

Master's Research Report

**Indigenous Land Politics & Inter-ethnic Conflict: A Case Study of
Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh**

by

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July 2019

Independent Final Research Report Presented to

Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Asia Pacific Studies

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Certification Page

I, CHAKMA Chandra (Student ID 51117009) hereby declare that the contents of this Master's Thesis / Research Report are original and true, and have not been submitted at any other university or educational institution for the award of degree or diploma.

All the information derived from other published or unpublished sources has been cited and acknowledged appropriately.

CHAKMA Chandra

2019/07/25

Acknowledgment

I want to thank everyone who helped me to complete my research paper.

I am grateful to my mentor, Professor Kojima Shinji for his time, valuable advice, constructive criticism and suggestions in shaping up this research report. Without his essential guidance, this study could become inappropriate. I am also thankful to Professor Salazar for his comments and feedback which ultimately helped me improve the content of my research paper.

I extend my gratitude to my uncle Mr. Kiriti Nishan Chakma and Mr. Anupam Chakma for their unconditional support throughout my data collection process. My younger brothers shared the responsibility equally with my parents, continuously motivating me throughout the journey of my study at APU.

Lastly, I am grateful and feel blessed to have lovely parents who always stood behind me in tough times. They always supported me morally and emotionally when I felt low and got distracted. Without them, I would have not been able to accomplish my research on time. My parents' blessings, their advice, and encouragement made it possible for me to learn new things and reach new heights, both academically and personally. My friends back home in Bangladesh, and friends at Ritsumeikan APU played a significant role standing by me and pushing me in a positive direction to finish the master's program.

Abstract

Indigenous people in Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh have experienced and are experiencing injustice and exploitation since the British colonial period. The different policies implemented by the colonial rulers and the subsequent governments enforced policies that marginalized the indigenous people. This research paper focuses on the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh and how the different ruling regimes and their policies over the past few decades have caused a huge disturbance and disruption in the lives of the indigenous people who dwelled in the region for centuries. The paper elaborately discusses the historical evolution of injustice towards the indigenous people of CHT since the British era, the Pakistan era, and modern-day Bangladesh, and summarized the ongoing issues with the land that belongs to the indigenous and how the non-indigenous are taking over the same. Finally, a recommendation made as to what steps should be taken by the government of the country to solve the ongoing issues and mistreatment of the indigenous.

Acronyms

AL Awami League

BNP Bangladesh Nationalist Party

CHT Chittagong Hill Tracts

CHTB Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board

CHTPA Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord

CHTRC Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council

HDC Hill Districts Council

JI Jamaat-e-Islami

PCP Pahari Chattra Parishad

PGP Pahari Gano Parishad

PCJSS Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti

PFII Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

UPDF United Peoples Democratic Front

UN United Nations

UNESCO United Nations Economic and Social Council

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

The Chittagong Hills Tracts (CHT) in the country of Bangladesh bordering India (Northeast part) and Myanmar (Burma) is inhabited by many indigenous groups namely the Chakma's, Baum's and Marma for thousands of years. These indigenous people are distinctive in every aspect such as ethnicity, language and culture compared to the rest of the Bangladeshi population. The CHT area was assigned a special status during the British rule (Bangladesh was then part of India) and categorized as tribal areas. During the British, era, the CHT area was permitted self-government and any person who does not belong to the indigenous category was not permitted to buy, own or reside on the land that belonged to the indigenous people. After the British left India, the country was divided into India and Pakistan and this partitioning was mainly based on the grounds of religion (Hindus belonged to India and Islamists to Pakistan). The CHT area was forced to become a part of Pakistan against the will of the tribal people. Since, then the area is facing discrimination and injustice, which recently escalated to another level. The Bangla people burnt down the house of Chakma family in the CHT area posing a severe threat to the indigenous people living in the area. The main reason behind this is government propaganda to throw the native people out of their land and occupy it for the development of the Bangla Muslim people.

The indigenous people who are living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, which is currently a part of Bangladesh are undergoing a lot of suffering and have only stories to tell how they are facing injustice and a lot of suffering from the Bangladeshi government. The indigenous people have undergone a lot of torture, killings, rapes and mass massacre. The ancestral lands that belonged to these people were confiscated by the non-indigenous people with the help of the government and are being evicted off their own land. The Bangladeshi government called them as traitors who left the motherland, which by the way is a very unfortunate statement to make given the situation that they are being raped and killed in thousands and are being thrown out of their ancestral land which was passed on for thousands of years.

This paper discusses the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), located in the southeastern part of Bangladesh, and the indigenous land politics that have persisted since its colonization.

1.2 Research Objectives

The research's main purpose is to analyze the CHT conflict by understanding its history; how different stakeholders, such as government regimes, changed the rules imposed over CHT; and how it later resulted in inter-ethnic conflict over the past few decades. Besides, this study also looks at the contemporary issues of CHT after Bangladesh's independence, the factors associated with inter-ethnic conflict, as well as the problems that currently prevail in the state of CHT. Finally, a recommendation will be made as to what steps should be taken by the government to reduce the ongoing conflict effectively.

1.3 Research Questions

To elaborate, the topic had been divided into sub-parts in the form of questions which will be discussed in detail in the following sections. Below are the questions that will be addressed as part of this research.

- 1) How did indigenous land politics start in the CHT area and how did this result in conflicts?
- 2) What are the causes of inter-ethnic conflicts among indigenous and non-indigenous people in CHT that are centered on ancestral lands?
- 3) What steps should the government take to put an end to land issues and inter-ethnic conflicts in CHT?

1.4 Definition of Terms

Indigenous

The term “indigenous” is described as “tribes, first peoples/nations, aboriginals, ethnic groups, Adivasi, and janajati” in some countries. As per occupation and geographic perspectives, the indigenous people are referred to as “hunter-gatherers, nomads, peasants, and hill people” (“A Question of Identity,” 2011, p.1).

There is no official definition of the term “indigenous” as adopted by the UN because it is difficult, given the diversity of indigenous populations. Therefore, rather than lay down a solid definition, the UN propositions to identify indigenous people as per the following criteria:

“1) Self-identification of an individual as an indigenous person based on the mother tongue of the individual and being recognized and accepted the members of the indigenous groups as their member; 2) historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies; strong links to territories and surrounding natural resources; 3) distinct social, economic or political systems, distinct language, culture, and beliefs, from non-dominant groups of society; 4) and resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities” (United Nations, 2015, p.1).

The Chittagong Hill Tracts region (CHT) is inhabited by the indigenous people for centuries. In the first ever official regulation introduced by the British under their rule to protect the cultural and territorial integrity of the hill people, they were defined as “tribesman” and “Hillman” under the CHT regulation 1 of the 1900 regulations. The terminology was later reiterated, that a Chakma, Mogh or members of any tribe who are dwelling in the CHT region are indigenous to the Chittagong Hill Tracts (Roy, 2000, p.22).

The land indigenous people live and cultivate is passed on from their ancestors. Typically land division and allocation is mainly dictated by the way the land will be used, example identifying certain land for cultivation, for grazing animals and building houses. The land is used with a concept of sharing where all the community people have common rights over the land and is considered as a collective property. The families or individuals have exclusive individual rights on the land where their houses are while the cultivation land is shared by the whole community. Although, individual land rights exist in the CHT region, it is the indigenous communities that have the ultimate inherent right and ownership to their ancestral lands (Roy, 2000, p.54; p.56).

1.5 Research Methodology

This research paper is primarily based on secondary data collected from sources such as academic journals, NGO data, newspapers, and magazines.

Research Site

The CHT is located in the southeastern part of Bangladesh and contains one of the largest ethnic groups in the country. It shares multiple international borders: in the north-east with the Indian States of Tripura and Mizoram, and the south-east with Myanmar¹. Its geographical features depict that “it is part of Tripura Hill and Arakan Yoma branching off from the Himalayan range and continuing to the south through Assam and Hill Tripura of India to Arakan of Myanmar” (Nepram, 2003, p.147).

There are 13 different indigenous groups (Jumma) as per the Census Population report saying in 1991 (Nepram, et al., 2003, p.148). However, 11 ethnic communities exist today and are recognized as Chakma, Marma, Bawm, Sak, Khumi, Khyang, Mru, Lushai, Uchay, Pankho, Tanchangya, and Tripura (Islam, 2013, p.2). They constitute 51% of the population in the area, along with Bengali migrant settlers (49%) (Nepram, et al., 2003, p. 149).

1.6 Significance of the Study

This is a sentimental topic among members of the Chakma indigenous community. The majority of the indigenous people who grew up outside of the CHT and are now a part of the mainstream Bangladesh population are not aware of the main reasons as to what, why, and how CHT conflict and violence started, and why it has been continuing over the years. News channels and mass media platforms frame the narrative which the public merely believes, without analyzing the truth behind the whole situation. In a recent incident in June of 2017,

¹ Arakan and Chin

home of a Chakma family was burnt down in the Longadu district while the family was still inside the home and two people succumbed to the fire. This attack was executed by the dominant Bengali (non-indigenous) people as a response for a killing that happened in Dighinala road which is approximately an hour and a half drive by car. The Bengali people and the media blamed the Pahari community (indigenous community) for the killing to protect their lands. On the other hand, the Pahari community spokesperson made statements that why a house in Longadu is torched for an incident that happened in Dighinala. The Pahari community believes that this is a staged drama to threaten the indigenous people to drive them away from their land and to occupy it. The media portrayed this incident in favor of the Bengali people and blamed Pahari people for the loss of lives, while the truth is otherwise. People are too busy to dig up more information and to know the root cause of the issue. This research explores and elaborates on the reality of this situation by revisiting the CHT history to gain a better understanding of what led to the escalating conflict among the people.

Land grabbing ancestral domains does not only exist in Bangladesh. Indigenous groups around the world face similar land rights issues and challenges. It must be understood that for the indigenous people, the land is not just for inhabiting and cultivating crops for livelihood, but bears deep meaning which reflects their identity, culture, and traditions. Therefore, if driven from their ancestral land, indigenous people are not only losing the land but also the personal and individual identities and their culture.

Fiona Weston, the director of Research and Advocacy at Survival International, describes this special bond with the land: “Indigenous and tribal people around the world

have an extremely close relationship to the environment. The land is fundamental to their livelihood and their economies, but also they have very deep and profound spiritual relationships to the natural world” (“Land Loss Threatens Indigenous Communities Worldwide,” 2018).

To research one indigenous community’s land rights in Bangladesh explains and represents the other indigenous communities in the state, and to a certain extent, the problems faced by indigenous communities worldwide. The native people are the constant victims of injustice and violations of their human rights, as declared by the United Nations. The native people are subjected to pain and humiliation constantly. Unfortunately, only a few states have recognized indigenous people as “indigenous” and have given a special status by law. Seldom the governments follow and incorporate the law in their political decisions, often undermining indigenous human rights.

The aim of this paper is to focus on actual events and stories about indigenous people, who have been struggling in the CHT over their land rights for decades and how the forced assimilation of indigenous communities into the dominant society through nationalism, religion, ethnic-cleansing, and internal colonialism has negatively impacted a multi-ethnic society. As a Society and Culture student and researcher, the author’s aim is to discuss the land rights issues in the indigenous societies in the Chittagong Hill Tracts region and to contribute to the existing literature on the land rights issues and to propose solutions that might help resolve the same.

1.7 Research Limitations

The major limitation of this research was that it was conducted mainly through the analysis of secondary sources. Given that there is only a limited amount of literature available, it can only cover certain aspects of the topic.

Moreover, there had been no opportunity for the researcher to personally access the CHT area and interview local people who are directly involved with this issue, due to security reasons.

1.8 Outline of the Study

This rest of this paper is organized as follows:

Chapter 2 historicizes how indigenous people had been colonized in the British era and how it continued after independence under the Bangladeshi and local CHT governments. Different governments had different strategies over the CHT area, such as starting multiple constructions and other developmental projects were initiated that would have benefited the nation from an overall perspective. Perhaps, these kinds of developmental and economic projects captured the land of the indigenous and deprived them of the land which was passed on to them from their ancestors. These lands were their main source of livelihood and where they had been dwelling for centuries.

Chapter 3 addresses the causes leading to inter-ethnic conflicts between the indigenous and the non-indigenous people over the different government regimes are elaborated. The different policies implemented for CHT are also discussed that played a crucial role in increasing the conflicts in recent years than ever before.

Chapter 4 recommends essential steps that the government must take to reduce the long-term conflicts discussed in this research.

Chapter 5 concludes the paper by summarizing the main points of the study.

Chapter 2

History of CHT land Politics and The Emergence of Conflict

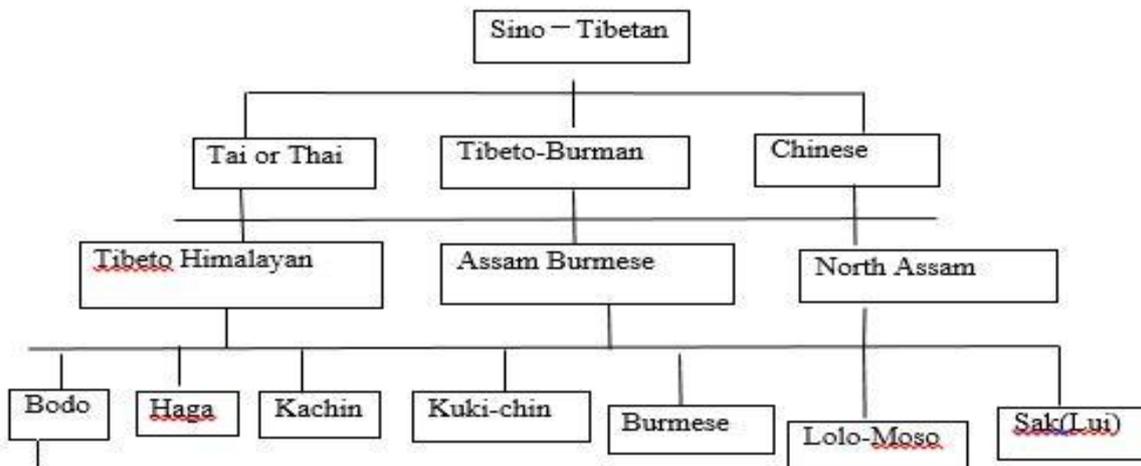
This section describes how indigenous lands became interesting to different stakeholders under multiple governmental regimes, and how they created a complex structure in the CHT under the Regulation Act, which had amended over time. Further, this section shows how indigenous people are losing their land for the sake of development projects and economic benefits.

2.1 The indigenous CHT people

According to Bangladesh's history, there is no particular evidence that states decisively who the earliest people in the country are. However, during the pre-historic period, ethnic groups from Mongolia were spread across the mountains of Himalaya to north-eastern India, mid-north, north-eastern, south-eastern and coastal region (greater Mymensingh, greater Sylhet, greater Comilla, greater Chittagong and Chittagong Hill Tracts) of Bangladesh which even extended to the border of Arakan (Dhamai, 2014, Chapter 1, p.19). Therefore, the indigenous people from the Chittagong Hill Tracts are found to have roots from Mongol and Tibetan and Burmese ethnicities. Some of them may also have descended from the Dravidian and Aryan people from India. It is said that substitute tribes arrived at different times all through the last thousand years.

There are 46 distinct indigenous communities living in Bangladesh among the plains and the highlands. All of them have distinctive “languages, knowledge systems, and beliefs; and possess invaluable knowledge of practices for the sustainable management of natural resources” (“A Question of Identity,” 2011, pp. 1-2).

Figure: Ethnic classification people residing in Chittagong Hill Tract area



Source: Indigenous People of CHT: Social and Indigenous People Issues, 2001 (p.5)

The Tripura is of the same birthplace associated with the Bodo community. The Bawm, Lushai, Pankhua, Khumi, and Khyang are contained within the Kuki-Chin stock and the Marma lies on the Burmese side. The Chakma, Tanchangya, Chak, and Mro together are not of any particular origin because of each of them having a specific culture, and vernacular as well (Indigenous People of CHT: Social and Indigenous People Issues, 2001, p.6).

Ancient history stated that the Chakma people had sovereignty over their kingdom, situated in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and extended to a part of Chittagong (extended Feni River), which was under the kingdom of Arakan at the time (Dhamai, 2014, p.20). They also had their own “tradition, norms and values, visions, needs, and priorities” (“A Question of Identity,” 2011, p.2), and had a special relationship with their ancestral land in terms of collective cultural existence, as well as sharing mutual natural resources.

2.2 A Brief Description of Timeline of Indigenous Land Politics in CHT

This section of the paper describes the timeline of the events that occurred in the Chittagong Hill Tracts area to build a consensus of the general flow of events that led up to the land politics in CHT and later resulted in conflict.

To better historicize the indigenous land politics in the CHT, this section divides Bangladesh history relating the area into three major categories: 1) British rule, 2) Pakistan regime, and 3) Independence period based on their periods. Through the history of CHT, the roots of the conflict can be traced back to the British colonial period, the Pakistan Period, to the different political regimes that followed, after the declaration of Bangladesh independence, up to present.

During these periods the CHT area was not only colonized but also had been alienated politically, socially, and economically. The violence and conflict started between the indigenous and the non-indigenous people while the government denied the cultural existence of native people in the CHT, and rejected their political autonomy (Islam, 2013, p.2). During the colonial period, the British colonizers thought that the indigenous people needed to preserve their culture, and therefore created the 1900 Regulation Act where non-indigenous

people are restricted from residing in indigenous territories. This is one of the existing causes of conflict in the CHT area. Later in 1964, the constitution was amended in the National Assembly and stated that CHT will be removed from the list of “Excluded Areas” during the Pakistan rule (Hasan, 2014, p.84). Pandey & Jamil (2008) assert that the ruling was “systematic abuse and misappropriation of the land and resources” to allow non-indigenous Muslim people to settle in the CHT region (p.468). However, after the Bangladesh independence, the causes of CHT conflict are “non-negotiable issues like citizenship, identity, and autonomy” which later led to an armed conflict (Eva & Khan, 2018, p.63). As a consequence, in early 1975, Shanti Bahini engaged in armed struggle against state military forces. In fact, the conflict of CHT is a result of the indication of “Politics Nationalism within the State” (Islam, et al, 2013, pp.2-3).

The land management and ownership system between CHT and plain land in Bangladesh are distinct from each other. The CHT legal administration completely differed from other parts of Bangladesh. Therefore, there is no interference of national legislation regarding CHT administrative matter as per Section 3 of the Hill Tracts Manual:

“According to Custom Law Raja, Karbari and Headman have the power to make the decision about land-related issues. It started from Karbari at the village level, Headman played a role at Mauza level, and finally, the highest court of appeal indigenous people goes to Raja” (Roy, 2000, p.35).

Moreover, Islam (2013) states that:

“There is a relationship between the land and conflict in the CHT because the land is a central source of conflict and violence (land issues still unsettled). It is quite challenging to access and control over land is still rolling over the conflict process” (p.3).

In 2001, a few years later of Peace Accord, a Land Dispute Resolution Commission (LDRC, or Land Commission) was created by the government to align with the protocols associated with Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord (CHTPA) such as empowering the Jumma governance, illegal leases elimination, rehabilitation of refugees; and initiating a land commission for the motive of adjudicating disputes. However, the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS) political party fought against the activities of the Land Commission due to having a bias towards the Bengali settler people. Now, the role of the Land Commission for indigenous people is controversial and unproductive (Islam, 2013, p.3).

2.3 The British Regime (1757-1947)

Historically, the CHT and Chittagong both were dependent on each other economically as CHT is the market of “timber, cotton, sun grass, and bamboo” for plain land, whereas Chittagong supplied “utensils, salt, and kerosene” to CHT. During the 18th century, the CHT was an autonomous region with its own “independent territory” before the British came into the area and ruled its administration (Hasan, 2014; p. 83). In the late 19th century, “the external administrators” came to CHT by motivating them about “economic interest” but was a strategy to enter this area easily and gradually and take control of it under the guise of economic benefits. Thus, the British East India Company, established in 1760, eyed the CHT because the area is rich in natural resources such as timber trees, bamboos, and cane, and made it attractive to colonizers of that period. When the British had full control over the CHT area, they then extended the collection of cotton tax which was an instrumental form of internal administration of the CHT area, only administered by CHT chiefs and the regional Headman (Hasan, 2014, p.83).

In 1776, the British set up a military camp to establish control over the CHT. During this period the indigenous Chakma Raja, Jan Bux Khan, and his general Ranu Khan Dewan (Ramu Khan) resisted strongly against the military campaign establishment in their region. The British military attacked the Chittagong Hill Tracts in retaliation and the combat continued for some time. However, the British decided to cut off economic benefits from CHT by stopping supply and eventually a treaty was established between the British Governor-General, Lord Cornwallis and Chakma Raja, Jan Bux Khan in CHT in 1787. For the exchange of treaty, “the Chakma paid about 20 maunds of cotton to the British for the right of trade” (Roy, 2000, p.40).

The Chittagong Hill Tracts was geographically not distinct to the Bengal region² but had a gap between the indigenous people and the non-indigenous Bengali people in terms of people’s psychology and culture (Uddin, 2008, p.18). According to Act No. 22 of the 1860 constitution, “The CHT is a district within Bengal, and a superintendent was appointed to the Chittagong Hill Tracts under the supervision of the commissioners in Chittagong.” (Hasan, 2014, p.84). However, in 1866 the British appointed Captain Lewin as the superintendent of CHT, who had the intention to control indigenous people by his power. During that period the Chakma ruler was Rani Kalindi Roy who saw through Captain Lewin’s motivation and made a complaint against him to his supervisor (Roy, 2000, pp.42-43). As a consequence, “The outcome was an independent inquiry into the CHT administration which found that the regulations were not being sufficiently observed” (Roy, 2000, p.43). When CHT was in a “process of annexation,” the British colonizers found the Chittagong Hill Tracts as a distinct culture in comparison to other parts of Bengal. Therefore, they granted the autonomy to the Chittagong Hill Tracts to administer the region independently while staying with British Bengal (Uddin, 2008, pp.18-19).

² Bengal consists of a country like Bangladesh and some parts of India such as West Bengal, Tripura, and Assam

In 1884, the Chittagong Hill Tracts was divided into three circles, with each circle monitored by the sovereignty of the circle's chief. These three circles were known as Rajas of the three distinct regions in CHT: the Chakma Raja, the Bomang Raja, and the Mong Raja. These circles chief managed each designated region in the CHT and worked to collect revenues (Uddin, 2008, p.19). The Chakma Raja has autonomy to control over half of the Hill Tracts including Rangamati, Khagrachari (only Dighinala upazilla and Mahalchhari upazilla); the Bomang Raja had autonomy to control the south adjoined with Burma (Bandarban); and Mong Raja exercised power over the north-west (other parts of Khagrachari except Dighinala and Mahalchhari) (Hasan, 2014, p.84).

In 1920, the CHT was considered as “Backward Tact” by forming CHT Regulation Act 1900 to make CHT as an “Excluded Area” and administered separate entity as well (Hasan, 2014, p.84). The purpose of this act is to protect indigenous lands from non-indigenous people so that they cannot abuse their land, secure their traditions, as well as their socio-cultural and political intuitions (chief circles), customary laws, and common ownership of land. It is a “safeguard” for indigenous people, thus non-indigenous people cannot migrate in CHT nor own a part of the indigenous land (Uddin, 2008, p.18). Later, the government of India passed an act to make the region “Totally Excluded Area” in 1935 (Zahed, 2013, p.98).

Key Characteristics of the British Regime:

- 1) Benefits of mutual groups (indigenous and British administrators) by exchanging resources
- 2) Colonization started when British East India Company established in 1760 at CHT region
- 3) British military controlled CHT administration

- 4) Non-migration at CHT enacted in 1892 which later new form 1900 Regulation Act and the area has own separate sovereignty and recognized as “Excluded Area” until 1963

2.4 Pakistan Regime (1947-1971)

In 1947 the CHT lost its independent status (Uddin, 2008, p. 20) when it annexed with West Pakistan (now Bangladesh) when Britain separated their colony into two nations, India and Pakistan, based on the "Two Nations Theory"³ (Zahed, 2013, p.98). Following the provision of the Indian Independence Act of 1947,

“The CHT being a non-Muslim populated area was due to be included in the secular state of India. However, the CHT people wanted to be part of India and not Pakistan because Pakistan was an Islamic country. Besides, they had previously experienced how they were compelled to vacate the lands they had in the Chittagong Hill District” (Uddin, 2008, p.19).

As a consequence, the government of Pakistan recognized the indigenous people of the CHT as “Pro-Indian” while the Indian flag was found in Rangamati waving in the Bandarban district after India separated from Pakistan. The anger of the Pakistani people led to violence when they found out that the Indian flag was being positioned in the hill tracts. In 1948 the Pakistan government rejected the indigenous police force in the CHT Police Regulation, which was mentioned in the constitution in 1881 to preserve the cultural setting of CHT. However, the infringement occurred in the CHT when Bengali Muslim refugees settled in CHT from India between the 1950s and 1960s (Uddin, 2008, p.19). The CHT was considered as an “Excluded Area” even in Pakistan Period until 1956, while the state was still in the process to decide its constitution. Besides, the government of Pakistan was also interested to utilize the CHT natural resources and formed a new provision that altered the

³ Two Nations Theory is two separate nation based on the religion. Like Muslims (East Pakistan now Bangladesh & West Pakistan) vs. Hindus (India).

status of CHT from “Excluded Area” to a “Tribal Area” in 1962 (Hasan, 2014, p.84). In 1964, the CHT was taken off the list of “Excluded Area” in the National Assembly as per Article No 223 in the Constitution (Roy, 2000, p.46). This amendment allowed for the Bengali Muslim people to settle in CHT, and thus, non-indigenous people were able to enter the area and acquire ownership of the land that previously belonged to the indigenous people (Hasan, 2014, p.84).

In the 1960s around 100,000 indigenous people were displaced from their lands in the establishment of the hydro-electric Kaptai dam. While under the planning and construction stages, the government of Pakistan did not think it was necessary to consult with the indigenous people who lived there (Uddin, 2008, p.19). In 1962, when the dam was completed, the water level rose and overpowered the whole zone resulting in massive floods. Countless people had to be evacuated; many had lost their homes, agribusiness grounds, and other properties. There were about 400 square miles of land including 54,000 hectares of place that is known for advancement lands, 40% of which were submerged. Neither any necessary measures for rehabilitation nor compensation was provided by the government to the people who lost their land. The life of the people like before was never recouped after the launching of Kaptai Dam (Zahed, 2013, p.98).

After this incident, approximately 40,000 indigenous people had chosen to move to India, and about 20,000 who migrated to Burma. Unfortunately, most of them faced an identity crisis as refugees because they were considered neither citizen of India nor Bangladesh (Uddin, 2008, p.19). The CHT conflict started when they established the Kaptai hydro-electricity power plant project where so many indigenous peoples were displaced from their ancestral land (Pandey and Jamil, 2009, p.1055). The consequence of the Kaptai Dam Project negatively affected the whole indigenous generation of the CHT and the Chakma people in particular. According to Chakraborty (2004), studies found that

“The CHT indigenous people who lived in the affected area, or grew up there in its aftermath, are still devastated by the impact, and considered the event as a chronicle of losing their homes through its construction. The lives of the thousands of indigenous people displaced during this event have been forever changed.” (as cited by Pandey and Jamil, 2009, p.1055).

In fact, the hydro-electric power project was considered a “death trap” by the indigenous people because it had major negative impacts on the people living in that area and a whole generation suffered as the recovery was near to impossible (Pandey and Jamil, 2009, p.1055).

Key Characteristics of Pakistan Regime:

- 1) Pakistan and India were separated into two nations based on religion. The majority of the Muslims belonged to Pakistan, while the Hindu population decided to stay in India. However, CHT was a secular state and people in CHT wanted to become part of India. Therefore, the government during that period recognized them as “Pro-Indian”.
- 2) Between the 1950s and 1960’s, Bengali Muslim Refugees came from India and settled in CHT. On the other hand, it was considered as “Excluded Area” until 1956. This area was later recognized as “Tribal Area” in 1962. In 1964 the constitution no longer recognized the area as an “Excluded Area” or “Tribal Area,” thus starting the settlement of non-indigenous people in CHT when the 1900 Regulation Act prepared by the British was not followed anymore.
- 3) The Pakistan government started developmental projects in CHT by establishing the hydro-electric dam known as Kaptai Dam without consulting the indigenous people who belonged there and owned the land in that area. This dam caused a huge

displacement of the native people from their indigenous land toward India as refugees. They faced an identity crisis for not being citizens of either India or Bangladesh.

2.5 Independence Period (1971 and Onwards)

In 1971, a Chakma politician, Manabendra Narayan Larma (M.N. Larma) and Mong Circle Chief Mong Prue Chai Chowdhury, participated in the liberation war of Bangladesh (known as East Pakistan before independence) against Pakistan. However, the Chakma Circle Chief Tridiv Roy and his followers supported Pakistan while other indigenous people fought in opposition to Pakistan due to their expectance of an independent secular country. Thus, the indigenous people joined the Freedom Fighters of Bangladesh under the Father of Nation, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, to fight against Pakistan (Uddin, 2008, p.20).

The state after independent in 1971 became a witness of “Burgeoning of Homogenous Bengali Nationalism” where only “Bengali” identity is reflected in the Bangladesh Constitution (Pandey and Jamil, 2008, p.468).

According to Article 9 of the 1972 constitution:

“The unity and solidarity of the Bengali nation, which derives 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” (Hasan, 2014, p. 85).

Therefore, the appeal from the Jumma people to the political leader and parliament member from CHT, M. N. Larma, when he met with the new government and the First Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, regarding the indigenous people rights and

CHT autonomy in the nation's first constitution had been rejected, he advised them to adopt new nationalist “Bengali” identity (Hasan, 2014, p.85).

By rejecting the appeal, it was evident that the state established only “Homogenous Bengali Nationalism” where Non-Bengali rights were not considered and have no separate identity for “other citizens” in the Bangladesh 1972 Constitution (Uddin et al., 2008, p. 20). However, M. N. Larma argued against “the Assimilation Policy of Government” and mentioned distinct cultures between Jumma People and Bengali People in the parliament (Uddin, et al, 2008, p. 20). He expressed contradiction in the parliament,

"You can't force your national personality on others. I am a Chakma, not a Bengali. I am a national of Bangladesh (Bangladeshi). You are likewise a Bangladeshi; however, your national identity is Bengali. They (Hill People) can never progress toward becoming Bengali." (Hasan, 2014, p. 85).

On the contrary, Prime Minister Sheik Mujibur Rahman said at Rangamati in 1973 that the incline people are known as Bengalis and they would not deal with some other identity (Eva & Khan, 2018; p.64). This is another example of ethnic conflict in CHT that arose from the non-recognition of “indigenous identity”. A year later, the “Peace Force” (known as “Shanti Bahini”) was established, led by the People’s Solidarity Association which is also called as Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS) in 1972. The armed insurgency against the government escalated and CHT turned into “Demographic Engineering” by the government, relocating 400,000 Bengali people to CHT, pushing out the indigenous people who became homeless in the plain land (Pandey and Jamil, 2008; p.468).

In 1975 the government took to “military solution” to set up political strategies, such as giving autonomy to the military in CHT, because of the rising resistance of the indigenous people against the government. The national government reassigned about a third of the

Bangladesh army to the CHT (Pandey and Jamil, 2008, p. 469). After the military coup, Larma organized the “Shanti Bahini” (Peace Force for indigenous people’s rights) against Military force for CHT “Regional Autonomy” and to establish the indigenous identity through the constitution (Uddin et al., 2008; p.20).

In 1976 when Ziaur Rahman took charge of the country as the Prime Minister, he used his political power to change the concept of “Bangladeshi nationalism.” During his tenure, Bengali Nationality meant only “Muslim Identity Population in Bangladesh” where the indigenous people were excluded (Islam, S., 2003, p. 141). Although in previous studies, Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman gave the indigenous people nationality, while at the same time, did not recognize their own identity. This was how the principle of “secularism” was eliminated and was replaced with “principles of absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah” (Muslim religion) during the Zia regime. In the Constitution of Bangladesh, the eighth amendment stated that the country was an Islamic country where other religious groups, including indigenous groups, were made offensive for their non-Islamic faith (Islam et al., 2003, p. 141).

Bangladesh was under military rule partly between 1975 to 1990, which was one of the possible explanations behind the militarization in CHT. On the other hand, the CHT had been formally controlled under militarization from 1977 and onwards. During this period, the military perpetrated violent acts against the indigenous communities, such as ambush, killing, confinement, compelled withdrawal, etc. General Mohammad Abdul Manzur, the officer in command in the Chittagong Division Branch, set forth the articulation “We need the land and not the people” (Zahed, 2013; p.100). The Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board (CHTB) was organized in 1976 to develop the area by military occupation as well as military infrastructure development. Military overall command was directed by the chairmanship of the CHTB (known as General Officer Commanding of Chittagong Cantonment) until 1997.

During that period, the military oversaw the development projects and monitored international funds invested in developing the CHT. It was found in one investigation that CHTB development projects were about 80% constituted to “military camps, roads and bridges, office buildings, sports complexes (stadiums), mosques, cluster villages for Pahari and Bengali settlers” (Uddin, 2008, p. 21). To resolve the clashes in CHT, the government created a committee name “Tribal Convention” in 1977 to reach negotiation between the government and the PCJSS (Pandey & Jamil, 2008, pp.469-470).

During the insurgency period, increasing armed conflict against the Bangladesh military played the Communal Harmony role between indigenous people and new Bengali settlers. In 1980, an example of the massive attacks on indigenous people in CHT involved by both settlers and military happened while indigenous populations mass migrated to other parts of the country (Pandey & Jamil, 2008; p.470). To handle the situation, the Bangladesh government-employed counter-insurgency strategies by resettling Bengalese people from plain lands to the CHT. It was called the “transmigration program” that started between 1980 and 1985. The policy was not made public and neither any Pahari (indigenous people) were neither informed nor consulted regarding this program (Hasan, 2014, p. 85).

“Adnan (2009) stated that the whole process of Bengali settlement in CHT was planned and executed with the precision and secrecy of a covert military operation. He also stated that the aim of this program was to accelerate the settlement of the sizeable Bengali population in the CHT that would be loyal to the Bangladesh state” (cited by Hasan, 2014, p. 85).

Therefore, many Bengali settled in CHT next to the army camps and made “cluster villages” which the army used as “human shields” against “the Shanti Bahini”. These settlers comprised mostly of landless families that belonged to the plain districts made homeless due to river erosion. They were assured by the government that if they settle in CHT, they will get the free land, food, cash allowances, incentives, securities from the military of Bangladesh.

The land vacated by the indigenous people was occupied by the Bengali settlers and enjoyed special privileges from the government of Bangladesh (Hasan, 2014, pp.85-86).

In 1982 under the Ershad government regime, CHT was declared as a “special economic zone” and pardoned to the PCJSS or SB from 1983 and 1985. However, there had been several efforts taken by PCJSS and the Bangladesh government to reach a solution regarding CHT conflict from 1985 to 1988 but were never successful. In 1985 there were about 300 fighters of PCJSS led by Priti Kumar Chakma who surrendered and accepted the rehabilitation plan by the government. On the other hand, J. B. Larma rejected this idea. Later, the representative committee in CHT and the Ershad’s government general scheduled a meeting to establish three Hill Districts Council (HDC) Rangamati, Khagrachari, and Bandarban in 1989 where indigenous people were about two-thirds of the majority population. It was found that this council was still acting within limited functional activities and was under supervision by the government. This lessened the trust among indigenous people for having limited autonomy and non-contribution to CHT issues such as land conflict, internal displacement of refugees and other issues associated with the legal administrative system. It said, “HDC has largely been marginalized by providing power allocation regarding district council seats” (Pandey & Jamil, 2008, p. 470).

In 1992, multiple political parties in Bangladesh such as the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the Awami League (AL), and Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) built a committee to resolve CHT issues. From 1992 to 1996 while BNP leading government was there, there were seven rounds of talks between the committee members and PCJSS. However, the result was not as effective as planned. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who was in charge from 1996 to 2001, created “the National Committee” (consisted of a 12-member committee) to seek a solution by launching a “Peace Process” ideology. From this idea, the government and PCJSS held their first meeting in December and continued to other meetings until it finally concluded a

solution: “Peace Accord Agreement” signed by both PCJSS and the National Committee where Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina participated throughout the Program (Pandey and Jamil et al., 2008, pp.470-471).

There had been several administrations after the independence of Bangladesh, but no one government dealt with the CHT issue because the intentions were not so clear. Also, and there was a scarcity of political commitment within the country. Before 1997, previous governments failed to recognize it as a national issue and had always kept it from the national agenda. There had been no print or mass media outlets that covered CHT issues, leaving the mainstream Bangladeshi societies completely unaware of the struggling lifestyles of, and savagery committed to the indigenous people in the CHT area (Pandey & Jamil, 2009, p. 1061).

In December 1997, the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord was signed to stop the armed conflict, as well as give indigenous people the authority of “Regional Autonomy” in CHT. After the Peace Accord agreement signed, the authorities modified the legislation system of CHT which differs from other parts of Bangladesh (Hasan, 2014, p.86). However, after Peace Accord, the indigenous student organization United Peoples Democratic Front (UPDF) criticized this Accord as a “sell-out”. On the other hand, this Peace Accord made a positive image of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the international atmosphere and was awarded the UNESCO Peace Prize in 1999 (Pandey and Jamil, 2008, p.471).

At the center of the Peace Agreement, two types of conflict emerged: one is intra-group conflict, where the conflict was among indigenous peoples themselves, based on who supported the accord and those who opposed it. The opposition party thinks that this accord will not bring them “full autonomy” in CHT. Therefore, the group of PCJSS branched off into several subgroups like UPDF, Pahari Chattra Parishad (PCP- known as Hill Students

Council), Pahari Gano Parishad (PGP-known as Hill People Council), and Hill Women Federation. The second conflict was between the indigenous peoples and Bengali settlers along with the Security Forces (Eva & Khan, 2018, pp.72-73). Nowadays, the two political indigenous parties, UPDF and PCJSS, blame each other for the ineffectiveness and violence of the Peace Accord. On the other hand, the military mobilized “Operation Dabanal (Wildfire) during the armed conflict, and after the Peace Accord, they changed it to “Operation Uttalan (Upliftment). According to Jumma Net 2007, this operation is one of the causes contributing to the human rights violation of indigenous people in CHT and created an internal conflict between the PCJSS and UPDF. This “ethnic tension” created anxiety and fear among local indigenous people (Eva & Khan, 2018, p.73).

Several critics saw the Peace Accord from different perspectives. Smaddar (1999) stated that “the Peace Accord was disappointing in that it did not bring total peace, and that there was a lack of a delegated self-governance system. There were also questions regarding its contents and timing; and that it was too little, too late, too loud” (cited by Pandey and Jamil, 2008, p. 472). Mohsin (1998) criticized it by saying that it planted the seeds of “insecurity, discontent, inequality, and further polarization” (Ibid., p. 472). Bengali settlers criticized this Accord claimed that the Accord made them as second-class citizens (Ibid., p. 473).

Key Features of Independence Regime

- 1) After independence, the Bangladesh constitution emphasized “Homogenous Bengali Nationalism” during the Sheikh Mujibur Rahman ministry period which defined “Assimilation Policy” initiated by the government.

- 2) The ethnic conflict started with the denial of “indigenous identity” status between the Shanti Bahini and government and the insurgency period emerged.
- 3) The constitution was changed when Ziaur Rahman brought “Muslim identity” in the nationalist ideology.
- 4) To stop insurgency in CHT the government developed a migration program by settling Bengali people in the CHT area. However, there was a “military solution” initiated by the government in 1975 to control military rule over the CHT area.
- 5) Militarization controlled CHT from 1975 to 1990. During these periods, there were some development projects established by CHT Development Board. On the other hand, there were many notable attacks on the indigenous people by the Bengali settlers and the military.
- 6) During the Ershad rule, there was an agreement between PCJSS (which led by Priti Kumar Chakma) and government. Later, CHT Council was established to reduce internal ethnic conflict in that area, however, it did not work well as thought and the outcome was not as desired.
- 7) Many governments came into power over the time in the state, but no one took effective measures to reduce the conflict. One main reason is due to lack of political commitment to the indigenous people in CHT.
- 8) During the Sheikh Hasina period as the Prime Minister, the Peace Accord signed by government and PCJSS with mutual consent, but did not bring peace in CHT, and perhaps raised conflict among indigenous political parties. These groups divided into two individual indigenous political parties who supported this Accord and vice-versa.

To summarize the chain of events throughout the history of this land area-based conflict, it can be asserted that the indigenous people have been deprived of a property (land) that solely belongs to them as a collectivist group, for the sake of upholding the interests of other stakeholders. This is a core assessment of the events that followed throughout the history of this conflict and based on these incidents, further assessments will be made in the paper.

Chapter 3

Factors leading to Inter-Ethnic Conflict in CHT

The following factors led, directly and indirectly, inter-ethnic in CHT:

3.1 The Extinction of Cultural and Ethnic Identity in Bangladesh:

This section shows how the term “indigenous” bore different meanings over the different ministers/governmental regimes and established the concept of “nationalism”.

According to Article 3 and Article 6 of the constitution, “the Bengali language and culture were promoted. It stated that “Bengali” was adopted as the state language (Article 3 Part 1) and declared that the citizens of Bangladesh were to be known as “Bengali” (Article 6 Part 1), which was imposed for the overall population in Bangladesh” (Mohsin, 2000, pp.79-80). On the other hand, during President Ziaur Rahman’s reign, the country adopted the “Bangladeshi Nationalism” and moved from “Bengali”. It is a concept based on “Islam” to strengthen this religious power in the state because the majority of the population was Muslim. Thus, the state discourse and policies made were like “absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah” (Mohsin, 2000, pp.79-80). However, this constitution did not only marginalize other ethnic groups but also alienate other religious groups like the Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians in Bangladesh. Besides, “it made the Bengali polity more polarized and more violent” (Ibid, p. 80).

In “Jumma⁴ Nationalism,” it was highlighted that they were culturally distinct from Bengali, and asserted that linguistically, “Bengali is not their mother tongue”. Besides, in the religious perspective, the indigenous people did not belong to “Islam”. This attempt made “the negative stereotype images” towards the Bengali community extensively among the

⁴ The term “Jumma” referred to indigenous people which came from “Jhum” word. It means traditional ways of cultivation in CHT and cultivated by indigenous people.

indigenous society in CHT, strengthened by actions such as rape, killing, torture, and land grabbing committed against them (Ibid, p. 81).

The state has been ignoring the indigenous people for years. In 2011 the government department mentioned that the indigenous people such as the “tribal populations of Bangladesh are not indigenous. They are ethnic minority groups of the country” (A Question of Identity, 2011, p.1). On the other hand, Bangladesh Foreign Minister Dipu Moni stated that:

“The indigenous people inhabit Bangladesh, and any linkage between the term “indigenous people” and the identities of the “ethnic minorities” living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) where the 1997 Peace Accord still remains to be fulfilled which is misplaced” (A Question of Identity, 2011, p.1).

She also stated that “there is no internationally accepted definition of 'indigenous people', and there is no definition of indigenous at all in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples adopted by the PFII (Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues) in 2006” (A Question of Identity, 2011, p.1). Moreover, she considered “the indigenous” term by using the definition of the Oxford dictionary. It said that the word 'indigenous' means "belonging to a particular place rather than coming to it from somewhere else" (A Question of Identity, 2011, p.1). Therefore, she concluded that “the indigenous or native people are first or original nations or aboriginals in the country who have been physically displaced and eventually dispossessed their lands by colonial or external settlers from a foreign nation”. (A Question of Identity, 2011, p.1).

Bangladesh was trying to deny indigenous people’s identity by stating “there is no existence of *Adivasi* (Bengali term which means indigenous people) and no people had ever invaded the CHT after the period 1400 AD” (A Question of Identity, 2011, p. 2).

In 2011 on the 10th August, the Bangladesh Adivasi Forum demanded that they include “Adivasi” in the Constitution of Bangladesh, instead of recognizing them as “tribal” or “small ethnic group.” The President of Adivasi Forum, Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma, known as Shantu Larma, stated that “the government is trying to make CHT a Muslim-dominated region. Besides, the present government is pampering ultra-nationalism and communalism instead of harboring good culture” (Ibid, p.2). The General Secretary of Bangladesh Adivasi Forum, Sanjeeb Drong, stated that

“The indigenous people have a right to express their self-identity, and the state could not enforce its own definition on them. Indigenous people are usually marginalized and have historically been deprived of all civic amenities and isolated from mainstream society” (Ibid., p. 3).

3.2 Demographical Change by Migration Program

This section focuses on how indigenous people lost their lands through settlement programs and the consequences that occurred after this program in CHT.

Chittagong Hill Tracts migration occurred in two ways: 1) Natural and 2) Political. Natural migration happened through creating employment and business opportunities and thus people moved to CHT. Political migrations are government-sponsored settlement programs from other districts of Bangladesh (Ahsan & Chakma, 1989, p. 965).

In 1947, the indigenous population in CHT was more than 98%, whereas the Bengali population was only less than 2%. After the state’s independence under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s reign, the Bengali population rate changed drastically. Three full-fledged military garrisons were constructed, and new settlement programs were initiated in CHT during the

Ziaur Rahman regime, as well as to H.M. Ershad governments. This migration program affected the socio-economic environment of CHT which caused land conflicts to be a regular incident (Ibid, pp.965 -966).

The migration program to settle Bengali people in the CHT region was problematic at the onset due to its political design where the aim was to colonize CHT through changing the physical features of the area. Once Shanti Bahini began to kill the Bengali settlers, the government decided to send the army and militarized the CHT area. Later, the military tried to control the civil administration as well (Islam, 2008, p. 65).

There were basically two objectives involved for CHT migration program as a part of counter-insurgency strategy from 1980 to 1985: 1) to enhance popular support for the armed forces to contain insurgency and create strategic hamlet's similar to those in the ill-fated American strategy in Vietnam; and 2) to pursue a policy of gradual extermination of the indigenous communities through a demographic change in the CHT" (Chakma, 2010, p.290).

The following table shows that the demographical change of ratio both indigenous and non-indigenous people after the settlement program took place:

Table 3.1: CHT Population by Ethnicities (Approximate values)

Ethnic Groups	Population	Percentage %
Chakma	239,400	24.6
Marma	142,300	14.6
Tripura	61,100	6.3
Bengali	473,300	48.6

Source: Second Chittagong Hill Tracts Rural Development Project (CHTRDP-2), 2016, (p.12)

Another study claims that the settlement program is a kind of ethnic cleansing process in CHT which operated in two ways: “1) through eviction and land grabbing, and 2) through deliberate policy of extermination such as massacres, pursued jointly by the army and new settlers and conversion” (Chakma, 2010, p. 291). Moreover, the indigenous land dispossession process started when Bengali settlers migrated in CHT with cooperation from the military, by making collusion in the civil management system under military control. Land grabbing of ancestral lands was the consequence of Bengali settlement in a natural way, as well as of the policy of militarization (Ibid, p.291-192).

Daily news reports revealed “killings, destruction of villages, plunder, rape, and torture” perpetrated by the military. The clashes between the Bangladesh army and the Shanti Bahini continued until 1981, resulting in the migration of about 70,000 indigenous people from the country toward India (Islam, 2008, p.65).

The massacres against the indigenous people carried two main objectives: “1) terrorization of the Hill People so that they stopped supporting the Shanti Bahini, and 2) conversion to Islam and slowing down the natural growth of the indigenous population. Besides, the women who were raped did not come back to their families and they frequently became Muslims” (Chakma, 2010, p.294).

3.3 The Emergence of Military and Militarization in CHT:

This section examines how militarization administration started in CHT and the effects of military control in the area.

Militarization in CHT and its expansion is one of the reasons for conflict in that region. There are two main reasons militarization was established in CHT. 1) To defeat the Shanti Bahini, and 2) to control the CHT area through militarization and motivated Islamization and Bengali Settlement. During the Ziaur Rahman regime from 1975 to 1981, and Hossain M. Ershad's reign from 1982 to 1990, the two above-mentioned objectives had been expanded widely in the area. D. P. Barua stated that "a vast military camp" where a total 115,000 personnel military was established. Militarization did not manifest merely through physical armed forces but also their control over civil administration and developmental projects in CHT (Chakma, 2010, p. 289).

Zia Regime (1976-1981)

In 1975 the Mujib regime, after Ziaur Rahman, came to rule the government in Bangladesh. He was recognized as "a fiercely nationalistic military-turned political leader" (Dowlah, 2013, p. 775). However, he did not make military existence more powerful but also increased the Bengali settler numbers in CHT. A study showed that the M.N. Larma and PCJSS leaders resisted when over 15,000 military and paramilitary personnel developed during the Zia ruling period (Ibid, p.775).

During his period, Bengali settlers were introduced to CHT by the government. The government was providing cash, allowances, and allocating land for them and thus, 400,000 Bengali settlers newly migrated there. He assimilated the CHT area to make it a "special

economic zone” by initiating economic development programs like the CHT Development Board and developing infrastructure in that region such as building roads, bridges, providing electronic and telecommunication facilities. Moreover, Western donors assisted in the development of the region as the national economy by working as a financial support system (Dowlah, 2013, p. 776).

Ershad Regime (1982-1991)

H.M. Ershad followed the same strategy to settle Bengali people and strengthen the military in 1982. In 1983, the number of Bengali settlers reached about half million, and a quarter of the country’s military forces progressed in CHT. At the same time, there had been attacks by Bengali settlers and armed forces against Jumma people. As a result, about 17,000 Jumma left the country and became refugees in the neighboring country, India. The Shanti Bahini, however, attacked Bengali settlers and Armed Forces. In July 1988, 233 Bengali settlers had been brutally killed (Dowlah, 2013, p. 776).

In 1987 a national committee nominated to protect Jumma’s traditional cultures and heritage and encouraged them to participate in developmental programs. In 1989, the CHT divided was into three administrative districts: Rangamati, Khagrachari, and Bandarban. Though these three districts, autonomy belonged to the indigenous people, military presence remained, and the insurgency continued (Dowlah, 2013, p. 776). Military rule continued until the General Ershad regime, orchestrating attacks on villages, torturing, robbing, murdering, detaining, which was found as a daily occurrence in CHT. Thousands of teachers, students, and civil officers suffered from 1977 and after. This is “gradual extermination” towards indigenous communities in CHT found by Bhumitra Chakma’s study (Chakma, 2010, p. 290).

3.4 Development Projects

This section shows how the indigenous people lost their land and how their lifestyle was changed after the introduction of so-called developmental projects in CHT.

Another cause of conflict is the initiative of developmental projects by the government, whose goal was the “amelioration of the CHT area.” The government undertook the projects for “economic benefits” and to “decrease the gap between the core and the periphery” (Islam, 2008, p. 65). Some researchers stated that when the state invests new projects in traditional areas, it should consult that particular region before implementation. According to the Myron Weiner, “once the state takes on new investment responsibilities, whether for roads and post offices or steel mills and power dams, questions of equity are posed by the regions’ tribes [and] linguistic groups which make up plural societies” (Islam, 1981, pp. 1215-1216).

The Kaptai dam played a crucial role in triggering conflict between indigenous people and non-indigenous people, by displacing local people from their ancestral land extensively in the CHT area. This Kaptai dam project built for economic development had negatively affected both the economy and the lifestyle of CHT people when Bangladesh was still under Pakistan rule, called East Pakistan. After building the dam, about 54,000 acres were submerged underwater where cultivating land constituted 40% of total acres of the district, and 90% of the Rangamati subdivision was seriously affected. Due to the flood, about 10,000 farming families and 8,000 Jumma families were affected and a total population of more than 100,000 individuals lost their homes. However, “it was possible to settle the displaced persons about to 20,000 acres of flat cultivate the land of somewhat inferior quality. Compared to the original 54,000 acres, it bears the net loss of 34,000 acres of land. Among 18,000 families there had 11,761 been rehabilitated” (Islam, 1981, p. 1216).

The Karnafuli power project did not bring any benefits to the indigenous people. The employment percentage in Kaptai Project and Chandraghona Paper industries showed that it resulted in less than 1% of indigenous people recruited. These kinds of developments brought only a feeling of deprivation among the indigenous groups. According to a survey in 1979, 78% of the people complained about unemployment due to the hydroelectric project and found that 93% of the indigenous people's economic conditions had been much better before Kaptai dam construction (Ahsan & Chakma, 1989, p. 964).

In 1976, the Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board was established. Many new projects such as “schools, colleges, roads, hospitals, and cottage industries” were erected, however, these developmental activities created negative image among the indigenous people in CHT. To illustrate, the roads were built for Bengali people and the military for their easy accessibility in and out of the region. Bengali population expanded in the 1960s when industrial infrastructures were built in CHT, such as the Karnafuli pulp and paper mill, and governmental departments, as well as administrative offices (Parveen & Faisal, 2002, pp.202-203). Moreover, to assimilate the indigenous culture into the Bengali culture and homogenize them into mainstream society in the state; new educational institutions were set up in the CHT area. The government attracted Bengali entrepreneurs by providing them with special incentives like “tax relief, interest reductions on bank loans, and tax holidays for 12 years” whereas indigenous people did not get to enjoy the same treatment. These kinds of objections came from the indigenous people where they neither hold any position as members of the CHT Board nor being consulted before the implementation of this project (Islam, 2008, pp.64- 65).

As seen above, besides, Kaptai Dam there was few other developmental projects initiated by the government during the Pakistan Period. However, these projects were planned for the benefit of Bengali settlers as well as fast development in the military sector. Thus, it said that

“The internal colonization is used as a control mechanism to contain ethnic minorities in a multi-ethnic polity. This mechanism applied to dilute the tribal character of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Population which is indigenous people’s viewpoint there and another motivation for colonization had to exploit natural resources of the sparsely populated areas of the Hill Tracts” (Ahsan & Chakma, 1989, p.965).

3.5 Peace Accord

The Shanti Bahini emerged while the nation’s leading integrated CHT culture into a divergent way along with the rest of Bangladesh. The leaders belonged to most of Chakma’s indigenous people who were affected during the establishment of the Karnafuli Hydro Electric Project. In 1973, Manabendra Narayan Larma newly led the indigenous people as an elected member of the Bangladesh Parliament. He demanded for the indigenous rights in the Parliament which was neglected. In 1975, the state started a one-party presidential rule and separated the parliamentary government including current political parties except Awami League, who was the ruling party at that time. Larma started resistance and insurgency period had begun through emerging Shanti Bahini. The main reason for creating Shanti Bahini was because of “tribal resentment on the heavy influx of outsiders into the area, which is generally believed to jeopardize their economic and cultural entity” (Islam, 1981, p.1219). Thus, the Shanti Bahini made a slogan which became the well-known “*Bengalira Hill tracts Charo Paharee Jatir Upor Julam Bandha Kara*” (Bengalese quit Hill Tracts and stop the exploitation of the Hill People” (Islam, 1981, p.1219).

In 1982, the General Hussain Ershad ruling period, “the government first declared a general amnesty for members of the Shanti Bahini and urged the refugees to come back” (Islam, 2008, p. 65). The government asked a list of demands to the Bahini but the following demands responded by them: “1) self-determination within Bangladesh within a separate legislature, 2) restitution of all lands taken by Bengali immigrants since 1970, 3) constitutional arrangements for the preservation of the indigenous cultures and their identities, 4) free movement and commerce within the district, 5) freedom from official harassment, and 6) a primarily force recruited from among the ethnic groups” (Islam, 2008, p.65). In 1989, on 1st March the government agreed to end the long-term conflict in CHT between the governmental armed force and the Shanti Bahini (Islam, 2008, p. 65).

However, the Shanti Bahini was not satisfied based on the government’s six demands mentioned above. The reasons were: “1) the District Councils Act of 1989 was not Constitutional. 2) The Act was conspicuously silent on the issue of Bengali settlers, 3) There was no provision to return land occupied by Bengalis” (Islam, 2008, p.66).

In 1997 a peace agreement was signed with a mutual decision between the government and PCJSS on December 2. The government made a special budget for implementing current projects and formulating new projects and enacted laws that had been consulted with the Regional Council. Besides, the Council played a role to approve for purchasing, selling or transferring any land in CHT. (Islam, 2008, p. 66).

On the other hand, after the Peace Accord agreement, the government faced several obstacles for its implementation. First of all, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and the Jammāt-I-Islami protested against this Accord because they believed that that the state will

lose its sovereignty if implemented (Islam, 2008, pp. 66-67). There are other two reasons for failure to implement the Peace Accord: the first reason was that the Bengali settlement programs were not addressed in the Peace Accord. The second one is the Bangladesh government's lack of sincerity to implement it. There are three key provisions still unimplemented "1) settlement of land disputes including proper rehabilitation of displaced people; 2) withdrawal of temporary army camps; and 3) the formation of the indigenous police force" (Chakma, 2010, p. 295).

However, the tensions also rose among the indigenous groups who signed and other indigenous groups who had not, based on of "full autonomy and independence" from this Accord (Islam, 2008, p.67). Later, the insurgency took to increasing violence because the Accord had not been implemented as a whole since 1997. As an example, the Mahalchhari Upazilla incident in 2003 which was notorious for the massive violence after the Peace Accord 1997. This incident affected some areas like Lemuchhori village, Babupara, and kerengyanala negatively through the assault of the indigenous people and burning their homes conducted by the army and Bengali settlers. This incident created fear among the indigenous people which forced them to run away from the violent atmosphere. They did not dare to protest against these kinds of event events (Islam, 2008, p.67-68).

Conversely, the Shanti Bahini leaders lost the power to take care of the CHT, while new actors who controlled this region clashed consistently. It is found that the Rohingya refugees who came from Burma involved themselves in illegal activities like "smuggling, criminal gangs, extortionists" wreaking havoc the CHT region (Islam, 2008, p. 68).

Moreover, the Peace Accord, though valid when the Regional Council established it was deemed invalid by the Bangladesh High Court. The Bengali settlement, though stopped by the Bangladesh government, continues in the CHT with the cooperation of the military and Islamic NGOs (Chakma, 2010, p. 295).

3.6 Land Commission

The Land Commission of CHT constituted in 1999 based on CHT Peace Accord on December 2, 1997, to resolve land problems for indigenous people and later CHT Land Disputes Resolution Commission Act was established on July 12, 2001, during the Awami League government who made Peace Accord 1997 with indigenous political leaders (Alamgir, 2017).

The clauses included as per to the CHT Peace Accord 1997 (Part D) concerning land disputes resolution in CHT such as

- “4. A Commission (Land Commission) shall be constituted under the leadership of a retired Justice for settlement of disputes regarding lands and premises. This Commission shall, in addition to early disposal of land disputes of the rehabilitated refugees, have full authority to annul the rights of ownership of those hills and lands which have been illegally settled and in respect of which illegal dispossession has taken place. No appeal shall be maintainable against the judgment of this Commission and the decision of this Commission shall be deemed to be final. This provision shall be applicable in the case of Fringe-lands.
5. This Commission shall be constituted with the following Members: (a) Retired Justice; (b) Circle Chief (concerned); (c) Chairman/Representative of the Regional Council; (d) Divisional Commissioner/Additional Commissioner; and Chairman of the District Council (concerned).
6. (a) The tenure of office of the Commission shall be three years. But its tenure shall be extendible in consultation with the Regional Council. (b) The Commission shall resolve the

disputes in consonance with the law, custom and practice in force in the Chittagong Hill Tracts” (Indigenous Peoples Human Rights Defenders Network, 2016).

According to the CHT Accord, “The Commission shall resolve the disputes in consonance with the law, custom and practice in force in the Chittagong Hill Tracts” (Indigenous Peoples Human Rights Defenders Network, 2016). It is believed that the CHT Land Commission Act was formulated without taking into considerations and recommendations made by the CHT Regional Council (Alamgir, 2017).

3.7 Differences between the CHT Land Dispute Resolution Commission Act (2001) and the Land Commission Amendment Act in 2016

The CHT Land Dispute Resolution Commission Act (2001) included “existing laws and customs in forces in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and excluded the term “practices”. The word “practice” plays an essential role in land management system”. Later, this term was included in the Land Commission Amendment Act in 2016 (Indigenous Peoples Human Rights Defenders, 2016).

“This Commission shall, in addition to early disposal of land disputes of the rehabilitated refugees, have full authority to annul the rights of ownership of those hills and lands which have been illegally settled, in respect of which illegal dispossession has taken place” as per the CHT Accord (Indigenous Peoples Human Rights Defenders, 2016).

On the contrary, Land Commission Act of 2001 made statements such as “disposal of land disputes of the rehabilitated refugees” but excluded “the resolution of those hills and lands which have been illegally settled and in respect of which illegal dispossession has taken

place” (Indigenous Peoples Human Rights Defenders, 2016). One study showed that land dispute cases by not maintaining the legitimacy of “settlement” and “occupation” in CHT, the settlers increasingly outnumbered the number of indigenous refugees. However, the Land Commission Amendment Act (2016) comprised of “land disputes associated with illegal settlement and occupation” (Indigenous Peoples Human Rights Defenders Network, 2016).

The Land Commission Act (2001) bequeathed an anti-democratic role to the Chairman of Commission which indicated that,

“The Chairman shall take decision on the basis of discussion with other members present on the areas of activities stated in section 6(1) and under related areas unanimously, but if the decision is not unanimous, in that case, his decision shall be treated as the decision of the Commission and the decision of the majority members of the Commission including the chairman shall be treated as the decision of the Commission” (Indigenous Peoples Human Rights Defenders, 2016).

In contrast, in the Land Commission Amendment Act, the chairman and another three members exist instead of the chairman and another two members where Commission made more democratic, accountable and transparent. Additionally, the “the secretary, officers, and employees of the Commission shall be employed from permanent residents of CHT both Jumma people and Bengali people” (Indigenous Peoples Human Rights Defenders Network, 2016).

3.8 Criticism regarding CHT Land Commission from Eminent Society

The President of Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti and a member of commission known as Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma (Santu Larma) stated that there had been no chair for the Land Dispute Resolution Commission since September 6, 2014, and that there had been no initiative to appoint a new one. “The government has yet to frame the rules under the amended act although the commission submitted a draft in January. The commission is yet to start hearing the land disputes in absence of the rules” while Former Chairman Justice Anwarul Haque retired from the responsibilities (Alamgir, 2017).

National Human Rights Commission report (November 2014) found that

“It is the understanding of the National Human Rights Commission of Bangladesh that the resolution of land disputes is the key to an overall peaceful situation in the region. The Land Commission set up to deal with these issues proved incapable and failed to gain the trust and confidence of the CHT people” (Alamgir, 2017).

However, Santu said,

“For the proper functioning of the commission, local administration, police, and all other organizations have to provide all cooperation to the commission on a priority basis. Otherwise, the commission can take legal action against any organization or person concerned. He also added the commission’s works were hampered due to the crisis of manpower and a separate office in Bandarban and Rangamati” (Alamgir, 2017).

On the contrary, Land Secretary Abdul Jalil gave hope for the indigenous people by stating that the government is “in the process of appointing a new chairman. We will take the necessary step as soon as possible”. (Alamgir, 2017).

3.9 Recent Update and News about Land Commission:

The first meeting was held on August 4, 2016, regarding The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Land Commission between Santu Larma (Chairman of CHT Regional Council) and Chairman Anwar-ul Haque. After the fourth meeting, Larma stated “Today's meeting discussed the ways to speed up the Commission's work. It sees slow progress as the Commission has a shortage of manpower and the government is yet to make rules of business.” However, the Chairman made a statement as

“Twenty-two thousand applications have been submitted from three hill districts. We will start hearing on the objections about land ownership soon if the government makes rules of business for the land commission. He said the Commission has decided to open two branch offices in Rangamati and Bandarban” (“Slow Progress in Land Settlement,” 2018).

Chakma Circle Chief, Devashish Roy, made comments regarding meeting about the CHT Land Commission such as “Most of the families are yet to get a settlement for their lost land. I hope that the Commission will work for solving the problem” (“Slow Progress in Land Settlement,” 2018).

Chapter 4

Initiatives Government Should take to Reduce Conflicts in CHT

These are the following steps the government should take so that the inter-ethnic conflicts in the area can be reduced gradually:

As a first step, to reduce the long term inter-ethnic conflict in CHT of Bangladesh should be the proper implementation of the land commission. If the Land Commission Amendment Act 2016 is implemented properly by the government, the illegal land dispossession in the CHT area and illegal Bengali settlement will be reduced there. United Nations Economic & Social Council (2014) advises that the government should carry out its “political” and “legal” responsibilities to amend the Land Commission Act according to the recommendations made by the CHT regional council in an attempt to solve the problem (Pg.18). It has been 20 since the establishment of the land commission, and as a constituted act in 2001, yet nothing seemed to change. Even as an amended act, the progress was slow in its implementation. One of the main problems of this delay is the lack of sincerity of the government in recruiting an appropriate leader for the commission. The leadership had always been appointed by a retired Bengali judge who, himself, had led that commission at one point. However, one study found that

“There had no strict records of indigenous people ancestor’s land and many Bengali settlers also will not be sustainable their land claims with solid legal documents. Besides, these settlers fear that the new powers created under the treaty will exacerbate land disputes in the CHT and result in the loss of their land and expulsion from the region” (Rashiduzzaman, 1998, p.659).

Since the CHT land commission was hired by a Bengali, there may be chances of bias in making decisions concerning indigenous land rights issues. Therefore, decision-making regarding land conflict should not only be limited to the Chairman but should also include indigenous leaders so that outcomes will be through a fair and mutual decision. Unfortunately, even if the constitution names the chairman, the circle chief, the chairperson of the CHT Regional Council, the Divisional Commissioner, and Chairperson of the Hill District Council could become members of the Land Commission, they seemed unaware of the extent of their functions.

The second step is the government execution of unimplemented ACT provisions mentioned in the Peace Accord 1997. According to United Nations Economic & Social Council (2014) stated, as highlighted in the report of the Permanent Forum on its tenth session, these included “the transfer of full authority for land administration to the Hill District councils, to rehabilitate the unrehabilitated Jumma refugees and the internally displaced indigenous people, and to effectively demilitarize the Chittagong Hill Tracts” (Ibid, 2014, Pg.18). The Peace Accord had been established in 1997 but there are still obstacles that hinder its full implementation. Those are “devolution to the Hill district councils, the resolution of land-related disputes by the CHT Land Dispute Resolution Commission, the cancellation of land leases granted to non-residents, the proposed grants of land titles to landless indigenous people” (Roy, 2004, p.123). However, if the military does not interfere, exert control over the development projects in the CHT area, nor enforce illegal Bengali settlement programs, then some conflict in the CHT will be overcome.

The third step will be if the government recognizes indigenous people as per UN Indigenous People Rights recognition and give them sovereignty over their livelihood in CHT. However, if the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples is urged to ensure that the free, prior and informed consent process is scrupulously followed, in accordance with the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act and the customary laws concerned, in granting certificates of title to ancestral domains and certificates of title to ancestral lands and to enhance indigenous participation in all relevant activities and at all levels. It should revise procedural practices that cause an undue evidential burden on communities, including supporting documents, to establish their claims (Ibid, 2014, Pg.18). Practicing these steps will reduce the CHT long term land conflict.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The indigenous land politics and its inter-ethnic conflicts in the CHT area of Bangladesh are systematic. The internal colonization system which started initially from the British Period continues. The clashes between indigenous and non-indigenous people over the land is created by the government's lack of sincerity towards the indigenous people and their rights, and the poor civil and legal administration system under different political regimes. Instead of arriving at a solution and ending these conflicts, they continued to escalate.

Ancestral lands, which were passed on from the Jumma's ancestors, are not only pieces of property but are also essential aspects of their heritage, as well as their sole source of earning and sustenance. By taking away the land that belongs to the Jummas, the government segregates and differentiates among the citizens of the country based on ethnicity and religion.

This research discussed how the ancestral lands are being taken from the indigenous people for the benefit of the ruling political parties who show tremendous interest in occupying the indigenous land. From the British colonization to the Bangladesh independence, the indigenous people have always been looked down upon in terms of civil rights and protocols, in which the mainstream society had always had an upper hand on certain issues. To the indigenous people, the issues they face are nothing short of a political calamity regardless of who is in power.

This study claims that the enforced placement of the military in the CHT area ensures that the authority is in charge of the situation. The authority abuses the power they possess to gain and grab more land from the indigenous people. Indigenous communities are being attacked, abused, and harmed in every possible way. The crimes committed against the indigenous people continue and the events that led to their displacement remain unrecognized. These wrongful acts should come to an end. Though the PCJSS is trying to undertake approaches to seek resolutions to the problems that the Junmas face; very little has changed. There needs to be a more prominent force demanding the rightful acts from the authority.

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