

**THE STUDY OF INDO-BANGLADESH  
RELATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF CHAKMA  
REFUGEE PROBLEM**

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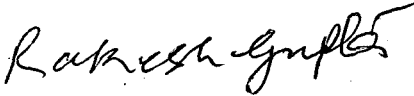
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**CERTIFICATE**

Certified that the dissertation entitled, "THE STUDY OF INDO-BANGLADESH RELATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF CHAKMA REFUGEE PROBLEM" submitted by Prabeer Kumar Nayak is in partial fulfilment of Master of Philosophy degree of this University, and has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other University and is his own work.

We recommend that the dissertation should be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

  
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*In Reverence of  
My Late Father*

# CONTENTS

	<b>Page No.</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>I-II</b>
<b>ABBREVIATIONS</b>	<b>III</b>
<b>PREFACE</b>	<b>1-6</b>
<b>CHAPTER I</b>	<b>Introduction</b>
	<b>7-17</b>
<b>CHAPTER II</b>	<b>National Self-determination:</b>
	<b>Secession or Autonomy</b>
	<b>18-53</b>
<b>CHAPTER III</b>	<b>Chakmas and Reasons for their</b>
	<b>Migration to India</b>
	<b>54-99</b>
<b>CHAPTER IV</b>	<b>Impact of Chakma</b>
	<b>Problem in India</b>
	<b>100-119</b>
<b>CHAPTER V</b>	<b>Chakmas and Indo-Bangladesh</b>
	<b>Diplomacy</b>
	<b>120-142</b>
<b>CHAPTER VI</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>
	<b>143-150</b>
<b>APPENDICES</b>	<b>151-155</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>156-167</b>

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*Prabeer Kumar Nayak*

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>CHT</b>	<b>:</b>	<b>Chittagong Hill Tracts</b>
<b>UNP</b>	<b>:</b>	<b>United National Party</b>
<b>TULF</b>	<b>:</b>	<b>Tamil United Liberation Front</b>
<b>LTTE</b>	<b>:</b>	<b>Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam</b>
<b>JSS</b>	<b>:</b>	<b>Jana Sanghati Samiti</b>
<b>UNO</b>	<b>:</b>	<b>United Nations Organisation</b>
<b>UNHCR</b>	<b>:</b>	<b>United Nations High Commissioner For Refugees</b>
<b>MNF</b>	<b>:</b>	<b>Mizo National Front</b>
<b>BSF</b>	<b>:</b>	<b>Border Security Force</b>
<b>BDR</b>	<b>:</b>	<b>Bangladesh Rifles</b>
<b>MP</b>	<b>:</b>	<b>Member of Parliament</b>

# PREFACE

The role played by India in the liberation struggle of Bangladesh is well known and felt far and wide. It rendered whole hearted support to the Mukti Bahini, the liberation army of East Bengal, in its struggle against the oppressive rule of the Pakistan regime and effected the birth of sovereign independent Bangladesh putting an end to the nine month old sanguinary war. India's role in the emergence of Bangladesh was gratefully acknowledged with the two neighbours signing a treaty of Friendship, peace and cooperation in March 1972. The treaty signed for a duration of 25 years touched upon every important sphere of bilateral relations. India actively participated to rebuild the war-ravaged economy of Bangladesh extending every possible assistance for this. Though Bangladesh accepted the generous aid provided by India, it spurned the same offer from America because of the latter's support to Pakistan during its independence movement. This clearly indicated that both the neighbours were heading towards a stable and cooperative relationship.

However, the euphoria was short-lived. The Indo-Bangladesh relations took a downward trend in March 1972 itself when grumblings were echoed among the political circles in Bangladesh expressing their dissatisfaction over the just-concluded Indo-Bangladesh Trade Pact. The dissident groups gave vent to their anger by branding it as a 'slavery treaty', which was for them overwhelmingly in favour of India. The brutal assassination of



Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman paved the way for the military junta to hold the reins of government. Indulgence in anti-Indian demagoguery became the favourite pastime of the political leaders in Dhaka. The successive regimes also propagated the same anti-Indian stance and distinctly demonstrated their indication towards Pakistan. There are various reasons which contributed to the deterioration of bilateral relations between India and Bangladesh.

The construction and commissioning of a dam at Farakka in West Bengal, about 11 miles from Bangladesh's border, has probably enticed the most attention from the rest of the world souring the Indo-Bangladesh relations. India observes that in order to sustain a steady flow to flush out Hoogly river and provide fresh water to Calcutta operation of Farakka Barrage is essential. It also enables to free the river from silt and also meets the requirement irrigation in U.P and Bihar. Bangladesh on the other hand has time and again claimed that because Ganges is an international river India must respect Bangladesh's demand as a lower riparian for a share in the Ganges water which is so vital for its south-western districts . Raising of the issue in different international fora by Bangladesh has invited the ire of India. Along with this the maritime dispute between both the

neighbouring countries over territorial sea limits has also adversely affected the bilateral relations.

Indo-Bangladesh relations took a further downward turn on November 4, 1979 when sporadic firings broke out between Indian Border Security Force (BSF) and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) in the Belonia sector. It was stated in the 1974 Land Demarcation Agreement signed by Sheikh Mujib and Indira Gandhi demarcation of the midstream of the Muhuri river as the permanent boundary between both the countries even if the river changed the course. However the dispute continues because India did not ratify the 1974 agreement since then.

Another major irritant between the two countries is the annexation of a newly emerged island New Moore Island (also known as Purbasha Island) in the Bay of Bengal by India. This has intensified the anti-Indian sentiment in Bangladesh. Situated in the mouth of the river Hariya Bhanga the disputed island is about 24 by 12 kilometres. This was first formed after the cyclone and tidal waves of 1970 and discovered by India in 1971. Bangladesh put forward its claim over the island in 1978. Since both the countries claim their sovereignty over this the dispute lingers on.

The large-scale migration of Bangladeshi nationals mainly for economic opportunities to India since 1974 also remained an issue of friction. Large influx of such migrants across the boundary has posed serious social, economic and political problems for the people of Indian

states bordering Bangladesh. The efforts to check this flow by erecting barbed wire fence along the borderline by India is met with strong protest from its counterpart. To tackle the situation India's method of 'Operation Pushback' invited much hue and cry from across the border with Bangladesh accusing India of sending its Muslim population into its territory. This has further embittered the relations.

With the transfer of Tin Bigha to Bangladesh on a long term lease basis to connect Dahagram and Angarpota enclaves with the mainland of Bangladesh bilateral relations between the two countries have seen certain normalcy in the 1990's. But this is only a part of the entire story. Alongwith many contentious issues the Chakma refugee problem still remains unsolved. The Buddhist Chakma tribals are the inhabitants of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh which was supposed to be a part of India but unfortunately bestowed to the then East Pakistan against their will. Because of their expressed unwillingness to join Pakistan they were the target of suppression by the Pakistani government and due to the alleged controversial role of the Chakma chief during the freedom struggle of Bangladesh the latter perpetrated all sorts of atrocity against its own minority tribal population. Bangladesh's 'detrribalization' policy was strongly opposed by the Chakmas but this has rather invited the wrath of successive Bangladesh regimes which have followed the policy of repression causing large number of Chakmas to flee to the neighbouring north-eastern states of India. In order to protect their separate identity and

culture form the onslaught of Bengali nationalism the Chakma tribals have started the insurgency movement in the form of Shanti Bahini which has been fighting for autonomy of the CHT for more than two decades. The Chakma refugees' presence has caused socio-economic tension in the insurgency infected north-eastern states of India. Even though a number of efforts have been made by both Bangladesh and India the Chakma issue still remains unresolved causing one of the major irritants in the bilateral relations.

### **THE PURPOSE AND THE PLAN OF WORK :**

In this context the study focuses on the genesis and growth of Chakma movement for autonomy within Bangladesh within the framework of Gurr and Harff on ethnic conflicts in world politics. Further more efforts have been made to know the impact of Chakma refugee problem in North East of India and the impact of this has had on Indo-Bangladesh bilateral relations.

Chapter One discusses the international dimension of refugee problem in an ethno-political perspective.

Chapter Two deals with the approaches to national self-determination and the position of Chakmas in this context. It also discusses whether their struggle leads to secession or autonomy.

Chapter Three focuses on Chakmas and the factors which are

responsible for their migration to India. It also discusses the details of the insurgent movement of Chakmas in the CHT.

Chapter Four delves into the impact of Chakma refugees on India.

Chapter Five discusses the measures undertaken by India and Bangladesh to solve the Chakma problem. Indo-Bangladesh bilateral relations have also been discussed keeping in view the problems of Chakma refugees.

Chapter Six suggests some solutions to the problem of the Chakmas.

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

The refugee is one of the most important political symbols of twentieth century. Wars, revolution, military and political events uproot a large number of people. Due to this refugees are compelled to leave their country of origin or place of residence to other places and take shelter in another. Once refugees leave their home country, they need protection and assistance. At the same time the refugees accelerate existing internal conflicts in the host countries. For example, during 1980's the proliferation of arms following the influx of three million Afghans contributed to a resurgence of Pathan unrest in Pakistan. Elsewhere, Palestinian refugees upset delicate domestic balances in Lebanon and Jordan. The past fifty years have seen additional significant refugee and other population movements. World War I generated millions of refugees and World War II uprooted some 30 million civilian in Europe alone.

Out of the various reasons mentioned as causes of refugee problem, ethnic conflict is one of the most important factors. Various explanations have been given by different scholars for ethnic conflict. Gurr and Harff propose that "a people who strongly identify with their ethnic brethren and who live in an autocratic political system with low international economic status, one that has used discrimination and intermittent violence

to repress its ethnic peoples, are most likely to challenge their oppressors"<sup>1</sup>.

We examine the problem of refugee in the context of ethnopolitical conflicts.

### **What is ethnicity ?**

'Ethnic groups are "psychological communities" whose members share a persisting sense of common interest and identity that is based on some combination of shared historical experience and valued cultural traits - beliefs, language, ways of life, a common homeland. They are often called identity groups'<sup>2</sup>.

### **Reasons for ethnopolitical conflicts:**

Since the 1960's increasing numbers of ethnic groups had began to demand more rights and recognition, demands that are now recognised as the major source of domestic and international conflict in post-Cold War world. The protagonists in the most intense ethnic conflicts want to establish their autonomy or independence. On the other hand, other ethnic conflicts arise from efforts by subordinate groups to improve their status within the existing boundaries of a state rather than to secede form it.

There are various reasons responsible for the ethnopolitical

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1. Gurr, Robert and Harff, Barbara, *Ethnic Conflict in World Politics* , Western-Press, Oxford, 1994, p.93.
  2. Ibid., p-5.



mobilization and conflict. Gurr and Hurff provide the following reasons.

- i. *Degree of group discrimination* : when people with a shared ethnic identity are discriminated against they are likely to be resentful and angry. They may use their anger constructively or destructively or they may be people opt for accommodation whereas others vent their frustration openly. Those who are motivated to action, the greater the discrimination they experience, the more likely they are to organize for action against the sources of discrimination.
- ii. *Strength of group identity* : Finding like minded individuals with similar grievances intensifies discontent and increases willingness to take action. The more strongly a person identifies with an ethnic group discriminated against, the more he or she is likely to be motivated into action. Furthermore, the group identity is stronger when the number of traits common to a group is greater.
- iii. *Degree of ethnic group cohesion*: The cohesion of the challenging ethnic group and the strength and unity of its leadership is another important factor. Strong ethnopolitical leaders create the required environment for people to subordinate their personal preferences to group preferences. Thus in this atmosphere if the leaders want they can use violent protest or political action to protest grievances. Here the cohesive groups accept strong, autocratic leadership.

- iv. *Type of political environment*: In a democratic political environment, it is more likely that, the ethnopolitical groups will voice their opposition nonviolently. On the contrary, in other political environments, violence is more likely to be used by political authorities to suppress and riots. Hence, there is more probability that challengers will respond with increased violence.
- v. *Severity of government violence*: Those state authorities using extreme force, such as massacre, torture and genocide, to subdue challengers are less likely to be challenged openly. Here the challengers respond with clandestine movements like terrorism and guerrilla warfare against the government as they cannot organise open resistance or fear the consequence of doing so.
- vi. *Extent of external support*: Many ethnic groups receive and depend on external support like verbal encouragement, financial support, weaponry, military personnel and other forms of active and passive support. Therefore, depending on the external support violent means are used by the group to challenge the government.
- vii. *International status of regime*: States having abundant resources are more likely to be supported by the international community and are less likely to be interfered unlike their counterparts having fewer resources. Hence, challengers against states having greater international status, are less likely to receive external support.

Most of these above mentioned factors are interdependent and interrelated. Their importance also vary. Hence, it's been argued that external support may have greater impact on the extent of ethnic conflict than that of group cohesion.

Apart from this Kathleen Newland also mentions three patterns<sup>3</sup> which are more or less similar to other factors- specified earlier.

Directed by Ted Robert Gurr, a recent study of politically active national peoples and minorities throughout the world in 1980's identified 233 sizable groups that were targets of discrimination or were organized for political assertiveness or both.

According to the study nearly 80 percent of the politicized ethnic groups identified in 1990 faced discrimination. They lived with the consequences of historical or contemporary economic discrimination(147 groups) or political discrimination(168 groups) or both. Gurr and Harff mention that most of the ethnic minorities are poor and are politically under represented in comparison to the majority groups in their societies.

Resenting the unequal treatment ethnic groups frequently try to improve their condition. More than 200 of the 233 peoples identified in the study tried to defend or promote their collective interests against

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3. Newland, Kathleen, Ethnic Conflict and Refugee, *Survival* , Vol.35, No. 1, Springs, 1993, p-84.

governments and other groups by organising politically at some time between 1945 and 1989.

Though, in most cases, their political protest began peacefully sometimes that became violent and led to rioting and terrorism. These were escalated, in 80 cases, into guerrilla and civil wars. Apart from this, there have been 49 protracted communal conflicts involving different groups such as the Catholics of Northern Ireland, the people of East Timor, the Kurds and Palestnians and the people of Southern Sudan.

Gurr and Harff state that "protracted communal conflicts over the rights and demands of ethnic groups have caused more misery and loss of human life than has any other type of local, regional, or international conflict in the five decades since the end of World War II. They are also the source of most of the world's refugees."<sup>4</sup> It has been found that about 63% of the world's 42 million refugees, at the beginning of 1993, (but according to UNHCR report till 1992 it was 18.9 million) were fleeing from ethnopolitical conflicts and repression. Out of this, more than a million ethnic refugees crossed over international boundaries. The host countries and international agencies were providing the assistance to them. There were also 17 million internal refugees displaced in their home countries without getting any help from the relief agencies.

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4. Gurr and Harff, *op.cit.*, pp.6-7.

The enormous changes and instability generated by the end of the Cold War are triggering new mass movements of people across the globe. Break-up of the Soviet empire also contributed to the growth of refugee - producing ethnic conflicts.

The former Soviet Union has tremendous potential for ethnic conflict. It had 200 ethnic groups, 15 republics and 38 autonomous regions. Now there are already a large number of refugee producing conflicts. The tussle over the enclave of Nagorno- Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan has displaced more than 5 lakh people. Moreover, 1 lakh South Ossetians and 18000 Georgians became homeless due to ethnic violence in Georgia. Thus, the number of 'internal refugees', currently one million in the former Soviet Union, is increasing rapidly.

There are various agencies and organizations of the United Nations which look after the different narrow aspects related to them. Likewise UNHCR is looking after the refugee. At the beginning of 1990's according to UNHCR report, there were four crises 'regions' or refugee focused 'hot spots'. They are Central America, virtually all of Africa, Southeast Asia and Afghan refugees residing in Pakistan and elsewhere. To escape the adverse condition at home migrants inundate these areas. On an average, in the last few years, 2700 people per day become refugee.

Afghan problem is most important in South Asia In 1990 Afghans constituted the single largest displaced population in the world. At the

beginning of 1990 there were 3.8 million Afghans in Pakistan. Half of them were children. Approximately they were living in 356 villages in two provinces bordering Afghanistan. Iran hosts around 2.35 million Afghan refugees.

From the UNHCR economic data provided at the end (see appendices) it is quite clear that in some region the amount is spent more. Africa hosts a large proportion of the world's refugees. In 1988, among the 20 African countries classified by the UN as critically affected by famine, 13 were hosting a substantial number of refugees. In 1980's armed conflicts and secessionist movements existed in the Horn of Africa. This was due to political instability and failure to achieve social cohesion and also because of the discrimination perpetrated against some ethnic groups by newly independent governments. Due to its geopolitical significance Horn of Africa became a play ground for the superpowers and Middle Eastern states. This led to the generation of large number of refugees. Through international relief assistance programmes they played one group or government over another.

By supporting different groups of rebels regional states intervened frequently in the affairs of their neighbours in the Horn of Africa. While Sudan provided help to guerrilla units in northern Ethiopia, Libya and Ethiopia supported Sudan People's Liberation Army's insurgency in Sudan. Libya, Egypt and Sudan were involved in different sides in Chad. Somalia

backed the guerrilla activities of the Ethiopian liberation forces. Ethiopia and the Soviets assisted the southern Sudanese rebels whereas with US military aid, Sudan helped Eritrean and other separatist groups against Ethiopia. As a result of such interventions regional and local wars became aggravated with direct implications for refugee flows. Apart from this the South African proxy war in Angola and Mozambique generated a large scale refugee movements.

There is no comprehensive and widely accepted theory of causes of ethnopolitical conflict. There are several theories for explaining why and how ethnic groups mobilize and enter into open conflict, very often which is violent, with the governments which claim to rule them.

- i. *Modernization theory* : Many social scientists particularly in 1950's and 1960's, expected that factors like economic development, the migration of rural peoples to cities and growing literacy will enable to build throughout the world complex and integrated societies. This theory argues that greater political and economic interaction among people along with widespread communication networks would set aside 'parochial' identities of the people with ethnic groups. Rather loyalties to larger communities would be preferred. Canada and the European Community are the good example. But political facts of 1970's and 1980's when conflicts based on the assertion of ethnic identities and interests rose alarmingly, proved this to be wrong.

- ii. *Primordialism* : It emphasizes the defence of ethnic identity. This approach argues that peoples ethnic and religious identities have deep social, historical and genetic foundations. Since modernization is considered to be an enemy of ethnic solidarities, to protect their culture and way of life mobilization takes place among minorities.
- iii. *Instrumental* : This approach puts emphasis on the pursuit of group material and political interests. Here, material and political gains are considered to be important goals of a group. To achieve these ends the help of the cultural identity is taken recourse to. This argument also says that to increase economic differences between dominant groups and minorities is the most important effect of modernization.

Kathleen Newland gives Rudolfo Stavenhagen's approach as one of the best in examining the relationship between ethnic conflict and refugees because it emphasizes that ethnicity can be an important determinant of privilege and entitlement. This approach explains that - "ethnicity is a political and economic resource, a major factor in the distribution of power and wealth. A group may emphasize its ethnicity when it is useful and downplay it when it is seen as a handicap. Ethnic conflict is usually defensive or opportunistic, a tool for political mobilization aimed at preserving or capturing resources"<sup>5</sup>.

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5. Newland, Kathleen.p.83.



After examining all these explanations it can be concluded that Gurr and Harff's model is the best one as they identify seven key factors and give a broader framework for ethnic mobilization and conflict.

There are millions of people in the world today who have been driven from their homes because they belong to a particular ethnic group. Ethnic diversity does not automatically produce conflict and ethnic conflict does not automatically produce violence. However, modernizing elites in ethnic groups are the variable to explain the ethnic conflict and violence. Therefore, ethnic violence, very often, produces refugees. The refugee issue cuts across all regions of the world and is becoming an increasingly prominent feature of international politics. The case of Chakmas has the dimensions of ethnic conflict, refugee syndrome in the host country (India) and its linkage with the Indo-Bangladesh bilateral relations. The Buddhist Chakmas, an ethnic minority in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh, are being discriminated and oppressed by the successive Bangladesh regimes, compelling them to seek refuge in the north-eastern states of India. To preserve their separate identity and autonomy which they enjoyed since time immemorial, they have been fighting for the right to self-determination for more than the last two decades.

# CHAPTER II

## NATIONAL SELF- DETERMINATION : SECESSION OR AUTONOMY

The nation-state, which dates from the late eighteenth century, is a construct which we now take for granted as a ' natural ' or eternal political state of affairs. Until the dawn of the modern industrial era however, it was very difficult for centralized authority to control power and authority over long distance. It is only in recent times, with the rigid definitions of political boundaries and advent of centralized government, that minority peoples have not only become problems within our modern nation-states, they have become problems which appear to be unresolvable. As a result of which, to protect their human rights from the ravages of the wider nation-state or states in which they exist, minorities fight for ever smaller and smaller sized nation-states of their own , against great military odds. To mention just few examples, the Kurds, the Protestant Irish & Tamils illustrate this simple point<sup>1</sup>.

A large number of states have been created with artificial boundaries that encompass different ethnic groups, with religious and linguistic cleavages. It has been estimated that, out of almost 190 states, only in

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1. Chaliand, Gerald (ed.), *Minority Peoples In the Age of Nation States*, Ajanta Publications, Delhi, 1990, p.1.

about a quarter of the states in the world over 95 percent of the population comprise one ethnic group<sup>2</sup>. Almost every United Nations member government has several minorities or other groups suffering discrimination inside its borders. Since a considerable number of national minorities are not ready to go meekly to their doom, their assertion of political and cultural demands summed up in the need for self-determination / autonomy.

The First World War and its aftermath put the right of (European) peoples to self-determination and the problem of nationalities back in the forefront. The American President Woodrow Wilson and Lenin both expressed these ideas. In fact, the right of peoples to self-determination figures in Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points. After October revolution, it is contained in the Declaration of the Rights of the Toiling Masses (Moscow, January 1918)<sup>3</sup>. In World War I the Allies, largely under the influence of Wilson, accepted self-determination as a peace aim. But contrary to the expectations of the liberal democrats, the new principle of national self-determination proved no basis for a stable peace<sup>4</sup>. Rather the principle itself became the main weapon for the destruction of peace in the hands of

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2. Nielsson, G., 'States and " Nation - Groups " a Global Taxonomy' in E. Tiryakian and R. Ragowski (eds), *New Nationalisms of the Developed West*, Allen and Unwin, Winchester MA, 1985, pp.30-31.
  3. Chaliand, G., op. cit., p-3.
  4. Carr, E.H., *The Twenty Years 'Crisis 1919-1339 : An Introductio to the Study of International Relation* , Macmillan and Co. Ltd., St. Martin's street, London, 1949, p.60.

Adolf Hitler. Mindful of the trouble of the previous League of Nations Minorities Commission, the authors of the 1960 UN Declaration on Colonial Independence produced a classic example of ambiguity which asserted both the right of all peoples to self-determination and the right of all countries to freedom from any attempt to disrupt their national unity and territorial integrity.

By the mid-1980s there have been numerous studies of nationalism and self-determination. There have been theoretical (B. Anderson, 1983, Gellner, 1983, Munck, 1986; A.D. Smith 1971, 1981), Comparative (Breuilly, 1982, Satyamurthy, 1983; Tiryakian and Rogowski, 1985) and individual case studies. Like the comparative studies, the individual case studies have contributed, through an examination of particular nationalism(s), to more general debates.

Ernest Gellner states that, "nationalism is a theory of political legitimacy, which requires that ethnic boundaries should not cut across political ones, and, in particular, that ethnic boundaries within a given state \_\_\_ a contingency already formally excluded by the principle in its general formulation \_\_\_ should not separate the power holders from the rest"<sup>5</sup>. He further goes on to argue that nationalism engenders nations. It uses very selectively the pre-existing, historically inherited proliferation

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5. Gellner, Ernest, *Nations and Nationalism*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1983, p.1.

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of cultures or cultural wealth. Very often they are radically transformed by nationalism. Nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent. That is why "nationalist sentiment is deeply offended by violations of the nationalist principle of congruence of state and nation; but it is not equally offended by all the various kinds of violation of it. It is most acutely offended by ethnic divergence between rulers and ruled"<sup>6</sup>. Gellner points out a fundamental change in ways of perceiving the social world which occurs before nationalism can emerge and he relates this change to the requirements of 'industrial society'. He emphasises cultural homogeneity which is the imposition of a common high culture on the variegated complex of local folk cultures. Surprisingly, while depicting the role of nationalism in the transition from agrarian to industrial society, he hardly mentions territory. He only refers this to a minimum size at which the modern state must function, His analysis is rooted in the original European state nationalisms, whose experience is the source of much theorising on the formation of and integration of the nation state. Local and regional societies were supposed to lose their territorial attachments, as they began to participate in the modern world of circulation and exchange throughout a unified space that was being shaped in the nineteenth Century. The boundaries and power of a state do not coincide neatly with the will or action undertaken by other collective actors.

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6. Ibid., p.134.



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Culture is indeed so important a basis for nationalism that the concept of nation is some times mistakenly seen as purely a matter of culture. In Gellner's Weberian theory of nationalism, culture is communication, and its significance for national solidarity stems from the fact that in modern society where many social encounters are non-local, impersonal and ephemeral in character, people have to share a means of communication and hence a common identity which is also non-local, non-sectional and non-class. A shared cultural identity, an ability to 'speak the same language', is central to the inter class solidarity of nationalism. That is why while discussing about Political Culture and Political Development, Lucian W. Pye writes " the politics of historic empires, of tribe and ethnic community, or of colony must give way to the politics necessary to produce an efficient nation state which can operate effectively in a system of other nation-states"<sup>7</sup>. He observes that political development is the politics of nationalism within the context of state institutions. Not only that he also emphasises the concept of political culture which enables an individual to learn the knowledge and feelings about the politics of his people and community. While developing his own politics, learning from the previous generation, the laws which govern the development of the individual personality and the general culture of a society must be followed<sup>8</sup>.

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7. Pye, Lucian W., *Aspects of Political Development : An Analytical Study*, Amerind, New Delhi, 1972, p.37.
  8. Pye, Lucian W. and Verba Sydeney (eds.), *Political Culture and Political Development*, New Delhi, Princeton, 1969, p.7..

Like Gellner, Benedict Anderson's nationalism also centres on culture. He explains its origins in terms of a switch in the focus of non local identities from the large multilingual cultural entities of the world religions to the unilingual nation or nation-state. This switch in consciousness was brought about by the coalition of Protestantism and print-capitalism. What made the new communities imaginable was the rise of capitalism, the development of vernacular languages out of more localised dialects and the spread of printing. According to Anderson the formation of 'print-language' and shared experience of the 'journeys' undertaken by the colonized intelligentsia would bring about cultural homogeneity. He further proposes that "nationalism has to be understood by aligning it, not with self-consciously helped political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which \_\_\_ as well as against which \_\_\_ it came into being"<sup>9</sup>. Both Gellner and Anderson see a set of modular forms in the third world nationalisms. Anderson's theoretical tendency tries to equate the phenomenon as part of the universal history of modern world. But Partho Chatterjee vehemently criticises Anderson's argument. He argues that third-world countries in Asia and Africa do not choose their own imagined communities from the set of modular forms supplied by Europe and the Americas<sup>10</sup>. If it is so, no room is left for their imagination.

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9. Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities : Reflection on the Origin and Spread Nationalism*, Verso, London, 1991, p.12.

10. Chatterjee, Partho, *Nation and Its Fragments : Colonial and Post Colonial Histories*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1994, p.5.



Chatterjee puts forward his view point very strongly stating that anticolonial nationalism, which is the most powerful as well as the most creative results of the nationalist imagination in Asia and Africa, is different from the modular form as proposed by the West. Prior to the involvement in political battle against the imperial power, anticolonial nationalism creates its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society. To substantiate his point Chatterjee divides the world of social institutions and practices into the material and the spiritual domains. The material, which belongs to the "outside" domain, includes the economy, statecraft, science and technology where the west had superiority. But in the spiritual, an "inner" domain, the East proved its mettle upholding its cultural identity. He observes, "nationalism declares the spiritual its sovereign territory and refuses to allow the colonial power to intervene in that domain"<sup>11</sup>. Contrasting the West, to shape a "modern" national culture, nationalism sets in its most powerful, creative and historically significant project. This way an imagined community is brought into being and even though it is a colonial state the nation is already sovereign in this domain. Nationalism contradicted the colonial claim that backward peoples were culturally not capable of ruling themselves in the conditions of modern world. Setting aside the alleged inferiority of the colonized people, it asserted that without discarding its cultural identity a

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11. Ibid, p.6.

backward nation could 'modernize' itself.

But nationalism, which was till recently considered as one of Europe's most magnificent gifts to rest of the world, is now branded as the principal danger to world peace by the same Western countries because of the resurgence of nationalism in different parts of the world. For example, by the 1970's, nationalism had become a matter of ethnic politics because of which people in the Third World entangled in protracted civil and military wars taking each others life. All nations of the world have their minority peoples, who frequently speak a different language, who live apart from the majority of the population, who dress differently and who have different religion. Ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities want to continue to exist and be recognised as such and feeling themselves discriminated against or oppressed, want their protection assured and their rights recognised. Thus to achieve their goal minorities assert themselves by demanding for self-determination. Since the virtual settlement of the colonial problem minority questions have precipitated violent conflicts all over the world : Biafra (Nigeria) ; Eritrea and Tigre (Ethiopia) : Baluchis (Pakistan); Kurds (Iraq and Iran); Tibet (China) ; Karens and Kachens (Myanmar); Mizos and Nagas (India); South Sudan; Lebanon; the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland ; Tamils in Sri Lanka; Chakmas in Bangladesh ; Chechens in Russia etc.

## **MEANING OF SELF -DETERMINATION :**

In contemporary international relations self-determination has several meanings. Self-determination, historically meant, the right of people in a state to choose their own government. It is also defined as the "right of a group with a distinctive politico - territorial identity to determine its own destiny". It is the right of a nation to constitute an independent state and determine its own government for itself. It is a theory about the relationship that should prevail between nation and the state, the latter being understood as any separately governed political community. While urging all nations to accept Monroe Doctrine, President Woodrow Wilson expressed " that no nation should extend its polity over any other nation or people but that every people should be left free to determine its own polity"<sup>12</sup>. The doctrine of self-determination also inspired several anti-colonial and independence movements in Latin America, Asia and Africa. Thus this concept leads either to demand for an independent state with full political sovereignty or for autonomy within the existing state. David B. Knight states about two forms of self-determination<sup>13</sup> : internal self-determination referring to a choice a total people make when a form of

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12. Encyclopaedia Britannica, INC, William Benton Publisher, Vol.20, London, pp. 191-92. 1969.

13. Knight, D.B., 'Self-determination for indigenous peoples : the context for change', in R.J. Johnston, D. Knight and E. Kofman (eds.) op. cit., pp-119-20.

government is selected and external self-determination which refers to decolonization. He argues that new post colonial forms of internal self-determination should be recognised, where with limited forms of internal recognition, substate regional identities are given recognition and political control within their states. Apart from colonial limitation his view points regarding self - determination seem to be appropriate. First, self - determination is justified for people who are governed by an apartheid philosophy by a minority. Second, people of a state under foreign subjugation have a right to self - determination. Third , if majority of total population opted so, a sub-regional minority may be granted self-determination. But the concept of 'internal colonization' is yet to be recognized by the United Nations.

Interestingly, Dov Ronan has tried to make the study of self determination clear by putting forward the existence of five archetypal forms<sup>14</sup>. : 1) nineteenth century, e.g. German and Italian; 2) Marxist class struggle; 3) minorities' self - determination associated with ideas of Woodrow Wilson; 4) anti-colonialism; and 5) today's 'ethnic' quest for self determination. But it is very difficult to prove whether, in the analysis of actual events, is it possible to make such clear-cut distinctions. In many of

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14. Burghardt, Andrew., 'Marxism and Self - determination : The case of Burgenland, 1919' in Johnston, Knight and Kofman (eds.) op. cit., p.57.

the recent movements for self-determination, it is not uncommon to find Marxist class struggle, minority rights and anti-colonialism mixed together.

### **THE PRINCIPLES OF PRESIDENT WOODROW WILSON<sup>15</sup>.**

When the Peace Conference opened in 1919, its leading principle was to be self-determination for all nations. Once the Fourteen Points and the Four Principles of President Woodrow Wilson had been given publicity, his allies could not stand against them. The key to the understanding of Wilson's conception of self-determination is the fact that for him it was entirely a corollary of democratic theory. The democratic and national ideals of the French and American Revolutions shaped his political thinking. Again for him national self-determination was almost equal to popular sovereignty. He strongly believed that Rousseau's General Will was not merely an ideal will, but the autocratic will of the people, which needed liberation from the ill will of autocratic governments for its innate goodness to be manifested. Thus Wilsonian ideology emphasised the idealization of democracy. He had great faith in the goodness and power of world opinion - the General Will of humanity and democratic nation which gave him the impetus to emphatically propound the self-determination of nations and national sovereignty as the only basis of world peace.

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15. Cobban, Alfred, *The state and national self-determination*, Collins, the Fontana library, 1969, pp.57-84.

In theory, Wilson's ideas form a closely integrated and logically consistent whole. But in practice they led him into a long series of inconsistencies and contradictions that finally inextricably entangled him. Perhaps he was quite unaware of the significance of this explosive principle. He could not realize the difficulties involved in the application of his principle of self-determination. His fundamental weakness was his lack of knowledge about nationalities that sometimes might create problem in deciding actual frontiers. In the Fourteen Points he supported historically established allegiances in the Balkans and in Poland and while promising to both Poland and Serbia free access to the sea, he took little care to pay heed to the wishes of the populations affected. Granting of the Brenner frontier for Italy with the concession that any German population given to Italy should have the right of cultural autonomy was another major flaw of his principle. But, the greatest limitation of all to the application of Wilson's principle as admitted by him was that, "it was not within the privilege of the conference of peace to act upon the right of self-determination of any peoples except those which had been included in the territories of the defeated empires"<sup>16</sup>. This statement amply proves the duality of the principle - one for the victors and the other for the vanquished. This shows how a moral principle, which the victors refused to apply to themselves, was unhesitatingly being enforced on the subdued states. It is a matter of great irony that the person, who was responsible for advocating this principle,

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16. Ibid, p16.

deliberately paid no attention to the numerous petitions from subject nationalities of the Allies. America rejected the treaty and obligations imposed by the Covenant and " the ultimate consequences of this withdrawal of American cooperation were incalculable and far-reaching"<sup>17</sup>.

### **LENIN'S VIEW OF SELF-DETERMINATION<sup>18</sup>.**

Throughout this century, especially after the end of World War II, Marxism has been a strong supporter of self-determination. Not surprisingly, therefore, because of this some Western countries showed their inhibition in lending support to movements for self - determination. Lenin was staunch supporter of national self-determination. In the course of bitter arguments with other Marxist leaders, Lenin developed his view points regarding national problem. Two Austrian socialists wrote the first systematic treatises on the problem of how to relate national aspirations to the socialist movement. Developing a positive attitude toward the national and cultural heritage of the various peoples composing the Austro-Hungarian empire, they argued that culture was not part of the capitalist super structure. Hence, the socialist cause did not mean a fight against national cultures but against capitalism. Nationalism was progressive

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17. Carr, E.H., *International Relations Between The Two World Wars (1919-1939)*, St. Martin's Press, New York, , 1967, p19.

18. Meyer, Alfred G., *Leninism*, Praeger Publisher, New York, 1972, pp.145-60.

because it was a rebel movement in Austria-Hungary. For transforming itself into a loose federation of nationally autonomous social democratic parties, the Marxist movement asked for national autonomy within a socialist Austria. But this was not enough to convince Lenin, who argued that this type of inclination, including that of Russia's national minorities were nothing but a fantastic bourgeois aberration.

Lenin also differed with Polish socialist Rosa Luxemburg's view on nationalism. In her opinion nationalism as an ideology belongs to pre-industrial societies. Therefore, classes fighting for the bourgeois or the proletarian revolution do not pay any attention to it. By this way Luxemburg deprived the importance of nationalism and nations in the struggle of the proletariat. She almost presented capitalism as an integrated world - wide system. Lenin took a middle position between Luxemburg's denial of nationalism as a force and Bauer and Renner's demand of national cultural autonomy. Undoubtedly Lenin took an ambivalent position.

While fitting nationalism into the strategy of nationalism Lenin predicted that the world revolution would begin in one of the advanced countries of the West like England, France or Germany. He urged the proletariats of all underdeveloped countries, including Russia, to unite under one banner to overthrow the yoke of Western bourgeoisie in order to establish socialism. The dilemmas that troubled him the most were the nature of support to be given to the bourgeois nationalist revolts and coordination of the strategies of different national proletarian parties along



with the strategies to be adopted by the world proletariat as a whole. To resolve the baffling problems of this kind Lenin devised the policy of "national self - determination." But "behind this all - too - simple Wilsonian slogan, far more radical than the modest demand of the Austrian Marxists for cultural national autonomy, a complex array of theoretical and practical considerations was hidden."<sup>19</sup>. Instead of putting an end to the difficulties, the slogan itself appears to be mere reflection of Lenin's problematic attitude toward the question.

Lenin firmly believed that the sweeping fulfilment of the bourgeois revolution and all the demands attributed to it should be the first step of proletarian revolution and by his radical demand for self - determination he strongly advocated this. Cleverly analysing Wilson's war aims Lenin made an effort to prove that, unless compelled to do so, the bourgeoisie would never be ready or accede to do so, the bourgeoisie would never be ready or accede to comply with its own ideals of national self -determination , as that would tantamount to self liquidation. Radical execution of these would help wipe out world capitalism. Therefore, ideals national aspirations of the Chinese people (directed against world imperialism), the Poles (against Germany, Austria and Russia) and the Jew (against the very

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19. Ibid., p.150.

principle of exploitation and oppression) were considered as revolts against the existing social system. Hence these revolutionary forces deserved the much needed help of the proletariat.

Behind the strong propagation of national self-determination lied Lenin's additional motive for it. He expressed unwillingness to antagonize his temporary allies (the bourgeois movements of national liberation) until the time was ripe for it. He lampooned Trotsky for neglecting the revolutionary tasks of the peasantry. Lenin's motive for nursing national movements of revolt was to infuse a sense of attachments among the peasants to follow his party and leadership.

Finally, his strong arguments in favour of his slogan make full sense only if they are recognized as parts of the programme, not of world communism, but of the Russian Communist Party. While propagating national self-determination for all peoples, Lenin expressed his views as a Russian Communist first. To accomplish the task of a true internationalist he urged Russian proletarian to take a firm stand in favour of national self-determination. While providing his simple theory of "internationalism" he advocated that at the outset proletariat of any one nation must seek to bring about the weakening, defeat and downfall of "its own" bourgeoisie. It should work against "its own" national interest as conceived by the ruling classes. He urged the working class not to co-operate the imperialist powers even during war and suggested to turn their weapons against their own ruling

classes, thus transforming the international war into a revolutionary civil war.

Since Tsarism had been conspicuously guilty of trampling on the rights of Russia's numerous minorities, Lenin took a defiant stand against this by urging the Russian proletariat to support all separatist struggles of any national minority oppressed and exploited by Russian imperialism. Therefore to atone for Russia's sins, he wanted the Russian Marxists to be tolerant of national minorities and their aspirations. He very emphatically argued that deprivation of the 'minorities' rights to full self-determination would tantamount to the continuation of the injustices of Tsarism. Lenin followed the formula of "national self - determination" strictly in a negative sense. He recognised nationalism not as a principle of political organization for the future, but only as destructive force.

The deficiency in Lenin's formula is nothing but democratic absorption. It is beyond doubt that Lenin conceived the Soviet Union as a response to the nationalism of the Ukrainian, Georgian, Armenian and other minorities, but he believed in the existence of a single unitary party for the workers of a particular state, irrespective of nationality. Like the founding fathers of Marxism he advocated that the right of nations to self-determination was subordinate to socialism.

## SELF-DETERMINATION : A CONTEMPORARY VIEW

In the controversy-ridden fields of international relations, the widespread recognition of the existence of national rights to self-determination provides a welcome point of agreement. Traditional international principles that deal with the right of secession or self-determination are inadequate to address the avalanche of new group claims to self-determination. Through different ways like formal recognition, the granting of independence from colonial powers, the dissolution of an empire, mutual consent of two independent states, seizure of independence or de facto control of a territory new states got their life in the past. Self-declaration of independence doesn't enable automatically to help attain the right to statehood. Thus, the situations like Somalia and former Yugoslavia, in which groups have ambitions to secede or to establish internal autonomy, require outside observers to resolve competing group claims. That's why existing conventions and the new draft declaration of United Nations are inadequate in solving the problem of group rights vis-a-vis the rights of the states<sup>20</sup>.

Given the current organization of the United Nations, states that remain the highest level of institutional structure are also the most crucial objects and vehicles of efforts to achieve self-determination or autonomy as a political community.

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20. Gurr, T.R. and Harff, Barbara, *Ethnic Conflict in World Politics*, Westview Press, Oxford, 1994, pp. 140-46.

As states remain of crucial importance, so too does the ideology of nationalism. Nationalism claims are one genre of answer to the questions of what constitutes an autonomous political community capable of self-determination. While one version puts stress on the ethnic or cultural similarity of the members of a political community, the other emphasises their common citizenship in a specific state. But both the versions underestimate the sociological problems of social integration <sup>21</sup>. The international factors in the changing world system have played a decisive role in reshaping conflicts between ethnic groups and states. Since the 1960's increasing numbers of ethnic groups have asked for more rights and recognition making them the major source of domestic and international conflict in the post Cold war world. Their aim is to attain autonomy or independence. "The grievances articulated by the minority nationalism were often to do with economic and social disadvantage or exploitation" and "the very fact of this discrimination helped to keep alive a distinct ethnic or cultural consciousness"<sup>22</sup>. providing the basis for minority nationalist mobilization. They are less likely to accept assimilation with the dominant group. While seeking special status along with non-discriminatory treatment under the law, in certain cases they express the willingness to secede from the territorial state. State leaders have very often tried to deal

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21. Calhoun, Craig (ed.) *Social Theory and The Politics of Identity*, Blackwell Publishers, Cambridge, USA, 1994, p.305.

22. Watson, Michael (ed.) *Contemporary Minority Nationalism*, Routledge, London, 1990, pp196-96.

with ethnic group demands through accommodations and in case of its failure, through coercion. "The concern of the traditionalist is that if ethnopolitical groups are given special legal status in international and domestic law, it could provide the impetus for innumerable claims and counterclaims which would lead to protracted conflicts and leave few existing states intact, since most states are heterogeneous units"<sup>23</sup>. But Gurr and Harff outrightly dismiss this apprehension. They argue that "potential conflicts could be circumvented or avoided by establishing clear standards under which groups have the claim right to secede and, in cases of ongoing conflict, by designing specific international actions that would prevent further escalation and lead to peaceful settlement of conflicts"<sup>24</sup>.

The history of self-determination is a history of the making of nations and the breaking of states. Nationality is a construction specific to modern era and to the emergence of a modern world system in which claims to statehood become crucial bases for standing in world affairs and potentially for autonomy. Here claims to statehood can be justified most readily by professions of nationhood. But this does not lessen the reality of nationality or the sentiments of nationhood. The problem of self-determination lies in the fact that for every socially relevant self there are internal divisions and vital links to others. The value of it lies in entrusting the general political

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23. Gurr and Harff, *op.cit.*,p-153.

24. *Ibid.*

power over a group and its members to the group. If self-government is valuable then all political decisions regarding the matters that affect the group and its members should be taken in consultation with the group because the idea of national self- government "speaks of groups determining the character of their social and economic environment, their fortunes, the course of their development and the fortunes of their members by their own actions"<sup>25</sup> that are properly within the realm of political action. That's why Watson's argument seems to be quite appropriate when he argues that members of established minority nationalities within larger states have a right to be treated by the rest of the community and the state in a manner which allows them to preserve their cultural identity and practice.

#### **RIGHT OF SELF-DETERMINATION AND THE UNITED NATIONS**

The United Nations Charter and many other U.N. Documents include statements on self-determination. The right of peoples to self-determination is mentioned in Articles 1(2) and 55 of the Charter. Article 2 of the famous 1960 General Assembly Resolution 1514(XV) on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Peoples states that'all peoples have the right to self determination'.

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25. Margalit, Avishai and Raz, Joseph, 'National Self - Determination', in Will Kymlica (ed.), *The Rights of Minority Cultures* , Oxford University Press, 1995, p.80.

The United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on 10 December 1958 and with the adoption of two international covenants unanimously by the General Assembly it was completed. The covenants are - an International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and an International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The first articles of the two human rights covenants mentioned the following:

1. All peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.
2. All peoples may, for their own ends, freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources without prejudice to any obligations arising out of international economic cooperation, based on principle of mutual benefit and international law. In no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence.
3. The states parties to the present Covenant, including those having responsibility for administration of Non-Self- Governing and Trust Territories, shall promote the realization of the right of self-determination, and shall respect that right, in conformity with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations.

Almost every year the General Assembly overwhelmingly supports a



Resolution on the importance of universal realization of the right of peoples to self-determination and of the speedy granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples for the effective guarantee and observance of human rights. Despite of this there is ambiguity because the Declaration prohibits the application of this right by stating in Article 6 that ~~any~~ attempt aimed at the partial or total disruption of the national unity and integrity of a country is incompatible with the principles of the Charter<sup>26</sup>.

The United Nations continues its efforts to eliminate colonialism<sup>27</sup>. A plan of action was adopted by the General Assembly in 1991 for International Decade for Eradication of Colonialism (1990-2000) which the Assembly had declared in 1988. There the political questions addressed were self-determination and the future political status of Non-Self-Governing Territories. In 1993, efforts continued towards organising a United Nations-supervised referendum for self-determination of the people of western Sahara, in accordance with the a settlement plan approved by the Security Council in 1991, to settle the differences between the two parties concerned - the Government of Moscow and Frente POLISARIO. By three resolutions adopted in 1993, the Commission on Human Rights reaffirmed the right to self-determination of the people of Cambodia ,

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26. Rayan, Stephen, 'Ethnic Conflict and the United Nations,' *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol.13, No.1, Jan.1990, p.44.

27. For detail please refer *Year Book of the United Nations 1993*, Vol.47, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, London, 1994.

Palestine and Western Sahara. A fourth resolution adopted under the item pertained to the use of mercenaries as a means to impede the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination. The Committee on colonial countries considered the following 12 island Territories while supporting the right of self-determination and independence to them. They are American Samoa, Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Guam, Montserrat, Pitcairn, St. Helena, Tokelau, Turks and Caicos Islands and United States Virgin Islands. In September 1993, accepting the Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) recognised the right of Israel to exist in peace and security and renounced terrorism and violence. As a result Israel also recognised PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people. Only due to this gesture a peace agreement could be materialised between Israel and PLO providing Interim Self-Government Arrangements. United Nations has time and again expressed its deep concern at the continuation of acts or threats of foreign military intervention, aggression and occupation that are threatening to suppress, or have already suppressed, the right to self-determination of an increasing number of sovereign peoples and nations. The manner in which Iraq was severely punished for its invasion of Kuwait violating their principle is a glaring example of this. But the UN is playing a dubious role in Bosnia flouted umpteenth times by the warring factions.

With the changing scenario in the international arena over the recent decades both the UNO and international practice have given importance to

the right of self-determination to peoples already forming states rather than to right of peoples to form states. In reality, in the last fifty years the right of people to self-determination has been mostly the right of colonized peoples to free themselves from control by the West

### **SECESSION OR AUTONOMY ?**

So far as right to self-determination is concerned the movement for attaining this either leads to the demand for full independence, with political and economic sovereignty which can be considered as secession or autonomy within the existing state in which the group or minority, as the case may be, enjoys political power in the full range of domestic or internal governmental functions, while leaving external political and economic relations and defence to the external authorities. In terms of constitutional arrangements, autonomy points to some form of federalism like a ' classical type where legislative and judicial powers of both government levels are coordinate. It may also refer to confederalism where the central authority derives its power from the component state governments and is responsible to them.

In 1977, when the disintegration of the Tsarist empire began the Bolsheviks put, into practice the principle of right of secession substituting the right of self-determination. Realising the situation Stalin drafted a Report on the National Question in 1917 where it was mentioned that "The oppressed nations forming part of Russia must be allowed the right to decide

for themselves whether they wish to remain part of the Russian state or to separate and form an independent state"<sup>28</sup>. But in fact the right of secession did not indicate that a nation had necessarily to secede. Stalin summed up the Bolshevik national programme in the following ways : "(a) The recognition of the peoples to secession, (b) regional autonomy for peoples which remain within the given state; (c) specific laws guaranteeing freedom of development for national minorities; (d) a single, indivisible proletarian collective body, a single party, for the proletarians of all the nationalities in the given state"<sup>29</sup>. Though theoretically it seemed to be very attractive and easy the main difficulties arose in its implementation. Therefore the Communist government was virtually compelled to accept that as a practical policy national self-determination , or the right of secession, was incompatible with the military and economic interests of Soviet Russia. Even though secession from a capitalist empire was justified as a first step towards economic freedom, the same was opposed tooth and nail when it affected a communist state branding it as a retrograde movement. Hence, undoubtedly, the truth was that the right of secession in the Soviet Union was merely a theoretical right and no more.

The implementation of glasnost, policy of openness, by Gorbachev allowed a freer discussion of nationality problems in the official media and more tolerance of unofficial demonstrations. Ironically with his own

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28. Quoted in Cobban, Alfred, op. cit.,p.194.

29. Ibid., pp. 194-95.

much celebrated policies of glasnost and perestroika started the tide of separatism and movement for independence. The ice was broken in 1986 when the first attempt at ethnic self-assertion was made in Kazakhstan<sup>30</sup>. The resurgence of ethno-nationalism and its violent manifestation in Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Latvia, Estonia and various other places once again placed the nationality question on the high agenda of the Soviet leadership. The final death blow came on 8th December 1991, when the leaders of Russia, Belorussia and Ukraine "proclaimed the end of soviet Union and announced the formation of a new commonwealth of independent states on its ruins"<sup>31</sup>. Later on all the 15 republics of the USSR declared their independence and sovereignty. Prior to that in 1990 the Baltic republics of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia seceded from Soviet Union declaring their independence. The contagion of the passion for self determination among the Soviet Union's non-Russian republics reflected Moscow's long trumpeted claim of it having "solved" its nationalities question. The Stalinist system used violence to speed up the process of national integration leading to a situation where an explosive dose of discontent, fear and mutual mistrust accumulated in the country. Therefore, even the slightest liberation of the regime was enough to show that forcible integration has failed. Even now also there is ethnic problem leading to separatist movements in Chechnya, South Ossetia, Abkhazia etc. along with

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30. *New Strait Times*, Kuala Lumpur, 5th December, 1990.

31. *Times*, London, 9th December, 1991.

growing assertion for more autonomy by different nationalities in the former Soviet Union republics.

Sri Lanka and Yugoslavia represent multi-ethnic societies riven by protracted civil wars exacting an immense loss of lives and displacement of scores of population. Both are plagued by aggressive assertion of ethnic identities. The perpetual discrimination over employment, education, language, the colonization of Tamil homeland, and physical attacks amounting to genocide have compelled the Tamils to resist Sinhala rule as one people; one nation<sup>32</sup>. There were four serious outbreaks of ethnic rioting directed against Tamils- in 1977, 1979, 1981 and 1983 - all of which were allegedly orchestrated by leading United National Party (UNP) politicians and trade union officials with active connivance of troops and police. The July 1983 pogrom claimed more than 3000 Tamils and rendered more than 15000 homeless. Being aghast mushroomed several Tamil parties including the moderate Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) and radical Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to help attain autonomy and increased powers or even independence. But now the LTTE has hardened its stand for the establishment of independent Tamil Eelam for the Tamil-speaking areas in the North-Eastern region of Sri Lanka, leading to protracted civil wars which have claimed thousands of lives.

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32. Bose, Sumantra, 'State Crises and Nationalities Conflict in Sri Lanka, and Yugoslavia', *Comparative Political Studies*, Vo.28, No.1, April 1995, p.100.

King Alexander carved out a separate country Yugoslavia meaning the land of the southern Slavs in 1929. Post-World War II Yugoslavia produced as many as four constitutions- in 1946, 1953, 1963 and 1974. All of them except the second one guaranteed the federal republics the right to secede and the constitution of 1974 enshrined a confederal institutional arrangement in Yugoslavia. But in reality the federal state of Yugoslavia resembled more closely a unitary state because of the strict application of the principle of democratic centralism by the communists<sup>33</sup>. The peoples of Yugoslavia were never allowed to exercise self-determination. The long suppressed nationalist and minority sentiments burst out with the disintegration of Soviet Union. While Slovenia, Croatia and Macedonia asserted their independence in 1991. Bosnia-Herzegovina followed their toe the next year. Fighting broke out between the Serb , Croat and Muslims, each demanding a separate state in Bosnia or like the Bosnian Serbs' willingness to join Serbia to make a greater Serbia. This has caused extensive damage to the Muslims. The United Nations has so far failed to make any important breakthrough to solve the Bosnian quagmire.

Britain also faces a difficult task regarding Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland or Ulster governed by Britain has predominantly Protestant population unlike the rest of the Ireland which has Catholic majority. Since its Catholic people are subject to some kind of discrimination by the

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33. Ibid., pp. 103-104.

Protestants, they launched a struggle to merge with the rest of Ireland. The Basque people who live in south Euskadi, inside Spain, have posed the greatest threat to Spain by demanding to realise their right to self-determination. Similarly the people of Quebec in Canada and the Afrikaners of Transvaal in South Africa have launched their movements for independence. The Kurds located in Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria have been subjected to forced acculturation and till recently were not allowed to even use their language. The Kurds of Turkey, numbering nearly 12 million, have been involved in conflict with the Turkish Government for the past 11 years to establish an autonomous state. Though East Timor's integration into Indonesia was formalised in 1976 and it had rights and obligations equal to those of the other provinces, it has been incessantly trying to become a separate state. In South West Pacific, a French Colony New Caledonia has been struggling for independence against France, In the Sindh province of Pakistan, the Mohajirs who migrated to Pakistan from the Indian states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh during partition, have been entangled in protracted ethnic violence demanding to carve out a separate Mohajir province called Jinnahpur or Urdu Pradesh. Thus the list goes endlessly as more and more minority groups demand either for secession or autonomy for their betterment.

Dissenting minorities exist in many states. For some substate regional minorities the struggle against state oppression is constant, difficult and at times extremely severe because tyrannical governments aggressively



seek to control, subdue and even eradicate those who do not conform to what is held to be the societal norm. Freedom and self-respect are dear to any community or group under dispensation. Only because of these reasons the Bengalis of East Pakistan (Bangladesh) rose up against the oppressive regime of Pakistanis. The constitutional history of Pakistan provides a classic example of the persistent breach of implementing a representative government. After all, the Wilsonian idea of self-determination owes its origin to the 'consent of the governed' principle. The Universal Declaration of Human rights also laid stress that the legitimacy of governmental authority is to be judged only on the basis of the will of the people expressed in free and periodic general elections. The correlation between self-determination and democracy is that both prescribe that a government should rest on the consent of the governed. The entire anti-colonial movement was formed on this prescription. But unfortunately in Pakistan, with the exception of the 1973 Constitution which made some tentative attempts to reflect the aspirations of the provinces, neither the 1956 nor the 1962 documents showed much appetite for federal principles. This was despite the fact that the Lahore resolution of 1940, considered to be the magna carta of the proposed association of the Muslim majority provinces in India, offering 'sovereign' and 'autonomous' status to constituent units within independent Muslim states in the north west and the north east of the subcontinent. Countering the Bengali majority was the foremost concern

of the harried architects of Pakistan's constitutional future<sup>34</sup>.

Under a majority rule East Pakistan would have a decisive voice in shaping the political, economic, social, foreign and military policy of Pakistan. Far from that, rather it was reduced to a status of a dependent territory. In 1970, instead of following normal democratic procedure the military oligarchy of Pakistan attempted to reverse by bullets what East Pakistan had achieved through ballots in the first ever held general election in Pakistan. When a majority is deprived by using force its equal and democratic rights of constituting a representative government, the majority people's right to self-determination is undeniable. The military oligarchy had no popular base whatsoever. It pursued several discriminatory policies to deprive the majority Bengalis of their due rights. Punjabis from the middle and upper economic strata were the main recruits to the civil bureaucracy and especially, the military. This undoubtedly exacerbated the problem of constructing a state structure capable of accommodating diverse linguistic and socioeconomic groups. In the early independence, Bengalis in the eastern wing accounted for just over half of the country's total population. But they were woefully underrepresented in the civil bureaucracy and military. Even during Ayub regime Bengalis constituted only 5 percent of the officer corps of the army, 15 percent in the air force

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34. Jalal, Ayesha, *Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia :A Comparative and Historical Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 1995, p.184.

and 20 percent in the navy. Bengalis continued to be underrepresented in the Civil Services of Pakistan at a time of growing pressure for entry due to a 162 percent increase in college enrolment in East Pakistan.<sup>35</sup>

Apart from the above mentioned reasons, there was a strong cultural dimension to Bengali alienation. They deeply resented the early attempt to impose Urdu as the sole national language. The Bengali students had led a language movement as early as February 1952, but could not achieve much due to state repression. Further more, the basic human rights required for the survival as human being, the concern of all communities, were denied to the East Pakistan citizens. At the time of separation, numerous violations of human rights were being committed by the Pakistan army in East Pakistan. The Bengalis became their principal target of planned mass killings. Being confronted with this genocidal operation the Bengalis passionately asserted secession as a last resort restoring security<sup>36</sup>. Pakistan made its east wing an internal colony with the politics of exclusion and economic inequalities. Since the Bengali's were well convinced that the security of their livelihood, properties and very lives could not be safeguarded if they were subject to remain under the control of the Pakistan government and since it became impossible to realize equal rights and self

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35. John, Rounaq, *Pakistan: Failure in National Integration*, Dacca, 1977, pp. 62 and 106.

36. Islam, M. Rafiqul, 'The Territorial Integrity of a State Versus Secessionist Self-determination of its people : the Bangladesh Experience', *BISS JOURNAL*, Vol. 5, No.1, Jan. 1984, p. 26.

determination in a constitutional manner, majority of them manifested their option in favour of territorial separation in 1971. After a bloody war of nine months on the graveyard of East Pakistan took birth a new nation called Bangladesh.

The Chakmas, who have made the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh their home land since the eleventh century A.D. after migrating from the Arakan hills of Burma, are an ancient tribal community of Sino-Tibetan descent belonging to Mongolian group. They are followers of Buddhism having their own distinct way of life, language, values and culture. Though more or less they were leading an independent or semi-independent life under various successive rulers, the most crucial part of their history was the partition of India which altered everything. If the partition destroyed the faith of the Chakmas in both the British as well as the leaders of the Indian freedom struggle to yield a just and fair political solution and safeguard their special status, successive Pakistani and Bangladeshi regimes have shattered the lives and psyche of the Chakmas and other indigenous peoples of CHT<sup>37</sup>. The CHT which was supposed to be a part of India, but unfortunately handed over to the then East Pakistan against their will. Due to their unwillingness and alleged controversial role of the Chakma chief during Bangladesh's national movement the later

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37. Ghose, A and Gillani, S.I. , "Life and Times of the Chakamas : Survival, Human Rights and Self - Determination', *Mainstream*, July 3, 1993, p.26.

perpetrated all sorts of atrocity against its own minority tribal population. Bangladesh has driven them to the edge of existence in every sense for the last quarter century witnessing a national awakening , a rapid development of their sense of unity and their collective will and ability to resist and the slow, gradual but sure emergence of a determined movement for self-determination in the face of repression that has reached genocidal proportions.

Once a colonial people achieves independence, it is considered to have accomplished its 'external' self determination in the form of freedom from foreign interference. But what they require the most is ' internal' self determination in the form of electing and keeping the government of their own choice and of having the right not to be oppressed by the Government<sup>38</sup>. In case they are deprived of this 'internal' self determination due to obvious reasons, definitely there will be resistance against this. That's why Gurr and Harff propose that "a people who strongly identify with their ethnic brethren and who live in an autocratic political system with low international economic status, one that has used discrimination and intermittent violence to repress its ethnic peoples, are most likely to challenge their oppressor"<sup>39</sup>. Ironically, Bangladesh which owes its freedom to the principles of right to live culturally and socially of one's own ,

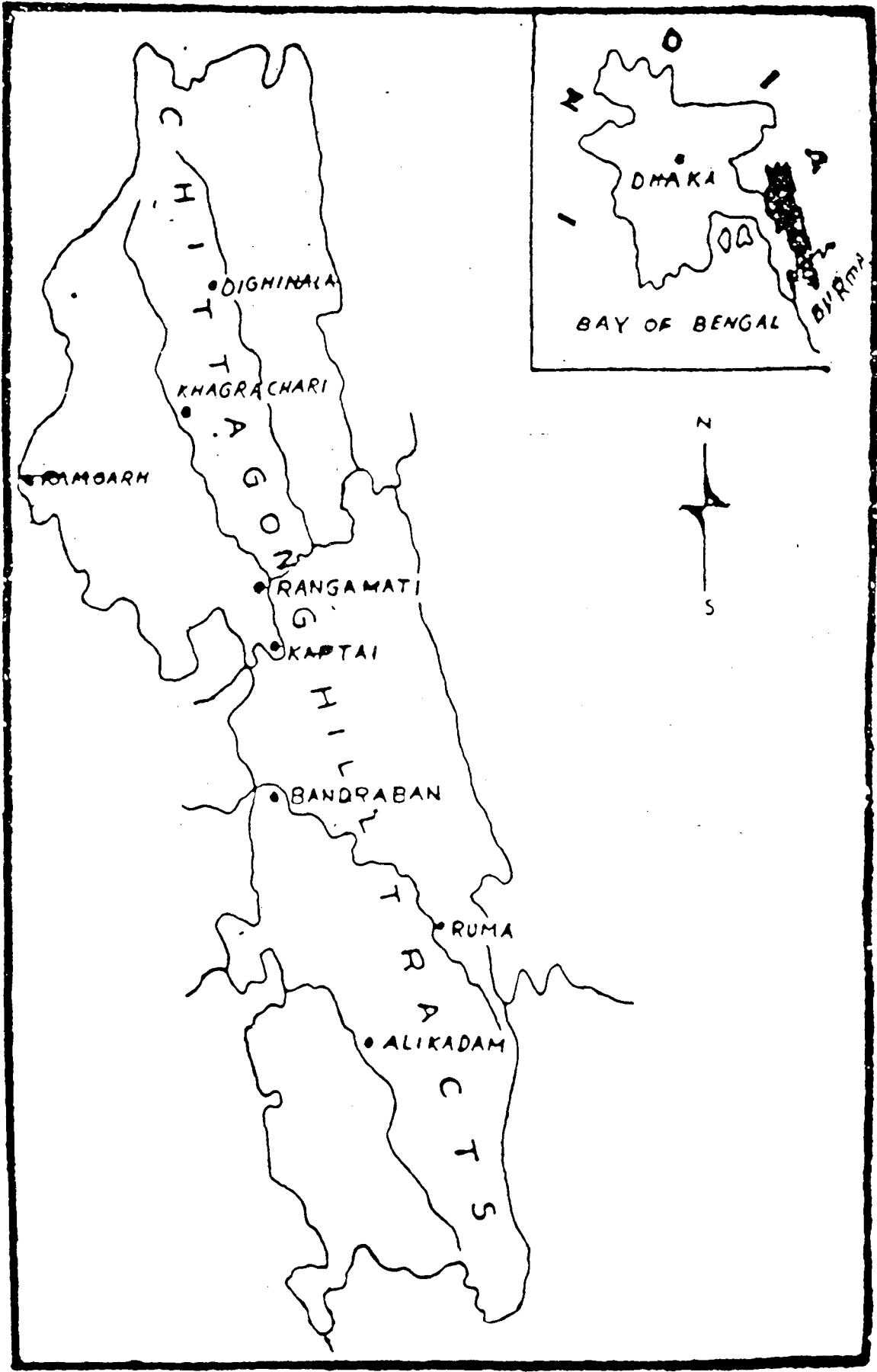
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38. Islam, M. Rafiqul, op.cit.,p.23.

39. Gurr , Robert Ted and Harff, Barbara, op. cit., p.93.

suppresses its minority tribals to assimilate them in Bengali culture. This is one of the main factors which instigate the Chakmas to start insurgency movement peaceful resistance came to naught. Since the mid seventies they have been putting up a resistance against the Bangladeshi government to accomplish their demand for right to self determination. But they do not really demand a separate political entity but rather an autonomous status. Their grievances hover around the threat to their cultural entity, de-tribalisation and changing the demographic and ethnic balance through Bengali settlement and insufficient economic development.

# CHAPTER III



A Map of The Chakma Homeland  
(Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh)



# CHAKMAS AND REASONS FOR THEIR MIGRATIONS TO INDIA.

## AREA

Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), the most south eastern district of Bangladesh, differs strikingly in all aspects from the rest of the country. While an overwhelming proportion of the surface of the Bangladesh is flat alluvial plain, the CHT consists of parallel ridges of sedimentary rocks running from the south in a north westerly direction. The CHT lying between 20° 13' and 23° 47' N latitude and between 91° 46' and 92° 49' E longitude is the homeland of the Chakmas. Covering an area of 5138 square miles, it is flanked by Tripura and Mizoram of India in the North and East respectively, Chittagong District of Bangladesh in the West and Arakan of Burma (Myanmar) in the South.<sup>1</sup> Comprising 10 percent of the total area, it is consisted of three districts out of a total of 64 districts of Bangladesh. With less than 1 percent of the population of Bangladesh, the area accommodates a traditional society with divergent religious, languages and primordial sentiment. Geographically, the district of CHT belongs to hilly region that branches off from the Himalayan ranges to the South through

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1. Talukdar, S. P., Chakmas: An Embattled Tribe, Uppal Publishing House, New Delhi, 1994, p. 1

Assam and Tripura to Arakan in Burma<sup>2</sup> The area is rich in natural resources and 51 percent of the total forest land of Bangladesh is in the CHT.

Constituted by its four principal rivers- the Pheni, the Karnafuli, the Sangu, the Matamuri and their tributaries, the CHT has four major valleys. The valleys are delineated by diversified hills running in south to north-western track. From the mountains of north Arkan of Burma emanate all the rivers that flow through the CHT. The river banks, the river beds and the river valleys are dotted with the Chakma Villages. Divided in to three hill districts with head quarters at Rangmati, Bandarban and Khagrachari, the CHT is under a nominal Autonomous District. Council with limited self- autonomy. Incidentally, the names of the headquarters and districts are the same.<sup>3</sup>

#### **ETHNIC PROFILE:**

Apart from this physical environment, the people of the CHT are ethnically different from the majority of the people of Bangladesh. The inhabitants of the CHT are commonly called 'hillmen' as opposed to non-tribal 'plainsmen' living in the plains of Bangladesh. The 'hillmen' are

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2. Islam, Syed Nazmul, 'The Chittangong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh: Integrational Crisis Between Centre and Periphery,' Asian Survey, Vol. XXI, No. 12, December 1981, p. 1212.

3. Talukdar, op. cit, pp.1-2.

further categorized into 'ridge-top hillmen' and 'stream-side hillmen'.<sup>4</sup> David E. Sopher classifies them into 'mountain tribes' and 'valley tribes' respectively. The mountain dwellers belong to the Mizo group. Lushai, Pankhua, Bonzogi, Bom, Mru and Kumi come under this category. The valley hillmen include Chakma, Tontsongya, Tippers, Riang, M'ogh, Khyang, Sak and Mrung.

The hillmen possess a separate culture of their own and their way of life is drastically different from the rest of the Bengali population.<sup>5</sup> The inhabitants are of Sino-Tibetan descent belonging to Mongolian group and closely resemble the people of north-east India, Burma and Thailand rather than the people of vast alluvial plains of Bangladesh.<sup>6</sup> Most of the tribes have their own dialects which belong to the Tibeto-Burman language group.

Owing to terrain and other environmental conditions, the district is thinly populated. The density of the population in the CHT is far below the national average. According to the census of 1974 the total population in the CHT was 540,000, the density of population being 100 per square mile as against the national average of 1286. Out of this, the Bengalis

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4. Hunter, W.W. (reprint), "A Statistical Account of Bengal," Vol. VI. D.K. Publishing House, New Delhi, 1973, p.39
  5. Sopher, David E., 'Population Dislocation in the Hill Tracts,' The Geographical Review, Vol. 53, 1963, pp. 337-62
  6. Ahsan, S. A. and Chakma Bhumitra, 'Problems of National Integration in Bangladesh : CHT , Asian Survey , Vol. XXIX, No. 10, October 1989. p.961.

alone, settled in the CHT over the period of time, comprised 35 per cent. Among the original inhabitants of the district the Chakmas are the largest ethnic group followed by Mogh and Tipperas.<sup>7</sup> It is inhabited by 13 minority ethnic groups that include the Chakma, Marma, Tippera, Morang, Thangchangya, Lushai, Bowm, Pankho, Khiyang, Kumi, Sak and others. The Chakma, who are mainly concentrated in the Chakma circle, alone constitute nearly 47.89 per cent of the total tribal population.<sup>8</sup> Apart from the CHT region of Bangladesh and the Arakan region of Myanmar, by migration over different periods, The Chakmas have settled in Assam, Tripura and Mizoram of present day India's north-eastern area and acquired Indian citizenship and are categorised as Scheduled Tribes in these States of India. Though the Chakmas are also living in Arunachal Pradesh they are yet to acquire the status either of 'refugees' or 'citizens' and still remain in a condition of statelessness.<sup>9</sup>

From mid-18th to 20th century, the British scholars, while studying the Chakmas residing in the CHT, named this ethnic tribal groups as Chakma. Therefore, the word Chakma is a recent name given to the hill tribes of this region. It is interesting to note that the word Chakma in English

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7. Govt. of Bangladesh, *Census of Bangladesh: 1974*.
8. Nuruzzaman, Md., 'National Security of Bangladesh: Challenges and Options', *BIIS Journal*, Vol. 12, No.3, 1991, p. 388.
9. Ghose, Aurobindo and Gillani S. I., 'Life and Times of the Chakmas: Survival, Human Rights and Self-Determination,' *Main stream*, July 3, 1993, p. 25.

is not pronounced as it is spelt .Any Chakma till today would pronounce himself as Changma or Sawngma and not Chakma. <sup>10</sup>

Chakma means people of Tsak or Thek clan who are the progenitors of the Burmese race. The British scholars have called the Chakmas 'Kyangtha', a Burmese/ Arkanese word, which means the children of river.

## ORIGIN

Inhabitants of the CHT are perhaps the least known people of Asia being the residents of a remote and backward area which is of little political or economic consequence. This place has been the homeland of the Chakmas for centuries. Though the origin of the Chakmas is too murky, it is not difficult to rebuild it. Most general belief of the Chakmas is that their history connects them with the mountainous Kingdom of Kapilnagar ( an ancient place at the time of Buddha, presently in Nepal) in the Himalaya ranges. <sup>11</sup> It is learnt that from 1052 A. D. the Chakmas started moving from Arakan into the bordering area of Bengal right down the plain areas of Chittagong and made it their home.<sup>12</sup>

From about sixteenth century onwards the Chakmas began to form into a coherent people. Their peaceful and self-contained subsistence level

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10. Talukdar, S. P., op. cit.,p. 3.

11. Ibid, p. 8.

12. The Observer, 23 September, 1994.

tribal existence unfettered by external influence or domination, where the struggle was once waged against nature in order to eke out a living, was first disturbed by the Mughals when they captured this land in 1665 and there after by the British East Indian Company when the territory was ceded to them in 1770. It is a tribute to the spirit of freedom and resistance of the Chakmas and their irrepressible nature that made the British to struggle for many years and fight six bloody battles before annexing the CHT as a tributing state in 1787. Since then the dark clouds started hovering over their fate. They have had to struggle against both nature and the outside man in order to survive with freedom and human dignity.<sup>13</sup>

The CHT was ruled by the British as a part of India from 1787 to 1947 by providing the status of an autonomous area exclusively for the tribal people. To equip the hill subjects of Chittangong with some kind of administration the British Government formulated an act in 1860 making way for the appointment of a superintendent of hill tribes in charge of the hill tracts which was henceforth known as the 'Hill Tracts of Chittagong. Prior to this it was a part of Chittagong District. A very important administrative reform introduced by the British at the turn of the century was the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation of 1900, popularly known as the Hill Tracts Manuals. This regulation categorised the Hill tracts of

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13. Ghose, A and Gillani, S.I., op. cit., p. 25.

Chittagong in to following three circles.

- (1) Chakma circle, with headquarters at Rangamati;
- (2) Bohmang Circle with Headquarters at Bandarban, and
- (3) Maung Circle, with Headquarters at Maniksuri.

Each circle was headed by a Chakma, a Bohmang and a Maung Chief respectively. The reason for this division was that the British government was never in favour of a powerful Chakma chief who had considerable clout over these hill tribes. The other factor which promoted the British to take this measure was their increasing concern about the political and administrative affairs of these hill tracts.<sup>14</sup> At that time, the seat of Chakma chief was at the periphery at Chittagong regular district. To gear the control of the distant border areas from raids, the British authorities stressed the shifting of the Chakma chief from Chandroghana to Rangamati . This, in turn, enabled the British government to extend its sway over Rangamati by appointing a British Superintendent for the hills.

Corresponding to the three circles were three sub-divisions under the supervision of sub-divisional officers who were responsible to the deputy commissioner of the district. The tribal administrative set up was based on

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14. Talukdar, S.P., *The Chakamas: Life and Struggle*, Gian Publishing House, Delhi, 1988, pp. 38-39.

a threetiered structure in descending orders- the Circle, the 'Mouza' and the 'Para' . The tribal chiefs were entrusted the task of collecting revenues and dispensing traditional justice in tribal courts. To check interference by the civil administration in tribal affairs certain measures were taken by the British. No one was permitted to meddle with the customs and norms that regulated tribal life. The British policies were aimed at simplifying the legal and judicial system so as to help the tribals retain their traditional norms and institutions as much as possible.<sup>15</sup> The British restricted all migration into the district, providing a permit system for outsider travelling to the CHT or wishing to reside there. However, the scores of preconditions attached to obtain such a permit virtually made it impossible for the outsiders to penetrate the area. In 1920 by amending the Hill Tracts Manual, a new administration was set up under CHT (Amendment) Regulation, 1920, which declared the district an "exclusive area" independent of general administration. The restriction was further strengthened by the Government of India Act ,1935, which made the CHT "Totally excluded area" <sup>16</sup> But this act undoubtedly deprived its inhabitants of representation in Bengal Legislature and opportunity of expressing their views on any of the issues connected with the partition of Bengal.

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15. Ahsan and Chakma, op. it., p.962.

16. The Hindustan Times, 17 April 1993.



## **SOCIAL STRUCTURE:**

Elite representatives of various tribes in the CHT describe their respective tribes as nations. They were semi-independent and at times independent nations in the precolonial period. The Muslim rulers hardly interfered in their day-to-day affairs and each tribe was a self-sufficient economic unit as well as a self-administered political entity, with tribal customs regulating the intertribal relationship. Thus, the tribes were nations both culturally and politically. Culturally, they communicated in their language and kept alive their tribal norms, politically, they determined their own destiny.<sup>17</sup>

The present administrative structure of the CHT is dyarchy-tribal administration and civil administration that reflects the persistence of the tribal structure. In terms of the civil administration of the Central Government of Bangladesh, the district is put under the jurisdiction of the deputy Commissioner (district administration). Corresponding to the tribal circles, it is further categorised into three sub-divisions administered by three sub-divisional officers. While administering the district the Deputy Commissioner is assisted by the sub-divisional officers. Sometimes the Deputy Commissioner acts as the judge of the district as well. Furthermore, each of the three sub-divisions is again sub-divided into several Thana or

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17. Ahsan and Chakma, pp. 959-60.

Police stations. The police Officer is entitled to maintain law and order in the thana under his jurisdiction.

However, when one takes a look at the structure of the tribal administration it is bit different from that of the civil administration carried on by the government. In terms of tribal administration, the CHT is divided into three circles, each circle being headed by a Chief or Raja, which is a hereditary position. The Raja being the ultimate authority in tribal and social affairs is the symbol of unity and integrity of the people of his circle. That is why he always keeps himself aware of "Weal and Woe" of the people by listening them patiently and making himself accessible to all who have a complaint to make. In different religious ceremonies sometimes he is accorded the position of a presider. Apart from maintaining law and order, the raja always tries to have an effective liasion and good neighbourly relations with the tribes of his adjoining circles. Disobedience to his order or failure to show him due reverence tantamounts to a grave social offense. With respect to relations with the central government, the tribes are represented by him at the national level. While as the principal member of the Advisory Council to the Deputy Commissioner, the Chief extends all help, information and advice to him for the proper administration and development of his circle, he also acts as the link between the tribal people and the district administration.<sup>18</sup> He is assigned the task of collecting revenue for the government and the headmen take this burden on his behalf.

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18. Islam, S.N. op., p.1213

The administrative set up of tribal affairs is based on a three-tiered structure-the circle, the mouza and the para, in descending order. While the top slot is occupied by the chief, next to him is the position of a headman for each mouza, composed of several villages or *para*. It is the headman who is the bridge between a mouza and the Chief. The headman, a hereditary post, is settled by the Chief and endorsed by the Deputy Commissioner who never vetoes the chief's selection. While collecting land revenue and tax for jhum farming (a type of slash and burn agriculture used in the hills) from the people of his area, the headman, after depositing the entire amount, shares a portion of jhum tax with the Chief. The rest amount is deposited by the Chief in the district administration. As the lieutenant of the Chief, the headman executes the former's order and preserves peace and discipline in his *mauza*, having some judicial power in minor cases. The lowest hereditary position in the tribal administration is held by 'Karbari', a formal leader of the village or *para*. Maintenance of peace and order and representation of his *para* in various occasions are the most important functions performed by him. <sup>19</sup>

It has been argued that while the codified laws of the land are applicable to the rest of the country they are considered to be unsuitable for the primitive hillmen. The persistence working of this dyarchy in the CHT buttresses the tribal peoples allegiance to the tribal Chief rather than to the central government.

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19. Ibid., p. 1214.

The Chakmas are categorised into four major groups<sup>20</sup> : (1) Annakya Chakmas, those who had migrated from Arakan to the CHT; (2) Doingnak Chakmas are believed to have broken off from the parent tribe a long ago, when Jaun Baksh Khan (1782) was the Chief. When he order them to intermarry with the other branches of the tribe, disapproving this many Doingnaks fled to Arakan and later on some of them came back and settled in the hills of the Cox's Bazar sub-division; (3) Rowyangya Chakmas are those who stayed at Arakan; and (4) Tungjanya Chakmas, another sub-tribe is said to have come into Chittagong hills from the Arakan in early 19th century. They are found both in CHT and Arakan region.

From the earliest historic times the CHT tribesmen moved into the hills and used them for agricultural activities, locally called '*jhum*' (swidden or slash and burn) cultivation. The *jhum* and permanent plough cultivation now form the primary economic activities of the Chakmas. Until now, almost half of the population still depend on *jhumming* and decisions for *jhum* cultivation are taken by the village communities which traditionally own land in the CHT. *Jhumming* which is more than a mere agricultural practice, is the basis of cultural pattern of the society itself. For this type of agriculture only limited effort is needed. It is a practice by which bamboos , trees and other weeds are cleared on a particular slope of

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20. Risley, H.H., The Tribes and Caste of Bengal, Vol.I, p. 169, as quoted in Talukdar. S.P., Chakmas; An Embattled Tribe, p. 15.

hill and then the cutting are set afire. After the shower of rains the jhumias go for a mixed cultivation comprising a variety of rotation crops such as rice, vegetables and fruits. The entire operation calls for forming a period of about four to six months. Once the crop is harvested, it is carefree life for the tribesmen for the rest of the year. In a sense, the tribal organization evolved round the *jhumming* practice and it was from the *jhum* tax that the Chief of the tribal population managed his administration.<sup>21</sup> It is because of the practice of *jhumming* the tribals of the CHT are commonly known as 'jumma' people.

#### CUSTOMS:

Nothing could be farther from the truth than to brand the inhabitants of the CHT as primitive, if one means by the term survivors of some prehistoric age in their pristine purity. Nonetheless, the hillmen, in whom the tribal affiliation plays a vital role in their lives, are quite different from the people of the plains. Their social organization, marriage customs, death and birth rites, food, techniques of agriculture and other social customs differ markedly from rest of the population of Bangladesh.

In the Chakma society the Dewans or Talukadars were entrusted the juridicial functions and those cases beyond their power were normally sent to the King. They were also responsible for helping the law enforcing

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21. Holiday (Dacca), 10 February, 1989.



agencies to apprehend the lawbreakers. The Chakma customary law states that in case of break out of any epidemic, contagious disease like Cholera, the *Ojha* (Priest cum quack doctor) would put the whole village in quarantine and during this period no outsiders would be permitted to enter into the village. In case the police suspected that any criminal or deserter has taken refuge in the village, the police should inform the *Karbari* (Village headman) who would be responsible to handover the said person to the police. The *Ojhas* are both male and female. Those women who could effectively handle delivery cases are also called *Ojha*. At the time of marriage ceremonies, the male *Ojhas* generally perform the duties of the priests. Apart from this, they are likely to handle competently various cases like curing diseases, snake bites, exorcising of evil spirits etc. There are also *Vaidyas* (quack doctors) who are supposed to possess knowledge of the roots, leaves and metallic compound. Generally, the *Vaidya* is held in high esteem by the Chakma people.<sup>22</sup> Till date in the villages people prefer to be treated by the *Vaidyas* even if the qualified doctor is available. In fact the treatment by the *Vaidyas* has great social approval as it has stood the test of time.

## RELIGION

While religion of the major tribes of the CHT is Buddhism, minor tribes are followers of animism. Though the Chakmas are followers of

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22. Talukdar, S.P. Chakmas: An Embattled Tribe, pp35-36.

Buddhism, their contact with the Hindus in the adjacent part of Bengal has helped mould their religion in the present form. During mid nineteenth century they came under the influence of Vaishnavism. Tungjainya sub-tribe worships Laxmi as the Goddess of harvest. She is represented by a rude block of stone draped in a cotton seven times around it. The votaries offer pigs and fowls and eat the same later on. The Chakmas also revere the goddess Laxmi and worship her with some changes in the performance pattern. Some vestiges of primitive animism, which is believed to be the religion of the Chakma prior to their acceptance of Buddhism, are still found in the festival called *Shongbasa* when nats or the spirit of woods and stream are worshipped. Apart from that, the Chakmas have as many as fourteen tribal gods and goddess whom they worship in all reverence and solemnity.

Chakmas bear distinct marks of old traditions of Buddhism. Every well to do family generally builds a worshipping place, a small temple for Lord Buddha, in front of their houses raised from the ground on a *machan*. Their religious beliefs highly flow through their attitude to life. Making generous offerings to the Buddhist monks, who perform religious ceremonies, are a common feature among the Chakmas.

## **MARRIAGE**

In Chakma society polygamy is socially approved but the widows can scarcely remarry. The custom of dowry or *dafa* is existent in some

orthodox families. Though parents consent is highly essential for marriage, if a girl manages to elope four times with her beloved then she is socially entitled to marry a man of her choice. The tradition is that for each elopement the eloping couple will have to pay a fine along with two pigs. Two most important things in a marriage, *Chumulong* and *Jurget* (nuptial knot) are ceremonized by an *ojha*, a village priest. Marriages and divorce and other related problems are still tried by headmen in *mauza* and the *Chieg* constitutes the final tribal court of appeal in matrimonial affairs and petty offences. The system involves a cumbersome process. For instance, if any one is found guilty of sex offense, the parties involved will have to pay a fine in the shape of buying one or two pigs. Sex relationship between two persons on the prohibitive category could end up in a humiliating note for the offenders. The man has to tonsure his head, carry a chicken basket on it and while moving from door to door will have to confess his guilt.<sup>23</sup>

## LANGUAGE

The mother tongue of the Chakmas is a mixed language of Bengali, Pali and Sanskrit written in Burmese script. The cursive style of the Chakma script, brought from India in the 5th century A. D. by the Buddhists religious teachers to Burma was adopted as Burmese script. Among the dialects of different tribes the Chakma dialect comes nearest to Bengali, yet it is quiet

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23. Holiday, 10 February, 1989.



different from the Bengali language, the mother tongue of almost all the Bangladeshi.<sup>24</sup>

Games which fascinate the Chakma boys the most are the 'gudu-khela,' 'par khela' 'ladum khela', wrestling, tug of war, swimming, racing etc. while 'patti khela', 'gila khela' etc are the favourite games of the girls. The outstanding accomplishment of the Chakma girl is decorative weaving. The women are proficient in separating cotton thread from the seeds by an instrument known as 'charki'. The Chakmas being honest, simple, frank and truthful, crime is rarely committed in Chakma villages. Generally, the most frequent disputes are of social nature only. Petty theft cases are tried by the mouza headman and when he fails to implement his decisions, it is referred to the Chief.

Nine hospitals have been constructed, 30 thousand acres of land rehabilitated, 938 primary schools, 33 junior high schools, 62 secondary schools and eight colleges plus a second technical college have been established over the five year period between 1984 and 1989. Two residential schools for tribal students have also been started. Nevertheless, there is high rate of illiteracy in that area<sup>25</sup>.

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24. Islam, S. N. op. cit., pp. 1214-15.

25. Davis, D., 'Four Rays of Hope,' *The Far Eastern Economic Review*, 23 March, 1989, p. 22.

Inspite of the fact that over the centuries this border region has experienced a successive invasions and change of ruling dynasties, the people of the district enjoyed a high degree of autonomy with respect to their internal administration in every phase of the different dynasties. Despite all the cataclysm and upheavals all over the world the Chakmas could retain many of their primitive nature until 1971 after which every thing got topsy-turvy because of the various discriminatory policies implemented by the Bangladesh government. The violence and bloodsheds let loose by some educated tribal boys in the line of insurgency(Shanti Bahini) and Bengali Muslims have hampered the socioeconomic life of the Chakmas.

#### **REASONS FOR THEIR MIGRATION TO INDIA**

The awfully inauspicious British Raj came to an end with the tragic partition of the Indian subcontinent. But this was even more catastrophic for the ill-fated Chakmas. In 1947 when the country was to be partitioned it was expected that the CHT with over 98 percent non-Muslim population would be included in India. Contemplating this, an Indian flag was hoisted by the optimist Chakmas in Rangamati District for three days from August 15, 1947.<sup>26</sup> But brushing aside all the expectations Sir Cyril Radcliffe .., Chairman of the Punjab and Bengal Boundary Commission, awarded the CHT to Pakistan on 17th August, 1947, in contravention of the Indian

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26. The Hindustan Times, 25 September, 1994.

Independence Act of 1947 for “political ends”. Even Alastair Lamb was very critical about this arrangement when he stated, “Sir Cyril Radcliffe’s major qualification for this, it appeared, was his almost total ignorance of Indian affairs.”<sup>27</sup> As archival materials amply show, Mountbatten, Nehru and Patel also wanted the CHT to remain as a part of India. Yet, 600000 Buddhists, like other ‘Kafirs’ were thrown to the wolves and offered on a platter to East Pakistan.<sup>28</sup> Though no specific reasons were given by the Boundary Commission for taking such an unethical division, some Research scholars attribute them to the following :

- (1) Because, there were compact Sikh communities in the Muslim dominated Ferozepur and Zira sub-divisions of Punjab, contrary to the principles of Partition Act, they were awarded to India on 17th August, 1947. As a compensation to Pakistan’s loss in the west wing, in the east wing CHT was awarded to Pakistan.
- (2) While Calcutta city being a Hindu majority area, Calcutta port went to India, the alternative port Chittagong and its hinterland considered vital for East Pakistan economy clinched the issue for Pakistan. This may be in lieu of Murshidabad district in West Bengal which was to go to Pakistan because of its Muslim majority, but bestowed to India since the holy Ganges flows through this district.<sup>29</sup>

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27. Patriot, 19 May, 1993.

28. The Pioneer, 21 October, 1994.

29. Talukdar, S.P., Chakmas : An Embattled Tribe, op. cit., pp 64-65.

Thus, the fate of the Buddhist Chakmas was decided by a treacherous appeasement plan put forward by the shrewd representatives of then dominating communities. To their great dismay, no referendum was held to elicit the opinion of the Chakmas regarding the future of their destiny. To register their protest against this authoritarian proclamation, a delegation comprising the Bohmang and Mong Chief and the younger brother of the Chakma Chief representing on his behalf set out for Delhi to vindicate the apprehension of the Buddhist tribes to Nehru. Despite all the assurance that their view points would be due respect by the Radcliffe Commission, unceremoniously the CHT was gifted away to the Islamic nation of Pakistan. Thus, the authority committed one of the earliest mistakes in handling the minorities issue ineptly. Objection from some disgruntled student leaders of the CHT only amplified their agony inviting the wrath of the Pakistani army. The stern measures taken by the army thus made the students flee, leading to the first Chakma exodus to India since independence.

### **CHAKMAS UNDER PAKISTANI ADMINISTRATION**

The developments during the partition period gave way to a relationship of distrust between the Pakistan government and the tribal people. Their grievances could not be mitigated by the government and later outcomes further alienated the tribal people from the mainstream of the nation. Initially, in a bid to preserve the long standing tradition of the

tribal structure, the government of Pakistan adopted the following basic principles<sup>30</sup> for the administration of the CHT.

- (1) No middlemen would be allowed between the representatives of the government and the tribal people. All lawyers and attorneys were instructed to refrain from foul play regarding matters between two hillmen in the court.
- (2) The maximum simplification of legal procedure should be observed. In the process of adjudication measures were taken not to overburden the hillmen with expenses.
- (3) Quick and expeditious administration of justice.
- (4) Non-interference in tribal laws, customs and norms that regulate tribal life.

These were sacrosanct only on paper and in practice held in breach. Very often the administration blatantly meddled with the tribal affairs through various discriminatory measures. Thus the hornet's nest of the Chakma tangle emerged when the autonomy and protected status that their sparsely populated area had enjoyed for centuries, even prior to the arrival of the British on the subcontinent, was abrogated by the Pakistani

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30. Islam, S.N. "The Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh : Integrational Crisis between centre and periphery," Asian Survey, Vol.XXI, No.12, December, 1981, P.1214.

government. The process was initiated in 1948 when the government contrived to repeal the "CHT Frontier Police Regulation III of 1881" which allowed the tribal people to have a police force manned exclusively by themselves. In 1955 the provincial government made an effort to abolish the special status but in the wake of stiff resistance from the hillmen and lack of support from the central government it could not be accomplished. The Constitutions of 1956 and 1962 maintained the CHT as an "excluded area" but under constitutional amendment of 1963 which came into force in 1964, the CHT ceased to be known as a tribal area and lost its special status and autonomy. The situation was further complicated as the change coincided with construction of the Kaptai dam which had far reaching impact on later developments in the CHT.

#### **THE KARNAPHULI PROJECT AND ITS IMPACT**

Some writers are of the opinion that any new investment policies in traditional areas must be evaluated and enforced with utmost caution, keeping in mind the prospective benefit they would provide for both the region and the nation. As Myron Weiner observes, "Once the state takes on new investment responsibilities - whether for roads and post offices or for steel mills and power dams - questions of equity are posed by the regions' tribes (and) linguistic groups which make up plural societies."<sup>31</sup>

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31. Weiner, Myron, "Political Integration and Political Development" in Claud & Welch, Jr.(ed) *Political Modernization : A Reader*, Belmont, California, 1967, P.154.

Imbalance modernization can accentuate cultural discrimination of minorities and increase their hostility toward the dominant group. The huge power development project in the CHT had similar effect upon the local people.

The construction of the Kaptai dam, an ambitious multipurpose project on river Karanaphuli, which began in 1957 and was completed in 1962. The project that was constructed to accelerate economic development in East Pakistan had serious effects on the economy and life patterns of the people in the region. An area of approximately 400 square miles, including 125 mouzas and major portion of the district head-quarter at Rangamati was submerged by the dam. The inundated area includes 54,000 acres of settled cultivable land comprising 40 percent and 90 percent of the total acreage of the district and Rangamati sub-division respectively. The flooding affected severely more than 100,000 persons consisted of 10,000 ploughing and 8,000 jhumiya families. After a vigorous effort the government could allocate only 20,000 acres of flat cultivable land of some what inferior quality to settle a total of 11,761 of the 18,000 displaced families. This caused a net loss of 34,000 acres, comparing to the original 54,000 acres of land. While in the reservoir bed the 10,000 ploughing families had an average of six acres of land, the displaced families could be accomodated with barely two acres of land on average in the new settlements in the non-submerged and de-reserved areas.<sup>32</sup> This dam not

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32. Islam, S.N., op. cit, P.1216.

only inundated vast tracts of land but resulted in destruction of the traditionally determined pattern of living of the tribals.

The rehabilitation and compensation were objectly minimal compared to the loss. Mismanagement in the process of implementation worsened the situation further. While according to government estimation the compensation amounted to 59 million dollar only 2.6 million dollar was actually allotted. Whatever little amounts they received were not properly utilised nor did the government came forward to help them use the payments for productive purposes. To add to their woes, the public officials engaged in the rehabilitation programme indulged in corruption and while disbursing the compensation, discriminated between the tribals and non-tribals. Though the Karnaphuli power project revolutionized the industrialization of Bangladesh, the tribal people hardly reap any benefit from it. Tribal employment in major industries like Kaptai project and Chandraghona Paper Mill has been less than 1 percent. Even business is also monopolized by the outsiders and in the markets of the Hill Tracts hardly can one locate a tribal shop. These developments and conditions magnified the feeling of deprivation among the tribals.<sup>33</sup> In the absence of proper and adequate resettlement programme many of them were forced to cross the borders into the neighbouring countries of India and Myanmar.

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33. Ahsan, S.A. and Chakma, Bhumitra, 'Problems of National Integration in Bangladesh : The Chittagong Hill Tracts, Asian Survey, Vol.XXIX, No.10, October, 1989, P.964.



## **JOB OPPORTUNITIES AND THE INFLUX OF NON-TRIBALS INTO THE AREA**

In order to resolve the issue of unemployment the government encouraged the tribal people to take up new occupations such as fishing and horticulture but was unable to motivate them because of two important reasons : the circumstantial disadvantages and the tribals' lack of professional skills. The creation of job avenues led to a massive influx of non-tribals into the area, causing distress to the local people. On the lake created by the dam, there were about 3,000 registered fishermen by late 1970s. The local people comprised only 20 to 25 percent. The Bengalis - the non-locals - completely regulated and controlled the commercial supply of fish causing considerable indignation among the tribal people. The government tried to induce horticulture as another supplementary occupation with pineapple being the main product. But even in this venture also the Bengali moneylenders and businessmen did not spare the tribals by purchasing fruit at minimal rate when the pineapple plants were flourishing and no other cash crops were ready for harvesting. To protect the horticulturists from unscrupulous money lenders, the government introduced agricultural loans at a nominal rate of interest but massive corrupt practices by some officials of the loan-granting agencies demoralised the tribals from taking loans. Rather than alleviating the grievances of the hillmen, the governmental initiatives engendered indignation and bitterness.

Migration to the CHT is of two types : “natural” and “political”. While people in the former category migrated in search of jobs and business opportunities, in the latter category settlers came under government sponsorship from other parts of the country. According to the census of 1981, tribal people accounted for only 1.03 per cent of the total population of Bangladesh. Almost one-half of the entire tribal population of the country is concentrated in the CHT, the share the tribals in the hill tracts being 58 per cent. In most other districts they account for less than 1 percent of the total.<sup>34</sup> In 1947, while the tribals constituted more than 98 percent of the population of the CHT, the Bengalis’ share was less than 2 percent.

**Table 1 : Tribal and Non-Tribal Population of Chittagong Hill Tracts in the 1951-74 period.**

	Population		Percentage Increase
	1951	1974	
Tribal People	261,538	449,315	71.7
Non-Tribal People	26,150	58,884	125.1

Source : 1951 Census of Pakistan and Syed Nazmul Islam’s interview with subdivisional Public Relation Officer, Rangamati, CHT.

34. Statistical Pocket Book of Bangladesh 1987, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Dhaka, 1988, P.52.

The massive influx of non-tribals into the area is one of the main reasons for the Chak a problem can be gauged from Table.1<sup>35</sup> While in 1951 the tribal population in the CHT was 261,538 and the number of non-tribals was 26,150 constituting approximately 91 percent and 9 percent respectively, by 1974 the respective population figures were altered to 449,315 and 58,884. The growth rate of non-tribals being 125.1 percent, it outclassed comfortably the increase in the tribal population which was 71.7 percent. The explosive rate of population growth led to growing landlessness among Bangladesh agriculturists. The massive Bengali migration effected grave dislocation in the CHT's socio-economic environment. Because of the relatively lower price of hill lands, many fortune seekers settled down in this district. Clashes over land became a regular feature. The British had fore seen such an annexation of the CHT and sought to protect their population being swamped by outsiders. The largest community in the CHT and the most hounded among the tribals, the Chakmas first trickled into India in 1963 following large-scale incursion into their area by land-hungry Bengali Muslims.<sup>36</sup>

## **EMERGENCE OF BANGLADESH AND THE BEGINNING OF REPRESSION**

The worst tragedy befell the Chakmas after the birth of Bangladesh

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35. Islam, S.N., op. cit., P.1216-17.

36. The Statesman, Calcutta, 12 June, 1993.

which emerged as an independent state in 1971 after a nine-month sanguinary war. It is alleged that some sections of the tribal leadership and particularly the role of the Chakma Raja Tridiv Roy was controversial during the war and it is a fact that he did this to save people from the onslaught of the Pakistani regime. Since it was seen a struggle between the Bengalis and Punjabis, the tribals showed little concern about the war. In spite of this some tribals plunged in the independence war.

Immediately after independence misunderstanding developed between the Bengalis and tribal people. On December 5, 1971, Bengali freedom fighters assaulted and killed 16 tribal people branding them as collaborators. The now defunct Rakhi Bahini, a para-military force created by the Sheikh Mujib government wrought havoc in some tribal villages under the pretext of (1) ferreting out persons who collaborated with the Pakistani Army during the war of independence in 1971 and (2) receiving a hidden stock of arms and ammunitions. On February 15, 1972, a tribal delegation under the leadership of Manabendra Narayan Larma, a Member of Parliament, called on the Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and placed before him a four point charter of demands. These were (1) autonomy of the CHT with its own legislature; (2) retention of Regulation 1900 in the constitution of Bangladesh; (3) continuation of the tribal Chiefs' offices ; and (4) a constitutional provision restricting the amendment of Regulation 1900 and imposition of a ban on the influx of non-tribal people. Rejecting

these demands, Mujib advised them to forget their ethnic identities and merge with greater 'Bengali' nationalism.<sup>37</sup> No provision for a special status for the CHT was made in the 1972 constitution. Disgusted with this sort of discrimination, on March 7, 1972, M.N. Larma formed a regional political party called the Parbattya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity or JSS (United Peoples Party of chittagong Hill Tracts) to exert constitutional pressure on the government to accede to the tribal demands. Mujib roused the tribal anger again in 1973 when he declared in a pre-election meeting at Rangamati that henceforth all the tribal people would be known as Bengalis and would have no other separate identity of their own. M.N. Larma vainly tried to establish the case of separate identity of the tribal people as a national minority citing historical, geographical and logical explanations in favour of his arguments. He argued emphatically that under no definition or logic can a Chakma be a Bengali or a Bengali be a Chakma. Undoubtedly as citizens of Bangladesh the tribals are Bangladeshi but despite of this they do have a separate ethnic identity which was completely overlooked by the Bangladeshi leaders.

#### **VIOLATION OF THE HILL TRACTS MANUAL, 1900**

Much before this nationality question of the tribes came up for debate, the oppressive measures of the government and savage brutalities committed

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37. Montu, Kazi, 'Tribal Insurgency in Chittagang Hill Tracts, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol.15, No.36, 1980,P.1511.

by many political and non-political forces, aggravated the condition in the Hill Tracts. In order to safeguard the interests of the backward and less fortunate hillmen and uphold their special ethnical, cultural and other identities, a Law known as the Hill Tracts Manual, 1900 was formulated by the British. To large extent even the Pakistan government followed this Manual. Even though certain modifications were effected in the power structure of the tribal chiefs, the rights of the common as almost remained intact. This Manual restricted the entry and settlement of the outsiders in any part of the Hill Tracts unless the headman of that area or Mouza granted the permission. With few exceptions, even those Bengalis who settled in Rangamati or Bandarban before independence had obtained the required legal sanction. But the Mujib regime brushed aside the special rights and privileges of the tribal people as a 'protected' community, a status conferred upon them since the days of the British rule.<sup>38</sup> After the liberation of Bangladesh the flood gates for the Bengali settlers was opened into the Hill Tracts. Even some Bengali refugees repatriated from India were rehabilitated in different parts of the Hill Tracts by expelling tribal people from their ancestral homesteads and in other cases agricultural land was forcibly taken and distributed among the Bengali settlers.<sup>39</sup> Confronted with

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38. Hussain, Hayat, 'Problem of National Integration in Bangladesh' in S.R. Chakravorty and V. Narain (eds.), *Bangladesh : History and Culture*, vol.1, South Asian Publishers, New Delhi, 1986, P.203.

39. Kamaluddin, S., "A Tangled Web of Insurgency", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, May 23-29, 1980.p.26.

this new menace scores of tribal families voluntarily left or deserted their ancestral homes and shifted to the deep interior of the hills.

Ziaur Rahman, the former Bangladesh President, carried out a plan to settle 20,000 families from each Bangladesh district on the fertile land along the Karnaphuli river. The plan was first sought to be implemented in 1978 causing an influx of Chakma tribals into the Indian border states of Tripura and Mizoram. A storm of protest raised by the neighbouring Buddhist countries, because the Chakmas are by and large Buddhists, compelled the Zia plan to be suspended. But the government encouraged the Bengali Muslims to move into the area so as to relieve the pressure on land elsewhere in the country and also, perhaps, to counter the threat of secession by the tribals who had opted for India in 1947 but were pushed into erstwhile East Pakistan against their will. A secret government memorandum from the Chittagong divisional commissioner ordered the deputy commissioner of the Hill Tracts to arrange five acres of hilly land, four acres of mixed land and 2.5 acres of paddy land for each newly settled Bengali family.<sup>40</sup> But very few are aware that 90 per cent of the total land area in the hill tracts are reserved forests and cultivable land holding is the lowest in Bangladesh. From this it is quite apparent that a large scale conspiracy is being carried out to completely transform the demographic balance in the CHT. Since 1972, the security forces of the Bangladesh

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40. *The Chittagong Hill Tracts : Militarization, Oppression and the Hill Tribe*, Anti-Slavery Society Publication, London, 1984, PP.71-73.

government have been actively collaborating with the Muslims of the plains to carry out a vast resettlement programme. Muslim settlers have sought the help of the armed forces to grab tribal lands, to commit large scale arson, abduction loot, murder and rape, without attracting any penal action for this heinous crimes. Consequently, tens of thousands of tribals have been compelled to desert their ancestral homes and seek refuge in the Indian States of Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland. The process of marginalization has been also indicated by census figures of Bangladesh. Figures quoted by the CHT Jammu Refugees Welfare Association showed that the population of Chakmas that was 2,39,783 in 1941 in the CHT had increased to only 5,50,500 in 1991 whereas the Muslim population increased from a negligible 7,270 to 4,51,500. Meanwhile, settling of Bengalis in the CHT continues to further complicate the situation. Faced with the fearful prospect of being reduced to a minority in their homeland by the non-tribal settlers, coupled with the atrocities committed on them, the tribal people formed their own defence force in the form of Shanti Bahini. The very name Shanti Bahini or Peace Force indicates that their aim was to resist atrocities and maintain peace in the area but over this long period their original self-defence stance has transformed into an offensive one.

#### **THE KALAMPATI MASSACRE**

The brisk spreading of army deployment in the Hill Tracts mounted tension in that area. The Shanti Bahini guerillas ambushed the Bangladesh



army, stationed at Kaukhali Bazar of Kalampati Union under Betbunia Police Station, in which 22 army men including an officer were killed. To avenge this, the commander of the army unit made an arrangement for the gathering of the leading tribal people of the Kalampati Union in the market to hold a religious congregation and the ordinary hillmen were asked to assemble for repairing the Poapara Buddhist temple in the morning of 25 March, 1980. When the repairing work was being carried on, they were asked to stand in a line and immediately after they lined up were sprayed with bullets by the army men. Some miraculous survivors of the massacre described that more than 50 persons were buried in mass graves at the Western corner of Poapara High School, just behind the army camp. Twelve hillmen sustained serious bullet injuries. The orgy of the carnage surpassed all previous records of brutalities committed against the tribesmen. More than 30 women were also forcibly taken away to the army camp. While the old women and children were allowed to leave in the evening, the young women were held captive for a couple of days to quench the carnal desire of their custodians. While coming back from the army camp, the old women and children were pounced upon by the Bengali hooligans. The rioting Bengalis revelled in the arson and ransacking spree with the active cooperation of the army men.<sup>41</sup>

A five-member parliamentary committee was set up to review the law and order situation of the district and submit a report regarding that. But,

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41. Hussain, Hayat, *op. cit.*, PP.197-98.

the committee omitted Upendra Lal Chakma, a tribal M.P. belonging to the opposition Jatio Samajtantrik Dal, who in a press conference on 1 April, 1980, brought into limelight the Karampati carnage. This did not deter Upendra Lal Chakma, who along with two other opposition M.Ps formed a Fact-Finding Team to investigate the Kalmpati episode separately. While reviewing the circumstances the team reprimanded the government for letting loose a reign of terror in the Hill Tracts with a purposeful object of uprooting the tribals from their ancestral home to foil their just movement for right to self-determination. As per the report forcible distortion and destruction of the religion, cultures, languages and traditions of the tribal people were the main objectives of the government. Apart from other things the team called upon the government to recognize the nationalities of the district and confer them regional autonomy since guaranteeing the rights of the oppressed nationalities was the main issue.<sup>42</sup>

Due to gradual aggravation of the condition at Rangamati and expanded ventures of the Shanti Bahini some tribal leaders demanded autonomy for the Hill Tracts citing strong historical and geographical grounds in favour of that. The demand for autonomy was supported by only a few politicians of Bangladesh like Muhammad Joha of the Communist Party (ML). To press this demand Shanti Bahini started the insurgency movement. Deployment of army in the Hill Tracts also carried out vigorously. To meet the new situation, some more camps had to be made

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42. Ibid, PP.198-99.

in addition to the three cantonments from Ramgarh to Ali Kadam made during the Sheikh regime. Because at that time the Shanti Bahini activities were limited and unorganized posting of one battalion for six months was enough. But presently, with the provision for a number of increments and special allowances, deployment of every battalion for two years by rotation is made compulsory. In the name of counter insurgency the military authorities deny basic amenities and human dignity to the tribals. It has become a common phenomenon of the military for perpetrating mass killing, rapes, arson, plundering, religious persecution and confining the innocents. The genocides of Kanungopara in 1979, Kaukhali (Kalampati) in 1980, Matiranga in 1981, Bhusanchara in 1984, Panchari in 1986, Baghaichari in 1988 and Longarde in 1989 are attempts to systematically evict people and create a Muslim dominated area in the CHT.<sup>43</sup> Military operations in the CHT have resulted in an exodus of about 65,000 to neighbouring Indian state of Tripura. Moreover, atleast 50,000 tribals, failing to withstand atrocities by security forces and settlers and unable to cross over to India have fled to dense forests inside the CHT. Remarkably, instead of granting a priority to the rehabilitation of these internal refugees, the Government of Bangladesh has published a lot of concern for the repatriation of the Chakma refugees from Tripura without the previous approval and implementation of political settlement suitable for such repatriation. Undoubtedly, the Bangladesh Government intends to misguide

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43. Gupta, Rakesh, 'Extend Democracy to Chittagong People', Link, October 27, 1991, P.18.

international opinion. . . d donor countries regarding the utterly wretched state of human rights in the CHT.<sup>44</sup>

People in the CHT have been subject to wide-spread human rights violations in the last two and half decades. There was no improvement in Bangladesh's dismal human rights record in the CHT even after the return of democracy in 1991. Since, 1976, the CHT which progressively was patterned into emergency zone have been controlled by the military. Reportedly 80,000 military and paramilitary forces are deployed there. The Khaleda Zia government also didn't improve the state of human rights conditions which include violations like massacres, detentions without trial, extrajudicial executions, tortures, rape etc. According to press reports around 300 hill peoples were massacred at Lougang 'strategic hamlet' on 10 April, 1992 by the Muslim settlers and the security forces. This was also confirmed by the Awami League president Sheikh Hasina Wazed, including the intellectuals of Bangladesh, after visiting Lougang on April 27, 1992. Diplomats of the Western Countries reportedly asked the Bangladesh government to make public everything. A one-member judicial committee headed by S.A.K.Chowdhury investigated the matter. Detentions lead to disappearances in CHT. Given the high number of deaths reported as occurring on clashes between the security forces and the armed opposition group, Shanti Bahini, extra judicial executions of the tribals are difficult

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44. 'Ethnocide in Chittagong Hill Tracts " Intellectuals Appeal to World Community, Mainstream, September 17, 1994, P.30.

to estimate. Coupled with this since the bodies of dead are rarely returned to their relatives or released for independent autopsy, exact quantification is greatly hindered.<sup>45</sup>

The forcible relocation of the tribals from their traditional villages to 'strategic hamlets' and settlement of Bengali Muslim intruders into their ancestral homes led to class struggle without philosophy. Without the permission of the security forces no one is permitted to go out from the 'strategic hamlet'. Since to eke out their living they have very often to go to far-off fields, restriction on free movement has crippled the economy of the hillmen. Hence, they are compelled to risk their lives for survival. If some one is detected by the army in restricted places, he is suspected of having links with the Shanti Bahini and may precisely be shot or captivated for torture. Apart from this if any one is found to possess medicine and rice more than the permitted quantities he may have to suffer the same fate like that of other law-brakers.<sup>46</sup>

### **SHANTI BAHINI AND THE INSURGENCY MOVEMENT**

When the Bengali Muslims from the plains started pouring in thousands to work in various new development projects and established business and industries, along with resultant description of tribal life from

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45. Chakma, Suhas, 'Chittagong Hill Tracts : Appalling Violence', Economic and Political Weekly, October 17, 1992, PP.2295-96.

46. Ibid, P.2296.

the Kaptai dam, the tribals showed their concern against the new economic and settlement policies, which they considered to pose a threat to their ethnic identity and culture. It was against this backdrop that the tribals of the CHT began to put up some armed resistance. With the aim of protecting the rights of the hillmen, they floated an underground political party called CHT Welfare Association in 1966. The Pakistani government took stern measures to suppress this movement which they considered to be a 'Communist inspired' guerilla activity from across the border from neighbouring hostile territories of India and Myanmar. This insurgent movement was intensified in the form of Shanti Bahini after the independence of Bangladesh, when Sheikh Mujib abolished the Hill Tracts Regulation of 1900.

The tribal people were subjected to repression and atrocities by the Rakhi Bahini, Mujib Bahini and police, throughout the Mujib regime. Killing, rape and looting became a regular feature. To put forward the grievances of the tribals before the government Manabendra Narayan Larma formed the Rangomati Communist Party and later on it was transformed into Parbattya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity or JSS (United Peoples Party of CHT) in 1972, to exert constitutional pressure on the government. An armed wing of the JSS, the Shanti Bahini was floated in 1973 headed by M.N. Larma's younger brother Jyotirindra Larma, with a group of young, modern educated youth capable of providing leadership to the tribal people. The Shanti Bahini has been fighting for the interest of the tribals to achieve

political, economic and cultural autonomy of the CHT region. A pro-autonomist insurgent group did not surface in the 1960s because during that time infiltration of the non-tribals into CHT was limited, and Raja Tridib Roy, the Chakma Chief, who was the symbol of integrity and cohesion of the Chakma people, was known for his pro-Pakistani outlook. But with the beginning of the freedom struggle in 1971, the Chakma Chief left the country for good to settle in Pakistan. Along with the vacuum in leadership, due to departure of Tridib Roy, came the government's policies of 'detrribalization' through different measures threatening the hillmen ominously of losing their identities and traditional tribal rights. These factors undoubtedly invited the younger generation of the tribes to form Shanti Bahini which is mostly dominated by the members of Chakma community who were the worst sufferers by the construction of the Kaptai dam.

The Shanti Banini, a militant group armed with sophisticated modern weapons, is composed of roughly two to three thousand guerilla members. Although the membership overwhelmingly came from the dissatisfied educated Chakma youths, the assumption is that some armed collaborators of Pakistani's vanquished army in Bangladesh merged with the force. Furthermore, collaboration with the Mizo dissident group from the adjoining Indian state of Mizoram and the Karen secessionist group from Myanmar may not be ruled out.<sup>47</sup> The Shanti Bahini seem to have acquired

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47. Islam, S.N. op. cit, PP.1219-20.

arms and ammunitions with the help of these two groups. The organizational network of the Shanti Bahini has been an extensive spread over all important administrative centres like Ramgarh, Banderban and Rangamati. In the dense forest, the main camp is said to exist. The major offensive against the government forces at Shubalong in 1974 unnerved it. Overthrow of Mujib aggravated the condition because the pro-Mujib forces who fled to India started insurgency movement against the new military government of General Ziaur Rahman. Since 1978 the insurgencies have been intensified due to surfacing of many other groups in the CHT. Apart from the Shanti Bahini another organization named Mukti Parishad (Liberation Council) has its strong holds in the CHT region of the Tangchainga tribe led by Sudharta Tangchainga. Eventhough the goals of both the groups are establishment of tribal rights in the CHT, they are constantly at logger-heads. While the Shanti Bahini accused them as anti-tribal, they have branded the former as a stooge of Indian government.<sup>48</sup> It is also said that another underground organization, the Sharbahara Party, led by a fugitive army officer and an independence war hero, has formed a united front with the Mukti Parishad. Nevertheless, the Shanti Bahini seems to be the most powerful organization of the rebel tribesmen and has led most of the attacks against the government forces so far. The main tactics of the Shanti Bahini are ambush and sabotage. By storming police stations, looting market places and attacking ferry boats on the lake, very often

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48. Montu, Kazi, 'The Situation in the Hill Tracts', The Holiday (Dacca), March 30, 1980.



they demonstrate their militancy. Evidently between the mid-70s and 1986 the Shanti Bahini attacked many Bengali settlement provoking vicious reprisal raids by Bengalis sometimes with the active cooperation of the Bangladesh armed forces. But every time the insurgents raid the non-tribals, the security forces fight back by attacking innocent tribals in the Chakma villages. In June 1989, the Bengali settlers and security forces went on a rampage attacking several Chakma villages due to murder of a Bengali Chairman of a sub-district, which sparked off another exodus of Chakma refugees into India.

The JSS and the Shanti Bahini have been as riven by factionalism as any other Marxist movement. While the Larma brothers were in favour of autonomy within Bangladesh, the Preeti Kumar Chakma faction stood for complete secession. The main challenge to the Larma leadership was led by Preeti Kumar Chakma, with the support of Bhabotosh Dewan and J.L. Tripura, who got M.N. Larma killed in 1983. The Preeti group, on the other hand crumbled in 1985 when its 235 members surrendered to the authorities at Rangamati. Though infighting declined after that, in December, 1988, Shantimony Dewan, leader of the rebel group negotiating with the government was assassinated by the Shanti Bahini because he was suspected of nursing political ambition. According to official sources the Shanti Bahini have killed more than 1100 of their fellow tribals who allegedly collaborated with the authorities.<sup>49</sup> When General Earshad, the

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49. Davies, Derek, 'Self-rule offer to end 20 years of bloody conflict : Four Rays of Hope', *The Far Eastern Economic Review*, 23 March, 1989, P.26.

President of Bangladesh declared first general amnesty in 1991, quite a good number of Shanti Bahini followers reportedly surrendered. But this did not end the insurgency. The political wing of JSS had announced a ceasefire in response to Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia's offer for dialogue in August, 1992. But they also declared that the tribals would reserve the right to self-defence in case of any attack from the Muslim settlers and security forces. So far nothing substantial has been done to pave the way for a permanent peace process.

The failure of the Bangladesh military to wipe out the insurgency on the one hand and the limited external support for the insurgents on the other has caused both sides to scale down armed confrontation. The relatively small tribal population in the country and the large Bengali settlements in tribal areas also have made them more pragmatic realizing that to force the government to give in is almost an impossible task. Whatever may be the radical points of the Shanti Bahini's objectives, the main reasons for tribal resentment are the heavy influx of outsiders into the CHT area, which is generally believed to jeopardize their economic and cultural entity. Therefore, the popular slogan of the Shanti Bahini activists is "The Bengalees quit Hill Tracts and stop exploitation of the hill people."<sup>50</sup>

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50. Islam, S.N., op. cit, P.1220.

A nationality is a population held together by ties like language and literature, ideas customs and traditions in such a way to feel itself as a coherent unity distinctly dissimilar from other populations who are similarly held together by like ties of their own. It is a sentiment of unity, a common mass consciousness. Similarly 'ethnic groups are "psychological communities" whose members share a persisting sense of common interest and identity that is based on some combination of shared historical experience and valued cultural traits— beliefs, language, ways of life a common homeland'<sup>57</sup>. because the Chakmas are held together by a common bond having a distinct culture, language, customs, traditions etc. of their own they spontaneously qualify to be an ethnic nationality. Psychologically they share a perpetual feeling of common interest and identity. The Chakmas are also sharing a common historical experience of suffering by various regimes one after another. The sufferings and discrimination have made them more conscious about their kinship and uniqueness which are distinctly separate from rest of the parts of Bangladesh. When the Bengali culture tried to over-haul the tribal culture, the Chakmas took up arms against this to protect their separate identity. Hence the ethnic struggle still continues between the tribals and non-tribals in the CHT. Thus this ethnonationalists, the largest among the tribals of the CHT and regionally concentrated, have started their political movement to achieve greater autonomy that they enjoyed earlier.

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51. Gurr and Harff, *op. cit.*, p.5.

In this context we are discussing the Chakma issue applying it with the various reasons provided by Gurr and Harff (discussed in Chapter 1) that are responsible for ethnopolitical mobilization and conflict.

When one goes through these reasons carefully, it is quite clear that more or less they are applicable to the Chakma tribals as well. Since the Chakmas sharing an ethnic identity are discriminated (reason 1) they have become resentful and angry which led to organization for action against these discriminations. They have strong group identity and ethnic cohesion (reasons 2 and 3) because of which they identify themselves with their own culture, tradition etc. and support the autonomy movement being carried on by the Shanti Bahini leaders and its politically wing Jana Sanghati Samiti. They have used both violent protest and political action to challenge grievances. Since its independence Bangladesh has been intermittently ruled by different autocratic rulers pushing aside democracy into a corner. These rulers perpetrate massacre, torture and genocide using extreme force inviting guerilla warfare against the government by the Shanti Bahini (reasons 4 & 5). It has been commonly assumed that the Shanti Bahini gets support from India and China. Perhaps because of this they have continued their insurgency for more than two decades (reason 6). It may be due to the lower status that Bangladesh enjoys in the international sphere. According to World Bank report released in 1993

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Bangladesh ranked 12th from the bottom among 127 countries. The ranking was made on the basis of Countries Gross National Product (GNP) in the World Development Report, 1993 where Bangladesh's per capita income was shown as 220 US dollars. In Comparison India enjoys much more superior status in world politics and is considered as the leader of the Non-aligned Movement and third world countries. India's GNP in the said period was 310 US dollars<sup>52</sup>. India's exports to Bangladesh in 1992-93 were valued at Rs. 1031 crores whereas imports from Bangladesh were Rs. 35 crores only. In 1993-94 these were valued at Rs. 1249.69 crores and Rs. 56.09 crores respectively<sup>53</sup>. Therefore India is both politically and economically far superior to Bangladesh. Though this low status (reason 7) has not necessarily led to India's support to the insurgency movement in the CHT, still then it can be viewed as playing an indirect help to the Shanti Bahini to get some strength against the Bangladesh government. May be because of these reasons only the insurgency movement still continues even after more than two decades.

According to Gurr and Harff there is possibility of successful ethnic movements against 'autocratic regimes' if the modernized elite is leading the movement. However it has been not possible for us to know the socio-economic background of the insurgency leadership either on the basis of

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52. The World Bank World Tables 1994, The Johns Hopkins university press, London, p.125.

53. Annual Report 1994-95, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, p.4.

secondary documents or on the basis of primary documents. Interviews could not be conducted for various reasons. Given the exception of lack of proof of support from India and China and lack of information about the leadership we can fruitfully apply the Gurr & Harff model to understand the Chakma refugee problem.

# CHAPTER IV

## **IMPACT OF CHAKMA PROBLEM IN INDIA.**

The Chakmas are huddled together in the north-eastern states of India, which are in volatile situation due to intermittent insurgency movement. Any effort to study the impact of Chakma problem in India requires a critical endeavour encompassing all the three states of Mizoram, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh which accommodate a sizable number of Chakma people on their soil. The issues involving the Chakma tangle differ considerably in each of these three states because of the different status accorded to them in these states. Each case, therefore, necessitates separate discussion for a proper understanding of the matter.

### **THE CHAKMAS IN MIZORAM POLITICS**

Demagiri situated on the bank of river Karnaphuli, in the western part of Mizoram is inhabited by the Chakma tribals. The original name of Demagiri was changed to Tlabung after Mizoram became a union territory. A group of Chakma came over to Lushai hills (the present Mizoram) beyond the river Thega, an international river boundary between India and Bangladesh in the western border of Mizoram, when this part was dismembered from Bengal during the British rule. After the partition of the Indian sub-continent this became a part of Mizoram. During the British days the Chakmas used to seek permission to settle in the bordering villages



of the then East Bengal. Occasionally they were allowed to stay in the Mizo villages on the condition that the Chakmas would be considered as the subject of the hereditary chieftains of the villages. Until 1947 approximately 3000 Chakma got the approval to settle down but post independence period saw a considerable number of infiltration due to certain amount of slackness in the restriction of their entry. Ultimately, on account of the vote catching game of some politicians, a separate district council was carved out for the Chakmas on the periphery of Bangladesh border when Mizoram's status was upgraded to a union territory in 1971<sup>1</sup>. The Mizo district council was dissolved and the Pawi-Lakher Regional Council in the southern Chhimtuipuri district was reorganised in to three council of Chakma, Lakher and Pawi. The creation of Chakma District Council has been a sore point with the Mizo politicians, mostly Christians, who have invariably proclaimed that this arrangement was effected solely due to the wrong policies of the then authorities, to accommodate foreign nationals from the adjoining CHT in Bangladesh. <sup>2</sup> Apprehending that the Chakmas might overwhelm them in their own land, the foreigner issue continued to cast its ominous shadow during the People's Conference rule causing great mental distress to the Chakmas. In the 4th General Assembly Election in Mizoram, the People's Conference did not field its candidate from Chawngte and Demagiri constituencies where Chakmas are predominant.

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- 1 1. Talukdar, S.P., *The Chakmas: Life and Struggle*, Gian Publishing House, Delhi, 1988, p. 78.
- 2 The Statesman, 27th December, 1995.

In Mizoram politics Chakmas hold a lot of importance for the Congress (I) for which they have always voted, assuring two seats to the assembly. This makes things complicated for Chief Minister Lalthanhawla. If he continues the campaign against the Chakma his party will lose their support. And if he is soft on them, the opposition will exploit the situation to rouse Mizo ethnic passions. The election campaign of Congress (I) got the boost with the dramatic visit of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to Chakma concentrated areas namely Chawngte and Demagiri, and hypnotizing the simple illetrate Chakma voters. The Congress (I) got the absolute majority to form the government in 1984. Immediately after becoming the Chief Minister, Lalthanhawla announced that the first& foremost task before his government would and be nothing but the detection and deportation of foreign nationals.

The Chakmas, on the other hand, claim that they are the original inhabitants of Mizo hills. Krista Mohan Chakma, President of District Congress (I) Committee empathically put forward his argument that records of the British and pre-British period proves#The Chakma are loyal to India. After capturing political power the Mizos followed a policy of deprivation and denial against the Chakmas. The Mizo national Front (MNF) have killed 139 Chakmas, kidnapped 30 and burnt 48 of their villages<sup>3</sup>. But contrary to this argument People's Conference leader

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3. Gupta, Shekhar, 'Mizoram Crisis,' India Today, June 15, 1984

Brigadier Thenphunga Sailo asserted that the region around Demagiri is being increasingly inhabited by the Chakma tribals infiltrating from the neighbouring CHT of Bangladesh. Writing a letter to the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, Brigadier Sailo maintained that because the situation is ominous, the peace loving Mizos are taking resort to agitation. Very often to get rid of the situation, the Mizo students have threatened to launch an Assam-type anti-foreign movement against the Chakmas.

Mizoram became the 23rd state of the Indian Union on 20th February 1987 by an agreement signed on 30th June 1986 between the Mizo National Front President Laldenga and the Union Government, paving the way for establishing peace in the two decade insurgency infested state. In the Assembly election held in 1987 the Chakma voters once again voted in favour of the Congress (I) even though the latter failed to come power. But the party still heavily banks on this tribal community to secure six seats of this region in the 40 member state Assembly.

Hostile attitude still persists against the Chakmas of Mizoram. An accusing finger was pointed at Nirupam Chakma, a Minister in the Lalthanhawla's cabinet in 1995, by a People's Conference member in the last session of the Assembly. That a minister was branded as a 'foreigner' that too in the Assembly, betrays the hostile feeling the Mizos have towards the Chakma refugees. Incidentally, Nirupam Chakma who represents Chawngte Assembly constituency, had won the seat in 1989 also. Every

Chakma is looked out suspiciously by the dominant Mizos.<sup>4</sup>

Though they constitute only 7 per cent of the total population of the state, their socio-economic development has been retarded and could not keep pace with the aspirations of the emerging elite amongst the Chakmas. Along with this there has always been a sense of distrust between the Chakmas and the dominant formation in the state. Coupled with these the restrictions of the political representation and sharing of power between the Lakhers, the Pois and the Chakmas have complexed the situation further. Only because of these developments Chakma organizations have asked for the consolidation of all Chakma inhabited regions of Lunglei and Aizawl district put forward their demand for a separate administrative status so as to accelerate the development of their socio-economic conditions. But the dominant local population have expressed their reluctance to accept the Chakma demands apprehending the fact that like other states in the region heavy influx of Chakma refugees from Bangladesh may swamp the state and later on the Chakmas may dominate over them<sup>5</sup>.

#### **THE CHAKMA PROBLEM IN TRIPURA.**

The Chakmas have all along been a bone of contention between the authorities and local people. The Chakmas had to flee to Tripura in 1986

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4. Statesman, 27th December, 1995.

5. Gopalkrishnan, R., *Insurgent North-Eastern Region of India*, Vikash Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1995, pp. 108-9.

to escape persecution by the Bangladesh army and Bengali Muslim settlers. The first time this happened was in the late 70's and since then the people of Tripura have had to contend with the refugees . They had a two-year respite when all the refugees were repatriated to their home land in the Chittagong Hill Tracts in 1984 following talks between Indira Gandhi and General Ershad. Swamped by the 1986 influx, the Government set up six permanent camps for them- in Karbook, Pancharampara, Silachherri, Takumbari and Lebachhera in Amrapur sub-division, and one in Kanthalcherri in Subroom sub-division, of the South district<sup>6</sup>.

From the hill top they look like a swarm of ants. The luckier ones have a shed above their heads, while the rest huddle in pits covered with dirty plastic. They are strangers in their own land, not just landless but homeless too, not only homeless but nationless as well. Life for them is sheer survival, stark and mirthless.

The tide of refugees crossing over into the bordering Tripura and Mizoram continued unabated. In May 1986, a major influx saw about 40,000 Chakmas seeking refuge in five camps set up in South Tripura. By May 1989, their numbers swelled to around 70,000. Because of this there is trouble in the Tripura border, with Dhaka accusing India of involvement in an alleged attack on one of its border out post. It is nevertheless, the direct

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6. Ganguly, Tapas, 'Vanishing Act,' *The Week*, April 2, 1995, p. 22.

result of repression of Buddhist Chakma tribal in the CHT, who have been resisting the Bangladesh Government's systematic attempt to settle plainsmen on their land. India, of course, can not interfere in the internal affairs of another country, rather it can show all its sympathy for the plight of helpless minority in its neighbourhood. But if the victims of oppression cross the border in large numbers, it dose cause a problem to this country. This is what happening along the South Tripura border. This volume and composition of the tribal influx into Tripura is a clear indication that the armed forces of Bangladesh are in desperate mood. There has been a qualitative change from the small trickle of refugees crossing the border in earlier periods to floods of people fleeing from army atrocities in different phases. Due to humanitarian and moral ground the Indian Government accommodated them in six permanent camps specially set up for the refugees in the southern part of Tripura. In the hope of segregating the refugees from the local population, the Government provided them free ration, medical assistance and education at the camps. But now the Chakmas are encountering starvation conditions because of the decision by the Central Governments to completely stop financial assistance for the relief of Chakma refugees herded in six crowded camps in Tripura. Without giving any notice beforehand the Central Government took resort to this extreme step. Until 1993 the Tripura Government has spent Rs. 1.92 crore to look after the Chakmas but the state on its own cannot indefinitely support such a large refugee population.

## REDUCED RATIONS

It seems New Delhi has applied the screw effectively. The usual ration cycle was 10 days. But this has now gone up to 20 days or more. At present, a Chakma adult gets only 400 grams of poor quality rice for food and the children get 200 grams. Even though there is not much to cook, no edible oil is supplied to cook their food. When it is available, they are entitled to get 50 gms of dry fish and 10 gms of pepper as well as 10 gms of salt per day. Depending on the availability of supply 20 gms. of pulses is provided to them. Even for the new born babies numbering more than 4000 there is no supply of milk powder, what to talk about providing it to others. While, earlier they used to get some amount, though negligible, for purchasing firewood and pocket money, the cash dole has been stopped since December 1992 along with the usual supply of dry fish. While the supply of pepper was reduced since October 16, 1992, from January 1, 1993 there is no supply of oil at all. In this context provision of coconut hair oil, an unthinkable luxury, was stopped in March 1993.<sup>7</sup>

Upendra Lal Chakma, a former M.P. of Bangladesh Parliament and president of the Chakma Refugee Welfare Association accused the government of following this policy deliberately. He alleged that since the ration cycle was increased and the supplies themselves were reduced, it

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7. *The Hindustan Times*, September 13, 1993.

had become common for the tribals to go around half-fed and hungry most of the time. Because of this malnutrition and related diseases are common, making the children look shrivelling. Various Chakma organisations have pleaded to the Central Government not to employ food as a weapon to compel the tribals indirectly to go back to Bangladesh. While beseeching the Central Government to maintain at least minimum international standards for refugee relief, they suggested to seek the help of UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) in case of necessity. But New Delhi is of the opinion that if the UNCHR is made to involve in refugee care in India that would be a signal to the persecuted minorities and other oppressed people in the neighbouring countries to flock these camps in India. Therefore, the Central Government which never expressed its inhibition to securing such assistance for Tamil refugees from Srilanka, has somehow always objected the same facilities for the Chakmas.

In the meantime, sanitary conditions are increasingly deteriorating and accommodation is proving scare as since 1986 when the major influx took place, the camps consisting of bamboo huts, have not been renovated. There is acute scarcity of water though a few deep tubewells had been sunk. There is inadequate medical facilities making the situation worse. Despite the miseries of the camp life and the soul destroying dependence on official helps and that too from a foreign authority, these unfortunate victims of partition and the subsequent land hunger in Bangladesh seem to have no alternative but to accept dispossession and deprivation. Because



the fresh refugees are not registered in the campus, often the other inmates share their rations with the new comers.

Interestingly, within the small space of their compound, the refugees have started growing different kinds of vegetables. After all, the Chakma people are well known for their good agricultural stint. Even quite a good number of people have chickens and several families have cows in their possession. Even though they are in an alien land facing all sorts of difficulties, they observe their social and religious customs in the camps. Schools up to higher secondary stages have been set up, with the qualified refugees being appointed as teachers and paid remuneration for their work. White children usually got school uniform and books from time to time, cloths were supplied to the refugees once in a year. Curiously, some of the refugees have started their age old practice of weaving and wicker work.<sup>8</sup>

Since there is no restriction on the movement of the refugees, the restive refugees slowly began taking uncertain steps into the nearby villages until one day the government realized that over 22,000 of the 70,000 odd refugees were missing. A clue to where they have gone can be made out from the ever changing demographic profile of Tripura. They have simply vanished to be merged with the local population. It is very difficult to hound them out because many of them have settled down in Tripura having married into the local communities. Furthermore, to distinguish between a Chakma

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8. *National Herald*, New Delhi., 22 June, 1989.

and a native is not an easy task because they look alike and speak the same language. But this has created some socio-economic tension in the area. The refugees pose a problem for the local people because they work as cheap labourers far below the wage rate fixed by the Government much to the chagrin of the local tribals. The forest wealth is being adversely affected as the refugees themselves cut bamboos and other wood for fire. Even the common allegation of the local people is that the Chakmas women are taking to prostitution to make money. Tension between the refugees and local tribals is brewing for several years because of these socio-economic issues. Tripura is already in the grip of an explosive insurgency problem generated by the rebel Tribal National Volunteers (TNV). The Chakma problem can evolve into a "Potential time-bomb" unless it is tackled effectively.

### **THE CHAKMA PROBLEM IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH**

Arunachal Pradesh, which was untouched by the insurgency problem that has shocked the border states in region, had been the most stable and peaceful of the seven sisters of the North-East. But, today the situation is fast changing due to the anti-foreigner agitation spear-headed by All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union (AAPSU). The AAPSU suddenly woke up to the consequential change in the States population structure having an adverse impact on the political, cultural and economic life and has now raised the demand that the Chakmas must quit Arunachal. Whatever may be the status of illegal migrants in Assam, the current anti-Chakma agitation

in Arunachal Pradesh needs to be viewed closely before the Chakmas are rendered “Stateless” citizens.

Most of the Chakmas currently settled in Arunachal Pradesh came to India in 1964, when they were displaced from the Kaptai hydro electric project in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) constructed by the then Pakistani government in the early sixties. After crossing over to India, they were accommodated in a Government camp at Ledo in Dibrugarh district of Assam. But latter on they were shifted to North Eastern Frontier Agency (NEFA), which was a part of Assam at that time but constitutes the present day Arunachal Pradesh. Mahavir Tyagi who was the then Union Minister for Rehabilitation, Government of India, visited the camps and offered the schemes for rehabilitating the refugees keeping in mind the miserable life of the camp dwellers. As an option for rehabilitation Chakmas were given the places like Andaman and Nicobar islands, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and NEFA. Since Tripura and West Bengal were already full with Bengali refugees, the natural choice of the Chakmas fell on NEFA given the similar geographical and cultural moorings. After a negotiation was struck between the representatives of the then refugees, the Government of India and the local tribal leaders the refugees were transported into the interiors of NEFA by the Government of India. The Chakmas were mainly rehabilitated in three districts- Lohit, Subansiri( Now Papumpare) and Tirap (Changlang) in Arunachal Pradesh. In 1966, the Chakma Resettlement Scheme was drawn up by the State Government for these refugees. After the earmarking

areas for this purpose they were asked to move to these areas. While in Papumpare 18 Bighas of land per family was provided, in Changlang and Lohit Districts each family was allotted 5 acres of land. Initially they had to work hard since the lands they were settled in were predominantly hilly, unirrigated and sandy. But by dint of their untiring effort they managed to convert them to cultivable area. Besides being resettled, Chakmas enjoyed all the rights of citizen. They were endowed with land deeds, issued ration cards, given admission in schools, absorbed in Government jobs and even exercised right to vote in various elections including the State Assembly election. They merged into the Indian scenario without any apparent dislocation. Since the local tribes were party to the settlement, evidently had not grudged these people much.

### **GENESIS OF THE PROBLEM**

The Chakma problem started since the time NEFA was bifurcated and Arunachal Pradesh became a Union Territory. For a variety of reasons the locals became hostile towards the Chakmas. By the late seventies the situation started worsening and the facilities provided to the Chakma settlers were withdrawn slowly. In 1976 the real problem for them commenced when, all of a sudden, the Chakma students enjoying free education, stipend, scholarship and free books, were deprived of these facilities. To great dismay, admission to the Chakmas in different schools were denied blatantly, rather their seats were allotted to the native tribals. In the late seventies and early eighties, when the foreigners issue was at

its peak in Assam, AAPSU chose to be vocal on this matter. In this sense, the anti-foreigner agitation in Arunachal Pradesh is nothing but a spill over effect from Assam. The Chakmas and Hajongs became the easy prey of this drive as there were no Bengali Muslims in Arunachal to be thrown out of the state.

With the banning of Chakmas and Hajongs, along with Yobins and Tibetans, from public employment in 1980, began the saga of a well organised operation of 'de-Indianization' of these people by the state Government. In an utter disregard to the sentiment of these people, the Government order of September 29, 1980 stated that those persons already in Government service may continue without their posts being made permanent. Through an official notification in 1991, issuing of trade licences and ration cards were cancelled. While in February they were stripped off the facilities of Public Distribution System, all other facilities including that of health care were withdrawn in September 1994. Even the Chakma village headmen, who usually enjoyed administrative and judicial powers were not spared. Thus, by and by the State Government devoured all the rights of the Chakma tribes through the deliberate policies of deprivation.

But the situation took an ugly turn when the AAPSU issued at notice to all the foreigners including the Chakmas and Hajongs to leave the state by 30th September 1994. The harassment which led to the exodus of the

Chakmas, began with 2000 of them fleeing Kokila in August, following the anti-Chakma rally organised by the AAPSU on August 21, 1994. Although the AAPSU's demand to detect and deport all "Foreigners" including the 60,000 Chakmas, the Tibetans, the Hajongs and Yobins from Arunachal is more than a decade old, they made a determined bid to pursue their goal only in 1994. In the month of May 1994, the AAPSU after holding a rally in New Delhi submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister condemning the Central Government for making Arunachal Pradesh a dumping ground and pasture land for illegal migrants and refugees<sup>9</sup>.

Takan Sanjay, President of AAPSU, has claimed that about 25000 Chakmas have already left the state in response to the union's quit notice. But it is difficult to assume their whereabouts considering the surrounding where they exist. Because of the strict vigilance on the part of the Chinese government, it is very difficult for the refugees to cross over to northern part. Apart from this, in order to reach a new place of refuge they will have to pass through Assam. Anticipating the infiltration of the Chakmas from the neighbouring state of Arunachal the Assam Government issued a shoot-at sight order to prevent any sort of illegal crossing from that state<sup>10</sup>. The Chief Minister of Assam Hiteswar Saikia gave this harsh order to impose the ban on the Chakma to ensure that his state was not converted in

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9. *The Hindustan times*, 25th September, 1994.

10. *Statesman*, Calcutta, 26th October, 1994.

to a 'dumping ground' for foreigners from neighbouring states. But his decision to impose night curfew along the states of borders and strengthening security along the inter state border to push back those fleeing the neighbouring states has apparently irked his counterparts in these states. The most peeved was Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister, Gegong Apang who agreed that because of geographical location it is Assam's job to push the Chakmas, Hajongs and others back to Bangladesh. But Saikia took this step so as not to repeat the Meghalaya-like situation of 1990 when the Khasis had driven out a large number of Nepalis to be dumped in Assam.<sup>11</sup>

#### REASONS THAT INCITED THE AGITATION

The most important reason that acted as a catalyst to the anti-foreigner movement is the July 7, 1994 letter from Union Home Minister of State P.M. Sayeed to a Member of Parliament from Arunachal, Noydek Yanggam. In that letter the minister stated that "during the debate in the Rajya Sabha on 27th June, 1994 you had raised the matter regarding repatriation of Chakma/Hajong, Tibetan and Yobin refugees from Arunachal Pradesh. We have examined the matter in detail and find that the Chakma/Hajong, Tibetan and Yobin refugees were settled in Arunachal Pradesh in consultation with the then NEFA Administration (now Arunachal Pradesh). Under the

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11. Karmakar, Rahul, 'Assam : Dumping Ground?' *Rastriya Sahara*, December 1994, p. 26.

Indira-Mujib Agreement of 1972, it was decided that the Chakma/Hajong refugees who came to India from the erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) before 25-3-71 will be considered for grant of Indian citizenship<sup>12</sup>. This whipped up the hysteria against the 'foreigners' prompting the AAPSU to issue quit notice on 1st August to all infiltrators in the state.

The reason for which Chief Minister Gegong Apang has openly endorsed the AAPSU demand for throwing the Chakmas out of the state is entirely political who had in mind the 1995 February Assembly election. Prior to during his 15 years enjoyment of seat of power at Itanagar Apang had never showed any distress even casually against the Chakma refugees. When the then Union Minister of State Prem Thangon and his supporter Omen Deuri were appointed as the members of the Congress working Committee(CWC) by the All India Congress Committee(AIICC) president P.V. Narsimha Rao to oversee the selection of Congress(I) candidates for the state Assembly election, that peeved Apang because that hindered his unbridled power. Eventhough, there was no strong opposition party to challenge the congress (I), the threat to his authority came from his party circle. To nip this challenge in the bud, he strived for wooing the APPSU to boost his position by extending all out support to this agitation.

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12. Letter of P. M. Sayeed , Minister of State (States), Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, to Nyodek Yanggam Member of Parliament, 7th July, 1994.



## CHAKMAS AND THE CITIZENSHIP ISSUE

The Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh do not consider their situation the same as that of their counterparts in Tripura, some of whom were deported to Bangladesh recently. According to the People's Rights organization, even though the Chakmas are settled in Arunachal for well over 30 years, they have had to encounter untold suffering, humiliations, persecutions and uncertainties over the past two decades. They assail the present law of citizenship as unreasonable and discriminatory against the Chakmas.

Section 6-A of the Indian Citizenship Act confers citizenship on all persons of Indian origin who came to Assam before January 1, 1966. At that time Arunachal Pradesh was a part of Assam. But the Indian Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 1985 granted citizenship to those people who had come to Assam as constituted immediately before the amendment. As Arunachal was no longer a part of Assam by that time, it deprived the citizenship rights legally to the Chakmas. If people settled in Assam before the cut off year could be granted citizenship, logically, the Chakmas who were settled before the cut off do have a point to grudge upon. With a top view to help Chakmas settled in Arunachal Pradesh, the Minister of State for Home Affairs Government of India, M.M. Jacob informed the Lok Sabha on February 27th 1992 that the Chakma had been recognised as Scheduled Tribes. In a letter to Lalita Umbray, M.P., he clearly mentioned that "Being "new migrants" viz.,

refugees from Bangladesh who came to India between 1964 and 1971 (25th March, 1971), they are eligible to the grant of citizenship according to the policy of the Government on the subject and most of these migrants have already been granted citizenship.”<sup>13</sup> On his part, the then opposition leader L.K. Advani is reported to have written to the Prime Minister on March 4, 1992, that justice was due to the Chakmas of Arunachal. Somnath Chatterjee, M.P., had also written to the Prime minister asking why the Chakmas were being denied employment, trade licences, rations cards and education. He reminded the Prime minister that these people who had been deprived of minimum facilities that the citizens of the country were entitled to enjoy.<sup>14</sup>

Going by the Indira-Mujib pact of 1972 and by the policy decision of the Central Government to grant citizenship to those migrants who came to India before march 25, 1971, the Chakmas of Arunachal are undoubtedly eligible for getting citizenship for they came to India well before 1971. But the Chakmas are aliens, if one goes strictly by the law. Even, in the Khudiram Chakma vs the State of Arunachal Civil Appeal Case, 1993, the Supreme court ruled that the Chakmas are foreigners. It is perhaps, because of this legal barrier, the Centre is dilly-dallying in conferring citizenship to the Chakmas in compliance with the decisions on migrants who come to

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13. Letter of M.M. Jacob, Minister of State for Home and Parliamentary Affairs, Govt. of India, to Lalita Umbray, Member of Parliament, 23 September, 1992.

14. The Hindustan Times, 25th September, 1994.

India before 1971. Therefore, it has been a familiar story for the Chakmas who are unwanted in Arunachal too which has become their home for the last 30 years.

While defending the actions of State Government Chief Minister G e gong Apang put forward the arguments that the Chakmas came to Arunachal when it was called NEFA and was a part of Assam . They were brought into the state without the consent of the state and because the Inner Line Regulations of 1983 is applicable to Arunachal, the Chakmas are entitled to stay in the state. But this seems to be contradictory when it is compared with the tripartite agreement that enabled the migrants to settle down in the then NEFA. Luckily, great relief was brought to this beleaguered community when the Supreme Court directed the Government of Arunachal Pradesh "to ensure that the Chakma refugees living within its territory were not evicted or otherwise harassed by any groups or agencies"<sup>15</sup>.

It is a crying shame that while lakhs of illegal migrants simply walked into the Indian territory as recently as the late eighties could manage to settle down almost becoming a part of the local landscape in several of our big towns and cities, the Chakmas have been meted out such a raw deal. Due to their small number they can neither motivate nor formulate an attractive vote bank for the unscrupulous power-hungry politicians. On the other hand, as their wont,

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15. *The Hindustan Times*, 12th January, 1996.

they are peace loving community incapable of applying force to achieve their goal which is the common practice of many of the north-eastern tribes.

The problem of the Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh can not be considered as an isolated phenomenon from that of the Chakma refugees in Tripura, who came to India much latter. Constant efforts have been made to send the Chakma refugees in Tripura to the CHT as they have never been treated as Indian citizens, neither did ever they claim to be so nor has the Tripura Government specified to accept them as Indian citizens. On the contrary repatriation of the Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh does not arise because Bangladesh would never agree to accept them as its citizen like the CHT Chakmas who are accommodated in the refugee camps of South Tripura.

“Citizenship is a most precious right,” ruled as US court in 1963 in the course of the Kennedy vs Mendoza-Martinez case. In this context, the Chakmas of Arunachal Pradesh who have been fighting for this right for more than last 30 years, seem to have entered the most decisive phase of their struggle. While the citizens enjoy full civil and political rights, aliens are deprived of them. Only citizens, as per the Indian constitution, are conferred the right to suffrage for the election to the house of the people (of the Union) and the Legislative Assembly of every state (Article 326). The Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh used to enjoy the civil rights like

employment, educational facilities, scholarships, rations cards etc. Even some of them have exercised their voting rights in Anchal Samiti and State Assembly elections, which an Indian citizen alone can enjoy. Though the constitution did not intend to lay down a permanent or comprehensive law relating to citizenship in India, it left the entire law of citizenship to be regulated by future law made by Parliament. Therefore section 6-A of the Indian Citizenship Act, which confers citizenship on all persons of Indian origin, who came to Assam before January 1, 1956, is also legally applicable to the Chakmas because at that time NEFA (Arunachal Pradesh) was a part of Assam. Birth is one of the various modes for acquisition of citizenship prescribed by the Citizenship Act, 1955, thereby "every person born in India on or after January 26, 1950, shall be a citizen of India by birth"<sup>16</sup> Even the Central Government, in case of Chakma refugee, admitted that, as large proportion of these refugees would have been born in India and therefore, would be automatically entitled to the grant of citizenship. Apart from this the Indira-Mujib pact of 1972 entitles citizenship to those migrants who came to India before March 25, 1971. All these above mentioned view points indicate a strong point in favour of the Chakmas. That is why unarguably citizenship right should be conferred on the Chakmas of Arunachal Pradesh, Those who feel that it will open the flood gates of chaos and confusion, because many other refugees would ask for

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16. Basu, D.D. *Introduction to the Constitutions of India*, Prentice-Hall of India Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1992, p. 74.

this right, should take into consideration the fact that the Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh enjoyed different status since the beginning of their settlements. Only because of the game plan of certain vested interest politicians the matter took a complex turn. On the contrary there is no obligation on the part of the Government of India to endow other refugees the citizenship right because they are always treated as refugees and no agreement is signed in this regard to treat them as citizen. Even the Supreme Court in its January 9, 1996 directive has asked the Chakmas to apply for Indian citizenship, but most of the refugees are yet to get hold of the forms.

Given the present fluid situation at the centre with only the BJP taking a helpful stand towards the Chakmas, Northeast observers do not expect the Deve Gowda Government exerting itself to solve the ethnic tangle.<sup>17</sup> Finding the solution to the problem should not be an impossible task if both the States and Central Government work cooperatively for this purpose. It is highly unrealistic to assume that any other state in India would accept to rehabilitate them. With a plethora of seemingly insoluble issues such as the influx of an unending stream of illegal migrants from Bangladesh, the rising tide of anti non-Hillmen agitation in Meghalaya and Mizoram and the explosive nature of the electoral lists in Assam and now the Arunachal anti-Chakma stir, it has become necessary to chalk out a blue print for the solution of the North-East's persistent problem.

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17. Biswas, Ashis K., 'Alien Rumbings', *Outlook*, July 24, 1996, p.17.

# CHAPTER V

## CHAKMAS AND INDO-BANGLADESH DIPLOMACY

Bangladesh emerged on the world map as a sovereign independent country in December 1971, with the whole-hearted material and moral help of India. As far as the role of India in the liberation struggle was concerned, it was based on certain principles. The Indian government observed the whole scene with patience and used every weapon from its armoury to bring about a political solution of the issue. Both the countries fought shoulder to shoulder against the Pakistani army to liberate Bangladesh. The bilateral relations started very cordially for both the countries and India also participated very actively to rebuild the nation's shattered economy.

But the euphoria did not last long. Even before the virtual assassination of Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman, relations between the two neighbours took a nose-dive in March 1972 when grumblings were heard among the political circles in Bangladesh over the just-concluded Indo-Bangladesh Trade Pact. After the overthrow of Mujib the successive governments have been following a pro-Pakistan and anti-Indian policies. Of the various issues responsible for deteriorating Indo-Bangladesh relations construction and commission of a dam at Farakha in West Bengal, about 11 miles from Bangladesh, has perhaps attracted the most attention from the world. While India maintains that it needs the barrage for the purpose of flushing the



Hoogly river to make it free from silt and therefore keep the port of Calcutta operational, Bangladesh claims that since the Ganges is an international river India must respect Bangladesh's demand as a lower riparian for a share in the Ganges water which is so vital for its south-western districts.

Indo-Bangladesh relations took a further downward turn on November 4, 1979 when sporadic firings broke out between Indian Border Security Force (BSF) and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) in the Belonia sector. The 1974 Land Demarcation Agreement defined the midstream of the Muhuri river as the permanent boundary between both the countries, even if the river changed its course. However, the dispute continues because India did not ratify this since long.

The annexation of a newly emerged island New Moore Island (also known as Purbasha) in the Bay of Bengal by India has not only further embittered Indo-Bangladesh relations but has also enabled to form an intense anti Indian public opinion in Bangladesh. The tip of the new island about 24 by 12 kilometers, situated in the mouth of river Hariya Bhanga, was first noticed by India in 1971. While Bangladesh has staked its claim to the island India categorically held the island to be part of Indian territory.

Apart from this the influx of innumerable illegal migrants from Bangladesh who mostly come in search of economic avenues has soured the relations further. Along with this migration has occurred the influx of Chakma refugees who are fleeing from their homeland in the Chittagong

Hill Tracts (CHT) to escape the suppression of the successive Bangladesh regimes. Since the mid 70s the spurt of violence in the CHT has displaced scores of Chakma tribals from their land and the Chakmas have always crossed over the border to seek refuge in the north-eastern part of India. Since both India and Bangladesh have failed to resolve this Chakma tangle it has further soured the bilateral relations between the two countries. As the issue still remains a matter of dispute between the two neighbours it requires a separate discussion regarding their efforts to tackle the situation.

### **POLICIES OF BANGLADESH**

Since the inception of Bangladesh, the Chakmas have been facing the wrath of various successive leadership due to their separate identity. Mujib regime perpetrated all sorts of atrocities among this ethnic national minority so as to assimilate them in the dominant Bengali nationalism. Mujib took every possible steps to deprive them the freedom and separate identity which they had been enjoying since time immemorial. In the name of development large scale displacement took place without rehabilitating the tribals properly. Large scale settlement of the non-tribals in the CHT was undertaken by both Mujib and Zia-ur-Rahman governments. In the pretext of wiping out insurgency of the shanti Bahini, security forces stormed Chakma villages causing massive human rights violations. Since this has already been discussed in the previous chapter an attempt has been made to study the issue of later periods.

President H.M.Ershad's government annulled the controversial CHT Regulations, 1900 which provided a separate administrative status to the area and restored some conventional facilities for the tribal chiefs, the headmen and the hillmen in general by enactments in the hill districts of Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban. Though President Ershad's efforts did not restore the special status, certain amount of autonomy was granted to the CHT. As per the provisions, chairmen of the three district councils were to be from among the tribesmen who would have enough powers to rule their areas having the competence to transfer police officials up to the rank of assistant sub-inspectors. Accordingly elections were to be held for the three district councils at Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban of the CHT. But these ensuing elections were being opposed by the Jana Samhati Samiti (JSS) because of several reasons. Provisions of tribal autonomy were drastically infringed under Rules 22, 53, 56, 62, 69, 77, 78 and 79 in the present Zila Parishad Act. The Parishad is simply a developmental institution. It has been mentioned under rule 62 of the Zila Parishad Act that police personnel ranging from constable upto the rank of assistant sub-inspector in the district shall be appointed by the Zila Parishad in discharging their duties. But, since the Zila Parishad has practically been not granted any administrative power in regard to maintenance of law and order in the district, this rule concerning control of police administration is self-contradictory.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Statesman, New Delhi, 2 June, 1989.

Apart from that, under rule 53 of the Zila Parishad Act, the Bangladesh Government is omniscient to dismiss the elected Zila Parishad at any moment on the pretext of 'failure to dispense with duties and responsibilities or working against the interest of the people or misuse of power'. No legal challenge can be entertained against the concerned order if the Parishad is dismissed. Rules 67, 68 and 69 of the Zila Parishad Act virtually cripple the Parishad by forbidding it to make rules, regulations, by-laws independently in the interest of the tribal people. Unlike the CHT Regulations of 1900, the enactment does not protect the tribals' right on land. Rule 64 of the Act reads that without the prior consent of the Zila Parishad, no land under the jurisdiction of it shall be handed over for settlement to a non-resident of the district. But the condition attached to it makes the rule defunct. The condition states that this rule shall not be applicable in the case of protected and reserved forests, Kaptai hydel project area, satellite station area at Betbunia, State industrial areas, in case of land that has already been handed over or provided for rehabilitating non-tribals from the plains and any other area that may be required by the government from time to time. Since only 10 per cent of the total area would remain directly under the control of the Zila Parishad, the Chakmas apprehend that the rest 90 per cent tribals would become landless due to this rule 64. Thus the Parishad has no authority to control the thriving non-tribal settlers in the forest areas. The Act also does not have any provision to safeguard tribal rights on economy or to preserve tribal religion and cultural heritage.

Furthermore to curtail the power of the Chakmas, in the pattern of allocation of seats of the three district councils, each having 31 seats, the government followed a separate policy. Out of the total 93 seats, 30 were reserved for non-tribal resettlers, 20 each for the Chakma and Marma clans followed by ethnic groups Tripura (8), Tangchangyas, including the Lushai, Bawn, Pankho, Khiyang, Kumi and Chak (1 each). Obviously, the non-tribals and pro-government tribal nominees will dominate the proceedings in all the councils. That is why in the October 1994, three CHT MPs belonging to the Awami League asked the government to suspend all the operations of the Local Government Councils in these three districts instead of further extending their duration by promulgating another ordinance. They alleged that former autocratic Ershad regime introduced the Local Government Councils in the Hill Tract districts which the local people never accepted. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) government after coming to power, politicised these institutions by converting the chairmen of these three district councils into BNP controlled bodies. The authorities simply use it for their own benefit through manipulation without strengthening these institutions at all. These moves are nothing but a discredit to the tribals by proving that they are not capable of running local government institution? A former M.P from President Ershad's Jatiya Dal, Upendra Lal Chakma, asserted that the district councils created by the Bangladesh Government were nothing except a house employed for

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2. Public Opinion Trend (POT), Bangladesh Series, Vol. XIX, No. 250, Nov. 15, 1994, p. 1007.

legitimizing the presence of over 4 lakhs plainland infiltrators in illegal possession of tribal land. The most unfortunate matter is that though the three hill districts hardly enjoy any autonomy at present, yet Dhaka is fond of telling the world about its decentralization of power in favour of the tribals in the CHT. The Chairmen in the three district councils are tribals no doubt but these structures are mere development agencies which can be dissolved by the administration at any point of time. Moreover, the District Council Act provides no guarantee at all to the hill men protection of their land and protection against infiltration of non-tribals from the plains.

Until Ershad's arrival in the seat of power in Bangladesh, none of his predecessors made any effort to ease tension between the two antagonistic adversaries- the Chakmas and the Muslim Bengalis, with the active support of the government authorities. To initiate a dialogue to solve this vexed issue, Ershad declared the first general amnesty in 1991, responding which some Shanti Bahini activists surrendered before the government so as to start the peace process. To further the peace process ahead Ershad's government launched a special five year plan for the CHT envisaging an expenditure of 263 crore taka. The 19 project plan included road building, telecommunication service, integrated afforestation, pulp wood plantation, fishery and cottage industry, education and tourism. Nevertheless, the Hill Tracts looked better than the earlier years, the development programmes were looked upon suspiciously by the hill tribals. They considered the upliftment of road works was meant for the swift movement of the troops

to continue their atrocities on the Chakmas. The tribals lot could not be improved because the beneficiaries were non other than the Bengali settlers whom the tribals despise the most due to their occupation of tribal land. As a result no substantial gain occurred in the peace process initiated by President Ershad.

The process which was left incomplete was carried on by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, who succeeded Ershad after a political turmoil. She offered for a dialogue to work out a solution for the long standing problem. In response to her offer the Shanti Bahini declared a unilateral cease-fire on August 10, 1992 to pave the way. In a marked shift in policy of dealing with Chakmas through counter-insurgency and military operations, the Bangladesh government in July 1992 formed a nine member committee to find out a political solution of the Chakma problem. Begum Zia herself visited the hill tracts and offered talks with the militants to bring about a settlement. Even the Jana Sanghati Samiti, the political wing of Shanti Bahini, also participated in the dialogue. The Bangladesh government postponed the scheduled elections to the three district hill councils as per the demand of the guerillas.<sup>3</sup> The Hill councils, which were created by the deposed president Ershad in 1989, were looked upon by the tribals as a conspiracy to divide the tribal population. Till last year seven round of talks were held at the high powered committee level and another few rounds

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3. Patriot, May 6, 1993.

at the sub-committee level between the two sides. The progress were no doubt slow but the discussions were moving in the right direction given the complexities involved in the issue. But the process got a setback due to various developments including the arrest of several insurgents.<sup>4</sup>

In the meantime, both the security forces and guerillas are engaged in occasional hide and seek game. The Shanti Bahini activists, though insist that their members are no longer engaged in subversive activities, continued their bush war occasionally looting and kidnapping several persons to accumulate a good amount to buy arms and ammunitions. The security forces also have carried out several reprisal raids on tribal villages in the pretext of combing operations. The ultimate sufferers are the innocent Chakma villagers of course. In order to continue the dialogue the government released four activist of the shanti Bahini in May 1996. The JSS on different occasions had been demanding the release of 15 guerillas who were captured by the security forces. The Shanti Bahini leaders, on their part, have agreed to extend the cease-fire in the CHT till July 31, 1996 in a bid to continue peace process. The agreement came in response to the proposal sent in the last week of June by the government for extension of the cease-fire till September 30, 1996. The ongoing cease-fire was due to expire on June 30, 1996. The cease-fire has been extended in the CHT for 24 times since the declaration of the first cease-fire on August 10, 1992.

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4. POT, Vol.XX, No.96, May 26, 1995, p.382.



Meanwhile, the Shanti Bahini leaders have urged the newly installed Sheikh Hasina Wazed government to set up a Parliamentary Committee for CHT to continue peace talks for finding out a political solution to the CHT problem.<sup>5</sup>

### **INDIAN RESPONSE AND THE REPATRIATION OF CHAKMAS**

On several occasions Bangladesh has accused India of preventing Chakma tribal refugees from returning home from the camps in Tripura, and also of providing sanctuary to the Chakma rebels who have been fighting a bush war for autonomy of CHT. But India has, in clear terms, denied all these allegations. Though JSS leaders are allowed to carry on their political activities, India has so far not allowed any training camps in its territory for the guerrillas. India is undoubtedly the worst sufferer in this problem which could well have been spent Rs.64 crores until 1995 on their maintenance through officials at the district level. Since there is no central agency to oversee the use of funds, there is ample opportunity for mismanagement. But inspite of this it has put severe financial strain in the Centre which repeatedly refuses to seek the help of the UNHCR to look after the refugees. Beside due to their presence there is socio-economic tension in the north-eastern region which is already infected with insurgence and ethnic problems making the situation further complicated.

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5. POT, Vol.XXI, No. 149, July 9, 1996, p.650

A section of the leadership in New Delhi favoured to involve UNHCR for bearing the burden. But this is strongly opposed by another section which feels that the price India will have to pay for such an involvement will be high and the move will lead to dangerous consequences. In this connection, the case of the Palestinian refugees is pointed out. For two generations these refugees have been living in permanent camps all over West Asia having a high potential to destabilize the countries of the region. While Bangladesh has been trying to internationalize several bilateral issues like sharing of Ganges water, India has maintained utmost restraint by not raising the Chakma refugee problem in any of the international platforms. But India should not abdicate its humanitarian responsibility by turning a Nelson's eye to the massive ethnic suppression of a hapless minority by the successive Bangladesh rulers.

Nevertheless, India has been making sincere efforts to solve this issue through bilateral dialogue with its neighbour. An understanding was arrived at between India and Bangladesh on the repatriation of Chakma and other tribal refugees now in Tripura during the visits of the Bangladesh Minister for Communications and of the Minister of State for External Affairs, Salman Khurshid, to Tripura on 8 and 9 May 1993. But the repatriation did not take off on June 9, 1993 because the refugees remained largely unconvinced about the assurances given by the government of Bangladesh about their security and safety in Bangladesh.<sup>6</sup> The rehabilitation package

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6. Annual Report 1993-94, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, pp.3-4.

offered to them was also not enough to convince the refugees. But not deterred by this process continued further. Director General level talks between Border Security Force and the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) were held in New Delhi from 10 to 14 January 1994 and in Dhaka from 9 to 12 November 1994. Several issues were discussed between the two sides, such as repair and maintenance of boundary pillars, cross border movements, illegal migration of Bangladesh into India, transborder crimes and repatriation of Chakma refugees from Tripura to Bangladesh. Due to this initiative a batch of 359 tribal refugees returned home on July 21, 1994, ending eight years of camp life in the Indian state of Tripura. At a simple ceremony, the Indian authorities handed over the refugees belonging to 69 families to Bangladesh officials at the Tabalchari-Shilichari border, about 50 km. from the Khagrachari district head quarter. Earlier in the first phase which began on February 15, 1994, 1841 persons belonging to 379 families returned till February 21.<sup>7</sup> Thus the negotiations between India and Bangladesh on the repatriation of Chakma refugees resulted in the return of 5198 refugees to the CHT in Bangladesh in separate phase (15 to 22 February and 21 July to 5 August 1994).<sup>8</sup>

The repatriation and rehabilitation of some 50,000 Chakma refugees camped in Tripura would cost Bangladesh about Taka 250 million. The

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7. POT, Vol.XIX, No.174, August 2, 1994, p.694.

8. Annual Report 1994-95, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, p.4.

refugees returning home after eight years are being given Taka 10,000 in cash for each family, two bundles of C1 Sheets, Taka 8,000 for purchasing cows and free ration for the next six months. They have been given an waiver of agricultural loan upto Taka 5,000 as per government decision. Moreover, a total of Taka 2,050,000 loans of 700 refugees would also be waived. further sources said that the authorities were considering to raise the initial cash payment upto Taka 15,000 from Taka 10,000. While Indian authorities gave a list of 11,806 families with 56,496 members who were living in the caps, the Bangladesh authorities only accepted 10,629 families consisting of 51,966 members.<sup>9</sup> The number issue has been a vexed problem between India and Bangladesh. That is why certain quarter in India opine that the UNHCR should be involved in the repatriation issue, so that Bangladesh cannot refuse the exact number of people who are at the refugee camps.

Meanwhile, a different type of situation has arisen in the Hill Tracts. The Bengali Krishak Sramik Kalyan Parishad\*, which represents 38,500 non-tribal families residing in the cluster villages in Khagrachari, alleged that the repatriated Shanti Bahini men were claiming possession of the lands of non-tribals. On the line of the rehabilitation of Chakma refugees, it also asked for several facilities employed to be candidates for chairmanship of the hill districts and local government bodies. They allege

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9. POT, Vol.XIX, No.178, August 6, 1994, p.710.

that around 4 lakhs Bangla-speaking people who were rehabilitated in cluster villages in Khagrachari during the late 80s are now asked to vacate by the local administration to accommodate the repatriated tribals. On the contrary the common accusations of the tribals are that the plains Muslims are still grabbing their lands under the active connivance of the administration and security forces. Even many refugees and tribal leaders claim that they are kept in 'strategic-villages' which restrict their free movement. Thus continues the ethnic conflict between the hill peoples and the illegal settlers. The tribals consider the present conflict as a direct consequence of 'Bengalisation Policy' which has been frankly admitted by senior military officers "We want only the land and not the people of Chittagong Hill Tracts."<sup>10</sup>

Only because of this, last years Bangladesh delegation headed by Communications Minister Oli Ahmed failed to convince the leaders of the CHT Refugees Welfare Association to persuade the Chakma refugees to return to their homeland at the earliest. The refugee leaders hold that only a political solution can enable a peaceful repatriation of the refugees . The leaders even citing the example of post liberation war condition of Bangladesh argued that even though no incentive was offered to the thousands of refugees in India all of them returned to Bangladesh after the political solution

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10. Chakma, Suhhas, "Chittagong Hill Tracts : Appalling Violence," *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 17, 1992, p.2296.

## CHAKMAS AND INDO-BANGLADESH RELATIONS

Every nation's primary goal is to protect and secure adequate defence for its homeland. No nation feels comfortable living under the security threat and consequently its energies are bound to be directed towards the singular objective of removing the sense of insecurity as soon as possible. Nations apply different types of strategies to bolster their security environment. They either seek the help of an outsider; form a bilateral alliance; join a multilateral alliance; buttress their own capabilities; encourage an outsider to enter the area to act as a balancer; isolate the adversary; elevate a regional alliance or reconcile with the adversary.

Perhaps keeping in mind this factor India and Bangladesh signed a 25 years treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace on 19 March 1972, on the lines of Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation. The treaty which was signed by the Prime Ministers of both the countries Sheikh Mujib and Indira Gandhi, committed the two neighbours to immediately enter into mutual consultations to take appropriate effective measures to eliminate the threat in case either party was attacked or threatened with attack. The twelve article treaty<sup>11</sup> has a long preamble which stated that both the countries were resolved to contribute in strengthening world peace and security and to make efforts to bring about relaxation of

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11. Bindra, S.S., *Indo-Bangladesh Relations*, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1982, pp.19-20 and pp. 134-137.

international tension and the final elimination of vestiges of colonialism, racialism and imperialism.

Apart from other things both the countries resolved that there shall be lasting peace and friendship between their two countries and their peoples, each side shall respect the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the other and refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of the other side. Article 3 of the treaty reaffirmed their faith in the policy of non-alignment and peaceful co-existence and important factors for easing tension in the world, maintaining international peace and security and strengthening national sovereignty and exchange of views at all levels. Articles 8 and 9 laid down the security problems of both the countries. In Article 8 both the parties resolved not to enter into or participate into any military alliance directed against the other party. It was also further stated that each of the high contracting parties shall refrain from any aggression against the other party and shall not allow its land to be used for committing any act which may cause military damage to or constitute a security threat to the other high contracting party. Article 9 of the treaty provided that each of the high contracting parties shall refrain from extending any help to any third party involving in the armed conflict against the other party. In case either country is attacked or threatened with attack both the countries shall immediately enter into mutual consultations in order to take appropriate effective measures to eliminate the threat and thus ensure the peace and security of their countries.

The treaty based on the model of Indo-Soviet treaty was not a defence pact between India and Bangladesh, as is clearly evident from Article 9 which provided only consultations and other measures to check the threat and not the automatic intervention. So far as the further interpretation of this article is concerned it can be argued that under the pretext of this very article, suppose there is law and order problem in Bangladesh, Indian military or police intervention at that moment will be considered as an interference in the internal affairs of Bangladesh.

However, the euphoria was shortlived. The Indo-Bangladesh relations took a downward trend in March 1972 itself when grumblings were echoed among the political circles in Bangladesh expressing their dissatisfaction over the just concluded Indo- Bangladesh Trade Part. The dissident groups gave vent to their anger by branding it as a 'slavery treaty', which was for them overwhelmingly in favour of India. The brutal assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib-ur Rahman paved the way for the military junta to hold the reins of government. Indulgence in anti-Indian demagoguery became the favourite pastime of the political leaders in Dhaka. Certain elements in Bangladesh started a propaganda against India and the Soviet Union. After the August 1975 turmoil, anti-Indian propaganda started in Bangladesh and Bangladesh press contributed a major portion in that act. The press alleged India of providing arms, training, funds or sanctuary to miscreants, including that of Shanti Bahini guerillas, who were busy in anti-national activities in Bangladesh. The Bangladesh government did not



take any concrete steps to check the anti-Indian tirade started by the press and other agencies in Bangladesh. Furthermore, the disputes over the maritime belt, Indian support for the pro-Mujib guerillas, the sharing of Ganges waters, disputes over the Muhurir Char and Purbasha (New Moore) Island in the Bay of Bengal seriously undermined the friendly relations between India and Bangladesh.

Alongwith many contentious issues the Chakma refugee problem remains one of the major irritants in Indo-Bangladesh relations. Due to the alleged controversial role of the Chakma chief during the freedom struggle of Bangladesh the latter has perpetrated all sorts of atrocity against its own minority tribal population. Bangladesh's 'detrabalization' policy was strongly opposed by the Buddhist Chakmas but this has in turn invited the wrath of successive Bangladeshi regimes which have followed the policy of repression causing a large number Chakmas to flee to the neighbouring north eastern states of India. In order to protect their separate identity and culture from the onslaught of Bengali Muslims the Chakma tribals have started the insurgency movements in the form of Shanti Bahini which has been fighting for autonomy of the CHT for more than two decades. The Chakma refugees presence has caused socio-economic tension in the insurgency infected north eastern states of India causing a strain in Indo-Bangladesh relations.

Because of these above mentioned factors Bangladesh heavily tilted towards Pakistan and China gradually. Until there was Mujib in the throne

of power their relations did not develop at all. But the post-Mujib era started swinging in favour of China and Pakistan. China which prevented Bangladesh's entry into the UNO and Pakistan which did not recognise Bangladesh for a long time suddenly became the close ally of the latter. The weakness of Bangladesh lays mainly in the fact that most of its bureaucracy and administration and especially its armed forces had been trained in Pakistan and had a sneaking sympathy with it. The result was a series of conspiracies which ultimately resulted in the overthrow of Mujib regime. It might be recalled that Pakistan was the first country to recognize the new regime in Bangladesh.

In November 1975 the Government of Bangladesh repealed the Collaborators Act which was directed against those who had supported Pakistan during the liberation struggle in Bangladesh. The government also released all the politicians who were arrested under the Mujib government for subversion. Again Dacca took a decision to pay compensation to foreign investors whose properties were nationalized after 1971. Since 75 per cent of the nationalized industries and commercial trading houses belonged to the Pakistanis, Islamabad was the largest beneficiary of this decision.<sup>12</sup> Thus both China and Pakistan's influence grew rapidly in the country. Both the countries main interest in the development of Bangladesh lay in drawing the new nation into their anti-Indian orbit and because the new regime's

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12. Jain, R.K. (ed.), *China, Pakistan and Bangladesh*, Vol .2, Radiant Publishers, New Delhi, 1977, p.xxvi.

main plank of foreign policy was to forge alliance with anti-Indian and anti-Soviet external forces, there was unanimity in Sino-Bangladesh and Pak-Bangladesh attitude on this score.<sup>13</sup> Thus their relations developed mainly on the basis of embarrassing India and maligning her in the eyes of South Asian countries in particular and to lower her prestige in the international sphere in general. But after the visit of Rajiv Gandhi to China in 1988 China has considerably changed its stance.

As such Bangladesh does not have any formal security arrangement either with Pakistan or China. Eventhough China has a good political relations and it has been providing formal training to security personnels and also a major supplier of arms and ammunitions to Bangladesh, China's security relationas with Bangladesh is always informal. In certain section of the press there were some news items that the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan is also extending some help in military training and espionage activities of Bangladesh. But there are no bilateral security pacts, either between China and Bangladesh or between Pakistan and Bangladesh so far. This also seems to be a distant possibility on grounds of its geopolitical location. Because of its geographical location any security pact would definitely be aimed at its immediate neighbour India, since Bangladesh does not have any serious problem with Myanmar the sole neighbouring country on its eastern part.. Engagement in anti-Indian

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13. Narain, Virendra, Foreign Policy of Bangladesh (1971-81), Aalekh Publishers, Jaipur, 1987, p.140.

political rhetoric and formal entry into security alliance are two diametrically opposite things. The Indian factor would always deter Bangladesh to enter into any bilateral security arrangement without jeopardizing its own national security.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, Bangladesh by herself cannot pose a realistic military threat to India because of the enormous difference in the 'Relative Resources' factor.

A major and immediate cause of fear in Bangladesh has been India's proclaimed support for democracy and democratic movements, though on close scrutiny one finds that such support in itself has not been as straight or easily forthcoming as the neighbouring country makes it out. Fears of Indian military intervention and economic pressures under the so-called pretext of ensuring stability and democracy are expressed on many occasions. Particularly on such occasions when either the switch-over from representative institutions to controlled polity takes place or when democratic struggle gains strength.<sup>15</sup> But it is a known fact that as far as the role of India in the liberation struggle of Bangladesh was concerned, it was based on certain principles. The Indian government watched the whole scene with patience and used every weapon from its armoury to bring about a political solution of the issue. Even during the political turmoil that

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14. Researcher's interview with Sujit Dutta, Senior Fellow, Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis (IDSA), New Delhi, in July 1996.

15. Muni, S.D., 'Defence and Development in South Asia', in Bhabani Sen Gupta (ed.), *Regional Co-operation in South Asia*, Vol.1, South Asian Publishers, New Delhi, 1986, p. 197.

occurred following Mujib's assassination India could have walked in at this juncture and set up a pro-Indian government in Bangladesh. In spite of requests from some Bangladesh quarters India wisely refrained from doing this. India has shown during 1971 that she has no designs on Bangladesh. In fact she withdrew the troops that had gone into Bangladesh at the invitation of its leaders and government two weeks before the stipulated date.<sup>16</sup>

The most critical elements in the people's personification with the state is the regime that controls the state. Accordingly, what is projected as the national security concern may in fact, only or largely be the manifestation of an endeavour of a group of ruling elites to preserve itself in power or even an individual leader's preoccupation with perpetuating his position of dominance in a given political hierarchy. And this is the exact method which has been employed by successive Bangladesh regimes. The Bangladeshi political leaders have always created an artificial fear psychosis among its people against India. Bangladesh has on several occasions accused India of providing training and material supports to the Shanti Bahini which is spearheading the Chakma insurgency movement. Perhaps to counter this insurgency problem and the alleged Indian support the Ershad regime increased its military expenditure substantially. India has provided the Chakmas shelter on its soil only because of humanitarian ground. It has time and again demonstrated its principles both in its internal

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16. Kaul, T.N., *Ambassadors Need Not Lie : India and Asia*, Vol.3, Lancer International, New Delhi, 1989, pp.52-53.

and external spheres. As a matter of fact it has been adhering strongly to the policy of non-violence, peaceful co-existence and non-interference in others internal affairs. Therefore the fears which Bangladesh has developed against India are not at all genuine, rather they are completely perceived notions. It is only imaginary issue.

No doubt India has been a strong and ardent supporter of democratic movements but to relate this with the Chakma refugee problem on Bangladesh's part is nothing but an attempt to complicate this issue further. So far India has only provided shelter to the Chakma refugees and allowed only political activities on its territory. There is lack of evidence of India's support to the insurgency movement of the Chakmas. Time and again India is prodding the Bangladesh government to solve this Chakma tangle politically in an amicable way. There is no possibility of SAARC (South Asian Association of Regional Co-operation) discuss the bilateral problems of India and Bangladesh regarding Chakma refugee, as the SAARC charter bars discussion of bilateral and contentious issues. Therefore it is to be resolved outside this forum.

Even though a number of efforts have been made by both Bangladesh and India the Chakma issue still remains unresolved causing one of the major irritants in the bilateral relations. It may be possible that after Sheikh Hasina Wazed took hold of the reins of Bangladesh regime efforts may be made to solve the Chakma refugee problem and relations between the two neighbours may improve.

# CHAPTER VI

## CONCLUSION

In Bangladesh, the dominant section of the political class has adopted neither a policy of protection nor assimilation. Rather, indiscreetly, they follow extinction of different cultures. The White followed this method to exterminate the culture of the Red Indians in Americas. And in this Asian sub- continent the Brown sahibs are pursuing the same policy against the ethnic minorities of the CHT. Ever since the mid 1970's successive. Bangladesh regimes have deliberately followed a policy of unlawful killing, torture and driving out of the tribals of the CHT from their hearth. No commission is set up to take action against the guilty yet.

The Bangladesh government tries to cover up its high handed policy towards the tribal people by putting forward the argument that as the CHT is an integral part of the country, people from other parts of the country are free to settle in that area. But it should also keep in mind that the tribals' lands are already submerged by the Kaptai dam and many of them are not yet rehabilitated by the government and arable land is very less due to its topography. Further more, the government is overlooking the nature of the post colonial states which are mostly artificial creation lacking in social and political cohesiveness. To suit their administrative convenience, political boundaries, cutting across tribal, religious and linguistic groups were capriciously divided by the imperial rulers during the colonial period. Therefore, even after independence, they are clubbed



together in a hotch - potch manner, making the business of accommodating the demands of rival ethnic or tribal groupings extremely difficult. To add to their woes, the right for national self-determination has been deprived to them.

Bangladesh is one of the few post-colonial states which has an almost entirely homogeneous population. In spite of this there is an ethnic conflict between the Chakmas and the Bengali Muslims. The tribals had been enjoying autonomous status for ages and it is because of the unscrupulous policies of the successive governments that they have lost their previous status. Since they constitute 1 per cent of the total population, they never pose a threat to the vast majority of the country. Because they have a distinctly separate culture, religion, language and racial origin having little commonality with the people of the plains, they have every right to preserve and protect their own cultural tradition. But the Bangladesh government has been pursuing a calculated policy to snatch away their birth right guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to which Bangladesh subscribes. The Bengalis, who fought so determinantly to preserve their cultural heritage from the onslaught of the Pakistanis, themselves are turning their back when the tribal people try to do the same. In utter disregard to their common sentiment, thousands of settlers from the rest of the part of the country are settled in the tribal lands. Instead of giving solace to the tribals, the government has joined its hand with the land-hungry plains people shamelessly. Only to protect their culture

and autonomy, the Chakma tribals have took up arms against the government authorities. Through its discriminatory measures Bangladesh has turned the CHT into an internal colony. Bangladesh should think over the fact that the Bengalis seceded from Pakistan as a protest against Punjab-Muslim imperialism. Therefore, to perpetuate such internal imperialism against its own ethnic minority is always condemnable.

The 1970 Declaration on Friendly Relations has been described as the most authoritative statement of the principles of international law relevant to the question of self-determination and territorial integrity. Paragraph 7 of the declaration deals with the maintenance of territorial integrity of a state. The first part deals with the territorial integrity of the state. This part states that nothing in the foregoing paragraphs shall be construed as authorizing or encouraging any action which would dismember or impair, totally or in part, the territorial integrity or political unity of sovereign and independent states. But this protection has not been automatically extended to all states. The second part has singled out the states that are entitled to the inviolability of their territorial integrity. The second part observes that only those states which are conducting themselves in compliance with the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples enjoy this protection. To be complied with the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, a state must possess a government representing the whole people belonging to the territory with out distinction as to race, creed or colour. Unfortunately the Bangladesh Constitution does

not provide any remedy for the protection of the land rights, and the linguistic and cultural identities of the tribal people in the CHT. Since the Chakmas are being discriminated upon by the majority community they have every right for self-determination. But unlike, Bangladesh which completely seceded from Pakistan, the Chakmas always want to have autonomy within the state itself. They want a permanent solution within the framework of the Bangladesh Constitution itself. The demand for autonomy for self-determination is nothing new but was enjoyed by them till 1963 when the then Pakistan government scrapped the CHT Regulations of 1900. Therefore, viewed in this perspective, providing autonomy to the CHT is not at all a difficult job to be accomplished.

For the CHT, the Bangladesh Government has two options in the present situation: (1) It may aim for a total submergence of tribal culture within the greater Bengali culture through the process of 'detrribalisation', or (2) it can genuinely provide policies and conditions under which traditional tribal autonomy is viable. Historical evidence amply shows that the policies of 'detrribalisation' are mostly abortive leading to either genocide or near genocide situation. Therefore, the solutions lie in the recognition of their ethnic identity and local autonomy rather than pursuing the current governmental policies which have tended to be more towards detrribalisation. It is still not too late to implement policies that can promote integrative forces without eliminating tribal cultures and ignoring traditional rights. Such a policy of 'unity in diversity' could stop the current

rebellion in the CHT by dealing with problems that have engendered them.

Apart from this autonomy issue, the Bangladesh government should recognize that the CHT problem is essentially a political problem requiring a political and not a military or law and order solution. Therefore, the government should withdraw all military and para-military forces from the area. Immediate steps should be taken to ensure that the Chakmas and other tribals recover all their lands of which they have been disposed by fraud or force. No further settlement in the CHT by the outside settlers should be allowed. The government should dismantle the 'cluster villages' immediately and provide proper rehabilitation and adequate compensation for the loss of life and property. Every effort should be made by the government to give constitutional protection to their autonomous status. Only through the inauguration of civil administration in accordance with the democratic aspirations of the indigenous people peace could be restored in the CHT. Even the tribal leaders also want a political solution of this problem. They also claim that unless Bangladesh government gives them guarantee that all their rights would be protected and they would not be subject to repression after their return, the refugees would not go back to the CHT.

On its part, consistent with the international law the government should provide "refugee status" to all the Chakma refugees living in inhuman conditions in refugee camps in Tripura. It should also provide the

basic needs of food, shelter, medical care and education and in case of necessity assistance of the international organisations should be sought. Until the minimum conditions for their rehabilitation, resettlement and security of life and property in Bangladesh are satisfied, no refugee should be repatriated to Bangladesh. Repatriation should be entirely voluntary in nature otherwise it would not fulfil the end result.

The Chakma refugee problem still remains to be a contentious issue between India and Bangladesh. As growing hostile policies of the Bangladesh government compelled thousands of Chakmas to live their homesteads and seek refuge in India, this has put enormous pressure in the north eastern states of India. To divert the attention of the donor countries and international perception about its pronouncedly wretched condition of human rights in the CHT Bangladesh has a number of times accused India of extending assistance and encouragement to the Shanti Bahini militants. This has generated further tension between the two countries. Apart from this, Bangladesh on many counts has alleged India of restraining the Chakma refugees from going back to the CHT. But India has nothing to gain by keeping the Chakmas on its land. Only because of humanitarian and moral ground the Indian Government has provided them shelter in Tripura. Due to this there is trouble in the Tripura border with Dhaka accusing India of attacking one of its border out posts. India on its part has blamed its neighbour for providing shelter and training to the insurgents of north-eastern states, especially to the TNV guerillas. Thus, there has been

allegations and counter allegations from both the sides adding fuel to the fire. In desperation the Chakmas are now trying to draw international attention towards their plight. They have knocked on all possible doors - the governments of Bangladesh and India, the UN and several international agencies. Through lectures and representation in many countries they have been making efforts to draw the world's attention. The Bangladesh government has tried to tackle the Chakma insurgency by military means. State as an institution fails to keep all diversities within a national fold and appears so far to the tribal people a partial instrument in the hands of the non-tribal people to perpetuate their own economic and political interests at the cost of the self-identity of these tribal group.

There is continuing concern among the informed circles in India over the long term implications of the large scale migration from Bangladesh. Tripura is facing severely the influx of Chakmas cutting deep into its economy. Frequent clashes have been reported between Chakmas and the local population in Arunachal Pradesh also. In Mizoram the situation is taking a new turn with the growing anti-Chakma feeling among the local circle. No Indian government can therefore afford to remain for long complascent about a potentially explosive situation. Although a number of efforts were made during the past years for the repatriation of the Chakmas to Bangladesh, the issue still remains unsolved. Therefore, the problem of repatriation of Chakmas has now become the main contentious issue embittering the Indo-Bangladesh relations. Unless a satisfactory solution

in the developmental front is taken up with the tribals in Chittagong Hill Tracts accommodating most of their demands which will negetivize their temptation to flee into neighbouring territories of India in search of sustenance, massive influx of Chakmas will not only cause ethnic crisis within India aggravating centre-state relation but also exacerbate the Indo-Bangladesh relations.

# APPENDIX I

Table - 1

Politically active ethnic groups by region in 1990  
(Gurr and Harff)

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Africa	=	74
Asia	=	43
Middle East	=	31
Latin America	=	29
Soviet Bloc	=	32
Western Democracies	=	24
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Total	=	233

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Table 2

Protracted Communal conflicts by region, 1945-1989  
(Gurr and Harff)

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Africa	=	12
Asia	=	16
Latin America	=	1
Middle East	=	11
Soviet Bloc	=	1
Western Democracies	=	8
<hr/>		
Total	=	49

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**Table 3**  
**Total number of refugees resulting from ethnopolitical**  
**conflict in each world region**  
**(Gurr and Harff)**

Africa	=	160,00000
Asia	=	22,00000
Latin America	=	2,00000
Middle East	=	39,00000
Ex-Soviet Bloc	=	41,00000
Total	=	264,00000

# APPENDIX II

Table 4

The following table lists the countries that have generated the greatest numbers of the world's refugees. It includes persons those who have been offered permanent resettlement and status in another country.

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## ASIA

Afghanistan	=	6027100
China (Tibet)	=	114000
Bangladesh	=	75000
Burma	=	50800
Iran	=	211100
Iraq	=	529700
Palestine	=	2428100
Sri Lanka	=	228000

## INDO-CHINA

Cambodia	=	344500
Laos	=	67400
Vietnam	=	122200

## AFRICA

Mozambique	=	1427500
Ethiopia	=	1066300
Liberia	=	729800
Sudan	=	499100
Somalia	=	454600
Angola	=	435700
Rwanda	=	203900
W.Sahara	=	165000
Burundi	=	186000

## CENTRAL AMERICA

Guatemala	=	57400
Nicaragua	=	41900
El Salvador	=	37200

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Source: UNHCR Report

# APPENDIX III

Table 5

## FINANCIAL DATA

UNHCR expenditure in 1990 by regional bureau/country  
and source of funds.

(in thousands of United States dollars)

Regional bureau /country or area	United Nations regular budget	General Programmes	Special Programmes	Total
Angola		2960.4	1049.0	4009.4
Botswana		988.7	36.8	1025.5
Burundi		624.2	256.1	880.3
Cameroon		1591.9	174.2	1766.1
Central African Republic		581.7	8.0	589.7
Cote d'Ivoire		215.0	5700.5	5915.5
Djibouti		894.7	93.8	988.5
Ethopia		55044.5	19856.2	74900.7
Guinea		0.0	9813.8	9813.8
Kenya		2695.9	152.6	2848.5
Lesotho		267.6	73.2	340.8
Malawi		19756.0	16981.8	36737.8
Mozambique		477.2	4506.2	4983.4
Rwanda		1284.8	485.9	1770.7
Senegal		4128.2	1626.4	5754.6
Sierra Leone		38.0	2373.2	2411.2

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
Somalia		9695.7	3191.2	12886.9
Sudan		23469.3	11162.5	34631.8
Swaziland		1429.2	207.7	1636.9
Uganda		3052.9	104.0	3156.9
United Republic of Tanzania		1835.0	33.0	1868.0
Zaire		4061.4	324.4	4385.8
Zambia		3928.0	245.4	4173.4
Zimbabwe		2861.7	1309.7	4171.4
West Africa		1819.8	361.7	2181.5
Other Countries		625.0	1413.7	2038.7
Subtotal	0.0	144326.8	81541.0	225867.8
2. Latin America and the Caribbean		24016.6	19375.7	43392.3
3. Europe and North America		24404.1	2896.2	27300.3
4. Asia and Oceania		52553.3	49355.4	101908.7
5. South-West Asia, North Africa and the Middle East		51854.2	45705.5	97559.7
6. Overall Allocations Global and Regional Projects	19852.5	34138.4	13842.3	67833.2
Total (1-6)	19852.5	331293.4	212716.1	563862.0

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