

BOOK REVIEW**The Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh: The Untold Story**

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The book "The Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh: The Untold Story" depicted the early inhabitation of the tribal peoples in the three hill districts of Bangladesh, their roots of migration, their ethnic background, the languages they adopted for themselves, the pattern of their inhabitation, etc. in the first stage. Then their livelihood and inter-tribe relations vis-a-vis the intrusion of plain land Bengalis into their territories and the conflicts created out of the infiltration of Bengalis have been described from the time of the Moghul period. The efforts of the individual tribes to retain their ethnic and cultural identity from that time up to date have been mentioned. The legal arrangements introduced by the British colonial authority and the continuing atrocities due to anti-plain land sentiments of the tribal people were discussed. The oppression of the Pakistani rulers and the negligence to rehabilitate the affected tribal people due to the implementation of Karnafuli Hydropower Project has been mentioned. The dual role of the tribal people during the war of liberation of Bangladesh was discussed. Then the efforts of the successive governments of Bangladesh up to 1992 to bring a solution to the problems of the area, the legal constraints, the developmental works taken up, the land ownership disputes and on the other hand the demands of the tribal peoples to protect and uphold their ethnicities were described.

In the introductory chapter the roots of the problem have been digged out. On the other hand examples of similar problems in other countries and nations-in underdeveloped, developing and developed countries were cited. The post-colonial struggles in Africa and Asia: Biafra, Kurdistan, Southern Sudan, Eritria, Somalia, India's Nagaland, Mizoram, Assam, Kashmir and the Punjab, Pakistan's Sind, Myanmar's Karens, Kachins and Shans were mentioned. In the presence of such multi-ethnic problems how other countries are keeping harmony were mentioned. In particular the example of India was discussed. But at this stage the examples of USA's Red Indians and Spain's Bask separatist problems were not cited, among others. It was urged that massive poverty, illiteracy and low political culture were the causes of the nations to face the ethno-cultural or religious problems. External dimension of these problems were also discussed. The main external dimension was pointed as the direct and indirect sponsorship of neighbouring countries in helping the atrocities of the separatists. However regarding the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) tribal problems India has been blamed to help the outlaws in many ways. The first chapter also described the initial migration history of the various tribes to this area and their roots. According to the authors the tribals migrated to this area between 15th to mid-nineteenth centuries, the Kukis being the earliest from Myanmar and Tripura regions. According to the descriptions of the book there are 13 tribes of Sino-Indian descent out of which the Chakmas became more numerous and dominant. Some of the tribes have sub-groups. The tribes have their own languages mostly linked with the Chittagong dialect of Bangla. But only the Chakma has alphabets. During the late 17th century the Mughals shattered the influences of the Arakanese and Tripura over the whole Chittagong area. It was followed by regular battles between the

Chakmas and the Mughal forces that gave rise to Chakma military might. But the Mughals contained a peaceful settlement providing Chakma military ruler control over the trade between hills and the plains on payment of a fixed amount of cotton to Mughal agents. The Bengali movement into the CHT dates back to the 17th century on invitation on the Chakma Chief.

According to the authors the CHT problem that the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) has been facing had its roots from the Mughal period. Chapter II of the book discussed this in details. It was apprehended that to keep the awesome Mughal power at bay the Chakma chiefs used Muslim names, such as Rattan Khan, Jalal Khan and Shermust Khan. The Bengalis' appearance in CHT at the invitation of the Chakma Chiefs in late 17th century was due to daily necessities like dried fish, chicken, salt, tobacco, molasses, black cloth, etc. which were not available in the hills. Bengali merchants were allowed to trade in merchandise with the tribals in return of payment of an annual tribute by the Chakma Chief to the Mughal authorities. But by the mid-eighteenth century the Chakma Chiefs ended up yielding to the Mughal authority. Payment of annual tribute voluntarily found to be galling to the Chakma Chiefs and military defeat dealt a further blow to their exclusive identity consciousness and complacency. The resultant hatred against the plains people remained built into their psyche and got transmitted through generations, to be manifested in later years under certain specific circumstances.

In 1760 the area was ceded to the British East India Company. Stoppage of payment of taxes to the East India Company in 1777, then submission in 1785 prohibiting the entry of plains people and later rescinding the decision resulted the administrative interference by the Company. Occasional

intertribal conflict led the separation of the area from Chittagong in 1860 naming Chittagong Hill Tracts District. Predatory raids by Kuki and other tribes created turbulent situation and necessitated further administrative tightening. The result was the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation, 1900. Also by the Chittagong Hill Tracts (Amendment) Regulation, 1920 CHT was retained as an excluded area. These measures were regarded by the tribals as to be the safeguards of their exclusiveness and special rights and privileges. On the eve of partition of India the CHT tribals were in a dilemma whether to be included with Pakistan or union with India. On 16 August 1947 CHT became a part of Pakistan but before that on 14 August 1947 Indian flag was hoisted in Rangamati and at the same time Marmas hoisted the Burmese flag at Banderban. Loyalty of the tribals to the Pakistani rulers always remained suspect. Pakistan Government's earliest move was to ban Jana Samity, the only tribal political organization. But the 1956 constitution of Pakistan retained the "Excluded Area" status of CHT and the Regulation, 1900. They were given the right to franchise. But in 1962 the administrative status of CHT was changed to that of "Tribal Area" and in 1964 the special status was abolished. But the Regulation of 1900 was kept operative. In 1956 an amendment to the Regulation gave non-tribals having resided in the area continuously for 15 years property rights. This was interpreted by the tribals as a serious blow to their special status. On the other hand the implementation of the Karnafuli Multipurpose Project building a dam across the river Karnafuli to produce hydro-electricity in 1963 created the artificial Kaptai lake submerging an area of about 1036 sq.kms. Including 54,000 acres of settled and cultivable lands. About 18,000 families totaling more than 100,000 persons were affected. They were not properly rehabilitated and the socio-economic life of a

sizeable number of tribals was disrupted with a massive impact. As a result, a large number of tribals, mostly Chakmas crossed over to India. But alongside a large number of educational institutions were established in CHT. The Chakmas were mostly educated and consequently political consciousness developed. the educated Chakma youths formed Pahari Chatra Samity in 1962 and made a way for the youths to easy converts to Marxist political philosophy. In 1970 the Rangamati Communist Par ty was launched. M N Larma and J B Larma (alias Shantu Larma), the two brothers who had their education in Dhaka University were two among the leaders. M N Larma was prominent, as he was the first tribal student leader to go to jail for participation in the anti-Ayub mass movement in 1969. In the 1970 general election M N Larma and A S Prue Chowdhury were elected as independent candidates to the Provincial Assembly and Tridiv Roy, the Chakma Chief to the National Assembly. But in 1971 the tribals could not take a clear and quick decision as to the side of choosing the liberation war. Some elders went over to India and joined with the liberation forces. But the families of the Chakma and Bhomong Chiefs sided with Pakistan. M N larma remained neutral. Thus Bangladesh inherited the tribal problem at its independence.

The location, physical feature and topography, climate, soil conditions, administrative set up, land capability, demography, ethnic feature and groups, dress, tribal cultures of the 13 tribes, economy, jhum cultivation, plough cultivation, land tenure system, the Kaptai project and effects of the Karnafuli Dam, industry, development and education, employment, etc. have been discussed in details in Chapter III. The Chakmas, as stated earlier forms the largest portion of CHT population occupying 67.45%, followed by the Tripuras 12.88% and Mogh 7.78%.

The Bengalis are 10.46% in the CHT population. The Chakmas and Moghs are Buddhists, whereas the Tripuras are Hindus. There are small tribals who are Christians. The rituals of each of the tribes are described. The land tenure system has been different in CHT. Under the Regulation of 1900 and its amendment in 1930 the control of land transfer was in the hand of Deputy Commissioner of CHT. In 1989 to protect interests of the tribal people, settlement of land property has been barred without prior approval of the hill district council and one's land holding is not transferable to any person who is not a resident of the hill districts.

The settlement history and the consequences of the Regulation of 1900 have been discussed in chapter IV. From the last part of 19th century plough cultivation began in CHT and Government tried to establish permanent hats and Bazars and connect the CHT with good road systems for marketing the surplus of agricultural products. The restrictions on the plain people to visit the CHT were also withdrawn. The traders from the plains monopolized all the hats and Bazaars. It followed that the tribals were exploited.

The growth of the problem in CHT as it assumed the dimensions of insurgency in post-liberation Bangladesh was traced in Chapter V. Bangladesh had already inherited an incipiently politicized ethnicity that had its immediate origins in the mid-sixties. By 1972 ethnicity in CHT, ostensibly under Chakma leadership, had become sufficiently politicized to create a periphery-challenging centre like syndrome. The national moment of Bangladesh had coincided with the arrival of the moments of vocal section of the Chakmas, trying to assert their perceived right to a manifest, distinct identity. The Prime

Minister in 1972 faced the strident demands with a call to facilitate national integration. The tribal leaders were infuriated and rejected the call. Ultimately Parbatyo Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) was formed in 1972 and Shanti Bahini, an armed wing was added to PCJSS in 1973. With the political changeover in mid-1975 the leader of PCJSS, M N Larma went underground and crossed over to India to lead the armed insurgency.

After an analytic enunciation of the responses of the various Governments of Bangladesh to the problem in the CHT for the period from 1972 to 1992 it is concluded that these reveal sincerity and depth of commitment of Bangladesh and its governments to evolve just and peaceful solution of the problem. Bangladesh, struggling with the residual problem of integration of ethnic minorities in the mainstream of national life, have given priority attention to the problem in CHT.

The book is well written except some incorrect words. It is also well analytical. Facts and figures of the CHT problem up to 1992 have been well drawn up. This book is suitable for first hand readers and researchers who want to know the root of the causes of CHT problem and Bangladesh Government's efforts in minimizing it. However, the Chittagong Hill Tracts situation has dramatically changed since the signing of the peace accord between the government of Bangladesh and PCJSS. Hence, the book needs to be revised to include latest information on Chittagong Hill Tracts.

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