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Process of Marginalisation of Indigenous People in Their Homeland: A Study on CHT in Bangladesh

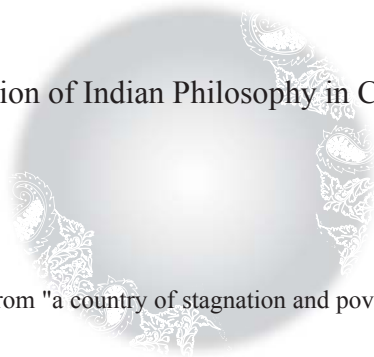
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The Living Tradition of Indian Philosophy in Contemporary India



The image of India has recently shifted from "a country of stagnation and poverty" to "a country of great power" as a result of its growing economic strength.

India has realized this remarkable economic development primarily because of its relatively stable "democratic" politics. What interests us is that the norms and morals that maintain the Indian economy and politics reflect traditional Indian thought and philosophical concepts such as *Satya* (truth), *Dharma* (morality or duty), and *Ahiṃsā* (nonviolence), which have been formed during India's long history.

Our project attempts to integrate the knowledge and materials on Indian philosophy and Buddhism accumulated during the 370-year history of Ryukoku University with the new findings of contemporary India studies, focusing on the "Living Tradition of Indian Philosophy in Contemporary India". To that end, we opened the Center for the Study of Contemporary India (RINDAS), in collaboration with the National Institutes for the Humanities, for five years from April of 2010 through March of 2014.

Unit 1 Politics, Economy and Philosophy of Contemporary India

Unit 2 Social Movements in Modern India Across Borders

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Process of Marginalisation of Indigenous People in Their Homeland:

A Study on CHT in Bangladesh

Harun-or-Rashid

Process of Marginalisation of Indigenous People in Their Homeland: A Study on CHT in Bangladesh

Harun-or-Rashid*

Introduction

By marginalization we mean putting a community or a group of people in a disadvantaged position pushing to the corner (brinkmanship) in all respects be that social, economical, political, religious, cultural, demographical, administrative, sometimes to the extent of near extinction. By process is meant a deliberate attempt on the part of the authority at that direction. Marginalisation happened throughout human history (the Red Indians in the USA, the Aborigines in Australia may be cited). This is not unheard of in modern state system. Whenever a state pursues a policy of majoritarian rule and/or homogenization in place of 'unity in diversity' in respects of its diverse ethnic communities, marginalization may become the end result. A similar kind of situation seems to be taking place in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in Bangladesh.

A Brief Historical Account of CHT¹

The Chittagong Hill Tracts is located on the South-east corner of Bangladesh bordering India in the North and East and Myanmar in the South-west with the Bay of Bengal in the West, which covers 10% (5093 sq miles) of Bangladesh's total territory and one-fifth of resources. Historically it was the homeland of thirteen multilingual, mostly dialects, groups of indigenous people² of Mongolian, Sino-Tibetan descent, comprising around six hundred

I am greatly indebted to Professor Yusho Wakahara for giving me the opportunity to work in association with him carrying on the present study under the Numata Fellowship, Ryukoku University, Kyoto, Japan and for his guidance and every cooperation.

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1 . For details about CHT, see Pierre Bressaignet, *Tribesmen of the Chittagong Hill Tracts*, Asiatic Society of East Pakistan, Dhaka 1958; *The Report (May) of the International Chittagong Hill Tracts commission*, 1989; Amina Mohsin, *The Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh: On the Difficult Road to Peace*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, boulder, London 2003; Amina Mohsin, *The Politics of Nationalism: The Case of the Chittagong hill Tracts, Bangladesh*, University Press limited, Dhaka 1997; also Ishtiaq Jamil and Pranab Kumar Pandey, "The elusive Peace Accord in the Chittagong hill Tracts of Bangladesh and the Ploight of the Indigenous people", *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, Vol.4, November 2008, pp.464-489; shwakt Ara Husain, "Tribal Problems in Chittagong Hill Tracts and the Bangladesh Government" (in Bangla), *Bangladesh Asiatic Society Patrika*, Vol.8, December 1990, pp.118-137

2 . Names of groups and their numerical position as of 1991

Names	Number (1991)
Chakma	239,417
Marma	142,334
Tripura	61,129
Mro	22,161

thousand (0.56%) among the total population, being distinct from the rest of the people of the country³ in all respects- social, cultural, racial, religious or faiths⁴, economical, mode of cultivation (jhum) and so on.

They had their own system of hierarchically based administration with the King at the top, headmen in the middle and *karbari* at the bottom.

The land had gone through a long historical process of change, first coming under the Mughal (1660), next under the East India Company (1760), to be followed by the British Raj (1860), only to be a part of Pakistan at the time of Indian partition (1947), finally becoming a part of Bangladesh in 1971.

In 1860 the Chittagong Hill Tracts was made an administrative district⁵ under a Deputy Commissioner by the British government in India purported to enhance revenue collection without effecting any real changes in the traditional system of governance of the region. An enactment of the Chittagong Hill tracts Frontier Police Regulations was made in 1881, creating a special police force manned by the tribal people for the region. This was followed by the declaration of CHT as a Special Area excluded from the rest of the country under The Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation Act, 1900⁶, intending to prevent external influx, particularly from the side of the Bangalis.

Tanchangya	19,211
Bawm	6,978
Chak	2,000
Pangkhu	1,950
Khumi	1,241
Lushai	662
Others	828
Total	501,144

Source: Derived from PCJSS Website, pcjss-cht.org/index

3 . Ethnic and religious profile of population of Bangladesh

<i>Ethnicity</i>		
Bangali	:	98.7% (Muslim and Hindu combine; Language-Bangla)
HillandTribal	:	1.3% (0.61% in CHT;0.42% scattered in several districts)
<i>Religion</i>		
Muslim	:	89.4%
Hindu	:	10.51%
Buddhist	:	0.58%
Christian	:	0.32%
Others	:	0.20%

4 . By religions/faiths: Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Animist

5 . The three districts of Rangamati (1860), Bandarban (1981) and Khagrachari (1983) were created out of the old CHT district. After the creations of the last two districts, the rest of the lands of the CHT district continued in the name of Rangamati district.

6 . See '*Life Is Not Ours*': *Land and Human Rights in The Chittagong Hill Tracts , Bangladesh*, The Report of The Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission, May1991, pp.9-12; also Ishtiaq Lamil and Pranab Kumar Panday, " The Elusive Peace Accord", p. 486, note 11. Under the Regulation, the CHT was divided in to three Circles, such as, the Chakma, the Mong and the

This continued to remain up to the initial part of the Pakistani rule while coming to lose its exclusionary character under the Ayub Khan regime⁷. The region witnessed a phenomenal change including demography in the post-Bangladesh period, leading the indigenous people to rise in insurgency continued for about two decades, finally resulting in the signing of the 1997 Peace Accord⁸ between the Bangladesh government and the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS), the body that spearheaded the insurgency. Despite the Accord, the process of change to the disadvantage of the indigenous people has not halted; rather it goes on engulfing almost every aspect of their life.

Focus of the Study

The aim of the paper is to examine the state of marginalisation of indigenous people of CHT in Bangladesh with a focus on process, areas, actors, instruments, role of the state and end results of the process. The work has been drawn on both primary and secondary sources.

Examining the Process of Marginalisation

Karnaphuli Paper Mills and the Kaptai Dam⁹: The beginning

The process of marginalisation of the CHT people began with the installations of two mega projects by the Pakistan government. First, established under financial assistance from the World Bank in 1953, the Karnaphuli Paper Mills, being then the largest in Asia, extracted huge quantity of raw bamboos from the forests for making pulps and manufacturing papers, causing deprivation to the indigenous people of their traditional claim on land and forests along with displacement. However, they were hit hard by the other. The construction of Hydroelectric plant at the Kaptai Lake erecting a dam in the Rangamati area during 1957-1963 inundated 54,000 acres or 40% of the cultivable lands of the CHT region with a wide displacement of people to the extent of a hundred thousand causing untold miseries to them. To their further dismay, the old Rangamati township including the Palace of the Chakma Circle Chief (King) completely went under water. On the other hand, the two projects neither created the promised employment opportunities for the hill people nor provided them with 'free electricity'.¹⁰ Even, as of today, 91% hill people do not have any access to electricity.¹¹

Bohmong Circles, each placed under a tribal Raja (King), who operated through headmen (in charge of Mouza) and karbari (in charge of a village). The British interest was collection of revenue leaving them alone. Indeed the arrangement made under the Act was the formalization of the old system.

7. See Ananda Bikash Chakma, "Peace-Building in Chittagong Hill Tracts: An Institutional Approach", paper presented at the national seminar on 'Bangladesh at 40', organized by the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh during 15-16 March 2013; also Shwakat Ara Husain, "Tribal Problems in Chittagong Hill Tracts", p.123-124

8. For details of the Peace Accord, see Amena Mohsin, *The Chittagong Hill Tracts*, pp. 129-140 (Appendix 3)

9. See 'Life Is Not Ours', p.12-13; Nusrat Jahan Chowdhury, "The Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord Implementation in Bangladesh: Ideals and Realities", *Nepalese Journal of Public Policy and governance*, Vol.xxv, No.2, December 2009, pp.19-35; also Harun-or-Rashid, "Ethnicity, Religion and Nation-Building: The Case of Bangladesh", *Journal of The Asiatic Society of Bangladesh*, Vol.39, No.2, December 1994, pp. 1-13; Amena Mohsin, *The Chittagong Hill Tracts*, pp.24-25; Shwakat Ara Husain, "Tribal Problems in Chittagong Hill Tracts", p.124

10. Amena Mohsin, *The Chittagong Hill Tracts*, p. 24. Jobs went to the Bangalis while electricity was fed in to the national grid.

11. Abul Barkat and Sadeka Halim *et.al*, *Socio-Economic Baseline Survey of Chittagong Hill Tracts*, Human Development Research Centre, Dhaka, April 2009, p. iv; also Figure 8.11, p. 68

Absence of Constitutional Safeguards

While framing a Constitution in 1972 for the new born Bangladesh state, an opportunity was created for the political elites to revisit the *sine qua non* of the special status demand of the CHT people in view of their distinctive feature in the frame of a kind of autonomous status as granted under the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation, 1900. However, that was not there. To the contrary, in denial of the demand, the first government headed by the founding father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman pursued a policy of homogenization through the instruments of 'Bangali nationalism' representing the national identity of the majority Bangali ethnic group (on the basis of which the struggle for national emancipation including the 1971 War of Liberation was fought) and a unitary state, which led the hill people to found their organizations of resistance called Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (peoples united party) in 1972 and a year later its armed wing, paradoxically named, the Shanti bahini (meaning, peace corps).

However, the CHT issue did not take a violent form during the Mujib era (1972-1975), mostly because of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's charismatic personality and of not doing anything detrimental to the immediate interests of the CHT people except political rhetoric and constitutional detachment. The situation rapidly deteriorated taking a violent turn in the form of insurgency against pro-active policy including planned settlement under the successive military regimes of General Ziaur Rahman (1976-1981) and Lt. General H.M. Ershad (1982-1990).

Changes of Demography under Policy of Military Solution

Despite legal restrictions imposed under the CHT Regulation, 1900 remaining in force until mid-1960s, a slower process of in-migration of Bangalis in to the CHT from the adjoining areas was taking place over the period, mainly because of demographic pressure¹² and resource constraints in the main land. One may have a clear view of trend of demographic changes in the region from the following Table1.

Table1: Demographic Composition of CHT Involving Indigenous and Bangali Population, 1941-1991

Year	Juma Population	%	Bangali Population	%	Total	Source Census
1941	239,783	97.06	7,270	2.94	247,053	1941
1951	269,177	93.71	18,070	6.29	287,247	1951
1961	339,757	88.28	45,322	11.77	385,679	1961
1974	392,199	77.17	116,000	22.83	508,199	JSS*
1981	441,744	58.77	313,188	41.48	754,962	1981
1991	501,144	51.40	473,301	48.60	974,445	1991

Source: PCJSS Website, <http://pcjss-cht.org/index>

*JSS statistics

As can be seen, in 1941 Bangali population was only 2.94% as against 97.06% of hill people. The proportion rose to 6.29% - 93.71% within the next ten years (1951). There was a further rise of 5.8% of Bangali population in the

12. Bangladesh is the most densely populated country in the World with on average 1174. 33 persons per square km (World Bank 2011).

years between 1951 and 1961. The Bangladesh period marked a soaring rise of Bangali population in CHT; again this was predominately under the military regimes.

Seen from the security perspective, both General Zia and initially General Ershad had a recourse to military solution of the problem, turning CHT in to an army camp wholesale¹³; a half of the state security forces including army was deployed¹⁴; more permanent cantonments were built; hundreds of security camps were established; helipads were made. Thus a security regime to a ratio of one for every fifteen persons was created in the name of what was called 'Operation Dabano' (meaning, flames of fire). As a counter-insurgency measure, 'clusters of villages' were organized for hill people to end their scattered habitat. Further restrictions were imposed on their free movements. Attempts were also made to divide them internally. What was worst of all the measures of the regimes tantamount to a criminal offence, was the policy of planned Bangali settlements¹⁵ in the region from the plain lands drawn mainly on neighbouring districts, most of poor background, with the incentives of 85 kg rice per family per month¹⁶ and 5 acres of land, designed to counterbalance the hill people numerically. Thus during 1976-1987 more than 400,000 Bangalis were brought in to the region for settlement at the behest of the regimes¹⁷ leading an expert on CHT to call it as an act of 'Bangalization'¹⁸. This might explain why the ratio of the Bangalis leaped from 22.83% in 1974 to 41.48% in 1981, almost double, over a period of just 7 years, as the Table 1 shows. According to 1991 Census, the percentages of Bangalis and indigenous people among the total CHT population stand at 48.60 and 51.40, respectively. By now the scenario might have changed further more. Although planned settlement has ceased, the indigenous people of CHT would be soon, say, within next 20-25 years, comfortably overtaken by the Bangals by an overwhelming majority for reason of higher birth rate among them¹⁹ vis-à-vis hill

13. 19 infantry battalions, 11BDR (currently renamed, BGB) 3 artillery battalions, 1 engineering battalion, and 4 armed police were deployed. Shapan Adnan, *Migration, Land alienation and Ethnic Conflict: Causes of Poverty in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*, Research and Advisory services, Dhaka 2004, p.25. Also see Nusrat Jahan Chowdhury, "The Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord Implementation", pp. 20-21; Harun-or-Rashid, "Ethnicity, Religion and Nation-Building", p.12, note 4 ; also 'Life Is Not Ours': An Update Report (March 1992), The International Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission (1989), p. 4

14. According to one source, more than 114,500 security forces personnel including army (police, VDPs not included) were deployed in the region during insurgency. See Dalem Chandra Barman and Mong Sing Neo (eds.), *Human Rights Report 2012: On indigenous peoples of Bangladesh*, Kapaeeng Foundation, Dhaka 2013, p.175. According to another estimate, there were 230 army, 100 BDR and 60 police camps, See 'Life Is Not Ours' (March 1992), p.4

15. Harun-or-Rashid, "Ethnicity, Religion and Nation-Building", p.2; Nusrat Jahan Chowdhury, "The Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord Implementation", p.21; also Ishtiaq Jamil and Pranab Kumar Panday, "The Elusive Peace Accord", pp.464, 477

16. Many families among the settlers have been receiving free rations since their first settlement till today whereas the internally displaced tribals are not being covered by such scheme. Some observers termed this as 'an of discrimination'. Ishtiaq Jamil and Pranab Kumar Panday, "The Elusive peace Accord", pp.474, 479

17. Harun-or-Rashid, "Ethnicity, Religion and Nation-Building", pp.2; Nusrat Jahan chowdhury, "The Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord Implementation", p.21 ; also Ishtiaq Jamil and Pranab Kumar Panday, "The Elusive Peace Accord", p.469

18. Amena Mohsin, *The Chittagong Hill Tracts*, p.33

19. In an interview with the author in Dhaka on 27 January 2014, Anurug Chakma, a faculty of Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Dhaka, holds that there are on average about 6-8 children per Bangali family among the settlers whereas this is 3-4 among the indigenous. Aunga Marma, a former student of Political Science, University of Dhaka, who is now actively involved in politics among the indigenous people of CHT, holds nearly a similar opinion. It is difficult to procure exact data from government source. However, the fact that the rate of birth among the Bangali settlers is higher than that of indigenous is corroborated by other sources. See Abul Barkat, Sadeka Halim *et.al.*, *Socio-Economic Baseline Survey*, p. ii, also see Figure 4.1,

people, if not for other reasons, reducing the latter to a starkly minority position in their homeland.²⁰

Islamisation of CHT

Bangladesh, born out of the 1971 War of Liberation, which was further the culmination of a long struggle of the Bangalis for national emancipation, was founded upon the ideal of Secularism, being incorporated into the Constitution as one of the guiding state principles. However, soon with the assassination of the founding father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the fall of his government in a bloody coup in August 1975, the country came to be drifted to Islam, the religion of the majority people (Muslims constitute 89.4% of the population), as an important component of national ideology under the military regimes.²¹

Initiated by General Ziaur Rahman with fundamental changes in the Constitution, his successor General Ershad pushed it through further by declaring Islam as the state religion. Apart from state level, Islamisation has also gained some manifest ground in respect of public matters in Bangladesh society over the period since 1975 for both internally as well as externally induced reasons.

Alongside the general trend of Islamisation in the country, there marked a rapid growth of a similar process, mainly deliberate, in the CHT with the increase of the number of Bangali Muslim population, prompted by the military rulers under their policy of planned settlement, as already mentioned.

People do not in-migrate from one place to another in person alone. They carry with them their faiths, practices, habits together with other traits of life. In line with the Pakistani tradition, members of the Bangladesh army are being inducted into Islamic practices on a regular basis. So, one may find a mosque in or around every garrison and CHT is no exception. Mention may be made of a few of such mosques, such as, Brigade Jami Mastjid, Army Zone Mastjid, BGB [Border Guard Bangladesh] Camp Mastjid, Police Line Jami Mastjid, Ansar VDP [Village Defence police] Jami mastjid, New police Line Mastjid, and Tinathari ansar headquarters Jami Mastjid.²²

Mushrooming of the growth of mosques and madrassas (schools of Islamic learning) comes to one's immediate notice throughout CHT. The leap may be seen in the following Table 2.

Table 2: Number of Mosques and Madrassas in CHT, 1961-1981

Year	Mosque	Madrassa
1961	40	2
1974	200	20
1981	592	35

Source: Amena Mohsin, *The Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh: On the Difficult Road to Peace*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, London 2003, p. 63

p.32; also Dalem Chandra Barman and Mong Sing Neo (eds.), *Human Rights Report*, p.26

Further, while polygamy is allowed in a Muslim society, it is against the social taboo among the indigenous people.

20. Ishtiaq Jamil and Pranab Kumar Panday, "The Elusive Peace Accord". p.477

21. For details, see Harun-or-Rashid, "Religion Islam in Social and Political Transformation: The Case of Bangladesh". in Wakahara Yusho, Nagasaki Nobuko and Shiga Miwako (eds.), *Voices for Equality: Minority and Majority in South Asia*, RINDAS International Symposium Series1, Ryukoku university 2010, pp.75-87

22. Derived from official websites of the three Hill Districts: <http://www.rangamati.gov.bd/node/376894>; <http://www.khagrachari.gov.bd/>; <http://www.bandarban.gov.bd/>

As the Table 2 shows, there were established as many as 35 madrassas and 542 mosques by 1981 as against only 2 and 40, respectively in 1961. According to one source, there are now 460 mosques in only Rangamati district of which 23 are located in the district headquarters. In Khagrachari district, the numbers of mosques and Buddhist temples are nearly equal (255 mosques against 263 Buddhist temples). There is a huge concentration of mosques in the district headquarters with a number of 43. Again, where there are 38 madrassas in the Kharachari district alone, the figure was 35 in the whole CHT region in 1981, as seen above (Table 2). In the third CHT district, Bandarban the number of mosques far exceeds the number of Buddhist temples, 297 mosques as against 177 temples.²³

Operating to disseminate Islamic ideals and values and carrying out related activities as an autonomous organization under the Ministry for Religious Affairs of the government of Bangladesh, Islamic Foundation (est. 1975) has been engaging itself in a series of programme in CHT that include, among other things, mosques based The Quran and Islamic learning for children, establishment of Islamic libraries preferably in mosques, Imam (leaders of prayers) training, celebration of important religious events, etc., thus contributing to the process of Islamisation.

Forced conversions to Islam by Islamic NGOs and other bodies are occasionally reported. Al-Rabita, a Saudi and Kuwati funded such an organization being the most prominent among them, definitely engaged itself in such kind of activity allegedly with the backing of the army during the period of insurgency.²⁴ With head office in Dhaka, this organization had its field offices in Rangamati, Barkal and Langadu to run its activities including a hospital in Langadu and an Islamic Missionary Centre in Alikadam (Bandarban).

Operating through a Naikhongchari and Lama (Bandarban) based madrassa, namely Mohammadia Jamia Sharif, a Dhaka based Islamic NGO named Anjuman [meaning Association] -i-al-Baiyinat is reportedly currently engaged in such an activity alongside huge land grabbing, coming locally to be widely called as the 'Laden Group'.²⁵ It is alleged that this organization takes indigenous children to Dhaka for the purpose of conversions by applying different inducements including financial help.²⁶

Among the pro-political Islam parties, Jamaat-i-Islami, the leading fundamentalist organization in the country, is known to have engagement in the CHT area, too²⁷ with significant number of following among Bangali settlers. It

23. *Ibid.*

24. 'Life Is Not Ours' (May 1991), p.90; also Amena Mohsin, *The Chittagong Hill Tracts*, pp.54, 63

25. Dalem Chandra Barman and Mong Sing Neo (eds.), *Human Rights Report*, pp.97-100

26. An incident of escape of eleven such children including a girl belonged to the Tripura ethnic group (Bandarban) from a chain of a religious school in Gazipur and Dhaka named Darul Huda Madrassa took place in 2012, which might have a link with the Laden Group. The rescued children with their family names and the names (in parenthesis) given after attempted conversions are listed as follows: 1. Shanti Chondra Tripura (Md. Abdur Rahman); 2. Mathew Tripura (Md. Josim); 3. Joseph Tripura (Md. Masud); 4. Dominic Tripura (Md. Hafiz Uddin); 5. Simon Tripura (Md. Abu Hurera); 6. Pitor Tripura (Md. Bashir); 7. Reshmai Tripura (Abdullah); 8. Juel Tripura (Abu Jafar); 9. Shantona Tripura (Halima Begum); 10. Raymund Tripura (Md. Abdur Rahim); and 11. Shusanta Tripura (Md. Abdul Bashir). See Dalem Chandra Barman and Mong Sing Neo (eds.), *Human Rights Report*, pp.62-63

27. Amena Mohsin, *The Chittagong Hill Tracts*, p.63

must be mentioned that this party along with the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) vented their opposition to the signing of the 1997 Peace Accord, terming it a 'sell out' of one-tenth of the country's territory to the anti-state elements.

As a part of Islamisation, changes of names of places from locals to Islamic/Muslim ones or districts/areas of origin of settlers or names of influential persons, etc. are also markedly taking place, as the Table 3 will show a few as cases in instance.

Table 3: Changes of Names of Places in CHT

Old Names	New Names
Bhai-Bon Chora	Islamabad, Kalo Majir Tila
Sunduk Chori	Dhaikaia Tila, Aziz Tila, Majid Tila, FIDC Tila, etc.
Haza Chora	5 No. block, Uttor (North) Sonai
Gatha Chora	Mohammadia Para, Diwani Tila, Mistri Tila, Majid Member Para, Sheikh Para, Jalalabad Para, Nobabpur Tila, Kutob Tila, Dowder Tila, Sondip Tila, Lokman Tila
Uluchori	Uttor (North) Sonai
Maladip	Molladip

Source: Md. Moshir Rahman, *Struggling Against Exclusion: Adibasi in Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh*, Lund University 2011, p.117

The list of places renamed by Bangali settlers goes on: Islampur, Muslim Para (locality), Mohammadpur, Maulana Para, Bangal Kati, Comilla Tila, shantinagar (similar name in Dhaka), Kolabagan (similar in Dhaka), Sabujbagh (similar place in Dhaka), Master para, Banani (a part of Dhaka city similar name), Kashem Bazar, Ghias Tila, etc..²⁸

Mention must be made of some places being renamed after General Zia, such as, Zianagar in Manikchari (Khagrachari district), Sapmara Zianagar (Khagrachari). It must be recalled that General Zia played an instrumental role in demographic changes in the CHT, raising the size of the Bangali Muslim community by effecting a policy of planned settlement there from plain land that he himself initiated.

Thus the rapid expansion of the Bangali community fraught with the process of Islamisation led the authors of a work on CHT to hold the following view in dismay:²⁹

If the present policies continue, the Jumma [as the hill or indigenous people see their identity] will soon find themselves in a situation in which they will have no option but to flee the CHT, embrace Islam or pursue unconstitutional struggle.

Dispossession of Land and Internal Displacement: Economic Marginalisation

Land has core value to everyone. It is more so to indigenous people, who live on it. For them land includes hills, forests and slopes of hills stretched from one to the other.

28. Derived from the official websites of three Hill Districts, *op.cit.*

29. Ishtiaq Jamil and Pranab Kumar Panday, "The Elusive Peace Accord", p.477

Land constitutes the core issue of conflicts in CHT involving the indigenous people on the one hand and the government and new settlers on the other. Comprising one-tenth of Bangladesh's total territory, CHT used to be a most resourceful area full of forests and hills producing valuable timbers, bamboos, rubber, agricultural products and other necessities of life. In proportion to original population, the resources were much more than plenty. The people used to live a simple, happy, natural life, mostly in a system of customary community ownership in virtual detachment from the control of the state.

As seen above, situation began to change during the Pakistan period. However, it witnessed a massive change in the aftermath of the emergence of Bangladesh state. Mainly constrained by resources and land space (only 55,598 sq. miles) together with being pressed hard by huge size of population (75 million in 1972; at present, over 150 million), the new state soon came to extend its control over the region, which was further prompted by the CHT insurgency.

Establishment of cantonments and security camps, making of helipads, constructions of roads and bridges for army movement as parts of counter insurgency measures, general development interventions by the state, planned human settlement in hundreds of thousands from plain lands, building mosques, madrassas and other institutions, creating bazaars, markets etc. cast a heavy pressure upon land and resources of the region, in many respects to the extent of dispossession by the indigenous people, causing internal displacement and a great deal of suffering to them. They are being subjected to frequent human rights violations.

Besides these, land grabbing in the form of lease or just illegal possession is rampant in the hill. Thousands of acres of lands are being grabbed by non-resident Bangali business people, corporate houses, Bangali settlers, service personnel including army and civilian, or any other individuals, allegedly in connivance with the army and local civil administration.³⁰ For corporate houses, it is required for plantation of tea and rubber, establishing manufacturing industries, making resorts for tourists or for other business ventures. Sometimes indigenous people are induced to leave their lands in possession in lieu of nominal money. There are also occasions when they are evicted from their possessions by applying force or by means of intimidation including setting fire on their huts.³¹

Further, for indigenous people, forests are like water for fishes. The government policy of conservation of forests under category 'reserve' as a part of protecting bio-diversity or for any other mundane purposes with restricted or no entry from outside, results in losing control by hill people over these forests, depriving them of their natural

30. For a graphic account of land grabbing by various interests, see Dalem Chandra Barman and Mong Sing Neo (eds.), *Human Rights Survey*, pp.91-114; also Ishtiaq Jamil and pranab Kumar Panday, "The Elusive Peace Accord", pp. 475-477. Ignoring the provision of the Peace Accord (Part B, 4d), in place of three Circles Chiefs, the District Commissioners of the three Hill Districts have been empowered by the government to issue Permanent Resident Certificate, which is required for many purposes including entitlement to lease. This is being abused by them in favour of Bangali settlers or other Bangalis Also see Raja Devasish Roy, "Implementation of Peace Accord", *The Daily Star*, 5 December 2013, p.7

31. Interview with Rafiqul Islam, former Chairman, Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Dhaka, in Dhaka on January 27, 2014 on his return from a very recent visit to Khagrachari and Rangamati for field survey in connection with a research project of the Department on 'Conflict Mapping in CHT' being funded by UNDP; also interview with Anurug Chakma. Also Dalem Chandra Barman and Mong sing Neo (eds.), *Human Rights Reports*, p.28

rights and sources of livelihood, finally turning into internally displaced persons.

The indigenous people are rapidly losing control of local economy to the Bangali settlers. The latter are now in a dominant position owning lands, shops, controlling bazaars, markets, local business, construction works, and, in other case, many local government bodies. Further the share of the former in local services and employment is much lower than proportionate, leading them to raise the demand for giving 'priority to tribals in all services in CHT'³² as stipulated in the Peace Accord. Furthermore, like the use of electricity generated by the Kaptai Dam, the hill people are being equally deprived of Semantung field gas³³ (at Manikchari in Khagrachari District) as a result of fixing government priority to the rest of the country.

During insurgency (1976-1996) over 55,000 hill people left their hearth and home in the face of counteroffensives by the army, taking refuge in to the bordering Indian state of Tripura, which led them to dispossession of the control of lands along with other belongings. Their rehabilitation constituted an important part in the 1997 CHT Peace Accord. Following the signing of the Peace Accord, though they returned homes, land settlement issue involving them and many other internally displaced persons belonged to their community, yet remained to be solved.

To their utter frustration, the CHT Land Dispute Resolution Commission, popularly known as Land commission, formed by the government 14 years ago in 1999 with a retired justice as its head, has not been able to deliver any good. As a matter of fact, land dispute settlement in CHT would remain to continue as a compound issue largely because of vested interests that have developed around it among the actors - government, political parties, army, civil administration, Bangali settlers, business, and likely, a dominant section of leaderships among the indigenous people (Chakma, Marma).

Cultural Change

In the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the traditional system of shifting cultivation on the slopes of hills, called *jhum*, is shrinking (now only 14%) as a result of government restrictions imposed for ecological reason together with the gradual adoption of the method of plain land cultivation by the indigenous people under influence of the Bangali settlers. For the hill people, *jhum* was not just an indigenous way of producing agriculture, it represented their long standing culture, tradition, and identity, too. For the same reason, they prefer to call themselves as jhumas or jhum people instead of hill men or tribal, and the CHT as the Jhumland.

In the field of education, like the main land, the medium of imparting lessons in government primary and secondary schools in CHT is Bangla. Indigenous boys and girls are required to learn Bangla alphabets, scripts from their childhood. It is true that except the Chakma and the Marma, other indigenous groups do not have their own scripts. They have their dialects. In Bangladesh, the Ministry for Education distributes prescribed text books written by authors commissioned for this purpose to all primary and secondary level students on the first day of the year free. However, no text books in Chakma and Marma languages yet written for such distribution.³⁴

32. Shantu Larma's press conference in Rangamati on 1 December 2013, *The Janakantha* (Bangla Daily), 2 December 2013, p.3

33. Dalem Chandra Barman and Mong Sing Neo (eds.), *Human Rights Report*, p.28

34. In the Bangladesh National Education Policy 2010, it has been stipulated that the state would 'facilitate learning in the

Bangla is the language of the dominant ethnic group (Bangalis) among the population. It is also the official language of the state. Language is not merely a medium of communication, whether written or oral. It can be an instrument of opportunity, making fortunes. This is truer in case of all dominant languages. In Bangladesh, Bangla enjoys such a position and status. This might be further impelling for indigenous people to learn Bangla. Anurug Chakma, now a Lecturer in Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Dhaka, who crossed the border in 1987 along with his family members to take shelter in the Tripura refugee camp during the insurgency period at his tender age (just one), in an interview with the author³⁵, said, “I know Bangla alphabets, scripts but not that of my own [Chakma]”. Narrating the influence of Bangla upon the indigenous people, in the same interview, he maintained:

There are practical reasons, too to learn Bangla. Learning Bangla creates more opportunities, access to power. So, people feel proud.

To the contrary, there is also skeptical view among the indigenous people in this regard, which led many of them to oppose the establishment of a university in CHT region³⁶ for fear of ‘losing cultural identity’.³⁷

Anyway, a process of acculturation is taking place in CHT through the instrument of Bangali settlers and other agents of the state involving the indigenous community. Their boys and girls sing Bangla songs, perform Bangla drama. Changes in their dresses are also noticed.

CHT Peace Accord Revisited

It is worth revisiting the CHT Peace Accord in view of the foregoing discussion in order to bring out the gamut of the subject to the fore. The signing of the Peace Accord on 2 December 1997 between the Bangladesh government and the combating PCJSS representing the indigenous people marks an end to a long insurgency in the region, heralding a new chapter in the country’s political development that earned worldwide praise.

In a four part document,³⁸ both parties conceded to a great deal of things to their mutual benefits, which included, inter alia, a. creation of a 25-member Regional Council comprising three hill districts (Rangamati, Kharachari and Bandarban) with tribal majority headed by a Chairman (tribal) with the rank and status of a state minister, entrusted with the task of ‘supervision’ and ‘coordination’ involving overall development activities in the region; b. review of three Hill District Council Acts, 1989 in order to make them further effective, protecting the due interests of all concerned; c. rehabilitation of the tribal refugees and internally displaced families by the government, returning ownership of their lands after survey; d. formation of a Land Commission headed by a retired justice for

mother languages of the indigenous peoples and small ethnic groups at the primary level of education’. *National Education Policy, 2010*, Ministry of Education, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, p.12. The CHT Peace Accord also incorporated such a provision. (Article 33b.2). It may be mentioned that under the new education policy, primary level extends up to class viii.

35. Interview with Anurug Chakma.

36. A Science and Technology university finally came to be established in Rangamati in 2013 with a Dhaka University Professor, who comes of the Chakma community as its Vice-Chancellor.

37. Interview with Anurug Chakma.

38. Amena Mohsin, *The Chittagong Hill Tracts*, p.33

a three year term for settling land disputes; e. quota reservation and scholarships for tribals in government services and educational institutions; f. efforts by the government to maintain separate cultures and traditions of the tribal and to provide necessary patronisation to tribal cultural activities at the national level; g. a Ministry on CHT Affairs under a minister from among the tribals; h. eligibility of all permanent residents of hill districts to enroll on the voter list; i. withdrawal of all temporary security camps by phases after return of normalcy; finally, j. formation of a 3-member Implementation Committee headed by a nominee of the Prime Minister.

Needless to say that the greatest achievement made under the CHT Peace Accord is the ending up of a long insurgency by the hill people. As per agreement, the government has also undertaken a number of measures, such as, formation of an Implementation Committee (1998) headed by the Deputy Leader of the House, Begum Sajeda Chowdhury MP; enactment of various laws, such as, three Hill District Council Acts (1998), CHT Regional Council Act (1998), Land Dispute Resolution Act (2001); transfer of a number of promised subjects (12 out of 33)³⁹ to the three hill District Councils; initial rehabilitation of Tripura (India) returnee CHT refugees by giving hand cash and other necessities; rehabilitation of all former JSS combatants including withdrawal of cases lodged against them during insurgency; reinstatement of JSS members, both combatant and non-combatant, in their previous posts in the services; creation of a Ministry for CHT Affairs as under the Accord; appointment of a Land Commission (1999) headed by a retired justice; implementation of quota system for tribals; withdrawal of few temporary security camps, etc.

However, as already seen, settlement of land disputes has become the prime concern for the indigenous people for obvious reason for which it was given a special focus and attention in the agreement. It is so vital that, identifying the land issue as the main problem, in his work on land question, Raja Devasish Roy holds that peace in the CHT would largely depend on the resolution of this issue.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, there has been no visible progress so far made in this regard excepting the appointment of a Land Commission in 1999, which survives on periodic extension and has failed even to take off in a period of 14 years, for no fault of the Commission itself but for other reasons, as indicated above. The same is equally true of the CHT Accord Implementation Committee.

Further, though a Regional Council has been in place for a similar period with the JSS Chief, Jotirindra Bodhipriya Larma, alias Shantu Larma, as its Chairman, no real devolution of powers was granted to it.⁴¹ The Regional Council was to be an indirectly elected body by the members of the three District Councils being elected on the basis of direct ballot system, both for a period of 5 years. No elections to the District Councils, for that matter, to the Regional Council took place after the signing of the Peace Accord. The last elections to the three District Councils were held during the Ershad regime in 1989. They continue functioning under members, both tribal and non-tribal, mainly nominated by the administration. Although a Ministry for CHT Affairs has been created as under the agreement, very often it is being placed in charge of a state minister, though from among the tribals, instead of a full minister. Finally, in the signing of the Accord, the government has made a strategic gain in favour of holding

39. *Report on the Status of Implementation of the CHT Accord*, Information and publication Department, Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS), April 2011.

40. Raja Devasish Roy, 'The Land Question and The Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord', in *The Chittagong Hill Tracts: The Roads to a Lasting peace*, Tebtebba Foundation, The Philippines 2000

41. Nusrat Jahan Chowdhury, "The Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord Implementation" p.25

back the Bangali settlers by incorporating the provision that any citizen of Bangladesh, who is 'a permanent resident of Hill District', 'shall be eligible to be enrolled in the electoral roll' (Article 9), hence no out-migration of new settlers from CHT.

Ostensibly to accommodate the distinct identity feeling of the indigenous people, though the government does not officially recognise the existence of any *adivasis* (meaning indigenous) in the country, the Awami League government headed by Sheikh Hasina effected several vital changes in the Constitution through amendment (Fifteenth Amendment, June 2011) which included, among other things, a new article in regard to ethnic minorities, stating, "The state shall take steps to protect and develop the unique local culture and tradition of the tribes, minor races, ethnic sects and communities (Article 23A). Instead of extinguishing their tormented feeling, the amendment rather came under strong criticism from none else than the leader of the PCJSS, also the Chairman of CHT Regional Council, Shantu Larma himself terming it as an 'act of marginalizing other small national minorities in the country,'⁴² as the said amendment also reinstated the 1972 Constitutional ideal of 'Bangali nationalism' being the national identity for all citizens regardless of language, race, culture, ethnicity, etc.

The implementation of the Peace Accord to the letter and spirit is most vital for sustainable peace in the CHT. For the indigenous people, it is more a question of their existence with distinct identity, as Shantu Larma observed, "The existence of Juma people will be at stake if the peace accord is not fully implemented."⁴³

Sanjeeb Drong, the General Secretary of Bangladesh Adivasi Forum, echoed the similar feeling more candidly while he said:⁴⁴

"If the state's attitude towards the indigenous peoples of the hills remains unchanged for a long, they will be wiped out from their native land in a near future".

The dissatisfaction of the hill people also found expression in another way through ballots in the recently held national elections (5 January 2014) in which the ruling party Awami League's candidate Dipangkar Talukdar, who was elected three times from the same constituency and was the former State Minister for CHT Affairs, has suffered a defeat to PCJSS candidate, Ushatan Talukdar by a margin of around 2000. The winning candidate explained:⁴⁵

"I think people elected us because they were frustrated and upset with the Awami League's decision over not

42. Shantu Larma maintained this while he was addressing a press conference in Rangamati on 1 December 2013 on the occasion of sixteenth anniversary of the signing of the CHT Peace Accord, *The Janakantha*, 2 December, 2013, p.3

43. Shantu Larma made his observation at a view-exchange meeting organized by the CHT Regional Council in Rangamati on 7 December 2013 to mark the sixteenth anniversary of the signing of the Peace Accord, *The Daily Star*, 8 December 2013, p.5

44. He made this statement at a discussion held in Dhaka Reporters Unity on 7 December 2013, under the auspices of a citizen forum called Nagorik Samaj. *The Daily Star*, 8 December 2013, P.5. Drong was also reported that 'after few years 80 per cent of ethnic minorities of CHT would lose their lands, houses and everything for the negligence of the government'. *The New Age*, 8 December 2013, p.3. The dissatisfaction of the hill people has found expression in another way through ballots in the recently held national elections (5 January 2014) in which the ruling party Awami League's candidate, Dipangkar Talukdar, who was also the State Minister for CHT Affairs Ministry, suffered a defeat at the hands of PCJSS candidate, Ushatan Talukdar by a margin of around 2000.

45. Source: *Dhaka Tribune*, 7 January 2014

recognizing the indigenous people as 'indigenous' in the Constitution and non-implementation of CHT treaty."

The CHT has been a most 'difficult and complex issue'⁴⁶ over time. Though 'Operation Dabano' of the insurgency period has given way to 'operation Uttaron' (meaning recovery/uplift) in the aftermath of the Peace Accord, the military perception based on application of force or threat of force still persists there even under a civilian rule. True that few temporary security camps have been withdrawn from the region, yet few hundred still remaining.⁴⁷ If the same pace goes along, it would take a further around another 20 years to complete the process. However, one study shows that militarization of the region in the forms of extension of existing installations, establishing new ones or re-establishing the old camps is continuing alongside in the post-Accord period.⁴⁸ 90% of a survey respondents consider the military being the main stumbling block to the implementation of the Peace accord.⁴⁹

In Bangladesh, the military has emerged into a kind of pro-active role in both politics and economics from being an instrument, an important one indeed, of the state, as traditionally viewed, developing its own vested interests. This is more true to CHT in matter of their role.

Concluding Remarks

The CHT issue of Bangladesh may be seen from state-building nation-building paradigm of the of the post-World War II period concerning a host of newly independent 'states in hope but not in being'⁵⁰ cases. Pursuance of policy of assimilation instead of 'unity in diversity' by most of these states triggered off such kind of problem to the extent of insurgency from the side of minorities of ethnic, religious, race, tribe, ethno-regional, indigenous and of other variance.

CHT was granted a 'Special' or 'Excluded Area' status by a colonial power, the British. With the creation of Pakistan out of the 1947 partition, the problem of state-and-nation building came to the fore, exacerbating during the Bangladesh period.

Where the Bangalis fought for long long, finally, a bloody War of Liberation against Pakistani policy of marginalisation, in other words, 'internal colonialism' vis-a-vis them through the instruments of one state language policy (Urdu) ignoring the language of the majority (Bangla), so-called parity in representation in denial of Bangali majority, unitary character of the state with concentration of powers in to the centre disregarding the geography, and so on, paradoxically, are pursuing a similar kind of policy, even worse, in their state in regard to CHT.

46. Devasish Roy, "Implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord".

47. According to PCJSS and other sources, 31 temporary security camps out of over 500 have been so far withdrawn, On the other hand, the government claim that as many as 172 such camps have been withdrawn since the signing of the CHT Accord. See the *Report on the Status of Implementation of the CHT Accord*, p.44; Ishtiaq Jamil and Pranab Kumar Panday, "The Elusive Peace Accord", p.474; also see Devasish Roy, "Implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord".

48. Md.Rafiqul Islam and Anurug Chakma, "Major Obstacles to the Process of Implementing Peace: Experience from Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh", *Peace and Conflict Review*, Vol. 7, Issue 2, Summer 2013, Table 9, p.38

49. The survey was conducted by Md. Rafiqul Islam and Anurug Chakma in the CHT in connection with their above mentioned paper. *Ibid.*, Table 7, p.38

50. Rupert Emerson, *From Empire To Nation: The Rise of Self-Assertion of Asia and African Peoples*, Harvard university Press 1960.

Planned human settlement in the area in a bid to outnumber the indigenous people and the organized process of acculturation including faiths or religious persuasions, which may be termed as an act of internal colonization, are clear and flagrant violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The CHT Peace Accord might have put an end to planned settlement from outside, other challenges to the indigenous people and their distinct identity remaining, only to be engulfed from within. Indeed the problem has been compounded by the growth of a nexus of vested interests involving parties of all denominations from army, civil administration, business, political parties, ruling elites, settlers down to a section of tribal leaders, making retrieval most difficult. This might explain why the process of (non) implementation of the vital matters under the CHT Peace Accord including land settlement is being so delayed.

Ideally instead of aligning it with any particular ethno, religious, linguistic, ethno-regional or alike groups or interests, the state ought to act as a higher and, relatively, neutral body, what it actually meant for, being 'the highest political institution', as Aristotle perceived long ago. It should have been the custodian of both general and particular interests within a 'unity in diversity' frame. Even a small, unitary and mostly homogeneous state, as Bangladesh is, needs to be multi-dimensional and pluralistic in its roles and approaches to be correct in governance. However, the point is, there is an inherent general tendency on the part of the state to identify itself with the dominant majority, emerging into a kind of majoritarian rule to the detriment of others, resulting in further marginalization.

The indigenous people of CHT are on the brink of brinkmanship. There stands two prospects, either a gradual process of integration into the mainstream or further insurgency. To have a recourse to insurgency for the second time seems most difficult. However, one thing is certain, that they would face further marginalisation at the hands of the Bangalis from within being overtaken soon by number.

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RINDAS Series of Working Papers 21

Process of Marginalisation of Indigenous People in Their Homeland: A Study on CHT in Bangladesh

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January, 2015

Published by The Center for the Study of Contemporary India
Ryukoku University 4F Hakua-kan, Omiya Campus, 125-1 Daiku-cho, Shichijo-dori Omiya Higashi-iru,
Shimogyo-ku, Kyoto 600-8268, JAPAN
TEL : +81-75-343-3813 FAX : +81-75-343-3810
<http://rindas.ryukoku.ac.jp/>

Printed by Tanaka Print. co. ltd.
677-2 Ishifudono-cho, Fuyacho-higashiiru, Matsubara-dori, Shimogyo-ku, Kyoto 600-8047, JAPAN
TEL : +81-75-343-0006

ISBN 978-4-904945-54-4

