humanities at Dawson College. Dr. Dewan was a former professor of Sociology in Chittagong University. He has a Ph.D. in Anthropology, McGill University. He is the co-author of "Chittagong Hill Tracts: Living in a Borderland" (with Willem van Schendel & Wolfgang Mey; UPL, 2001).

Ilira Dewan is a human rights activist. She was born in Khagrachari. She completed her Masters in Social Science (MSS) from Jahangirnagar University. Since her university days, she has been actively participating in the movements on hill women's rights. From 1994 to 2004, she has worked with Hill Women Federation. At present, Ilira Dewan works with a development organization that works for establishing rights of the marginalized landless, people women, and indigenous people. She also writes articles on women's rights and the CHT issues regularly for national dailies.

Rupayan Dewan is Member of the CHT Regional Council and Co-Chairperson of the Convening Committee of the PCJSS. His involvement in politics started in 1969, during the country-wide Mass Movement. He organised Jumma students and youth to join the Mukti Bahini and sent them to the temporary training centre at Rangamati Station Club, and helped dispatch BDR personnel to the front. Unfortunately, Mukti Bahini local organisers excluded Jumma youth from joining the Mukti, due to racial discrimination. He was one of the members of the Jumma delegation to Bangladesh Government for demanding Regional Autonomy in October 1972. Bengali allies from left parties helped set up a historic 1972 meeting with Maulana Bhasani, who was a supporter of the Jumma people. When the Jumma formed the resistance movement, he went underground and spent 1973-1998 in the CHT jungles for the CHT movement. He was Director, Information and Publicity, PCJSS during the underground movement and led the PCJSS delegations in all initial talks with the Government delegations, leading to the 1997 Accord. He is currently writing a book on the CHT

Accord (in English) and a book on MN Larma (in Bengali). He has conducted research studies on microfinance activities in CHT.

Sagheer Faiz is a documentary filmmaker/ editor based in Washington DC. His most recent project was "Sonata: A Story of Autism" (premiere at Dhaka International Film Festival in February 2008), which told the tale of Tamzid, a musically gifted 10-year old with autism. Among other pieces, he also edited "Tears of Fire", a plea for justice for the 1971 genocide using graphic footage and eyewitness testimony. His interest in human rights issues occasionally includes written work, and he has contributed for publications such as The Daily Star and SAMAR (South Asian Magazine for Action and Reflection).

Audity Falguni obtained her honors and masters degree from Faculty of Law, Dhaka University. She is currently working in a national NGO. Audity is a Freelance columnist in different Bengali and English newspapers and writes poems and fiction in Bengali. She is the author of 14 books including three research books, four translation works from English to Bengali, five collections of short stories and novella, one collection of essays and one collection of poems. She is an activist and her major concern areas relate to gender equity, indigenous rights, environment and ecology, poverty eradication and pursuing a democratic and secular Bangladesh. Her books include "Rakhines of the Patuakhali and Bargona Region: In Quest for A Distant Homeland" (CODEC, 2007) and "Adibasi Jonoganer Odhikar Bishayak Jati Sangher Ghosana" (BANGLAYAN, 2009).

Philip Gain works on human rights and environmental issues in Bangladesh, combining investigative journalism with a systematic pursuit of policy change. His recent work with tea plantation workers that resulted in a landmark book, a documentary film, and a photography exhibition has drawn significant attention to the captive situation of a community of 400,000 people treated as untouchables. Gain's lifelong mission to promote investigative reporting takes him close to the ground on climate change issues, the serious consequences of inappropriate pesticide use, natural farming, monoculture, mining, and ethnic communities struggling to protect their land. He is also an adjunct faculty member at private universities in Dhaka. He is a Yale University World Fellow.

Meghna Guhathakurta has a Ph.D from University of York, UK, and until recently was Professor of International Relations at the University of Dhaka. She is currently Executive Director at Research Initiatives, Bangladesh, an organization funding research on poverty alleviation. Her area of interest is development, gender and politics in South Asia. She has published extensively on gender, development, and minority rights as well as conflict and peace-building. She served as member of the Netherlands Development Research Council from 1996 to 2002, where she chaired the sub-committee on post-conflict development. She was also member of the South Asian Peoples Committee on the Rights of Minorities, a commission formed by the organization South Asians for Human Rights (SAHR). She is Associate Editor of the Journal of Social Studies, published from the Centre for Social Studies, Dhaka and the Action Research Journal published by Sage. She is a member of the International CHT Commission.

Saydia Gulrukh is a PhD student in anthropology at the University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill), USA. She writes on the gendered nature of violence in university campuses, garments industries and in Chittagong Hill Tracts. Saydia edited the New Age supplement pages for the anniversary of abduction of Kalpana Chakma. She has also translated feminist pieces for various anthological publications and newspapers and is currently working on the translation of Rosa Luxemburg's work – *Comrade and Lover: Rosa Luxemburg's Letters to Leo Jogiches*.

Sadeka Halim has been professor in the Dept. of Sociology, University of Dhaka (DU) for the last 21

years. Dr Halim has served as elected Syndicate member at DU and is currently member of the Senate there. She was also member of Dhaka University Teachers Association. She is executive member of Bangladesh Sociological Association (BSA). She has been researcher/consultant to DfID, UNDP, OXFAM (Canada), OXFAM GB, NORAD, IFAD, SDC, Save the Children UK, Save the Children Sweden Denmark, and USAID. She also has conducted a number of evaluation studies, including "Gender Mainstreaming of Policies of The World Bank, UNDP, FAO and the Line Ministries of GoB". She is among eighteen prominent educationists on the National Education Policy Committee. She has a PhD from McGill University and Post Doctorate from Bath University. She is currently the Commissioner at the Information Commission of Bangladesh.

Glen Hill is an Associate Professor and the Director of the Master of Architecture program at the Faculty of Architecture, Design and Planning, University of Sydney. His research interests include the philosophical and design related aspects of social and environmental sustainability. He is also interested in architectural design as an expanded practice, including its potential benefit for indigenous and disadvantaged communities.

Kajalie Shehreen Islam is a Lecturer at the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, University of Dhaka. She joined the faculty in 2009 after completing her M.S.S. degrees from the same department, followed by an M.A. in Critical Media and Cultural Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. Her areas of interest include gender, media and conflict, and advertising. She has conducted research on health and development communication policy in Bangladesh and on the media representation of the war heroines of Bangladesh's liberation movement. Ms. Islam has also been working as a feature writer with The Star magazine of The Daily Star in Bangladesh since 2002 and has written on a variety of issues with concentration on human rights, including cover stories and features on political, sexual and domestic violence, gender issues, and the media in Bangladesh.

Khushi Kabir joined BRAC in 1972, as part of a group of young people working for the rehabilitation of the war torn country, and was the first woman BRAC volunteer to work in remote rural areas. She joined Nijera Kori in 1980, which works in 1,375 villages, organising 293,746 landless peasants, of whom 154,853 are women. Kabir is actively involved in promoting gender equality, rights of women and other marginalised communities; land and water rights, secularism, environmental justice, food sovereignty, and democratic values and accountability at all levels. Currently, she is Chairperson, Association of Land Reform and Development (ALRD), a network of NGOs and Citizens active in Land Rights; Founder Trustee, Centre for Policy Dialogue, a civil society think tank; Member, Human Development Foundation etc. She is also Core Group member, SANGAT, a South Asian Feminist Network; current Chair of Panos South Asia; member of APWLD; chairperson of ASIA: Asia Solidarity against Industrial Aquaculture, amongst others.

Farida Chowdhury Khan is a professor of economics at the University of Wisconsin - Parkside and Co-Director for the Center for International Studies there. She has worked on and written extensively about various aspects of the Bangladesh economy and is currently engaged in studying adivasi communities in Bangladesh, examining the effect of economic change and policy on these communities. She is part of US based organizations, including Bangladesh Development Initiative, Bangladesh Environmental Network, and the Association for Economic Development Studies on Bangladesh.

Brig Gen (Retd) Shahedul Anam Khan ndc, psdc was commissioned in the army in 1968. He commanded an infantry battalion in CHT from 1978 to 1979. He attended the "Military Science Course" at the Royal Military College of Science at Shrivenham, and the Army Staff College at

Camberley, UK (1979). He is a graduate of the National Defense College, New Delhi (1988) and holds a Masters degree in defense studies. He has commanded infantry battalions, the Independent Infantry Brigade, as well as held staff appointments at brigade and division headquarters at Grade II and Grade I levels. Brig Anam served as Directing Staff at the Defense Services Command & Staff College, Mirpur. He was Director of Military Intelligence and Director of Military Operations at the Army Headquarters. He commanded the UN Military Observer Group as assistant CMO–Iraq and subsequently as the CMO 1990–91. He was the Director General Bangladesh Institute of International & Strategic studies, 1997-2000. He regularly lectures at the NDC, DSCSC and the Foreign Service Academy.

Dipayan Khisa is Vice Chairperson of Kapaeeng Foundation. He is also a General Member of PCJSS. He is Editor of Mawrum magazine and Coordinating Editor of Sanghati. He graduated from Bandarban Government College. He was previously President of Pahari Chatra Parishad. He was imprisoned four times (under the Ershad, BNP and AL governments), with a cumulative jail time of four years, for organizing on behalf of Jumma students. All charges against him were eventually dropped.

Naeem Mohaiemen works on writing, art and technology projects. His essays include "Hip Hop & Islam" (Sound Unbound, MIT Press), "Beirut, Silver Porsche Illusion" (Men of the Global South, Zed Books), "Why Mahmud Can't Be a Pilot" (Nobody Passes, Seal Press), and "1971 Genocide & Accelerated Media" (Economic & Political Weekly, India). He co-authored a case study for National University of Singapore (w/ Prof. Durreen Shahnaz; on Radda Maternal Clinic's transition from donor project to local organization), and has written on minorities for Ain Salish Kendro Annual Human Rights Report. Art projects, in photography and video, have shown at Gallery Chitrak (Dhaka), VM Gallery (Karachi), Shilpakala Academy (Chobi Mela, Dhaka), Queens Museum (New York), Mufathalle (Munich), Shedhalle (Zurich), Transmediale (Berlin), Whitney Biennial of American Art, Finnish Museum of Photography, etc. As a technologist, Naeem worked for 14 years at HBO and Time Warner Cable in New York, and CellBazaar in Dhaka. He is a member of Drishtipat Writers' Collective (DWC).

Amena Mohsin teaches in the Dept. of International Relations, University of Dhaka. She graduated from the same department and later received her MA and Ph D degrees from the University of Hawaii, USA and Cambridge University, UK. She did her Post Doctoral at the ISS, the Hague. Amena has received several national and international fellowships, which include the CIDA International Fellowship, Commonwealth Staff Fellowship, SSRC Fellowship, and Freedom Foundation Fellowship. She has written extensively on rights issues, State, Democracy, Civil-Military relations and human security. She is author of "Politics of Nationalism: The Case of Chittagong Hill Tracts" (South Asia Books, 1997), "The Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh: On The Difficult Road To Peace" (Lynn Rienner Publishers, 2002), "Ethnic Minorities of Bangladesh: Some Reflections, the Saontals and the Rakhaines" (Programme for Research on Poverty Alleviation, 2002), and "The Birth of Minority: State, Society, and the Hindu Women of Bangladesh" (Bangladesh Freedom Foundation, 2005).

Anu Muhammad is an economist and political activist. He is a professor at Jahangirnagar University where taught anthropology and economics. His research is focused on globalization, social transformation, gender issues, NGOs and energy. Anu Muhammad is also a political activist against capitalism, imperialism, racism, and patriarchy. His involvement in politics led to a death threat in 2008. He was injured by police in 2009 during a demonstration protesting exploration deals granted to two international oil companies. He is the author of more than 20 books including the iconic Bengali titles "Rural Society and Economy of Bangladesh", "Crisis of Development and the NGO

Model in Bangladesh", and "Socialism in Underdeveloped Countries: Struggle and Experience". Anu Muhammad has edited "Bangladesh at 25: A Discourse on Development in Bangladesh" with Abdul Bayes. He is editor of Meghbarta, an online forum for activism. He was one of the earliest and noted critics of Grameen Bank's microcredit model.

Ainooon Naher is Professor and presently departmental chair of Anthropology at Jahangirnagar University, Dhaka. A member of the first cohort of anthropology graduates from Jahangirnagar University, which established the first department of anthropology in Bangladesh in 1985, she went on to receive an M.A. in Anthropology with distinction from University of Sussex, UK and PhD in Anthropology, magna cum laude, from the South Asian Institute, University of Heidelberg, Germany. Her research interests include gender, Islam, development, and identity politics. She is the author of "Gender, Religion and Development in Rural Bangladesh" (VDM Verlag, Germany, 2008), a book based on her PhD dissertation, and several published articles on topics ranging from Rural-Urban Migration in Bangladesh to Women and Islamization in Pakistan.

Zobaida Nasreen researches and writes on Bangladesh history, struggles of marginal peoples, and gender politics. She studied at Jahangirnagar University and Hiroshima University. She currently teaches in the Anthropology department of Dhaka University. Her publications include "Is the Unfolded Process of Nation-building in Bangladesh a Masculine, Muslim, Bengali and Class Agenda?" (2008), "Hajong Women in Labor Market" (Srabon, 2008), "Ethnic Women in Liberation War" (Sabdoshalee, 2007), "Leading Ethnic Women in Bangladesh" (Oxfam, 2007), "Marginalisation Discourse of Ethnic People in Northern part of Bangladesh" (with Mesbah Kamal and Ishani Chakrabarty; Dibbopokash, 2006) and "Politics of Development: 'Pahari-Bengali' Discourse in Chittagong Hill Tracts" (2002).

Ainun Nishat has been working as an educator and advocate, championing the wise use of natural resources and sustainable development in Bangladesh. He has been a member of the Bangladesh National Water Council, Indo-Bangladesh Joint River Commission, Bangladesh National Agricultural Commission and the National Council on Science and Technology. Dr. Nishat played an important role in the Ganges Water Treaty negotiations, water sector policy formulation, agriculture sector policy revision and strategy formulation. A graduate of Civil Engineering from Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), Professor Nishat obtained his Ph.D. from University of Strathclyde, Glasgow. Before joining BRAC University as Vice Chancellor in 2010, Professor Nishat worked for the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), from 1998 to 2009. He was a Professor of Water Resources Engineering of BUET before moving to IUCN.

Pavel Partha works for Bangladesh Resource Centre for Indigenous Knowledge (BARCIK). Since childhood, he has been involved with the struggle of the tea-garden workers, and does not drink tea in protest. The struggle for protection of biodiversity, anti-corporation sentiment, feminism, preservation of public culture, politics of visibility and representation, agricultural revolution and muscle-flexing of development organizations, forms the crux of his work. He has a degree in Botany from Jahangirnagar University and conducted a pioneering large-scale ethno-botanical research in Dhaka and Sylhet. He researches and writes, protesting the establishment of Eco Parks at the expense of indigenous livelihood and ecological balance. His other causes include ADB's control over natural resources, granting Shell permission for oil and gas extraction in the Sundarbans, Occidental-Unocal and Chevron's invasion of the Lawwachhara forest, and sexual harassment at Jahangirnagar University. He has worked to bring Manabendra Narayan Larma's parliamentary speech and debates to the masses. He is the author of two books: "Biodiversity of Madhupur Sal Forest: People's Testimonials of Madhupur Ecology" and "Indigenous Freedom Fighter of the North Bengal."

Biplob Rahman has done investigative reporting from the Chittagong Hill Tracts for nearly two decades. He has worked in many of the leading newspapers of the country and also worked with BDNews24.com, the country's first online newspaper. Currently he is working as a senior reporter at The Daily Kalerkantha. His first book, "Reporterer Diary: Paharer Pothe Pothe" (A Reporter's Diary: Down the Path of the Mountains), was published in the Ekushey Book Fair in 2009 and deals with the massacre at Logang, the first interview of guerilla leader Shantu Larma, the abduction of Kalpana Chakma, the lives of the refugees in Tripura, etc. His second book "Press Jokes" deals with the various humorous experiences in his professional life.

Jyoti Rahman is a blogger and the Editor of Drishtipat Writers' Collective (DWC). His blog posts and journalistic pieces are aimed at creating a political discourse in Bangladesh that champions individual freedom, participatory democracy, material improvement in living standards, and internationalism. He also does longer form analytical work on macroeconomics. He studied economics at graduate school and liberal humanities at the undergraduate level.

Priscilla Raj is a researcher, translator and freelance journalist. She has worked on projects for Asia Solidarity against Industrial Aquaculture, Global Alliance against Trafficking, Terre des hommes Foundation (Italy), DNet, RIB, and SEHD. Among other socio-economic issues, indigenous peoples of Bangladesh is one of her focus. She has observed CHT situation for about two decades and written numerous reports and articles. In 2002, she was detained by the Bangladesh security agencies along with two foreign journalists working for British Channel 4 TV, and Bangladeshi journalist Saleem Samad. She was released after appeals by many international organizations, include Drishtipat.

Arshi Dewan Roy is a Doctoral Candidate at Faculty of Education, York University, Toronto. She is currently working on her PhD dissertation on the particular challenges faced by linguistic minorities in maintaining their indigenous language in multilingual settings. Her research investigates how unique human knowledge and experience encoded in indigenous languages is in danger of being lost, when they cease to be spoken and passed on to future generations. She wrote her Master's thesis on the significance of indigenous textiles for women in the CHT. Her research on indigenous textiles is published in the Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion - Volume 4, 2010.

Chandra Roy is a lawyer. As an expert on indigenous issues, she worked for many years at the International Labour Office (ILO) where she was part of a team responsible for establishing a new inter-regional technical cooperation project aimed at increasing awareness and application of ILO standards, in particular the Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (No. 169). She was involved in establishing the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) to give a voice to indigenous peoples, minorities and nations. She is currently working as independent consultant on international legal issues with emphasis on human rights, indigenous peoples, discrimination and gender issues. Her publications include "Land Rights of the Indigenous Peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh" (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, Copenhagen, 2000), and "Militarization and the Chittagong Hill Tracts" (Indigenous Affairs no. 2/2001).

Devasish Roy holds a Barrister-at-Law degree from the Inns of Court School of Law in London. He has been practising law in the Dhaka District Court since 1988 and in the Supreme Court of Bangladesh (High Court Division) since 1991. He is Founding chairperson of the Hill Tracts NGO Forum, a representative body of local NGOs of the CHT. In 2008 he was appointed a Special Assistant to the Chief Adviser, Government of Bangladesh, with the rank and status of a Minister of State. In 2010 he was appointed as a Member (Indigenous representative) of the UN Permanent

Forum on Indigenous Issues (Asia Region), endorsed by an overwhelming number of the participating indigenous organizations (176 out of 203 votes cast). Devasish Roy is the traditional Chief of Chakma (Chakma Raja) in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. As Chief he is directly responsible for land and revenue administration, administration of justice and for advising several CHT-related statutory governmental institutions. He was Resource Facilitator during formal talks between the Government of Bangladesh and the PCJSS, at Padma Guest House, Dhaka, December, 1997. The talks resulted in the signing of the 1997 CHT Peace Accord.

Pinaki Roy is deputy chief reporter for The Daily Star in Dhaka. Specializing in Environmental issues, Pinaki often reports on rights of indigenous people living in CHT and plainlands. He has received five professional Awards between 2003-2010 for excellence in investigative, environmental and human rights reporting. He started his journalism career in 1998 as a Dhaka University correspondent of a Bangla daily 'The Bhorer Kagoj' while studying in the Accounting department of the Business Studies faculty. He joined Daily Star in 2002.

Tazreena Sajjad is a Ph.D candidate at American University in Washington DC. She works on issues of transitional justice mechanisms, war crimes, impunity and political reconciliation. She also works in the field of gender and conflict, and women and peacebuilding. She holds a Masters degree in International Peace and Conflict Resolution from American University. In between her degrees, she worked in the field of democracy-building with the South Asia division of the National Democratic Institute and later with Survivors' Rights International on refugees and human rights law. During and prior to her PhD program, she was in Afghanistan working on legal education and human rights law. She is a fellow at the Institute of Inclusive Security and is the recipient of the Dean's Fellowship of American University and the Gandhi Memorial Peace Scholarship. She is a member of Drishtipat Writers' Collective (DWC).

Saleem Samad is an Ashoka Fellow and an investigative reporter for more than 25 years. He has co-authored several books on conflict resolution, security, terrorism, elective democracy, ethnicity and press freedom. He contributed regularly to Time magazine (Asia), Daily Times (Pakistan), and Tehelka.com. In 2002, he was detained by the Bangladesh security agencies along with two foreign journalists working for British Channel 4 TV, and Bangladeshi journalist Priscilla Raj. He took refuge in Canada after state agencies intermittently harassed him for his articles on minority persecution, and recently returned after six years in exile. He was a Fellow at the Advocacy Institute, Washington DC and recipient of Hellman-Hammett Grants award by Human Rights Watch (HRW).

Deepak Singh is associate Professor in the Department of Political Science, Panjab University, Chandigarh. His book "Stateless in South Asia: The Chakmas between Bangladesh and India" (2010) is an outcome of a book-project fellowship from New India Foundation, Bangalore. He was one of the first recipients of the fellowship in 2004. His research interests include migration and refugee studies, politics and ethnicity in Northeast India, and postcolonial politics in South Asia. He has contributed several research papers in journals and edited volumes.

Zafar Sobhan was editorial and op-ed editor for The Daily Star since 2003. Sobhan commissioned and edited all opinion, commentary, and analysis pieces, and wrote a weekly opinion column for Bangladesh's most influential English newspaper. He was Editor of Forum, a monthly magazine focusing on politics and economics, and serves in positions of leadership in non-profit organizations supporting youth training and development. Sobhan was a 2009 Yale World Fellow and has been selected as a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum and as an "Asia 21 Young Leader" by Asia Society. He is currently working with Independent TV and Newspaper group.

Sudatta Bikash Tanchangya is the founder Secretary General of the Movement for the Forest and Land Rights in the CHT. He was also the founder Secretary of the organization's predecessor, the Committee for Forest and Land Rights in the CHT. He was the Convener of the Bhumi Punoruddhar Committee. Sudatta worked as Research Associate with Sadeka Halim for a paper on Natural Resource Management in Bangladesh for Adivasis, under a regional office in Bangkok. He works with land and forest rights in the CHT and has been involved in, and presented at, many workshops and seminars on this issue.

Masahiko Togawa is Associate Professor of cultural anthropology at Hiroshima University, Japan. He graduated from Keio university, Tokyo, and studied at Calcutta University, Visva-Bharati University and North Bengal University from 1992 to 1997. He has written several books and papers on religion and society in India and Bangladesh. He is the author of "An Abode of the Goddess: Kingship, Caste and Sacrificial Organization in a Bengal Village" (New Delhi: Manohar Publication), "Syncretism Revisited: Hindus and Muslims over a Sainly Cult in Bengal" (Numen: International Reviews for the History of Religions), "Women within the Hierarchy" (Journal of the Japanese Association for South Asian Studies), and co-editor of "Gram Bangla: Itihas, Samaj o Arthaniti" (in Bengali, Kolkata: K.P. Bagci), and "Minorities and the State: Changing Social and Political Landscape of Bengal" (New Delhi: SAGE Publications, forthcoming). He is a member of the executive board of the Japanese Association for South Asian Studies (JASAS).

Abhilash Kanti Tripura is the National Coordinator of the Promotion of the Rights of Indigenous People (PRO 169) of the ILO. He has worked in the Project Appraisal and Formulation of "Local Governance Capacity Building" and "NGO Capacity Building in the Chittagong Hill Tracts" for DANIDA Human Rights and Good Governance PSU. He has also worked as Programme Officer, CHT Region Wide Initiative; as Coordinator of Policy and Programming Unit for UNDP's CHT Development Facility; and as Senior Research Associate at BRAC. Abhilash has worked with UN organizations and Bilateral donors on the Indigenous People's rights and development issues at international, regional and national level. He is experienced in working in a highly complex post-conflict situation with confrontational political, social and economic interest groups.

Borendra Lal Tripura is a faculty member of the Department of English American International University, Bangladesh. He is also a consultant for Asian Development Bank, UNDP Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Facility (Scholarship and Placement Unit) and previously consulted for MSF (Holland). He has also taught at Matiranga Degree College (Khagrachari). He received his MA of Education (Distinction) from Monash University. His publications include "The Constitution and Education Policy of Bangladesh and the Place of Minority Languages", "Necessity of Mother-tongue in Primary Schools"; two books of poetry: "The Rebel and a Painting" and "Upol Dweper Meye"; and the novel "Shonaly Usha Dhusor Gudhuli".

Den Doha Jolai Tripura is a development worker. During 1970-71, while a student of agriculture in Sherpur, Mymensingh, he was involved with the student union's rebellion. He was almost caught by Punjabi soldiers near the Bhairab bridge in Ashuganj during a curfew. He went on to mobilize people in the Remakringpasha Tripura area, and gave training sessions on ensuring safe passage of refugees to India. When Pakistani army occupied Bandarban, he fled to Remakri and returned to Bandarban only after liberation. He finished his diploma in agriculture in 1972 and joined the Shanti Bahini in 1973. He left the organization for various reasons and joined Caritas Bangladesh in Chittagong, where he worked until 1995. Over the years he has worked in many development organizations and travelled the world as a trainer. His writing includes drama, fiction and non-fiction. His essays include "Social Condition & Status of Tripura Women" and "History of Bandarban", and he has published research on "Harmful Effects of BATC's Gold Leaf Tobacco Farming".

Mathura Bikash Tripura is the Executive Director of Zabarang Kalyan Samity, an NGO based in the Chittagong Hill Tracts working for rights to education, community empowerment, human skills and indigenous community development. Zabarang operates 100 pre-primary centres in three major ethnic languages in the region. He previously worked as District Coordinator for the Hill Tracts NGO Forum, the local network of CHT NGOs. Mathura has written numerous articles on indigenous culture, history and language, in various newspapers and magazines. Since 2006 he has been working specifically on Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education.

Prashanta Tripura grew up in a village in the outskirts of what is now Khagrachari municipality. He left Khagrachari in 1976 and completed school in Dhaka. He completed his BA in Anthropology from Brandeis University, Massachusetts (1986), where he studied as a Wien International Scholar. After completing his MA in Anthropology and further graduate studies at the University of California, Berkeley, he returned to Bangladesh where he taught anthropology at the Jahangirnagar University, Dhaka (1991-2001) before becoming a full-time development professional. His publications include a book (co-authored with Abantee Harun, in Bangla) on Jum Cultivation in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (Dhaka: SEHD, 2003) and several articles on issues relating to the indigenous peoples of Bangladesh.

Shaktipada Tripura is the Organizational Secretary of Jana Sanghati Samity (JSS). He is also the Organizational Secretary of Bangladesh Adivasi Forum and the President of Khagrachari District Headman Association. Earlier he worked as the Organizational Secretary of Pahari Chhatra Parishad (PCP) and Pahari Gana Parishad. He is the Founder President of Zabaran Kalyan Samity and Founder General Secretary of Khagrachari District Chairman Association. His articles have been published in various newspapers and he has taken part in national and international seminars.

Sontosh Bikash Tripura has been working in the development field since 2003. He studied Anthropology for Bachelors (Hons) & Masters degree. He also received M.Phil on Indigenous Studies from Tromso University, Norway under the Norad fellowship programme. His M.Phil thesis was "Blaming Jhum, Denying Jhumia: Challenges of the shifting cultivators land rights in the Chittagong Hill Tracts". He is interested in research on indigenous peoples rights, land rights and development.

Mahfuz Ullah is a leading environmental activist, trainer and communicator. He is the founder Secretary General of the Centre for Sustainable Development (CFSD). Some of his major publications include "Living with Cyclone", "Environmental Politics in Bangladesh", "Intellectual Property Rights and Bangladesh", and "Genetically Modified Organism & Bangladesh". He is credited for planning and publishing the first-ever lexicon of environmental words in Bangla entitled "Paribesh Shabdakosh". He holds degrees in Physics and Journalism and Mass Communication from Dhaka University. He is the first Bangladeshi elected as one of the Members of the Governing Council, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Faruk Wasif established a branch of a radical left student organization in his hometown in Bogra, and later entered Jahangirnagar University. While studying Bengali Language and Literature, he became involved in active politics. He also began writing numerous articles and essays on literature, politics and culture. His critical analysis focuses on understanding the matrix of the national course of life. Along with his comrades on the left, he led several student movements against oppression, sexual harassment and discriminatory state policy, both on campus and national level. He was arrested and jailed for seventeen days. His political journey took a different direction when he started a career as a journalist in the country's highest circulation national daily Prothom Alo. He tries to serve the greater common good with all his efforts in print and television media.

Etymology and Absence

The themes of each section in this anthology came out of multiple conversations with mentors and allies. Rahnuma Ahmed challenged the initial book structure, and suggested "Setting the Frame" for the book and the overview. The sections "'Terrorists' and Security Discourse", "Ethnically Singular Nationalist Narratives" and "De-colonising the National Imagination" came from three of her essays, originally published in *New Age*. "An Unquiet Violence" is a riff on Hartmann & Boyce's classic book "A Quiet Violence" (in the pre-Google 1990s, this was one of only a handful of books that would show up on Lexis-Nexis searches for "Bangladesh"). "A History of Unsolved Disappearances" came from Ruben Blades' song "Desaparecidos" and other memorials to Latin America's "dirty war" victims. "Collateral Damage of Development" is from both Farida Khan's essay and the profit potential of recent wars (unpacked in Naomi Klein's "Shock Doctrine"). The latter also inspires the pun on Weapons of Mass Destruction in "Settlers, Weapons of Mass Displacement". "Whose Land is it Anyway" substitutes "land" for the "life" in Atul Gawande's book "Complications". The section on "Invisibility, Violence and Erotic Fantasies" was partially a result of the search for photographs for inclusion, during which we struggled to find non-Orientalist imagery by Bengali photographers (a gaze that fixes the Jumma as "tribal-erotic-exotic-innocent" still dominates). The phrase "Bangladesh Has No Indigenous People" has been adopted by Ministers of both BNP and AL governments; so it seemed appropriate to have this as the title for a section where that ideology is challenged. Finally, since both "Bengali" and "Bangladeshi" nationalism have played a chauvinist role in Chittagong Hill Tracts, the book title deliberately uses the grammatically transgressive "Bangladesh Nationalism" to indict both sides of the political spectrum.

For Jumma authors, Hana Shams Ahmed was particularly crucial in making linkages and suggestions. Many crucial voices are absent from this book, such as Sanjeeb Drong, Pratikar Chakma, Kabita Chakma (HWF), Rang Lai Mro, Gyanendu Bikash Chakma, Zuamlian Amlai, Bashing Thowain Marma, Swagatam Chakma, Sudibya Khisa, Si Eyong Mro, Ina Hume, Mong Sing Neo Marma, Ipshita Dewan, Nirupa Dewan, Niru Kumar Chakma, Rosalind Costa, Badruddin Umar, Abul Barakat, Shourav Sikdar, Selina Hossain, Imtiaz Ahmed, Shishir Moral, Qurratul-Ain Tahmina, Tanvir Mokammel, Firoz Zaman Chowdhury, Robaet Ferdous, Wolfgang Mey, Willem van Schendel, and Lorenz Loeffler. This is due to our logistics, translation and time constraints. Schendel's "The Invention of Jummas" in particular is quoted in footnotes of almost every academic writing on CHT, yet no soft copy could be found in time for the press deadline.

In spite of best efforts, Jumma writers are only half of the authors in the book (legal, economic, and linguistic marginalisation all converged here). Among photographers, the ratio of Jumma makers is even lower. In addition to Bengali photographers, images came from long-time activists Samari Chakma and Ittukgula Chakma. We discovered that Ittukgula (also known as Shuvasish Chakma) was the author of the iconic Kalpana Chakma image that has been reprinted in many spaces, without attribution. This is particularly relevant in the context of struggles, by Shahidul Alam and others, to establish photographers' rights.

Some incredibly brave Jumma activists we met during our first trips into post-Accord Chittagong Hill Tracts, between 1997-2001, could not be contacted now, due to lack of digital or analog footprint. Many of the most vocal and articulate Jumma activists are in hiding, escaping persecution by state and local forces. Others are in custody, or, we fear, dead. This book is marked by their absence.

Naeem Mohaiemen
Dhaka, August 18th, 2010



Essays by

Saydia Gulrukh, Jui Chakma, Farah Mehreen Ahmad, Dipayan Khisa, Tazreena Sajjad, Samari Chakma, Anu Muhammad, Jenneke Arens, Kirti Nishan Chakma, Sagheer Faiz, Naeem Mohaiemen, Den Doha Jolai Tripura, Abhoy Prakash Chakma, Brig Gen (Retd) Shahedul Anam Khan, Kajalie Shehreen Islam, Mangal Kumar Chakma, Jyoti Rahman, Audity Falguni, Zafar Sobhan, Pinaki Roy, Meghna Guhathakurta, Hana Shams Ahmed, Shahidul Alam, Khushi Kabir, Manosh Chowdhury, Ainun Nishat, Mahfuz Ullah, Saleem Samad, Pradanendu Bikash Chakma, Chandra Roy, Prashanta Tripura, Zobaida Nasreen, Masahiko Togawa, Farida C. Khan, Priscilla Raj, Sontosh Bikash Tripura, Bhumitra Chakma, Ashok Kumar Chakma, Shapan Adnan, Sudatta Bikash Tanchangya, Philip Gain, Devasish Roy, Ziauddin Choudhury, Air Commodore (Retd) Ishfaq Ilahi Choudhury, Deepak Singh, Binota Moy Dhamai, Bina D'Costa, Amena Mohsin, Ilira Dewan, Mathura Bikash Tripura, Arshi Dewan Roy, Jagaran Chakma, Mong Shanoo Chowdhury, Chanchana Chakma, Sadeka Halim, Biplob Rahman, Ainoon Naher, Faruk Wasif, Rahnuma Ahmed, Pavel Partha, Shaktipada Tripura, Rupayan Dewan, Lelung Khumi, Aditya Kumar Dewan, Abhilash Tripura, Borendra Lal Tripura, Kabita Chakma, Glen Hill.

Photographs by

Shahidul Alam, Naeem Mohaiemen, Brian Palmer, Ittukgula (Shuvasish) Chakma, Wasfia Nazreen, Tanvir Murad Topu, Hana Shams Ahmed, Samari Chakma, Jannatul Mawa, Momena Jalil.

Bangladesh: BDT 350
Rest of the World: US\$ 18

Supported by

মানুষের জন্য
manusher jonno

promoting human rights and good governance