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# The Indigeneity question: State Violence, Forced Displacement and Women's Narratives in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh



A poster on display at the Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka promoting tourism in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Caption: Women of Chittagong Hill Tract.

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**Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)  
Department of Anthropology  
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2017



# **The Indigeneity question: State Violence, Forced Displacement and Women's Narratives in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh**

**Zobaida Nasreen**

## **Abstract**

This research aims to examine the experiences of forced displacement arising out of decades of militarisation and land grabbing perpetrated by the Bangladesh Army and Bengali settlers on the indigenous communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh. Situated within the context of the anthropology of violence, displacement, indigeneity and South Asia this is rooted in the paradigm of historical and social anthropology. The approach of the study is multi-sited, discursive, uses qualitative methodology and is based on nine months of ethnographic research between 2012 and 2013 in two districts in the CHT among four indigenous groups.

I focus on ordinary (non-activist) indigenous hill women's narratives of violence and forced displacement in the pre- and post- peace accord (signed in 1997) periods. Ordinary indigenous people were drawn into the armed conflict between the Bangladesh army and the Shanti Bahini (SB), the armed wing of Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS). Women's participation was in the form of direct and organised resistance as well as unorganised, everyday resistance and negotiation, yet none of it is acknowledged in the peace process. While there is some work on the narratives of indigenous woman activists there is little documentation of ordinary (often assumed to be passive) indigenous women's narratives of violence and everyday forms of protest and negotiation. Instead, I argue that the various kinds of non-activist women's everyday experience of terror as a result of Forced Displacement in the CHT is not a singular experience. Their experience can only be understood through the confluence of their encounter with state and army violence; as well as through interactions with activists, infra-politics in the local community and at the conjuncture of their own various locations. In the process, the ethnography of the ordinary indigenous women interrogates and challenge the concept of indigeneity.



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## **Abbreviations**

ADP: Annual Development Program

ANSA: Armed Non-State Actors.

BAL: Bangladesh Awami League

BGS: Bangladesh Geography Society

BGB: Border Guard Bangladesh

BIWN: Bangladesh Indigenous Women's Network

BLAST: Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust

BNP: Bangladesh Nationalist Party.

BJI: Bangladesh Jamat E Islami

BSD: Bangladesh SamajtantrikDol

BRAC: Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee

CHT: Chittagong Hill Tract

CHTC: Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission

CHTDB: Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board

CHTJRW: Chittagong Hill Tracts Jummo Refugee Welfare Association

DANIDA: Danish International Development Agency

DC: District Commissioner

ECC: Election Conducting Committee

FMO: Forced Migration Online

GOC: General Officer Commanding

HDCs: Hill District Councils

ICRC: International Committee of the Red Cross

IDPs: Internally Displaced Persons

ILO: International Labour Organisation

ISB: Intelligence in Security Branch

MoCHTA: Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs.

MP: Mahila Panchayat

MP: Member of Parliament

NGO: Non Government Organization.

NSI: National Security Intelligence

ODID: Oxford Department of International Development

PBCP: ParbattyaBangaliChhatraParishad  
PCP: Pahari ChatraParishad  
PGP: *Pahari GanoParishad*  
PCJSS: ParbatyaChattagram Jana SanghatiSamiti  
PID: Press Information Department  
RCP: Rangamati Communist Party  
SB: Shanti Bahini  
RC: regional Council  
RSS: RadhtriyaSwayamsevak Sangha  
TRRWA: Tribal Returnee Refugee Welfare Association  
UPDF: United Peoples Democratic Front  
UNHCR: United Nations High Commission for the Refugees  
UNPFII: United Forums Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.  
UNDP: United Nations Development Fund.  
UCDP: Uppsala Conflict Data Program  
VDP: Village Defence Party  
VHAT: Voluntary Health Association of Tripura







## **‘Beautiful Bangladesh’ has no Indigenous Communities: Introduction**

In Bangladesh, 142.3 million people are Bengali but approximately 3 million are indigenous peoples belonging to at least 54 different groups living in different areas and speaking at least 45 different languages. These indigenous groups are known as ‘tribal’ or ‘upajati’ (*‘Upajati’* had been translated in Bengali for the word ‘tribal’) or ‘adibasi’ (meaning original inhabitants) or, more recently, indigenous in Bangladesh. The Chittagong Hill Tracts, Sylhet, Mymensingh and North Bengal divisions are home to diverse indigenous peoples. The most distinctive feature of the CHT is its indigenous groups. Among them the Chakma, Marma and Tripura are the larger groups. The others are the Mro or Murong, Tanchangya, Bawm, Khumi, Khiayang, Lusai, Pangkho and the Chak<sup>1</sup>. In 2004 the ratios of the indigenous population and *Bangali* people were 44% and 56% respectively (BBS, 2004).

This thesis aims to examine the experiences of forced displacement arising out of decades of conflict, militarisation, land grabbing and exploitation perpetrated by the Bangladesh Army and Bengali settlers on the indigenous communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh from the point of view of the indigenous women. I focus on ordinary (non-activist) indigenous hill women's narratives of violence and forced displacement in the pre- and post- peace accord (signed in 1997) periods. Due to the prolonged conflict over 25 years, the CHT became highly politicised in varied and complex ways and drawn into the armed conflict between the Bangladesh army and the Shanti Bahini (SB)<sup>2</sup>, the armed wing of the local political party, Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS). Women’s participation was in the form of direct and organised resistance as well as unorganised, everyday resistance and negotiation. However the peace process neglected women’s engagement with it. While there is some work on the narratives of indigenous woman activists (Guhathakuta, 1997) there is little documentation of ordinary (often assumed to be passive) indigenous women’s narratives of violence and everyday forms of protest and negotiation.

I argue that the various kinds of non-activist women’s everyday experience of terror as a result of Forced Displacement in the CHT is not a singular experience. Their experience can

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<sup>1</sup>The opinions of scholars, however, vary regarding the number of indigenous groups (Adnan, 2004:10; Gerharz, 2001:23). Some think that it is eleven or twelve (Branus and Loffler, 1990:37, Roy 2004:11), some others think more (Mohsin, 2002:12; Shelly, 1992:44). JSS repeatedly claims that the number of hill indigenous groups is eleven. On the other hand, according to Pradipto Khessa (1996:13) there are thirteen groups if one considers Riyang and Usai as different groups; he refers to them as branches of Tripura community. In fact, the discrepancy arises from the way one classifies the groups. So far, there is no concrete anthropological evidence to suggest the exact number of indigenous groups in the CHT at any given time.

<sup>2</sup> When Larma's continued efforts to make the state recognise the rights of the tribal peoples failed, Larma and the PCJSS began organising the Shanti Bahini, an armed force operating in the Hill Tracts area.

only be understood through the confluence of their encounter with state and army violence; as well as through interactions with activists, infra-politics<sup>3</sup> in the local community and at the conjuncture of their own various locations. In the process, the ethnography of the ordinary indigenous women interrogates and challenge the concept of indigeneity.

Situated within the context of the anthropology of violence, state, displacement, indigeneity and South Asia this is rooted in the paradigm of historical and social anthropology. The approach of the study is multi-sited, discursive, grounded in a qualitative methodology (using walking interviews, questionnaires, focus group discussions, narrative analysis and participant observation) and is based on nine months of ethnographic research between 2012 and 2013 in two districts in the CHT among four indigenous groups. I also interviewed political party activists, civil society and state agents (military personnel, traditional leaders, and local administration) in the CHT and Dhaka. This ethnographic research and interviews are triangulated with various local and national discourses on indigeneity and state violence in Bangladesh. The indigenous women's accounts are based on their encounter with the state and army violence and also the everyday interactions with activists and infra-politics. Since the disenfranchised are not seeking official legitimacy, from which they anyway be exempted, they make a claim for their dignity through acts which can challenge internal group cohesion. As a result, to identify the direct effect of the terror and forced displacement inflicted by the state and army violence and presence in this postaccord period my ethnography reveals the divisions, hierarchies, self-surveillance, panopticon, suspicion and mistrust that exist within the indigenous communities. This has not been addressed in the prevailing literature. Hence the everyday experience of terror and Forced Displacement in the CHT can only be understood in the postaccord period through the lens of infra-politics and how claims to victimhood can be made within/against that framework of struggles within the community and the Bangladeshi state. Through a Foucauldian understanding of power, I examine how the women who have been displaced experience state and community violence in their everyday lives, on their memories and bodies and how through this experience they are dealing with power and resistance and forming subjectivities which fall between this power and resistance binary. I follow Ortner (1995) here who maintains that in academia there is a tendency to "sanitize" (p.176) these internal politics, and to focus largely on a singular relationship of power and resistance (for example, between the colonisers and the colonised).

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<sup>3</sup> The idea of 'infra-politics' is coined from Scott's work (1990: 183) and refers to acts, gestures and thoughts which are not perceived to be political and prevalent among the disenfranchised and those deprived of access to legitimate channels of expression.

So the overall finding of the thesis is that while activist indigenous women have been focused on as sites of agency, the everyday experiences of these varied non-activist women gives us an insight into the effects of state violence and forced displacement. I follow the scholarship on the anthropology of violence (Das, 2000; Green, 1994; Zur, 1994, Mookherjee 2015) which allows me to address how the effects of physical, structural, symbolic and semantic violence impact on the experiences of displacement of CHT women.

The thesis addresses this through the exploration of the following themes in the chapters:

- Physical violence by the state, the impact on these ordinary indigenous women.
- Emergence of everyday suspicion and distrust as a result of state violence and its impact on these indigenous women.
- The everyday interrelationships with the army, state, indigenous, *Bangalis* and the phenomenon of friends and traitors and how it impacts on these indigenous women.
- Memories of various kinds of forced displacement and locating home and impact on these indigenous women.
- Memories and artefacts, camp life and post camp life and impact on these women.
- The indigeneity debate and how this is made part of their account.

### **Representations of Indigenous Communities in Bangladesh**

Given that the ratios of the indigenous population and *Bangali* people were 44% and 56% respectively (BBS, 2004) images of the indigenous people are exhibited by the Bangladeshi government for various purposes. The poster on the cover of women of Chittagong Hill Tracts has been on the billboard at Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka promoting tourism in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in Bangladesh in 2013. The promotional images used of indigenous women<sup>4</sup> do not mention which groups they are from. Not only has this photo been used in the posters, but these 'tribal' dances have also been performed for the government's foreign guests.

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<sup>4</sup> In this thesis I use the category 'indigenous women' to refer to women belonging to the different indigenous groups in the CHT.



Photo 1: The photos, taken by me, of two posters on display at the Bangladesh Embassy in Lisbon

I came across these posters in the Bangladeshi Embassy in Lisbon which are published by the External Publicity Wing, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. These posters encourage the foreigners to experience Bangladesh and indigenous people are central to these posters. A video<sup>5</sup> entitled 'Beautiful Bangladesh: Land of Stories' and made by the Bangladesh Tourism Board also features the water festival<sup>6</sup> of Marma communities in the (CHT) to attract tourists to Bangladesh. The government of Bangladesh circulated stamps (2010) using the image of the indigenous community' living in Bangladesh where the figures of the indigenous women<sup>7</sup> have again been central.

<sup>5</sup> The video link is <https://www.google.co.uk/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=beautiful+bangladesh+land+of+stories>, last seen 1/08/2016. This was made as part of country branding 'Beautiful Bangladesh' to promote tourism in Bangladesh.

<sup>6</sup>The water festival is part of the New Year celebration festival of the Marma community. Three days of their four-day festival are spent bidding farewell to the outgoing year, with the fourth focusing on greeting the incoming year.



Photo 2: Indigenous peoples of Bangladesh in stamps<sup>8</sup>

The indigenous leaders (leaders of the local political party PCJSS, *Jatiya Adibasi Parishad*, traditional leaders, such as *Raja*, *Karbary*, *Headman*) opined that they were not consulted about the images and they were misrepresented. But the images served to show that Bangladesh is not only a country where indigenous communities are central to it. The government is also promoting tourism in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. At the same instance, the SB and the Hill Tracts community are considered to be terrorists and dangerous. As a result, the Bangladesh government issued a letter stating that foreigners willing to visit the Chittagong Hill Tracts, will have to get permission from the Home Ministry.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast to the celebration of indigenous people for the purpose of tourism, the government has outright claimed that there are no indigenous people in Bangladesh. Through this claim the government has refused the demands of the indigenous population itself to have their identity recognized. This was evident on 21 June, 2011, when former Law Minister Shafique Ahmed

<sup>8</sup><http://jefferson-stamp.blogspot.co.uk/2010/12/bangladesh-indigenous-peoples-in.html>.

<sup>9</sup>See more at: <http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2015/feb/05/permission-first-kforeigners-visit-hilly-districts#sthash.J8DL1Tdd.dpuf>.

reiterated that there were no “indigenous” people in the country. His remarks followed his earlier claim made on June 8, 2011 that those marginalised communities living in Bangladesh were ‘tribal’. Again the minister told a seminar organized by the Bangladesh Geography Society (BGS) at Dhaka University on 18 January 2011, quoting the UN International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention, that:

"American Red Indians and Australian aborigines could be called indigenous. Those living in a particular area before a country’s independence can be called indigenous ... indigenous people are those who have been forced out by a foreign conqueror and that happened after Christopher Columbus had discovered America. The same with Britain and Australia. Our situation is different." (18 January. 2011, bdnews24.com)

The terms indigenous or *adibasi* have been used in a number of laws and programmes, including the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation 1900<sup>10</sup>, the Finance Act of 2010<sup>11</sup>, the Small Ethnic Groups Cultural Institutes Act of 2010 and the Poverty Reduction Strategy paper of 2010<sup>12</sup>. Contradictorily, the Awami League’s (present ruling party in Bangladesh) election manifesto in 2008 states: “Terrorism, discriminatory treatment and human rights violations against religious and ethnic minorities and indigenous people must come to an end permanently.” Yet the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said at a press conference on April 27, 2011 that there are: "No indigenous other than Santal". Furthermore on 9th August, 2016, one of the advisors of Prime Minister HT Imam, opined to BBC Bangla that the people demanding their identity as indigenous, their life style, mode of cultivation and cultural activities have similarities with the people in Philippines and Cambodia throughout the history. Hence how are they indigenous in Bangladesh?<sup>13</sup> Here the state discourse on indigeneity is seeking to negate the claim of the indigenous people of Bangladesh by geographically distancing them to Philippines and Cambodia which anyway are far apart from each other. As a result since the claim is that they are not originally from Bangladesh they cannot be called indigenous. As a

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<sup>10</sup> Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation, 1900 (Act 1 of 1900) popularly known as Chittagong Hill Tracts manual is a manual enacted by the then British Government describing how to administer the Chittagong Hill Tracts of present-day Bangladesh.

<sup>11</sup> An act to grant certain duties, to alter other duties, and to amend the law relating to the National Debt and the Public Revenue, and to make further provision in connection with finance. Source: [http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/13/pdfs/ukpga\\_20100013\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/13/pdfs/ukpga_20100013_en.pdf). last seen 6.7.2016

<sup>12</sup> Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers are prepared by member countries in broad consultation with stakeholders and development partners, including the staffs of the World Bank and the IMF. Updated with annual progress reports, they describe the country’s macroeconomic, structural, and social policies in support of growth and poverty reduction, as well as associated external financing needs and major sources of financing. Source: <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2012/cr12293.pdf>. last seen 6.7.2016

<sup>13</sup> Source [http://www.bbc.com/bengali/news/2016/08/160809\\_bangladesh\\_indigenous\\_people\\_debate#orb-banner](http://www.bbc.com/bengali/news/2016/08/160809_bangladesh_indigenous_people_debate#orb-banner). Last seen 12.8.2016.



result Chakma *Raja* (chief of Chakma circle) Devasish Roy, who served in two ministries during the previous caretaker government, lamented the government position. “The Bangladesh government is one of the few in the world which officially denies the existence of indigenous people within its borders”, he told a press conference in New York, after attending the 10th session of the UN Permanent Forum of indigenous people on June 20, 2011.

East Pakistan became independent from West Pakistan as Bangladesh after a nine month long war in 1971. The official history of the liberation war was reluctant to give the indigenous people space in its history. In essence, it adopted the same kind of unitary and integrationist approach as the Pakistanis had undertaken. It was insensitive to the cultural diversity of ethnic minorities (Jahangir, 1986:33; Mohsin, 1996b:42). Manobendra Narayan Larma (popularly known as M.N. Larma), the architect of CHT nationalist politics, headed a small indigenous delegation to meet Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on 15 February 1972 with a four-point charter of demands (Adnan, 2004:26). The demands were as follows: 1) Autonomy of the CHT with its own legislature; 2) Retention of the 1900 CHT Manual<sup>14</sup> in the Constitution of Bangladesh; 3) continuation of the office of tribal chiefs; and 4) constitutional provisions restricting the amendment of the CHT Manual and imposing a ban on the further migration of *Bangali* people into the CHT (Ahsan and Chakma, 1989:976; Ali, 1993:183).

The Prime Minister Sheikh Mujib, the leader of the *Bangali* nationalist movement who had led the nation to independence, rejected the demands of the delegation as secessionist and said that it would encourage indigenous feelings. Later Mujib declared the following in a public speech at Rangamati in 1973: “From this day onward the tribals are being promoted into *Bangalis*” (Mohsin, 1996b:44). Thus the government displayed a total lack of sensitivity and accentuated the already existing feeling of insecurity among the indigenous people. The immediate response of the hill people to such rejection was to form a regional political party, PCJSS (The Chittagong Hill Tracts United People’s Party) (Mohsin, 2002:58). On 4 November 1972, the constitution of Bangladesh was adopted, paying virtually no attention to the concerns of the hill people (Adnan, 2004:27).

After independence the character of the new state was determined by the principle of nationalism. In the second article of the introduction to the Constitution of Bangladesh,

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<sup>14</sup> The CHT Manual has had a peculiar status subsequent to the colonial period: neither revoked, nor followed by successive governments, nor recognised under the Constitution (Anti-Slavery Society 1984:21, Gain 2000b:18). Instead, it has been manipulated at different times to suite the interests of the ruling class.

nationalism is accepted as the basic principle of the state. In the 9th article of the constitution the *Bangali* majority is described in the following manner:

*Bangladesh achieved independence and sovereignty as Bengali on the basis of linguistic and cultural unity struggled for with determination through the national liberation war. The unity and solidarity of the Bengali nation will be the basis of Bengali nationalism.*

When Bangladesh became independent on the basis of *Bengali* nationalism, indigenous people in CHT demanded autonomy on the grounds of their indigenous identity. The *Bangali* elite considered this demand as a movement for separation and defined it as a threat to national security. *Bangali* nationalism took precedence over the concept of a plural society. They placed the whole CHT administration under the control of the army in 1972. The new state of Bangladesh continued the policies of its predecessor. The Bangladesh constitution did not make any provision for the CHT nor did its first national budget of 1973 make any development allocations for the CHT region. The indigenous people, left with no hope for any safeguards from the new government, set up their own political party, the JSS. A year later its armed wing, the SB, was set up, but it was not until 1976 that it first carried out an armed patrol in the CHT against the Bangladesh army.

Against the backdrop of this history CHT women are located in a distinctive setting in both geographical and ethnic terms. About 33,000 women were involved in this struggle, some of whom also joined the underground group SB. A prolonged conflict over 25 years has existed between the Bangladeshi state and the indigenous communities in the CHT since 1977. As a result the region has been highly politicised and militarized in varied and complex ways in this armed conflict between the Bangladesh army and SB. During the conflict, women often had to go to the market instead of men because men would be more likely to be suspected and picked up by the Bangladeshi army. Rape and abduction were commonly committed by the army and security forces. A peace accord was signed in 1997 neglected indigenous women's engagement with it. Indigenous women's participation was in the form of direct and organised resistance as well as everyday resistance and negotiation. Women have been subjected to long-term state violence which has resulted in their displacement over many decades.

It is still happening. On 3 November 2014, there was an attempted rape of two Tripura women by two of the Siyaladai camp of the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) under Sajek Union of Baghaichari Upazila in Rangamati district. The women were going to take a bath in

a nearby stream when they were attacked by BGB soldier<sup>15</sup>. Their screams alerted some villagers and the soldiers fled to their camp. In January 2015, six indigenous women and girls including one who was allegedly killed after being raped.<sup>16</sup> However, the discrimination indigenous women face is often two-pronged, both from outside their society and from within.

Women faced harassment, sometimes physically, but mostly verbally. Derogatory names which one community often used for another – e.g. Chakku for Chakma, Mogh for Marma etc. – were used as verbal abuse by security personnel on the streets. Security personnel often searched buses coming in and going out of the hills. *Bangalis* and indigenous people would be treated unequally as only indigenous people were searched. Defence police would often body-search indigenous women. Usually they would perform their duties in a humiliating manner (e.g. ask them to open their bags, sexually molest them).

The situation of indigenous women within their societies in the CHT can be understood by analysing the comment of Shantu Larma, the leader of the PCJSS. He said “I do not believe in [separate] women empowerment. Once the nation is empowered women would automatically be empowered” (Mohsin, 2003:11). Indigenous women had not only been the worst sufferers and victims of the insurgency, they were also an integral part of the autonomy movement. As mentioned before, little acknowledgement was made by the indigenous leaders of women’s sacrifices and their participation in peace-building activities. Halim (2003:5) argued that the various roles played by indigenous women during the insurgency period were neither nationally rewarded nor received any formal recognition from their own communities. While some work has been done on the narratives of indigenous women activists (Guhathakurta, 1997) there is little documentation of ‘ordinary’ (often assumed to be passive) indigenous women’s narratives of violence and everyday forms of negotiation and internalization. This thesis is the first ethnographic account of the ordinary indigenous women in the pre- and post-colonial CHT. Therefore, this study shows how various kinds of non-activist women’s everyday experience of terror and forced displacement in the CHT is not a singular experience. Instead, it lies at the confluence of their encounter with state and army violence and also the everyday interactions with activists and infra politics in the local community at the juncture of various categories and the changing relationships between the army and local CHT communities.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://chtnewsupdate.blogspot.co.uk/2014/12/13-indigenous-women-and-girls-subjected.html>, last seen 14.2.2015.

<sup>16</sup> <http://kapaeeng.org/two-indigenous-people-killed-six-women-and-girls-subjected-to-sexual-violence-and-two-massive-communal-attacks-on-indigenous-peoples-take-place-in-january-2015>.

## Bangladesh and the indigenous Women of the CHT



Photo 3: Map of Bangladesh<sup>17</sup>

Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. Its economy is largely agrarian. Most of the country is plain land and populated by *Bangali*-speaking people who are predominantly of the Islamic faith. At 147,570 square kilometres, it is roughly similar to the size of England with a population of more than 160 million. The CHT lies in the south-eastern

<sup>17</sup> <http://pubs.sciepub.com/wjee/3/1/3>. last seen 5.11.2015

part of Bangladesh, bordering the Arakan and Chin states of Burma, and the Tripura and Mizoram states of India. The area of the region is 13,295 square kilometres, which is approximately one-tenth of the total area of Bangladesh.

The region constitutes about one-ninth of the country's total area and approximately 1% of its total population (LGED and ICIMOD)<sup>18</sup>. The region is comprised of three districts, Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban. The unique geographical location (hilly, densely forested), land pattern (high, non-fertile) and agriculture (shifting cultivation) contribute to the region's substantial difference from other parts of the country which use plough cultivation based agriculture. Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Animism are the faiths practiced by the indigenous people (Gain, 200b:8) although the *Bangali* Muslim populations in the region have increased sharply over the last decades as a result of state policy. In the early 1980s when the Bangladeshi government pursued a *Bangali* resettlement program in the CHT. The settler Muslim *Bangali* people from different flat areas in Bangladesh were very poor. They are under the rationing system. With the backing of the military they started grabbing the unrecorded land (traditionally the indigenous people didn't have recorded ownership of land) and thus caused the displacement of indigenous people. Economically the region is poorer than the rest of the country; most of the people live below the poverty line (LGRD and ICIMOD, 2006:56, 5)<sup>19</sup>. Thus, economic, religious and ethnic differences act as the prime reasons for the marginalization of the indigenous hill people. This has triggered a '*Bangali-Pahari*' (*Bangali* people address the indigenous people collectively as '*Pahari*' which means of the hills) problem in the form of 'majority-minority' discourse and resulted in large scale displacement of the indigenous communities.

A sustained state policy of disparity and negligence over decades on the issue of autonomy and constitutional recognition culminated in repression (Guhathakurta, 1998; Adnan, 2004) which generated a deep resentment amongst the indigenous peoples. After nearly 10 years of peace talks, the government of Bangladesh and PCJSS signed the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord (also known as 'Peace Accord') on December 2, 1997, which ended two decades of armed conflict. The main opposition party, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), strongly

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<sup>18</sup>As the full and adjusted version of the 2011 census is still not available, the latest size and ethnic distribution of the CHT population is not available. The enumerated (non-adjusted) version stipulates 1,342,740 as opposed to the national population of 123,851,120 which includes both *Pahari* and *Bangali* populations (LGED and ICIMOD, 2006). However, in 1991, the total population of the CHT was 974,455 as against the total national population of 106,315,000 (Rafi 2001:7). Of the population of the CHT, 61.07% (501,144) was *Pahari* and 38.93% (473,301) was *Bangali* (Adnan, 2004:15).

<sup>19</sup>Extreme and chronic poverty in the CHT region is acknowledged by the ILO Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) (Tomei, 2005:30), but no concrete statistical evidence has been available.

opposed the accord on grounds that it allowed the Hill indigenous peoples a separate administrative system and discriminated against the *Bangalis*. The United Peoples Democratic Front (UPDF) – a breakaway group of the PCJSS – also opposed the accord saying that it failed to address the issue of full autonomy, the most important demand of the PCJSS.

The Task Force on the CHT, formed after the Accord was signed, admitted that by the end of 1999 about 128,000 families (approximately 500,000 people) were internally displaced due to the conflict. The ratio of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) is very high when the total population of the CHT, about 1,100,000 is taken into consideration. About half of the total population was displaced during the 25 year conflict. Within this context it becomes important to explore if there is a gendered experience of forced displacement. Displacement has also taken place as a result of development programmes undertaken by the government and both national and multinational NGOs. Fresh displacement is also occurring in the region after the accord due to the conflict between *Bangali* and indigenous people and between PCJSS and UPDF. Before providing further context I will give brief descriptions of the indigenous groups who are part of this research.

## **Different Indigenous Communities**

### Chakma

At present the Chakma is the largest of the indigenous groups in the CHT. The primary census report of 2011 gives the number of Chakma as 444,748. In 1872, they numbered roughly 28,097 (Hunter, 1876). In the census of 1901, there were 44, 329. By the years 1951 and 1974 their number had increased considerably to 124,762 and 207,378 respectively (Bessaignet, 1958:1; Choudhury et al., 1979:33). The Chakma have an ancient alphabet and written literature of songs, folk tales etc. A few bamboo cylinders, engraved with these ancient characters (concerning the old religion of the Chakma called ‘Taras’) are still kept by some Chakma families in Rangamati. But the form of the letters shows that they are merely a rude adaptation of the Arakanese Alphabet (Lewin, 1869:66). In most of the linguistic classifications, the language now spoken by the Chakmas has been classified as Indo-European, and as a *Bangali* sub-group (Kunstadter, 1967:66; Census of India, 1961 and 1971). The Chakma script, also known as *Ojhopath*. The vast majority of the Chakma are followers of Theravada Buddhism. Almost every Chakma village has a Buddhist temple (*keyang*). Buddhist priests or monks are called *Bhante*. The Chakma *Bijakm*, the oral tradition, claims that they migrated from a place called Champaknagar (now Bihar in India) and settled in Chittagong in the days of the

Arakanese kings. Lewin argues that the name of the early Chakma kings were Muslim names. According to Hodgson (1853:17) the Chakma of Arakan are of aboriginal descent.

### Marma

The Marma comprises the second largest indigenous group in the CHT. At present they number about 210,000. In 1872, there were only 22,060 (Hunter 1876) and in the 1901, 1951 and 1974 censuses, the Marma population in the CHT was 31,906, 65,889 and 116,477 respectively (Government of Bangladesh 1974:). The Northern Marma who now occupy most of the areas in the Ramgarh and Khagrachari subdivisions were one of the refugee groups driven out of Arakan by the Burmese in 1783-84. The Marmas speak an Arakanese dialect, with their written language making use of intricate Burmese script. The traditional three-tier system of political administration continues among the Marmas, with a *Raja* as the chief, a *Headman* below the *Raja* and village level authority resting with a *karbary*.

### Tripura

In the history of the CHT and Chittagong proper there are references to Tripura State concerning the invasion, conquest and three-sided warfare among the petty kingdoms of Arakan, Bengal and Tripura over the procession of Chittagong in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Government of Bangladesh, 1975; Ali 1967). Among the Tripura community, all the groups and subgroups have their own dialects, dresses and ornaments. The Tripura does not have a uniform lineage system. In some groups, sons draw their lineage from the father's side while daughters draw their lineage from the mother's side. Tripuras are mainly Hindus, though their beliefs and religious practices are different in many aspects from those of caste Hindus.

### Santal

The Santals are known as one of the oldest and largest indigenous communities in the north-western belt of Bangladesh. However, there are 200 Santal living in Khagrachari and their existence is not recorded in any government documents. They actively participated in the *Tebhaga* movement led by Ila Mitra in 1950, the Santal revolt, the Birsa Munda uprising, the Kol revolt, the Jitu Samur rebellion, the Pandu *Raja* insurgency, the Swadeshi movement and the War of Liberation in 1971. Santals have their own language, culture and social patterns, which are clearly distinct from those of other indigenous people. An important ceremony of the Santals is *Baha*, or the festival of blossoms. The purpose of this festival at the beginning of spring is to welcome and offer greetings to the freshly blossoming flowers. It is also characterized by dancing, singing and music.

No doubt, one of the struggles of the CHT is based on identity politics. The erosion of the indigenous pattern of self-rule, language, culture, knowledge, recognition and economic

deprivation, especially the loss of land, had been instrumental in creating vulnerability (Reissen, 2000:4) and grievances among them over time. A structure of non-formal self-governing systems traditionally existed in the CHT which were considered to be independent and self-reliant. It was in 1860 that the British colonial power first formally annexed the area. Despite annexation, a degree of autonomy was still maintained via promulgating special laws and regulations. The first direct and large-scale state interventions (through development programmes) in the region were introduced in the post-colonial periods of East Pakistan and Bangladesh, threatening their very existence. In opposition to that, the PCJSS was formed on 7 March, 1972 to defend their rights and demands. On the side of government, the army was employed to launch a 'counter-insurgency' programme (discussed in chapter three). In an attempt to mobilize women's support and activism for the struggle, the first women's organization, Parbatya Chattagram Mohila Samiti (MS) came into being on 21 February, 1975. The group was directly involved with armed guerrilla struggle. In 1988 it became the Hill Women's Federation (HWF), comprised of young, educated, female students. The particular aim of this organization was to address issues of violence by the military personnel and security forces and sexual harassment against indigenous women, as violence against women became a systematic process during the conflict. Indigenous women are more likely to be tortured by the army or/and security forces when they are displaced due to conflict. Indigenous women also faced violence in the form of rape and even murder during conflict situations. Sociologist Halim (2002:11) points out that many women have resisted oppressive state and military actions. In the late eighties and early nineties the HWF acted as the only forum in which '*adibasi*' women could make their voices heard (Guhathakurta 2003:13). It was HWF which brought the issue of rape being committed by the army into the public arena and carried on their work within and outside the Hill Tracts. Kalpana Chakma, the organising secretary of the HWF, had been demanding the right to self-determination for the hill people under the rubric of '*Jumma* nationalism'<sup>20</sup>. She was however abducted from her home on 12 June 1996 and has not been found. There is no provision in the 1997 accord for compensation for women affected by violence. Nor is there any provision for rehabilitation or counselling for raped women. Furthermore, domesticity was highly politicised during the conflict where all aspects of women's lives were affected in varied and crucial ways. Not only was there direct physical and sexual violence, but women's daily household chores, raising children, procuring food etc., all

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<sup>20</sup> *Jumma* nationalism is the political ideology adopted by the PCJSS during the mid-80s. It attempted to unify 'indigenous' ethnicities under its banner. It has its genesis in the '*Jum*' mode of cultivation.



became extremely hard to perform. Consequently so called ‘apolitical’ women had to respond in a political manner that involved innovating survival strategies for the family, community and individuals, entering into negotiation with the authorities for the disappeared and detainees, and passing information to the guerrillas.

### **Conflict, Gendered Displacement and State Violence**

Why will my research prioritise the experiences of ordinary indigenous women who are forcefully displaced? The answer lies in the gap within the existing literature on indigenous women and the lack of any ethnographic work focusing on their sufferings and their struggle in the CHT. Existing scholarly practices are not only biased towards dominant indigenous groups (where the respondents were from mostly the Chakma community, since Chakma is the largest group and most of the leadership of PCJSS and UPDF are dominated by Chakma people) but also towards the dominant male groups (Mohsin, 1997; Ahmed, 1998; Adnan, 2004). While such practices have neutralised and obscured the life and work of the majority of women in general (Lalita K. et al., 1989:19) they have doubly excluded indigenous women.

The literature of the CHT can be placed in various categories. These categories depend on the researchers’ approaches to analysing the CHT. The CHT has been conventionally perceived and represented in most research works as a ‘security zone’ (Guhathakurta, 2001:253) or as a ‘development issue’ due primarily to the epistemological hegemony of the dominant Bengali groups or the colonial administrator in the field of production of knowledge regarding indigenous people.

The writings of colonial administrators (Lewin, 1889; Hutchinson, 1906; Bessaignet, 1958) shed some light on the semantic politics of indigeneity, although they are focused mainly on the physical and cultural aspects of the ‘Hill people’. Lewin’s (1889) study explains the origin of their language, customs, clans, lineages etc. and also depicts the evolution of British power in the CHT. Hutchinson (1906) treats the Hill people as a “tribe” and as “backward”. He describes the natural resources of the CHT and provides information on the essentials of the day to day life of the Hill people. Bessaignet (1958) studied three ethnic groups, the Chakma, Tanchangya and Mogh and treated them as ‘Hill’ people. As Tripura (1992:5, 7) appositely remarks, the colonial rulers approached these peoples with a superior and paternalistic attitude that legitimatised their intervention.

The notion of Hill people has continued in the post-colonial official mainstream and the academic discourse of indigenous peoples both in India and Bangladesh, resulting in gross violations of their rights (Levene, 1999: 345). In fact, the internal dynamics of these indigenous

societies are no less profound than others. Far from being divorced and isolated, many of these societies are integrated into the capitalist economy and world market in one way or another, resulting in quite significant structural changes (Deville 1992: 30), including division in indigenous groups or within other groups. All of the key social institutions, relations and practices of the indigenous peoples exemplify change and continuity over the passage of time<sup>21</sup>.

Regarding the causes of struggle in the CHT, Dewan's (1991) study recounts the historical process of class formation and the rise of ethnic consciousness among the 'Hill peoples'. Their economy was once based on '*Jum*' cultivation combined with hunting and gathering practises in the forest. The contemporary CHT economy combines those older elements with more recent economic components and is now characterised by the reduction of shifting cultivation, the limited emergence of capitalist production, trade and market development, and the destruction of the old self-reliant, subsistence economy (See Adnan, 2004:96-139). Major political upheavals like the CHT struggle have had tremendous socio-economic and political impacts on the region, resulting in changes in the areas of education, political participation and work diversification and so on for both men and women. Any discussion of the CHT should take into consideration that indigenous society is not a homogenous category but rather one that has evolved through time.

Researchers have reflected quite extensively on matters like land, identity, ethnicity, indigenous rights and economic or developmental aspects<sup>22</sup>. Another theme of the literature on the CHT has been human rights violations, indigenous people's shrinking rights in relation to land and forest, aggression by the dominant culture and religion, problems related to development initiatives and particularly the effect and consequences of the military presence in the region, which has been the principal subject of scholarly attention<sup>23</sup>. Shortly after the Accord, the question of the success and failure of the CHT struggle, the nature of the Accord and its implications have arisen in academic and non-academic circles. Related publications are mostly centred on these debates and are often written from positions either in favour of or against the Accord (Mohsin, 1998, 1999, 2003a; Roy, 2003). Mohsin has strongly criticised the Accord's character from the perspective of ethnic and gender representation. Roy's analysis

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<sup>21</sup>For instance, G.B Chakma (2002:9) has illustrated how several of the *Jum*-related culture and festivals of the Chakmas have undergone changes with the gradual decline of *Jum* cultivation.

<sup>22</sup>Ahsan and Chakma (1989), Ali (1993), Baloi et al. (1991), Ebhara (1996), Ertocci (1989), Bhawmik, Guhathakurta and Chaudhury (1997), Chadhuri (1991), Chowdhury(1989), Dewan (1991), Gain (2000a), Kamal and Mridha (1997), Levene (1999), Majumdar (2002), Mallick (1998:180-187), Mey (1984a, 1984c, 1981), Montu (1980), Roy (2000), Van Schendal (1995), Zaman (1982, 1984).

<sup>23</sup>Publications along this line include Amida Trust (2002), Amnesty International (1989, 1986, 1993, 2000), Anti-Slavery Society (1984), Khan (1997 b), OCG (2004), CHT Commission (1991), Timm (1991).

offers an intensive discussion in this regard, drawing on a variety of issues from the historical and political process of negotiations, achievements and expectations of the parties concerned with the pitfalls and possibilities of the Accord's content, its resultant implications and its future possibilities. General discussion of various aspects relating to the CHT struggle, the peace process and the Accord is available in some non-academic and non-scholarly publications<sup>24</sup>.

However, no anthropological research has been conducted which will help us to understand indigeneity in Bangladesh. While a number of studies (Adnan, 2004; Afsar, 2002; Kuhn, 2000; Fernandes et al., 1989) have examined the consequences of internal displacement in South Asia only a few scholars and activists have dealt with displacement and women (Guhathakurta, 1997, 1998, Banerjee, 2005; Behra, 2006; Bisht, 2009; Ganguly-Scrase and Vogl, 2008). In the light of the above discussion, it should be clear that the lack of gender representation in writing about the CHT is not an isolated practise. Only some scholars (Guhathakurta 1997, Halim 1998) have so far attempted to engage with the issue of women, gender and the CHT struggle. A dominant perspective of the literature on the CHT struggle is human rights, which sheds some light on the condition of women, although they tend to treat women as victims or objects. A few works in recent years provide some information regarding CHT women in the context of the oral history project of the HWF(1999), *Paharer Ruddho Kontho: Pahari Narider Nipiron O Protibad* (The Struggling voice of the Hills: Oppression and Resistance of Hill Women). This is a commendable effort which provides rare insight into the experiences and perceptions of mostly young female activists. Although it includes the points of view of a larger number of women activists, it focuses primarily on the reasons for their entry into the struggle and leaves aside discussion of the forms and modes of their participation. The transformation of women's identity can only be partially traced through these accounts of women activists. *The Diary of Kalpana Chakma* (HWF, 2001), another publication of HWF, reveals the perceptions and actions of a front line activist in the struggle. The strong feminist connotations of her views suggest that young women activists were developing gender awareness and asserting their own feminist agenda while participating in the struggle. Halim's articles (2002, 2003, 2004), oriented towards human rights, provide a general account of the Hill women's social, political and economic marginalization and insecurity as a result of state and social oppression. These are quite informative in illustrating Hill women's position in

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<sup>24</sup>These include Azad (1999, 2001), Kheesa (1996), Lenin (1999), Parvez (1999), Samad (1998).

society. Another publication (Halim, Chakma and Chakma, 2005) takes a similar approach but focuses on various forms of violence in the post-Accord period.

Two other publications endeavoured to capture the transformation of gender relations in the Hill tracts over the course of their interactions with the state and with the *Bangali* settlers. Islam's (2005) study focuses on the impact of state policies adopted at different times since the colonial period on Hill women's economic, social and domestic lives. Continuing with her previous post-nationalist approach, Mohsin (2003b, 2004) provides a convincing gender analysis of the Peace Accord. She exposes the gaps in the provisions of the agreement and shows where it has fallen short in terms of gender representations. Her two other publications (Mohsin, 2001a, 2001b) use the oral history materials of two victims of violence during the period of the liberation war in 1971 to offer a critique of the nationalist obsession of the freedom movement from a gender perspective by presenting the cases of the indigenous women of the CHT who were victims of violence. Thus far it appears that Meghna Guhathakurta (1997c, 200b, 2001, 2004), who works on women's issues and movements, has been the only scholar examining activist Hill women's experience (though from the activist perspective) in the struggle to include their negotiations, resistance and agency. Due to their specific focus on women these works have particular relevance for the present study. Guhathakurta's accounts of women's political activism concentrate solely on HWF-related activism leaving aside other political platforms for women, such as the MS. While she discusses questions of conflict management and coping, she gives a general account rather than context-specific descriptions of women's experience in refugee camps or how they cope with victimhood. Perhaps this is due to the methodological constraint involved in her work. As she acknowledges, she has drawn information from a limited number of Chakma interviews originated from a particular locality based in Dhaka (Guhathakurta, 2001:291-292). While activist *pahari* women have been focused on as sites of agency, the thesis shows how the experiences of these varied non-activist women are situated between power and resistance. Their accounts are based on their encounter with state and army violence and also the everyday interactions with activists and *infra* politics (role of divisions, hierarchies, self-surveillance, panopticon, suspicion and mistrust in the local community). This has not been addressed in the prevailing literature. Hence my research focuses on the 'ordinary' indigenous women's narratives on violence and displacement from four different groups (Chakma, Marma, Tripura and Santal).

Research in Bangladesh is dominated by the nationalist discourses of mainstream elite groups (Chakraborty and Nasreen, 2003, Dewan and Choudhury, 2003, Van Schendal, Mey and Dewan, 2000:298-300). From the outset, their omission of 'small voices' or subaltern

voices – that is, the voices of rural peasantry, '*adibasi*' and women – has been systematic (Guhathakurta, 1997). While such practices have neutralised and obscured the life and work of women in general (Lalita K. et al., 1989:19) they have doubly excluded indigenous women. In the wake of post-colonial and post-structuralist epistemological shifts and the growing feminist movement in South Asia (Alwis, 2000:48-50), placing and indigenous women to their rightful places has however tended to focus on the activist indigenous woman or the victim indigenous woman. Instead my aim is to present 'ordinary' women as an active historical and political subject who can make or shape an event and these are the core issues for which my research will contribute to a better understanding of subaltern women and their agency.

In critiquing the prevalent, romanticised and homogenous idea of the subaltern indigenous woman I draw from Julie Stephens' work. Stephens (1989:92) argues that contemporary feminist studies of Third World Women emphasise the directions or the 'day-to-dayness' of the experience of the women they present. The discourse attempts to offer a glimpse of the vast and complex reality of the daily struggle of the millions of ordinary women in South Asia. This is because 'experience' in studies of Third World women is not a simple construction. Three different types of experience interlink to form what is designated as 'the experience of being a woman'. Firstly, there is the experience of the subjects under investigation. Secondly, there is the experience of the investigating subject, the woman conducting the research, the narrator of the text. Thirdly, there is the experience of the hypothesized woman reader, an integral part of textual construction. She argues that it is not just an event or happening in a woman's life that earns the status of an 'experience' in feminist utterance. (Stephen, 1989:113). Keeping Stephen's overview in consideration, the experience of indigenous women has been documented in my research through their narratives of everyday life.

To understand the effects of conflict through the everyday experiences of women, the Partition literature provides us with great insight. Das (1995) has theorized the relation between language, pain, and the state through the lens of women affected by the anti-Sikh riots of 1984 and the partition of 1947. Butalia (1998) highlights how the trauma of displacement and losing one's home shaped people's lives and highlighted the indispensability of 'low caste and low status' jobs in the context of conflict. Butalia (1998), Das (1995), and Menon and Bhasin (1998) were the first to focus on the role of family violence and 'honour killing' (as a mark of masculine honour) of women during partition, telling the stories of women who had resorted to violence by killing themselves, and how their families could only recall them as heroic martyrs. The oral accounts of the Telangana uprising (Lalita K. et al., 1989) exemplify women's

multidimensional agency in the movement by reconstructing its history from a gender perspective.<sup>25</sup>

Writings on women in Bangladesh have for the most part been dominated by development discourse (Guhathakurta, 1997a:ix). The predominant influence of aid and donor driven attitudes that White (1992:16) observed in the early 1990s is still valid. The existing literature shedding light on women's participation in peasant resistance movements such as *Tebhaga*, *Tonko* and *Nankar* in Bengal are mostly activist's memories (Das, 2003; Singh, 2003). But in the context of the CHT, the indigenous women's contribution has not been registered even in the history written by indigenous people about the struggle against the Bangladesh army. A re-examination of women's involvement in all political conflicts is required not only to understand how women negotiate conflicts but also to consider the nature of the conflict itself (Banerjee, 2001:131).

In contrast, in examining public memories of 1971's wartime sexual violence on Bangladeshi women, Mookherjee (2015) focuses on the post-war lives of the women and contextualises the narratives within wider political, literary and visual discourses. Her work shows how the accounts of rape survivors manifest various national policies and narratives, and it also interrogates them. Therefore her work stands in a complex relationship to the Bangladeshi nationalist narrative and highlights its ambiguities and tensions with everyday lives and imaginations relating to war time rape during 1971. It not only gives us in-depth accounts of the impact of wartime rape in 1971 but also highlights the complex ways in which women and their families have dealt with the violence of rape over time (Mookherjee, 2015). Following Mookherjee's (2015) work, my research shows how the narratives of forcefully displaced indigenous women on violence and displacement contest national and local narratives around indigeneity and has an uneasy relationship to the Bangladesh nationalist narrative.

In thinking through the reasons behind the forced displacement of indigenous communities, it is important to remember that development-induced displacement. Such dispossession is not merely economic but social and political as well as cultural (Ganguly and Vogl 2008: 239). But in Bangladesh structural violence within the state is one of the foremost causes of internal displacement (Guhathakurta and Begum, 2005:188). Guhathakurta and Begum's (2005) research highlights the fact that the unitary nature of the country's Constitution

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<sup>25</sup>The people of Telangana (recently formed as a state of Hyderabad, India) embarked on an armed struggle against their long term feudal oppression in the early 1950s under the leadership of the Communist Party of India (CPI). The Telangana uprising has been especially famous for the large scale and crucial participation of women.

privileges *Bangla* language and culture over other linguistic and cultural groups. Similarly, the declaration of Islam as a state religion marginalises non-Muslims from the ideological mainstream. The experiences of political movements for autonomy in the CHT and the violence against minorities in the aftermath of the 2001 election are examples of such marginalisation. During the election period (2001) teenagers and married girls in the CHT were moved to the houses of relatives or even to nearby countries to protect them from probable harassment and torture. Some families also fled deep into the forest, thus demonstrating that these are, in fact, instances of systematic internal displacement in a majoritarian democracy. Based on her analysis of the displacement situation in South Asia, Banerjee (2005:76) analyses how South Asian states have integrated gender concerns in their programmes for displaced populations. She further analyses the response of the state, particularly the response to women who are displaced yet are forced to remain within the borders of their own country.

The story of the CHT has been told, but not in its entirety. Important aspects are absent from the existing literature, including: firstly, contextualising the CHT struggle on indigeneity in the light of the internal political dynamics of the Hill Tracts and integrating the perspective of the indigenous people in it; secondly, the impact of the struggle on the lives of the people; thirdly, the gender dimension of violence and forced displacement, women's position and experience in the struggle. For the most part, existing studies have not attempted to examine how women from different indigenous groups have perceived the violence, the nature of the implications and impacts of the struggle on their lives, and how they have negotiated with violence and its aftermath or questions including strategies used in coping with the violence. So my work departs from existing scholarship in the following ways: My research focuses on ordinary women in the various indigenous groups instead of activist women only. I examine women not only as victims but as a part of a whole process. I am aware of the 'romanticisation' of indigenous women; hence I highlight internal dissension among the indigenous women throughout the thesis. I deal not only with displacement and dispossession, I also focus on conflict and state induced violence and gendered displacement with detailed ethnographic accounts rather than generalised statements. Therefore I argue that indigenous women in the CHT have been affected by state violence induced displacement across generations and decades, and that everyday life has been transformed by the engagement with violence. Their significant contributions have not been recognised among their communities and they have been affected by the internal politics and dissensions that exist among their communities. In the face of this double set of oppressions, they have created a space for themselves in CHT

politics by intervening and negotiating with their struggle. In the process they have contributed to the debate on indigeneity in complex ways.

Overall, this contradiction is central to the thesis: indigeneity is used in the international branding of Bangladesh, while the government continues to say that there are no indigenous people in Bangladesh. On the other hand we are faced with Larma's comment that indigenous women's issues are not significant while the overall political struggle is. Here the JSS leaders do not want to address indigenous women's issues in the face of the overall political movement. In this way common indigenous women are oppressed from both sides: violence is perpetrated on them by the state and their wider community, while the imagery of their everyday lives in the nation is appropriated to present the diversity of the population in the People's Republic of Bangladesh. So the three main questions that I ask in this thesis are:

- (j) What are the various modes of state violence – including direct violence, surveillance and the creation of fear – and how has everyday life been transformed by them?
- (ii) What are the different aspects of women's experience in the context of conflict-induced gendered displacement and the internal politics that exist within their communities? What are the narratives of survival, resilience, compromise, strategies, and negotiation?
- (iii) How indigenous women's narratives and memory on state violence, forced displacement and sexual violence impact on and are linked with the state discourse on indigeneity.

Through these varied experiences and narratives of ordinary indigenous women the study seeks to decentre the assumptions of passivity of these women and argues that these women respond, negotiate and resist their experiences of violence and displacement with everyday forms of activism.

### **Chapter outline**

Chapter one outlines the theoretical scholarship that this research draws on to develop the argument in different chapters. To understand the experiences of women during and after the conflict situation and explore the state discourse on indigeneity, I engage with the theoretical positions developed by different scholars on state violence (Nordstrom and Robben, 1995; Das, Kleinman and Ramphela, 2000). I follow Foucault's conceptualisation of discipline (1972) to understand the indigeneity discourse of the state and the nature of violence created and justified by the state. To investigate the nature of conflict and violence in the CHT, I explore the panoptic nature of state violence as a result of which indigenous communities police themselves in different ways, (chapter four).



My research explores the possibilities of everyday forms of agency and overt negotiation among the indigenous communities in the CHT in response to state violence. However, this study is also cautious to not indulge in the romanticisation of resistance as discussed by Ortner (1995). I avoid this romanticisation and essentialisation not only by highlighting various intra-community dynamics but also by examining the prevalence of suspicion and distrust. I follow Das (2000), Aretxaga (2001), Green (1994), Zur (1994) and Mookherjee (2015) to explore how violence is folded into intimate, interpersonal, everyday relationships among indigenous women.

Chapter two locates oneself and the field and addresses the negative representation of indigenous people by the government and the *Bangali* majority in textbooks. Based on fieldwork carried out between Oct 2012 and June 2013 the chapter discusses the difficulty in doing field work in one's home country, especially in conflict prone areas where the challenge of the 'insider-outsider' dilemma, trust-distrust and negotiation between researcher and participants belonging to different cultural backgrounds, shapes the outcome of everyday fieldwork.

Chapter three discusses the history of the CHT. Addressing the unrest and the conflict among the indigenous groups in the pre-colonial era, the chapter challenges the findings of other researchers (Mohsin, 1997; Ahmed, 1994) and their view of the 'simple' life of the indigenous people in the CHT in the pre-colonial era. This chapter also maps the colonial attitude that prevailed in the Pakistan period as well as in independent Bangladesh, towards the indigenous people.

Chapter four explains the gendered interpretation of the experience of indigenous people in the field areas through analysis of physical violence that the informants experienced in the pre- and post-agreement periods. The chapter outlines the gendered violence in the CHT and explores the way indigenous women have responded to it. This chapter discusses the abduction of Kalpana Chakma (the organising secretary of the Hill Women's Federation) to illustrate the relationship between the military and indigenous women in the CHT. Indigenous women in the CHT have been involved with politics for a long time. They fight with the banner of JSS and have opened their own women's wing, MS and HWF. However, the chapter argues that women's organisations such as MS and HWF are controlled by the JSS or UPDF and do not have their own position in the movements.

Chapter five argues that visible and indirect violence led by the army and *Bangali* settlers has created the environment of fear which leads to distrust and suspicion in the CHT in Bangladesh. In addition, the chapter discusses the changing forms of relationships in the community after

the violence and how the state force plays a significant role in these changes. The chapter also argues how different artefacts come to stand in for state violence and power. Following Foucault, the chapter also examines practices of self-surveillance which enable one to avoid violence. The chapter also highlights semantic domination by showing how language works simultaneously as a grammar of domination and resistance.

Chapter six discusses the contesting relationships within and among the indigenous and *Bangali* groups in the CHT. The changing relationships of *Bangali* and '*Pahari*' and the military are also analysed in this chapter. It reveals the state's perspective on the *Bangali* people and indigenous people of CHT, remembering that neither '*Bangali*' nor '*Pahari*' is a homogenous category. The chapter also deals with the love, friendship and traitorous relationships among the triangulated agents (*Pahari*, *Bangali* and the army).

Chapter seven focuses on the nature of state violence and forms of forced displacement among the Chakma, Marma and Tripura families who had been displaced five times or more as a result of extreme violence inflicted by the army and settler *Bangalis* in the pre- and post-accord periods. People lost their hope of having a home (in terms of security, peace and comfort), or of getting back homes they once owned as returnee refugees from India. The chapter also discusses how people link artefacts with the memory of forced displacement due to state violence. The chapter also examines the process of memory-creation while Paul Antze and Michael Lambek (1996) write about how the 'very idea of memory' comes into play in society and culture and about the uses of 'memory' in collective and individual practice (1996:xv). However, Jackson argues that people obtain a 'sense of agency, voice and belonging' through composing their own stories or situating their own experiences within the outline of existing narratives (Jackson, 2002:18).

The chapter discusses the nature of forced displacement experienced by the indigenous people of the CHT. It argues that the socio-economic status of the respondents has shaped the experience of their violence-induced displacement. Women and men faced different experiences in terms of sexual identity and special conditions such as pregnancy or having a baby, which created particular physical challenges. It also analyses the gender perspectives among the indigenous societies, looking especially at the division of labour and the experience women had of escaping to India to save their lives, often having to leave their babies behind. This chapter also argues that violence has been portrayed most of the time in terms of trauma and victimization (Mohsin, 1997; Chakraborty, 2006; Kamal, 2006), thereby denying the agency of the indigenous women who encountered the violence. Instead their sexual relations are discussed as part of their displaced lives.

Chapter eight explores the difficulties and the negotiations of the indigenous women of the CHT in the six refugee camps in India. It depicts the gender division of work in the camps. In addition, the chapter argues that women retained their agency in such displaced situations. The chapter also discusses the hierarchy established in the camps among the indigenous groups in relation to the local politics of the Tripura province in India. It argues that women of different indigenous identities and from different socio-economic backgrounds found special conditions and had different experiences in the camps. The strategies for camp management, education, religious festivals and rituals are discussed. Refugee problems with the local people (Tripura and *Bangali* Hindu) are also analysed in this chapter. It also explores the adoption of indigenous children to France from the refugee camps.

Chapter nine deals with the politics of identification and the recognition of groups of people known as '*tribals*' or '*upajati*<sup>26</sup>' or '*adibasi*' or, more recently, indigenous in Bangladesh. It addresses, on the one hand, the way these terms are being constructed and labelled, and on the other hand, the rights and present predicaments of the people designated as such. It examines the semantic politics (the politics in the way language is used to connote different histories and politics) of various categories ('*tribal*', '*adibasi*', '*upajati*' etc.) associated with the term indigenous. It also analyses the meaning for the people themselves of 'being indigenous'. Finally, it examines how the indigenous women in the CHT perceive the term and how they engage with it through their experiences of violence and the state's perspectives. In conclusion, the thesis argues that the narratives of indigenous women in the CHT on state violence which induced forced displacement are connected with the politics of indigeneity in Bangladesh.

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<sup>26</sup>In Bangladesh, the term 'tribal' or 'ethnic' people is used in academic writing (Lewin, 1889; Hutchinson, 1906; Bessaiget, 1958) to identify non-*Bangalis* as a separate category. But the term '*Upajati*' denotes a subcategory for '*Jati*' or nation.

## Chapter One

### ‘Desperate to identify themselves as “Adibasi”’: Theoretical Overviews

গোপনীয়

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার  
পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রাম বিষয়ক মন্ত্রণালয়  
বাংলাদেশ সচিবালয়, ঢাকা।

নং- পচিবিম (সম-২)- ১৪/৯৯/ ১/ ১৩

তারিখঃ ১২/১২/২০০৯

বিষয়ঃ পার্বত্য সশস্ত্র বাহিনীকে মুসলিম বাঙ্গালী বসতি স্থাপনকারীদের জঙ্গীবাদ হিসেবে চিহ্নিত করণের অপচেষ্টা।

সূত্রঃ সশস্ত্র বাহিনী বিভাগ, অপারেশনস ও পরিকল্পনা পরিদপ্তর, ঢাকা সেনানিবাস-এর নং- ২৯২৯/অপস/সিআই/সাই, ডাঃ- ১৫/১০/২০০৯।

উপর্যুক্ত বিষয় ও সূত্রোক্ত স্মারকের বরাতে জানানো যাচ্ছে যে, পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রাম অঞ্চলে বসবাসরত বাঙ্গালীদের বিরুদ্ধে কতিপয় স্বার্থহীন উপজাতীয় ব্যক্তি অপপ্রচার চালাচ্ছে এবং এ অপপ্রচারকে পুঞ্জি করে উপজাতীয় কতিপয় ব্যক্তি বাংলাদেশকে আশ্বস্তর্জাতিক পরিমন্ডলে কোনঠাসা করার অপচেষ্টা করছে। ইতোমধ্যে তারা নিজেদেরকে ‘উপজাতী’ হিসেবে পরিচয় দেয়ার পরিবর্তে ‘আদিবাসী’ পরিচয় পরিচয় দেয়ার জন্য মরিয়া হয়ে উঠেছে যাতে তারা জাতিসংঘ ও অন্যান্য আশ্বস্তর্জাতিক সংস্থা কর্তৃক ঘোষিত ‘আদিবাসীদের জন্য প্রযোজ্য অধিকারসমূহ ভোগ করতে পারে। পাশাপাশি ‘আদিবাসী’ স্বীকৃতি আদায় শেষে ‘আদিবাসী’ স্বার্থ রক্ষায় আশ্বস্তর্জাতিকভাবে সরকারের উপর চাপ প্রয়োগ করতে পারবে। এভাবে তারা ‘আদিবাসী’ জনগোষ্ঠী হিসেবে নিজেদের প্রতিষ্ঠিত করলে ভবিষ্যতে সহজে স্বায়ত্ত্বশাসনের অধিকার অর্জন করতে পারবে বলে মনে করছে। এ ধারাবাহিকতায় পার্বত্য অঞ্চলে বসবাসকারী বাঙ্গালীদেরকে তারা ‘মুসলিম বাঙ্গালী বসতি স্থাপনকারী (Muslim Bangalee Settlers) হিসেবে চিহ্নিত করার প্রচেষ্টা শুরু করেছে। এতে পার্বত্য অঞ্চলে বসবাসকারী জনগোষ্ঠীর মধ্যে সম্প্রীতি বিঘ্ন হতে পারে।

২। বর্ণিত অবস্থায়, পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রাম অঞ্চলে শান্তি শৃংখলা অবাধত রাখার স্বার্থে পার্বত্য জেলার সার্বিক জনগোষ্ঠীর মধ্যে সম্প্রীতি বজায় রাখার প্রয়োজনীয় ব্যবস্থা গ্রহণ করার জন্য নির্দেশক্রমে অনুরোধ করা হলো।

(মোঃ মজিবুর রহমান)  
উপ-সচিব (সমস্বয়-২)  
ফোনঃ ৭১৬১৭৭৪

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার  
জেলা প্রশাসকের কার্যালয়  
রাঙ্গামাটি পার্বত্য জেলা  
(জে এম শাখা)

স্মারক নং-২৯৯.৪০২.০০৩.০০০.০০৩.২০১০( ২১)

অনুলিপিঃ উপর্যুক্ত পত্রের মর্মমতে প্রয়োজনীয় ব্যবস্থা গ্রহণের জন্য তাঁকে অনুরোধ করা হলোঃ-

- ১। পুলিশ সুপার, রাঙ্গামাটি পার্বত্য জেলা।
- ২। উপজেলা নির্বাহী অফিসার, (সকল), রাঙ্গামাটি পার্বত্য জেলা।
- ৩। জেলা প্রশাসকের গোপনীয় সহকারী, রাঙ্গামাটি পার্বত্য জেলা। জেলা প্রশাসক মহোদয়কে সদয় অবহিতকরণের জন্য।

তারিখঃ ১২ জানুয়ারি, ২০১০ খ্রিষ্টাব্দ

(মোঃ মাহমুদ নূরুল আলম চৌধুরী)  
অতিরিক্ত জেলা ম্যাজিস্ট্রেট  
রাঙ্গামাটি পার্বত্য জেলা  
ফোনঃ ৩৩৫১-৬৩১০২

www.dcr.angamati.gov.bd / E-mail: dcr.angamati@moestab.gov.bd / পোস্টকোড-৪৫০০/ ফোন- ০৩০১-৬২২১১/৬২১২১

Photo 4: A scanned copy of a secret letter issued by the CHT Affairs Ministry on December 21, 2009

**[People's Republic of Bangladesh  
Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs  
Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka**

No-PaChBiMo (SoMo-2) - 14/99/330

Dated: /12/2009

**Re: A malicious attempt to label violence in Hill Tracts as Bangali Muslim settlers' militancy**

Reference No: 2929/OPoS/CI/I dated-15/10/2009 of the Armed Forces Division, Directorate of Operations and Planning, Dhaka Cantonment

With reference to the aforementioned subject and the reference, please be informed that some *upajati* individuals with vested interest are spreading malicious propaganda against Bangalis living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts region and through capitalising this propaganda some *upajati* individuals are trying to stymie Bangladesh in the international sphere. They have already become desperate to identify themselves as *adibasi* instead of *upajati* so that they may enjoy the rights of indigenous peoples declared by the UN and other international organisations. Moreover, once they are recognised as *adibasi*, they would be able to exert pressure on the government internationally to protect the interests of indigenous peoples. They think that if they could establish themselves as *adibasi* in this process, it would be easier for them to gain autonomy. In line with this, they have started to label Bangalis living in the Hill Tracts as 'Muslim Bangali Settlers'. This may disrupt harmony among hill tracts communities.

2. In these circumstances, you have been requested as per direction to take necessary steps towards keeping harmony among communities intact in order to maintain peace and order in the hill tracts region.

[Signed and dated on December 21, 2009]

Mohammad Mojibur Rahman

Deputy Secretary (Coordination-2)

Phone: 7161774]

The position of the government on indigeneity can be traced quite vividly in this secret official letter. I was fortunate to have come across it by means of acquaintances who had access to these documents. The language used in the letter demands critical reading. By referring to "some '*upajati*' individuals with vested interest" the government of Bangladesh is resorting to a divide and rule policy among the indigenous people in the CHT. The term 'desperate' used in the letter carries a negative connotation to indicate that the attempts of recognition of the indigenous people is somehow irrational and has hidden connotations. This hidden connotation and propaganda is meant to malign Bangladesh in the international sphere. Whereas '*adibasi*' means the original inhabitant, the preferred term of the Bangladeshi government is '*upajati*' and that means a sub-nation. When referred to as the '*upajati*', the indigenous people would continue to remain under the control of the Bangladeshi nation and its governments. The letter also highlights the fear of the Bangladesh government and why they do not want to refer to the indigenous people as '*adibasi*'. According to the letter, if the indigenous people are referred to as '*adibasi*' then they would secure international rights which in turn would enable them to protect the interests of the indigenous people and pave the way for their demands of autonomy. Then the government would have to accept customary rights that it doesn't want to accept. The indigenous people have been central to various government sponsored promotions of 'Beautiful Bangladesh' and its tourism through videos, stamps, posters. However, the same government, at that very juncture, when establishing national identity in the constitution, has maintained that there are no indigenous people in Bangladesh. The irony of the situation is palpable when it is proclaimed in the letter that the indigenous people want to label Muslim Bengalis in CHT as Muslim Bengali settlers.

This chapter will look at the response of the government of Bangladesh to the CHT and its politics. It will analyse government discourse on the CHT through documents (secret letters, press note/release, circulars, bills and policies). Foucault's concept of normalisation helps us to understand the process of differentiation and exclusion used by the Bangladeshi government in terms of dealing and controlling indigenous people and their movement for the recognition of their identities as '*adibasi*'. It will allow me to explore the ways in which the state legitimises its intervention (used for controlling apparatuses like documents) in the CHT. What are the symbolic constructions, through which the politics of rhetoric and managerial practices (Foucault, 1972) are justified? How are they manifested in government documents? A few examples follow in terms of how labels and terms are restricted or used in government

documents to normalize and control the indigenous communities in CHT. In a circular issued on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2009, the State Ministry of Bangladesh stated:

'Recently a demand from various sectors has been made to refer to tribal people as indigenous' and to change the name of the CHT Affairs ministry to 'indigenous Affairs Ministry'. Various international organizations including the United Nations Development Fund (UNDP), Annual Development Program (ADP) and the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) are investing billions in the CHT for tribal empowerment programmes aimed at establishing the tribal people as 'indigenous and achieving their autonomy. Moreover many intellectuals in various seminars and symposiums and journalists in their writings are marking the tribal people as indigenous. Claiming to be indigenous is a game of Christian countries who were trying to influence or create unrest in the CHT. If this continues, the recognition of tribal people as indigenous will be mandatory. They say that under no circumstances should tribal ethnic groups living in Bangladesh be referred to as indigenous rather than 'tribal'; and that the NGOs working in the CHT must be placed under strict supervision and that there should be increased vigilance in the CHT.

These instructions were issued on the orders of the Prime Minister's office in a confidential notification by the CHT to the Home Secretary and the Deputy Commissioners of three hill tract districts, Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban. 'Tribe' is an administrative category in India. Colonial administrators (Lewin, 1889; Hutchinson, 1906) used 'Tribe' to refer to the people in the CHT. Instead, 'tribe' has been translated as '*upajati*' in Bengali. The government views that it is a game of Christian countries to convert them to Christianity where as the number of Christians in the CHT is less than 1%.

On 09 August, 2014, the Press Information Department (PID) issued a press release (reference No 2704) urging the media, experts, university teachers and civil society members to avoid the word *adibasi* in discussions and talk-shows during the International Day of the World's indigenous People. This is because according to the circular there exist no '*adibasis*' in the country as per the 15th amendment of the constitution. The circular added that in the 15th amendment<sup>27</sup>, minority ethnic communities in Bangladesh are referred to as '*tribes*' or

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<sup>27</sup>The Fifteenth Amendment was passed in the Parliament of Bangladesh on 25 June 2011 and made some significant changes to the constitution.

‘ethnic minorities’. When indigenous people reacted to the PID press release by protesting it, government did not respond. When the press releases were issued, the District Commissioner (DC) of the three hill districts applied their instructions. Even during our visit to a hilly place in Rangamati after the communal attack (attack on indigenous people by military and *Bangali* settlers) in Sajek (a union at Baghaichari *Upazila* in Rangamati district), the DC forced an activist journalist member of our committee to use the word '*upajati*' instead of '*adibasi*' and when asked why, he showed us the government issued letter. Similarly, when *Prothom Alo* (the highest circulated *Bangla* newspaper) changed the '*nrigosti*' instead of '*adibasi*' in one of my columns published on 4th April 2016, the editor clarified to me that the government had issued a letter to the media (print and electronic) not to use the word '*adibasi*'. If any media uses the word, they would be black listed for any government advertisement.

The letters issued by the government and other government development initiatives (as discussed in chapter two) are good examples of the state's hegemonic approach in the CHT. However, I also found various forms of complicity on the part of the Ministry of CHT Affairs, Indigenous MPs with the national government so as to carry out various forms of cultural hegemony over the indigenous people. It is a very important observation made by Margolds (1999) that state-sponsored violence targeted those who lacked influential protectors. Those people who were politically confident were usually the ones with kin in the military or the municipal government offices. So complicity becomes a very important of these hegemonic practices. In this regard, Pierre Bourdieu's (1977, 1984) concept of 'habitus' can serve a similar purpose, explaining how structures of violence may be reproduced in the society. For example here, systems of racial segregation and discrimination towards the indigenous communities structure social interaction in coercive ways which, in turn, reproduce the cultural divisions on which those very same practices are based.

The Bangladesh government is frightened about the words '*adibasi*' or indigenous and the dissemination of their rights and history in the media. Dan Rycroft's (2014:4) argument that “the conceptualisation and dissemination of '*adivasi*' identities and histories prompts a range of intellectual and political projects, notably the re-interpretation of '*adivasi*' histories, and the re-assertion of '*adivasi*' rights through fluid local, regional, zonal, national, and international discourses” is helpful to reflect on the government discourse of indigeneity. I argue in this thesis that state violence against the indigenous people is linked with the indigeneity politics. Here the Bangladeshi government is delegitimizing '*adibasi*' rights and reinterpreting their history only to ensure they remain within the control of the Bangladeshi nation. If the rights of



indigenous people and their history are circulated more, the Bangladesh government will have to accept their rights.

In the 15th amendment of the Constitution<sup>28</sup> in 2011, the present government, led by the Awami League, has denied the constitutional recognition of the fundamental rights of indigenous peoples but has imposed the terms 'tribal' and 'ethnic minorities'. However, the definitions of 'tribal' and 'ethnic minorities' were not included in the amendment. Dipangkar Talukdar, ex-minister of the Ministry of CHT Affairs, told me that the government as per the Accord, in new constitutional reforms, used the word '*upajati*' and the leaders accepted that. When I interviewed Shantu Larma, he told me it was a technical issue for that time, and had they objected the Accord would never have been possible. The government has also not responded to a Parliamentary Caucus (2012) on indigenous People which proposed to enact a "Bangladesh indigenous Peoples' Rights Act" and to set up a "National Commission on indigenous Peoples" to ensure the rights of indigenous communities on their ancestral lands. According to the Caucus, the existing laws are not adequate to ensure the rights of indigenous peoples. Thus the government's disciplinary power over the CHT is evident through these various documents. The government's perspective on indigenous people is also expressed through the textbooks used in government high schools which I examine in chapter four.

To analyse how fear is generated through the threat of state violence in the CHT I draw on Aretxaga's (2001) work on violence in Northern Ireland. She shows how women's bodies are used as spaces for violence. She analyses the practice of strip-searching women political prisoners in Northern Ireland as a violent technology of control aimed at breaking the political identity of the prisoners. Focusing on a controversial case of a mass strip search carried out in 1992, she examines the phantasmatic investments pervading this seemingly rational technology of control. By using a psychoanalytic notion of fantasy against the backdrop of a Foucauldian theory of power, she argues that strip searches constitute a gendered form of political domination driven by, and performed within, a phantasmatic scenario of sexual violence.

Stripping the female IRA prisoners naked was conducted in the midst of screams, insults, and the threat of physical violence. Women's accounts of being stripped naked and the accompanying humiliation and personal degradation is described as 'rape without penetration'

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<sup>28</sup>The Parliament of Bangladesh, the Jatiya Sangsad (National Parliament), passed *the Constitution (Fifteenth Amendment) Bill 2011* on 30 June 2011 to amend its Constitution. The Bill which contained 15 proposals was passed, while opposition parties were boycotting Parliament, by the division vote with a majority of 291-1. One of the features was that indigenous people would be termed as tribal and ethnic minorities.

The practice is discussed as the prison officers' attempts not only to subordinate women but also to weaken their identity as Irish political prisoners. Focusing on this very controversial case of mass strip searching of women political prisoners in Northern Ireland, Aretxaga shows how it was linked to and generated a heightened political subject hood which as a result defied any hegemonic control of their bodies by the authorities. In the following sections I also map out the theoretical outlines of the threat of violence and fear in the everyday lives of the indigenous women in CHT. This would also enable me to explore the theoretical significance of bodily and gendered memory.

### **Everyday Violence**

Previously the government exercised its power by military means, leading to massacres and the direct shooting of people. After the peace accord state power was indirectly exercised by arson committed by army backed *Bangali* settlers. In the CHT, there are four types of reality (political, military, intellectual and psychological). The political reality includes: the doctrines, deeds, and behind-the-scenes machinations of power brokers. There is the military reality: the strategies, tactics and loyalties of commanders; the camaraderie, actions and briefs of soldiers. There is the intellectual reality and the psychological reality: the fear, anxiety and repression among the people in the CHT.

Government officials have always claimed that peace prevails in the CHT, and that communal attacks were 'separate incidents' rather than evidence of 'violence'. The administrative voice (the DC and other government officials) says that 'peace' was everywhere in the CHT and the law and order situation in Khagrachari was under control especially after the communal attack (on the Buddhist community) took place in Cox's Bazar. They said that since the peace treaty had ended the conflict between the army and SB, there should not be any violence. The government authorities always try to say that now the conflict only exists between JSS and UPDF where the blame ultimately is put on the indigenous leaders.

As I mentioned earlier, most of the indigenous groups in the CHT are Buddhist, hence, the communal attack in Cox's Bazar (as a neighbour district of CHT) carried the extra fear of violence there. Not only are they scared by the army presence, they are also scared about the new Bengali people (since in the locality everyone seems to know each other) and members of JSS and UPDF. As a result they can't trust anyone in that area. To theorise this everyday threat of violence I draw from the ethnography of Das, Kleinman and Ramphele (2000:2) which

shows how violence examines the process through which it is actualised. Their comparative ethnographies provide accounts of the manner in which everyday life is transformed by the engagement with violence through direct and indirect methods, but in doing so they cross-examine the notion of everyday life from the site of the ordinary. As a result in the CHT the ordinary life is replete with the threat of violence and fear. Hence people are cautious of opening their doors. They were scared of my olive coloured bag since the military uses that colour. They don't want to make a permanent house as they have a fear that they can be displaced at any time. They are even frightened to use their mobile phones. They also try to take safe routes to avoid further violence in trying to negotiate everyday forms of violence. In trying to understand the threat of violence, my thesis also focuses on the narration of multiple experiences of indigenous women belonging to different groups and with various levels of socio economic status

Violence is also an intricately layered phenomenon where each participant, each witness to violence, brings their own perspective and techniques to face the violence. Mehta (2000:103) explains how local structures of feeling are generated to sustain the potential for violence, while Das (2000) similarly shows the heterogeneity of these local structures of feeling and the potential for a different stance toward violence contained in everyday life. While the potential of dramatic stories, relayed in rumours or in tea shop conversation, to generate violence is important, as shown by Mehta, there are also counter-images of digesting, containing and sealing through which local societies deal with this violence. The administrative system in the CHT is multidimensional and there are more agencies in the CHT than in any other district in Bangladesh. In addition to the standard agencies there are the regional council, the hill district council, the military and the Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board (CHTDB). The Bangladesh state treats the CHT as a 'terrorist zone' or 'punishment zone', and introduces new forms of discipline which then become the norm. Masco (2014) systematically shows how the legislation immediately following WWII and 9/11 radically re-shaped the security apparatus and made a host of state activities legitimate (that would have previously been understood as illegitimate). As a result people of the CHT were not allowed to use mobile phones for a long time. The government also transferred their corrupt civil servants to the CHT as a form of punishment. The state always tried to legalise their decision to deploy military control in the CHT. They are aided in this process by the competition for power between the innumerable government bodies in the CHT (regional council, Hill District Council, CHTDB, military) which encourages further threats of violence.

In my ethnography it is evident that patriarchy is a reality in the indigenous societies of the CHT. Even the JSS leader Shantu Larma was reluctant to give appropriate emphasis to women's issue in the CHT. However, indigenous women challenge this patriarchy with their everyday forms of negotiation/dealings (chapter four). In my field areas, however, violence gave birth to female-headed households as most of the male members of the families had to leave home due to military interference as they were suspected of being supporters or members of SB. Even though some of the women joined SB or JSS, their contributions were totally neglected in the peace accord process which only talked about men as fighters and women as family or support providers. That this kind of structural violence has long term effect is evident in the work of Mamphela Ramphele (2000) who shows how structural and physical violence, private and public, have become part of the everyday lives of children and adults in South Africa, shaping their definitions of self and others in important ways. Ramphele explains how institutions of family and kinship, which were singled out for destruction by the apartheid regime, were bent, shaped, and deformed by the policies and programmes of the state. She explains that black men during the apartheid era were categorised as belonging to a lower status than white women and children. The use of the term 'boy' refers to the majority of African men and captures the symbolic position they were meant to occupy in the power hierarchy of 'racist' South Africa. Their unfortunate leakage from complete powerlessness is the control they exercise over African women and children. However, masculinity is nowhere the same for black men and white men in the different classes. Therefore, of course, different households will have different conceptions of, and narratives to tell about, masculinity. Ramphele says in the essay that the myth of the man as supporter, protector, provider and decision-maker was carefully nurtured in an attempt to protect the community from a moral/ethical collapse during the struggle years in South Africa. She suggests that the disappearance of fathers, predominantly in African families, is often a reproduction of the inabilities of most fathers to provide. In conclusion, Ramphele says that "*South African men share a common culture [of patriarchy], be they African, Afrikaner, Jewish or English; patriarchy has been a part of social reality.*" (2000:117).

Furthermore, violence has had a long term effect on family, relationship and kinship in CHT. Previously, young boys used to stay outside the family to avoid physical torture or attacks by the army. Young girls were sent to comparatively remote areas where the army generally did not go. Still now, most of them have a strategy not to stay as family members together, believing that if there is a conflict some would remain safe or at least not killed. In my research, I examine indigenous women's perspective on everyday forms of violence drawing from

scholars [Das (1995, 2000), Scheper-Hughes' (1992) and Mookherjee (2015)], who don't treat violence as an exception. I also bring out men's narratives. Das firmly explores how the violence of extreme events such as Partition comes to be incorporated into the temporal structure of relationships and within the multiple weaves of daily life. In her essays, she gives us a concrete sense of the relationship between the eventful and the ordinary, between the large-scale events of political turmoil and the legacy of everyday lives that are the site of betrayal and violation but also of recovery and hope. She explores the meaning of being a witness to violence and the formation of the subject. Thus she raises a very important question in her writings as to why we need to ask not only how women were made the victims of ethnic or communal violence through specific gendered acts of violation such as rape, but also how women took these venomous signs of violation and re-occupied them through the work of domestication, ritualization and re-narration.

While focusing on overt state violence I will explore through the works of Michel Foucault and James Scott how state violence is normalised through every day practices and surveillance, how it might be internalised by victims and how they might resist the imposition of violence through their everyday acts of resistance. My research explores the possibilities of everyday forms of agency and overt resistance among the indigenous communities in CHT in response to the violence. However, this study is also cautious not to indulge in the romanticisation of resistance as discussed by Ortner (1995). In 'Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal' Ortner (1995) speaks about subaltern groups being internally divided by factors like age and gender at the same time. These factors allow one to have a "different, even opposed but still legitimate perspective on the situation"(p 15). Ortner writes about the importance of acknowledging internal politics, among the subordinate people. I avoid this romanticisation and essentialisation by not only highlighting various intra-community dynamics but also by examining the prevalence of suspicion, complicity, self-surveillance and distrust. I draw on Das's analysis (2000:10) where she shows how the terrifying brutalities of the partition of India left a bequest of relationships marked by suspicion, sullenness and treachery not only between the Hindus and Muslims but also between men and women of the same community and even the same kinship groups.

### **Everyday Fear**

My ethnography explores the everyday forms of fear among the indigenous women through their language, their everyday forms of activism and the self-surveillance processes used to keep themselves safe or to avoid further violence. I have found that disowning their

own memory of violence and displacement has become part of their self-surveillance. They also feel that they are being monitored constantly. As Koskela (2000:260) says that "a surveillance camera is an enigmatic object. Even though people under surveillance are aware of the fact that the camera itself cannot see, they are at the same time aware that someone sees, or might see through it. Although at a particular moment people are aware that someone may or may not be looking at them, they are aware of the 'gaze', and this gaze is (partly) unrelated to the act of looking".

Interestingly, the indigenous communities sometimes consider negotiating an attitude toward the state and settler *Bangalis* as a part of their self-surveillance. Margolds (1999) critically examines the widespread usage of such constructs as 'culture of terror' and 'culture of fear' to characterize settings in which state power affects the civilians. Taussig's concept of 'culture of terror/fear' suggests that terror and fear are totalizing circumstances that arrange all the fear experienced in daily life. These culturally-made conditions of terror and fear immerse a social group's vision and twist its competence to act. The notion of a universal 'culture of fear', however, tells us little about the sources of courage that enabled the mothers and grandmothers of the 'disappeared' in Argentina to appear in public with photographs of their lost children, marking themselves as radical during the country's 'dirty war'. Even as some of their own were being killed (Perelli, 1994:43), the women publicly personified a culturally stranded claim to justice that ultimately became more widely retrievable in their terrorized society. If terror and fear are associated with culture, it is difficult to conceptualise how an effective fight emerges.

Instead, Linda Green's (1999) work shows on one hand how everyone lives in fear of further violence. Green's writing gives us an ethnographic account of self-surveillance, visible and non-visible violence in Guatemala. On the other hand, she discusses secrecy and silence as well as the survival strategies of people. In CHT my CHT fieldwork people survived by pretending to not understand the language, (chapters four and five).

Zur's (1994) work is also very important because it helps to make sense of the violence in my field areas where most people were either resisting or coping with violence via multiple forms (i.e., socio-political, sexual, age-based, ethnic and so on). Zur identifies the violence that occurred in Guatemala as socio-political. Violence did not target every member of the population but was linked to socio-economic status, which, in Guatemala, was in turn linked to ethnicity. The discussion of history engaged through collective memory is presented in Linda Green's (1994) study of fear's diffusion of social memory in Guatemala. Many Guatemalans live in fear due to steady surveillance, kidnapping, torture, and murder. As a result, their

subjection to violence has become the custom. These communities use their collective memory of past Spanish subjugations to symbolize their present experiences. Like the Hutu camp refugees in Green's work, the Guatemalans strengthen and blend current and historical events in order to form a consistent collective identity. In this case, the identity is based on fear, yet the ubiquity of fear and the consequent redesigning and imitation of memory are not limited to victimized communities. An important finding of Green's work is the way fear is conceptualized by women through their experiences of encountering violence. As Green points out, the elite, dominant classes in Guatemala execute political violence because they are driven by racism and fear of communist rebellion. She captures the sense of insecurity that suffuses the individual woman's life, wracked by dreadful memories of physical and emotional survival, ongoing militarisation and never-ending fear.

She explores the effects that fear has had on Guatemalan society in the wake of genocide. She was struck by the persistent sense of fear and unease that saturated and structured their lives. Similarly, in CHT the women lived under constant threat and surveillance by a nearby military settlement, civil patrols and unknown neighbours who worked as the 'ears' of the government. Again, their fear was generated by more indirect factors such as disappearing bodies, rumours, uncertainty, puzzling forms of speech and constant mistrust. On the other hand, in regard to an analysis of the violence in the CHT, violence committed by the Bangladesh army is considered as state violence. And even now the army has always tried to legalise its steps in the CHT. Speaking after laying the foundation for the 'Parbatya Chattagram Complex' in Dhaka on 8th May, 2016, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said: "*We have removed most of the army camps from the hills. ... Only four brigades will remain in four places. We will withdraw the rest. We are setting up a cantonment in Ramu with that in mind.*"<sup>29</sup> Major General (Rtd) Syed Mohammad Ibrahim who served as GOC in the late eighties in the CHT however opposed the government's position, explaining: "*Army camps in the CHT make the relationship between the government and people. We were the witness of terrorism, hijacking and kidnapping in that area. We can't easily understand the situation of the area without the army camp*"<sup>30</sup>.

Hughes (2013) examines how former insurgents and military personnel positioned themselves in their stories and justified their actions, especially when extraordinary circumstances required despicable means to reach laudable ends. The narratives she collected

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<sup>29</sup>Bdnews24.com. 8th May, 2016.

<sup>30</sup>Parbartyanews.com, 8th May, 2016.

often include stock characters: victims, perpetrators, and heroes. No one positioned himself as a perpetrator of violence. Instead, former insurgents told of being tortured and former military officials related their fear for themselves, their families, and their nation in the face of a foe they perceived as strong and frightening. This narrative pattern obscures any clear distinction between ‘perpetrator’ and ‘victim’, although people obviously assumed such roles for particular acts of violence. Hughes’s interlocutors emphasised stories that made them feel good about themselves and avoided telling stories that put them in the wrong. Incoherence, inconsistency, and ambiguity revealed moments of cognitive dissonance during which people found it difficult to frame their own actions in ways they wanted to share with the ethnographer. Achieving the ‘right’ sort of story often required silencing of both self and others. Hughes argues that people give meaning to violence. She identifies Buddhist philosophy and the doctrine of karma, two sometimes contradictory dynamics. On the one hand, her interviewees discussed individual responsibility for choices. Bad deeds will have bad karmic effects in this life or future rebirths. Victims of violence can rest assured that perpetrators will face consequences, even if they are never officially held accountable for their actions. On the other hand, interlocutors discussed a doctrine of intent: if one acts with pure thoughts (for example, to save the nation), one can escape bad karmic consequences for unsavoury deeds. Participants on both sides of The Terror used their current interest in Buddhism to establish themselves as respectable community members. I theoretically explore this making of the self through the bodily and gendered memory of the CHT women in the next section.

### **Bodily Memory**

In my thesis I have tried to understand the character of violence through the experience, affect and agency of women, through the gender division of work and through everyday forms of violence and their response to the violence. The thesis also argues that the indigenous women’s narratives of the everyday forms of terror testify to the extent of state and community violence in various forms. In addition, it focuses on the everyday forms of bodily memory towards the violence. It also discusses the socio-economic status of the participants which is necessary to understand the violence. While talking about violence, the language, expression of trauma and emotional pain had been at the centre of the narratives. To analyse of memory of violence, the thesis follows the theoretical frame work of Das (2000) and Mookherjee’s (2015) work. Following Das, Mookherjee (2015:107) shows how “they folded [taken from Das (2000:220)] stories of violence, encoding, and incorporating them into uneventful, taken for granted practices and relations, constantly combing (hiding) them”. Following her helps me to achieve



a varied nuance of the bodily memory as expressed by Sabita Chakma, a school teacher and from a middle socio-economic status:

*'Still I feel pain in my right feet, as military heat my feet (showing the sign in the feet), I went to several doctors, but they could not find any problem, the pain may be in my mind, not in my feet'*. Bodily materialisation of pain and sufferings activate memories of the event (Mookherjee 2015, 2008), whereas Das (2006:46-58, quoted in Mookherjee 2015. 108) says "bodily mutilations mutilate the use of ordinary language, bruise and fracture normality". Scholars (Green, 1993; Zur, 1994, Mookherjee, 2015) have emphasized the socio-somatic processes of everyday life, through which social relations affect blood pressure, heart rate and respiration, with social loss and demoralization contributing to illness and disease. They add that experience is not limited to the secluded person but is shared across persons. Bodily complaints could also be construed as a form of strength against local sources of oppressive control. Indicators of social suffering and transformation are the cultural forms of lived experience. They are lived reminiscences. Thus, it is said that bodies transformed by political processes not only represent those procedures, they experience them as they lived memory of distorted worlds. Das examines the history in which the cultural memory of partition of India is made up of stories of women who chose to sacrifice their lives and thus were valorised in family narratives and popular cultures in the Punjab. Unfortunately, the trajectories of many female lives were not included in this culturally-sanctioned memory: such women were either not included or removed from familial narratives of the past. Following Nussbaum (1992) Das narrates the way violence is folded into interpersonal relationships establishing what she calls 'poisonous knowledge'. She suggests that such poisonous knowledge applies to the woman Asha who was betrayed by her senior affinal kin as well as by her brother. Her brother could not undertake to sustain her because of the knowledge that she herself might have betrayed her dead husband and sister-in-law by imagining their infidelity and thereby ultimately making a 'special' adopted child feel abandoned.

What are the instances of bodily memory and self creation that one may find in CHT? In instances where children were abandoned by women, an embodied memory exists which is expressed in personal and collective accounts. Bodily and embodied memory (still having a pain in the leg, nightmares, hearing the army all the time) reproduces the experience of violence that they went through. Hence both personal and collective memory can be considered as testimonies to the violence against indigenous people especially the women.

During my field work, I was asked many times how I came to believe that my respondents were telling me the truth since I was doing the work in a conflict zone. Referring

to the work of Halbwachs (1980) and Nora (1989) for different positions, Mookherjee (2015) cautiously notes in her research that people distinguish memory from history through a series of oppositions: whereas memory is skewed, genuine and individualized, history is objective, renovated and collective. Rather than romanticising history or memory her work focuses on discursive, circulatory, inter-textual and dialogical accounts of public memories (Mookherjee prefers to use the term 'public memory' since 'collective memory' suggests homogeneity and consensus). The relationship between individual and collective speech (memory) has been at the nucleus of many debates on memory, both in and outside the fields of oral history and life stories (Hirsch and Smith, 2002; they refer to Louri et al., 1987; see also the approach by Candida Smith, 2002). This is the field in which feminist theory has been linked to memory and where it has afforded a "valuable lens through which cultural memory may be studied" (Leydesdorff, Passerini and Thompson 2009:Viii)

My respondents had a relationship with individual and collective memory when they narrated their own stories of violence and displacement. They continuously used 'I' and then 'We' (in contexts where a large group of people face the same problem) which indicates that their individual or collective memory may lead to a homogeneity of memory while also highlighting moments of violence related to displacement. Kleinman and Kleinman (1993) begin with Connerton's theory (1989) that "collective and individual memory are so thoroughly interconnected, and ...those interconnections are so central to how societies reproduce their social order across generations, that it is appropriate to analyse how societies remember". They argue that societies memorize in three rather different ways: through engravings onto cultural texts (myths, great books, monuments); by way of memorial rituals that are highly appealing to people in participatory rationality; and through social action and via the integration of social memory into human body changes, cultural identity, and ethnic and class and gender difference. In addition to narratives, my respondents used songs and poems as oral texts and artefacts to recall memories and to interpret them with their personal experience to map the violence. These experiences of violence links with their identity. Therefore, the concept 'indigeneity' is very important in my research.

### **Debating Indigeneity**

Indigenous refers primarily to native to or born in and other terms which are synonymous with this meaning include autochthonous, and aboriginal. Each of these concepts and labels have a specific derivation and precise if overlapping meanings. Other terms include: 'tribal', 'local'

'traditional' and 'folk'. None is ideal; indeed, all have pros and cons against them<sup>31</sup>. The 'indigeneity' issue does not necessarily mean belonging to a land or having made the first appearance on the land. Being indigenous is a politically and culturally constructed phenomenon. It cannot be limited to the structured guidelines set up by the UN and the ILO. However, these different but very much interlinked approaches adopted by the Bangladesh government help me to fathom the concept of 'indigeneity' in relation to the state discourse, which will be discussed briefly in the latter part of this chapter I will also deconstruct the term from the perspectives of my respondents.

Territoriality is premised on originality, since original inhabitants have more claims on a territorial space. Hence, 'indigeneity' becomes a field of contestation. Some are 'born with it'; others 'imagine it as an ethnic belonging'. Empirically, the claim of 'indigeneity' is always contested since few human groups inhabit a space from the beginning. The groups that claim indigeneity associate themselves with the original inhabitants in quite imaginative ways though they exist many generations later (Nair, 2006: 8). For example, many 'tribes' in India use the term '*adibasi*', which literally means inhabitants of the beginning, to define their identity transcending the definitions of the state (see Hardiman, 1987: 223).

Mary Louise Pratt (2007:424) writes that 'indigeneity' names a relationship based on a conception of time and space that differentiates among groups of people. Words like 'Indian' in the Americas and 'Aborigine' in Australia were European inventions for peoples already there, prior to the arrival of the colonisers; and for its part indigenous has derived from the French 'indigene' and the Latin '*indigena*'. The label indigenous further discloses a relationship with other non-Europeans: the first English usage comes in a 1598 report about the discovery of America to distinguish between 'indigenes' (defined as 'people bred upon that very soil') and the people that Spaniards and Portuguese brought from Africa as slaves<sup>32</sup>.

Not surprisingly, these forms of relationality expressed a sense of European superiority, in the sense that indigenous was synonymous with 'pagan', heathen souls to be saved through Christianity. Later, as reason displaced faith as authority's foundation, 'the pagan' was renamed 'the primitive' (as opposed to 'civilized') including those classified as 'tribal,' 'native' and 'aborigine' in colonial administrative lexicons.

It is true that the globalisation of the concept of indigenous rights has been by turns powerful, uneven, and unpredictable. As it has travelled from familiar contexts like Canada, the United

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<sup>31</sup>Roy Ellen and Holly Harris (2000), 'Introduction' to *Indigenous Environmental Knowledge*, ed. Ellen, Parkes, and Bicker, 3.

<sup>32</sup>Oxford English Dictionary (n.d.) for 'indigenous'.

States, and Brazil to newer ones like India and Indonesia, the discourse of indigeneity has encountered interlocutors among marginalised, usually rural populations. To deal with this highly contested topic, it is necessary to underscore the way that indigenous people have been treated in the history of the CHT in different periods of domination.

### **Politics of indigeneity**

Defining the term indigenous people involves an understanding of the political struggle as well as questions of indigenous rights, although it must also be noted that debates on the use of the term, and of the politics of identity are still on the rise. Prominent anthropologist B.K. Roy Burman (2006: 241) argues against a World Bank document in which scheduled tribes of India were brought under the term indigenous people'. Burman explains that such identities could only be settled after thorough discussions with eligible people who are acquainted with the particulars of the Indian situation. Similarly, Andre Beteille says, the categorization of Indian tribal people as indigenous people' is seriously misleading (1998:188p). His point of argument is that the word indigenous is neither a good social descriptor nor an effective heuristic concept. He says, *"I call it an idea rather than a concept because the purpose it serves is as often evocative as analytical and its referent tends to shift from one country to another"* (Beteille, 2006: 235). Historian Sumit Guha also holds that the entire indigeneity discourse is being imposed on India and that the constitutionally recognized scheduled tribes *"have been classified as indigenous by international experts, quite regardless of their actual histories"*(1999:4). On the other hand, Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that the debate about the category indigenous people' speaks to larger issues related to contemporary politics, or, as he puts it, *"of how we imagine the political today"*. By claiming indigenous status and rights, oppressed groups follow what Chakrabarty calls the logic of "politics unlimited" (Chakrabarty, 2006:244) where he means there is a lot of politics to weave through the indigeneity.

Rycroft's work (2014:6) states that *"'adibasis' as indigenous and 'Tribal Peoples', summarises the key conceptual and semantic debates that have enabled adibasis to assert themselves as indigenous internationally and nationally. "Reinterpreting Adibasi History, he reflects upon a statement made about anti-colonial pasts by a leading Santal politician (the term 'Santal' refers to the third largest of the indigenous and Tribal Peoples in India) to weigh up how and why movements led by Adibasi freedom fighters maintain discourses of indigeneity in postcolonial India. Focusing on the Indian Confederation of indigenous and Tribal Peoples, he wanted to assess how this prominent indigenised organisation develops the notion of indigenous rights relating to history, in a range of representational contexts. He argues that "'Adibasi' identity*

refers to the multiple histories of resistance to and/or negotiation of the discourses and practices of marginalisation by the dominant groups in India, whether they be Hindu feudalists, Moghul governors, British colonials or Indian nationalists<sup>33</sup>. In these contexts, neither the term indigenous nor the term 'tribal' adequately encompasses the complexity of Adibasi subjectivity, creating a need for conceptual hybridity and pluralism"(2014, 10). In this context it is worth following Shah (2010:32) who "examines the social networks, forms of political representations, and economic structures that produce to subvert indigeneity as both an idea and a lived experience".

Such propositions are also true in the case of Bangladesh, where the question of indigeneity is mostly constructed out of the binary identities of *Bangali* and indigenous peoples. For instance, when the matter of constitutional recognition of indigenous people came forward, the country's policy makers raised the question, "*if they are indigenous, are the Bangali people foreigners? What is the status of Bangali people in this regard?*" (28 July, 2011, *New Age*). Shah (Varied nativist claims on the indigeneity of the majority population is prevalent in South Africa about the Afrikaner communities (Hodson 2009:23), in UK about the local white population(BNP Activists' and Organizers' Handbook, 2010:57), in India about Hindus being indigenous as claimed by Hindu right wing parties (Baviskar 2007:278), in Botswana (Nyamnjoh2007: 36), in New Zealand (Smith 2005: 6) or what Circe Sturm calls 'race-shifting' (2002: 18), in America: a 'migration from whiteness to redness'. But as the global indigenous movement is alive with promising contradictions, inverting national development standards, it promises unity based on plurality, diversity without assimilation. It endorses authenticity and invention, subsistence and wealth, traditional knowledge and new technologies, territory and diaspora<sup>34</sup>. The excitement of indigenous rights claims comes from the creative possibilities of such juxtapositions.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have briefly reviewed the scholarship concerned with state discourse on violence, forced displacement, memory and gender and indigeneity. To understand the state discourse on the CHT through the secret letter and circulars, the thesis has made use of Foucauldian theory which focuses on direct and indirect mechanisms used to control the people

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<sup>33</sup>See Bates 1995, 105-109; Xaxa 1999, 3591.

<sup>34</sup>Ronald Niezen (2005:534) describes the paradoxes of the indigenous movement: its newness versus its ancient heritage; dependence on the oral and face-to-face as well as international law and governance; and subsistence versus high-tech orientations. Clifford discusses the interplay of territoriality and diaspora in constituting indigenous identities.

in the CHT. I am also aware of the romanticisation of violence and it is important to remember how 'peace' became a powerful tool in the context of the CHT to understand the violence.

## Chapter Two

### **A Bangali anthropologist among 'Pahari' communities: Locating oneself and the field**

#### **Introduction**

'You people eat snake, pork, frog and dog's meat, how come?' This was one of the most common questions that most of my indigenous friends encountered in their childhood when they met any *Bangali*. When we were children, the representations were derogatory in the text books, i.e. they represented the indigenous people as 'primitive'.<sup>35</sup> For example stating that people 'Mro *Upajati*' kills cows because they believe that their religious text has been eaten by cows. Text books were the only source of information about these 'non-*Bangali*' people. But the old stories have been replaced by new representations or prejudices. For example, the indigenous food '*nappi*' (dry fish paste) is regarded negatively by *Bangali* people because of its strong smell. Regarding their dress, the distinction made between 'modern' and cultural dress is negative toward indigenous culture. The design of indigenous housing is also negatively represented in the text book, leading my niece to ask me, "*Won't these houses look funny if they are highly elevated?*" She had read in her text book that '*In general, the houses of Tripura are better elevated than the houses of Chakma and Marma*' (Bangladesh and Global Studies, class V, P.100). Why Chakma and Marma houses are highly elevated is not explained in the book. Regarding indigenous modes of agricultural production, the text book states "*The method that they follow in cultivation is called "Jum". At present, they are getting used to the usual process of cultivation*". (Bangladesh and Global Studies, class VIII, P.102). From the perspective of *Bangali* people '*Jum*' (Slash and Burn) cultivation is depicted with negative connotations as an 'unusual' process.

These representations of indigenous people are not limited to the text books. Banglapedia, the National Encyclopaedia of Bangladesh, under the heading 'Tribal culture', is derogatory: "*Some tribes living in the deep forests of the Chittagong Hill Tracts still wear tree leaves as their only dress....The tribals eat everything except their totems. The Garos do not eat cats as the cat is their totem. Maghs, Chakmas and Khasias do not eat beef, and Garos do not drink milk. Magh and Chakma men and women are fond of smoking. Their favourite dishes*

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<sup>35</sup>Social Science, textbook for class III, 1983, page 87, '*upajatider kotha*' published by Bangladesh Text Book and Curriculum Board.

*are those that are sour and are made of dried prawns. Oraons eat rats, eels, potatoes and khesari pulses. Alcohol made of fermented rice is every tribe's favourite drink*"<sup>36</sup>.

Representations such as these have created a mindset among *Bangali* people which has led to an interpretation among them that 'diversity' stands for 'other' and 'exotic'. For example because the majority of *Bangali* Muslims treat pork as a religiously prohibited food, they look down on the fact that the indigenous people in the CHT eat pork. The Chakma writer Suvra Jyoti Chakma (2016) has protested about these representations by stating that the representation of the indigenous people in the text book for children should have been done in consultation with indigenous people. On the other hand, SB had always been portrayed in the media as a 'terrorist group' responsible for the death of *Bangali* soldiers. This representation fanned *Bangali* nationalism against the indigenous people in the CHT. These textbook representations are important in my research in order to understand the way institutional representation and the power of rumour about the CHT people have influenced the attitudes of non-indigenous people outside the CHT.

Outside of the official sources, the '*Jummo Bulletin*' (a bulletin published by JSS) was the only source of news but it was not available in all places in Bangladesh. The army did not allow circulation of the bulletin to ordinary people even in the CHT. Those who visited after the massacres, wrote them up academically and presented CHT issues as Bengali-'*Pahari*' (Muhammad, 1992; Mohsin, 1997). After the peace accord the situation changed and now it is much better in terms of the spread of information, which is now immediate through various social media (face book, twitter or other forms of online activism, on-the-spot reporting). Recently, '*Thengari*' ('My Bicycle' 2015) is the first feature film made completely in the Chakma language, directed by Aung Rakhine. The film centres on indigenous people, mainly the Chakma community. However, 'My Bicycle' will not see a commercial release inside Bangladesh since it did not make it past the country's censorship authorities. Still others guess that 'My Bicycle' was censored due to its 'unfavourable' portrayal of the army. 'My Bicycle' is seen as a critique of state and army violence from the perspective of those who are considered to be "terrorists", and it is the other stereotype of the CHT.

This chapter analyses the negative representation of the indigenous people which was propelled by rumours and incorrect information during a time of media censorship in the CHT. This also highlights how my subject position was affected in response to these stereotypes that I was socialised in and with regard to my research topic. Therefore there are the three different

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<sup>36</sup>[http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Tribal\\_Culture](http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Tribal_Culture). Last seen 12.2.2015



constructions about the indigenous community that are prevalent in Bangladesh: as part of the national narrative of beautiful Bangladesh and yet that there are no '*adibasi*' in Bangladesh; as having a negative image in terms of food, clothing, housing, not being civilised, and as terrorists and members of left liberal civil society; and as activist indigenous women and as victims of state and army violence through the lens of '*Pahari*' vs *Bangali* which is limiting and skewed. This chapter explains how I myself grew up within these three constructions, and how this has affected my positionality on research about the CHT. However, while discussing the points in locating the fields, I make the point that doing field work in one's home country is never an easy endeavour, where there are the challenges of the 'insider-outsider' dilemma, trust-distrust and negotiations between the researcher and participants belonging to different cultural backgrounds, all of which shape the outcome of everyday fieldwork. It also highlights how one can do fieldwork in the midst of the potentiality of ever present terror, fear and violence. Overall, the chapter is a culmination of various stages of my fieldwork that was carried out between October 2012 and June 2013.

### **Background of My Interest**

My interest in indigenous people is firstly personal and secondly academic. I attempt to show how my involvement with the CHT changed my outlook. This is important as making one's political interest explicit has crucial implications in knowing the self and the 'other' (Lindisfarne, 1997:213). When I was in high school in Noakhali (a district located in the south eastern part of Bangladesh), two of my friends were Chakma. They told me how their maternal uncle had been killed by the military in the early nineties and why their parents did not want them to visit Rangamati at that time.

Jollyprue, a Marma girl was one of my roommates in the college hostel. One day I found her crying and asked her what had happened. She told me that a massacre had taken place in Logang (a village in Panchari *Upazila* in the Khagrachari district) and her relatives had been killed. That was the first time I had heard about Logang<sup>37</sup>. Another roommate of mine was the daughter of an ex-army officer. She replied to Jollyprue, "*your people killed thousands of soldiers there, what do you expect? Will the army always stay silent?*" Jollyprue did not reply but continued crying. The following day I joined in the rally with Jollyprue organized by *Pahari Chatra Parishad* (PCP) to protest the Logang massacre. At that event, I met Kalpana

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<sup>37</sup>Refers to the massacre of the indigenous by the security forces and *Bangali* settlers on the Logang village of Khagrachari District on 10 April 1992.

Chakma, the organizing secretary of HWF in Dhaka. On 15 March 1995, I was invited to participate in the PCP Council in Bandarban. The local administration declared a curfew on that day as the *Bangali Samoadhikar Andolon*<sup>38</sup> (Bengali Equal Rights Movement) called for a procession on the same date and at the same venue. However, the PCP began their procession with this curfew and I was part of that procession. The police fired on the procession and everybody started running to take cover and there was also tear gas. I could not see anything. One of my Chakma friends and I ran across and waded through the Sankho river. I do not remember how many miles we ran but we finally reached a ‘Barua’<sup>39</sup>*Bangali* home and asked them to give us shelter. They refused to do so. At last my friend convinced them to give me shelter for the night and told them that he would come back soon to collect me. In that home, I heard that three of my indigenous friends had been killed and their dead bodies had been found in the Sankho River. And late that night, I heard that the army and *Bangali* people had set fires in two areas of *Madhoyom para* and *Uzani para* in *Bandarban Sadar*. The situation was very tense. The next morning a Chakma man came but the owner of the house did not want to open the door. Only when the visitor told them that he was there to take me did they open the door. He gave me a letter written by my friend. My story could have ended there, but it continued till the next night.

When I returned to my friend’s house, it was half burnt. At night when *Omoi*, my friend’s mother (terminology for mother in the Marma language) and I were in the house, at around 2 am, about seven to ten people (I could not see all of them clearly) knocked on the burnt door. *Omoi* opened the door and then they asked about the male members of the house. She pretended that she could not understand the *Bangali* language. I was in bed. I heard the sound of the boots of the army. They wanted to enter the house to check. After hearing the sound of the boots, I got so scared and as a result of my fear I made a sound that alerted them. When they heard it, they asked who was inside and *Omoi* told them that I was her daughter and she told them in the Chittagong dialect that they were not allowed inside the house. For the first time I observed the way indigenous women adopted a strategy to counter the army in conflict situations by pretending not to understand the *Bangali* language. Scott (1985) shows

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<sup>38</sup>*Bangali Samaadhikar Andolon* is a platform of *Bangali* people especially the settler *Bangali* formed in the mid-nineties.

<sup>39</sup>It is quite interesting that the Buddhist *Bangali* people introduce them as ‘Barua’ rather than *Bangali* in the CHT. When the indigenous people in the CHT were the majority, and the *Bangali* were the minority, the *Bangali* people who are Buddhist prioritized their religious identity in order to march with the majority indigenous people as most of them are also Buddhist.

us that language is another form of resistance. During my field work I found that language played a role as a weapon for the ‘ordinary’ indigenous women.

It was 6 June 1996, prior to the seventh national election of Bangladesh, that Kalpana came to *Nawab Faizunnessa Hall* (a female hostel in Jahangirnagar University, Savar, Dhaka) to meet me. On 12 June in the late afternoon I heard the news that Kalpana had been abducted by the army (to be discussed in chapter five). To this date Kalpana’s body has not been found. Kalpana’s abduction left a hole in my heart that strengthened my commitment to CHT issues.

In 2003, at the time of the Mahalchari attack, as a researcher I interviewed Sonali Chakma and in the interview she confided that she was a victim of rape by both army personnel and settlers. After my interview with Sonali Chakma I was taken to a nearby army camp in the Mahalchari. My laptop was seized and I was questioned relentlessly. And they asked me who I was, whose agent I was and what I planned to do with the information. When I told them I wrote a column in the daily newspaper *Prothom Alo*, they called the editor of the newspaper. Thereafter, I was released after spending five hours of my life in the army camp. On February 19, 2010 two indigenous persons were killed and arson attack took place. I visited the place with a group of people and tried to talk with all groups related to the incident. In this way my ‘conscious bias’ kept me documenting their experiences. In essence, my research became a process of self-exploration while getting to know the people in my field areas.

Fieldwork in one’s own country commences many issues of bias that need to be overcome and is problematic for various other reasons (Munthali, 2001:122). Research on indigenous people by a non-indigenous researcher is always a challenging and sensitive task. Gaining the trust of the people and access to the community is crucial especially when the researcher belongs, as I do, to the group (*Bangali*) that has been dominating and exploiting them and against whom they were fighting. Moreover, I am from Noakhali, the place where most of the *Bangali* settlers came from. I have spent a lot of time earning trust and I had to substantially revise and re-formulate my research plan. I spent approximately nine months in my different field areas and from the outset I sought the help and support of indigenous friends and acquaintances and the top leaders and leading organizations of the indigenous people. In some cases where it was necessary, my indigenous friends and associates accompanied me on field trips in the CHT.

### **Re-shaping the Self in the Field**

In early October 2012, I returned to Bangladesh from the UK and was planning to do fieldwork. However, the political environment of the CHT (as the neighbouring district of

Cox's Bazar had communal strife a week before I went there) led me to reconsider my decision. Instead I decided to interview individuals in Dhaka who had been involved with the CHT issue for a long time (academics, activists, political leaders and some journalists). Among the three hill districts in the CHT, I chose Khagrachari as my research area as it is the district where numerous massacres took place between the 80s and 90s and the Bengali Settlement Program initiated by the Bangladesh government which started in 1979 was mostly implemented in the Khagrachari district since most of the places of Bandarban and Rangamati were considered as 'remote' areas. From the records I found that the displacement rate is higher in Khagrachari than in the other two hill districts. After going to Khagrachari, I discussed my objectives with the local indigenous leaders from various political parties. I considered their suggestions and tried to match these with my reviews, when selecting fields. I decided to meet Mr. Ratul Chakma, the secretary of the Tribal Returnee Refugee Welfare Association (TRRWA) who was an old acquaintance. He guided me in selecting the fields. After staying three days in Khagrachari town, I made my way to the field area with Ratul Chakma. It took nearly an hour to get to the field area by 'chandergari'<sup>40</sup>. The house I was supposed to live in belonged to friends of mine who are also relatives of Ratul Chakma. We reached the house in Shishirpur around 2 pm. The woman, who was my friend's mother and whom I called *Mashima* (aunt), came and hugged me and asked me whether I would like to drink some lime juice<sup>41</sup>. I touched her feet as part of a Chakma ritual to show respect and get the blessing<sup>42</sup>. Ratul Chakma explained to me that the house had been burned three times and still bears evidence of the last time it was burned. He added that now they do not want to get a new house as they thought that it would not be a good idea to build a new house since nobody knew for sure when it would be burned again. Furthermore they had a very big 'tong ghor'<sup>43</sup> before going to India as refugees in 1986. As Ratul Chakma said: "When a house is burned so many times, people may lose all the interest to build a good house again, it destroys all the hope, you cannot feel it until you lose your house".

After a few minutes *Mashima* asked Ratul Chakma to go with her to another room where they discussed what they should serve me for lunch and dinner since they cooked fish

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<sup>40</sup>A special vehicle that runs in the Hill area. Locally it is called 'chander gari', 'the car of moon'. Generally it has no roof and is run by a battery-charged engine.

<sup>41</sup>It is traditional to offer a lime juice or coconut water to welcome a guest in a village area, though in the town in Bangladesh the culture of tea has replaced lime.

<sup>42</sup>Though this ritual is practiced in various religious groups to show respect to the elders and in return one gets a blessing from them. But the way of practicing the ritual is not same.

<sup>43</sup>'Tong ghor' means a two-storied mud building; the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor is generally used for storing rice. However, it also symbolizes economic status in Chakma society. The people who have a 'Tong ghor' are generally very wealthy.

with '*nappi*' (dry fish paste) which most *Bangalis* dislike. After returning from their discussion, she told me that the toilet was a bit far away from the house and that there was no electricity in the house. Though I tried to reassure her by saying that I would not feel uncomfortable and that I was used to living in this environment, she seemed not to believe me.

I was accepted as a *Bangali* guest in the house. *Mashima* told me that they did not have a separate bathroom inside the house and I would have to go to the tube well down the hill which was an open space. My stay at that house as a '*Bangali* outsider' really caused them a lot of unease about the differences in language, food, religion, toilet, bathroom, dress patterns and so many things. From the very first day of my stay, I tried to make them see me as part of the family and not a 'guest.' At night I chatted with *Mashima* in the kitchen though she forbade me to go there due to the smoke<sup>44</sup>. On the following day, the youngest boy of the house went to the shop to buy *pauroti* (bread) for me. But they cooked rice for themselves, as eating rice for breakfast was very common in the indigenous household. And for lunch they cooked chicken for me, since I was their guest. However, when they found that I had no trouble eating whatever was cooked, they did not cook separate dishes for me anymore but served me whatever food the rest of the family had. We were trying to negotiate with each other's cultural practices. Mookherjee (2001) mentions the decisions she reflected on in terms of being dressed, having food and other identities and was aiming at a no-man's-land which would not pinpoint her as being overtly Indian or Hindu, while on the other hand attempting to dress in a style that would meet with the endorsement both of the activists and other Bangladeshis. My host family tried to accommodate what they knew of my lifestyle and I, on the other hand, tried to integrate myself into their daily lives through participation. It was full participation rather than observation. Robben (1995:84) states that ethnographic understanding through compassion and aloofness has been generally accepted as a common dialectic in fieldwork. We must establish a good rapport with our participants to grasp the world from their perspective, while a concurrent reflective objectivity as observers is necessary to objectify our perceptions and improve our analytical insight.

During those first few days my host family and I stepped out carefully to avoid any kind of misunderstanding. I also was aware of the danger of cultural misinterpretation. As Geertz (1973:15) notes, the relation between informant and field worker is speckled with mutual misunderstandings, clientelistic interests, power games and cultural proselytizing. Just

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<sup>44</sup>In the indigenous houses, the cooker is different from the ones used elsewhere. It needs a pipe and they use a mixture of coal to set fire to it.

as I was worried and tense about security, so they felt tense about me. They introduced me to their neighbours in various ways as their son's friend, daughter's colleague, *Bhante*'s (Buddhist priest) relative, NGO worker etc. I observed that most of the people who came to the house asked *Mashima* about my food habits. She replied with a smile that she did not need to worry about it and to prove it further she said “*she even eats ‘nappi’* – accepting me as an insider. They thought that it was difficult for me to get water from the tube well and change my clothes after taking a bath. But I changed my dress the indigenous way with ‘*pinon*’<sup>45</sup> which I fastened to my chest, and went to the place where the tube well was. They were rather surprised to see that I was familiar with the indigenous house and its customs. *Mashima* was also tense about my Islamic religious norms (she considered me to be a Muslim by my name and I am a Muslim by birth) as they have a Buddhist statue at home. I assured her that I did not have a problem. One day she cooked pork and hid it from me when I was eating. When she came to know that I eat pork she was relieved. She told me that she felt very embarrassed to cook pork in my presence. I brought some *hadi*<sup>46</sup> and *pinon* to the field and I wore them during the entire time of my fieldwork. My professional identity made me distant at the beginning before *Mashima* accepted me as one her daughters. *Mashima* asked me about my home town. When I told her it was Noakhali her face changed, though she did not say anything. She told me that she felt comfortable as I am a woman, that otherwise she would have thought twice about me staying in her home. They always tried to speak to me in the *Bangali* language though for the first couple of days *Mashima* seldom talked to me. Later, she told me that she did not know that I knew how to speak in the Chakma language and so she felt shy to speak to me in *Bangali* because her *Bangali* was not good. She communicated with me in Chittagong dialects and I replied in the Chakma language.

She told me that at night she felt alone and it reminded her about those days of pain. I found that she felt more comfortable talking at night than during the day. She told me that they never wanted to share their experiences with others because even now their lives were in danger. However, every night she told me a different story and the following night she changed that and told a new one. She added that after the death of her husband she felt alone. She told me that after my arrival at the house, she felt happy and that I reminded her of the days of pain and joy. She told that she previously was scared of her husband, but in the camp they had

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<sup>45</sup>The ‘*pinon*’ is the lower portion of Chakma female dress, mostly made of handloom. It has its own design on the right end which indicates the indigenous identity of each group. But it has different names in different communities.

<sup>46</sup>A kind of scarf made of handloom.

become very close. Her husband taught her a lot of things in the camp, for example nursing and traditional medicine. She said that she wanted to address me as Bonimala, as she considered me like her daughter – her daughters’ names are Kusummala and Monimala respectively.

In my other field site, Kuturitola, I lived in the house of Paromita Tripura. She is a primary school teacher. Her husband is a *Bangali* Hindu and a journalist. Paromita was also in the camp (from 1988-1997) and she told me that in Tripura province they were stronger than the Chakma people. The house was located in the area of the Tripura community. I attended a Tripura marriage ceremony there during my stay. I was invited by the local people and they told me that since I had become a part of their society, I should attend the ceremony. Before the ceremony I was provided with the traditional Tripura dress, as they wanted to see me wearing it at the ceremony. They taught me to dance to Tripura songs and taught me a Tripura song and offered me a drink, ‘*chu*’<sup>47</sup>, saying that they had home-made juice if I preferred. I drank ‘*chu*’ with them, even though it was not common for a *Bangali* woman to drink in public places where drinking was restricted for the *Bangali* man as well. I wore Tripura dress and learned the rituals of celebrations, public dances and poetry readings, and tried to learn some of their songs, the names of musical instruments and some of the operating systems.

Interestingly I experienced different issues in one of my field areas (a Santal-oriented area). When I went to this area, my Chakma friend teased me telling me “*you look like a Santal*”, which indicates racial similarities between me and my Santal respondents as they belong to a different race group from the Chakma and other indigenous groups living in the CHT. As mentioned in the introduction, the Santal living in the CHT are not acknowledged in any government or non-government documents. I cannot speak the Santal language but we communicated with each other through the Chittagong dialects. They first thought that I was Hindu as I put a red *Bindi* on my forehead. The CHT Santals are Hindus, so they assumed that I was ‘*Amrar Jat*’ (belonging to the same group). When we were discussing some Santal cultural practices they said to me that I must know most of them since they were of the Hindu religion.

In the above section I have argued that there are so many things that a researcher needs to take into account to minimize the gap between outsider and insider identities. Mookherjee (2001) has discussed some of these. She has stated that it is apparent that dress serves not only as a cultural marker, but can also create sartorial borders located in various categorical territories such as nationality, class, religion, caste, gender and region. However, overcoming

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<sup>47</sup>‘*Chu*’ is a traditional wine made by indigenous women.

these differences is not a one sided effort, but an endeavour on both sides. As I tried to be part of their lives, my respondents and host family tried their best to make me part of their lives through the various forms of cultural exchange. Cultural exchange or negotiation between two parties is really at the heart of field work even though both parties belong to the same territory but with different cultural and socio-economic and political backgrounds Maria Olujić (1995) and Joseba Zulaika (1995) have addressed some of the issues that arose when they returned from exile to their home countries to do fieldwork. Olujić returned from the United States after an absence of two decades to the war-torn republic of Croatia to do fieldwork. She describes a departure for the field that is at the same time a coming home. She returned to a motherland that no longer corresponded to her childhood memories. She emphasises the ethical dilemmas of the ethnography of violence and socio-political conflict by reminding us of its dire consequences. The researchers should be careful, Olujić stresses, in asking victims of violence to tell their story when we are unable to relieve them in the reliving of their traumas. It is possible to give a voice to the victims of violence, but it is impossible to restore their lives. There are so many factors at work that create insider and outsider identities that it is rare for the gap to be minimised straight away. For me, being an insider or outsider is a fluid idea and has much momentum. Narayan (1993:671) argues against the fixity of a distinction between 'native' and 'non-native' anthropologists. Instead of the concept emphasising a dichotomy between outsider/insider and observer/observed, he proposes that at this historical moment we might more usefully view each anthropologist in terms of lopsided identifications along with a field of interpenetrating communities and power relations. Therefore, in this chapter I argue that it is not only in the researcher's own country but also in more local areas that insider-outsider gaps may result from differences between people having different cultural identities.

### ***Bangalis in the field areas***

During my stay at *Mashima*'s house, some *Bangali* Muslim settlers came by the house to get information about me as my stay made them a bit nervous. They asked me a lot of questions such as: why was I there? What was I doing? Where was my hometown? Did I have any problems staying at that house? *Mashima* and the other family members suspected some of them to be agents of the army and they advised me not to talk with them for too long for both my personal security and theirs.



Two other women who used to work in that house as '*kajer lok*' (helping hands)<sup>48</sup> also asked many question about me. Mashima told them that I was her son's friend. I saw Tuktuki, a 12-year-old *Bangali* Muslim girl, helping *Mashima* collecting the water from the tube well and helping out in the kitchen. Her father was a rickshaw puller, and they did not own any land. She told me that her mother worked in another Chakma house as a helping hand. After a month, Tuktuki stopped coming to the house as her father forbade her to work there. One day I met her father and asked why Tuktuki was not coming to the house, and he replied that Tuktuki has grown up now and they were thinking of marrying her off. He further explained that it was not good for her to work in a *Pahari* house especially when they were looking for a groom for her. He said that nobody will want to get married to her if she continues to work in the *Pahari* house. However, he praised *Mashima* and the other members of the house because they had been so kind to his daughter. Some Bengalis work in the houses of wealthy indigenous people as helping hands, some work as day labourers on land owned by indigenous people and others work as day construction workers under Chakma contractors. Their lives do not reflect the generalised representation of the settler *Bangali* people who exercise power over the indigenous people in the CHT (Mohsin, 2007).

Though I soon became a family member I changed my residence frequently as I was worried that the family would become a target of the army or intelligence services. I decided to stay in the *Bihar*<sup>49</sup> sometimes to meet more people and avoid the scrutiny of the military and at the same time to ensure the security of the local people. In the *Bihar*, many people came and talked with me about many issues. The *Bhante* (Buddhist religious priest) introduced me to the people who wanted to know about me. He told them I was a friend of his, and that I was there to see him. He told me that some of the indigenous people were also agents of the military.

In the *Bazaar* area, I was asked a lot of questions by the *Bangali* shop keepers since most of the time either Monimala or her brother was with me. The most common question that was addressed to me was why I was staying in a *Pahari*'s house when there were so many *Bangali* houses in the area. They said to me that they spotted the new face because they knew everybody in the area. Some of them told me that they saw me on a television talk show speaking against the *Bangali* people in the CHT. They asked me whether I had any relatives in the area and invited me to take lunch with them as they thought that I had trouble eating in the

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<sup>48</sup>There are many *Bangali* settler women who work in wealthy indigenous households as helping hands. They help them in collecting water from the tube well, in taking things either to the '*Jum*' field or the plough cultivation. Sometimes they work mainly on the basis of three meals a day and are given 20 taka per day.

<sup>49</sup>A religious institution for Buddhist people. Sometimes it is situated in an orphanage run by local people.

*Pahari*'s house. They enquired why I was there. They were happy to hear I am from Noakhali and tried to talk to me in Noakhali dialects. They asked me to have tea or chat with them. They treated me as a member of the Hindu family because of the red *Bindi* on my forehead. They praised the indigenous people in front of them but when they were gone, to some extent they expressed their prejudice against them. In front of Monimala they always told me that they had very good relations with the *Pahari* people, though they would then wink at me, suggesting the opposite. They also suggested that I avoid food in the indigenous house because they ate so many '*haram*' foods<sup>50</sup>. Some of them gave me their mobile numbers and took mine and called me sometimes. They and local officials always told me that there was no problem between *Bangali* and 'indigenous people in the CHT, that they were all living peacefully. My negotiations with them does not necessarily mean acculturation; rather, it might mean adopting a strategy to get the fieldwork done peacefully in a zone affirmed by the administration to be 'peaceful'.

### **Negotiating Academic and Activist Identities**

"Certainly no simple conflict exists between academia and activism. Rather, occupying a third space of critical engagement enables research to become a personal and reflexive project of resistance." (Routledge, 1996:411)

I was involved in activism on CHT issues for a long time and protested regularly through my column, published in the daily newspaper and through appearances in television talk shows, and was present in the protest rallies organized to demand justice for human rights violations in the CHT. I extended my support to the movement against racist attacks that took place in the CHT. It was therefore difficult for me to negotiate between my academic and activist positions while doing the fieldwork. I had to think about the social responses to me especially by Bengali people. I organised legal help for a girl who had been sexually violated, helped in the organisation of a demonstration and sent complaints from individuals to the CHT Land Commission. I had to think about my security as well since agents of the army were following me. But critical anthropologists such as Merrill Singer (1989), Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1992) and Paul Farmer (1992) have confronted the role of the unreceptive anthropologist and recognized by their own actions that it is possible to be both a social activist and an anthropologist.

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<sup>50</sup>This term does not always mean '*halal*' or '*haram*' in the religious sense, but implies a negative impression of indigenous food habits.

For me, during fieldwork, I felt that activism was not a separate thing at all; it was a part of the academic world and along with Maxey (1999) I argue that ‘activism’ is a daily veracity for us all. Some respondents who knew me personally as an activist asked me a lot of things and especially expressed their pain about the failure to implement the peace accord and the various problems that they were facing as a result. So I came to know other relevant issues which I did not think about before going into the field. As an activist, some of my previous investigations into incidents such as the Mahalchari massacre in 2003 and the Baghaihat killing also helped me a lot in the field in terms of the changing form of displacement patterns in the CHT and helped me to find the common link between the narratives of these incidents and my experiences of working on related issues. However, I had to alert people about my activism in the field as I thought that Bengali people might have a different understanding about me.

### **Multi-sited Field**

My field is multi-sited, largely because my focus is less on geographical place than on people who are from different cultural backgrounds (Chakma, Marma, Tripura and Santal) and who live in different places mostly in accordance with their localities. Marcus (1998) argues that multi-sited ethnography provides a more complex consideration of a topic since it permits a researcher to draw populations, ideas, and material objects through time and space.

I did not begin thinking about the field but it was led by the people I spoke to. There were seven fields: Dhaka (I conducted some interviews there), Shishirpur, Kuturitola, Kusumpara, Shivalong, Jojekchari and Uttor Kadompur. Four of the fields (Shishirpur, Kuturitola, Kusumpara, and Jojekchari) are mainly based on the four indigenous groups, the Chakma, Tripura, Santal and Marma respectively. Shishirpur was a second field area where the Chakma are in the majority. According to my respondents in that area, in 1986 around 120 families were forced to leave their houses as the army and *Bangali* settlers set fire to their houses. Some of my respondents got back to their original places though some could not. The place still reminds them of the violence and the accompanying fear. As an aftermath of the massacre on 13 June, 1986, Chakma inhabitants of that area were forced to lead lives as refugees in various refugee camps (Panchoram, Thakumbari, Lebuchara, Shilachari, Kharbak and Sabrum camps) in the Tripura province of India. It was a constant struggle for survival for these people. The area has been renamed as Sailokhali, to rid it of its apparent ‘Hindu’ name though the Chakmas still call it Shishirpur. The data collected from the respondents tells us that the total number of refugee families was 12,223, with around 5,092 people returned to Shishirpur. The Chittagong Hill Tracts *Jummo* Refugee Welfare Association (CHTJRWA) does not have accurate data of the

displaced people of each para. The respondents of the area remembered that, in 1986, there were approximately 130 families in that area. Nearly 100 of the families had to flee to Tripura and the remaining 30 families stayed behind. They took shelter in their relatives' houses and in deep forests for over 11 years. Shibalong is the new location that the 23 Chakma families relocated to after they returned from the refugee camps in India; they did not return to their original place because they wanted to live in a remote place where there were no *Bangali* people around them. Kuturitola, the fourth field area, was mostly inhabited by 35 Tripura families who live next to each other to protect themselves from the *Bangali* settlers. Seven Tripura families settled here after the aftermath of the Kaptai Dam. Jojekchari was the sixth field area and Moghpara was a part of it. In Moghpara there are only Marma people. It is also a border area. Uttar Kadompur is known as a 'rehabilitation village' where Chakma people have been living for sixteen years since many of them lost their land to *Bangali* Muslim settlers. The military-backed government (1/2007 – 12/2008) set up the village for these families who did not have any land or any place to go to, in order for them to settle and start a new life after their return from the camps in India. I have said that this project was 'multi-sited'. Sites in this case aren't necessarily places, but positions. The change of site/position/location discloses changeability and differing understandings. To know their different perspectives on the issue of displacement and its consequences, I chose different fields and positions of the people. Some of the respondents had been displaced more than five or six times.

After some days, Samarjit Tripura, a retired school teacher, came to the house and *Mashima* told me that he was the main person I should talk to. Samarjit Tripura told me that I should visit his place and meet the Tripura people there, who had experience of displacement. I followed him to Kuturitola the next morning and talked to the women, which gave me a diversified data of displacement.

I knew that some Santal families lived in Khagrachari, though they were not included in the list made by the JSS or the Government of Bangladesh. In Kusumpara there are 29 Santal families who came here as a result of Kaptai Dam. Most of them don't have any land of their own and depend mainly on plough cultivation.

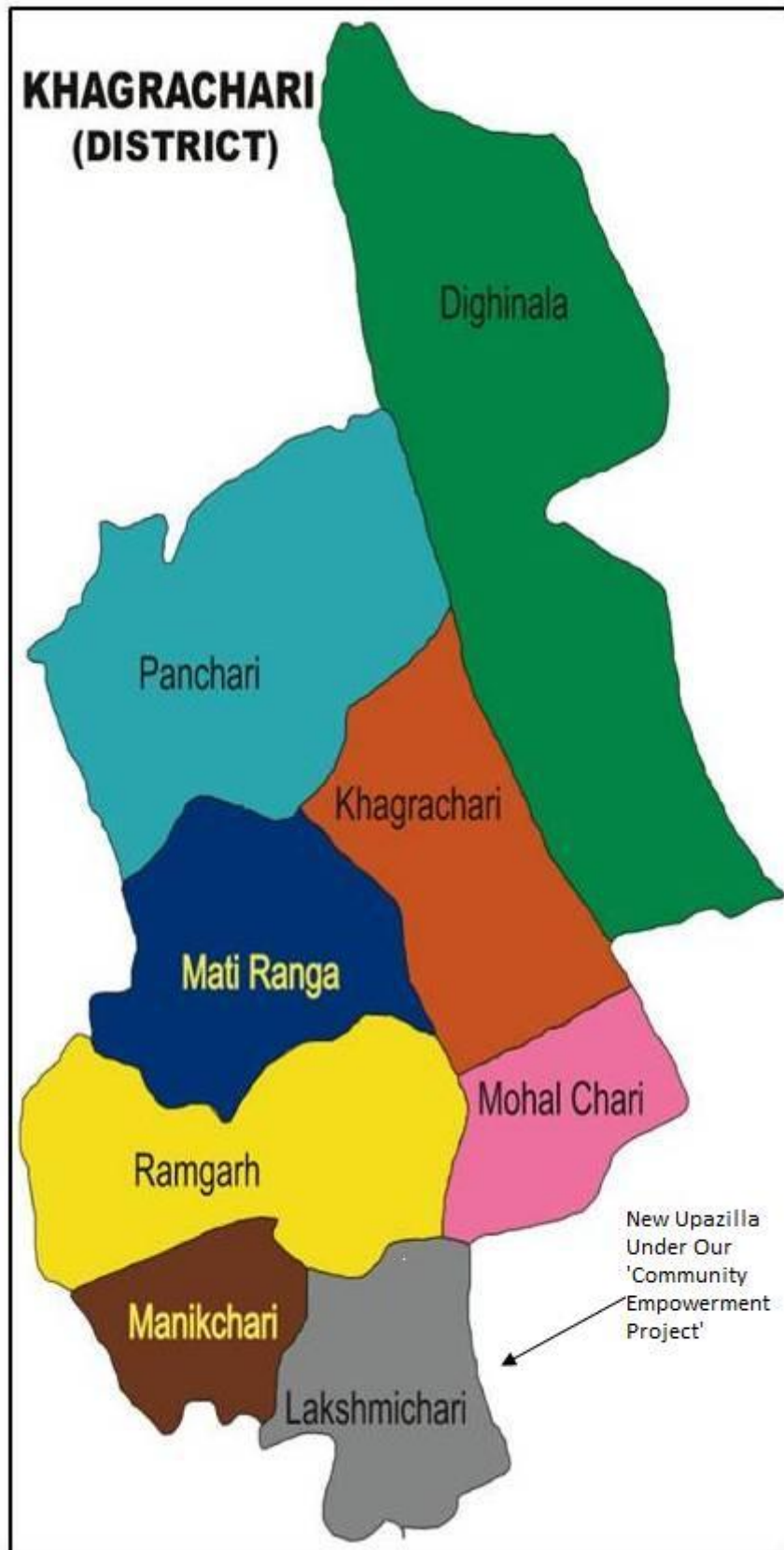


Photo 5: Map of Khagrachari district<sup>51</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Source:<http://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://trinamulcht.org/wp-content/uploads/Khagrachari-map-with->

## People to Whom I Spoke

First of all, to delve deeply into the experience regarding forced displacement, I chose respondents who had gone through these experiences. To demonstrate the diversity of the experiences themselves my respondents were chosen from different ethnic backgrounds. My interest in knowing the gender dimension of the experiences of displacement led me to interview both men and women. However, since the research aims to focus on women's experiences, the number of women is higher than men. Among the respondents, there was a purposive sampling regarding women and men from different socio-economic backgrounds and different situations of displacement. Some interviews were held with women who had given birth to but discarded their own child or children on their uncertain journey. Most of these people had settled there as an aftermath of the Kaptai Dam project implemented in 1959. People who had been forcefully displaced more than three times were chosen for interviewing, and to demonstrate the difference in the nature of experiences of displacement before and after the CHT accord, respondents were chosen accordingly. The researcher also interviewed some women from the Tripura and Chakma communities who had put their sons up for adoption through religious leaders to families in France. Moreover, some of the interviews were done with those who had been tortured or sexually harassed or raped by *Bangalis* or soldiers in the army. Some informants were also chosen from the returnee refugee rehabilitation village which was set up by the army.

There were some techniques I followed to choose the male respondents. First, the female respondents gave me the names of some people I should talk to. Second, some males from different ethnic backgrounds came to me and expressed their interest in sharing their experiences of displacement.

Table 1: Number of the respondents.

Respondents	Male	Female	Total
Chakma	7	18	25
Marma	4	11	15
Tripura	4	14	18
Santal	3	9	12

## Amount of Land

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Among the respondents, most of the females were landless due to the inheritance law which follows the religious rule. Some women who owned land inherited it from their parents. Most of the women respondents mentioned that the amount of land they possessed was basically the property of her husband or in-laws. Interestingly, the Christian respondents said that though their family had converted, inheritance still followed the Hindu law. The majority of respondents had lost their land to *Bangali* Muslim settlers.

Table 2: Amount of Land.

Amount of Land	Chakma Male	Chakma Female	Marma Male	Marma Female	Tripura Male	Tripura Female	Santal Male	Santal Female
0-1 acres	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	0
1.1-3	1	0	1	0	2	1	0	0
3.1-5	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Above 5	1	1	1		1	0	0	0

### Education

Among the informants, three females from the Chakma and three from the Marma communities did not go to the school or have any other formal education. They were educated in their own language and two of them teach in schools that they initiated in their mother tongue.

Table 3: Educational Status

Education	Chakma Male	Chakma Female	Marma Male	Marma Female	Tripura Male	Tripura Female	Santal Male	Santal Female
Illiterate	2	3	1	6	1	8	1	6
1-V	2	1	1	2	1	4	1	2
VI-VIII	0	4	0	1	1	1	0	1
IX-SSC	0	3	1	0	0	1	1	0
HSC	3	2	1	0	1	0	0	0

Table 4: Professional Status.

Profession	Chakma Male	Chakma Female	Marma Male	Marma Female	Tripura Male	Tripura Female	Santal Male	Santal Female
<i>Jum</i> cultivation	2	4	2	6	1	3	0	0
Plough Cultivation	2	0	1	1	1	0	2	4
small business	1	1	0	0	2	2	0	0
House wives	0	7	0	0	0	2	0	5
Gardening	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
Teaching	1	1	1		1	2	0	0
NGO worker	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Government Service	0	1	0	2	0	1	0	0
Local Government	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0
Nurse	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Politics	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0

### Marital Status

To demonstrate the diversity of the variation of the data, marital status is important.

Table 5: Marital Status

Marital Status	Chakma Male	Chakma Female	Marma Male	Marma Female	Tripura Male	Tripura Female	Santal Male	Santal Female
Married	4	11	3	7	3	7	3	5
Unmarried	2	4	1	3	1	3	0	1
Widow	0	2	0	1	0	3	0	2
Widower	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Divorced	1	2	0	0	0	1	0	0

Besides these fields, I have also interviewed 10 Bengali people and two indigenous people in Dhaka. Among the Bengali people, six were educationists, 2 were journalists, two activists.



Among the indigenous people, one was minister in the Ministry of CHT Affairs and another was an ex-university teacher. I use the socio economic status according to the perspective of respondents in the entire thesis.

### **Methods, Sources and Ethics**

Although indigeneity is a growing field of study across the world, there are very few critical texts on research methodology that touch upon issues of researching indigenous people. Smith's (1999) work on indigenous methodology is a persuasive one which provides an alternative paradigm for researching indigenous people. Before embarking on the field visits I acquainted myself with the culture, custom, norms and concerns of the people in order to build rapport. Another strategy is 'making space' for indigenous voices (Smith, 1999:176). During my fieldwork, I tried to ensure this by consulting with the indigenous people whenever possible and by sharing my thoughts with them and seeking their opinions. It helped me to get more of their interpretations of what had happened. However, there are some challenges. I had to choose what I share and with whom among them. Parr (1995:90) points out that the strengths of the beached approach lies in its open-endedness, its willingness to listen and act according to the results in every stage of the research process, preparing the analysis in the data derived directly from the field.

I have utilized both primary and secondary sources of data. Secondary sources include books, journal articles, monographs, and conference papers, particularly those on the CHT, indigenous women, state violence and forced displacement. Therefore, the study depended largely on other secondary materials such as organisational documents, research reports, press releases, decrees, programme statements, film, national population census data, exhibitions, newsletters, leaflets, pamphlets, posters, flyers, memorandums, and newspaper and magazine reports. Since documentary sources tell little about women, I had to depend almost entirely on primary data, i.e. oral sources (life stories, walking interviews, informal discussion) in order to trace the life experiences of the respondents. It was a challenging task for me to conduct the research in an area where my identity could be constructed as that of both an outsider and an insider due to my ethnic background. The area of study is part of Bangladesh, but my language and culture rendered me as an outsider there. However being an insider-outsider also created difficulties (Mookherjee, 2001) so I tried my best to be accepted by the community so that they would trust me.

As I have already mentioned, it was not as easy to go into the field area and collect data as I had assumed. Before my field trip, I meant to study 'ordinary' indigenous women in the

CHT. As soon as my field work started, I abandoned the concept of 'ordinary people' altogether, because everyone I met was extraordinary in his or her own right. I have taken to using the term 'participants' in the research, but that only applies to some of the people. I don't think there's a single word that captures the diversity of relationships we develop in the field.

I believe that my respect for them and their privacy was extremely important in building both boundaries and trust. I always carried my notebook, camera, and recording devices during my field research but did not take any of them out on my initial contact with the residents. The residents enriched my research in many ways: not only their experience made me think in new ways, but also their suggestions led to new dimensions for my project. It is in this sense that they were not just respondents; they became active participants in my research. With such trust and boundaries, the residents and I drove the research agenda together. Shao (2010) points out that trust is very central while conducting sensitive research even though it takes place in the researcher's own country. Rather, I waited and judged the reaction of the respondents to my presence in those areas and their interest in talking to me. It was really difficult to get them to open up and talk about the matter that they were scared to talk about and wanted to forget. They avoided talking about it altogether and pretended to know nothing. Even when I was talking to a Chakma woman in her house, her husband asked me why I was asking them about it when they knew nothing about it. He added that he had many documents and that women generally knew nothing. He advised me to talk to the men and not the women. However, my communication with them in the Chakma and Marma languages made them feel confident of their own languages though I needed a translator to understand the Tripura language.

Though the research follows a mostly qualitative methodology, to get varied data, it focused on the different identities and situations of the informants. Participants included both males and females. Also, the officials from government bodies and national NGOs and international NGOs, and representatives from different political parties and military forces, were selected according to their activities and connections with these forced displaced groups or the areas in which they lived.

In conducting interviews I attempted to follow the approach applied by some feminist scholars: ethical, collaborative, interactive, non-hierarchical, reflective, responsive, sensitive and bottom up instead of top down (Laslett and Rapport, 1975; Oakley, 1981, Parr 1995). Since memory is not unmediated, interviews needed special attention in relation to time, space, socio-political reality and the nature of experience, all of which affect in varying degrees the perceptions of the past. Traumatic experience, fear of retaliation, a desire to protect self and family and a sense of insecurity may lead someone to knowingly mask some facts or express

them in a different way (Bell, 1998). Remembering violent events in the CHT could be traumatic for some women who witnessed or experienced the violence. State vigilance of and fear of vengeance from the dominant *Bangali* community may also cause someone to stay silent. Lapse of time is sometime responsible for memory loss and the distortion of the facts. Recognizing these problems, in analysing interviews I checked and cross-checked them with other interviews and other documented sources. Due attention was also paid to the use of symbols, verbal and non-verbal expressions, special body language, silence and the chain of narration, all of which provide deeper insight into the personal experience of the participant (Parr, 1995:95).

Unstructured, informal interviews are useful in an ethnographic study as they help the researcher understand what people think and how one person's beliefs and insights contrast with another's (Fetterman, 1998:129; Kvale, 1996:117). I completed 70 informal and formal interviews of the Chakma, Marma, Tripura and Santal people living in Phanchari and Dighinala *Upazila* in the Khagrachari Hill district. Among the interviewees were the traditional leaders (*Karbary*, *Headman* and *Rajas*), the local authorities including police and the District Commissioner, leaders of regional parties (PCJSS, UPDF, HWF) and local leaders of national political parties. Among the above-mentioned communities, males and females were interviewed informally during their leisure time.

The sensitivity of the information can have implications for the personal lives of the informants, especially for those who have been sexually harassed. On the other hand, as Parker (2003: xiii) suggests, in some cases the historical value of confidential events may suffer if the actual names and places are not evident. Following this, I have used the real names of political activists and leaders so that one can re-use the present documentation of state violence, forced displacement and women's narratives in the CHT in the future.

To represent the diversity of the experience, the research captures different age groups of people of both sexes. I also collected narratives of 40 women. I was able to interview some army personnel who were in charge of different regions in the CHT during 1981-1988. The interesting part of the methodology is that some leaders from the indigenous groups did not care about my research objectives. At first they told me that they had many things to tell me since they considered me more an activist than a researcher. Mostly they complained about other groups. Then I asked their opinion of my issues and made some changes to my strategy to include them in the research topics. When I discussed the peace accord after their return, they started blaming the government for not implementing it. I sat with them many times to know their experience.

The research used the walking method, allowing the interviews to take place in a more convenient and friendly environment and sometimes in the backyard of the house and the kitchen. I went to the *Jumghor*<sup>52</sup> to follow some of my respondents where they felt comfortable enough to share their experiences. *Mashima*, especially, felt at ease sharing her life's story while both of us lay in the same bed at night. It was a new experience for me and I really looked forward to the nights to hear new stories from *Mashima*.

It is an interesting observation that women helped one another to remember something in the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and corrected others where it was needed and in this way were constructing a collective memory. And through the process they sometimes started laughing loudly when they were talking about funny incidents and they contested each other's memories. I found walking interviews to be a very useful method in this research. There were two women in the Chakma community who told me that they felt that it was easier to communicate with me while walking, so that observers would get the idea that we were talking informally rather than in a serious way.

I collected some information when I dropped by houses just to say hello. They opened up to me and started talking about themselves, as by that time I had formed a close bond with them. They invited me to wedding ceremonies and other occasions as a guest and they also shared their experiences at the refugee camps. Even on my way to Dighinala from Khagrachari when I sat next to a Marma woman, I talked to her and she shared her experiences in the refugee camps and came to me the next day to share more of her stories. However, as interesting as it was, I was in a dilemma when some of them discarded their previous stories and changed them the next day. They constructed their own memories/narratives and contested them as well.

It was very sensitive to talk about difficult issues such as sexual harassment and rape. I never asked anything and I always tried to give them the space and time so that they felt free to talk about what they really wanted to. Some took a longer time than others to prepare themselves and make the decision to share their stories.

I found that the narrative analysis method worked well in telling the story, especially for women. I highlighted the context of narration and the role of the listener in the structure of these accounts as highlighted by scholars (Bernstein, 1997:95; Gubrium and Holstein, 1998:76; Holmes, 1997:67; Mishler, 1986:53). In the field, the respondents were given the freedom to narrate their own stories. It was his or her choice to select the appropriate time and it was their

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<sup>52</sup>The temporary house made for the *Jum* cultivation season for workers in the *Jum* field. Generally they cook and stay there for the convenience of work.

choice what they told me about the stages of their lives. But contesting his/her own narratives happened frequently.

The case study method helped me to explore or describe the data in real-life environments, but also to explain the complexities of real life. In this research, as with the narratives, people were given the freedom and space to talk about how and what they wanted to talk about. In my research I used the case study method to gather individual experience in detail since these experiences cannot be generalized for all women. Participant observation was an important method used in the research because it enabled me to discover much about the intra-ethnic relationships, their daily dealings, kin relationships, political support and affiliations and so on, though some of them did not want to disclose their strategies while negotiating with *Bangali* people in order to avoid further incidents and to give them a sense of security as a community member and as a woman in the society. However, participant observation in conflict areas must transcend traditional approaches. As Robben (1995:84) points out, an anthropologist who wishes to understand a major armed conflict from the perspective of its principal protagonists cannot resort to participant observation in its traditional sense but is restricted to account interviews.

Specifically on ethics, the name of respondents and places will remain anonymous in my thesis except for the minister of the Ministry of CHT Affairs purposively. I did not take any photos or record their voices except for some special cases (such as interviews with the Minister, or leaders of JSS or UPDF). But it is also interesting that I did not record anything, whether in digital form or film photography, not only for security reasons, but because they felt uncomfortable hearing their own voices. They were also not happy to be photographed. However, they sometimes asked me to read out what I had written about them and they sometimes changed it when they felt that it was not appropriate or accurate. As I mentioned earlier, before I went to my field areas Ratul Chakma advised me not to show my identity as a teacher or researcher to anybody in the field as this was not the appropriate time to do the research work. They may not talk to me, people were scared about a new person as they are frightened that they may face the reality of incidents such as Coxa's bazar.

On the first day of my staying with my host family, I did not tell them the objective of my research and I did not express my identity as a researcher. We discussed food, her children, her gardening. For the first few days I talked to many people to know how people talked about violence and how it had been constructed by people from different ethnic groups (Bangali, Chakma, Marma, and Tripura). I found that generally people don't want to talk about violence as all know that I am an outsider (meaning not from that area). I told them my story when I

first came to Khagrachari and where I visited, whom I became close to. I am an outsider in terms of my home town (my home town is Noakhali, most of the settlers are from the same area), my profession, my language, ethnic identity, socio economic status, all of which gave me the identity of an outsider.

A mutuality in the field areas (my effort to be insider and their effort also to accept me) helped me in making close relationships and in feel that the insider-outsider situation is very fluid. Fabian (2001, 2007) shows that mutuality appears as a methodological obsession in discussions about fieldwork ethics; he refers to the way in which anthropologist and informant are occupied in processes of co-responsibility (quoted in Pina Cabral, 2011: 1).

During my field work, I tried to change where I stayed so that the army or other special branches could not target one family. It should be noted here that after my arrival in my field areas, the agents and members of National Security Intelligence (NSI) and Intelligence in Security Branch (ISB) followed my every movement and asked me endless questions. They asked me what I was writing. I sometimes made another field note briefly for them.

Besides my host family house, I stayed in the *Bihar* (Buddhist temple) and my friend's house. I tried to keep secret where I was going and whom I talked to. To keep them secure and keep myself safe, some of the respondents suggested that we meet in a comparatively safe place. I also tried not to contact people using my mobile phone, as it was recorded. I contacted people through my indigenous friends and their families to introduce myself in different field areas.

During the study I was aware, in asking victims of violence to tell their own story, of the danger that they would be retraumatized. I was conscious of the point made by Olujić (1995) that we should be careful with the victim when we are unable to relieve their traumas and cannot restore their lives. I tried very hard to give them the space to tell me what they wanted to say without making them relive their trauma.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the representation of indigenous people in text books (Bangladesh and Global Studies) published by the National Curriculum, involving different classes at the Primary and Secondary level. It has also analysed the way these representations contribute to a mindset and stereotypical knowledge among the majority of *Bangali* people about indigenous people and within that how I got closer to the CHT and developed my position with the CHT issues. The chapter argues that this mindset can be changed through a person's journey of personal and political struggle with the indigenous people, leading to a

reconstruction of the self which reconciles the self and the reality of the field researched. This chapter also argues that achieving trust and changing the researcher's identity from outsider to insider is not a one-sided effort; it is process of cultural negotiation between both parties. I believe that this chapter makes a special contribution to a review of the different 'factors' researchers need to be aware of culturally and politically and especially in relation to the contemporary debate between academics, activists and those whose identities overlap. I argue here that activism sometimes appears as a reality in the fieldwork. In this chapter, I also show that 'indigenous women' is not a homogenous category since my field includes women from different cultural identities and with different socio-economic status, age, profession etc. It is also true that *Bangalis* in the CHT are not homogenous, for example those who are working in indigenous households.

## Chapter Three

### CHT Kothon (Stories of the CHT)

#### History of the CHT and its Place in Bangladesh

It is difficult to build up a picture of the CHT before British occupation due to the lack of written evidence for the pre-colonial era. For all their limitations however, researchers have been able to access the first hand data preserved in historical documents in the record rooms of the British government. In these documents and writings the indigenous groups of the CHT are referred to as ‘Hill tribes’ or ‘Hill men’. Most of the researchers (Shelly, 1992; Mohsin, 1997; Mohammad, 1997; et.al.) who have emphasized the transformation of CHT, started their accounts in the colonial period.

This chapter depicts the relationships between the indigenous groups using historical evidence from the pre-colonial period. It also analyses the role of colonialism in the CHT and in the development of indigenous culture. In the partition of 1947 the CHT was not originally meant to be part of East Pakistan; it was given to the Muslim-dominated country in exchange for Ferozpur being given to India. This chapter explores the policies of the Pakistan government implemented through development projects in the CHT and their effect on the indigenous people. The chapter reveals the role of state hegemony to control the indigenous people when they demanded their constitutional identity. The chapter argues that state mechanisms have acted against the interests of indigenous people and that the state plays a majoritarian politics through *Bangali* nationalism and religion (Islam).

Before the Mughal conquest in 1666, the coastal population of Chittagong and its neighbourhood must have been comprised of Arakanese, Tripura, and other hill ‘tribes’ as well as *Bangalis* and Portuguese. At that time Chittagong had no administrative set up such as a district government, and no fixed boundary. The southern part of Sungo and the Mathamyhuri River were under the Arkanese rule, while the northern part of the district was often guarded by the kings of Tripura of the Sultans of Bengal, even when the city of Chittagong and the port passed into the hands of the Arakanese (Government of Bangladesh).





Photo 6: Sixth century Portuguese map showing the Chacomas kingdom in present-day Rangamati north of Arakan<sup>53</sup>.

The hill groups originally living in the coastal plains of Chittagong had to withdraw to the interior hills after the Mughal conquest of Chittagong. This period represents a turning point in the history of the ethnic hill groups and *Bangali* power in Chittagong. The indigenous groups had been living in comparative segregation from the population in the plain since their retreat into the hills, until 1860 when British administrators annexed the CHT areas. In spite of their isolation from, and hostility to, the plains, the Chakma chiefs (from 1725 to 1757) and the Marma chiefs had always maintained trade relations with the plains and paid compliments or trade taxes to the Mughals.

### **The CHT Administration**

On the basis of the information recorded in the Records of Committee of Revenue (1874) and other documents from the colonial era it can be argued that the present problems of the CHT faced by the government of Bangladesh date back to the Mughal period. To keep the Mughal at bay, the Chakma chiefs started to adopt Muslim names themselves such as Rattan

<sup>53</sup>Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chittagong\\_Hill\\_Tracts](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chittagong_Hill_Tracts), last seen 2/11/2015.

Khan (1673), Jalal Khan (1715-25) and Shermust Khan (1737-58). From 1666 on, the Mughal influence was regularly felt in the CHT, and they were regarded not as intruders but as traders. Jalal Khan, the Chakma Chief, requested the Mughal administrator of Chittagong to permit *Bangali* merchants to trade with the indigenous people. As an exchange and in reciprocity, he promised to pay a voluntary annual tribute to the Mughal authorities. The place where the tribute was paid was known as 'Karpas Mahal'. In 1724 Jalal Khan refused to pay the tribute and was consequently attacked by the Mughal Dewan Krishan Chand, but ultimately Jalal Khan compelled the Mughal administrator to introduce the most of Dewan in the Chakma administration and it existed up to 1900 (Dewan, 1990).

### **Colonial Period (1760-1947)**

British policy towards the CHT was basically determined by defence of the coloniser's economic and political interests. Before the CHT was formally incorporated into the British state in 1860, interaction between the people of the region and external political structures was nominal. Although hill chiefs paid tribute to the Mughals, they still maintained their freedom and independent spirit (Schendel, 1995:133)

Even the British had no 'direct influence' over the people of the CHT during the period of East India Company Rule (1760-1860) (Roy, 2000a:45). Hence, prior to 1860, hill people were basically self-governing small entities without highly formalised structures administered by chieftains who were considered to be independent (Bangladesh Group Nederland, 1984:18; Roy, 2000a:45)<sup>54</sup>. However, one major aspect of the Company rule was changed in 1789: the method of payment by the hill chiefs changed from produce (raw cotton) to cash (Mohsin, 2002:28). This led to the process of monetisation of the hill economy, the entry and influence of *Bangali* money lenders and traders and the growing indebtedness of the hill people (Adnan 2004:20). Attempts to increase tax and the appointment of *Bangali* intermediaries as tax collectors at this time (1777-1987) were met with strong armed resistance by the Chakma chiefs (Bertocci, 1989:146)

The CHT was declared a separate district of Bengal for the first time in 1860. From 1760-1947, British policies had brought about profound and fundamental changes in the economic system of the hill people. The initial contacts between the hill people and the British were confined to the collection of taxes. Tax was collected in the form of cotton locally

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<sup>54</sup>In 1829 Mr. Halhed the British Commissioner of Chittagong, conceded that 'the Hill-tribes of the Chittagong were not British subjects, but merely tributaries and he recognised no right of the British to interfere with their internal arrangements' (Hutchinson, 1909:8).

known as '*karpas*' and the amount of revenue varied. This collection was done through *Bangali* middlemen who served as the agents of the company and who usually collected more cotton than the amount they had to pay to the Company.

Since the revenue had not been fixed, at times these middlemen took the entire amount of cotton from the CHT people. Traditionally cotton was the mode of payment of the CHT people in their commercial transactions with the *Bangalis* (Committee of Revenue, 1784). The first direct intervention of the British Colonial state in the economic life of the CHT people was on their mode of production. The British asserted that '*Jum*' which was the characteristic form of agriculture in the CHT, was a 'primitive' method of agriculture; it entailed long fallow periods, which were assessed as a waste of resources by the British (Mohsin, 1997). They attempted to replace it with plough cultivation which was economically more profitable and was considered to be technologically superior. The colonial system created conditions that demanded money to pay land revenue, taxes and other levies to meet expenditure of various kinds, and to buy and sell commodities and other necessities. It is possible to see how the colonial system created two divisions of the population of the CHT by modifying the mode of production, resulting in a new relationship between the indigenous people and a new class of people from the plains. Therefore, by the 1890s more than half of the 3,000 hectares of reclaimed lands were occupied by *Bangali* immigrants (Mey, 1984:22). In order to protect the hill people from this exploitation the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulations of 1900 came into effect on 1 May 1900. The Act of 1900, often known as the CHT Manual<sup>55</sup>, amended the Act XX11 of 1860.

Thus the final destruction of the self-governing system of the indigenous hill people found legal expression through the Regulation of 1900 (Bangladesh Group Nederland, 1984:22-23). Since the predominant intention of this administration was to ensure tax collection, the landholding pattern was changed too. Traditionally, land was common property for the shifting cultivators (Bessaignet, 1997:36).

### **Colonial Hangover**

Two hundred years of British rule in India had come to an end in 1947 with the emergence of two independent states, India and Pakistan. The division was made on the basis

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<sup>55</sup>The British had abolished the pre-existing practices of debt bondage and slavery. Lewin's accounts tell us that an interest rate of five percent a month or 60 % a year was imposed by the *Bangalis* on the money lent to the people. The hill people were unable to defend themselves; they could neither read nor write and were not familiar with the proceedings of the court. (Lewin, 1869:225-226).

of religion, with the majority separated into Muslim or Hindu and the rest, including Buddhists, Christians and people of other religions or ideologies relegated to either of the states. Because of close religious, cultural, linguistic and ethnic affiliations with the adjacent population of India, the CHT representative at the talks demanded that CHT areas be included within India. Indeed, on the day of independence, the Indian flag was hoisted in Rangamati and the Burmese flag in Bandarban, where people wanted to merge with Burma. Despite strong protests, the CHT was nonetheless placed in the newly formed state of Pakistan. But the Boundary Commission Chairman Sir Cyril Radcliffe arbitrarily awarded the CHT to East Pakistan, providing no explanation whatsoever (Dewan, 1990). Pakistan's state-building process was associated with the development of a strong, centralised, unitary government. Forcible integration and denying the rights of other ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural groups and minorities in the name of development and modernization were part and parcel of this approach. This model was applied to both the *Bangalis* of East Bengal (EB) as well as the indigenous people of the CHT (Mey, 1984 b:101). The CHT region was especially targeted for its rich natural resources. The foremost blow to the region's autonomous administration came through the Constitutional Act of 1962 that changed the status of the CHT from 'Excluded Area' to 'Tribal Area'. The abolition of special status came about by a Constitutional Amendment in 1963 (Mohsin, 2002:45-46). By the mid-1960s, the majority of employees in local administration and the police force of the CHT were *Bangalis* (Huq, 1992:56).

The rhetoric of 'development in the national interest' was invoked to justify economic intervention by the state. Little concern was shown for the possible consequences for the lives of the hill people (Adman, 2004:23). The CHT was declared to be a 'project area' for its economic potential (Gerharz, 2001:27). In 1953, the government of Pakistan completed the construction of a paper mill at Chandraghona, on the bank of Karnaphuli River in the CHT, with the help of foreign aid. Before the mill, this area was inhabited by the Marma. They were evicted without concern for their welfare. Now, 100% of the inhabitants of this area are *Bangali* (Chowdhury et.al., 1979). To this end a hydroelectric project was constructed on the Karnaphuli River in Rangamati district in 1960. A large number of frustrated Chakma farmers migrated to India where they remain as refugees. Although the dam was expected to control the flooding of the Karnaphuli River, flooding has since become endemic in the region (Van Schendel, Mey and Dewan, 2000:204). The government also deceived the hill people in its promise to provide them with free electricity, On the contrary, 99% of the CHT population was without electricity until the late 1970s (EPW Report, 1978:726). In 1964, the government of Pakistan contracted with a Canadian company, 'Forestal Forestry and Engineering

International Limited' (Forestal) to survey the soil and topography of the land surface of the CHT. They encouraged the hill people to make the change from *Jum* to gardening, rubber cultivation and a teak plantation. In 1995 the afforestation rate was 3.36% and it was reported that there would be insufficient oxygen for human beings in the near future (Chakma and Hill, 1995). Before the independence of Bangladesh, an earth satellite centre was set up at Betbunia in the CHT. This satellite centre caused the people of the Marma community to emigrate.

### **State Discourse on CHT (Bangladesh Period)**

After the birth of Bangladesh in 1971, two ideological forces were particularly instrumental in alienating the hill people in the process of the formation of the new state: aggressive *Bangali* nationalism (later Bangladeshi nationalism) and Islamisation. The long-standing economic, political and cultural discrimination by Pakistani and then East Pakistan authorities<sup>56</sup> led to the growth of a *Bangali* nationalist movement in the 1960s spearheaded primarily by the Awami League (AL) and its leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman<sup>57</sup>. As opposed to the conservative, religious nationalism of Pakistan, *Bangali* nationalism was secular, based on *Bangali* cultural identity (Mohsin, 1996b:33). As the movement served to protect *Bangali* interests, the very process contained the germ of exclusion with respect to the identities and interests of the indigenous people in East Bengal. Despite the havoc wrought by the Kaptai Dam, the cause and interests of the CHT people were not included in the political agenda of the Bangladesh nationalist movement (Mohsin, 2002:44). It is therefore not surprising that most hill people remained isolated from the national political developments that ultimately led to the independence struggle of 1971 (Adnan, 2004:25; Mohsin, 1996a:2).

Therefore, a majority of hill people remained passive rather than hostile in relation to the war of 1971 (Mohsin, 2002:55)<sup>58</sup>. Active minority participated directly in the independence struggle and many others helped the *Bangali* freedom fighters (Tripura R.K., 1996:5-7). The Mong Chief, Mong Prue Chai Chowdhury, joined the liberation force. Nevertheless, certain individuals such as the Chakma chief, *Raja* Tridiv Roy, supported Pakistan, considering that allegiance to Pakistan was the best way to secure indigenous people's interests. The role of these few individuals from the ruling class led *Bangalis* to consider the indigenous people as pro-Pakistani and against the liberation of Bangladesh (Shelly, 1992:33). This erroneous

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<sup>56</sup>The former province of East Bengal had been renamed East Pakistan as a province of the state of Pakistan.

<sup>57</sup>See Mohsin (2002:50-56) for a detailed account of the development of *Bangali* nationalism.

<sup>58</sup>Shree Pele (1996:16) pointed to the roles of local pro-AL leaders and administrators as responsible for the alienation of hill people from the struggle.

perception also provided a pretext for revenge attacks by the *Mukti Bahini* (liberation force) and armed *Bangalis*, especially during the closing phase of the war in December 1971 (Montu, 1980:1510). They ransacked several indigenous villages and committed violent atrocities throughout the entire month (Ahsan and Chakma, 1989:967; Ali, 1993:183; Shelley, 1992:33, 109).

After the emergence of an independent Bangladesh, the indigenous people of the CHT were treated as a distant people from the *Bangali* perspective. Firstly, the *Bangali* people considered them as Pakistani collaborators since Chakma chief *Raja* Tridiv Roy extended his support to Pakistan in 1971. Secondly, the CHT was used as a training camp for the Pakistani forces. Thirdly, the dominant historiography of the liberation war glorifies the war as '*Bangalir Muktijuddho*' (liberation war of *Bangali* people). This perspective helped the *Bangali* people to develop a generalised idea of the indigenous people living in Bangladesh, though several documents (Kamal, 2003; Nasreen, 2008) contain evidence that many indigenous men and women joined the war and some of them became martyrs. The official history of the liberation war was reluctant to give them space. It was insensitive to the cultural diversity of ethnic minorities (Jahangir, 1986:33; Mohsin, 1996b:42). The lesson of 1971 and growing insecurity led indigenous leaders to seek constitutional protection. The Prime Minister Sheikh Mujib, the leader of the *Bangali* nationalist movement who had led the nation to independence, rejected the demands of the delegation as secessionist and said that it would encourage indigenous feelings. The *Bangali* elite considered this demand as a movement for separation and defined it as a threat to national security. Later Sheikh Mujib declared the following in a public speech at Rangamati in 1973: "From this day onward the 'tribals' are being promoted into *Bangalis*" (Mohsin, 1996b:44). They took the whole Hill Tracts administration under the control of the army in 1972. On 4 November 1972, the constitution of Bangladesh was adopted, paying virtually no attention to the concerns of the hill people (Adnan, 2004:27).

At first, the new state of Bangladesh continued the policies of its predecessor. The Bangladesh constitution did not make any provision for the CHT nor did its first national budget of 1973 make any development allocations for the CHT region. Thus the government displayed a total lack of sensitivity and accentuated the existing feeling of insecurity among the indigenous people. The immediate response of the hill people to such rejection was to form a regional political party PCJSS (Mohsin, 2002:58). Following the 1975 coup that ousted the AL from power and assassinated Prime Minister Sheikh Mujib, the country underwent a process of de-secularisation and militarisation. Bangladesh nationalism in this context took an overt turn towards religion (Mohsin, 2002:66). Islam was used as a political weapon by the

ruling elites in the post-Mujib era (Wright, 1987:24). In order to secure and legitimise its power and earn the support of the dominant Muslim majority, subsequent military regimes of General turned President Ziaur Rahman and Hussain Mohammad Ershad gradually incorporated Islamic ideals into the Constitution and into political practices, contrary to the secular nationalism of the independence struggle. President Ziaur's concept of Bangladeshi nationalism was in essence a reassertion of the dominant *Bangali* Muslim identity (Wright, 1987:18) as opposed to 'Hindu/Sanskritic West Bengal' (Murshid, 1999:356-358). The inherent bias in the concept towards one religious community deepened the sense of alienation among the hill people who found themselves as minorities both in ethnic and religious terms (Mohsin, 2002:68, 70). Furthermore, the principle of secularism previously set forth in the Constitution was abandoned and "absolute trust in the communal political parties was also lifted" (Mallik, 1998:177; Wright 1987:22). President Ershad declared Islam to be the state religion through the eighth amendment of the Constitution (Article 2, Clause A) on 7 June 1988. Thus by state patronage, Islamisation gained momentum, marginalising religious and ethnic minorities (Mohsin, 2000b:66; Mushy, 1999:358-360). One sign of Islamisation was the number of mosques in the CHT that increased from 40 in 1961 to 592 in 1981 (JSB, 1993:33).

Instead of negotiating, governments have reacted with a two-pronged strategy that includes socio-economic interventions in the name of development, and militarisation in the name of counter insurgency (Khan, 1997a:83). Some have argued that development interventions were indeed part of a composite counter-insurgency agenda (Adnan, 2004; Arnes, 1997:57; Tripura, 2000a:99).

A large proportion of foreign aid money was used to maintain paramilitary forces and to support construction of roads and bridges, military camps and barracks in the CHT that caused displacement in the CHT (Kamaluddin, 1980:31). In 1976, with the declaration of Ordinance 77, the government established the Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board (CHTDB). From the formation of this Board until 1983, the Divisional Commissioner of Chittagong Division was appointed as the chairman of this board. After 1983 the General Officer Commanding (GOC) of the Chittagong Cantonment was appointed to the same post. Now the ruling party Member of Parliament (MP) is the chairman of CHTDB. The consultative committee of the board consists of three Circle Chiefs. However, these chiefs do not have any power to direct the activities of the board. The chairman is the supreme authority, directing all the activities of the board according to the plan of the Government with the help of civil and military bureaucrats. In this connection some remarks from the report of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission can be quoted:

*The Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board (CHTDB) was established in 1976 by the late president Ziaur Rahman to fight the Shanti Bahini. It is a purely political organization to bribe the tribes. Loans are given for private purposes, to business and tribal leaders. They are showpieces of the Government. Yes, it is mostly a political bribe to tribal leaders to buy them off so that they will not help the Shanti Bahini-. (Mey, 1991).*

In the interests of the government CHTDB has invested a huge amount of money in the transport and communication sector. The military and the administration are the two powerful agencies in which the government invests a large portion of the budget. It is evident from various research reports (Dewan, 1990; Mohsin, 1997; Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission Report, 1991:114) that a large portion of the government's budget spent in the defence sector for the CHT remains hidden. Government-published statistics never show the actual expenditure for the military in this area. One of the major programme piloted through the CHTDB was the *Joutha Khamar* (collective farms) project to resettle *Jumiyas* (practitioners of *Jum* cultivation) and other landless people. Under the scheme, each family was allocated five acres of hill land for cultivation with the expectation that they would achieve self-sufficiency within three years (Hussain, 1999:36-37). The Board also undertook a community development scheme, part of the cluster village programme, which was used as a counter-insurgency measure in 1988. Forcible relocation and regrouping of the indigenous population was entrusted to the military's counter insurgency operation in the 80's, as a result of which many indigenous people were forced by the security forces to leave their lands and homes and to relocate in those artificially created settlements where they remained under military control and surveillance. Essentially the purpose was to limit the movement and take control of the lives of indigenous people. There have been numerous incidents of human rights violations in the indigenous cluster villages (Roy, R. C.K., 2000:126-127; CHT Commission, 1991:73-75; Timm, 1991:14).

The most damaging aspect of the government's socio-economic policy was 'demographic engineering' (Adnan, 2004:47). It involved a politically motivated 'population transfer' programme and forcible relocation of the indigenous people (Adnan, 2004:47-53), which included organised transmigration of *Bangalis* from the plains into the CHT to settle on the lands of the indigenous people. The program was implemented in three major phases over 1980-1985 (Adnan, 2004:41, 48; Roy, R.C.K., 2000:111-112). The Ziaur Rahman government of Bangladesh made a drastic and ill-advised change to the land law of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in 1979. Through an amendment to rule 34(1) of the CHT Manual, the government



maintained most of the provisions of early legislation, but with one important omission, namely the restrictions with regard to settlement of Chittagong Hill Tracts land by outsiders. In addition, the hastily grafted amendment also did away with the definition 'non-Hillman resident' the legal term used to identify resident *Bangalis* of the CHT who were entitled to some of the privileges reserved specially for the indigenous people.

Approximately 350,000 to 450,000 people in total were brought into the CHT under the programme (Adnan, 2004:49). The government argued that Bangladesh was a densely populated area (1,400 persons per square mile in 1980), while there was a vast tract of empty land in the CHT. The notion of empty land in the CHT, however, was a fallacy as only a small percentage of its land was suitable for cultivation (Burger, 1987:132; Mohsin 2000b:67-68; Roy, R.C. K., 2000:115)<sup>59</sup>. It is a matter of record that the government sought to provide 5 acres of high land, 4 acres of 'mixed' land and 2.5 acres of paddy land to each settling family from the plains in the early eighties. In the first phase of the resettlement program, about 25,000 families were reportedly brought into the Chittagong Hill Tracts. According to the CHT Regulation of 1900, whose provisions favouring the indigenous hill people have been gradually eroded over the years, such a settlement programme could not be carried out without the knowledge of the Circle Chief (*Rajas*) and *mouza Headman* (Roy, 1995).

Under the resettlement program, poor and landless people from different parts of Bangladesh have migrated to the hill districts. The official population census of 1991 estimated 974,445 people in this area of which 51.34% were *Pahari* People and 48.66% were *Bangali* people (BBS: 1991). But it is necessary to add here that at the time of partition in 1947, only 9% of the population in the CHT was *Bangali* (UNPO, 2002). The shift in demographic composition has been variously interpreted as 'demographic invasion' (Chakma, 1997:239), 'ethnocide', or the attempt to 'colonise' the hill people by making them a minority in their own land (Mohsin, 2002:119). Demographic shifts also brought about changes in the region's religious configurations. The growth of the Muslim population rose from only 6% in 1951 to 44% in 1991. By the end of the twentieth century, Muslims outnumbered Buddhists, who had been the overwhelming majority in 1961 (72%) and 1974(66%) (Adnan, 2004:57).

The Reserve Forest (RF) and government-sponsored afforestation programmes have been fundamental sources of uprooting indigenous people. One example of the arbitrary

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<sup>59</sup>According to one survey carried out by a group of soil scientists in 1960, only 3.2% of land (A category) was suitable for all-purpose agriculture; 15 % ( B category) for fruit gardens and forestry; and 77 % ( C category) was solely for afforestation (Mohsin, 2000b:67-68). The Anti-Slavery Society also presents similar findings based on the information of a report, The Forestry Survey (Anti-Slavery Society, 1984:17).

enforcement of this policy is that in 1992 the government declared 76,000 acres of land in Rangamati, 37,387.5 acres in Khagrachari and 7,389.2 in Bandarban as RF<sup>60</sup> resulting in the eviction of a huge number of people from their land. The consequence of the government's forestry policy was a severing of the traditional tie between the forest and hill dwellers.

### **Nationalism and Militarisation**

The emergence of modern political consciousness in the CHT can be traced to the British colonial period. *Parbatya Chattagram Samiti* (CHT People's Association), a political organisation, was established in 1920. During the partition of India in 1947, the leaders of the organisation strongly lobbied for merging the CHT with India instead of Muslim-dominated Pakistan. In the 1950s, the present form of politicisation of the CHT was crystallising. A student organisation called *Pahari Chatra Samaj* (Hill Student's Association) was founded in 1956/57 under the leadership of an educated Chakma youth, M.N. Larma. It became the principal vehicle of protest against the Kaptai project and government socio-economic repression at that time (Ali, 1996:21-22).

The construction of the Kaptai Dam forced many to acquire more education as a means of finding alternative incomes. This gave birth to a politically-conscious literate group who gradually became involved in politics. During this time, young educated people began to work as teachers in order to educate people and to generate a political consciousness (Bangladesh Groep Nederland and Mey, 1984:125). M.N. Larma was actively involved in the anti-Pakistan mass movement, for which he suffered imprisonment and gradually emerged as the principal architect of the nationalist movement in the CHT. He was elected as an independent candidate to the Provincial Assembly of East Pakistan in the general election of 1970 which preceded the war of liberation (Husain, 1999:12). PCJSS was forced to go with their demands on 7 March 1972 after the failed meeting with PM Sheikh Mujib led by M.N. Larma in January 1973 against the backdrop of the diminishing prospect of a political solution and a constitutional means of protest.

The SB developed to become quite a strong guerrilla organisation during the initial years without any external support (Behra, 1996:992). But with the political changeover in 1975, JSS was banned and M. N. Larma fled to India. One SB source claimed that 15,000 fighters joined the force (Bangladesh Groep Netherland and Mey, 1984:128). According to government information, the figure could have been anywhere from 5,000 to 7,000, whereas

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<sup>60</sup>Dainik Sangbad, 13/8/1992.

there was a reserve force of 50,000 trained youth presumably organised into militia units (Mohsin, 2002:171).

The resistance offered by JSS was not limited to armed operations. The party had two wings: political and military. Its organisational network was wide and complex, reaching down to the grass roots. The political wing was comprised of *Gram Panchayat* (Village Council), *Jubo Samiti* (Youth Association), *Mahila Samiti* (Women's Association) and *Parbatya Chattagram Kyttanya Samiti* (CHT Woodcutters' Association) (Husain, 1999:19). The armed wing consisted of a central force, local militias and an intelligence information section called 'Gonoline' (Mass Line)<sup>61</sup>. JSS used to run a parallel administration in the areas under its control primarily through the *Gram Panchayet* network. The *Panchayet* had its own laws, judiciary and revenue systems which were the principal financial source of the organisation. They also extracted tools and taxes from *Bangali* traders and contractors (Adnan, 2004:28).

Although up until the early 1980's, the leadership of the JSS was primarily in the hands of M. N. Larma, fundamental differences in strategy and objectives led the organisation to split into two factions. Preeti Chakma, a central committee leader of JSS and former chief of SB, was in favour of adopting the objective of self-determination within a shorter period of time. He was allegedly a strong Indian ally. On the other hand, M. N. Larma preferred a protracted guerrilla war along Marxist Leninist lines (Husain, 1999:12). The internal conflict ultimately led to the assassination of M. N. Larma on 10 November 1983, after which Santu Larma emerged as the undisputed leader of JSS (Husain, 1999:22-23).

The JSS represented various shades of political ideology: Marxism plus Maoism and nationalism. The background of the founding cadres, like M.N. Larma and Shantu Larma shows that they were trained in Marxism as students and established the RCP with a strong commitment to communism (Ali, 1996:22). SB followed the principle of Maoist guerrilla operations, as outlined in a book called *Amader Samar Sanghita* (Our Military Manual) by Shantu Larma (Behera, 1996:994). The Maoist overtone of JSS also became clear during the period of the internal rift between the Larma and Preeti factions in the early 1980s. The Preeti group was reportedly in favour of abolishing the communist base of the party as this would prevent them from getting necessary help from outside, especially from India. Meanwhile, the Larma brothers were advocating a Maoist line of attaining autonomy through a protracted war. Santu Larma enunciated this line of thought in the 1982 Party Congress, reportedly desiring a proletarian form of comprehensive struggle through a broad based democratic front in which

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<sup>61</sup>The name signifies a mass network of human-to-human communications.

the *Jumma* proletariat would fight along with the oppressed masses of Bangladesh. Preeti Chakma rejected this tactical line (BISS, 1987:49).

Significantly, however, the public image of JSS is one of a secular, progressive, liberal party fighting for hill people's democratic rights, rather than of a Marxist or a radical leftist party. The liberal political philosophy of JSS envisages a society free from discrimination and exploitation between people and between indigenous groups (Kamal, 1999:20). Party guidelines made available in 1986 mentioned humanitarianism as its ideology, nationalism, secularism and democracy as principles, and establishing the right to self-determination as the main objective (Mohsin, 2002:227, Appendix 44). Even the party constitution (PCJSS 1999) drawn up after the Accord does not hint at a leftist orientation. Hence a certain amount of political flexibility has always been maintained.

The leftist orientation has shaped the party's perception of gender issues. Ideologically it believes in women's rights and emancipation. At the top level, the leadership is quite aware of gender concerns. M. N. Larma was extremely articulate in this regard while critiquing the newly-formulated Constitution of Bangladesh with regard to its gender insensitivity. Women's rights are totally neglected in the Constitution. "*In order to establish women's rights, they should be given the same rights as men*" (PCJSS, 2002:28). Yet, this perception is not properly reflected in the party agenda and action.

Another disputed ideological point is the concept of *Jumma* nationalism espoused by JSS: it has been analysed as a constructed category developed over time as a reaction against oppression (Mohsin, 2002; Van Schendel, 1995) and critiqued for its Chakma hegemonic element (Mohsin, 2000a, 2002). Mohsin (2002) argued that while *Jumma* nationalism emerged as a counter force to the domination of *Bangali* nationalism, the very concept itself contained the seed of Chakma domination. However, JSS leadership did not accept the term indigenous for a long time but after the peace accord they shifted their position to *Jumma* nationalism to 'being indigenous', though their manifesto still carries *Jumma* nationalism giving the explanation that there are many indigenous groups living in Bangladesh who don't practise *jum* cultivation, so *Jumma* nationalism doesn't cover them. The existing political process of the JSS in the CHT is not totally exclusionary. For instance, the party guidelines (1986) maintain the right to self-determination for all nationalities in the CHT. *Jumma* nationalism in this context has to be considered as a process of identification rather than a solid, fixed identity, which is being constituted and reconstituted over time. The process of identification allows one to consider a wide range of self-definitions, some more stable and continuous, and others transitory and situational (Hilhorst, 2003:32). In the case of the rise of *Jumma* nationalism in

the CHT: it is not a regional identity. Instead, it is a process that helps identity these people with the region and with a certain cause. Ethnic identities are constructed and developed through a process of describing and re-describing the collectives (Werbner, 1997:229) on historical and material grounds. One has to consider *Jumma* identity as a political one (Gerhar, 2001:39; Tripura, 2000b:127) and one that has been formed on the basis of common experience and the attributes of the communities concerned with a psychological, historical and material basis.(Shree Jagodish, 1993:18)

### **Militarisation**

Militarization has been a part of government policy towards the CHT since colonial times. However while the British and Pakistani regimes deployed armies primarily to secure economic interests, the state of Bangladesh has used its armed troops as a tool of direct domination (Mohsin, 20002:163). Although there had been low intensity militarisation during the Mujib period, the formal operation of counter insurgency began in 1976 with the government announcement that it would fully deploy the interests which dominated the perceptions of the post-1975 military regimes of Ziaur and Ershad. Consequently, during their rule, the CHT underwent full-scale militarisation. The 24th infantry Division of Chittagong was placed in charge of the CHT operation.

In addition to the army, the BDR (Bangladesh Rifles), Ansars (Paramilitary Force), Armed police, VDP (Village Defence Party: government-appointed Village Security Force) and District Police took part in the operation, as did the Bangladesh naval and air force personnel stationed at Chittagong (Bangladesh Groep Netherland and Mey, 1984:147-148;Mohsin 2002:171-173). Available information suggests that in the 1990s, one third of the Bangladesh army was deployed in the CHT, i.e. between 30,000 and 35,000 troops (Mohsin, 1997:25)<sup>62</sup>. The ratio between the security forces and hill people was estimated to be 1:20 (CHT Commission, 1992:176). In the CHT there were three cantonments, four Brigade Head Quarters, two garrisons, one naval base and army camps in every *Upazila* (sub-district) headquarters as well as in *bazaars* and villages and several others on the roadside.

Apart from security matters, the involvement and influence of the armed forces extended to socio-economic as well as political issues (Ibrahim, 1991:26). Although there was

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<sup>62</sup>Burger (1987:133) reported that about 30,000 regular and paramilitary troops were stationed in the CHT in 1980. On the other hand, the independent fact-finding CHT Commission (1991:58) estimated that there were 114,500 armed personnel excepting the police and VDP, which is somewhat in agreement with the assessment of the Bangladesh Groep Netherland and Mey (1984:147). However, the CHT Commission revised its estimation in 1992 to 30,000-35,000 (CHT Commission, 1992:176).

a civilian administration headed by the DC, in practice the military dominated decision-making in all aspects of people's lives (Chakma, 1997:237). For instance, the GOC, the most senior military official in charge of the CHT, was the Chairman of the CHTDB whose power was all-encompassing (Mohsin, 1997:27). He had exclusive control of health, education, electricity, agriculture, fisheries, forestry, natural resources, roads and other infrastructural aspects. Even civil and political lives were totally controlled by the army. There was no freedom of expression or right of association. Local people required permission from the army to hold meetings, get together and even for religious ceremonies (Mohsin, 2002:173).

The majority of my respondents in this research explained that their physical movement was controlled by the military in the cluster villages. They also needed permission from the army to travel within the Hill Tracts. Their shopping, marketing and entertaining of guests were all targeted by army surveillance. Purchasing more usually invited extra risk as the army could suspect them as agents or suppliers of SB (EPW Report, 1978:726). Villagers were compelled to feed and to sell food products to security personnel for minimal or no payment. Furthermore, media reporting regarding the CHT was exclusively controlled by the military. Local newspapers and magazines required permission from the army and had to conform to their rules. However, the hill organisations always attempted to disregard military regulations through their own publications, namely: *Radar*, *Satellite*, *Jumma Sangbad Bulletin* (JSB), Hill Literature Forum and various anonymous publications, etc. (Mohsin 2002:174).

The army resorted to a policy of 'divide and rule' (Mohsin, 1996a:11). Organisations were established under direct military sponsorship in order to destroy intra-ethnic alliances and create divisions among the indigenous groups in the CHT. These included: *Chakma Unnayan Sangsad* (Chakma Development Council), *Marma Unnayan Sangsad* (Marma development Council) and *Tripura Unnayan Sangsad* (Tripura Development Council). At the same time *Murong Bahini* (Murong Force) was created by the army among Murong people by giving them special assistance to fight against SB. Similarly, under a special programme, Marmas in Bandarban were given financial benefits and job offers after the tenth grade so that they were diverted from the movement. Army propaganda and publicity had always highlighted the differences among the indigenous groups and the territorial dimensions of the movement. Gross human rights violations and massacres perpetrated by the army are widely documented by many internal and hill organisations<sup>63</sup>. Acts of violence committed by the army include rape,

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<sup>63</sup>JSS has been publishing reports regarding human rights violations since 1985. Similar reports have been produced by various international organisations, such as Amnesty International, Survival International, International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, World Fellowship of Buddhists, Humanity Protection Forum,

forced eviction, conversion, religious persecution, arrests, torture, kidnapping, forcible occupation of lands in the name of camp-building, detention in concentration camps and so on. Most importantly, together with the *Bangali* settlers, the army was implicated in a number of massacres carried out over the period of the counter insurgency.

### **Peace Initiative and the 1997 Accord**

As a result of a series of official talks and 26 dialogues between the government and CHT leadership from 1979 to 1997 (Guhathakurta, 2001:261), an agreement popularly known as the Peace Accord was reached on 2 December 1997. The 1997 Accord was the third agreement. The first agreement was signed in 1985 with the Preeti Group; the second in 1988 with the moderate leaders of the CHT (known as the Moderate Leaders' agreement), by passing the then underground JSS (Roy, 2003:30). Moreover, the democratic environment created a congenial situation for both parties to come together in search of a political solution. The BNP (Bangladesh Nationalist Party) Government under Prime Minister Khaleda Zia formed a nine-member parliamentary committee to conduct negotiations with the JSS. In response, on 1 August 1992, the SB unilaterally declared a ceasefire and modified its demands. But the question of autonomy and *Bangali* settlers remained among the main points of bargaining. After several rounds of talks the process stalled in mid-1994. The new government of the Awami League (AL) led by the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina came to power in 1996. Her government formed a twelve-member national committee on CHT affairs. After seven rounds of negotiations between the committee and JSS, the agreement was finally signed on December 2, 1997, bringing to a halt the decades-long conflict (Husain, 1999:43:57).

Despite many positive features, the Accord initiated a wide range of controversy and criticism, ranging from ideological and textual disagreements to political, functional matters. It has raised serious concern about the absence of constitutional safeguards, the effectiveness of the role and functions of the Land Commission and its failure to address the issues of justice and human rights violations and the issue of settlers, the absence of an implementation deadline and independent monitoring process, and the inadequate representation of the interests of smaller communities and of women (Arnes and Chakma, 2002:3; Roy, 2003). Moreover, it is also alleged that the Accord had compromised the question of hill people's identity by accepting the term 'tribal' instead of *adibasi* (Mohsin, 1999:22). It is in fact a long standing

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Research Institute of Oppressed People, and the CHT Campaign and CHT Support Group of USA (Shree Jogodish, 1997:223).

demand of the indigenous people of the country in general to be recognised as *adibasi* as an acknowledgement of their distinct identities.

The defence of the peace agreement, on the other hand, underscores the value of the formal/official recognition given by the Accord to the long armed struggle of the hill people who had been previously labelled as mere ‘miscreants’ and ‘terrorists’. It also highlights the achievements, such as: the formation of the separate ministry for CHT affairs which was the first of its kind for any particular community in Bangladesh; the creation of local administrative unity in the divided districts (Chakma, T.L., 2002a:5); Hill District Councils (HDCs) with a variety of policy making powers invested in them; and the proposed Land Commission for resolving land issues and resettlement matters. Despite limitations, these proposed arrangements were purported to have the potential to bring about peace, autonomy and development opportunities in the region if implemented properly (Chakma, T.L., 2002 a:5-6). But this potential awaits fruition, as key areas of the Accord have not been implemented, including the empowerment of the RC (Regional Council), establishment of the land commission, rehabilitation of the CHT IDPs, resettlement of the state-sponsored settlers and the withdrawal of the army (Kamal and Drong, 2002:10).

The Accord appeared to halt a prolonged conflict that had significant implications from the perspective of the state (for strategic and security reasons) as well as from the hill people’s perspective (identity and development purposes). Yet a new conflict has erupted as a result of intra-indigenous rivalry and clashes. The Accord was immediately opposed by a breakaway faction of the PCP, PGP<sup>64</sup> and the HWF.

These groups later launched a new political party, UPDF, on 26 December 1998. The UPDF and its allies have dubbed the Accord a complete ‘sell out’ which has compromised the issue of greater autonomy for the CHT people. In their view, the provisions of the Accord fall far short of the real agenda and goal for which the struggle was waged. They pledged to continue the struggle to attain ‘full autonomy’. The acrimony between the JSS and UPDF has accentuated violence and unrest, resulting in the killing of many supporters from both sides. Meanwhile, the army and settler violence have continued, and the problems of refugee resettlement and IDPs and violence in general have remained unresolved, and the common indigenous people are caught in a precarious situation. As a result, the debate has surfaced on the ground as to how far the ‘Peace Treaty’ has brought about the desired peace or end of conflict.

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<sup>64</sup>The PCP and PGP were acting as the de-facto students’ wing and civilian wing of the JSS.



At the same time, a process of polarisation has taken place among both the hill people and the *Bangalis*, dividing those who support the Accord from those who do not.<sup>65</sup>The agreement has been rejected by some staunch nationalist and fundamentalist *Bangali* parties like BNP and Bangladesh Jamaat-E-Islam, on the grounds that it provided too many advantages to the indigenous people, circumscribing the rights of the *Bangalis* living there (IWGIA, 2002:315; Parvez, 1999:63-68; Roy, 2000b:62). Conversely, despite opposition from the UPDF, the bulk of ordinary indigenous people, being weary of conflict and uncertainty, in fact welcomed the Accord (Adnan, 2004:34).

The CHT Accord has not been fully implemented. Although the Government points out that 283 military camps have been dismantled in the CHT, the area still remains heavily militarised. The PCJSS party estimates that the number of military camps withdrawn to date is around 74, out of more than 500 (temporary) military camps.<sup>66</sup>The most basic demands in the Accord have not been addressed. For instance, even though the government was supposed to hand over the management of 33 departments to three hill district councils, it has not relinquished control of any important departments, including law and order, local government, agriculture, education or the environment. Moreover, the land commission has not played an effective role in resolving land-related disputes. The government failed to amend the CHT Land Disputes Settlement Commission Act 2001 in 2013, which means that the provisions of the act that conflict with the Accord remain unresolved, making it impossible for the commission to operate effectively. The Accord envisaged that the government would withdraw all temporary military camps and all but six cantonments from the region. However, it has not done so.

The government of Bangladesh does not recognize indigenous peoples as indigenous. The Small Ethnic Groups Cultural Institution Act 2010 uses the term ‘*khudro Nrigoshthhi*’ (small ethnic groups) to refer to the indigenous peoples. However, in the definitions section, when explaining the meaning of the term ‘*khudro Nrigoshthhi*’, it uses the term ‘*adibasi*, the *Bangali* equivalent of indigenous or aboriginal. A 2011 amendment to the constitution refers to the indigenous peoples of Bangladesh as ‘tribes’, ‘minor races’ and ‘ethnic sects and communities’.

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<sup>65</sup>For a cross-section of opinion about the Accord, see Peace Campaign Group (PCG, 2000:9-12); see Amang (2003:35-52) for views regarding resolution of the conflict between pro- and anti-Accord groups and Parvez (1999:69-83) for opposition by the national political parties to the treaty and government reasoning in defence of the Accord.

<sup>66</sup><http://chtnewsupdate.blogspot.co.uk/2013/05/press-statement-upr-review-of.html>

The Rangamati Hill District Council (Amendment) Bill 2014, the Khagrachari Hill District Council (Amendment) Bill 2014 and the Bandarban Hill District Council (Amendment) Bill 2014 stipulate the formation of a 15-member interim district council including a chairman from the ethnic minorities for each of the three hill districts. There is a multiple administration running in the CHT, i.e.: hill district council, regional council, ministry of CHT Affairs, traditional leadership, and army which are additional to the general administration in other districts in Bangladesh.

The Parliamentary Caucus in Bangladesh on indigenous Peoples, formed on 1st February, 2009 comprising 24 Members of Parliament including 4 ministers and 5 indigenous MPs from both *Bangali* and indigenous communities supported by a 6 member Technical Committee, has been working for the establishment and promotion of indigenous peoples' rights in Bangladesh in a constitutional and legal framework. Recently, on 24 May, 2016, Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid told reporters after a meeting at the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) in Dhaka that the government has decided to print pre-primary level books in five ethnic languages from the next academic year. He stated: "*We will print pre-primary level books in Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Sadri and Garo languages from the next academic year*". The decision was taken considering that pre-primary-level students of the ethnic communities face difficulty if they are not allowed to learn in their mother tongue<sup>67</sup>.

### **Contrasting Discourses: indigenous Women's Socio-Economic Status**

Gender relations across different communities in the CHT are guided by general principles of patriarchal ideology. Although gender divisions of labour exist (Khan et al., 2000:8; Rafi, 2001:10), they do not accord sharply with the public-private binary: women work both domestically and outside the home, yet the nature of their work is usually different from men's. The subsistence agricultural structure based on *Jum* cultivation has allowed women from all the communities in the CHT to play a pivotal role in productive activities (Halim, 2003:100) and thus contribute substantially to the family economy. In fact, *Jum* is a labour intensive method of farming demanding constant care, nursing and monitoring of attacks by wild animals, birds and rats (Rafi 2001:10).

In addition, with a decrease in *Jum* cultivation and encroachments on their land by the *Bangali* settlers, army camps and the forestry department, indigenous women have been compelled to search, like their male counterparts, for supplementary/alternative income as day

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<sup>67</sup>24 May, 2016, *The Daily Star*.

labourers, or by weaving and knitting products, growing vegetables and selling goods. Due to the rise in NGO activities in the post Accord period, many of them are now engaged in weaving, poultry farming, fishing and the like. I also found women running makeshift tea stalls and small shops by the roadside. Educated women are finding jobs in government service, but more numerous in national and local NGOs. A study in 2001 of indigenous men and women's comparative economic activities showed the following: in *Jum* cultivation, women render more service than men, both men and women work equally as day labourers, liquor is made only by men (which is another source of family income); it is women who raise the cattle and the poultry, and take part in business equally with men. Nevertheless, economic independence has not earned indigenous women both rights and positions to a corresponding degree. Among the Chakmas, men are not supposed to touch women's clothes. Shantu Larma, in his interview, admitted observing this custom in his childhood (in the late 1940s), stating that women's clothes were not even supposed to be hung in public as they were regarded as polluted. (Naripokhho, 2001:3).

Similarly, customary practices related to childbirth and menstruation across different cultures reveal the purity-pollution notion associated with the woman's body that is often engrained in male-dominated culture. Among the indigenous societies child-delivery takes place in an isolated room which is often inferior in quality (Naripokhho, 2001:3). Even though the *Jum* fields may remain barren without women's labour, a taboo against menstruating women in cultivation persists among the Chakmas (Chakma and Nayeem, 1997:137). A menstruating woman is also excluded from taking part in any religious activities. All communities in my research are patrilineal. Residency after marriage is in most cases patrilocal, although matri-locality and neo-locality are also found in some indigenous societies in the CHT (Ahsan, 1995:36).

### **Succession and 'Inheritance' Rights**

The asymmetrical succession law is another strong hold of patriarchal traditions in indigenous communities which, despite variations, tend to be discriminatory against women. Generally, women do not have rights to paternal property unless it is stated in a will written while the father was alive. The Marmas in Khagrachari are following the Buddhist inheritance law where women don't have any rights in the inheritance of property, while the Marmas in Bandarban are following the laws practiced in Myanmar where the daughters can inherit the property. Different *Dofas* (sub groups) of the Tripura have different succession rules. Some enable only sons to inherit both parents' property, while among others, sons inherit their

father's property, and daughters inherit their mother's property if there is any (Tripura, 1998:25).

This discriminatory practice has contributed to the basic structural inequality reinforcing women's economic dependency within the family and a devalued position in the society. Regardless of their social and political positions, educated women have expressed a desire for legal reform in favour of equal rights in inheritance (Halim, 2002:140)<sup>68</sup>.

### **Politics and Power Structure**

In the traditional political structure of the CHT, power is vested in men. None of the early accounts or subsequent anthropological studies has hinted at the presence of women as clan leaders. The notable exception with regard to women in power is Kalindi Rani who, being the wife of Chakma *Raja* Dharam Box Khan, succeeded him after his death in 1844 (Mey1996:10). Kalindi Rani's period was significant in the history of the Chakma community for many reasons, particularly because of her political aptitude; Hutchinson described her as 'an exceedingly able woman' (Hutchinson, 1906:94).

At the village and even at *mouza* levels, revenue and judicial matters are looked after respectively by *Karbary* and *Headman*. If the case remains unsolved, the case then goes to the court of the *Raja*. Usually the chief's decision is final aside from a few instances where the Chief's decisions have been challenged through review, via a petition at the national level of the judicial system (Halim, Chakma and Chakma, 2005:15). In this entire process of justice and arbitration, indigenous women are left out. They are hardly ever consulted in the political or social decision-making process regarding their communities, nor are they allowed to hold leadership positions at the village or circle levels.

The above administrative positions are usually hereditary, passed down from father to son. There are only a few exceptions, especially among the Chakmas, where women have been appointed *Headman* and *Karbary* by male predecessors, mostly due to the absence of a male successor. Exceptions to this norm are rare but can be found. I came across a woman who had been nominated *Headman* by her father-in-law when she was a widow. Later on, she remarried but retained the position. Despite indigenous women's marginal presence in the traditional politics and the power structure at a participatory level (Halim, 2003:103).

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<sup>68</sup>Roy (2002:36), the Chief of the Chakma Circle, proposes that government intervention in such legal reform of customary practices has to be based upon the concept of fundamental human rights, outlawing discrimination against women, or on the basis of the Convention of the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

In terms of female political participation, a change started to occur in the late 1960s and 1970s with the rise of ethno-nationalism, which eventually led to the growth of two political organisations for women, MS and the HWF. Furthermore, before this development, there were some women who were involved with the national level students' organisations. There were few women chairmen elected in the last *Union Parishad* (UP) election. Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that the regional administrative structure envisaged in the CHT accord has failed to give women equal representation as desired by many.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the history of the CHT. In contrast to the findings of some researchers (Mohsin, 1997; Ahmed; 1994) that describe the 'simple' life of the indigenous people in the CHT in that era, I show that the colonial attitude prevailed in the Pakistan period as well as in independent Bangladesh, creating various development programmes for indigenous people which left some of them displaced or evicted from their land, with weaker rights to forests, and made them victims of military occupation. This chapter has also shown that the government of Bangladesh overlooks indigenous people's perspectives of development when they plan for development in the CHT.

## Chapter Four

# Kalpna Chakma: Symbolic of the State's Physical Violence and Women's Activism

### Introduction

On 15th February 2014, thirty year old Sabita Chakma's dead body was recovered from Kamalchari, Khagrachari. Locals found her naked body and informed the local police station and suspected she was raped before being killed<sup>69</sup>. Like any other day, Sabita went out to the Chengi River to collect fodder for their cattle. Sabita's neighbours and her husband went back home for a lunch break. In the meantime, Sabita's husband became worried when she did not come back home after lunch time. He along with the villagers started searching for her and at around 5.30 pm the villagers found her body in a crop field near the Chengi *Chor*<sup>70</sup>. Some *Bangali* labourers were loading up a truck with sand near the crop field at the time when the victim was last seen alive. Sabita's things were found near the truck. The villagers alleged that they had seen some clear marks of grease, petrol and oil on the dead body.<sup>71</sup> Sabita's husband filed a case in this connection with Khagrachari police station against a truck driver. Police did not arrest anyone. indigenous people's organisations organised protests in Khagrachari, Rangamati, Chittagong and Dhaka and demanded the arrest of the suspects and the provision of exemplary punishment to the culprits, adequate compensation to the victim's family, the rehabilitation with dignity of *Bangali* settlers outside the CHT and the implementation of the CHT Accord in order to ensure the security of indigenous women in the CHT.

Meanwhile, as a consequence of these incidents, a schoolgirl in Matiranga, Khagrachari, was allegedly raped by two *Bangali* persons on February 25, 2014. Sexual violence against the indigenous women in the CHT is not uncommon. In 2003, the Mahalchari attack took place against the backdrop of the kidnapping of a *Bangali* businessman. The *Bangali* Samonnoy Parishad (Bengali Coordination Council, an organization of the *Bangali* settlers) played a particular role in creating tension and started making provocative statements attacking the indigenous people. The tension reached its peak and *Bangalis* started attacking the indigenous villages. As a result, according to a PCJSS (2003b:3) report, two indigenous

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<sup>69</sup><http://www.dhakatribune.com/law-amp-rights/2014/feb/22/violence-against-indigenous-women-rarely-get-law-enforcers-attention>.

<sup>70</sup>Chengi is the name of a valley in Khagrachari. Char means the land rises on the bank of the river. Here Chengi Chor refers to the piece of land that has been auto generated at the bank of Chengi Valley.

<sup>71</sup><http://iva.aippnet.org/bangladesh-indigenous-chakma-woman-allegedly-murdered-after-gang-rape-in-khagrachari/>, February 19, 2014.

persons – including one eight month old child – were killed and ten indigenous women were raped by army personnel and settler *Bangalis*. Fifty were injured and many others fled to the jungles and were compelled to stay there for several days after the incident. According to the accounts of the victims and the local indigenous people, the atrocity in Mahalchari was carried out under the protection of the army. As a researcher I interviewed Sonali Chakma and in the interview she confided that she was a victim of rape by both army personnel and settlers. One woman had to deliver a baby while being chased by the settlers.

Sexual violence against women in the context of armed conflict has been examined in feminist scholarship from at least the 1970s. In the 1990s, feminist scholarship showed that rape is used historically in armed conflict as ‘an instrument of terror’, and classified rape as ‘a war crime and a crime against humanity’. During the 1971 liberation war of Bangladesh, the Pakistan army, in collaboration with local *Bangali* men in paramilitary forces, systematically committed acts of sexual violence against *Bangali* women. Sexual violence in the 1971 conflict included nationalist intentions. Because the West Pakistani rulers held the view that East Pakistani *Bangalis* were not ‘pure’ Muslims, Muslim *Bangali* women were raped with the gross aim ‘to purify the *Bangali* nation’ (Chakma, 2013)<sup>72</sup>. They also targeted Hindu *Bangali* women because of their non-Muslim religion. A religious nationalism entangled with hegemonic Urdu linguistic nationalism led to ‘rape’ being used as a ‘weapon of war’.<sup>73</sup> Mookherjee (2012) states "The discourse of genetic inscription in the act of sexual violence seems to suggest an attempt to transform the very substance and personhood of *Bangali* Muslims into pure Muslims. In addition, this practice is also an attempt to leave behind a trace of the Pakistani soldier in the womb of the *Bangali* woman, with the hope that the children born would reflect later, in independent Bangladesh, the characteristics of their biological father and of the father embodied in the nation of Pakistan. She argues, "along with the earlier mentioned citationality of colonial discourses in the act of rape, that this renders the act of sexual violence during wars a racialized performance".

The systematic sexual violence targeting non-*Bangali*, indigenous women in the Chittagong Hill Tracts was initiated soon after 1975, when the CHT was militarised. As in 1971, the Bangladesh army adopted the same position, aiming to create a *Bangali* in every *Pahari* womb as a process of ethnic cleansing in the CHT. Von Erlhof (1988:101) elaborates this idea in analysing capitalist domination over ‘the colonies’ which appears identical with

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<sup>72</sup>For details please see [http://www.newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2013-06-12&nid=52554#.Ub\\_C65yNA1p](http://www.newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2013-06-12&nid=52554#.Ub_C65yNA1p).

<sup>73</sup>Kabita Chakma, [http://www.newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2013-06-12&nid=52554#.UvNoxPI\\_v-t](http://www.newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2013-06-12&nid=52554#.UvNoxPI_v-t).

domination over women and land. The ‘rape of women’ hence metaphorically becomes the ‘rape of the land’ itself (Drkulie, 1994:176). During conflicts, rape is also used as an instrument of ‘ethnic cleansing’ by forcing women to give birth to the children of rival men (Guhathakurta, 199b:141). In 1991, summarising the extent of sexual violence against indigenous women, the CHT Commission reported that *“rape is used systematically as a weapon against women in the CHT”*. There are limited statistics on sexual abuse against women during the time of armed conflict. But one of the limited available sources, the 1995 Hill Women’s Federation document, reported that *“94% of all alleged cases of rape of women between 1991 and 1993 in the CHT were by ‘security forces’. Of these, over 40% of the victims were children.”* The Kapaeeng Foundation’s recent findings stated that in 2013, 67 indigenous women and children– 53 from the CHT – were victimised.

This chapter is an analysis of the physical violence that the informants experienced in pre- and postaccord times. The chapter also outlines the gendered violence of the CHT and the ways in which indigenous women responded to it. It discusses the abduction of Kalpana Chakma, the organising secretary of the Hill Women’s Federation, in order to understand the relationship between the military and indigenous women in the CHT. It goes on to argue that the figure of Kalpana Chakma has been shaped into a centre point for the national and indigenous women’s movement in Bangladesh. Indigenous women in the CHT have long been involved with politics. They fight with the banner of JSS and they opened their own women’s wing MS, HWF. However, this chapter argues that the women’s organisations such as MS are controlled by the JSS or UPDF and don’t have their own agency in the movements.

### **Location of Violence**

Military treatment of ‘indigenous’ males and females is not similar. The link between militarisation and gendered aggression helps us to understand the causes of the violent counter-insurgency measures that were tested in the CHT following the establishment of army rule by Ziaur Rahman and Ershad after 1975. Although information on how military personnel are trained in Bangladesh is not available, and the counter-insurgency plan presented from their perspective appears quite benign (Ibrahim, 1991, 2001), international Human Rights Organisations, foreign journalists, and the hill people themselves claim that the military have long been involved in raping and assaulting women (Mohsin, 1996a: 3-14; Mohsin, 1997:30-31). The CHT Commission (1991:34, 142-145) presented a number of cases of raped women who took shelter in the refugee camps of Tripura.

### Sexual violence



I met Giti in one of my field areas and she was 6 years old. In 2009, when she was 3 years old, she had been raped by a Bengali settler. Her mother started the story putting the question, “could you simply believe that somebody could rape a baby who was suckling her mother’s milk?”

Realising my confusion, she went on saying that Giti went to the Mainy River to have a bath with her elder sister. She was very fond of her mother. When her sister delayed taking her bath, she told her sister that her mother asked her to come back home immediately. Then she was on the way to the home through the field. Her mother was at the corn field then. In the field she was captured by a Bengali and he raped her. When she came, her mother saw that she was bleeding and asked her what had happened. The little girl narrated what had happened to her. Then her mother took her in her lap and ran to catch the rapist. With the help of other Chakma young people she was able to catch him. Giti’s mother also added that they were really nervous to file the case against the rapist because they thought that they could be harmed more in return. But some *Bangali* men insisted on her filing the case and they promised that they would be the eye witnesses of the case. The accomplices of the rapist sought help from locally powerful *Bangali* people, but they did not want to help an infant assaulter. However, Giti changed after the incident, she told me. She did not want to go outside and became very quiet; she did not want to talk with *Bangali* people; she would cry if she saw any *Bangali* people around her. Her father brought her to the court one day, but she fainted seeing the rapist at court. She plays with other Chakma girls outside though some girls of her age tease her, calling ‘*Bangal-laga*’ (which means touched by *Bangali* people). She felt bad and started crying. So the girl’s mother went to their houses and talked with their parents and requested them to tell their daughters not to tease Giti with that term.

In her opinion, the incident happened due to the unrest between *Bangali* and indigenous people in this area. Some days before the incident there was a *Kawaz* (quarrel). She thought that raping her daughter was a part of that. She added further that it was not normally possible to rape such a baby. Giti now could not remember so many things and she often fainted. The doctor opined that it was caused due to the trauma that the incident had inflicted on the infant. She suspected that her daughter might not grow up like a 'normal' human being since she went through a traumatic experience in her childhood. She left her daughter after the incident at a relative’s house for some days to keep her safe from any further danger. Giti experienced pain in the lower portion of her body for long time. Her mother dared to bring her to her own house for six months. Her mother took care of her and she did not want to come to this area. After 8

months she took her baby to their house. Then she went back to her house again and came with some documents and asked me to have a look.

Giti's rape case tells us many things. Her mother did not want to tell it to anyone to avoid further incident. After the 90s it was HWF who brought some cases out and sought justice. Before that, they wanted to keep the cases secret to avoid more hassles. Moreover, the memory of rape exists in the context of scorn in Chakma societies, exemplified by the fact that Giti's friends teased her. Mookherjee (2006-444) has argued that scorn supplies the framework within which the memory of rape exists in her field area, but that this framework is subject to the vagueness of exposure and suppression which are a characteristic of the public secrecy of rape and requisite to the operations of power. Figures for 2011-2012 gathered by the CHT Commission and the Bangladesh indigenous Women's Network show that 95% of the perpetrators of sexual violence against indigenous women were *Bangali* settlers, staff members of the forestry department or members of the armed forces. In June 2012, *Bangladesh Mahila Parishad*, *Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha*, *Karmojibi Nari* and the Bangladesh indigenous Women's Network (BIWN) called a press conference to highlight the sexual targeting of indigenous women in the country. It detailed incidents of violence against women for the first half of that year. 63% of these cases were in the CHT while the rest were in the plains of Bangladesh. 83% of the CHT cases were sexual assault, including rape, rape and murder, gang rape and attempted rape. 86% of the rape victims were children. For the CHT all perpetrators were *Bangalis*, 92 % of them were settler *Bangali*.

The sexual violence under discussion includes rape, abduction and sexual harassment. When Monimala and I were discussing the nature of violence enacted on the indigenous women in the CHT, Anjana Chakma, who is a *pizi* (paternal aunt) of Monimala, came and asked us what we were doing. There was a boy aged 14-15 with her, whom she introduced as her grandchild. She told us that the boy was always with her since he had lost his mother when he was only a year old. I asked her how his mother had died. She started to recount:

*It was in 1999; it might be the month of Bangali Chaitra. Bangali and pahari kids were taking a bath in the river. Two Bangali kids drowned in the river and died, but the Bangalis spread the news that pahari people intentionally drowned them in the river. Therefore Bangali people started a procession. They destroyed the houses of Chakma families in the tilla (small hill). We again left the house with very short notice and took shelter in our relative's house. It was the house of my daughter-in-law's parents. The following day my daughter-in-law died in that house due to heart failure. I believe it occurred because she could not bear the tension and pain of that incident. But it did*

*not end at that. When we returned to our house after her funeral we thought that everything would be alright, but the second day of our stay in our house, about 200 people came to my house and held a janti (sharp knife) at my chest and asked when we would leave the area. This was led by the Bangali chairman of the area. He had two wives, and his second wife was a Chakma. At that time she was pregnant. When she saw that they were about to kill me, she rushed in and tried to protect me. Then the chairman said that he would also kill his wife with me as he did not want to have a child of Chakma origin. I was injured. They demolished my house. We left the house with our lives immediately after the incident took place. Then we came to this place that was near to where my other relatives lived. I was mentally sick for a long time. I used to have nightmares about my death and could not bear any Bangali man's presence.*

This narrative helps us to understand how the trauma of such violence can lead to death and stays in the mind as a memory of violence. Therefore, here I like to argue that masculinity works together with nationalist and religious domination to make the ethnic cleansing very particular when *Bangali* Muslim men commence physical torture of indigenous women who are marginalised in terms of ethnic, religious and sexual identities. A person can be a man, a Muslim or a *Bangali* having different identities or combined identities when he is involved with violence against indigenous women. Nasreen (2001) argues that indigenous women are marginalised from more than three corners. Firstly they are minority in terms of ethnicity, religiosity, and gender. Secondly, they are marginalised in their patriarchal society. Finally, most of them are poor in the context of CHT.

Sexual violence against indigenous women has been instrumental in the forced relocation of indigenous people from their homes and lands. It has been observed that mass rape and sexual violence on *Pahari* women in the attacks on their villages was a key factor in making their communities leave to seek shelter elsewhere, thereby providing occasion for their lands to be taken (Adnana and Dastidar, 2011:68-69). This is an important point when we discuss the feminist theorisation of sexual violence, that it is not always about men and women but about land grabbing and generating threats before inflicting direct violence and it has been happening in the CHT. Many indigenous people relocated themselves to India or other parts of the CHT for protection, particularly for the protection of female members of their families.<sup>74</sup> There is no complete record of the number of sexual violence cases that has occurred in the

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<sup>74</sup> In December 1992, the Bangladesh government agreed to dismantle the *Jumma* cluster villages in order to continue its peace talks with the JSS. Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission, *Life Is Not Ours: Land and Human Rights in the Chittagong Hill Tracts*, Update 2 (Copenhagen: IWGIA, April 1994).

CHT or their details. Among a limited number of partial records, Ume Mong, an indigenous woman leader, estimated that from December 1971 to 1994 a total of 2,500 indigenous women were raped (Nahar and Tripura, 2010, 194) A pre-accord report of 1995 documented that “over 94% of all the alleged cases of rape of indigenous women between 1991-1993 in the CHT were by ‘security forces.’ Of these, over 40% of the victims were alleged to be children.”<sup>75</sup>

In some cases when they made some comments or talked, their husbands came and asked why I wanted to talk to a woman. They would say, women do not have anything to talk about. It is better to talk to men since they have so many issues to talk about and that I should not hope to have such information from the woman. Yes, in their eyes masculinity and documentation work together whether or not the woman’s memory testifies to the violence which has been overlooked most of the time. Women always tried to talk to me in the absence of the male members of the family. Provati Tripura (52) from a lower middle class family and a *Jum* farmer, asked me to follow her and she took me at the shadow of a big tree and then started:

*I was 17-18 years old in 1986. My father was out of the house. We three siblings were in the house. My two sisters were married by that time. We were seeing that almost every house in the Dighinala had been burnt in front of our eyes. My mother went to see my elder sisters in her house. We three went out by following other people. Bangalis in Rashiknagar helped my father to reach another Chakma house to save his life. We met with my father after a week. My mother stayed in my elder sister’s house in Chappaipara (known as Tripura para). My father took my mother with him and they started living in a Tripura house while I and my sister were in a Chakma village. In the night the army came and it was nearly 11 o’clock in the night. They rounded up four girls including me. They decided to take us to the cantonment. They used slang and told us that we are the daughters of Shanti Bahini. They took us to the army camp, I was asked to kneel down naked. Though they did not do anything to me, I felt 'jor gori sudhana' (like being raped)<sup>76</sup>. Another military person came to me and told the soldier to leave me and forbade him to touch me. I asked him to dress me but it seemed that he could not look at me. And then he arranged my safe journey home and he did apologise to me on the way to my home. When it became daylight, we tried to hide ourselves in the kans grass (*Saccharum spontaneum*), also known as Kas in Bengali language. The*

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<sup>75</sup> “Autonomy for Peace in the CHT,” leaflet by CHT Women’s Federation, Bangladesh, at UN World Conference on Women, NGO Forum on Women, August 30–September 10, 1995, Beijing.

<sup>76</sup> There is no term for ‘rape’ in the Chakma language; they use the word '*jorgorisudhana*' to indicate rape.

*army fired on us and the shepherd. I was injured. We were in the forest for nearly 17 hours and then we again fled with my sisters. The army again went to my parents' home and opened fire. Two of the family members were injured in the attack.*

My data also supports her argument as my participant felt that she could make a protest by telling the soldier to kneel down when he was asked to dress her. It was very interesting the way she delivered the narrative. She showed me the marks of her injuries and each time she touched the marks, it gave me the feeling that she was touching her memory. To her, the body still preserves the memory. Mookherjee (2015:108), quoting Das says, "bodily mutilations mutilate the use of ordinary language, bruise and fracture normality" (Das 2006:46-38, quoted in Mookherjee, 2015), "then it becomes significant to explore how the body carries this violence and becomes the memory."

Seeking an apology from a soldier is not common in the CHT. We can understand the nature of violence on the indigenous women by the army and the way of direct action by the indigenous women'. Hayden (2000:34) states "the view of rape as a communicative act reinforces the appropriateness of treating mass rape as a war crime rather than as a pattern of supposedly random acts by individual soldiers. The feelings of being raped can be understood even when it was not physical. Here it is important to understand the deep feelings of being raped rather than questioning whether it was legally rape. Aretxaga (2001) explains that her respondents had openly spoken of a strip search as rape and sexual abuse. She argues that in talking of strip searches as rape, Northern Irish Republican women were challenging legal definitions of rape that ignore institutional forms of violation of the body as well as their political character, which they saw "as an attack on the core constructions of identity and ontological security in its most personal and profound sense" (Nordstrom, 1996: 151, quoted in Aretxaga, 2001:14). In terms of protest, Aretxaga again quoted one of her respondents: "Once I was naked from the waist down a screw sat on my legs while the others eased their grip slightly to remove the clothes from the top half of my body. When I was totally naked they told me to get dressed as they left me lying on the floor. I then insisted that they dress me. The four screws who had held me down and the two who had stripped me re-entered the cell and stood looking everywhere but at me. The same two screws who had torn the clothes from my body seconds earlier now stood fumbling and avoiding my angry stare as they gathered my clothes which were all over the floor and put them on my body. I then insisted that they dress me. The four screws who had held me down and the two who had stripped me re-entered the cell and stood looking everywhere but at me. The same two screws who had torn the clothes from my body seconds earlier now stood fumbling and avoiding my angry stare as they

gathered my clothes which were all over the floor and put them on my body"(Aretxaga, 2001:12).

Physical Violence:

*Whenever I brush my teeth I find two holes in my mouth that reminds me how the army tortured me. I lost my two teeth when they punched me in the face in their camp. Though I was a poor school teacher back then, the army arrested me on suspicion of my being involved with the Shanti Bahini. I was given electric shock thrice within the six months of my life in the army camp. I could not move my legs when I was released with the help of another officer. I do not know why and how this officer became sympathetic to me. My family lost all hope of my survival. The army told me that I was a bastard and they do not want any Jumma people in the CHT who help Shanti Bahini. I do not remember much of the last three months of my life in the army camp and then they sent me to the hospital in an unconscious state but two military personnel were always in the hospital to guard me. (Interview with a head teacher of a primary school, Ratna Pratim Chakma, 57, from higher socio-economic status, dated 27.12.2012, Dighninala Bazaar, Khagrachari)*

While giving the interview he showed me his leg and informed me that still now when he touches his leg, he feels an electric shock. This helps us to understand that his physical torture still drives him to the memory of violence. His family asked him to become inactive in the movement but his experience of torture made him do the opposite, and this is the reason he now plays an important role in JSS politics. The chapter argues from accounts such as this one that the bodily memory witnesses the violence, and that therefore violence cannot be a past event. Bodily memory, biography, and social history are glued. The bodily association of moral courses of social experience are combined with historical events, symbolic meaning, and social situations. The memory of bodily complaints reduces social complaints which are not so much represented as lived and remembered in the body. On the other hand bodily complaints can also be interpreted as a form of resistance against local sources of oppressive control (Kleinman and Kleinman, 1994). Mookherjee (2015:115) says that "bodily experiences, rather than being the result of 'the event' are in fact a trigger that causes them to remember the violent encounter of rape."

Having experience of being beaten is common among the 50+ age group of male respondents among the three groups (Chakma, Marma and Tripura) as they were young before the CHT accord when physical torture by the army was the common reality. The day I met Birbahadur Chakma (an ex-leader of JSS and now the president of the *Parbatya Chattagram*

*Saranarthy Kallyan Samiti*, Dighinala branch) in the local market, he just asked me to follow him. I guessed that he preferred to talk to me in a safe and secure place. He was drinking tea in a small tea shop when I met him. We chatted for about twenty minutes about many things and he told me many Chakma fairy tales that made me laugh. I understood that he did this intentionally to create an environment where no one could suspect anything. Then he told me that he wanted to go to another place as he had some emergency work to do. We started walking and he indicated that I should follow him. I was accompanied by Monimala. He asked her to keep an eye on anyone who could follow us. We went to a broken *Kayang*<sup>77</sup> which felt safe.

When we reached that quiet *Kayang* in the late afternoon he started his narratives by showing me his artificial wooden leg and telling me that he lost his leg at the hands of the army at a young age. He was involved in JSS and was caught by the army. After six months of physical torture, the army found out that he was going to lose his right leg and he was sent to the hospital with guards. He asked me to speak loudly as he had partially lost his hearing when the army gave him electric shock treatment in the military camp in 1986-1987. He stated that younger or older male members of most of the families in the CHT could not stay in their houses since the army checked every indigenous village to search for people involved in the SB. The army personnel suspected young males and checked their elbows for signs of crawling, one indicator of SB military training.

Khew Shaw Mong (46), currently known as a leader of BNP, had become involved in the reformist group of JSS in the past. He told me that he used to wet his trousers when he saw a military uniform. The panopticon metaphor was used by Foucault (1975) and helps us to understand the environment of fear in the CHT. The panopticon was planned for prisons. It is a cylindrical structure where prisoners are invisible to one another but are all potentially visible to a guard station in the centre of the building. Guards are not practically able to observe each inmate all the time, to check if they are behaving and following the rules. The point of the panopticon is that control is achieved through what Foucault calls 'disciplinary power', a form of power that is steady, unnoticeable and internalized. As inmates are not sure whether they are being observed at all times, they must always act in harmony with the rules. Control is thus achieved through self-surveillance as the fear of being caught violating the rules keeps them in line. Foucault saw panopticism in many institutions, not just the prison system. Institutions such as asylums, schools, military and secret services also adopt a panoptic way of surveillance and punishment, with constant observation acting to maintain control over those within them.

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<sup>77</sup>*Kayang* is the Chakma name for a Buddhist religious temple.

However, it could also be argued that the officious nature of society today, and the amount of supervising that takes place, could class contemporary society that we live in today as panoptical.

Some people would start to cry if they saw army personnel. The army personnel, when they saw the tears, beat them more with sticks to make them more afraid. He further added that in their youth they were given unnecessary physical punishment. They were given either kneeling or other forms of physical punishment (such as placing their arms under their knees and being ordered to touch their ears with their arms) for long periods. It was very hard to do. But they had no option but to do what they were told. He stated that from the mid-eighties to early-nineties most of the indigenous families lost their male members and women would usually head the families. At market, they could not buy more than 1 kilo of salt and or saline in case the army thought that they were supporting SB. They took his son to the jungle and beat him and left him in the jungle and told him that they did it because the jungle is full of mosquitoes and he might be infected with malaria. He further added that malaria in the CHT is more dangerous than anywhere else. The army thought that if children were infected with malaria, they would not go to SB. In this way the location of violence is on the body, and the threat of violence is usually carried through everyday means.

The physical torture inflicted on indigenous people by the army was a state technique for controlling their movements. Most of the male members of the family were under military surveillance and hence in the mid-eighties, some of the places in the CHT became female-headed as male members of the families were kept hidden. The army changed its strategy from killing or physical torture to arson which sent a message but allowed army personnel to remain unseen. Wilson (1991) discusses that people's first experience of violence in Guatemala was the 1978 massacre in the central square in Panzos in which over one hundred people were killed. And it was routine for the army in the highlands from 1981 until late 1983 to commit massacres. The plan was to terrorise indigenous people and separate them from the guerrilla troops. As a preventive measure, the villages developed with local institutions such as cooperatives and schools, but the army took this as sympathy for the revolutionists so they set fire to houses, burnt or cut down the crops and killed livestock.

### **Kalpana Chakma: Symbol of Victim and Protest**





Photo 7: Kalpana's abduction, an illustration by Pragyan Chakma

The photo used is an illustration to make us understood the relationship between the army and the indigenous women in the CHT. I got the photo from the artist and then it has been circulated widely on Facebook and especially among indigenous and *Bangali* activists who have been demanding justice for Kalpana. They use the photo in different forums to raise their voices about Kalpana's case. Kalpana Chakma is probably the most discussed indigenous woman in Bangladesh. A frontline activist and former Organising Secretary of the HWF central Committee, Kalpana came from a landless, internally displaced refugee family that had been evicted from its original home in the 1960s when the creation of the Kaptai hydroelectric dam inundated Rangamati. Kalpana was abducted from her home by army Lieutenant Ferdous on 11 June 1996 when she was a first year graduate student of Baghaichari College. Presumably she was being punished for political involvement, and in particular for her arguments with the lieutenant over the matter of an army raid in her village (MS and HWF, 2002). Thus far, the fate of Kalpana remains unknown.

Kalpana possessed a very brave and independent spirit. Her perception and understanding of the world was profound as illustrated in her diary which was discovered by a journalist in her home after her abduction (Guhathakurta, 1997c:120) and has subsequently been published by the HWF (HWF, 2001). The book is a clear indication that despite being

constrained by many social and political pressures, Kalpana did not give up her beliefs and free way of thinking. In her own words:

*What I understand as freedom is freedom of all, freedom of the society, of the individuals, the freedom of men and women, rich and poor. It is not only freedom from state oppression, not only the equal distribution of wealth. It also means eradication of racial and social discrimination, disposing of narrow communal thoughts and superstition. Life has only one purpose and that is to attain freedom from all constrictions'. (HWF 2001:27).*

Her understanding of women's freedom is placed within this broader concept of freedom. She believed that biological differences between males and females do not necessarily make one sex strong or weak, eligible or ineligible; categories of eligibility or ineligibility were created by the powerful and are therefore essentially social constructions (HWF, 2001:20-21). Thus, the struggle for self-determination in the CHT was, in her view, a part of this struggle. Yet she had a clear understanding that the question of women's freedom could be easily ignored in the agenda of national and class struggle due to men's lack of concern about it (HWF, 2001:21). For this reason, she believed that HWF's struggle was not only 'political' (in the sense of nationalism, autonomy), but also opposed to male domination in society and the family (HWF, 2001:23).

But after the kidnapping of Kalpana, the investigation committee formed by the government of Bangladesh and it never opened up its investigation report. But some rumours have been spread by the military that Kalpana was seen in *Agartala* in India and she has gone there with her boyfriend. On the other hand *Bangali* left liberal activists suspected that Kalpana probably had been raped by the army before being kidnapped. Kalpana's abduction created a huge outcry across the country. It brought a new dimension to the resistance politics of the CHT (Guhathakurta, 1997c:117). The movement that gained momentum around the issue of Kalpana's kidnapping in effect symbolised the culmination of protest against the long history of torture and violence against hill women by the army and *Bangalis*. The HWF, PCP and PGP spearheaded this movement. But it also involved sympathisers from *Bangali* left-wing political organisations and human rights and women's rights activists (Guhathakurta, 1997c:117,119). The significance of the movement was that despite the pervasiveness of violence against women in the CHT, the subject had not previously appeared on the agenda of the national women's movement in any serious way.

There were several problematic aspects of the women's rights movement in Bangladesh: concerned women and human rights based organisations are by-and-large

development oriented, seeing women's rights and human rights as instruments of development (Guhathakurta, 2004:204), inherently limiting their capacity to address politically sensitive issues like that of Kalpana Chakma's abduction. They too are not immune from hegemonic *Bangali* nationalist perceptions (Guhathakurta, 1997:124; Karim, 1998:313; Nasreen, 2006:103). Consequently, they are unable to be effectively engaged with questions of ethnicity, nationality and more particularly, with CHT-related matters.

Similarly, the Bangladesh government appears blind to sexual violence against indigenous women in the CHT. The tenth session of the United Forum Permanent Forum on indigenous Issues (UNPFII) recommended that "the Department of Peacekeeping Operations prevent human rights violators and alleged human rights violators within the security forces of Bangladesh from participating in international peace keeping activities under the auspices of the United Nations."<sup>78</sup> Although this was eventually adopted by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in July 2011, Bangladesh vigorously objected to the recommendation,<sup>79</sup> going as far as to state at the UNPFII and the ECOSOC that it did not have an indigenous population (even though in 1982 the Bangladesh government had reported to the UN that it did).<sup>80</sup> This denial compounds the state's blindness to the existence of its indigenous peoples,<sup>81</sup> including its indigenous women. However, the indigenous women have a long history of protest against the violence. In the following section I will discuss the nature of their protest and response to violence.

### **Indigenous Protest and Women's Organisation against Sexual Violence in the CHT**

The polarisation of indigenous women in the CHT and the subsequent development of a women's political group was the culmination of factors which germinated in the national and regional politics of the 1960s and the early 1970s. Opposition to state policy gradually took the shape of an identity-based mobilisation in the region. Both women and men were drawn into that process. A number of young women emerged as serious, committed activists imbued with the spirit of nationalism in this phase to take up future political leadership.

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<sup>78</sup>E/C.19/2011/6, para 58 (a); "UNPFII Ends with Call for Screening Military HR Record for Peacekeeping," *New Age*, May 28, 2011.

<sup>79</sup>The Bangladesh government urged deletion of para 58 (a) of E/C.19/2011/6, "UNECOSOC Rejects Bangladesh Government's Challenge to UNPFII's Mandate to Deal with CHT Accord," press release by the International Council for the Indigenous Peoples of CHT (ICIP-CHT), July 30, 2011; "CHT Commission Asks ECOSOC to Adhere to UNPFII Report," *New Age*, July 30, 2011.

<sup>80</sup>"Study of the Problem of Discrimination against Indigenous Populations," submitted June 20, 1982, to UN Economic and Social Council by Special Reporter Mr. José Martínez Cobo, E/CN.4/Sub.2/1982/2/Add.6, <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/spdaip.html>.

<sup>81</sup>Zafar Sobhan, "Missing the Point at the UN," *Sunday Guardian*, October 23, 2011.

*We are always enemies. In the Pakistan period we were treated as pro-Indian or pro-Bangali. In Bangladesh, again we are either pro-Indian or pro-Pakistan as our Raja supported Pakistan. Can we ever be just what we are and get justice?*

(Rishima Tripura (46), a member of Union Parishad, from a middle class background, interview on 17.4.2014 at Dighinala Bazar).

The pronouncement is a tragic reflection of the reality and suffering of being a member of the indigenous community of the CHT and it mirrors the politics of creating otherness (politically, socially and culturally) from colonial times up to the present. The politics of naming and identifying continued in like manner in post-independent Bangladesh. The controversial role of a few indigenous people earned the entire population the title of Pakistani collaborators, while the active participation of many indigenous people and direct and indirect assistance of many in the liberation wars were totally disregarded. Women's testimonies reveal the dilemma they faced when they were caught between the two belligerent parties and victimised by both. They were scared of both the *Pathan* (the Pakistani Force, according to them) and *Mukti* (Bengali freedom fighters).

Unsurprisingly, indigenous women's sacrifices and sufferings are completely ignored, even though approximately 400-500 indigenous women are known to have been violated during that period (Mohsin, 2003b:60, 62; Nasreen, 2007). These women had to bear this violation silently, without having any mental and material support, despite many people being aware of it (Mohsin, 2003b:62-64). The *Mukti Bahini* in 1971 committed physical violence against the indigenous people in the CHT because of their non-*Bangali* identities and the support of the Chakma king for Pakistan. However, the freedom fighter have been disputably glorified in the history of the liberation war in Bangladesh. And these incidents involving the freedom fighters have never been discussed in the history of the liberation war of Bangladesh. Indigenous women were subjected to rape by Pakistani soldier in the CHT during 1971 (Mohsin, 1998; Nasreen, 2006). Here, I wish to argue that violence against the indigenous people' is not a new phenomenon, but that military, nationalist, and religious domination have shaped the nature of violence. Following Das (2000), Green (1994) has referred to these as evidence of how violence seeps into the everyday and the everyday becomes a 'state of emergency' in the CHT since 1971. However the continuous violence in the CHT has led women to get involved in politics and shape their everyday activism. Tin Tin Maaye is one of the organisers of MS and was one of the women involved in SB. She told me that she came from a very lower socio-economic background. Her parents did *Jum* cultivation. She added that she became involved with the political party for personal reasons as she had seen many

things in her life. She lost her father. The army kidnapped him with some of the villagers. Her brother was also involved in SB. Her life was totally insecure. She thought that it was better to fight than to die. The personal backgrounds of women activists are important in explicating the situation, as they provide information about certain individuals who were motivated to participate in politics (Kampwieth, 2002:37) in contrast to those who did not. Personal links also proved important for the activist Jitika Dewan. She was influenced by her sister in law, Shefalika Dewan, who was actively involved with PCS politics and was drawn into it when she was a student in class eight or nine. Nepoli Chakma, another leading activist, had a very different but similarly compelling story in connection with her participation in politics. She too became involved with her school's PCS branch. But with the increase in militarisation in the region from 1974-75, she eventually became the target of a military lieutenant who made her life difficult by following her wherever she went. According to her, many indigenous girls were harassed by army and security personnel. She was even forced to drop her studies for fear of being abducted, and to stay away from the family home when her father was arrested in connection with his involvement in the movement. In the next section, I will discuss the ideology and role of MS in the CHT politics.

#### Genesis of MS

Most of the early MS activists had their initial political training through organisations such as PCS and *Jubo Samiti* (Youth Association)<sup>82</sup>. PCS was the central mouth piece for the hill people's protest against the Kaptai Dam project. Women also participated actively in the Election Conducting Committee (ECC) of 1960-70 which was established to conduct and coordinate the Provincial Assembly election of 1970 in which M.N. Larma was a candidate. The CHT people did not as yet have any open political platforms because of the restriction imposed by the CHT Manual on the regulated area.

Preparation for full scale guerrilla struggle became evident with the formation of the SB in 1973 as the possibility of a political solution gradually waned after the independence of Bangladesh. The situation prompted hill people from various spheres to unite in support of the movement. As part of this move, the JSS was expanding with a need to incorporate a mass membership including women. In this context, the decision to establish a women's wing was twofold: to provide already-active women with a platform of their own, and to mobilise more women behind the struggle.

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<sup>82</sup>*Jubo Samiti* was the youth wing of JSS. It was presumably formed in the early 1970s. In order to attract young people, its work was initially centered on various social activities like organizing sports competitions, cultural functions, etc., besides holding discussions and building awareness.

As far as political ideology was concerned, the MS followed the Marxist-leftist party line of the JSS. Its first constitution stated:

*The principle objective of the organisation is to take part in the struggle to establish a national state of people's democracy through a national liberation struggle by abolishing the repression and exploitation of feudal, patriarchal ideologies and systems and abolishing the repression and exploitation of the Bangladesh government, an agent of the repression and exploitation [that comes with] imperialism, feudalism and bureaucratic capitalism'. (MS, 1975c:2)*

The concept of class struggle underpins the above approach. Yes, no programme for a class struggle for freedom for women was mentioned in the available documents from the MS. Instead, priority was given to the national liberation struggle.

### HWF

HWF came into existence in 1988, a time marked by intense violence and growing mobilisation. We have seen how educated young women of the 1960s were mobilised under the banner of MS. Similarly young women in the 1980s needed a platform to voice their demands and protests. Although long standing injustice and identity crises contributed to the mobilization of both generations of women, and their motivation was to resist *Bangali* domination, the immediate situation for HWF women was different.

### **Witnessing and Trajectories of Protest**

The 1980s was the most devastating period in the contemporary political history of the CHT. The security forces and settlers were implicated in carrying out massacres during this period along with the plunder and destruction of numerous villages (Chakma and Chakma, 2001; Guhathakurta, 2001:258; Mohsin, 2002:182-184). Rape, forced eviction, arrest, torture, detention, abduction, raids and forced conversion became everyday phenomena in the lives of hill people. There was always a fear that communal attacks that could break out due to trivial reasons and even for no reason at all. Witnessing violence was the biggest contributor to women's political activism at this time. In my experience, it is indeed difficult to find any young person who grew up during this period who did not witness or experience violence directly or indirectly. In fact, words such as 'army', 'operation', 'settlers' etc. became the most terrifying words for hill children (HWF, 1999:21, 31). That the word 'army' represented marauders in popular perception is signalled by a lullaby<sup>83</sup>: "My baby sleeps, the village is

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<sup>83</sup> This lullaby was brought to my attention in the context of an informal discussion with Chakma *Raja* Devasish Roy, 22 April, 2013, Rangamati.

quiet, suddenly these dragoons (army) have arrived” (in the original *Bangali* lullaby, the word '*borgi*' was used instead of the word 'army' in order to refer to Maratha horse raiders (Chakraborty, 1989:79, 87).<sup>84</sup>

'*Dei jem*' (fleeing) became a recurrent theme in the narratives of the childhood memories of HWF activists. A classic example is the experience of the family of Ratna Dewan (41), originally from a lower socio-economic status, now a local NGO worker who had to flee to the jungle four times within three years (1986-1989). The violence, especially gender violence, had prepared the ground for an overt women's organisation to grow.

### **Women's Protest**

For the indigenous women in the CHT, the *Jumma* national struggle for self-determination appeared to be a means to channel their political activism. According to Seikaly (1997:136), nationalism is an important category for assessing women's participation in the social and political culture of the country. Along with everyday form of protest, some indigenous women in the CHT involved with JSS or MS received arms training.

#### Arms training

As asserted by both MS leaders, armed training for MS activists was primarily undertaken for self-defence. The training, however, did not enlist women as combatants nor were they provided with arms for self-protection in the face of attacks by the army or raids by *Bangali* settlers. So, the intention was rather to prepare women in case the struggle needed their combat contribution in the future. Finally, it was considered that during that period, organising the masses to support the movement was more important for MS activists than to fight. (Interview Shantu Larma, 23.4.2013, Rangamati, Madhovilata, 27.4.2013, Rangamati.)

#### Medical training

It was difficult for underground party workers and guerrilla fighters to access essential medical treatment: hence, the need for medical trainees. Medical training began immediately after military training. Twenty women respondents attended medical training for a period of 1-2 months.

#### Mahila panchayat

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<sup>84</sup> The Marathas were Hindu Chieftains based in the Indian province of Maharashtra, and were known as a 'martial race' for their military prowess, leadership and guerrilla warfare techniques. Their policy and administration were primarily characterized by indiscriminate raids and plunder that antagonized the peasants and failed to attract allegiance and cooperation beyond Maharashtra.

The *Mahila Panchayat* thus exemplified a new strategy of survival for women's activism in a changed context, defying the armed authority of the state. But the central committee of the MS continued to exist, making liaisons between the Party and *Panchayat*. The duties of the MP were basically to manage the livelihood, health and education of the families, maintain inter-familial relationships, plan their overall development and make them aware of party ideals and principles etc. In spite of those contributions, indigenous women were totally neglected during the peace talk process. The accord signed between the government of Bangladesh and JSS did not provide any focus on the physical violence. The following section will discuss the gender dimension of the accord.

### **Gender Dimension of the Accord**

As one of the most problematic areas of the agreement, certain gendered features have received particular attention from scholars and intellectuals concerned with women's rights at the national level. Mohsin (2004) has termed it a 'gendered peace' based upon the argument that the hegemonic nature of the gendered nations – the *Bangali* and the *Jumma* have inevitably produced a gendered peace treaty. Two major areas have evoked most criticism apart from women's exclusion from the negotiation process: the neglect of human rights violations and violence in general; and the insufficient political representation of women.

The agreement made no reference to the issues of justice, human rights violations and violence against hill women, or made proposals for the compensation and rehabilitation of the victims. Considering that the atrocities and injustices committed against the indigenous people in the CHT constituted the major part of the insurgency campaign, effective diffusion of the ethnic tension resulting from the counter insurgency and militarisation would have depended largely on how these matters were dealt with in the peace agreement. Rendering justice and addressing the needs of the victims, involving a combination of sanctions, apologies, compensation and rehabilitation, are crucial for any peace to be established in a society where people have been physically and psychologically torn apart by decades of war (Roy, 2003).

Shantu Larma acknowledged that the agreement did not cover everything and that a number of compromises were made. Failure to address the issues of justice and violence also explains the continuation of violence against hill women in the post-1997 period, as will be discussed in due course (Amnesty International, 2004:3). The need for reparations for genocide or crimes against women are usually things that are easier to address during the making of the peace deal rather than separately afterwards, especially in cases like the CHT where it is necessary to operate within the structure of the present state. The provisions of the Geneva



Convention (1973) and the International Criminal Court (ICC) Convention (1980) define sexual violence as both a crime against humanity and a war crime (Begum, 2002:144). As Bangladesh is a signatory to the ICC, it is ethically and legally obliged to punish those responsible for such crimes. Officially, the country had demanded an apology from Pakistan for the rapes and human rights violations perpetrated by the Pakistan army in 1971 (Mohsin, 2004:61).

The representation of women in the local administration bodies formed under the accord is insufficient to rebuild the region after the conflict. Composed of 30 members, each HDC has three reserved seats for women in the accord, one of which is for 'non-tribal' women (The CHT Accord, 1997: Section B, Article 4a). However, the government-formed interim councils currently in charge of the administration are dominated by *Bangalis* and there is no provision for women's reserved seats (Dewan, 2006:27). In a similar fashion, out of 22 members of the newly formed Regional Council, three are reserved for women (two 'tribal' and one 'non-tribal'): one seat is the post of the chairperson and the remaining 18 seats (12 for 'tribal' and six for 'non-tribal') are open to both sexes (Dewan, 2006:27), but they are occupied by men. The above drawbacks explain the anti-accord campaign of the UPDF and its member organisations (breakaway factions of HWF, PCP, PGP). One of their early statements, made on 15 December 1997, maintained that the causes of justice and human rights violations had been left unaddressed in the agreement.

### **Women's Organisation: Autonomous Agency?**

While observing the nature of women's groups flourishing under nationalist mobilisations, Jayawardena commented: "With rare exceptions, autonomous women's organisations did not exist" (Jayawardena, 1986:259). They were subordinated to the greater political struggle and male groupings in the political parties. The observation applied to women's groups like MS and HWF which were offshoots of the nationalist struggle and essentially associated with male-led groups.

Earlier I discussed how the MS was conceived by the male leadership of the JSS and developed so as to represent the women's wing of the party. It was therefore obvious that any 'independent' operating power would be somewhat restricted. From the very beginning, its activities had been dictated and mediated by the decisions of the central group. The policy, principles and objectives MS upheld accorded with the greater party approach and were primarily the work of JSS's central leadership.

The JSS was based on the principle of democratic centralisation. It was binding for all its auxiliary bodies including the MS. My respondents explained that what this meant in practical terms was that bottom-up decision making and implementation were strongly controlled and monitored from the top. Despite this, the central leadership also assisted the lower bodies through consultation. The MS's relationship with JSS was also maintained in both restrictive and supportive ways. There was a specific organisational link to maintain this relationship. In addition, Zonal Directors (the three zones being Maynee, Chenghi and Kachalong)<sup>85</sup> of the MS were appointed directly by the central Party, providing the central leadership with more regulatory authority over its activities.<sup>86</sup> Thus controlled consultation characterised the relationship between the JSS and MS. The priorities and policies of the MS have to be understood in this context.

By comparison, the HWF's relationship with JS, especially during its formative year, was marked by far more ambiguity. Guhathakurta (2000b:83) maintains that the PGP was the civilian wing of the JSS, while the PCP was the student wing, but does not mention anything about the relationship between the HWF and JSS. Shelley's work(1992:118), which is quite informative but influenced by dominant and state-based perspectives, refers to the PCP and PGP as front organisations of the JSS, but is equally silent about the HWF. In the context of the anti-and pro-agreement divide in the post-accord CHT, some former HWF activists are uncertain which camp to show allegiance towards. Some pro-accord sources affirmed that the relationship between the PCP, HWF and JSS was primarily maintained through the PCP and that only the top leaders of the PCP and HWF organisation were aware of it. Information from the JSS is also somewhat ambiguous. In interviews in 1995 and 1996, Shantu Larma denied any relationship between the JSS and PCP, PGP and HWF. He explained that the similarity in their demands derived rather from the crisis of the CHT (Rahman, 1996:12; Samad, 1998:102). In 1999, by contrast, he asserted that those organisations were associated with the JSS (Kamal, 1999:19). Presumably, an apparent vagueness was purposely maintained previously so that the organisations could work openly. The nature of this relationship may not be clearly known until there are comprehensive histories of the groups concerned.

However, as I mentioned earlier, a number of HWF workers received their political training in the PCP. The modes of operation of the PCP, PGP and HWF were in fact very

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<sup>85</sup>These are the three valleys in the CHT: Maynee, Chenghi and Kachalong.

<sup>86</sup>The function of Zonal Directors was to supervise all branch committees. Moreover, in consultation with the Party representative, they could dismiss the President, Secretary and Treasurer of an executive committee in charge of disciplinary activities. (MS, 1975c:50).

similar and their memberships often overlapped giving the appearance of a 'loose coalition', although this was unofficial (Guhathakuta, 2000b:89). On numerous occasions, they carried out programmes together, voiced similar concerns, or assisted each other and took part in each other's programmes. The HWF's organisational tours were often planned in conjunction with the PCP. The post-accord split of the HWF into pro- and anti-agreement factions is a case in point that was allegedly initiated and influenced by the male counterparts of the PCP. Ilira Khisa said: "It is sad that the HWF we created is divided now, the PCP became divided and its influence led women to divide".

A number of present and past HWF activists has acknowledged the fact that the HWF leadership chose to follow those male leaders of the PCP with whom they were personally close in deciding who to support. This concern in fact suggests that women's leadership is to a large extent subsumed under a broader male dominated leadership. However, activists insisted that they exercised greater authority in proposing and deciding gender-related issues that needed to be raised and incorporated in the agenda apart from the practice of consultation and mutual decision in all major matters. It might be sound romantic that activist indigenous women (who involved in HW or MS) don't have agency on their way of making protest whereas 'ordinary' indigenous women applies that.

### **Everyday Activism**

In contrast to frontal attack through armed insurgency or organised resistance with situations of oppression, female strategies often seem to take a hidden form. As Scott (1985:xv) states, "most subordinate classes throughout history have rarely been afforded the luxury of open, organised political activity". This applies especially to subaltern women who are marginalised within a marginalised community. Most ordinary hill women, who were apparently apolitical and isolated individuals and not integrated into any organised group or political process, often espoused strategies to work the system to their advantage or minimum disadvantage as Hobsbawm noted in the case of the resistance of most 'submissive peasantry' (Hobsbawm, 1973:13). The kind of actions women generally espouse through their everyday activism are often regarded or disregarded as mere 'contributory' or conventional feminine tasks. It is true, as Manchanda says, that "women's language of support and resistance flows from their cultural experience, especially of being disempowered. Women are not strong in the classic rally and speech variety politics" (Manchanda, 2001a:24). For this reason, their resistance politics may appear very 'subtle', yet dismissing them is tantamount to denying their agency.

One of the most common strategies used by different types of women was non-cooperation with the army. During the conflict, army raids in the villages were common in their attempts to drive out and capture SB guerrillas. In the face of such operations, men were compelled to flee from their homes in order to avoid arrest, torture and harassment, while women stayed as long as possible to protect the homes and villages, since, if found empty, the dwellings could be burnt down or occupied by *Bangali* settlers. In this situation, women were often left to encounter the army. It was quite common, then, that the army interrogated women about their presence in the villages in order to extract information regarding the names and where about of SB members living in those villages.

Women usually remained tight-lipped, not giving any vital information. They did not even surrender in the face of mounting pressures from the army, displaying great resilience and courage. One of the effective strategies they used was to pretend not properly to know or understand the *Bangali* language. Many women whom I interviewed divulged how they often diverted the questions posted by the army by giving false answers on the pretext of lack of understanding. Sonali Tripura (49) from a lower socio-economic status, a *Jum* cultivator, said:

*We also pretended to be foolish, naïve. For instance, on one occasion, the army came to our village and inquired about SB activities in our area. They asked whether we had seen any SB members nearby. We replied “Yes, we did.” They asked, “When?” Then we said, “Maybe a couple of months or a year ago. We always had to invent different tricks like this [laughter].*

Tricks were the common tactics that Indigenous women applied to cope with the situation especially with the army. This way they tried to avoid further incidents. As Scott (1990) argues we can learn much about power, hegemony, resistance, and subordination through these actions.

Women's traditional role as homemaker was the key to the survival of the SB. They cooked food and provided shelter to the guerrillas when required. With the reduction of the male support base under extreme military control and surveillance, women constituted the crucial support for the guerrillas. Even male informants acknowledged they would not have been able to help SB unless women agreed to cook for them and provide shelter. Indeed it was not uncommon to find examples of women saving the lives of guerrillas at the risk of their own lives. One former SB member, Pradipon Chakma (60), narrated his own experience in this regard. He was travelling with another comrade, transporting a considerable amount of money and arms to another place. On the way, they were interrupted by the army and instantly ran away leaving the bag (containing money and the arms) with a woman who was collecting

firewood in the nearby jungle. Although the woman was completely unknown to them, she instantly hid the bag to prevent it being captured by the army. Despite being closely questioned by the military about the movement of the fleeing SB members and even being whipped and forced to stay in cold water for a long time, she did not disclose any information. Extracting information particularly from women thus proved extremely difficult for the army.

Arising from the impact of conflict situations on women, familial and social relationships undergo transformation (Jad, 1998:53-62). This was also the case in the CHT during the struggle. Women's roles as mother and wife took on a new meaning during this time (Guhathakuta, 2001:273). Instead of being 'protective' or 'possessive' mothers or wives trying to prevent family members from joining the struggle, women gradually changed with the intensification of the conflict: many became more encouraging, inspiring mothers or wives supporting their children and husbands to fight for their nations.

The valorisation of heroic motherhood as expressed by the protest song below (translated by Guhathakurta, 2001:274) displays the embedded dichotomy of the movement. On the one hand, it celebrates politically conscious, brave, courageous motherhood as opposed to the grieving mother; and on the other, it reproduces the essentialist view of women as sacrificial mothers and pressurises her to let go of the children:

*We cannot survive without opening our mouths,*

*how long are we to lock up our voices,*

*the time has come to take to streets*

*So mother, don't prevent us anymore.*

*Mother, we have to go*

*Join the demo in the street*

*We have to face the bullets*

*Oh Mother, don't forbid us*

*Don't pull us from behind*

*The streets quake*

*With the slogan*

*And the sound of protest*

*We all have to fight!!*

*Mother, don't worry about us*

*Stay calm and happy*

*If we are killed*

*Then think yourself to be the mother of a martyr.*

Amidst violent conflict, gender role reversal is discernible. As the security forces and armed groups spread institutional terror, the space for men to act publicly shrinks. Literally and metaphorically, an army of them retreated to the 'private domain of women', abdicating their public roles. Furthermore, women associated with male activists who had 'disappeared' or who had been rounded-up by the security forces, often had to visit courts, jails, detention centres and torture cells in search of those persons or to plead for their release. Through such acts, women had to enter into negotiations with the institutional power structures, the army and the administration. At times, they utilised their feminine identities in the process: narrating their sufferings as a mothers, wives or sisters; addressing the persons working for the administration as 'brothers', presenting as their 'mother', or 'sister' and so on. These appeals did not always work: on the contrary, they were often subjected to misbehaviour, rough treatment, verbal abuse, sexual and other kinds of harassment. Women interviewees disclosed that many of these women endured the 'pain' associated with the process only in the hope of gaining a positive outcome, although in many cases those hopes ended in utter despair.

Women also played crucial roles in disseminating and accumulating information for the SB regarding the activities of the security forces. *Gonoline*<sup>87</sup> was the intelligence service of the JSS that operated across the CHT. These women used the natural protection that women have from being considered less politically suspect and less threatening in order to collect and forward information to the SB. Usually they did so voluntarily, at times risking their own lives. In the villages, it was mostly women who ensured the security of SB activists by hiding them if necessary. I was told that a woman saved an SB member from being arrested during the army raids by introducing him as her husband although he was in fact completely unknown to her. In a strong patriarchal milieu, such an act from a young, unmarried woman required considerable courage and sacrifice.

The CHT was completely under military rule during the period of conflict, when even the daily lives of the ordinary *Paharis* were controlled and regulated by the army. They were not even allowed to buy goods from the market according to their wishes. The army had introduced a system of rationing daily necessities based on a per capita allotment for each household in a village so that the SB would be cut off from necessary supplies. Under heavy surveillance, procuring food, medicine, oil and other required goods was extremely difficult for SB guerrillas or for their male agents. The assistance of ordinary women in the villages

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<sup>87</sup>*Gonoline* means using people in different roles to send or collect news from different sources and send it to the JSS.

proved very useful in this regard, as they were proficient in collecting and delivering the necessary goods for the SB through various tricks and strategies, employing their conventional invisibility in the public sphere. Immunity attained through a conventional apolitical identity enabled women to perform dangerous political acts that in turn actually helped them transcend ascribed social roles. Manchanda (2001a:15) notes that women use their usual invisibility in the public sphere to create a space for activism. In this case, I propose that the usual visibility of hill women in public spaces provided them with a safety net or disguise to carry out political acts without evoking suspicion. Otherwise, in a lengthy conflict like the CHT, any usual task was easily noticed by the security forces.

### **National and International level Activists and Activism**

Identity was a crucial site for the HWF both in terms of protest and forming alliances. In doing so, the HWF focused upon race and gender identities as two prime sources of oppression against hill women by placing gender discrimination within the greater structure of the ethnic discrimination operating against the hill people in general. The HWF's conceptualisation of racial identity had multiple layers.

Firstly, it was based on indigeneity, evoking a shared feeling of discrimination to which all indigenous people across the world are subjected. The HWF used this to build alliances with other indigenous communities across world when they demanded demilitarisation not only in the CHT, but also elsewhere, for example in Burma and India, where indigenous areas had been turned into de-facto war zones due to heavy militarisation (HWF, 1995 a). Thus, the HWF identifies itself as part of the common struggle of indigenous peoples across the world. Furthermore, 'indigeneity' meant they were the '*adibasi*' of Bangladesh and therefore had an identity that gave them a valid claim over the land and solidarity with other '*adibasis*' of Bangladesh, and a shared demand for the restoration of their lands and cultural rights (Tripathi and Manda, 2003).

From early on, the HWF began to publicise the sufferings of hill women under military rule by partaking in international forums whenever they had the opportunity, including: the NGO forum on women in Beijing in August 1995; the Session of the Working Group on indigenous People, under the auspices of the Human Rights Commission in Geneva in 1994; and the First Conference of indigenous Women of South Asia in Nepal (2003). Network-building and actively responding to the greater 'gender awareness' generated by global actors, were the underlying objectives of such participation. In particular, their involvement in

international forums for women shows that they were aware of themselves as actors promoting women's liberation. Security concerns for hill women dominated their agendas in most cases where the notion of security was viewed in a 'holistic' sense, not only tackling the physical threat but also tackling other destabilizers such as: lack of food and health care; shortage of land; poor development planning; hardship inflicted on women's lives because of the indiscriminate abuse of ecology and natural resources by dominant groups; the absence of male income-earning members. These were part and parcel of the HWF's overall security concerns for hill women (HWF, 1995a; UNHCR, 1994:1-3).

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the nature of physical violence on indigenous people by the army, security forces (police, BGB) and *Bangali* settler people. Special attention has been given to the physical violence against the indigenous women. The chapter argues that rape and physical violence (abduction, killing, sexual harassment, torture) have been used as weapons of nationalist, religious and cultural power to wipe out the indigenous movement and continue the culture of fear in the CHT. The chapter also argues that the figure of Kalpana Chakma has been shaped as a symbol of protest which has narrowed the gap between the *Bangali* women's movement and the indigenous women's movement. The chapter discuss not only the physical violence on the indigenous women, it also covers the history of response and protest by indigenous women against the violation. The chapter argues that the women's organisations (MS, HWF, etc.) among the indigenous people are controlled by the male-dominated JSS. However, indigenous women have been turning everyday forms of self into strategies with their space and capacities for action.



## Chapter Five

### **‘Doledale Theith See Huhui Thigthigi’ [Lizard is everywhere]: State Violence and the Everyday – Suspicion and Distrust**

#### **Introduction**

Some of my respondents used the phrase *‘Doledale Theith See Huhui Thigthigi’* (lizard<sup>88</sup>is everywhere), which means they cannot trust anyone. They sometimes used a symbolic language to indicate the agents that they felt were the enemy. This chapter is about everyday forms of violence and fear in my field areas.

One foggy morning during December, 2012, I was on my way to my field area in Khagrachari district, on a bus. Suddenly the bus stopped without any reason. Though I did not have much idea about where exactly the bus was stopped, I knew that buses were regularly checked three to four times a day in different areas in the CHT. In spite of that, I thought that all army check posts would be withdrawn as it had been placed under the CHT accord. After two or three minutes, four military persons entered the bus and started checking all the seats and the people inside. They questioned some of the passengers who lowered their gaze and replied in a low voice, addressing them as ‘sir’. They carried rifles and torches in their hands. The entire situation was tense. Nobody talked. The military personnel continued their search for about five minutes and only when they were satisfied with everything was the bus allowed to go.

The checking of buses is not a common phenomenon in the other regions of Bangladesh. Though it was common in 1971 as West Pakistani soldiers attempted to check Bangali Muslims, whose colonial constructed image was one of being lazy, effeminate, small and dark men. (Mookherjee, 1915:170). I asked the person seated next to me in the bus, whether the ‘peace accord’ could do anything to change this checking by the military. He replied that it was less frequent than before, but that was all. Through our conversation, I learned that his name was Nobarun Khisa, and that he was from the Phanchari Upazila in Khagrachari. He worked in a trade firm in Dhaka (the capital city of Bangladesh). He told me that previously, these checks were run four or five times on the way to Dhaka and back. Whenever the bus was stopped, mostly the ‘Chakma’ people (the army was mostly violent to the Chakma people as all indigenous people in the CHT were led by the Chakma) and they were asked to step out from the bus and were ordered to sign their names in the cantonment or other check posts.

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<sup>88</sup>Here lizard refers to a detective.

Nobarun Khisa continued his story. The incident had happened two years earlier. It was early in the morning, and he was on a bus heading to Dhaka. According to the previous rules set by the army in the CHT, the bus had to be stopped at check posts. According to his narrative, this was the first check post on the journey. The army personnel entered the bus and forced the Chakma people to get off. He did not get off as he felt irritated about the checking. When the military ordered him to do so he replied, *'I am not a Chakma, I am a Khisa'*<sup>89</sup>. He told me laughingly that the military personnel thought Khisa was a different indigenous group<sup>90</sup>. So they did not extend the conversation with him any further and he did not have to get off. Sometimes army personnel ordered the people from various groups to get off the bus and made them stand for extended periods of time, he added. He further commented: *"The army always thinks that they are very clever and we are stupid and simple, but they do not know that we are actually cleverer than them to some extent. The only reality is, we do not have power. So, we have to more or less adjust with the regulations made by the army"*.

This example helps us to fathom the practical environment of the CHT, where fear in everyday life is the reality, and to understand the way people undertake self-surveillance where violence is concerned. In this regard, self-surveillance acts in association with exercise of the care of the self. Fear became the metanarrative of my research. Green (1994:227) had similar experiences among the people of Xe'caj in Guatemala. She stated that fear is the reality in which people live, fear is the authority of power which was unseen and silent. She speaks of the invisible violence of fear as a result of the ongoing militarisation in Guatemala, which is also very common to the indigenous people of the CHT. From her brilliant writing, it is easy to see how people are socialised into a life of terror, conflict and militarisation. Green raises a very important question about the social scientist's interference in violent situations or communities, and the need for them to train themselves not to counter at first, then afterwards not to feel or see it. She discusses the way such societies internalise fear. Lawrence (2000:175) talks about people living in the throes of war having to unlearn and choke natural human feedbacks in the face of fear and surveillance, e.g. going to aid a neighbour in distress (in case their action is interpreted as support for one or other of the various militant groups or the army).

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<sup>89</sup>*Khisa* is one of the four caste-based titles of the Chakma people.

<sup>90</sup>There is a power relationship between the indigenous groups living in the CHT. The military always tried to make the small groups work in their favour and they asked members of the small groups such as the Murung or Khayang to work as spies on the activities of the Shanti Bahini or Jana Sanghati Samiti. They were paid or given benefits or extra facilities. As a result of these initiatives taken by the army, *Mukhosh Bahini* (Masked group) emerged in the CHT in the mid-1980s. The objective was to create division among the indigenous groups in the CHT to demolish their movement.

She adopts Jeremy Bentham's panopticon model in which self-censorship happens to be second nature, and she emphasizes that most social scientists miss this context in which people live.

The CHT Accord signed in 1997 between the government of Bangladesh and JSS has not been fully implemented yet. Although the Government points out that 283 military camps have been dismantled in the CHT, the area still remains heavily militarised. The PCJSS party estimates that the number of military camps withdrawn to date is around 74, out of more than 500 (temporary) military camps.<sup>91</sup>

Therefore, the chapter explains the nature of the state of violence in the CHT through the lens of everyday forms of suspicion and distrust. The core issues of this part are three fold. In the first section, I talk about the military intervention in the everyday life of the indigenous people that creates the ecology of fear and suspicion in the CHT. It also includes the responses of the indigenous people towards the fear, and their self-surveillance.

### **Mapping the violence**

*"J waisa harung kamajak, boar harun got hamanya kamia* (When one loses their land they never get it back)". [Sankhomoni Tripura, a low economic status woman, day labourer]

This is a Tripura proverb that the Tripura participants told me when they first talked about the violence they experienced. They had been evicted from their land, their homes had been burnt, their cattle were gone, and their lives had been changed due to the violence. Most of them are not certain about their homes. They are prepared for any violence when they have to run to save their lives. Most of them lost their previous sources of livelihood.

My participants in the field mapped the violence through massacres, killings, rapes, torture, burning of houses, eviction from land and the insecurity or uncertainty of life. Some violence is visible and some has remained invisible (through language, development projects, or in the name of 'national' interest etc.). Zur (1994) identifies two types of violence in Guatemala. Overt violence consisted of burning and bombing villages, a tactic called 'Operation Cinders' within the army. Visible violence also consisted of public carrying out and massacres, events which addressed no-one but were an end in themselves, proposed to wipe out completely the identities of individuals and populations. Invisible forms of violence seemed to aim for completeness and quiet on the one hand and brutal repression on the other. However, in my field areas, people showed me the places where they used to live before the massacres and the arson that took place in 1986 and afterwards. The government does not want to reveal

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<sup>91</sup><http://chtnewsupdate.blogspot.co.uk/2013/05/press-statement-upr-review-of.html>

the actual number of *Bangali* people living in the CHT as they want to show that the CHT is still dominated by the indigenous people which was a condition of the CHT Manual 1900. It should be said that in 1901, the percentage of *Bangali* people was only 9%, though they always claim that the food rationing<sup>92</sup> for ‘tribal’ and ‘non-tribal’ is 50:50.<sup>93</sup> The nature of the violence in the CHT is multi-layered. It contributes towards the changes in the forms of relationships in which the environment of distrust is prevalent. What provides a productive resource in this context is the recent scholarship on anthropologies of violence (e.g. Mookherjee, 2015; Jeganathan, 2000; Das et al., 2000; Kleinman, 2000; Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois, 2004; Bourgois, 2001; Banerjee et. al., 2004; Coronil & Skurski, 2006) that has broadened the concept of political violence and enriched conceptions of social suffering, everyday violence, and the relationship between violence and subjectivity.

Land issue is the central issue to analyse state violence in the CHT which caused displacement of the indigenous people. Indigenous people are becoming evicted and displaced continuously, while there is no one to pay notice because the state patronises the land. In Shishirpur, the place where the vehicles are stopped is called the ‘Soap factory’, but previously it was called Laxmipur. Between 1986 and 1997, the army set up a soap factory in the area and then they established the name ‘soap factory’ to occupy the land that the indigenous people left when they went to India. They set up some Madrassah and an Islamic aid office on the land of the indigenous people.

There are special procedures for land acquisition and settlement in the CHT. Article 64(A) of the Khagrachari District Council Act prohibits settlement or the transfer of any ‘Khas’ land without prior consent of the Council. Article 64(B) provides that “No land, hill and forest under the control and jurisdiction of the Council shall be obtained or transferred by the government without consultation with and consent of the Council.” However the government continues to violate this provision when it comes to acquisition of land belonging to the indigenous people in the CHT. As I already mentioned in an earlier chapter, the indigenous people are often driven out of their land when projects are undertaken in the name of development, tourism, afforestation and construction and extension of military installations.

However, a Chakma male informant (47) from Shishirpur, who is a small businessman and from a middle socio-economic background, informed me that now the powerful Chakma people are following the military and the Muslim *Bangali* settlers’ strategy to grab the land.

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<sup>92</sup>A fixed allowance of provisions or food, especially for soldiers or sailors or for civilians during a shortage, but in the CHT all soldiers and settlers are given rations per person (20 kg of rice per month, 2 kg sugar, 5 kl of oil).

<sup>93</sup>[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chittagong\\_Hill\\_Tracts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chittagong_Hill_Tracts). Last seen 13.3.2015.

Now they were just grabbing the land of other small indigenous groups and establishing a temple or house with the name of Buddhism so that nobody could complain about it. Foucault (1972) uses the term ‘discipline’ to refer to a type of power that is exercised by means of disciplinary institutions such as schools, prisons and hospitals. They present the mechanisms of domination as normal, natural and even desirable, which Foucault termed as ‘normalisation’. Power however is productive and not simply a negative force whose sole function is repression. He treats power as a net-like organization of relationships running through the whole social body. This analysis enables us to see that power is not concentrated in the state apparatus. The state has to rely on other knowledge-producing apparatuses to render its functioning possible. These knowledge-producing apparatuses could be the way these disciplinary organisations in CHT create an atmosphere of fear or the threat of violence to ensure subordination.

Along with that, the dominance of the *Bangali* language is seen not only in the official activities in the CHT but also in other areas of the life of the people. The *Bangali* settlers of Khagrachari changed the names of various places, which had been named in the Chakma, Marma and Tripura languages. In some cases, the religious dominance of *Bangali* Muslims received precedence over others in naming places. The nationalist dominance in the alteration of the name of different places in the CHT can easily be understood by reference to the following table (Table-1).<sup>94</sup>

Table 6: Changed Names of Various Places in Khagrachari

Previous name	Present name	Origin of language	
		From(Previous)	To(Present)
Banal Kath (Divided into two parts)	Shantinagar	Chakma name	<i>Bangali</i> name
	Muslim Para		Islamic name
Pankheyoya Para (Divided into four parts)	1.Milonpur	Marma name	<i>Bangali</i> name
	2.Pankhaiyapara		Mixed with Noakhali District dialectics
	Kallanpur		<i>Bangali</i> name
	Madampur		<i>Bangali</i> name
Khagrapur	Islampur	Tripura name	Islamic name
C.N.B Tila	Kadampur	Chakma name	<i>Bangali</i> name

<sup>94</sup>Zobaida Nasreen and Masahiko Togawa, ‘Politics of Development: ‘*Pahari-Bangali*’ Discourse in the Chittagong Hill Tracts’, *Journal of International Development and Cooperation*, V.9, NO.1, 2002, p 97-112, IDEC, Hiroshima University, Japan.

Kamal Chari	Battolla	Chakma name	<i>Bangali</i> name
Khabong Puizza	Khabong Paria	Chakma name	Distorted form of original language
Khagrachari Bill	Anandapur	Chakma name	<i>Bangali</i> name
Majon Para. (Divided into two parts)	Mahajan Para	Chakma name	<i>Bangali</i> name
	Narikalchara		<i>Bangali</i> name
Kawali Mura	Kathali Para	Chakma name	<i>Bangali</i> name
ComillaTila	Ambagan	Chakma name	<i>Bangali</i> name
Kanoongo Para	Mohamadpur	Marma name	Islamic name
Uttda Chari	Rasulpur	Marma name	Islamic name
Pa-ongKabari Para	Fatemanagar	Marma name	Islamic name
Tai Kusum	KalapaniChara	Marma name	<i>Bangali</i> name
Tai Bagla	Tai Pagla	Chakma name	<i>Bangali</i> name
Para Kalak	Lambapara	Marma name	<i>Bangali</i> name

Source: (Nasreen 2002)

### **Every day forms of violence: fear and distrust**

*Yet the most frightening experience was rounding a curve and suddenly encountering a military patrol* (Green, 1995:113).

After my arrival in the field, one day in November 2012, I had just finished some interviews in the Shishirpur area and was heading back to my host's house in Kuturitola which is mostly inhabited by the Tripura people as mentioned earlier. While crossing the road which led to the house in which I was staying at the time, I saw a queue outside a small grocery shop. I asked the people standing in the queue what it was all about. Someone I knew among the crowd replied that the queue was for government aid ('relief' as it is commonly known in Bangladesh) which was being handed out to returning 'refugees' after the signing of the peace accord. From my conversation with him, I came to know that as a part of the 'relief' provided for the returning refugees they were given oil, sugar and salt for the first six months. The amount of 'relief' was diminishing each day. At that time it had come down to only 20 kg of rice per person and to receive it, one had to show an identity card issued in 1998. Another acquaintance who is a *Karbary* joined me in walking up to the house and told me that his family was not entitled to receive the 'relief' as they were not listed as 'refugees'. According to the government, returning refugees are those people who returned to Bangladesh as a part of the CHT Accord, but the people who could not go to India or chose not to go had were not listed as returning refugees. The people who returned before the peace accord was drafted, were also not listed as refugees. He added that his family was in a dangerous situation and his uncle had been brutally killed by the *Bangali* Muslim settlers in a paddy field. The settlers called his

uncle out to the paddy field and butchered him using sharp knives. The *Karbary*'s extended family members suffered a lot and went into hiding in different places between Rangamati and Khagrachari, but they were not offered any compensation or relief. Excessive bureaucracy is used there as a form of violence in itself by the state and to inflict more/continual suffering on people.

However, when I was talking to him, during our conversation, he offered to carry my bag as a courtesy. He said that the bag seemed rather heavy and jokingly asked me whether I chose the olive coloured bag on purpose to make the military happy as they have the same coloured uniforms and advised me not to use the bag here as that would make the people either frightened or nervous. I changed my bag and tried to avoid the things that would create any distance between me and my respondents. The incident helps us to understand that the colour of the army's uniform carries fear in the mind of indigenous people. They are psychologically frightened of this colour as it reminds them of the severity of the violence they faced from soldiers dressed in the same colour. Hence, if they see the same colour worn or carried by a civilian they don't want to trust them because of the power of the army. My friend talks about symbolic violence as that which is exercised on a social agent with their complicity. It is with the underlying sense of fear that violence and militarization evokes in everyday life amidst terror, and also speaks to the psychological impact/'trauma' of violence.

Fear, suspicion and distrust were ever-present among the respondents. Jamini Tripura, a 40 year old woman, a member of Union Parishad and from a middle socio-economic status, told me that in the mid-eighties when they were teenagers, at night when they saw the flashlight of the military jeep, everybody would be overcome with fear and they would just start running to save their lives. Even if it was a flash light, they felt scared of the army. This fear persists even now. Seeing the light of army vehicles or personnel at night will make them feel uncomfortable and stop whatever they are doing till the lights disappear. This uncertainty has influenced them not to build permanent houses, something they desperately wish to do. Before the accord, massacres were perpetrated in large numbers by the army; after the accord, arson took place instead of mass executions because the perpetrators were less visible. During the mass executions soldiers could be identified but in the case of arson, groups of people were involved.

In 1999 communal ethnic violence occurred in the area. Some of the homes had been destroyed by *Bangali* settlers and they took shelter in their neighbours' houses. Again in 2001 *Bangali* settlers set their houses on fire and they were displaced once again. Angkraprue,

a female respondent (50), a *Jum* cultivator and from a lower socio-economic status (landless) said to me,

*Military personnel were visible everywhere. Due to this, our male members in the family could not go outside frequently. The army came and checked the house and looked for the male members in the house. Only women were in the house and we had to do everything by ourselves. We could not buy more than 1kg of salt and even medicine as they suspected that we bought them for the members of Shanti Bahini. Not only these, we could not bring our vegetables from the Jum field together. They would seize our things forcefully. We never tried to resist them, to avoid further incident.*

In addition, she told me that not only *Bangalis* and the military, but some of the Tripura, Marma and Chakma people who worked with the army informed the army about the other members of their communities. She told me that violence not only affected themselves, it destroyed their relationships within and outside communities. They don't trust *Bangali* people, especially the settler *Bangalis*. They also don't want to trust their own people sometime as they act against their own interests. Hughes (2013) discusses how denunciation destroys relationships of trust and perpetuates terror on the ground. Another great writing by Gellately and Fitzpatrick (1996) shows how denunciation/collaboration is a way in which the state imposes policing within communities in contexts of terror. By giving different fragments of Asha's life, Das (2000) firmly explores how the violence of extreme events such as Partition comes to be incorporated into the temporal structure of relationships and within the multiple weaves of daily life. Her case is very significant for me since it helps me to comprehend the experiences of indigenous women in the CHT by clearly acknowledging the subjectivity, the lived and imaginary experience, of the people involved. Her case also contains both resistance to the norms in which women are expected to perform within their gender identity, and an intricate subjection to these norms. She addresses the way in which the atrocious and horrifying brutalities of Partition left a legacy of relationships marked by suspicion, bitterness and betrayal not only between the Hindus and Muslims but also between men and women of the same community and even more in the same kinship groups or in extended families and networks. I consider this a very significant observation and one that I can make in my own research in terms of changing forms of kinship and other social relationships. Indigenous soldiers has been in the wider project of state violence and militarization and it is important to see how it has an implication in and within the communities. The government is deploying indigenous soldiers to patrol the area after the violence.





Photo 8: The soldier in the photograph is a Chakma. He was deployed to patrol the Chakma village after the violence that took place on 22 February, 2010. The photo was taken by journalist Biplob Rahman during a team visit to the affected villages where I was member of the team.

Recruitment of the indigenous people in the Bangladesh army started in 1998. Juni Chakma (32) who was employed in the army (but left the job, since he did not like it) informed me that around 100 indigenous males were offered the job of soldier in the army (not in a ranked position) when they got back from India as a returnee refugee. After the recruitment the army began to use indigenous soldiers' in the indigenous area to give the idea that *Bangali* soldiers were no longer patrolling them, that their own people were doing the job, so that the community would start thinking that their own people were their enemy and would no longer trust them, thinking that they were serving the army's interests against their own. But it resulted in a situation where the military didn't need to carry out excessive monitoring or violent control because local indigenous people in the CHT had taken the task of censorship and control upon themselves. The colour of your bag is sufficient for people to feel that they are under surveillance. That suggests that the army has actually done a fairly substantial job of instilling fear but have cleverly, albeit sadistically, now placed themselves in a position where they no longer need to assert their physical presence as much. It puts a new twist on the idea of indigenous soldiers taking over the job of controlling the area. Some might argue that a Chakma soldier could be reassuring (surely a Chakma soldier won't carry out criminal acts against his own people, they might think), but this must be understood as a form of covert and tacit surveillance, in which the Chakma no longer know when they are being monitored. They are provided with constant reminders of military surveillance but the actual army are less present

than before. And introducing indigenous soldiers, rather than allaying fears, has actually caused them to doubt their own community. They can no longer rely on other Chakma to stand by their own people, so it leaves them feeling more isolated and vulnerable than before. Even where the soldier was Chakma, the Marma people started whispering '*Chakmas are like that. They can stand against their nation*'. Therefore, I argue here that it is violence which changes relationships and introduces suspicion.

### **Discarding Memory and suspicion**

In all fields except Dhaka, both men and women were discarding their narratives every day. They did not want other people to hear about them. It was not all about their shyness, it was about their general distrust of people, especially the *Bangalis*, and also their fear of the consequences. I was not allowed to record their voices with an audio recorder. It does not mean that they did not allow me to use the recorder, but they became frightened hearing their own voices as they were not habituated to it. Then they asked me to turn it off and said that they did not feel comfortable with the recorder. They couldn't trust the recorder itself. They thought that it might reach the army. The respondents had various ways of expressing themselves. One Chakma female respondent from the field of Shishirpur, a housewife from a lower socio-economic status, said that if they told me anything about their situation it would mean that they were inviting enemies. From their point of view, it was better to be silent if it meant avoiding future problems. As a *Bangali* researcher, they could not trust me, as their land had been grabbed by *Bangali* settlers. Some of them asked Monimala, who mostly accompanied me during my fieldwork, about me. When the respondents hesitated to talk to me, Monimala convinced them and made them understand about my research objectives and ensured them it would cause no harm to them. She built a bridge between us to communicate. But some of them seemed scared while talking to me. Green (1995:105) states that fear destabilises social relations by driving a lodge of distrust between members of families, between neighbours and among friends. Fear divides communities through suspicion and nervousness, not only of strangers but of each other.

When they started talking to me, I found some of them discarding their memories every day. They came to me and said that it was not true what they said to me the previous day. They did not find me trustworthy since I was there for only a few days of my field work, so they thought again about what they had said and when they feared that it may invite risk they recanted their stories. They were always in fear and it became clear to me that fear is the reality of their everyday lives. In addition, they also tried to go back to their own stories and

negotiated with themselves every day. It was not easy at all for them to go back to those painful days and decide what they wanted to remember. They were not sure what they should tell me and what not, and as Hughes argues, memory does not involve an abstract recording of the past, but is informed by the socio-political context of remembering (Hughes, 2013:4). Some of them considered these memories as the ‘secret story’ of the family which was connected to family ‘honour’ in patriarchal Chakma, Marma or Tripura societies. Green (1995) has openly analysed fear in a personal and political context.

I referred to Nabarun Chakma’s story in the introduction to this chapter and how walking through the fields gave me more ethnographic details. While on the way to take an interview or returning from one, I would charge my mobile phone either in the market or in the next house that had electricity. There were few mobile networks in this area: only Teletalk (government owned) and Grameen Phone have their own network in the area. Kaptai Hydroelectric dam was constructed in order to produce electricity, yet 90% of the area of the CHT is not serviced by electricity<sup>95</sup>. Most of my field areas did not have electricity, except for the houses of some influential<sup>96</sup>indigenous people. And the house I lived in mostly had no electricity. Monimala informed me that they were supposed to get electricity six years ago but they could not get it. They would get electricity only if they paid the 20,000 taka bribe to a member of the *palli bidyut samiti* (rural electricity association). Most of the time, I went to the neighbouring house to charge my mobile phone. When mobile networks from various companies were introduced in Bangladesh in the late nineties, the CHT was not included for a long time as it was considered a ‘risky’ and ‘insecure’ zone. Only army personnel could use phones in the cantonment area. But in cases of emergency, common people could also use the telephone with some additional permissions. But they always had to talk in the presence of army personnel so that the conversation did not remain private. Also, since the army personnel could not understand indigenous languages, conversations in *Bangla* only were permitted. In 2008, the CHT was taken into the mobile phone network coverage but this was only extended to Teletalk which was a government operated mobile network. One day I went to a neighbour’s house to get my phone charged. I was in a hurry as I had an appointment to meet someone. A boy named Ajal asked me whether I was interested in listening to a funny story about mobile phones. I showed my interest and Ajal narrated the story that about six years back when he was a student at a college in Dhaka, his father went to the cantonment to call him for an emergency.

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<sup>95</sup>The data is collected from a leader of JSS, dated: 30.5.2013, at Dhaka.

<sup>96</sup>Here influential refers to those who have good connections with powerful political leaders or organizations.

Ajal received the phone call and since it was from an unknown number, he asked who was calling him. His father replied in *Bangla* instead of the Chakma language because there was a military person in front of him. Ajal just hung up because he could not even imagine that his father could speak in *Bangla* over the phone. *Bhante* advised me not to say anything over the phone about the CHT to my friends or other persons as these conversations would be recorded by the supreme authority.

### **Self-Surveillance of indigenous people**

In the field, my respondents knew either that I was a friend of Monimala, or her elder brother's friend who studied in India and was now employed by the Task Force. In the beginning, Monimala did not want to go outside with me and she told me that if she was seen with me going to different places, she would be a target for the military once I left the area. She observed my every move so as to find out if I was trustworthy. She also tried to learn about me from various sources to be sure that as a *Bangali* researcher I would not do them any harm. It was the third day when I asked Monimala to go with me for an evening walk. She refused and said that it would not be safe to go out in the evening since *Durgapuja* (*Bangali* Hindu's biggest festival) was going on and that every year the *Bangali* Muslim settlers tended to make *kawaz*<sup>97</sup> or cause conflicts, during the time of *Parab* (new year celebration day, well known as '*Boi-Sa-Bi*')<sup>98</sup>. The festival is called '*Boisu*', '*Sangrai*' and '*Biju*' in the Tripura, Marma and Chakma languages respectively. '*Boi-Sa-Bi*' is the shorter version of the name of the festivals using the three first letters of all three names in the three languages.<sup>99</sup> She added that seven years ago they boycotted *parab* (the New Year festival) as a protest against a *Bangali* attack on a *para*<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup>It is a type of quarrel with loud voices which can lead to conflict and violence. Initially when this is happening they (indigenous people) guess that something is going to happen and try to prepare to face it.

<sup>98</sup>The Chakma and the Marma are Buddhist, the Tripura and the Santal are traditionally Hindu. But some of the Tripura people converted themselves to Christianity. But the Tripura who are the followers of Hindu religion told me that '*Baisu*' is their main festival rather than the *Durga Puja*. So in the CHT, *Durga Puja* is treated as a *Bangali* Hindu festival. The data provided by the population census does not tell us the exact number of *Bangali* Hindus living in the CHT. They provided data by religion but it was mixed with Tripura and Santal people who are Hindus as well. From the experiences in the CHT, it was seen that some conflict took place during the festival which created extra fears for them. So, festivals come with further fear. However it is interesting that *Bangali* Buddhists love to introduce them as '*Barua*' rather than *Bangali*. The title '*Barua*' indicates Buddhist. In 1947, the percentage of the *Bangali* people in the CHT was only 9% and most of them were *Bangali* Buddhists who used to introduce themselves as *Barua* to be a part of that majority in the CHT in terms of religion.

<sup>99</sup>Though there are twelve indigenous groups in the CHT (according to the JSS and the population census in Bangladesh), the term '*Boisabi*' is only used in the three majority languages (Chakma, Marma and Tripura) and not in others' languages. It is a simple example to see how the majority's politics work among the indigenous groups in the CHT. Interestingly, the Santal in the CHT are not included in the above list. They are usually included in 'other', though it is not clear who belongs to this group.

<sup>100</sup>*Para* is a local term which indicates a specific locality.

in Khagrachari. Monimala seemed very scared during the time of my field work since it was immediately after the incident took place in Rangamati and everybody was afraid that the conflict might spread into all areas in Khagrachari. She also advised me to tread carefully. She reminded me that I was not a resident of the area and that it was not the appropriate time to go around especially in the evening. I found there was a quiet atmosphere everywhere, that people did not want to talk spontaneously. For some reason, Monimala changed her mind and decided to go with me. Her house was located near a bazaar area called 'Kuturitola'. The local *Bangali* people in the bazaar became very curious about me and asked me to stop by a tea shop run by a *Bangali* owner. In a small town everybody knows everybody. So they easily understood that I was an outsider, who went there for some reason. Since I always wore a red *Tip*<sup>101</sup>, they thought that I was Hindu and exchanged greetings customary in the Hindu religion. I saw people were chatting in the tea shop about the political situation of Bangladesh and some were watching a *Bangali* movie on the television set in the tea stall. They asked me to sit down in the stall and asked about my identity: Who was I? What was I doing? Where was my home town? Why was I there? Why was I staying in a Chakma house? Was I Hindu or Muslim or Barua? They talked about Monimala's family and praised Monimala's father. But I found Monimala did not like that. Her face was not lively. It had changed. The entire time we spent in the tea shop Monimala kept to herself and was completely silent. While coming back from the tea shop, I asked Monimala why she was so silent and what had happened to her. She was hesitant to answer my question.

Being silent can act as self-surveillance as we believe that the strange proximity between the Panopticon and 'Big-Brother' is rooted in the understanding of self-surveillance not as care of the self, but as self-monitoring (Lyon, 2001: 114) or, as Norris and Armstrong ingeniously put it, as "habituated anticipatory conformity" (Norris and Armstrong, 1999: 6). Although normalizing judgment can be understood as an infra-penalty that partitions an area that the law has left empty – the vast domain of gestures, attitudes, quotidian activities, tasks, discourses, uses of time, habits, etc. – its real novelty resides in the fact that these micro-penalties are not addressed so much to what one does, but to who one is (Foucault, 1979:178). However, being silent to avoid further incidents was a means of covering up a sad incident in Monimala's family history. Finally she told me that she did not like *Bangali* people and explained why she was silent. She told me that they did something very bad with her family

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<sup>101</sup>A small round mark on a woman's forehead. Generally Hindu women use the red *Tip* as a sign of marriage. But in the Indian subcontinent it is a mark of beauty, not necessarily related to religion or marital status.

and that what they told me about her father was not what they really believed about him. She added that she did not want to protest as she did not want any future confrontation. Then she told me an untold story of her father, which she previously did not want to do.

It was the story about how her father died four years ago, and she was adamant that the military was responsible. Her father was the owner of a *tilla* (a small hill) and one day during the period of the caretaker government (2007-2008), he was asked to go to the cantonment. He went there and was informed that a *Bangali* person had filed a case against him saying that he (the *Bangali* man) was the rightful owner of the *tilla* and it would be a wise decision for her father to leave. They later found out that the *Bangali* person<sup>102</sup> who had filed the case was a former employee at their home. It was in fact the military who had initiated the case using the name of that *Bangali* person, and they had pressured him also to build a bamboo house on the *tilla* to ensure control. Her father died due to the heart attack two days after that incident. She added that her father was a brave person, but he died as a result of the stress of the threat from the army and because he could not bear the disgrace the situation brought on him. After meeting the army his father had sent Monimala to her uncle's house since he suspected something, and that was the starting point of Monimala's stay at her maternal uncle's house in the Dighinala Bazaar. Her father thought that his family was being targeted by the military. Then her immediate younger brother was sent to Malaysia for safety. Monimala's elder brother-in-law served as a policeman, having gotten the job as a returnee refugee. Her father invited him frequently to their house to find a way out of this situation and thought that maybe he could do something in this regard and the military would not disturb them when they saw policemen coming to their house frequently. Every member of the family was scattered and they realized that the military wanted to capture the hill at any cost.

Monimala was talking about her father. She said that her father had never faced such a situation before. He was well respected in her community and everybody knew him as a good person. And the *Bangali* man who used to work in their house came to them after the death of her father and told them that he did not want to file the case against his master as he loved him, but that the military had pressured him to do so. Interestingly, I heard a sympathetic note in Monimala's voice for the *Bangali* person when she said he did not have any other option than to do what the army asked, as he was threatened as well. Everybody was frightened of the army.

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<sup>102</sup>*Bangali* Settler people are not a homogenous category in the CHT. And all of them do not dominate the indigenous people. The people who were brought there as a part of the government development programme were poor. Some of them worked at the houses of upper socio-economic indigenous people and also ploughed the land owned by the indigenous people.

The *Bangali* people always needed the army's support. The army manipulated and used the person to capture their hill. The army and the *Bangalis* support each other and work against the indigenous people in the CHT. Monimala told me that in the refugee camp, though it was not a good life, she never felt insecure, but that in this *para* she felt insecure all the time. Their house could be burnt anytime if something ever happened between the *Pahari* and the *Bangali* people. She informed me that, now, nobody wanted to make a good house because of the uncertainty of life. She said to me, "*Who knows, tomorrow maybe you cannot stay at our house, if it is burnt tomorrow.*"

Why was Monimala so scared? When I started my fieldwork it was scary as there were on-going attacks on indigenous people in Rangamati district and on the indigenous people in Khagrachari. *Bangali* settlers conducted communal attacks upon indigenous people in Rangamati on 22 September 2012. At least 40 indigenous students from different communities, a government physician, twelve Union Parishad (a unit of a local government system) chairmen, two college teachers and five *Bangali* students were wounded while severe damage was inflicted on the office and rest house of the CHT Regional Council, and on the shops and houses of the indigenous people. Despite the army taking up positions at different locations along the main road (Rangamati-Chittagong road), the *Bangali* settlers conducted attacks upon the *Jumma* people and their localities, causing widespread damage to *Jumma*-owned shops and houses.<sup>103</sup> And days before this incident took place there was a communal attack on the Buddhists at the Ramu Upazila in Cox's Bazaar district. These two communal attacks took place within a small span of time and made the people in the field more frightened and worried. I found that Monimala's face changed with an unknown fear when she was describing the situation. And she added that whether or not I knew the reason, they did not have an attached bathroom and toilet within their house. After sharing this story with me, Monimala asked me whether I felt bad hearing her complaints against the military and the *Bangali* settlers, and whether I was angry at her for telling the story. I realized that she was trying to read my expression.

The next day, Monimala and I went to the Dighinala Bazaar, which was seven miles from their house. It was late afternoon. We were buying some biscuits when suddenly three boys came and started talking with Monimala. Monimala did not understand what was going on. They were nearly dragging and pulling her. I was busy with making a payment but after

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<sup>103</sup><http://chtnewsupdate.blogspot.co.uk/2012/09/Bangali-settlers-attack-on-Jummas-in.html>, last seen on 13/7/2015.

seeing this I went to them and asked what was happening. Monimala identified herself as a college teacher. The boys told me that they were workers for UPDF. They said that the area was controlled by the UPDF. They were Chakma in their indigenous identity. They said they did not want their women going outside in the evening as it was not safe for them and they had fixed the time for the women till evening. After that if somebody wanted to go out, they needed their permission. Since there was the possibility of an attack, they were trying to avoid all issues which might lead to a big conflict. On one hand, this move was taken to protect the women but on the other hand, they were policing the women as they thought that the women of their own communities should only belong to them. The entire situation was tense and full of fear and on the other hand self-surveillance was taking place. So indigenous women are subjected to multiple forms of surveillance.

### **Semantic domination and protest**

In areas inhabited by the Chakma, Marma or Tripura, everybody tries to speak the majority language. For example, the Chakma will speak Marma in Marma areas. Only the Santal people speak with other people in the Chittagong dialect. For them, if they cannot speak other languages, they will speak in the Chittagong dialect<sup>104</sup>. *Bangali* people do majoritarian politics on indigenous minority people through language and religion; some of the majority Chakma people are doing the same thing on minorities among the indigenous groups to ensure power over them. They also try to dominate others through language in localities where they are a majority. As Scott (1990) argues, the potentially strategic element in appeals to hegemonic values is apparent from almost any setting of inequality; it follows from the domination of language.

However, they think that by protecting their language, they can make a strong protest against *Bangali* domination in the CHT. In the peace accord, under clause 33 (b), it was written that primary education should be conducted in the mother tongue; however, the government did not take any initiative to promote this. However, some NGOs like the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) initiated pre-primary schooling in some of the indigenous languages. But in an analysis of this programme by BRAC, it can be seen that the initiatives were confined to the translation of *Bangali* poems and rhymes for the children rather than using poems and rhymes written in the languages of the indigenous groups living in the CHT. But

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<sup>104</sup>In Bangladesh, all sixty four districts have their own dialect.



one of my Marma respondents, Youngruang Marma (47) from a lower middle class socio-economic background opened a school in the Jojekchariin where teaching was done in the Marma language. She told me that some of the Marma students left her school because they wanted to be taught in the *Bangali* language. She told me that she was educated in the Marma language in *Kayang*, which led her to establish a pre-primary school in the Marma language.

While I was talking to Youngruang in the yard back of her school, a Chakma boy named Barun sat next to me. He joined in the discussion by sharing his own experience. He said that he had dropped out twice from the school. The first time it was a misunderstanding between him and the class teacher. He told me that in the Chakma language there is no division between the three distinct *Bangali* referential terms of address, 'tui', 'tumi' and 'apni'. The Chakma language has only one way of addressing a person, and that is 'tui'. When Barun was eight years old, he addressed his class teacher as 'tui'. But his class teacher was *Bangali* and could not accept that his student addressed him as 'tui' and beat him badly and for this reason he dropped out of the school.

While going to the Jojekchari by motor cycle with a friend, we stopped at a tea stall near the village we were heading to. The tea stall was under an old banyan tree. There are many small tea stalls on the road about every 5 km, most of them owned by people from different indigenous communities. In the shop, there were some people who were gossiping in the Marma language. They asked me in *Bangali* who I was and what was I doing there. I replied in the Marma language and they again asked me how long I had been there given that I had actually managed to learn their language. It was interesting to observe that the *Karbary* of that area, Mong Thoi Prue, who was in the tea stall, was praising *Bangali* Muslims while the others were laughing and told me that he was trying to make me happy as I was a *Bangali* woman and I looked like an outsider in the CHT. They said that he was not telling the truth. Mong Thoi Prue is a man of 37 years<sup>105</sup>. Besides carrying out the duties of traditional leadership, he ploughs the land and *Jum* fields. He told me that he has a *Bangali* name because the military and the *Bangali* people could not pronounce his Marma name (and in general, most of the Marma names for that matter). His *Bangali* name was Modon. He also told me about his father and that his experience was common and had been happening for a long time. He said that his father's name was Jibon Chowdhury. When his father was admitted to the school, the teacher could not pronounce his name and called him Jibon. So, for the *Bangali* people, his father's

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<sup>105</sup>While *Karbary* is a position of traditional leadership in Chakma society, it continues through the generation of the family. There are very few women *Karbarys* in the CHT.

name was always Jibon Chowdhury. The people in the tea shop also told me that derogatory names which one community often used for another, such as Chakku for Chakma, Mogh for Marma and so on, were used as verbal abuse by security personnel on the streets. Scott (1990) said that when a commoner is addressing the sultan in Indonesia, he uses the term *hamba*, which translates roughly as ‘your slave’, and he was traditionally positioned before the throne in a posture of wretched humility. Every encounter that brings together people of different status in such societies is designed to underline and support those differences by rules of language, sign, tone, and dress.

Naming can be considered a form of violence (Dawes, 1991). Among post-structuralist theorists this is an essential and commonly raised critical maxim. The act of naming can be a matter of forcibly impressing a sign upon a person or object with which it has only the most random of relationships. Names create an ‘other’, establish hierarchies, enable surveillance, and establish violent binaries: naming is a strategy that one installs in power relations. The violence incises all levels, from the practically political (“They are savages”, “You are queer”) to the ontological (one detractor writes of “the irreducibility of violence in any mark”). Discussing the naming practices of Nambikwara children in *Of Grammatology*, Jacques Derrida (1997) identifies naming as an act of “originary violence” that is productive of both the disciplinary violence of the law and the cognate violence of its infractions: “war, indiscretion, rape”. Naming is authority’s attempt to classify and control disparity. For Derrida as for others, this is at the heart of post-structuralist logic.

On the contrary, by using the establishment language they can avoid so many unpleasant situations caused by the army and others. They communicate with themselves in their own language that the army cannot understand. And sometimes they pretend that they do not understand *Bangla* especially when they are asked to do something which they really do not want to do. Subal Chakma (52) from a middle socio-economic background and a male UP member said,

*It was a terrible incident that I cannot forget. This happened before we went to India in 1986. This incident happened just 1 month before the Khagrachari incident where a series of massacres took place in the various areas in the CHT. We left the houses when we came to know that the military was coming. However, they had some people who worked as an informer and most of the time they worked by acting a beggar or van puller. Outsiders could not recognize them. Mostly they were associated with the SB. They used some code language and we could understand the meaning of them. One day my mother was alone in the house. At midnight the military came to our house and*

*called us by our names. My mother opened the door and asked something in the Chakma language. The military asked about us, my mother could understand that but she kept on talking in her own language. Then the military shouted at my mother as they could not understand what she was saying. And after twenty minutes the military finally gave up and left.*

This statement gives me an idea of how language can act as a form of protest or tackle the situation. Language is used as a tool of domination, just as it is used as a weapon of resistance. Graves (1998) states that language happens with a political grammar of social oppression and social resistance. Scott (1990) refers to the process by which Aesopian language may offer a means of direct vituperation, which is very much like the process by which everyday forms of struggle give way to overt, collective insolence.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has argued that visible and invisible violence inflicted by the army and *Bangali* settlers has created an ecology of fear leading to distrust and suspicion in the CHT in Bangladesh. I have contested the government's population census by the testimony of the violence inflicted on indigenous women. In addition, the chapter has discussed the changing forms of relationship in the community after the violence, and how state forces play a role in changing the relationship. The chapter also states that colour itself symbolizes power when it is used by powerful agents of the state.

The self-surveillance of women in the CHT is analysed in this chapter through the lenses of Foucault's theory, where self-control and being silent were used to avoid further violence. The forms of semantic domination are discussed and the chapter argues that language works simultaneously as a grammar of domination and resistance. The atmosphere of violence and the sense of self-surveillance leads us to the group/friends-traitor relationship in and between the communities that I will discuss in the next chapter.

## Chapter Six

### Apnar cheye por bhalo ('Other' is better than 'we' or 'my own'): Friends and Traitors

#### Introduction

*16 December 2013, 11:58 am*

*Shopkeeper: Didi, (a term used by Bangladeshi men and women to address women who are strangers. Literal meaning, sister) are you Hindu or Barua? (Barua is a common last name among Buddhists and a lot of people use this term to mean Buddhists)*

*Me: Why do you ask that?*

*Shopkeeper: Because of the red 'tip' you are wearing.*

*Me: Any woman can wear it.*

*Shopkeeper: Muslim women usually do not put on red. Also, I have heard that you have been staying in Banshi Lal Chakma's house.*

*Me: Yes.*

*Shopkeeper: See, I am right! I knew your religion from the very beginning.*

*Me: How?*

*Shopkeeper: It is difficult for a Muslim to stay in a Chakma house for a long time as they eat pork and other non-halal things. Banshi Lal was good to us though. Anyways, if you feel any problem just call me. We are always here, you are our Bangali sister.....*

*[Fieldwork diary, 16 December 2013, 11:58 am, Shisirpur, Dighinala]*

This is part of a conversation I had with a shopkeeper on 16 December 2013. On the surface the conversation is between a shopkeeper and a new person in town who is being initiated into the new neighbourhood. Underlying the conversation are layered complexities, showing the way ethnic identity and religion play to determine the 'us' or the 'other'. Apparently my facial features, language and accent suggest I am among the 'us' that encompasses the world of the shopkeeper, a *Bangali* settler himself. Yet, a simple adornment like a '*tip*' or the fact that I was staying in the house of someone who is 'other' brings my identity into question. Am I among his 'us', or am I of the 'other'? If I am of his own why would I wear a '*tip*' that is almost exclusively worn by Hindu or Barua women in the CHT? If I am of his own why would I stay in a Chakma house that might not be safe or welcoming to a *Bangali*? The conclusion he comes to is that I surely must share some kind of commonality with my host family, which he assumes is my religion. However, he does not dismiss the sense of me being part of his 'us' and gives me his phone number to call him if I am in any trouble with the 'other'.

The conversation sheds light on the prejudice that *Bangali* Muslim settlers hold against indigenous people in the CHT, allowing us to understand better how ethnic and religious supremacy work together to shape the image of indigenous' people. However, not all of my fellow *Bangalis* treated or looked at me with the same sense of oneness.

One evening, when I was out walking, someone flashed a torchlight on my face, momentarily blinding me. I stopped walking for a moment and returned home when the *Bangali* person walked away. The following day, in the shop where I had the conversation quoted above, I heard a man talking about me. As I took my seat, he stopped talking. Instead, the owner of the shop asked me again why I was staying in a Chakma house in spite of the availability of so many *Bangali* houses. The Chakma could easily harm me, he warned. He also said that if I wanted I could stay at his house. Then the other man, who was talking about me earlier, said that he had seen me in the street and informed me that he was working for the military as an agent. If I needed any help, I should call him. He added that he had taken photos of me the previous night and had already gathered some information about me as he had developed connections with some *Pahari* people doing this spying job. And he further added that the *Pahari* people were not as simple as I thought them to be. They did not like the *Bangali* people. They harboured vengeful thoughts against the *Bangali* people. It was better not to trust them. The fact that I was a *Bangali* outsider coming to live in a Chakma house, albeit temporarily, instead of a *Bangali* house, made my activities suspicious. Interestingly, the man who worked with the army depended for information on the same group of people that he did not trust. Seeing one of his own staying with the 'other' made her a person of interest. Am I like his respondents who betray their own by providing key information? Or, am I just a simple outsider who does not know better than to live with the 'other'?

These two incidents suggest that the situation of the CHT cannot solely be addressed through the lens of '*Bangali-Pahari*' discourses. These contested relationships contribute to a dynamics of politics of the CHT that the CHT researchers (Mohsin, 1999; Guhathakurta, 2003; and Adnan, 2007) mostly overlook in their discourse of '*Bangali-Pahari*'. Therefore, this chapter identifies the different types of *Bangali* individuals and how they are perceived by various *Pahari* populations, how socio-economic position, political power and historical conditions cause tensions among the indigenous communities and outside of them, how even the relationships bound in love and intimacy become signs of betrayal among the same group of people or those outside their realm and how these changes have irrevocably altered the stereotypical images of friends and traitors.

The first section will deal with the internal groupings among the *Bangali* groups and the indigenous political groups and how friends and enemies are determined by alliances that may not have anything to do with the 'assigned' group of the people involved. The second section will investigate the role of the army and how it shapes and un-shapes the *Bangali-Pahari* narrative. The final section will show how power plays and unusual alliances in the CHT have changed the way people perceive their friends and enemies.

The indigenous people in the CHT categorise the *Bangali* people in three types: *Adi Bangalis*, who are *Bangalis* who have been living in the CHT since the British period; *Settler Bangalis*, who had been brought to the CHT as part of the Government's 'Development Programme' started in 1979; and *Other Bangalis*, who migrated to the CHT because of their job, business or religious work. Since the *Adi Bangali* people have been living side by side with the indigenous people for as long as they can remember there is not much animosity towards or from them. However, this attitude changes if there are any specific clashes between individuals. Among the three groups, the most unwanted or disliked are the *Settler Bangalis* as they were the ones who came and invaded the land and life of the indigenous people. They were the ones who took over the lands and businesses not by their own right but by the might and mercy of the army. Not all indigenous groups can be categorized in a homogenous way as there exist multifaceted hierarchies that result from socio-economic conditions, positions of power and authority and even skin tone. This section will attempt to address each issue.

### **Contesting 'we' and 'they'**

I visited the Ministry of CHT Affairs in Dhaka to interview the then Minister Dipankar Talukdar (who is a Chakma). When I arrived I saw many *Bangali* individuals in his room who were talking to him about various projects for the *Bangali* people. I explained the objectives of my research and let him know why his interview was important to my thesis. He asked me why I was interested in the experiences of indigenous people. When he learned that I am an anthropologist, he asked me whether the term '*Khudro Nree Gosthi*' (small ethnic groups) was better than '*adibasi*'. He had taken the government position of preferring the term '*Khudro Nree Gosti*'. He started the interview by blaming the leaders of JSS and UPDF for not implementing the peace accord. He said to me suddenly that he always preferred to give more opportunities to the *Bangali* people as in his experience *Bangali* people were better than indigenous people. I asked him what made him come to this opinion. He said his career started with JSS politics when he was a college student and that he was in the underground for a long time. He saw many things close-up. He informed me that JSS was divided in the early eighties

and that M.N. Larma was murdered by a Priti group. He said to me, “*Our people killed our leaders, same as Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was killed by the Bangali people*”.

He said:

*Do you want me to believe that Wadud Bhuiyan<sup>106</sup> won only with the Bangali vote? No. Our people supported him as well. You may think that all indigenous people would vote for me, but this is not the reality. You cannot measure the intimacy of the relationship by observing their attitude. It is very difficult to know people’s minds, especially in the political field. See, Raja Devasish Roy can stand for the recognition of the ‘adibasi’ now, but when he was the adviser to the military-backed caretaker government, he supported the government’s position on the CHT. I can show you the letter issued by him. So you cannot be sure of who favours you. I think you have heard about Mukhosh Bahini<sup>107</sup> [who was] made by the army to work against the JSS and you also know of the conflict between the UPDF and JSS and the recently formed reformist groupings of each party. You have to understand that people who betray their own people are more dangerous than known enemies as they know so many internal things about the group and the society. And you know that from history, there must be the character of the ‘Dulo Dhajye’ (Traitor). In our history of struggle, some of our own people had always been working on behalf of the enemy. If not, how did the military catch members of the Shanti Bahini? They collected the news from ‘our people’. So some people are always double faced. You may know the Bangali proverb, “Apnar cheye por bhalo”.*

[Interview: Dipankar Talukdar, 18 December 2013, at Ministry of CHT Affairs]

This extract from my discussion with Dipankar is very important in the analysis of the contested relationships in the CHT. The proverb he uses here indicates that he found some *Bangali* people were helpful to him, which was something he expected from his own ethnic group especially in regards to his election and political interests. This is not the only case in which an indigenous leader who became part of the government with the help of his own people, ended up siding with the government and voicing its views. The actual people we think we know the best and

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<sup>106</sup>Wadud Bhuiyan was the Member of Parliament, and the Chairman of CHTDB, in the BNP-led government (2001-2006). He was the president of BNP in Khagrachari district

<sup>107</sup>When every attempt to suppress the PCP failed, the military picked up anti-social and criminal elements among the *Jumma* youth and formed a terrorist organisation styled *Pahari Chattra Parishad*, *Pahari Gano Parishad-er Santras Pratirodh Committee* or PPSPC (Committee for resisting terrorism by the Hill Students Council and Hill Peoples Council). It was popularly known as Mukhosh Bahini or masked force, since its members would take part in military-sponsored processions with their faces covered. The Mukhosh Bahini lasted from September 1995 to December 1996 and in the face of popular resistance, the military finally had to decommission it.

with whom we share the most can cause the highest impairment and may surprisingly turn to enemies.

In the context of the CHT, power relations work as a factor of continuously changing forms of relationship. Dipankar's observations about the JSS and UPDF show that to become the voice of the CHT he was actively involved with local politics and benefitted from the demography of the CHT. However, once he gained the power to which he aspired, his attitude towards his own people changed. This may be because when he reached a government position he became an object of jealousy from his own people, or it may have resulted from his interest in impressing his new peers by supporting their positions rather than his own. It may be argued that when a member of a minority becomes involved in power politics, she/he turns herself/himself into a major leader while denying her/his community's position<sup>108</sup>. It is also the case in Bangladesh that anyone can be chosen as a spokesperson of the respective political party (who belongs to either a religious minority or indigenous groups) when something happens.

Different power relations within indigenous parties also shape relationships especially in underground political groups such as JSS. If anyone betrays the group or forms an internal faction, they are treated as very harmful to the party. As Thiranagama says (2009:127) "*the traitor is more dishonourable than the enemy*", referring to LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran's announcement in his annual Heroes Day speech. Das (1998b) argues that the anxiety of violence can lead to a "withdrawal of trust" from even the most commonplace and seemingly ordinary practice (quoted in Thiranagama, 2009:16). Klein (1967) says that intimate relationships craft vulnerability and much anxiety as well as friendship and support.

Interestingly, the word '*por*' (not us/they) works differently in his statement ("*Apnar cheye por bhalo*"), contesting the interpretation that comes with the concept of 'orientalism' in which Said (1978) constructs the victorious relationship of 'we' and 'they'. This statement is itself a challenge to this dichotomy in that it argues that there is no static form of 'we' and 'they'. These may contest each other at any time and their character changes. The actual people we think we know the best and with whom we share the most can cause the highest impairment and may surprisingly turn out to be enemies

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<sup>108</sup>A similar thing was observed when Hindu religious minority people were tortured by the BNP and Jaamat-e-Islami in parts of Bangladesh. Goyeshwar Roy, Minister of Youth Development (2001-2006) in Khaleda Zia's cabinet, stated that nothing had happened while the State Minister in the same cabinet admitted that in some places scattered things were happening.



During the Ershad regime (1982-1990), the military used some of the members of a small (in number) indigenous community as agents by bribing them with money and convincing them that they were also being oppressed by the Chakma people. This is a classic example of 'divide and rule'. They were used to collect information about Shanti Bahini and pass it on to the military. Furthermore, among the groups, the Marma and the Tripura (the second largest group in the CHT) also criticized Chakma domination in the movement and the existing quota system in employment and education in Bangladesh. Although in the civil service in Bangladesh, there is a 10% quota reserved for the '*Upajati*', most of the quota is filled by Chakma people. On top of that, the rate of education in Chakma society is comparatively higher than other communities whereas most small communities such as the Khumi, Lusai, Kheyang and Murung are denied these opportunities.<sup>109</sup> The military singled these out and used them against the movement led by JSS. One of my friends who is currently a civil servant became involved in JSS politics and admitted that some members of JSS, UPDF and the reformist groups of JSS and UPDF had good relationships with the army.

It may appear that these are new phenomena in the CHT, but in fact the contested relationship was and is the reality of the CHT which shapes the politics and lives of CHT people. On my return to Bangladesh after the completion of my MA from Hiroshima University, Japan, I found there were many groupings and underhand connections between the two groups (JSS and UPDF). One of my close friends, who was a top leader of UPDF, turned his back on UPDF and became affiliated with JSS. As a result, UPDF leaders stopped talking to me because I was his friend and he frequently visited me. He also told me that UPDF wanted to kill him as he knows so many secrets about them. He told me that it is the norm in guerrilla formations that if someone betrays their party they kill him or her for the safety of the group. He was also forced to hide on some occasions. I have heard that they (who resigned from either JSS or UPDF) could not go to some places in the CHT especially if they were controlled by either JSS or UPDF. However both of these parties started collecting a levy from the businessmen of the areas controlled by them, and they have started using arms against each other. Fifty of my friends from both groups have died due to this conflict.

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<sup>109</sup>Chakma is the majority ethnic group among the indigenous people in the CHT. They have a history of being more educated than other indigenous people in the CHT, and had the first elected representative in the first parliament after Bangladesh was liberated. They organized the movement for recognition of their identity in the constitution and formed the armed wing Shanti Bahini. Because of the resulting power they have attained they don't treat other communities in the CHT as equals.

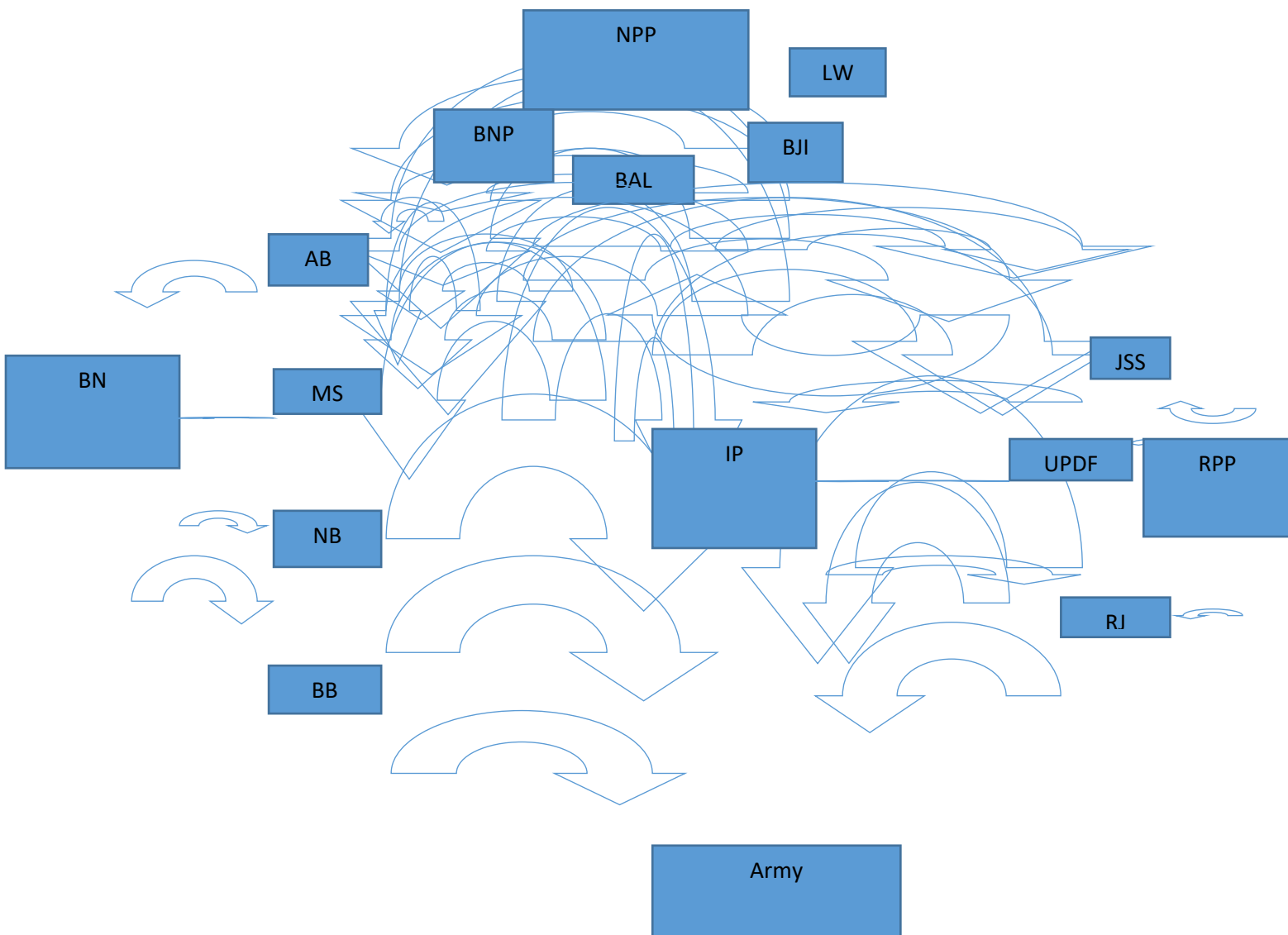


Photo 9: A mapping of the contested relationships among different agents in the CHT

During my field work, I found that all groups are related to each other to some point. Based on kinship, nationalism, religious affiliation, locality, political ideology, the exercise of power and other issues are linked with the negotiating relationship to each groups. Though the relationship between the agents in the CHT changes according to context and becomes the reality of everyday life, the state itself contributes to shaping the opinions of the people to each of these groups.

### **Role of Army and Complicity**

As I mentioned in the earlier chapter, the army's presence is the unavoidable reality in the CHT. While talking to me, Zanoki had to answer a phone call. Once finished she informed me that a major in the army had called her and asked her to look after a friend's land. It is

interesting that Zanoki was prepared to assist a member of the same army that caused so much suffering in her life. She did this because being connected to the Army meant safety from other threats in the CHT. No matter how much animosity she felt from her neighbours or other groups no one would dare to cause any harm to her because of the army connection. As long as she continued to do such favours for members of the army she knew she would be protected, at least to some extent. I found a photograph of a person wearing military dress hanging on the wall of Zanoki's house. She told me that she believed that that photo saved her from any further attack because having a photo like that meant a connection with the army, which other people either coveted or were afraid of. Green (1994: 234) argues that she met several women in her field in Guatemala whose sons had been in the military when their husbands were killed by the army. She interviewed a widow who explained the particularly horrific death of her husband at the hands of the army, while behind her on the wall notably exhibited was a photograph of her son in his Kaibil uniform. When she was asked about the man, she acknowledged his irregular attendance in her house but said nothing more. Conceivably she sensed her son's photograph might endow her with protection in the future.

I suddenly remembered that she had talked about a garden. I noticed a garden of plums but there was no housing nearby. I asked my friend Juni Chakma why nobody was there. He said that the garden belonged to someone who never lived in that area and I found out that the owner of the garden was a very well-known *Bangali* intellectual working in the educational sector. The army was taking care of his garden and they frequently went there to look after it. That's why everybody left the area. Before the plum garden was planted, some Tripura families used to live there. Juni explained to me that there were many ex-army personnel, journalists, educationists, artists, government bureaucrats and human rights activists who had bought lands in the CHT, though according to the CHT Manual, non-residents cannot buy land in the CHT. The owners live in Dhaka and in most cases are unknown to indigenous people. In their absence, their representatives, mostly military persons or powerful *Bangali* people, looked after the land. For this reason, the local indigenous people left the area and settled with their own community to feel secure.

I heard that all groups (including national and regional parties) have connections with military. Anjan Chakma, a respondent from Shivalong, who is a *Jum* cultivator of a lower middle socio-economic status, mentioned that Santu Larma had once demanded the withdrawal of all military camps but now he too was talking in favour of the military because he needed military support for his security. Three groups are currently in armed politics and they all had connections with the army. Sudasindhu Khisa also admitted it but in a different way. He said

that though they had good relations with military personnel it was not for the purposes of any deal.

### **Enemy within and between**

The existing conflict between JSS, UPDF and the reformist groups of both parties has been treated as *Bhatre Sanghat* (brother against brother) by many academics and activists writing on or working in the CHT (Mohaimen, 2010; Hossain, 2001; Mamun, 1999; Chakraborty, 2007). This was evident when I visited my friend Liton Dewan soon after the murder of a JSS worker by the reformist group of JSS in December, 2012. Liton was a worker for JSS and had joined the reformist group a few months before. He was also a secretary for the Returnee Refugee Welfare Samiti, in its Dighinala branch. I went to his house at around 7 pm. When I knocked on the door, nobody opened it. I could hear sounds coming from inside the house. After fifteen minutes, an older person opened the door and asked me who I was. I asked to meet Liton Dewan. Then Liton came out and explained that they did not open the door at that time because people might come in and shoot them. Then he mentioned his joining the BNP in order to save his life. He said that among the regional political parties, the conflict had escalated, so he needed the support of the second largest national political party for his safety. He told me that now they fought about many things. Previously, it was just against the military and *Bangali* settlers. Now they fought against their own people. It was his opinion that the government of Bangladesh had benefitted from this conflict among the indigenous people in the CHT.

During my field visit, in the middle of March 2013, a Marma girl was raped by a *Bangali* settler in Marissya, another upazila of Khagrachari. The Women's Network<sup>110</sup>, Mahila Sangho and UPDF supported the Hill Women's Federation in organizing a half day strike as a protest at this incident. Shamefully, JSS did not support them because the family of the raped girl supported UPDF. Even Santu Larma, the chairman of the regional council, said in an interview that either he would live, or UPDF, but not both. Now, the main objective of the JSS is to get rid of the UPDF from the CHT. In the interview Santu Larma admitted that nearly 50,000 people from both sides had been killed during the previous 16 years, though he could not provide an accurate figure. He also admitted that he needed administrative security (i.e. police or the RAB) to protect himself (interview with Santu Larma, 27 March 2013, at Rangamati).

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<sup>110</sup>An organisation newly founded by the UPDF.

However, in 2007 when the military-backed government came to power for two years, they tried to initiate reformation among the political parties. The reformation group of the JSS emerged with the leadership of Sudha Sindhu Khisa and they created a different sub group called JSS (M.N. Larma). However, from the beginning of JSS there had been many groupings and divisions. In Sudha Sindhu Khisa's interview he criticized the authoritarian leadership of Shantu Larma and his power in the JSS. He complained that Shantu Larma showed nepotism by assigning a lot of his relatives to various important posts following the culture of *Bangali* political parties where kinship is given priority over eligibility. This led Sudha Sundhu Khisa to leave the party and form the new groups.

After interviewing Sudha Sindhu Khisa I was rushing to return to field areas as it was becoming dark. The people in the field area asked me not to be late as it is not safe to be outside in the dark. So I caught a *Chander Gari* (a local version of a taxi which holds 10-12 people) towards Kurkitola. I had a seat next to an old Marma woman who had her head partially covered by a towel and was carrying a big basket full of vegetables. I started chatting with her in the Marma language, asking her where she was heading. She replied that she was going to her relative's house, as she was frightened to return to her home because she had heard of an incident taking place between JSS and the UPDF in the *para* (area) where she lived. I introduced myself to her in Marma and we continued our conversation. Her name was Thabuiching (72), a *Jum* cultivator from a lower socio economic status. She told me:

*No one is good, neither JSS nor UPDF; we are frightened of both of them. Before the peace accord, we were frightened of the army, Bangalis and Shanti Bahini as well. We helped them when we were asked to but it does not mean that we support them or we like them. We know all groups have arms. What else can we do? We have to save ourselves first.* [Thabuiching Marma, 17 April 2013 at Chander Gari, 5:47 pm]

We continued our conversation until I got off at my destination. I observed her face, which showed that she was getting clearly annoyed while talking. It was clearly understood that her help to SB or UPDF was not voluntary or support-based. This suggests that people's help to one other cannot always be treated as support for the organization or group for whom they provide such help. Baumann (1991) states that modern states are characterized by a relentless ordering and re-ordering, based on distinctions between "us friends" and "those enemies" who are not "us."

Examining *Bangali* people in the CHT, the same question may arise: are all *Bangali* people in the CHT living within the 'friends' camp? Do the *Bangali* people living in other parts of Bangladesh agree on CHT issues? The answer will be 'no' in this case as well. We can

therefore observe how the peace accord has created a division between the *Bangali* people in the CHT and the rest of the country.

However, after the accord, my friends from the CHT divided themselves between the two camps. When I started my MSS dissertation on State, nationalism and resistance, I stayed at the house of a friend in Khagrachari. That was mid-May, 1998. My friend supported UPDF and was elected the secretary of the HWF (UPDF). We have been very close friends since we were at university together. However, another friend from Bandarban, with whom we have had a very close family friendship for a long time, got very angry and called my family to say that I was working against him as I was still friends with his enemy. During that visit I heard the phrase '2 number' for the first time. It is a phrase used by opposing sides to address each other and means fraudulent. At the time, some parts of Khagrachari were controlled by JSS and some by the UPDF. My friend could not go everywhere with me as she was targeted by the JSS-supported PCP (*Pahari* Chatra Parishad). The PCP was also divided into two opposing groups, the JSS-supported PCP and the UPDF-supported PCP. I found her very tense while moving around and she refused to go to certain places with me. Some of my friends stopped talking to me since, due to this friendship, they labelled me as a supporter of UPDF. I found myself in a fix.

Others at the time were also divided in favour of or against the peace accord. After the accord, it is said that some leftist groups (especially Lekhok Shibir, the Writers Forum) containing *Bangali* people patronised the UPDF. However, before the peace accord was signed, the military invited most of the intellectuals to a meeting. After the event, some of the intellectuals wrote articles in favour of the peace accord before it was signed. However, the two groups (JSS and UPDF) also labelled the members of civil society as being in favour of one group or the other based on their relationships with the leaders of each group. *Bangali* people living in the CHT cannot be treated as a homogenous group for several reasons, but on some issues they might march together.

### **CHT, Government Perspectives and the Dynamics of Relationship**

Faisal Mahmud, my batch mate in the university was appointed as an *Upazila Nirbahi Officer* (UNO) (Thana, an administrative position) of Dighinala Uapazila at the time of my field work. I was not aware of it until one day he called me and said that he came to know I was in his area and we should meet each other. He expressed sadness as to why I did not let him know about my staying over there. He further said that had he known, he would have set up my field as he had the highest administrative position there. I told this to Monimala and she

told me that most of the *Bangali* officers sent to the CHT were anti-indigenous people and had a bad record in their professional careers. However my friend was a bit different, as he maintained a good relationship with the indigenous people. Furthermore, she told me in a very low voice that she heard from others that my friend had been transferred there as an ‘immediate transfer’<sup>111</sup> and forbade me to tell this to my friend. My friend also confirmed Monimala’s account. He said to me:

*It is true, I am enjoying here, but I feel very bad when Bangali people ask me what I did wrong in my previous posting. Everybody knows posting to any district in the CHT means a punishment transfer, and it is interpreted as if I did something wrong or a criminal offence, the only possible cause of transfer to the CHT. My family tells me that they have to answer so many questions when others come to know that I have been posted here. So it is an embarrassing situation for me. You know Kohinoor, the most notorious police officer who had been posted here. When the Awami League government came to power he was transferred to Rangamati. As a result, everybody teases me and asks me what I had done previously. It was for me that I was sent to Andaman .Even the ‘Upajatis’ also tease me in a way by saying that they have to live with all bad Bangali people. Since they also know that the government dumps all the ‘bad’ people here, they never miss a chance to tease me. Even the low level employers also say these things.*

This shows us the perspectives of the government of Bangladesh about CHT as it is treated as ‘dumping zone’ or ‘punishment zone’ for civil servants. This indicates that the CHT is such a bad region where the civil servants feel they are being punished. By Andaman, the speaker refers to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the Indian Ocean which provided as a penal colony for the British where they jailed various anti-colonial leaders during the struggle for India's independence. The islands are also referred to as *Kala Pani* (copied from Sanskrit words ‘*Kal*’ which means time or death and ‘*Pani*’ which means water), consequently it is assumed that transferring a civil officer to the CHT would be a death sentence for him or her. Previously it was told that malaria and ‘*Kala jor*’ (Hill fever) are very dangerous for the human body and as the CHT is a jungle area, it must be full of mosquitoes that carry the germ of malaria. The government still treats the CHT as a ‘dangerous and insecure zone’. This also highlights how the people who have been sent to the CHT are treated by the government and the Bangali

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<sup>111</sup>Indicates the nature of the offence someone committed. If the offence is very severe, he or she has to be transferred immediately as part of punishment and it must be in the ‘remote’ area.

people in the CHT. Recently, a protest was made when Kongjuri Marma, the chairman of HDCs in Khagrachari, refused to accept Sadek Ibn Shams joining the administration as he was transferred to Khagrachari as a punishment for his involvement in corruption in the agricultural department. Kongjuri Chowdhury stated that “Khagrachari is a place for good people, why are we always given bad administrators?”<sup>112</sup> In addition to this, Health Minister Mohammad Nasim threatened doctors who smoke by stating they will either be terminated or be sent to Bandarban as a punishment<sup>113</sup>.

The *Bangali* people in the CHT do not belong in the same group in terms of their socio economic position, settlement history and political background. *Bangali* people in the CHT are divided into various political camps such as the Bangladesh Awami League (BAL), Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (BJI) and the Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dol (BSD). They have their student and youth organisations such as *Bangali* Chatra Parishad and *Bangali* Jubo Parishad. As I have already said, the BNP and BJI oppose the peace accord whereas the BAL is in favour of it. When I went to the house of the president of BAL in Khagrachari branch on 2nd February, 2013, he blamed the BNP for many of the incidents that happened in Khagrachari. He informed me that so many indigenous leaders had recently joined the Awami league and that the current MP of Khagrachari district, who is from the Tripura community, has been elected from the Awami League. I have seen many posters from the Bangladesh JMI and the BNP on the bamboo wall of the street shop where I went frequently to buy my groceries. Campaign posters were also seen on bamboo or terraced houses in my field areas, especially in Shishirpur. During my fieldwork, in all fields, I found that people were discussing potential *Bangali* and indigenous candidates for the upcoming election. In studying the positions involved it is useful to keep in mind that *Bangali* people do not all belong to the same political groups and that indigenous people are likely to align with national as much as with local politics.

There are many dynamics to explore in the relationships that emerge in these contexts. I started this chapter with the dialogue of a shopkeeper. Every evening I went there to talk to some *Bangalis* and indigenous people. There was a local *bazaar* at the back of the shop where indigenous women and *Bangali* men were selling vegetables and fish. One day, I was visiting the *bazaar* and after buying some dried fish for my host family I was waiting for my change. The woman who sold me the fish did not have enough change, so she asked a *Bangali* seller to

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<sup>112</sup>The *Daily Prothom Alo*, 21 April, 2016.

<sup>113</sup><http://bangla.thereport24.com/article/158035/> 31 May, 2016.



give her some cash. The man did so and told her, “*I always helped you, but you people never liked us*”. In the same incident, Khabkung Moghini (39), an indigenous lady of middle socio-economic status who sold the vegetables from her *Jum* field, said:

*It is very difficult to trust the Bangali people though sometimes they show their good faces to us. You can find the Bangali people support different political groups (Awami/BNP), but they always stand under the same umbrella if anything happens between the Bangali and Pahari in the CHT. You cannot judge by observing them from outside.*

Most of the Buddhist *Bangali* people in the CHT introduce themselves as ‘Barua’ rather than *Bangali*. When I stayed in the Doshbol Bihar, I would spend some time in the shop near the Bihar, especially in the morning. The customers were mostly from the nearby brick field. They shared many things with me. Abul Kashem (73), a day labourer from a lower socio-economic background, said:

*I want to return to my district Noakhali. I have been here for more than 30 years. I am still a day labourer, whereas many people who came here with me are rich now. Everything depends on power, do you understand? If you have a relationship with MPs, Police or Military, your future is bright. Look at the Barua people, they have everybody on their side. Chakma people never want to hit them, they are from the same religion. The military never disturbs them as they have good relations. On the contrary here we are, frightened of the Bangali Mahajan as well. Do not think that he favours us because we are Bangali. In fact, we are unlucky as we are always in trouble.*

There are also class issues among the settler *Bangalis*. Not all settler *Bangalis* are equally powerful. Some of them have been working for wealthy indigenous families. They are being used in election campaigning but they have not been given appropriate jobs. They want to get back to their own places as they think that they are victimized more widely in the CHT than they were. They had to borrow money from the *Mahajan*<sup>114</sup> but sometimes were not able to repay it on time and their remaining assets (homestead or other belongings) were taken away by the *Mahajan* or his people. Sometimes they worked for the interests of indigenous people to the extent that the *Bangali* leaders or other wealthy people did not like them and treated them as agents of indigenous people. I wish to explore the context in which they march together in spite of their political differences and when they split and form new alliances or go their

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<sup>114</sup>*Mahajan* works like a pawn broker who lends money at high interest. Sometimes, interest includes physical labour.

separate ways. Kelly (2009) points out that antagonism can be ingrained in a frightening mutual acknowledgment. It is not just the unknown that produces anxiety but the known. Far from understanding and knowledge creating a sense of warm familiarity, these can also lead to their own type of fear. People can simply know too much about each other and what they are capable of, precisely because they face the same predicaments and burdens. *Hindu Bangali* is the minority among the *Bangali* people living in the CHT. Most of them were settled there before the partition and have more close relation with the Tripura people due to their same religious belief.

The above discussion argues that there are different types of friendship and antagonistic relationships among the indigenous groups and *Bangali* groups based on political party, religion, socio-economic status and personal material interest. It challenges the perception that the identities of *Bangali* and indigenous people in the CHT are homogenous. Due to political ties or opposition, there are divisions among the indigenous communities in the CHT in terms of colour, religion, sense of superiority or inferiority and majority in the politics of the minority. The skin colour of the Marma is comparatively darker than that of the Chakma people, who often tease the Marma people about this and treat them as an inferior race. I was in Mogh village for some days talking to the Marma villagers regarding many issues they are facing from the Chakma people. One day, a two year old baby was crying in front of the house of my respondent, Kabiung Mogini (42), who works as a day labourer in an agricultural field owned by a *Bangali*. Kabiung brought the baby to me and asked whether I could recognise him as Chakma or Marma. Then she said that the boy was her Chakma friend's baby. Her friend always teased the boy saying he looked like a Marma as he had darker skin and asked him to go to her. She also told me, "*If someone's skin tone is a bit darker in a Chakma family they often tease him or her as Marma*". Interestingly, the Santal in the Khagrachari district get less attention by others including the government, NGOs and even in the regional politics in the CHT. My Santal respondent said to me that they are not even treated as '*adibasi*' there by the other indigenous races because of racial differences.

Marriage between the communities is rarely welcomed. My friend, Provati Tripura, is a primary school teacher at whose place I used to stay during the period of my third field work. She was married to one of my *Bangali* journalist friends. Her house is located in the Khagrachari main town. I wanted to hold an interview with a person at her house, but I was told that she had gone to Khagrachari Sadar to visit her relatives. So I went to her relatives' house following our telephone conversation. After the interview, they asked me where I was staying. I told them and then they informed me that Provati was married to a Chakma boy, but

the bridegroom's family never accepted her as she was from a Tripura family. They added that the Tripura follow the Hindu religion and some of them in Khagrachari had converted to Christianity. One of them said to me: *"If they change their religion, they can do so many things, but no Chakma has ever converted, neither will they. You can understand people's commitment by observing their life and belief"*. But after some minutes of silence she added, *"Mixed marriages among the indigenous communities are often accepted, if the family has very high status, they do not care what anyone else thinks or says."*

Furthermore, the degree of education is higher in Chakma society than in the other indigenous communities since the Chakma Queen Kalindi Rani established many schools in the CHT in the early 19th century<sup>115</sup>. As a result, they hold most of the top positions in the government and elsewhere. However, the present MP and UP chairmen are from the Tripura community. When I was with a group of *Bhantes* in the Bihar, they said, *"It is not wise to select the two representatives from the same community, as they always try to recommend the jobs for the Tripura people. If the Awami league does the same they will not get the vote of the Chakmas."*

A new trend in the takeover of indigenous lands emerged in the period under discussion. Until then *Bangali* settlers or politically powerful *Bangalis* were responsible for taking over the land of indigenous people then setting up a mosque because people tended not to make a complaint against a religious establishment. When I was in the field, two similar incidents happened. Some powerful Chakma people took over some Tripura land and built a Buddhist temple there. One of my Marma respondents told me, *"Kula thaak Marma ru kohung mokong olosung bia* (Marma people also learnt so many bad things from the *Bangali* people).

There are so many cases which can challenge the homogeneity of indigenous society. This section provides sufficient data to argue that there are many factions existing among the indigenous societies and that hegemonic relationships are continuing. Hence, there are so many hierarchies within and between the groups living in the CHT.

### **Love with' enemies'**

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<sup>115</sup> Interestingly, Kalindi tried hard to gain rights for permanent settlement over all lands, to enable the indigenous authorities to collect taxes as proposed by the British, even as she continued the existing traditional capitation ('couple') tax, a kinship-based levy. She appealed to the Revenue Board, demanding her rights of permanent settlement, but this was refused in 1866. She was told that she only had the right to collect capitation tax, as the government was the sole proprietor of the land. She appealed to a higher authority but this also failed. Kalindi resisted British power through its own institutions throughout her rule. To claim her properties, she fought for 12 years in the courts and was the sole representative of all the properties of the late *Raja Dharam Bux Khan*.

It was quite interesting to me that people were saying so many things against each other, especially the neighbours. Among my field areas some had electricity, while others did not. In Shishirpur, only four families had electricity. Zanoki Chakma's house was one of them. Sometimes I went to her house to get my phone or laptop charged, however my host family and others cautioned me not to tell any secrets to her because she had good connections with powerful *Bangali* people and the army and that it was thanks to these connections that she got electricity in her house. They also informed me that one of her daughters had committed suicide some years before when her *Bangali* boyfriend refused to marry her. However, her other daughter got married to a soldier. It was not easy to deal with, especially in the context of the CHT. The JSS had a meeting with her family so many times about that relationship of her daughter with the military but, finally, her daughter eloped with the soldier and they settled in Chittagong. She had to face the problems of living with that afterwards. She faced so much teasing and social pressure. A significant point is that, although Zanoki enjoyed the benefits of being connected with influential *Bangali* families and the army, she was also treated as an outcast by her own people.

When I was talking to Zanoki Chakma at her home in Shishirpur, she informed me that Giti's father was her nephew, but she did not have a good relationship with him. The reason was tragic and sums up the life of so many indigenous people in the CHT. Zanoki, being the victim of displacement, became a refugee herself. Her sister and brother-in-law refused to go to the refugee camp, wishing to continue their lives in their own home. However, the brother-in-law was killed by some *Bangali* people and part of their land was taken by the *Bangali* settlers. After the peace accord Zanoki returned to her home only to find out that the Army had taken her land and had built a soap factory. Later the project was discontinued and Zanoki regained possession of her land and built a house there. Problems arose when her nephew came over and built a house which occupied a large portion of Zanoki's land. Her nephew justified the land grab on the grounds that he himself was a victim of land grabbing by influential *Bangali* people. This caused a rift in their personal relationship and among the members of her kin within the indigenous society. Displacement as a result of violence has ultimately had long-term effects on family and community relationships which can turn to be a relationship of 'enemies'. These data provide the evidence of relationships with the 'enemy' among the indigenous leaders and the indigenous people at different levels. Thirangamna (2011) argues that the anxiety of displaced people shapes their relations in families, between families and between castes. Anxiety about a house or land left behind also puts focus on the existing tension among the members of indigenous societies in terms of having relations with *Bangali* settlers

and the military. However, I found some families in my field areas whose relatives or family members had married *Bangali* settlers. One of the Tripura respondents, Saptorshi Tripura (61) from the Kurkitoli field, is a housewife from a mid-socio-economic background who told me that her daughter got married to a Muslim *Bangali* man from Mymensingh (a district located in the western part of Bangladesh). She further mentioned an existing proverb in Tripura society: “*If a tiger touches one, no one touches her anymore.*” So they accepted the marriage.

In an affair between a *Bangali* girl and an indigenous boy, or vice-versa, there is pressure to convert them to Islam if she/he wants to get married to them. Also, indigenous people sometimes accept the Bengali if they are Buddhist or Hindu (most of the indigenous people in the CHT are Buddhist; only the Tripura and the Santal are Hindu). However, some of them put restrictions on the girls. Bakul Chakma, the secretary of the Refugee Welfare Association and a worker for JSS told me that he would distribute his land equally among his daughters and sons though according to the Buddhist religion, women cannot be an heir. He would do that only if none of his daughters married a *Bangali* man. If any of them were to marry a *Bangali* he would not allow her in his house and he would not give her any land.

When I met Giti’s mother for the second time she started telling me that there was good news. I mentioned Iti’s rape case in earlier chapters. The rapist was going to be punished. She added that five *Bangali* people showed up in court as eye witnesses. She continued that some *Bangali* people had helped her a lot though the rapist himself was a *Bangali*. She again said that when she managed to catch the rapist, four *Bangali* people had helped her and had taken the girl to the hospital in the absence of her father who was the Chakma *Headman* of that area. An Imam (religious priest of Muslims) told the girl’s mother not to be worried since he also had a daughter like her and he persuaded her to file a case against the rapist. The Imam helped her to bring Iti to the hospital. He asked Iti’s mother to explain Iti’s condition so that he could understand the gravity of the situation. Iti’s mother felt shy but finally did as he asked. Then the Imam, with the help of two other *Bangali* men, took Iti to the hospital and explained her condition to the doctor. Iti’s mother also added that they were really nervous about filing the case against the rapist because they thought that there could be retaliation. But the Imam and the two other *Bangali* men insisted on her filing the case and they promised that they would be eye witnesses for her. The accomplices of the rapist sought help from locally powerful *Bangali* people, but thankfully they did not want to help a child assaulter. Then she went back to her house again and returned with some documents and asked me to have a look at them. She told me that when things happened between *Bangalis* and *Pahari* in other places, the *Bangali* people

tried to get revenge by setting fire to, beating or doing some other wrong to the *Pahari* girls. She said:

*Today you can find them very good but, you only know their original face when something happens. On the other hand, some Bangali people helped me this time and they went to court with me. There are some good people, I should say that.*

At times, I heard the same thing from Juni. Juni was a 27 year old boy who accompanied me in the field. After he returned from the refugee camp he did not go back to his old work in the military. Now he had a motor cycle, which he used as a part of a business. We talked while walking and Juni told me that the *Bangali* people there did not like seeing a *Bangali* girl with a Chakma boy. The chance of my being targeted for this by others was not unrealistic. It was also the same for the *Pahari* people if they saw any *Pahari* girl with a *Bangali* man. It would usually lead to regional political parties interfering over the matter. Having said that, friendship between *Bangali* and *Pahari* boys is not uncommon. Even in terms of political party affiliation, BAL or BNP, they support each other when it comes to a matter of nationalism.

Despite the strong racist feelings that usually exist between *Bangalis* and *Paharis*, love relationships between people of the separate groups are not uncommon. But the acceptance of such relationships by the indigenous group and *Bangali* people depends on class, status and the political and social position of both parties. Power games in the social structure play an important role in acceptance or refusal of the relationship.

It is not just this mindset and its representations that leads to opposition between the different groups. Khelaching Marma, a Marma male respondent (age 37), a *Jum* cultivator with low socio-economic status from the Shivalong field area, told me they could not even raise a hen or pig or ox in their previous area, let alone own a house or land. If such household livestock somehow entered the houses of the *Bangali* people or any of their gardens, they (the *Bangalis*) would start quarrelling, which might lead to greater conflict. In order to avoid conflict or violence, they preferred not to have hens or oxen or pigs. He added that *Bangali* Muslims hated pigs due to their religious beliefs<sup>116</sup>. Indeed, *Bangali* Muslim settlers sometimes raised the issue of rearing pigs and abused the indigenous people, verbally claiming that they were dirty and had foul breath because they ate pork.

Even the shopkeeper whose words are quoted at the beginning of this chapter always warned me by saying that the Chakmas were very dangerous. They could kill anyone anytime.

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<sup>116</sup>In the Islamic religious faith, pork is prohibited. People who rear pigs are seen as the enemy from a general viewpoint.

He gave me his number and asked me to call if I faced any problems. However, the indigenous people also have prejudice towards the *Bangali* settlers. Monimala said to me several times that though they had very good relations with *Bangalis* and in her university life she had so many *Bangali* friends, in Khagrachari *Bangali* settlers were different. They were conflict initiators and most of them were thieves and dirty.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the contested relationships within and among the indigenous groups and *Bangali* groups in the CHT. The changing relationships of *Bangali* and *Pahari* and the military are also analysed in this chapter. It also reveals the state's perspective on the CHT, the *Bangalis* living in the CHT, and the indigenous people. Neither *Bangali* nor *Pahari* is a homogenous category. But depending on context, people can maintain their own beliefs and political identity and can merge beneath the same umbrella. Context, power and space are very important in the weaving of identity. The chapter also deals with love, friendship and traitorous relationships among and between the triangular agents (*Pahari*, *Bangalis* and the army), which tells us that human relationships cannot be categorised easily, and that these, even in the CHT, are very much constructed and contested.

In conclusion, I would like to refer to a question posed by Hanshodhaggo Chakma (61), a school teacher in Shisirpur with a middle socio-economic status, who told me that now it had become difficult for them to identify who the real enemy was. They previously thought that the military was their main enemy, and then it was the *Bangali* settlers; but now their own people were involved. Puzzled by all this he asked me, “*Could you please tell us who our real enemy is?*”

## Chapter Seven

**‘Mainy is not only a river to us, it has saved our lives many times’:**

### **State violence, Forced Displacement and Locating Home**

#### **Introduction**

*It was in summer as far as I remember, but I cannot remember the exact date. Trees were full of ripe jackfruits and mangoes, it was so hot. But our mind was more heated than that...every day, every moment we thought that we were going to be dead as we were receiving the news of the death of our relatives. We had one dream only and that was to ‘survive’. It was our only wish to get ourselves out alive.*

*However, my family was not prepared as we were Jum farmers. Where would we go to? But our fate took us to India and we were there for a long time. I would remember that day until my death. When at first we saw the black smoke, we could easily imagine what was going on. We found other people also running through the Mainy River. We thought that we had to save our lives first. My daughters were in the field. We could not wait for them. I and my husband started our journey with little things like rice, borgi and some money.*

[Ang Keu Moghini, (66) a housewife from a middle socio-economic status narrated her experience in this way]

This narratives helps us to understand the situation of violence in 1986, when the indigenous people in my field areas were forced to leave to save their lives. They always chose the river Mainy, as they thought that military or Bangali people could not go there. There was a rumour that something would happen in that area within a short time. The biggest exodus took place in 1986, following a series of planned massacres by the settlers and security forces in Khagrachari district, Panchari, Dighinala, Matiranga and adjacent villages, resulting in the flight of 30,000 people to India over a two month period. The number reached around 50,000 by the end of the year (Umong, 1993:14), forcing the Indian government for the first time to give them official shelter in the state of Tripura. The refugee infiltration continued over the next eighty years up to 1994 and dominated the CHT’s agenda, giving it an international dimension<sup>117</sup>. Many people went to Tarabania for two days after hearing those rumours. They heard the news of other places where the Chakma people had gone to India after losing their houses. The situation grew

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<sup>117</sup>The Charge of Genocide: Organizing Committee Chittagong Hill Tracts Campaign, 1986.



worse. Some people transformed their rice into puffed rice so that it could be stored for a long time. Some of them also stored paracetamol, saline and other first aid items as a part of their preparation as the situation was really difficult. They got news from the beggars (they were not beggars but just acted as beggars, who generally worked as agents of SB) about the safest way and received some messages from SB as well. Another important item they always stored was *Borgi* (a traditional quilt made by indigenous women). They made an extra package for the important items that they needed to carry. Some families became female-headed suddenly in the absence of the male members as they headed to another place to avoid the military. Some of them understood that they were going to face far worse experiences in their lives. Some of them could not go as they had to help the family to go elsewhere.

In this chapter I focus on the nature of state violence and forms of forced displacement among the Chakma, Marma and Tripura families (some of them four or five times or more) as result of extreme violence inflicted by the army and settler *Bangalis* in the pre- and post-accord periods. This chapter explores how people perceive, conceptualise and adjust to the violence and displacement. It includes accounts of people who lost their hope of having a home (in terms of security, peace and comfort), including those returning from taking refuge in India. It also discusses the gender dimension of work in displaced situations and in the camps. Bodily memory, and memory related to artefacts, are analysed in this section.

### **Violence and Displacement**

There have been numerous attacks on indigenous people by the settlers and the Bangladesh Army. The massacre of Kaukhali Bazaar of Kalampati on 25th March 1980 stands out because it was the first massacre in which 300 indigenous' people were killed and many more injured. On 26 June 1981, the settlers, under the protection of the Bangladesh army, invaded the indigenous areas in Banraibari, Beltali and Belchari, murdered 500 men, women and children, and occupied their villages and farmlands. Thousands of people fled to the nearby forests and 5,000 of them managed to seek refuge in the Tripura State of India. On 19 September 1981 the army and the settlers made co-ordinated attacks on 35 indigenous villages including Telafang, Ashalong, Gurangapara, Tabalchari, and Barnala in the Feni valley of the CHT, plundered and burned the villages, and killed many thousands of men, women and children. The surviving villagers fled to the Indian State of Tripura and to the adjacent forests. On 26 June, 11, 26, 27 July and 9, 10, 11 August 1983, Bangladesh armed forces massacred the indigenous people of the villages of Golapatimachara, Machyachara, Tarabanchari, Logang, Tarabanya, Maramachyachara, and Jedamachyachara. Hundreds of houses were

looted and burned, and 800 people were murdered. After clearing the area, the government settled *Bangali* families there. On 31 May 1984, the SB guerrillas attacked the *Bangali* settlements at Gorosthan, Bhusanchara and Chota Harina of Barkal *Upazila*. About 100 settlers were reported killed, their homes burned down in the attack. Three BDR (Bangladesh Rifles) camps in the locality were also simultaneously attacked so that the BDR personnel could not intervene in the larger action. Bhusanchara was the village most severely affected. No publicity was given, however, to the reprisal taken against the indigenous population by Bangladeshi security personnel immediately after the assaults on the *Bangali* settlements. Again on April 29th, 1986, the SB simultaneously attacked the BDR border outposts at Assalong, Chota Assalong and Taidong of Khagrachari District and followed with attacks on new *Bangali* settlements. Reprisals by the Bangladesh army, BDR, Ansars and the settlers began immediately after 29 April.

On 1 May and the following days, law enforcement personnel, together with settlers, entered a number of indigenous villages in the Panchari-Khagrachari area and arbitrarily killed the indigenous inhabitants. The Bangladesh security personnel ordered the inhabitants to assemble on open ground, men separate from women, away from the villagers' huts. While the villagers were held in this way their settlements were set on fire by the settlers. The Bangladesh security personnel then opened fire randomly on the groups of villagers who were assembled, killing hundreds of indigenous men, women and children. Following the Bangladesh military atrocities described above many people from the affected areas sought refuge in the forests away from their homes. A few hundred people from several different villages gathered during the first week of May between the villages of Sarveswarpara and Manudaspara, in the Matiranga area. One night, probably the 1st or 2nd May, although the precise date is not known, people were ambushed by a detachment of Bangladesh soldiers while they were trying to reach the Indian border. The soldiers opened fire without provocation and without warning and shot at them randomly. In the middle of May over 70 indigenous people were killed. After the Matiranga massacre a large group of indigenous people fleeing from their homes, numbering over 200, most of whom were of the Tripura nationality, were moving towards the Indian border at Silachari in southern Tripura. Their presence in the area appears to have been known for some time by Bangladesh security personnel. They were eventually discovered by the troops of the 31st battalion of the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), who surrounded them and made them walk into a narrow valley between the villages of Comilla tilla and Taidong. In the restricted space of this valley, the soldiers fired indiscriminately at the group, killing most of the people. Once the firing had ceased, a number of settlers further attacked the group with

machetes, killing injured men, women and children. The Bangladesh Army with the aid of the settlers killed hundreds of indigenous people in the Hirachar-Sarbotali-Khagrachari-Pablakhali areas in massacres on 8,9,10 August, 1988. Many women were gang-raped by men from the Bangladesh Army and settlers. In reprisal for Abdur Rashid's killing members of the Bangladesh Army, the VDP (armed group formed by the Bangladeshi settlers) and settlers carried out this gruesome massacre in Longadu, on 4 May, 1989. Their houses were burned down and Buddhist temples in the area were destroyed. On 2 February 1992 two bombs exploded on a passenger boat at Malya. Malya is now inhabited by *Bangali* settlers from the plain. The explosion killed one passenger and seriously injured the driver of the boat. The settlers attacked the indigenous passengers, men, women and children. About 30 of them were killed. Fourteen bodies were recovered, the others were lost in the water. On 10 April 1992 the biggest massacre in a single day, at a single place, in the history of the CHT, took place at Logang cluster village in Khagrachari District, perpetrated by the Bangladesh security forces and settlers.

The military forcibly relocated some fifteen hundred indigenous families from the surrounding indigenous villages to the Logang cluster village, which is nothing but a concentration camp, and distributed their ancestral villages and farmlands to the Bangladesh infiltrators free of cost. Then the invaders forced the old people, women and children into their homes and burnt them alive by setting their homes on fire. The exact number of indigenous people killed at Logang will never be known, as many of the dead bodies were removed by the military immediately after the massacre<sup>118</sup>. On 17 November 1993 at least 29 indigenous people were killed and more than 100 wounded when settlers, supported by the Bangladesh Army, attacked a peaceful rally of indigenous people in Naniarchar Bazaar. The rally was organized by the Greater Chittagong Hill Tracts Hill Students' Council, with the advance permission of the local authorities, and was part of a campaign against the use of the only waiting shed for motor-launch passengers as an army check post.

Before the peace accord there were two notable massacres which took place in the CHT: the Maichchachari massacre, 12 April 1997; and the Changrachari massacre, November 1997. Also after the peace accord, there were communal attacks which often involved violence in these areas such as the Babucharabazar incident, 16 Oct 1999, and the Modhya Boalkhali incident on June 25, 2000, in which 277 houses belonging to the Marma community in seven villages in Ramgarh under Khagrachari district, were burned down. The attack left more than

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<sup>118</sup>Please see, Life is not ours: the Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission, April 1994.

a hundred indigenous people wounded and thousands homeless. On April 2, 2003, 100-150 *Bangali* settlers from Joysen Karbaripara moved to Saprue Karbaripara and started to build houses on land owned by the indigenous villagers. Some indigenous women tried to resist the settlers. Following the incident, the settlers attacked three indigenous villages on 3 April at around 8.30 am. Two indigenous girls were raped and more than 50 indigenous people were injured. About 100 indigenous houses were looted. In 2003, *Bangali* settlers launched a horrendous communal attack on indigenous people in Mahalchari Upazila under the Khagrachari district of the CHT. According to the press report and my field work, more than 350 indigenous households of 14 villages under five *mouzas* were burnt to ashes. Four Buddhist temples, one UNICEF run primary school, and a good number of shops and statues of the Buddha were also destroyed. Two indigenous people including one eight month old child were killed. Ten women were reportedly raped by *Bangali* settlers. Again, on April 20, 2008, in a clash between *Bangali* settlers and indigenous peoples, seven indigenous villages, in Rangamati district were severely damaged. In a violent land dispute between local indigenous people and *Bangali* settlers in the Baghaihat Gangaramukh area about 450 houses of indigenous people and 23 houses of *Bangali* settlers were burned, two indigenous people were killed and over 100 injured. There were also the Longodu incident on 17 Feb 2011, and the Rangamati incident on 22 September, 2012. Moreover, the number of people mentioned above includes only the displaced people or families who moved to Tripura. In addition to physical violence, my respondents who had experienced displacement due to the Kaptai Dam, considered it to be violence as it caused social suffering for them.

There was a change in how events were perceived or conducted after the peace accord was signed. What was called a massacre before the peace accord was afterwards re-designated as an ‘incident’. Arson attacks took the place of direct shooting. There may have been a reduction in the physical violence committed by the military, but rape, torture and invisible forms of domination and violence are continuing.

People tried to save dry food, medicine and easily packed stuff as they learned that they would have to go on an uncertain journey. People with money prepared differently. The *Jum* farmers depended on other agricultural resources. Some of them were unable to prepare as most of the family members had already dispersed into different houses, thinking that if they died some family members could survive at least. Some started living in *Kayang* as they thought that *Kayang* would not be attacked by the army or *Bangali* people. Some of them sent their young daughters to the houses of relatives who were living in comparatively ‘remote’ areas. Some of them started selling their cattle and saving money for the uncertain journey. Talking

about her preparation, Santona Tripura (53), a housewife with a middle socio-economic status, said that they saved some money and that she had hidden her gold ornaments by making a hole inside her house. She also saved her money by making a hole in the bamboo that was used to make the house. She sent her sons to Chittagong to continue their studies as the military always came to the village to search for young people. In her mind, she was getting prepared for an uncertain journey. They owned land where they ran a teak plantation and they kept some tobacco at her aunt's house in Hajachara. She thought that if they needed to leave the place and had no money they could sell it. These stories help us to understand how people perceived the context of violence and its aftermath.

Before examining the nature of population displacement in relation to women, the background to this issue and the paradoxes inherent in the life of displacement should first be appraised. Forced migration (external and internal) in the CHT began with the problematic birth of Pakistan in 1947, involving a number of consequences. Firstly, the arbitrary inclusion of the CHT with Pakistan against the will of its inhabitants left many so frustrated and insecure that they migrated to India. Secondly, the building of the Kaptai Dam in 1959 itself caused more than 40,000 Chakma people to cross over into the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh after being evicted from their own lands. Many of them – approximately 20,000 according to Majumder (2003:77) – are still living there as stateless persons (CHT Commission, 1991:85), while the rest are scattered around the CHT as internal refugees or IDPs (Mohsin, 2002:15). In addition, the abolition of the special status of the CHT in 1963 that initiated *Bangali* migration to the region also caused a massive exodus of the *Paharis* in the 1960s. However, the violent and turbulent political developments in the CHT after the Independence of Bangladesh brought a new dimension to the issue of eviction and dislocation. It became a systematic means of controlling and punishing the hill people. Several factors are responsible for this: intensified militarisation; population transfer; forcible relocation of the people; increased levels of violence; and massacres. Consequently, the period 1978-1988 witnessed a cycle of repression by the security forces and settlers, exodus of the hill people, and the forcible return of refugees by the Indian government (Umong, 1993:12-14).

### **The Day of Fire and Black Smoke**

Taposhi Chakma (48), a housewife and with a middle socio-economic status narrated that the day was full of “fire and black smoke” when they were forced to leave their place. Some of them started hiding themselves in other people's houses in the jungle. But they sometimes returned and looked after the house when there was less of a possibility of the military coming

in. The situation was narrated by Mohini Chakma (50), a house wife and with an upper socio-economic status. She said:

*We went to Tarabania in the evening. The military people sometimes came to our house and searched for males. One day we just came to see our house and saw that there was a fire. We immediately ran to save our lives. I had four daughters and a son then. I was pregnant at that moment for three months, but Bangali settlers did not beat us and did not put obstacles in our way. Our whole family went together and we decided to go to Hajachara like other people. We did not know anybody then. It was a hilly area but covered with deep forest. We could not bring any money with us. We hired a gabur (helping hand) with us who carried 20 kilograms of rice, a tambala (pot for cooking vegetables ) and a bhatpilla (pot for cooking rice) and two big borgi (indigenous blanket). We were hungry in the forest. The children started crying because of hunger. I decided to work in the other people's field as a labourer and earned money. We did not know the people with whom we stayed in the Hajachara. In a Chakma household, it is common that they allow other Chakma people to stay once they identify themselves as Chakma. However, there were so many people in one house. But they did not have that many resources to offer food for all of us. We offered our labour to them in their field so that they could feed us. We stayed there for five days. Jumbola (the Jumias residing in the forest) gave us rice for twenty days. A hill contained only one family. We slept on the side of the hill. We went to many houses but every house was full. So we could not find any shelter. After twenty days of our traumatic journey we reached the Indian border at night.*

So many things emerge in narratives like this. People mention their relatives, cattle, their lost land, ornaments, household assets, their source of income, trees and even religious places. According to them everything is related in their lives. Some of the informants said that their relatives started leaving the country and asked them to join; they did not want to, though in the end they did. All of them said that they did not have any choice but to run for their lives. Some people did not even have time to think about their children. They ran in different directions and some of them lost family members on the way. The moment they had to leave the house was a very significant time for them as they did not know whether they would live or not. They did not know what would happen in the next minute, though they did not have time to think about anything at that time. Some of my informants told to me that it would take much more time for them to talk about it.

Some of them were mentally ready for this journey whereas others were not prepared to undertake an uncertain journey. Some of them married off their young daughters because they were frightened about rape. During this time rape by soldiers was not that widespread and the army censored all news before it reached the media. However, indiscriminate firing and physical torture by the army were very common. Displacement has different consequences for women and girls than for men and boys (Guru Raja, 2000). It even has different effects on different women based on their socio-economic status, indigenous identity, age, and so on. In the narratives presented below we get several accounts of relationships and the vulnerability of indigenous women. Jonaki Chakma (66), a housewife and previously of a high socio-economic status who has suffered from violence inflicted in 1986. As an aftermath of the armed conflict between the army and SB, the army set fire to the entire area. She narrated:

*My husband was a village doctor. In 1986, my eldest daughter was 10, the son, eight, my youngest daughter three and my youngest son was only 11 months. We took our lunch. It was around 1 pm. Two of my (husband's) cousins' sons continued their office from my house. Suddenly I saw smoke from the Obakhali, Zamtoli, Dighinala side. All of my children were in the house. My father-in-law and my husband were also in the house. I had two helping hands in the house at that time. After observing the situation my nephews told everybody that we needed to flee as early as possible.*

Then she stopped for a while. I observed tears in her eyes. She said that she could not narrate the story. Both of us took a break for a while. Suddenly she asked me if I could imagine a situation where I had to give up every last thing I had only to find myself helpless, penniless, homeless, and nearly dead. Our conversation ended there for that day. I understood she could not continue to revisit the memory of her displaced life. The next morning her sister-in-law came and she said that she had talked to me about the life of a refugee last night. Again on 22 October, at night, we re-opened our conversation. She forgot where she had stopped previously. She again narrated. I found her narrating the struggle she experienced while they were heading to India.

She again started:

*Suddenly I saw smoke from the Kobakhali, Zamtoli, Dighinala side. By that time we had heard that the army had opened fire on the indigenous people and killed at least 15 people, including her two brothers in Dighinala, and Bangali settlers had set fire to the Chakma houses. At that time, there was an army camp, just opposite our house. But a Bangali, who was considered to be mentally challenged by Bangali people, was roaming around and told everybody that it was not fair to set fire to the Chakma*

*houses because these people had nowhere to go, and nothing to eat. All of my children were in the house. My father-in-law and my husband were also in the house. I had two helping hands in her house at that time. After observing the situation my nephews told everybody that we needed to flee as early as possible. They just put some rice in a jute packet and one of my helping hands took a hari (pot) with her. My youngest son was on my lap and I told the rest of the children to walk. We embarked on an uncertain journey. We had 15 cattle, but we could not bring them with us. We had to flee leaving everything behind. I wore two Pinon and two blouses and also advised my children to wear double dresses. I did not know where we were heading and when we would get the chance to have another dress. We first crossed the river Mainy and just took the opposite route to the hill. We found that we were not alone; thousands of people were with us, helpless and moving on an uncertain journey. The Shanti Bahini helped us to find the way to the deep forest. Once we reached the forest, we just had a chance to turn back toward the location of our house and found that it was ablaze. We were sent to the house of an unknown person by Shanti Bahini. When I was given food I tried to force it down my throat, but failed. I did not know where I was going.*

The escapees preferred to take the route of the Mainy River as they knew that *Bangalis* or the army could not follow them that way; their family chose the way as they had female members in the group. They always referred to the river Mainy as it was a part of their lives and had saved them many times. Women had to do so many things, taking children and organising food and other things when they got displaced and they became very sick. They got only few minutes before being displaced to save their lives. Within those few minutes, it was women who organised most of the things and women who had preserved dry food for some days when they started suspecting that they may need to leave home.

### **Gender Division of Work**

The gender division of work varies in the indigenous societies of the CHT, which was also true of life at the time of displacement and in the camp. Family members were scattered and they did not have information about each other. In some cases, though all family members started together, they separated on the way as they belonged to different groups and lost each other especially when they heard the firing of the army. Some people brought knives with them, which they used to make holes for fires, and tried to cook when children started crying for food.



Cooking and the collection of water are considered women's work in the four indigenous groups with whom I work. Most of them brought rice, dry food and pots if they had the chance. It was the women who took care of the children even in the forest by feeding them, playing with them and spending time with them. Sometimes the women did some temporary jobs in the houses of other people in which they had taken shelter. The condition of pregnant women was worse. Some women gave birth in the jungle whereas a number of women had miscarriages. Another narrative comes from Chandan Chakma (51) a male *Jum* farmer and with a lower socio-economic status:

*We had been displaced six times before 1986. There were three families in a small tilla. In 1986 when the incident happened, a group of Bangali settlers came to our house and asked us to follow them. We followed them and stayed in their house. In the morning, a little child of the Bangali family came to us and said that her father and his associates were planning to kill us. Following the little girl's instructions we just left the house and went to Monoghor (a small house built in the Jum field to look after the field) and we stayed there for three days. The owner of the Jum field gave us food and shelter. My wife Sona Dewan was pregnant at that time. We started our journey to India by following others. We heard the sound of rifles firing from the military. We ran not looking behind or forward. I lost my wife and I kept looking for her in the jungle. Then two days later I heard from someone that she reached Rangamati, and stayed at her brother's house. And then we started our journey anew. We ate the inner portion of banana trees, jungle potato and even some insects. We encountered a tiger while going through the jungle. By that time, my wife had been suffering from diarrhoea and she was given only green banana and nothing more. She had been pregnant for six months. When we arrived at Satrachara, my wife was in delivery pain. We went to a Jumghor, all other people left the house for her. My wife was very weak and could not eat anything. She gave birth to a boy child in that physical condition. However, the baby died after two days due to the lack of milk. My wife was not in good physical condition to supply milk and he was an immature baby. My wife told me that she could not go to India. She was so sick and upset. Then we returned to Babuchara from half way to India. After a week's break we again started our journey as we knew that we could not stay there. At that time we brought rice, two pots for cooking and three borgi.*

This narrative shows that the experiences of being displaced differ according to gender identity and special physical circumstances. Among the respondents, 19 were pregnant at the time, and it can be observed that there is a difference between men and women while recalling the

experiences. The women who were pregnant mapped the narratives with the experience first, and when they were describing their own narratives, they were talking about the condition of other women as well. But it also needs to be mentioned here that all women did not face the same experiences though they belonged to the same group. Some women were injured on the road when they were running after hearing the gunshots and some of them were beaten by the BSF in the border area. Furthermore, additional labour and struggling with a sense of insecurity have been a very small part of men's narratives though in most of the cases they had been central to running the family. There were more than physical problems and food crisis in the forest. Some people were caught by the military. They were severely beaten and were taken to the nearest cantonment.

Sometimes they could not narrate the situation chronologically. Whatever they thought first, they said. And on the second or third day they came again and filled in the gaps in the narrative. That was the way I came to know the stories about abandoning children on the way to India. The next section is about that.

### **Abandoning Children**

*It took us four days to reach India. We stayed in the forest. When we felt tired we took some rest. My children shouted with screaming. In the forest there was no water. It was risky to search for a chara (stream) in the forest as we were frightened of the army. So, I brought the water by Cbonga (bamboo) from down the hill. It was not an easy task. My body was in pain. There were no tain (vegetables). I cooked only rice in the forest. We made a hole and we collected fuel from the forest and boiled the rice. We reached the border at night after four days. Several times I fell down and my child also fell from my lap, but she did not cry and did not get injured. I am still surprised that she had survived those trying times. Many women threw their own children away in the forest when it got impossible to carry them or when they cried a lot. Other people used to scold them when their babies cried. They told them, "Only for your baby we could not sacrifice our lives. If the army heard the sound of the crying, they would come and see us."*

[Rajeswari Tripura (51) with an upper socio-economic status and a housewife]

The displaced people were always frightened about the army. The women who had an infant accompanying them faced tremendous problems while fleeing to India. Some babies died due to the diseases in the forest, some suffered from various diseases and some women were forced to leave and abandon their children to protect themselves or other people in the group or their

hiding place. Many of my respondents mentioned this in their narratives but they did not feel comfortable in discussing it further. It seemed that it was every woman's pain as well. But they did not want to discuss it in front of the men. Kajali Dewan (38) a housewife with a mid-socio-economic status, said:

*When everybody was seeing the fire they just shouted, Uzu, jei jei agot, jei jei eideidei, pali tobe army etton, jei jei (Army came, please flee fast). We were taking our lunch. We had chosen the north-western- side through the Nakshachara, then we passed a small stream and we found a house and again started through the north-westside called Pablakhali, and then crossed the Modhay Banchara, and then went to Udalchari. We stayed there for three days in my pizi bon (cousin's house). With them we again started our journey towards India. We stayed in the forest and the people living inside the forest provided cloths and rice for us, we made a cooker in the forest and boiled the rice. Suddenly, the army attacked and fired, I was nearly injured. With this insecurity we went to the border area and were beaten by the BSF. They uttered 'Baghao, baghao' (Go). I saw a woman crying and asked her why she was crying. She replied that she had left her 10 months old child behind. The mother was hearing gunshots and thought that the army was nearby. Her group mates advised her to abandon the child as the army could discover their hiding place by listening to the child's voice.*

As mentioned earlier, I had heard of similar incidents from some of my respondents. But it was a very difficult and sensitive matter to discuss more about the issue. I interviewed a woman but I did not ask her anything. She asked me what I wanted to know from her. I replied, nothing. Then she asked me why a mother has to leave her children. I did not answer the question. She added that the men who requested her to leave the child later said that she was a bad mother as she abandoned her child. She said that she did not want to say anything as she had forgotten most of the incidents. Remember to forget is used as a strategy by the respondents frequently. Mookherjee (2006:443) shows the people in her field would 'remember to forget' to uphold a collective forgetting. In the context of rape in liberation war in 1971, she refers "Thus in these villagers' attempts to retell and recollect local events there has been a simultaneous process of production as suppression' (Cohen 1994:13), a constant process of knowing what not to know' (Taussig 1999: 2). In light of Tonkin's assertion that 'literate or illiterate, we are our memories' (1992: 1)."

But another Tripura woman who also was forced to abandon her child said that when the other people started talking about her, her husband protested by saying that she did not do

it intentionally. Still now when she cries for her son her husband consoles her by saying that it was not her fault. But she complained that when she did leave her son everyone in her group said, *“You are a great mother, you sacrificed your son to save so many people’s lives”*. But the same people started saying later that she was a bad mother.

These are the patriarchal norms that the societies practice. When a woman does a job in the interest of the male they are labelled as either ‘good’ or ‘bad’ for the same incident depending on their power to adopt either a good or bad label. They never told me who had been raped on the way to India, but most of them told me that they had heard that some women had been tortured by the army and some had thrown their own children from the hill when scolded by others for the children’s noises. Their companions had rebuked them, saying *“Your child is crying without a break; the army could come any time and we would be shot because of a baby. Do you want this?”* A similar phenomenon is observed in Laila et al. (1989:49) which contains 14 stories of the women of the Telangana movement. For example, there is the story of Kamalama who reared her child for six months as she was moving and working for the Party. Then the Area Committee leaders said to her, *“Kamalamma, either you must give this child away to someone or else you must leave us and go and live in a village with your son”* Among those who said this were Omkar Kondeti Vasudeva Rao – did you hear that? – and there was Tirumala Rao. I was working under all of them. The boy is six months old and is bound to cry sometimes. The leaders are all with us in the forest. So many lives will be lost because of this one child...” When I was able to meet two mothers who had been forced to throw their children in the deep forest, they did not tell me anything about their lost children. One of them ended her story telling me, *“I am the most unfortunate mother in the world, who could only save my life, but not my child”*. People lost their young babies on the way to India. Women’s activities and roles in displacement, conflict or war are narrated differently from those of men. Of course the perspective may vary according to gender, age, religion, profession or socio-economic status or place. Among my informants there was a woman from the Marma community (46) and with a lower socio-economic status who ran a small business. She had tightened her baby with her cloth in the traditional way but had lost her baby when she was running away from the Indian army at the border. She did not know that her baby was lost. It happened in the morning. After crossing the border in the late afternoon she discovered that she had lost the baby. The night had passed and she thought that there was no possibility that she would get her son back. On the following day, one of the BSF found her and returned her son to her, though he died two days later. Her other boy also died after two months in the camp. Another informant lost her two sons. While going to India, they heard the sound of gunfire. Then they ran to save

their lives. Their family members were lost in that event. Even they did not know where they were. One of her sons went through the deep stream as he did not have an alternative way to run. After three hours of running they did not have a single moment to think of others. She met her husband after 4-5 hours in the jungle and she asked about the sons. That time she heard that a boy had been drowned in the stream. She did not even think that he could be her son. Some people just picked up his body and brought him to them. They were so unfortunate that they could not cremate him, they had to leave his dead body in the forest. They could not even cry for him loudly, the situation was so bad. When they reached the camp, her one child was very sick. She could not send him to the doctor. He died after 15 days. After the death of two sons she became mentally unstable, she could not do anything and almost lost all hope in life.

Such narratives help us to understand the overall condition of a displaced person or family. They also help us to understand their physical and mental crises, especially when they had lost their children or family members and were also very much worried about their own lives. Children died for various reasons. Janoki Chakma (66), a housewife with a middle socio-economic status, said:

*We had to cross the river knee-deep in the water. We were sent to another house to have food with many other people by the guide. I don't know who the guide was, but I heard later that they were members of Shanti Bahini. We spent seven days in this condition. In our group two women just threw their three or four months old baby down the hill. People in the group were worried about the military so they advised the mothers to leave their child because if they cried the military would know their location and kill all of them. When a baby cried out, her mother, one of my sisters, tried to silence it, pressing her hand on its mouth and we heard the sound of military fire. But after 10 minutes, when she finally removed her hand, we found that the baby was dead.*

There is no documentation of how many people died as part of forced displacement. The 'Jummo Bulletin' (published by JSS) only published the number of people killed in the massacre. The number of dead children remained unreported. Parents left their dead bodies in the forest as they did not have an opportunity to bury them and they had to leave to save their own lives. So, these deaths have never been recorded in the documents of the Bangladesh government, or in the documents of JSS and the government of Tripura.

### **Everyday Life in Forest**

The displaced people faced many risks in the forest. The bites of mosquitoes, snakes, leeches and various insects were very common. They did not care about these as they were more frightened of more dangerous things such as the army or the Indian BSF. Some of them got injured severely near the border area when the Indian army started beating them up. Daily life in the forest during their journeys was not only full of anxiety and pain, there were also issues of marriage, sex and so many other things that people did not want to share. My respondents said to me that if people come to know that they got married while living a life in constant danger, they would not accept this very well. However, these were parts of life. They were always frightened about the army and that's why they chose an escape route through the forest. Though my respondents said that they did not face rape or sexual harassment while going to India, they had heard about such cases. They did not want to disclose the names and addresses of such people as they thought that their stories were not part of their own and I am from a different society than theirs. Four girls had gotten married in the households where they were given shelter. One of them joked to me that the massacre, and the experience of being displaced, gave her a new life; otherwise she could not imagine what would have happened to her.

The situation of uncertainty brings people closer to each other and sometimes creates misunderstanding or further conflict. People try to help each other or they start conflicts fighting for the limited available resources for survival and the pressure and strain of everyday life. Green (1994) talks about a constant underlying sense of panic. In the forests, some young men and women fell in love and had sexual relationships. When I got close to one of my respondents she shared this with me though her parents beat her in the refugee camp for engaging in a sexual relationship at a dangerous time. According to her, *“if the relationship was for one day that would have been different. When we came to know that there will be no quick ending, I accepted it as a part of my daily life.”* She explained that in these situations everybody wanted to feel secure, and everyone was frightened. She said,

*Can you tell me one truth? Didn't your freedom fighters fall in love with someone when they went to fight? Nothing can be stopped for a long time. Life has its own mobility. I knew one woman who committed suicide within a month of the start of our refugee camp life. She was in our group. She also fell in love with a Tripura boy. When other people knew about it, the boy's family did not want to accept her. By that time the girl got pregnant and she committed suicide. The girl committed suicide not because of Bangali settlers or the army. She committed suicide because of our indigenous man who refused to marry her”.*

This is a testimony to the fact that the issue of displacement cannot be presented only through the lens of trauma. More significantly my research seeks to focus the different connotations of violence, Mookherjee states in her work on the Bangladesh War of Liberation that people had a different connotation of war and experienced the war as erotic excitement and as an adventure (Mookherjee, 2011:75). In this section I want to argue that the story of a displaced person is not full of pain, trauma or misery, that it is full of complex feelings. The presentation of a displaced person depends completely on the politics of what we want to hear and what will be socially accepted. The construction of memory also depends on public perception and this is the way public memory has been constructed. Moreover, as these are mainly kin-based societies, they think that they should not disclose these incidents to members of other societies despite the fact that they talk behind each other's backs.

One of my Chakma respondents who did not want to disclose her identity in any form told me that she ran away from the forest because one of the members of SB disturbed her a lot and she was nearly raped. She said to me that she knew that if JSS was aware of it, they would create trouble for her again for disclosing the information, but she wanted others to know. All of her family members went to India except her sister, who stayed at her uncle's home in Rangamati. She continued her study. In the CHT the image of SB is that they are freedom fighters. They are well respected in the indigenous societies of the CHT. People don't want to hear bad things about them because they always consider the Bangladesh army as their main enemy and then the settler *Bangalis*. She pointed out that men are men irrespective of their political ideology, race or religion. She said that there are no differences.

There were conflicts regarding the resources available to the families in their situations of displacement. Some families were well off and they saved money and rice in anticipation of trouble but they were threatened by other families or groups on their journey to India. In the forest they were asked to share their food. When they refused, as they thought the food was not even enough for themselves, let alone for other people, other members tried to attack them with knives and other weapons they carried for protection from the army and others. Finally they were forced to share the food with the other members of the group. The intense pressure that extreme violence puts on social relationships can lead to people apparently "turning on each other".

Some families returned from the forest to other places or their relative's houses inside the CHT as they had lost their way and had heard that there were problems in the border area. So they decided to return though they knew that they could not return to their original homes. They sheltered in their relative's houses on a temporary basis. Some of them moved themselves

from one place to another more than ten times until the peace process took place. Some of them could not continue their schooling due to continuous shifting and the uncertainty of life. But they were not included as refugees in the list made by the Task Force. And there is no policy in Bangladesh regarding IDPs. However, in the interviews, some of my respondents showed me the symbol of violence in the body, and the expression of violence was prominent in their body language.

### **Bodily Memory**

*Ohhhh!!' (with closed eyes), it was such a hard life, still I can feel the pain in my body, or maybe it is in my heart, but I really feel that it made a hole inside my body. I had a child in my lap and a heavy basket full of rice in my other hand. It was a rainy day. In the forest I collected water from the deep stream using bamboo and I came down with a severe headache which I still have. And if you have a headache for a long time, you forget almost everything. [Chayanika Tripura (52) a housewife with a lower economic status]*

Pain is not always a physical thing, it becomes a mental issue which transfers to and from the body and people always feel that. Hughes (2013:24) argues that torture is both expressible and meaningful. Where people find its verbal articulation difficult, they creatively draw on alternative means of communication, and on narrative devices such as the body and emotions, to mediate and express their memories of torture. Arthur Kleinman and Joan Kleinman (1994) have helped me to understand how we interpret the political control of stigmatised bodies, for example in leprosy or schizophrenia, the cultural construction of gendered bodies, the shifting historical meanings of pain, the local elaboration of salient symptoms, and the ethno-medical categories through which healing is evaluated in political as much as personal terms. In their narratives of illness, patients' memories of bodily complaints widen into more general stories of suffering that combine memories of threat and loss with their traumatic effects and with their sources (criticism meetings, whippings, prison, refugee status). Three paradigmatic symptoms discussed in the article – vertigo, tiredness, and pain – create an interpersonal space of suffering in which bodily complaint is indirectly expressed in social distress and shared criticism. Dizziness, a common though usually unmarked symptom of neurasthenia and other chronic tiredness syndromes in the West, transmits particular salience in Chinese society, where the Chinese medical tradition emphasizes balance and harmony as constitutive and expressive of health.



Memory selection is also integral to narrative. Most respondents told me memories that they wanted to tell and that they thought of as not too 'private'. They laughed as they told me about the 'silly' things that happened in the camp and then they wept when they narrated their painful experiences. There are experiences that people do not wish to remember as they never want the events to come back into their lives. In regard to the subjective experience of violence, Hastrup discusses that the way the pain is imposed by a certain form of violence, be it rape or torture, is highly localized and bounded by the victim's body (Hastrup, 2003). Terror individuates the victim because pain cannot be shared (Daniel, 1994:238). Along with bodily memory, people remember violence through the affects it has in their lives.

In my thesis I have tried to understand the character of violence through the experience, affect and agency of women, through the gender division of work and through everyday forms of violence and their response to the violence. The thesis also argues that the indigenous women's narratives of the everyday forms of terror testify to the extent of state and community violence in various forms. In addition, it focuses on the everyday forms of bodily memory towards the violence. It also discusses the socio-economic status of the participants which is necessary to understand the violence. While talking about violence, the language, expression of trauma and emotional pain had been at the centre of the narratives. To analyse of memory of violence, the thesis follows the theoretical frame work of Das (2000) and Mookherjee's (2015) work. Following Das, Mookherjee (2015:107) shows how "they folded [taken from Das2000:220] stories of violence, encoding, and incorporating them into uneventful, taken for granted practices and relations, constantly combing (hiding) them". Being subsequent to Mookherjee, I use the word 'trauma' in this research to indicate "pain, suffering, and shock and to show how it is culturally constructed collective/national narratives rather than an individual Western/global internationalised or psychological effect". Following her helps me to achieve a varied nuance of the memory entrenched in every society, or to be precise, the body, the economy and the home.

*'Still I feel pain in my right feet, as military heat my feet (showing the sign in the feet),  
I went to several doctors, but they could not find any problem, the pain may be in my  
mind, not in my feet'*

Sabita Chakma, a school teacher and from a middle socio-economic status told me as she was touching her feet. Bodily materialisation of pain and sufferings activate memories of the event (Mookherjee 2015, 2008), whereas Das (2006:46-58, quoted in Mookherjee 2015. 108) says "bodily mutilations mutilate the use of ordinary language, bruise and fracture normality". She examines the history in which the cultural memory of partition of India is made up of stories

of women who chose to sacrifice their lives and thus were valorised in family narratives and popular cultures in the Punjab. Unfortunately, the trajectories of many female lives were not included in this culturally-sanctioned memory: such women were either not included or removed from familial narratives of the past. People learned many things to cope with violence and receive violence as a part of their lives as violence is folded in many ways. Das's argument about the relationship between the configuration of the subject and the experience of overthrow is captured by Foucault's analysis of the discipline of the body by an imprisoning metaphor. By unveiling the experience of the life of Asha, she finds the models of power/resistance or the metaphors of captivity to be too easy as tools to understand the subtle work of self-creation.

In memories of children abandoned on the way to India to save their lives led to some labelling of the mother as 'bad mother' due to the existing patriarchy among the indigenous societies. But some also were supportive and explained the situation and indigenous women treated them as '*bhala manush*', what Mookherjee (2015, 126) termed as 'less of a man' though it had been different depending on varied social interactions and conditions.

In my research, I want to argue that both personal and collective memory can be considered as testimonies to the violence against indigenous people especially the women. And bodily memory (still having a pain in the leg, nightmares, hearing the army all the time) reproduces the experience of violence that they went through. Personal and collective memory are interlined in my research in the multiple layers of violence. The concept of 'embodied memory' is also important in my research; it is helpful in understanding precisely in what way 'early trauma is remembered by the body' (Leuzinger-Bohleber, 2008).

### **Memory and Artefacts**

*When we started our uncertain journey in 1986, following the incident of our house being burnt, I was just four years old. My father was a Karbary in our area. We were three sisters. My younger sister was only fifteen days old. Now I almost forgot the memory of that day. I can only recall that I was told to be inside the Khallung (basket made of bamboo) and someone carried me for more than ten days with some rice and salt. We made some stopovers in the jungle and again I sat inside the Hallung and we started our journey. I was told to keep my head down so that the army could not see me and at least my life could be saved. Even now when I see the Hallung, I can still feel that. For me, the Hallung is something special. (Part of an interview with Sarnojukta Chakma, aged 30, dated 26 October 2012)*

There is a link between artefacts and memory. In the early eighties a series of massacres took place in several areas of the CHT. The Dighinala massacre is one of those which left a large number of indigenous people displaced forcefully and most of them went to India to save their lives. These narratives help us to understand the victimisation of indigenous people when they are displaced. They also make a connection between the artefacts used by them in their everyday lives and their memory of being displaced. Artefacts were used in my research as a vehicle for mediating memories of violence.

Most of my respondents were victims of the massacres of 1986 and most of them were returnee refugees. Some of them were internally displaced many times. Their recollections appear as 'absolute memories' of words and actions that dominate all others. A woman who had experienced displacement showed me around her house. The walls were covered with photographs of life in the refugee camp and a picture of her daughter who had committed suicide in the camp. It seemed as if they had trapped her in the time of the massacre. Violence from any time never passes, it becomes an intransitive memory. As Kanapathipillai argues (Kanapathipillai, 1992:343) "the violence did not just 'erupt' and then disappear", it is not "contained in time" but "experienced as continuous violence".

They had always tried to save tokens or souvenirs of their lives in the camps but due to frequent displacement after the accord, when their houses were burnt again, all the artefacts of memory (photographs, posters, dresses, etc.) had been destroyed. Since their lives were still very uncertain, they generally did not talk about their experiences. However, respondents preserved their memories in many other ways. The role of mundane domestic events, their environmental surroundings (narrative below), and their material culture in mediating traumatic memories is also important to look at, and in particular the way women draw on their cultural repertoire to give meaning to, and come to terms with, memories of violence. Singing songs was one of the ways of preserving memory. Cooking items such as potatoes, dried fish and green chili were found to preserve memory symbolically. "*This chili and dried fish looks like that given to us in the camps,*" one of them commented almost humorously. Sutton (2001:472) claims that the importance of the conjunction of two cultural dominions, eating and remembering, and wrestles with how best to imagine and analyze it/them. Food contains both clear and esoteric cultural roles, which merge the realistic and the highly symbolic. Memory, as well, mingles productive courses of remembering and forgetting with subsequent use of its substance to construct personal and group identities in an understood social cosmos.

Some respondents showed me the shawls and *pinon* they had made in the camps. When they returned, they brought them back with them and I found that they kept them in boxes like gold. A respondent told me that she never wanted to wear the *pinon* as it symbolized so many things to her. Her daughter, who was killed in a fire set in the camp, liked the *pinon* very much so that, when she opened the box, she started crying and said that it was everything to her now. It was important that women particularly narrated their experiences in the refugee camps or spoke about the uncertain journey that resulted from being displaced many times. Bisuisa Dewas (52), a housewife and a woman of a low economic status, said:

*I was 16 years old when the Dighinala massacre took place. Before that we were hearing whispers that we could not go on with our lives here smoothly. When our house was being burnt, we were three women in the house. We could not go outside beforehand as we were very anxious about my father and other relatives. Then my mother, I and my younger sister fled to save our lives. We did not know where we were going, but because of our previous experiences we always preferred the deep forest near the Mainy River where Bangali settlers never thought of going. Still I feel that the Mainy River is not a mere river for me — it saved my life so many times. It helps me to not forget those days.*

It is a part of the narrative when a picture has been described and memories are recalled in an emotional tone. Emotion is not just a sentiment that influences memory: it is memory itself ('emotional memory' or 'emotion as memory').

'*Borgi*' (a traditional handloom quilt) was found to be another symbol of preserving memory. Some of them took only the '*borgi*' with them when they had to start one of their uncertain journeys. It was for them a sign of memory, a symbol of preparation for future life. I met some of the young children who were born after their parents returned from the refugee camps. They told me many stories and said that they had heard them from their parents, especially mothers and grandmothers. Whitehouse (1996: 710-11) catalogues memories that are 'printed on the mind' as 'flashbulb memory', and he considers them to be correlated to the traumatic nature of 'dramatic, terrifying and shocking experiences' such as beginning rites. Events become tremendous in percentage to the 'intensity of emotion at encoding'. Antze and Lambeth (1996:XVIII) discuss the cultural determining of memory, the roles of trope, idioms, narrative, ritual, discipline, power and the social framework in its production and reproduction.

However, the preservation of memory differs among age groups, genders and different indigenous identities. Florita Tripura, who was a teenage girl when her family went to India as a result of the Dighinala Massacre, showed me secretly the love letter she received in the camp

from her boyfriend. Since the boy was from a local Tripura community, it created social problems for them and led to the conflict between local people and them.

The respondents narrated their situations in various ways. Sumitra Chakma (65), a retired teacher with upper socio-economic status told me that she could not say anything about camp experiences because it was very difficult to remember for her; but she wanted to sing a song. I could easily understand what she tried to convey in the song. She said that some of her friends also wrote many poems and songs during camp life. Some lyrics of the songs are below-

*'Bek Jadordokpeye Manelok Mon Dine Shuno  
Jummo Jador Dogor Huda Hom Ekko  
Shunde Dok Lage  
Dok Lage, Lage Monordok  
Shunibar Judi sho-bei Hill Tarctser Huda  
E Upamohadeshot'.  
(Poor people of all communities, please listen attentively  
I will narrate the sorrow of Jummo people  
It is very painful to listen to  
Sadness wells up, heart aches  
If you could only hear the story of Hill Tracts  
In this Continent.)*

This song highlights the sorrow of the indigenous people that they want others to listen to<sup>119</sup>.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the experience of forced displacement among the indigenous people of the CHT. I argue that the socio economic status of the respondents has shaped their experiences of violence-induced displacement. I have also discussed violent situations perpetrated by the state before they were forced to leave and the preparations made by the indigenous people. The chapter has analysed people's way of conceptualising violence and their methods of adjustment. It argues that women and men faced different experiences in terms of sexual identity and analyses the gender perspective among indigenous societies, especially the division of labour during the journey to the Indian border to save their lives and those of their

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<sup>119</sup> Aretxaga (2001) gives an account of a prisoner who talked about the poems written in jail, including those about strip searches, as if her ability to speak about this traumatic event required the distancing of writing and the mediation of poetry.

families. It addresses the question of why some women were forced to abandon their children on the journey. In the next chapter I will discuss how people link significant artefacts with the memory of forced displacement due to state violence.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **Lost lives, lives in the Camps and beyond**

#### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter I discussed the forced displacement of indigenous CHT groups and their journeys to India. Here I examine the adaptive strategies within the camp lives of indigenous women. The first part of this chapter discusses the camp life of the indigenous women in terms of their housing, health, education and the gender division of work . It also analyses hierarchy among the indigenous communities in the camps in relation to local politics in the Tripura province in India. This chapter explores how women with different indigenous identities and from different socio-economic backgrounds experienced life differently in the camps. The strategies for camp management, education, religious festivals and rituals are discussed in the chapter. The problems that refugees had with the local people (Tripura and *Bangali* Hindu) are also analysed. The second part of this chapter focuses on the identity crisis in the camps and finally the chapter also explores the processes of adoption to France of indigenous children from the refugee camps.

The Indian state did not allow the UNHC, Red Cross or any other international bodies to intervene because of a regional treaty between India, Pakistan and Bangladesh to resolve such matters among themselves (CHT Commission, 1991:45). Consequently, the facilities provided in the camps were quite inadequate as there was no international or outside help despite repeated pleas from the refugee leaders. Naturally, camp dwellers faced a host of problems that had significant ramifications for the lives of the refugees in general and especially for the refugee women. There were six camps situated at Kathachhari, Karbook, Pancharamchara, Shilachari, Thakumbari and Lebachari in the southern part of the state of Tripura (Chaudhury and Biswas, 1997:160). The estimated number of CHT refugees in India was 50,000-55,000 (Ali, 1993:193; Debbarma and George, 1993:55-56; Roy, 1997:168; CHT Commission, 1991:33-36). Obtaining and verifying information regarding the exact number of refugees is difficult for a number of reasons. The conflict obviously hampered information gathering. The numbers shifted due to movements in returnees and fresh arrivals and there is no detailed report available. The Indian government was reluctant to allow any international monitoring body, and any available information varies in reliability depending on the point of view of the sources of information. The government of Bangladesh has never acknowledged

the extent of the numbers claimed by international and human rights organisations, while Indian sources are accused of exaggerating the facts and numbers.<sup>120</sup>

The gender dimension of the refugee problem only began to attract the attention of researchers in the 1980s with the growing number of female refugees worldwide (Camus-Jacques, 1989:143). It is known that women and children comprise 75-80% of the world's refugee population (Palvish, 2004:22) This has prompted Espin to affirm that “gender is central to the lived experience of migration”, be it forced or voluntary (cited in Ahmed, 2003:22). While refugee life is generally disempowering and depriving for all, it can be a potential site of struggle for some women in asserting themselves as dynamic actors (Camus-Jacques, 1989:151; Chaudhury, 2004:267-279).

Women survivors exhibit a great deal of creativity in surviving, coping, overcoming difficulties and creating new meaning in their lives in the midst of distress. Indigenous women's experience in resettlement was not homogenous. There were subjective variations as well as variations derived from the material and physical conditions, the site and time of dislocation, and the age, state of health and socio-economic positions of the uprooted people, despite some general commonalities in the case of lost identity, changed life style, economic hardship and the like.

Thus, for example, pre-1986 refugees in India faced much harsher treatment and fewer facilities in the host country. They did not receive any official status and formal assistance. The help provided in the unofficial settlements was minimal; their movements were restricted and many were forcibly repatriated within a short span of time. The situation of the refugee women was more difficult from 1986 onwards. Mrinmoyi Chakma (61) with a mid-socio-economic status, said:

*In the refugee camps, 12 of us were staying in one room. Some of our relatives who had been driven out before us had gone to Tripura and settled there. They came to see and helped us. I had a severe headache and vomiting tendency for a long time after coming here. My menstruation had been stopped for two years. The reason for it may be that I could not eat properly for a long time. We had to go to the middle of the two 'jhuri'*

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<sup>120</sup>Keeping in mind these impediments, statistics in this regard range from 48,348 in April 1987 (Umong, 1993:14), 44,957 in June 1988 (Debbarma and George, 1993:56), 30,000 according to government of Bangladesh sources (Dewan, 1988:3), 64,000 in the mid-1980s (US Committee for Refugees, 2003:142) and 70,000-75,000 at the height of the exodus (Guhathakurta, 2004:197). The ethnic and geographical dimensions of the refugee problem replicated the general pattern of the CHT struggle: Chakmas made up approximately 71% of the refugee population, Marmas 15% and Tripura 14% (Chaudhuri, undated: 8). The number of uprooted women is unavailable. According to the records of the Tripura Government from December 1996, the number of adult female refugee inmates in the camps in total was 15,490, just a little more than the number of men (Majumdar, 2003:94,100).



*(hills). I sometimes think that I might have committed some sins in my previous life. That's why I was given that kind of punishment by God. After two years, again our block was burnt. A block contains 8 camps. There were some doctors in each block. The Chakma doctors were also to be found among the refugees. They made a health worker team and asked me to join them. We used to act out our frustration beating our innocent children. We always thought that somebody in the family brought that misfortune.*

People who had been forcefully displaced and took shelter in a refugee camps always had a wish to get back to their 'home'. The term 'home' refers to getting back to their belongings which they left in the CHT. Thirangama (2011:19) shows that the effective emotional force surroundings and *ur* (In the Tamil language meaning home)/home, has been marshalled by Tamil and Muslims – especially in relation to each other. *Ur* has the leeway to be used across ethnicity and caste for the same geographical entity is more displaced, gesturing to the idealized hierarchical controlled interactions within Tamil life, that were gradually more unsustainable through war and displacement. Another important aspect of the narratives was that in the cycle of violence, the 'victim' becomes 'perpetrator' of violence when they beat their children and children became the victims of various violence.

This fear grows out of the feeling that the memory of the displacement is their own property, intimate and communicable only within the group of people, since they share the knowledge of unique events. At the same time, however, the villagers have an unfulfilled desire for justice and public recognition of their sufferings and they wanted their land back. Though the women told me that their narrated memory of the displacement could be public, nobody ever showed an interest in listening, though they sometimes recalled their memories through household artefacts or stories shared by other women while talking during leisure time or while going somewhere. Life in a refugee camp had a remarkable effect on their lives; it was where they lived for nearly 12 years of their lives.

## **Camp Life**

### **Dwelling and difficulties**

All camps presented a more or less dismal picture regarding the basic conditions of living. Dwellings consisted of a long chain of small sheds made of 12 ft. polythene sheets and bamboo where up to three generations of a family lived without any privacy (Majumdar,

2003:96). Food, nutrition, health and medical care were highly inadequate (Majumdar, 2003:96; Murtaza, 1988a:14-15; Murtaza 1988b:14). Indian Government supplied rations included essentials like rice (4 kg per person per week), lentils, oil, a glass, a pot, a plate, salt and firewood (5 kl fuel per week) and a daily allowance of only 0.20 *rupees* (Indian currency) for adults and 0.10 *rupees* for minors, which was inadequate to meet all the basis daily needs of a family. Milk also was given for the babies. Sometimes dry fish was also given. The toilet was made of two bamboo planks and a hole. In addition they were given a tee-shirt and a *pajra* (like a pinon, which is woven in the mill). The babies were given dresses made of wool.

The general picture of the lives of women in the Tripura Refugee camps was characterised by a struggle similar to what Coulson and McNeill (1994:194) observed in the case of Yugoslavia's refugee women, which included the "*issue of loss, of identity, meaning as well as with the particularities of survival for their families and for themselves.*" As for camp life, the role of the host government is crucial in determining the fate of refugees. Many households remained half-fed. Around 900 refugees reportedly died from stomach upset (diarrhoea) in the early months of 1987 (Samad, 1987:7-8). However, Chameli Khisa (63), a retired school teacher, said:

*We were taken to the Thakumbari. Our names were listed and we were given a room in the camp. Then we were given rice, 4 kg per person in a week. Besides, we were given a tee-shirt and a pajra). The babies were given dresses made of wool. We always thought of returning to our home. India was not our country. We had everything in our own country. But border security did not allow us to leave the camp. In the camp, we had been suffering from diarrhoea and cholera. We had social problems with the local Tripura people. We sometimes went to distant forests to collect fuel. They did not allow us to do that and that led to a quarrel. After some days, when some teenage girls in the camp got involved with the local Tripura boys, it also caused some social problems between the local Tripuras and us. Along with the physical problems, we were also psychologically stressed and felt nervous and worried. We had nightmares about the house fires and the past. We had a hope that one day we would be able to go back, but were quite uncertain when it would happen. When we were physically unwell, we saw Chakma Doctors who were also refugees and stayed in the camps. I forgot to mention that the child who was in my womb when we fled to India miscarried due to the physical and mental pressure. Moreover, after the miscarriage, my bleeding continued for a long time. The colour of my urine turned reddish. I became very thin and did not have the energy to do any work. In the camp, we sometimes experienced difficulties: my daughter*

*first got involved with a local Tripura boy, and it created problems for us. His parents came to us and said that if my daughter talked with the boy they would complain about us to the security people who might send us to some uncertain place.*

There were the local people already struggling with scarce local resources when the refugees arrived, thereby increasing competition and resentment were the centre point of that context. Therefore, there were conflicts among the indigenous groups in the camp and with the local Tripura people. The intergenerational perpetuation of gender violence and the role of women in perpetuating/upholding patriarchal norms exist there. Since it is a Tripura province, the Tripura people thought that they were powerful there. The conflict emerged regarding collection of water and fuel and the relationships between the groups and the local Tripura people. Inside the camp, among the communities, there was also competition. The Chakma who were the majority in the CHT had become a minority in the camp. In the camps, the persons who held a higher socio economic status had always stocked rice in their houses, while people with lower socio economic status took out rice loans with high interest, 15kg within ten days on a loan of 10kg.

## **Education**

Education was an area where women suffered major setbacks due to displacement. Economic constraints combined with reduced opportunity caused interruptions and the end of study for many. Both male and female students were affected. Education for a girl is sacrificed first when there is a choice to make in an adverse situation. Initially, there were no schools in the Tripura camps. However, in view of the grim future facing the younger generations, refugee leaders subsequently took initiatives to set up primary schools. Many educated male and female inmates provided a voluntary service to run the schools. Later on, the Tripura government extended its help by providing free books, study materials and some infrastructural facilities and a small remuneration of Rs.100 per teacher hired from among educated refugees. In total, twelve schools were established in the five camps (Mazumdar, 2003:95-96).

As for young children it was difficult to educate them. Though with the help of SB they started a school there, the standard of education was not good. The women who had some education were appointed as teachers. They didn't know when they could return to their country but they did not want their children to remain uneducated. In every camp one to three schools had been set up. Some of them could send their children to government schools, but due to the

increased demand on the family – for example various jobs including day labourers in the local Tripura’s house or field – they could not do so. However, many of them sent their child back home to study. Some of them sent their children illegally to Bangladesh and left them in their relative’s house or Bihar from where they could continue the study. However, some of them remained in India after the peace accord for the better education available in the different parts of India. Nibedita Tripura (56) with upper socio-economic status and a housewife, said that she had a yearning to return to the country. After four years, she returned to Bangladesh illegally for the education of her daughters. She took them to a school located in Rangamati because her sister had taken her children there because she felt that they needed proper education as they had always hoped to get back to their homeland.

Nevertheless, only certain categories of people were able to take advantage especially those who were financially comparatively better off, and those who already had an educational orientation back home. Relatives in Tripura also assisted some by letting them stay at their homes to study in local schools. On the other hand, many people just could not afford to pay. Girls’ education was also sacrificed for the more ‘realistic’ purpose of taking care of younger siblings, or helping mothers with housework, or participating in some extra income generating activities. Many girls who were attending school or college were married off early because of insecurity and the uncertainty of life, putting an end to their education as a survival strategy.

## **Health**

Women's day-to-day roles within the ‘family sphere’ in securing income (like collecting fuel, selling extra fuel to other persons) providing care to the children, husband and other members in the family etc. led to health issues. The health of refugee women was especially important because the whole family structure was likely to collapse if the woman became ill, incapacitated or if she died (Camus-Jacques, 1989-148). Generally children, elderly people and women were the main victims of prevalent diseases because of the acute crisis of proper curative and preventive medical facilities. Women particularly suffered from ailments related to malnutrition such as anaemia, complications in pregnancy, delivery and so on. According to the respondents, the death rate was highest in the camps in the first year. But there is no record of these deaths. There were insufficient tube wells, there was always a problem of getting drinking water. Women could not bathe properly due to the scarcity of water. They often got involved in quarrelling with one another in getting water. Saroshwti Tripura (48), a gardener with low socio-economic status, said:

*Once we started life in the camp, I came down with a high fever and itching. There was a problem for women to take baths. We were given the tube well. But it was not sufficient. There was always a long queue for collecting water. Women used to fall out with one another while collecting water. Finally with the help of the male members of the families, we dug a small Kua (pond) in the field of the Tripura community. At first, they did not accept it cordially. They just closed the pond the following day. We just got involved in fighting with them and finally they understood our situation and extended their helping hands.*

None of the rooms had an oven or cooker. Most people dug a hole for cooking in the allocated room. When the cooking finished, the room became very hot and women generally started coughing as they were the ones doing the cooking. They felt very exhausted. They were supplied 5 kilos of fuel for a week by the Indian government. Women suffered from cholera and diarrhoea in large numbers. Some of them miscarried and others had menstruation problems. Three women I met in my field research said that they had lost their memories in the camp for a long time due to stress and fear. However, they used to take indigenous medicine and 'kabiraji' (traditional) treatment for their diseases and illnesses. Some of them went to the *Bhante* to learn what might be the 'fault' in their lives. Their bodies were painful for a long time. Over-bleeding in menstruation, or the cessation of menstruation for a long time were very common among the women. They blamed their fate. To get rid of their bad fate they tried to pray to *Buddha*. After a couple of years they made a small temple in the camps. Before that they used to go to local Tripura or Chakma areas to look for temple. The birth rate was high in the Tripura Refugee camps; camp dwellers explained that they were motivated by a desire to increase the population against the threat of extinction (Majumdar, 2003:94). Regardless of the cause, what it meant is that women had to deal with frequent pregnancies. Many reportedly died during childbirth. Joyoti Chakma (56), a member of MS, described the situation of pregnant women as "beyond description", as many mothers and new born babies died due to malnutrition and lack of treatment. Apparently there was a structure for providing health care and medical services in the camps. It is claimed that in Thakumbari (the biggest camp) and Pacharam, temporary dispensaries with doctors and paramedics were established, while a temporary hospital (30 beds) and a semi-permanent hospital (10 beds) were constructed in Kathakchari and Korbuk and the primary health centre of the State Government at Silachari met the needs of people sheltered there (Majumdar, 2003:94). The camp residents also had the option of using the local hospital facilities. Additionally, the Voluntary Health Association of

Tripura (VHAT) provided some basic health and medical training and afterwards distributed medicine.

Yet these services were insufficient to meet the needs and urgency of the camps as reflected in phrases heard often in stories such as ‘long waiting’, ‘lack of proper treatment’, ‘lack of medicine’, ‘death of many’, etc. Santoshito Chakma, who was the Information and Publication Secretary of the indigenous Refugee Welfare Association (JRWA), alleges that the services of the government appointed doctors and paramedics, which were initially regular, became intermittent. Moreover, in the absence of a medical allowance, in most emergencies the camp dwellers were left with no option but to sell their limited possessions or their rations to access better and immediate treatment.

There was a shortage of drinking water; according to one source, there was only one tube well for some 300-400 people, while another source reports that initially there were no tube wells at all in camps like Korbuk. As a result, women were forced to line up for a long time to collect water. The situation was compounded when they had to walk long distances outside the camps to collect water or firewood and to bathe. This brought them into contact with the local Tripura people which meant that their safety and security were at stake in the face of local people’s annoyance and resistance. On many occasions, the refugee women were interrupted on the way; sometimes their utensils or equipment or firewood were snatched away, and sometimes they were physically attacked by local people.

It is indeed disturbingly common around the world to find refugee women falling prey to physical violence, sexual coercion, abuse and rape (Ahmed, 2003:16; Vickers, 1993:27-30). Although there were some instances of rape and sexual violence, compared to refugee camps elsewhere the number was limited. Encounters with the local population are likely to be one major factor in this respect. While at the beginning, it was far more risky for women to leave the camp alone, the situation improved when they came to know the localities and the local people. Building relationships with local people was comparatively easy because a good number of people residing in the localities were from the Tripura and Chakma communities though it was a bit difficult at the beginning. It was also women who started working as helping hands offering cheap labour in the well-off local Tripura and Chakma people’s homes, and as a result they gained the respect of the local people. Then some of them also started businesses together that allowed them to develop good relations with the local people.

There were more tragic incidents in the camps than the participants in the research wanted to share at the beginning, since they thought that they were ‘personal’ stories and that the *Bangali* people might use them against them. When I went to Jonaki Chakma, she was

alone in her bamboo house and I saw many photographs hanging on her walls. I saw a photograph of a girl. I asked about her. She replied that she was her daughter who never returned after getting married. I asked her the reason. She said her in-laws never allowed her to return. After some time she told me that she had lied as she did not want to disclose the story to anyone. Her daughter in fact committed suicide in the camp. And such a fate was true not only of her daughter; there were on average 8-10 suicide cases in the different camps in the first year of camp life. Most of them were related to love affairs, unexpected pregnancy and depression. She said to me that her daughter had a relationship with a Marma boy but the boy refused to marry her. So finally she committed suicide. Jonaki had been nearly senseless for a few days due to the loss of her child and the resulting social teasing. However, suicide rates have gradually decreased over time.

### **Adaptation, Assertion and Changes**

According to the first-hand observations of Hans (2003:365), the scale of poverty in the Tripura Refugee camps was unparalleled even compared to that of the worst urban slums in India. Despite the predicaments mentioned above hill women displayed extraordinary strength in adjusting, growing and flourishing by taking on new roles and acquiring new skills and 'making do with nothing'. Their dire circumstances and poverty forced a large number of able inmates to seek alternative income sources. Men were mostly employed in various informal sectors outside the camps either as day labourers or as casual workers in local hotels and business establishments, while a few others were self-employed (small businesses, hawkers etc.) (Debbarma and George, 1993:70).

Over time, however, refugee employment evoked serious resentment among the locals who lost jobs as the refugees worked for lower wages. It is alleged that the refugees worked for low wages because they were supported by government rations, and local business and land owners were also exploiting them due to their circumstances (Debbarma and George, 1993:70). This situation brought the refugee men into conflict with the local population, which led the Tripura government to impose restrictions on local employers of the refugees (Debbarma and George, 1993:70). As a result, employment opportunities for male refugees decreased considerably, placing enhanced pressure on women's income earning activities. In this context, many refugee women took jobs as domestic helpers, day labourers in agriculture, even workers on construction sites (usually a male domain), and so on. For local men, this did not pose a big threat because of the different nature of women's jobs and the cheaper rate. Refugee women

could therefore continue to work with less difficulty. Women's work load was doubled, but in the interview some of them said that they did not have any options other than doing that.

In the early 1990s, women in the camps were also provided with training on waist-looms (a traditional way of making cloth) and in primary medical and health care. The waist loom training program was funded by a local voluntary organisation for six months under the supervision of the JRWA. The training targeted both sexes, but the number of women trainees was much higher. Upon completion of the training, these women carried on with production and running the shops in each camp to which people from outside came to buy. Similarly, the VHAT organised a medical and health training program to provide primary health care knowledge and treatment for the inmates. Some women derived benefits from being involved in both training projects, which opened up ways of learning new skills and acquiring economic opportunities for the participants, resulting in growing self-confidence, independent work ability, initiatives and a kind of professionalism. Women like Sukti Khisha (56), a small business person with mid socio-economic status, derived many benefits from being involved in the VHAT training. She spoke fervently about its empowering effects. Apart from the fact that the money she earned helped her financially to continue with further education, it gave her moral satisfaction and purpose derived from helping people. Life became something more meaningful than just for her own survival.

The completion certificate also proved useful for some women when returning home. One woman reportedly obtained a job as a nurse in Khagrachari by dint of that qualification. Equally, some women involved with the waist loom project have individually found ways to utilise their skills professionally to survive after resettlement. A degree of independence was achieved through the training process, as women became more assertive in making family decisions on matters like children's education, marriage and planning the family's future. Both male and female respondents acknowledged that husbands became more consultative and attentive to their wives' advice in contrast to the conventional unilateral male decision making that usually prevails in the hill societies. There is concern that the changes caused by a crisis do not outlast it. The position of refugee women in the camps is usually one of under-privilege, overwork and exploitation (Pavlish, 2004:22). Where male partners were absent, women had to handle new and extra responsibilities as household heads. Nonetheless, since hill men's work opportunities shrank considerably in the Tripura Refugee camps due to lack of mobility, freedom and restrictions on employment, women had to work harder. Therefore women became burdened with the task of both men and women within and outside the household.



Sumitra, an NGO employee who spent a substantial part of his adolescence and youth in a camp, reflected on women's multifarious roles:

*Women's extra activities to run the family were common in the camp. To generate their income, they used to weave net, mojra (small chair), borgi, dari (mat for drying paddy). Women used to cut bamboo into small pieces to help their husbands make mojra with them. Additionally, some of them worked in the Tripura fields as a day labourer and got 20 rupees a day to run her family.*

### **Challenges of Survival**

Another day, Zanoki Chakma came to the house where I was staying and asked me whether I could understand her. She said that she had forgotten to tell me a lot of things the previous day and she could not sleep properly. She said, "I recalled so many things that I needed to tell you." Das (2001) spotlights "social traumas" and the "remaking of everyday life" within survivor communities. I told her that I came here to listen to women like her, so obviously I would love to hear all of the stories that she had to tell me. Then she asked me to follow her. I followed her and we sat outside her house. She was now trying to rebuild her house. So we sat on bricks. However, she asked me whether I would mind if she turned on a song on her mobile phone. Then she started:

*My uncle's son died in the jungle while going to India. The forest was so cold. He developed severe pneumonia and cold. He died before we reached the border. We just left his dead body in the jungle. Everybody was busy saving their own lives. To tell you frankly, we lost all of our emotions. I had also been suffering from pneumonia and 'challi' (a digestion disorder). We used to get our own treatment if we were sick. I had to work hard to earn money as my husband was paralysed. At first I went to the forest to collect the fuel along with other women. But some incidents happened which were perpetrated by the local Tripura. Three of our girls were raped so we felt frightened and stopped going there. I illegally came to the country with some of the people and bought dry fish, nappi and other vegetables from here. After a week I returned to the camp and sold these among the refugees. On the other hand I bought some copper made plates, bowls, spoons and bed sheets from the market near the refugee camps and sold them among the indigenous 'people living in the Khagrachari and Rangamati districts. By that time, I had come to know the shortest way to go to the CHT from the camps. I started after dinner and brought some rice to eat on the way. It was not only me; all women in the camps did so many things to ensure the survival of their families.*

It was mostly indigenous women who ran the family in the camps. They invented many ways to be the source of income. They also faced a lot of problems and obstacles in collecting fuel and other things. They made their own way with strategies (going for other work, taking voluntary work) to counter those problem and helped their family survive. Men were involved in cultivation on local Tripura land. Women also did the same job but did not receive the same payment. Some women worked as helping hands in the *Bangali* Hindu or local Tripura houses that belonged to people of higher socio-economic status. But the problem was that the local Tripura did not accept them warmly. The refugee people accepted the jobs offered by the local elite people with low payment, which angered the local Tripura of low socio-economic status as this meant the loss of their jobs. The first few years they faced difficulties with local Tripura and *Bangali* Hindu people. After three years some of them started to open new shops with the help of local Tripura and *Bangali* Hindu people. Among my respondents five women informed me that they had started a small business selling dried fish and vegetables with the help of two Hindu businessmen.

After some days they were given thick rice which they could not eat. Then some Tripura people went to the local Tripura MPs and complained to them. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPM] was in charge of the state government. The opposition MPs (mainly from Congress) raised the issue in the local parliament and they changed the rice.

For widows, the challenge of identity had a different dimension that caused a much harsher struggle for survival. Hill society, which religiously is an amalgamation of Hindu Buddhist and animist traditions, does not ostracise widows the way *Bangali* Hindu society does. Apparently there are no particular dress or food codes, no restrictions on remarriage, nor restrictions on participation in 'auspicious' social or religious events. Even the Tripuras, Hindu by religion, do not consider widowhood as '*amagoli*' or '*ashuvo*' (inauspicious).

### **Camp Management**

Although resettlement in new locations required new modes of living and changed roles, the women remained as marginalised as ever in public decision making regarding camp management and repatriation talks. For administrative convenience, each camp was divided into several blocks operating under the block supervisors appointed by the Tripura government. A representative nominated by refugees from the block assisted the supervisor in distributing rations and managing the blocks. There was also a camp officer (a government employee) and storekeeper. No women, either from the Tripura government or from the refugees, were known to have been appointed to such positions.

Similarly, the JRWA, an organisation of refugees to protect their rights in Tripura, was not representative in terms of gender. The organisation reportedly had only a few female members on some of its camp management committees that were established to look after the interests of that particular camp to coordinate and liaise with the local Tripura government management and the JRWA Central Committee. There were only one or two women out of 15-21 members of the committees depending on the size of the camp population. Moreover, their role was limited. They were mostly consulted about religious and cultural matters in accordance with their social roles. Women were also excluded from the major repatriation talks that began in 1994.

### **Identity Crisis**

For refugees, life in displacement meant dealing with the question of identity. Super imposed on the individual's personal identity, the common identity of being a refugee masked individual variations. Identity crises were more acute among men, especially those who had had some power, position and social status. Yet, refugee women from better off backgrounds also suffered from the loss of identity to some extent. It is reflected in their references to their fathers' or husbands' distinguished positions as either '*Headman*', '*Karbary*' or teacher etc., or their own positions as students and the like.

Some women even contrasted their previous economically solvent condition with refugee life, attempting to reclaim past personal identity as opposed to their refugee identity. Those who were previously self-sufficient found it difficult to live at the mercy of the host government's handouts, which were usually impersonal and inadequate. As a matter of fact, changed lifestyle affected both well-off and poor, though in varying degrees. *Pahari* life, characterized by independence and hard work, suffered from the sudden imposition of dependency as illustrated by the remarks of Trisilata Chakma, (57) a housewife from a meagre socio-economic background "*We could be poor, but we were never beggars! You would not see any beggars among the hill people. But living in the camp was like being a beggar...always looking for help!*" This hurt their sense of pride both as human beings and as *Pahari*. In this respect, Needham (1994:4) has rightly observed that with no power and control over their own lives, without any sense of social belonging, future direction, income or source of livelihood, refugee men and women easily suffered from the loss of self-worth and self-dignity.

### **Organisation and Identity: Overcoming and Reconfiguring**

As with the economic crisis, women made efforts to overcome obstacles. Personal determination was significant in pursuing education amidst extreme hardship. Some of the women became involved in various remunerative activities from time to time to meet their educational expenses. In fact, it was not unusual to find *Pahari* girls even in normal situations engaged in extra income generating work to raise money for their education, in contrast to the boys, who depended primarily on their parents until they finished their study. As discussed in earlier chapters, the lack of an opportunity to represent their voice in the collective decision-making process, led women to form their own groups known as MS. The JRWA leaders claimed that the MS in the refugee camps was formed under their initiative as the affiliated body to look after the interests primarily of destitute and needy women. According to Pravakor Chakma, a JRWA Central Committee member back then and its current President, the Women's Committee of the JRWA (referring to MS in the refugee camps) was a non-political body and had no connection with the MS that was affiliated with the JSS. However, his daughter Joyoti Chakma, who was then Secretary of the Silachari Camp's MS, strongly asserted that this MS was a branch of the central MS of the JSS.

The tasks of MS performed in the camps were similar to those of JSS's MS: helping destitute women; raising consciousness among women about discrimination, their rights and social position; mediating conjugal conflicts; and so on. It organised classes to train women from different socio-economic backgrounds to be aware of the place of women in society as well the necessity of the struggle for self-determination. In order to support the most needy and destitute women, they also ran a waist loom project and created a common fund based on members' fees or donations. According to Joyoti, their efforts not only affected women, but also helped bring about some attitudinal changes among men. She explained that men who helped women with housework previously had been ridiculed and criticised by society, but that these MS initiatives had helped to foster a mentality of mutual help between men and women in the camps.

Many women had to deal with personal or collective tragedies, stress and trauma. For most of them, forced migration required a continuous response to change and the skill to adjust to a new environment. Women had to learn to cope with new roles and responsibilities, new community structures and changed familial relations (Martin, 1992:7-10). Furthermore, the loss of family members, division of families, loss of identity, the experience of or witnessing violence, and so on, caused or aggravated the stress and a range of traumatic feelings that negatively affected women's mental health (Palvish, 2004: 23). Hill women learned to survive and live through personal losses, despair, trauma and fear.

In coping with tragedy and stress, women tended to draw on support from collective solidarity. Many Refugee and IDP women recurrently mentioned that they were not alone in that situation. Some of them lost their relatives back home while in exile in India, but there was consolation in knowing that they were not alone in this experience. And most importantly, they believed that their sacrifice was made for the collective benefit of the indigenous people and the nation. Community support from friends, relatives, neighbours and family members, and the sharing of experiences, were crucial. Almost everyone with experience also gave people the necessary strength to deal with their own personal loss and experience of violence.

However, in a study like this it remains largely impossible to gauge how far and in what ways individuals had overcome the pain and trauma caused by violence. Moreover, it was difficult for a number of specific reasons. Firstly there was obviously a time-gap between the field work and actual displacement, which had happened some years before. The overriding concerns of subsequent life struggles could also result in people suppressing their innermost feelings. Secondly, the culture of silence that usually prevents women from expressing their personal feelings, grievances, sadness and agony in public was also a factor. Thirdly, the silence of both women and men often signified the depth of their sadness. For instance, I twice interviewed Sahntoshito Chakma, a key respondent on the refugee issue and the General Secretary of the JRWA, but on neither occasion did he reveal that one of his children had died while they were at Thakumbari refugee camp. I learned about it only afterwards when talking to his daughter. It seems to me his deep sense of sorrow was masked by his apparent silence.

### **Child Adoption**

After nearly a year of camp life, Bimol Bhante, who was also a refugee, proposed that there was an opportunity to send some of the children to France to get a better education since they could not otherwise provide an appropriate education system for the children. Bimol *Bhante* was the religious leader, so they believed him. 72 boys aged between four and 16 were sent to France and they were never told that they were sent there for adoption. Bimol *Bhante* told them that they would return when they finished their education. But finally they were given to an organisation named PASTAGE (<http://www.pastage.org/>). They did not know anything about the organisation. They heard later that Bimol *Bhante* had met the representative of the organisation in the Vietnam Monk Association congress where the scheme had been proposed in relation to the refugee people in the seven camps. I was able to meet two of the 72 boys as they had returned to the CHT. Among the 72 boys, 7 were Tripura and the rest of them were Chakma. However, four of them died due to unknown diseases and a car accident at a young

age. Some of them visited Bangladesh after a long time but returned to France because of language and re adjustment problems. However, I interviewed 7 families who had gone through the experience. Ranit Tripura (73) a retired school teacher with an upper socio-economic status, sent his three sons to France:

*We did not know anything. But we thought that they would get a better future if they could study, we were not told that they would be given up for adoption. We did not get any news of them. People were saying that they were sold. We asked Bimol Bhante, but he did not give us any news. Then people got very angry. They evicted Bilmol Bhante from the camp. After five years I got a letter from one of my sons and he told me the story of their lives. Then we communicated with other sons as well. They now had new parents. They had good jobs there. They visited the CHT after 12 years. One of my sons, who was eight years old at the time, forgot the Tripura language. We arranged a marriage for them with three Tripura woman so that at least they could learn the Tripura language and culture from them.*

Ranjit Tripura happily informed me that his sons took him and his wife to France and they stayed there for six months. He showed me their photographs taken in Paris and in other cities. However, he said that all 72 boys lost communication with each other when they were given up for adoption in different cities in France. However, some of them were able to track each other down when they grew up. His three sons were also separated. But his eldest son was 15 years old that time, so he started searching for his brothers and found them.

I met some of the family members of these children. Rajen Chakma's mother created a fictitious relationship with me saying that I was her 'dharmo bon' (sister through religion). She thought that I might be able to find her son as I had been studying in the UK. She told me that Rajen visited them once, but he had forgotten the Chakma language. They offered him marriage with a Chakma woman but he refused as he could not speak the Chakma language. He left after a month. After that they did not get any information about him. He never communicated with them. So his mother thought that I might be able to reach her son and get him back for her. When I was talking to Trimity's mother, a Tripura woman, Shovarani, came to me with photos of her son. She said her son contacted her five years back but that was his last contact. He had forgotten his language and felt shy talking to her. Shovarani further informed me that she could not speak English or French and as such had no idea how to get her son back. She showed me her son's photo when he was a child. She remembered his activities in the village before they went to the refugee camp. That occasion turned out to be a get-together of the families who sent their sons or brothers to France. Some other family members also came from different

houses. Suhashini Chakma (61), the elder sister of Himadri Chakma, came to me and started talking about her brother. She said that her brother had also forgotten the Chakma language but after getting married to a Chakma woman he learned it again. Now he calls them frequently. They sent them some CDs of Chakma songs that helped him to remember his lost culture.

I met two people who came from France and settled in the Khagrachari Sadar. One of them introduced himself to me as a jobless person who had returned from France. I saw him while crossing the road. My friend Sasosto introduced me to him. His home was located in the Tarabunia *mouza*. He studied up to class eight in *Doshbol Rajbihar*. He is the youngest of his six siblings. His father remarried when he was 14 years old. He started his story in this way:

*In 1986 I was a student in an orphanage with 250 students. I went to India with other student from the orphanage. By that time, my mother had died. We were given an allotment in the Khorbuk camp. Six students including me stayed in a room. We were there for more than a year. Then 72 students were sent to France for a better life through Bimol Bhante. When we reached Paris, we found that it was not like what we were told in the camp. It was very difficult to contact each other. I returned from Paris after 12 years. The students were scattered throughout France and it was really difficult to communicate with all of them. Some of them forgot the Chakma language and the Tripura language. We faced many difficulties in France. Everything was new, new language, new culture, new food. Four students died due to various causes.*

Though some people talked about this transnational adoption, most of them did not know what had actually happened. The boys were sent secretly and there was no written document that they carried with them. Today, indigenous people are still divided on the issue of Bimol *Bhante*. I interviewed Bimol *Bhante* over the phone in Kolkata, where he now resides. He told me that he did not know that these boys had been sent for adoption. He said that after the boys had been sent he never went to the CHT as people were very angry with him.

### **Benefits of Being a Refugee**

The stories of the refugee camps are not just full of pain, loss, depression or struggle. People also benefited in various ways. Many felt that they had discovered their identities in the refugee camps. Rally Chakma, the daughter of Santochish Chakma, who is a secretary of the Refugee Welfare Samiti, told me that they would not have been able to study if they had not been forced to leave their homeland. They started studying in India and then, after returning from India, they bought a piece of land in the city area of Khagrachari district and received a government education and jobs. She said to me that if they had not gone to Tripura, they would never have

been able to build a house and get good jobs. Hence, sometimes, she thought that they had benefited from displacement though they had lost their younger baby sister in the camp. Some of the respondents opened new shops and started a new life. Most of my respondents from all fields told me that they had learned a great many things when they were in the refugee camp which had helped them to survive back home as well.

Some of those who saved money in the camps opened new businesses. One of the respondents told me that although it was not a nice thing to say, the truth was that he could not have earned as much money as he did had he been in the CHT. From his perspective, being a refugee gave him a practical advantage in life.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the difficulties and the negotiations of the indigenous women of the CHT in the six refugee camps in India. First and foremost, negotiation was involved in the exigency of securing physical and social survival. Negotiation became a tool of survival and, as such, resistance occurred within the spaces of victimhood. The experiences of women also reflect their heterogeneity, including their social positions, education, political orientations, as well as the kind of violence they suffered, their living contexts and so on. Examining these variables reveals a number of things. Refugee women from well-to-do backgrounds had means or networks that provided support to use the educational facilities available in the places of displacement. The forms taken by their socio-political critiques were also different. Collective and individual dimensions of the experiences of refugee women were also perceptibly different from those of direct or indirect victims of physical violence (physically harassed by the local people). The collective dimension of experience provided scope for more and overt assertion. As a whole, it is discernible from the above accounts that women's will to live and rebuild lives has dis-established or overcome their victimhood. Survival appears as a means of challenging 'victimhood' as well as demonstrating agency, at least for some women. This was paradoxical because their identity as 'victims' limited women's capacity to exercise energy. Simultaneously, however, their very identity gave them the power, courage and determination to live on.

Overall this chapter has been an attempt to examine the process of constructing the memory of displaced indigenous women in the CHT through their narratives of displacement and other relevant issues. It is a fact observed by many anthropologists that descriptive representations of a particular context are much more common than representations of a knowledge-based, abstract, evaluative kind, or what Tulving (1972) calls 'general world



knowledge'. By observing their daily dialogue towards others and the material used in everyday life, the chapter explains how the memory of displacement of women is preserved and assimilated into culture, and analyses these traumatic events in relation to individual and cultural memory. Finally, it deliberates on the style and politics of representation through narrative.

My argument is about the experience of being a refugee and part of that experience included losing children as a result of misleading pretences. However, the chapter has also explored how the transnational adoption that was caused by conflict was experienced more broadly by placing a special focus on the children who had been sent to France for adoption.

## Chapter Nine

*"I am always frightened because I am a Chakma Woman":*

### Semantic Politics of Indigeneity and indigenous Women's Encounter

#### Introduction



Photo 10: 'Aarong' used the indigenous theme in their poster 'Tribal Craze' (29/11/12)

The Bangladesh Tourism Corporation regularly highlights the images of indigenous people and their cultural activities. Ironically, however, the official position of the government of Bangladesh when it comes to indigenous people is that "there are no indigenous people in Bangladesh". Images of indigenous people have been figuring prominently in the branding of the country which is termed as 'Beautiful Bangladesh', not just by the government but by private firms. Even *Aarong* [arguably the most well-known shopping outlet run by Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC)], draws on the indigenous theme through their poster titled 'Tribal Craze' in order to attract more business. The National Curriculum and Text Book Board (NCTB) of Bangladesh uses three categories, 'ethnic groups', 'minor race' and 'minority ethnic groups' in the text books for different years of students to indicate the indigenous people in Bangladesh. This is not only the case in text books. Any foreigner arriving at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (previously known as Zia International airport) will be greeted by photos of 'tribal dance' hanging on the walls. Yet the government claims that there are no indigenous people in Bangladesh. Is it to avoid the allegation that the Bangladesh military is involved in human rights violations in the CHT, especially on the indigenous people, which could hamper the process of sending the Bangladesh army to join a UN peace-keeping mission. This is because it is a condition of every UN mission that if military personnel of any country are involved in any human rights violations in any country, that country is not eligible to join

the UN mission. The position of Bangladesh now is that it is at the top of the list of countries who send the maximum personnel to UN missions. This chapter deals with the politics of identification/recognition of the groups of people known as ‘tribals’ or ‘*upajati*’ or ‘*adibasi*’ or, more recently, indigenous in Bangladesh. It relates to, on the one hand, how these terms are being constructed and labelled, and on the other hand, the rights and present predicaments of the people designated as such. It examines the semantic politics (the politics in the way language is used to connote different histories and politics) of various categories (‘*tribal*’, ‘*adibasi*’, ‘*upajati*’<sup>121</sup> etc.) associated with the term indigenous. It also analyses the meaning of ‘being indigenous to the indigenous people themselves. Finally, it is an attempt to examine how indigenous women in the CHT perceive the term and how they engage with it through their experiences of violence.

The Bangladesh ex-foreign minister Dipu Moni made this argument while briefing foreign diplomats and UN agencies in Dhaka on July 11, 2011:

*The CHT people were late settlers on Bangali soil and in the CHT region compared to the Bangalee native, the vast majority of whom have been residing here for more than 4,000 years.... Giving a special and elevated identity to only 1.2 percent of the total population of 150 million by disintitling the 98.8 percent cannot be in the national interest of Bangladesh.*

This is, of course, absolutely correct, but it's beside the point. I am not arguing here that the government should give elevated status to CHT groups. What we should be arguing is that they deserve the same rights as every other Bangladeshi and because they have had usufruct rights over the lands they live in for a very long time, this should be protected, just as it is protected for Bangladeshis in other parts of the country. So it isn't about giving them special rights, it's about protecting the normal rights they should have. The question of ‘indigeneity’ has been viewed here from a majoritarian, exclusionary approach that considers the indigenous peoples as adversarial counterparts. The same approach is evident in the latest constitutional reform that has recognised them as a ‘*Khudro Nri-Gosthi*’ (small ethnic group) without the consensus of the people concerned. Also prior to this reform, a law was passed in the parliament entitled the *Khudro Nrigosthi Sanskritik Protishthan Act, 2010* (Small Ethnic Groups Cultural Institutions Act, 2010), which applies to the people of the CHT and other parts of Bangladesh. Here also the term ‘*Khudro Nrigosthi*’ is used to refer to non-*Bangalis*.

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<sup>121</sup>In Bangladesh, the term ‘tribal’ or ‘ethnic’ people is used in academic writing (Lewin, 1889; Hutchinson, 1906; Bessagnet, 1958) to identify non-*Bangalis* as a separate category. But the term ‘*Upajati*’ denotes a subcategory for ‘*Jati*’ or nation.

In my field areas, we were discussing the politics of the hill tracts. Special attention was being given to identity politics in the CHT. In the *Bihar* there was a girl named Suchona. She was twelve years old. She was offering food to us. She told us she had cooked the *Binni Bhat*<sup>122</sup> herself. Shephalika Tripura, who was seated next to me, told me that her mother was also in the camp and that she had fled from the camp. But she was not able to get back to her original homeland, so she was given shelter in the Bihar and she cooks for the *Bhante*. She got married, but her husband died at a very young age. In our conversation Antika Chakma (Suchona's mother) said:

*We do not understand the term 'adibasi' or 'upajati'. We only understand that I am not lucky as you are. You were born in a Bangali family, I was not. You cannot understand the pain of being born a Chakma, I am here, doing this and I am landless because I am Chakma. I always think of ways of saving me and my daughter's life. I am always frightened as I am a Chakma woman. However, I am still proud to be a Chakma woman and how I have survived till now.*

The above ethnographic account helps us to understand how the women try to weave their own identity. It also depicts the way socially positioned people such as the *Bhante* see the ordinary people, especially women. The religious and social position of a person makes him/her think that they are more powerful in terms of knowledge, thought, and information. But for ordinary women, thought based on their experiences makes them aware of their own existence and to them, their suffering is caused by their identity but is also a source of great strength.

Though the issue of indigeneity<sup>123</sup> has long been hotly debated, I will start my arguments here with a recent statement by the government of Bangladesh that "the tribal people living in Chittagong Hill Tracts are 'ethnic minorities' and they should not be called indigenous in the region".<sup>124</sup>

### **UN Understanding of Indigeneity: An analysis**

The working definition of indigenous peoples is the one provided by UN Special Rapporteur Jose Martinez Cobo in his monumental study of the problem of discrimination against

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<sup>122</sup>*Binni* is a kind of patty usually used by the Chakma people for making traditional cake and special rice to honour guests.

<sup>123</sup>The Oxford English Dictionary (2010) defines indigeneity as "the quality of being indigenous, or indigenesness". The term 'indigenous' is defined as "born or produced naturally in a land or region; native or belonging naturally to the soil, region, etc." The term is used primarily to denote aboriginal inhabitants or natural products.

<sup>124</sup>July 27, 2011, *The Daily Star*.

indigenous peoples<sup>125</sup>. Cobo includes the following criteria to identify indigenous peoples: (i) continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies; (ii) comprising non-dominant sectors of society; and (iii) determination to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories and ethnic identity “in accordance with their cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems”<sup>126</sup>. But Dayes (2008:18) explains that if we summarise the above criteria, the following may emerge as the most crucial ones: (a) exclusion from (or only marginal inclusion in) modern state-building and formal development processes; (b) continuing non-dominance (or marginalisation) in major decision-making processes; (c) presence of customary law and traditional governance institutions; (d) close attachment to an ancestral or historical territory; and (e) geographic concentration in those territories<sup>127</sup>.

The UN forum for indigenous peoples is understood by many scholars as an avenue of expression of indigenous aspiration that has been denied until now (see Chakma, 2002:2; Muehlebach, 2001:39; and Henriksen, 1999:4). For instance, Muehlebach (2001:40) uses the metaphor of ‘place making’ to examine how indigenous delegates are involved in the discursive production of ‘indigenous place’ in the UN. Most often, indigenous identities are understood as a political strategy used by the respective communities, for lack of a better political terrain. For instance, Hodgson (2002:3) examines the Maasai attempts in Tanzania to link their fragmented identities together in terms of ‘indigeneity’ that in turn gave them better visibility, increased legitimacy and improved donor support. Murray Li (2000:149) shows that in Indonesia, ‘tribal’ people articulate transnational recognised indigenous identity as a strategy. She argues that indigenous identities are a contingent product of agency and the cultural and political work of articulation. A similar comparison has been made by Parkin (2000) in his study of ‘tribes’ in Jharkhand, a central region of India.

The recorded history of ‘indigenous peoples in the UN starts in 1982 with the Working Group on ‘indigenous peoples’ established by a decision of the United Nations Economic and Social Council. The Working Group completed a draft declaration on the rights of ‘indigenous peoples’ in 1993 which promised to usher in collective rights to a degree unprecedented in international human rights law. The latest in the line is the formation of the UN Permanent Forum of indigenous Peoples created in 2001 with a broad mandate to deal with six main areas: economic and social development; culture; the environment; education; health; and human

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<sup>125</sup>UN Document: E/CN.4.sub.2/1998/7/Add. 4, para 379

<sup>126</sup>Ibid.

<sup>127</sup>Erica-Irene Daes, *Indigenous Peoples: Keepers of Our Past, Custodians of our Future*, International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), Copenhagen, 2008, p. 18.

rights. But I feel uncomfortable with the various UN criteria as a basis on which to understand 'indigeneity'.

The category of 'indigenous peoples' that is used by the UN is ahistorical, mirroring the notion of the simple and undifferentiated society in the post-industrial discourse. While it is linked with the pre-colonial period, what is the status of the indigenous people in the countries that were not colonised? Moreover, the record of human settlement is not documented comprehensively and people's existence was there before the records of first settlement were made. The UN Working Group on indigenous Peoples has five criteria to determine an indigenous community (based on the Martinez Cobo report of 1986): self-definition, non-dominance, historical continuity with pre-colonial societies, ancestral territories, and 'ethnic identity' (Kingsbury, 1998:141; Anaya, 1996:7).

The first criterion, self-definition, has already made the space of indigeneity a battlefield for inclusion. In this sense, it resembles the representational political field of nation-states where communities that were unheard of before suddenly appear and assume an identity that cries out for representation. But the struggle of indigenous people in many countries is a part of history; even if it sometimes crosses the conceptual border of the nation-state. The second criterion, non-dominance, implies victimhood which, not surprisingly, is what generally defines 'indigeneity' (as vulnerable, marginalised) and is very much essentialist. It also implies the paralysis in the agency of 'indigenous peoples' around the world.

The third and fourth criteria lack historical sense. Let us look at the third and fourth criteria:

*'Indigenous' peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems.*(Martinez Cobo Report, Para 379-80, reprinted in Kingsbury, *ibid.*, emphasis added).

In the swirl of migration and nomadism that has characterized human history very few societies in the world inhabit ancestral territories. Rather, it could be argued that the creation of territories of belonging is itself a product of colonial practices that forced indigenous communities to recede into the forests. Furthermore, the idea of territory should not always

mean the landscape or geographical boundary; it may also mean the social and political sense of territory that brings in the issue of the right to culture.

The last criterion, 'ethnic identity', is not a significant marker of indigenous peoples alone. The UN discourse on indigenous peoples reiterates the vulnerability of the latter as a community, unable to establish itself due to centuries old marginalisation. The paradox of the UN discourse is that it attempts to empower the marginalised; however, they have to be relegated to the position of victims to be empowered. This illuminates the powerless subjecthood that entraps the indigenous communities, even when they adopt it as a political strategy. Ethnic identity cannot be treated as a criterion for being indigenous. If that were so the *Bangalis* of Bangladesh can also be categorised as indigenous. It is more the case that indigeneity can only be constructed from the people's narrative of indigeneity. These criteria show that the UN conception of indigeneity is linked to geographical territoriality, a primeval quality of defence of territories against others of the same species.

### **Construction of Indigeneity in Bangladesh.**

This part describes how the semantic politics of indigeneity has played its part in Bangladesh and what roles the state and public discourses play in these politics.

#### **'Tribe'**

The term 'tribe' itself was a construct born of the administrator's need for classified information, which initiated the colossal task of mapping the population into 'tribes' and 'castes'. The definition of the term 'tribe' has long been a subject for discussion among anthropologists, but a generally accepted definition is yet to be recognised (Naik, 1968:84-97). This leaves a basic question unanswered: are there people who can be identified as tribal? For some scholars, identifying the tribal from the non-tribal is easy. Weiner (1978:202) claims that everyone in Chotanagpur can be recognized as tribal. "A distinctive racial type, known by physical anthropologists as belonging to the proto-Australoid stock, they are somewhat darker than other Indians and have features that are sometimes Mongoloid in appearance. Perhaps the most distinctive feature of tribal life is the very attitude towards life itself. In contrast with their Hindu neighbours, tribals are carefree people and hedonistic in their nature." Several anthropologists hold the view that a tribe is no different from a caste (Ghurye, 1943:232; Beteille, 1974:178; Bailey, 1960:279). Tribe as a category, separated from the mainstream caste society, is an invention of colonial British administrators. As Singh puts it, "The notion of a tribe was introduced by the colonial administrators. It was part of their universal trend to

dichotomize the indigenous people and the colonizers, the savage and the civilized, the tribals and the non-tribals” (1995:182). Beteille (1974:165) discusses four key criteria that have been used to distinguish a tribe from the rest of the population: size, isolation, religion, and means of livelihood. He points out that these criteria fail to support the contention that distinct tribal communities do exist in India.<sup>128</sup>

### **‘Adibasi’**

The term ‘*adibasi*’ is mostly used in Bangladesh and India. The use of this term (literally, ‘original inhabitants’) or ‘indigenous people’ for the groups classified under the Constitution as ‘Scheduled Tribes’ in India, has now become common place. Despite its passage into everyday usage, scholars have voiced their misgivings about the applicability of terms such as ‘tribe’ and ‘indigenous people’ in the Indian context (Beteille, 1998:190). Andre Beteille points to the theoretical and practical difficulties of distinguishing ‘*adibasis*’ from the castes around them, given their long history of cultural exchange. Nandini Sundar (2009:103) has discussed the creation and modification of ‘*adibasi*’ identity and its direct connection to law. Rycroft (2014:13) points out” “Originating in the Hindi language in the 1930s, a period of intense conceptual and practical decolonisation, the word ‘*Adibasi*’ can be assessed as both a translation and a negotiation of the term ‘Aboriginal’. This was a colonial category employed to delineate the conceptual boundaries between Hindus and non-Hindus and thereby undermine attempts to construct a homogenous national identity.” Today more problematic pathways of indigenous claims are visible; the way Indian ‘*adibasis*’ have sometimes joined Hindu supremacists in hate politics and mass violence against Muslim minorities (Baviskar 2007. Froerer (2006:41)]. “We cannot assume,” Baviskar underlines, “that indigeneity is intrinsically a sign of subalternity or a mode of resistance.”

In a Muslim-majority Bangladesh their culture is mostly considered as anti-Muslim for their association with pig-rearing and habits of eating pork that are forbidden to Muslims. They are also placed at the lowest rank in the social hierarchy. Their lifestyle especially that of people from some groups who usually do not wear any cloth on the upper parts of the body, is often represented as ‘uncivilised’. Similarly, the contemporary public discourse of indigeneity in Bangladesh stands on the argument that *Bangali* is the ‘*adibasi*’ of the land since most of the ‘indigenous people’ living in Bangladesh migrated to the region from different parts of the

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<sup>128</sup>The current Sangh Parivar strategy of claiming autochthonous origins for Aryans is an inversion of this argument, now aimed at emphasising distance from Muslim “outsiders.”



world later than *Bangali* people settled there. Thus the argument goes: the ‘indigenous people’ cannot be the *adibasi* of Bangladesh since they are not the original inhabitants of these lands. In this regard anthropologist Rashid opined to the BBC in this way: “All ethnic groups are not *adibasi*, but some ethnic groups can be treated as ‘*adibasi*’ (Rashid’s opinion published on *BBC Bangla*, 9 August 2016). He added that *Bengalis* also have been in this landscape and many other people also came here. There is no scope for debate on who is to be identified as *adibasi*. It is also important to note here that the scholars in Bangladesh are divided into political camps following their political parties. Their opinion reflects their party’s position regarding ‘*adibasi*’ issues. [Thapar (1991) and Hansen (1999), quoted in].

### **‘Upajati’**

Although ‘*upajati*’ (literally ‘sub-nation’ or ‘sub-ethnic group’) is probably a direct, and yet etymologically flawed, translation in *Bangali* of the English term ‘tribe’/‘tribal’, it is the term used in some parts of India and Bangladesh, and may provoke further argument: if the indigenous people were to be regarded as an ‘*upajati*’, literally a ‘sub-nation’, from which ‘*jati*’ (nation) or people did the indigenous peoples’ originate? The term ‘*upajati*’ occurs in the CHT Accord of 1997 and in the district and regional council laws of 1989 and 1998. However, we also know that the term was not included in these instruments on the basis of the free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) of the peoples of the CHT.

### **‘Khudro Nri-Goshthi’**

Although the *Khudro Nrigoshthi Sanskritik Pratisthan Bill 2010* (Small Ethnic Groups Cultural Institution Bill 2010) fails to satisfy the aspirations of those peoples in Bangladesh who regard themselves as indigenous or *adibasi*, it none the less provides, and quite rightly too, a clear rejection of the term ‘*upajati*’ (sub nation), which was hitherto attached to the name of the concerned cultural institutes (then called ‘Tribal Cultural Institutes’). Academics engaged as experts by the Ministry of Culture to advise it on the terminology to be used in the law unanimously urged the government to use the term ‘*adibasi*’ and to refrain from using other terms such as ‘*upajati*’ or ‘*nrigoshthi*’ or ‘*nritattik jonogohsthi*’ (Small Ethnic Groups)<sup>129</sup>.

### ***Small Ethnic Groups***

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<sup>129</sup>Raja Devasish Roy, 2010, See also, Mangal Kumar Chakma, 2010.

In the first place, the indigenous peoples and the *Bangali* people are both ethnic groups. The ‘smallness’ of the indigenous peoples based on the size of population should not be the basis on which to distinguish between the different ethnic groups. Highlighting the difference in the numbers may itself promote discriminatory attitudes among those with large populations against those with small populations. It is also inaccurate, because Urdu-speaking people living in Bangladesh would also then qualify as a ‘small ethnic group’. This would therefore be confusing and imprecise. In this bill, only 27 indigenous groups were included and nobody knows how those were selected and why the rest were left out. There are more than 50 indigenous groups in Bangladesh (Kamal, Chakraborty and Nasreen, 2003)

### ***Minorities***

While the term ‘minorities’ – whether ethnic, linguistic or religious – could accurately describe the indigenous groups of Bangladesh, it is still not as appropriate as indigenous as a human rights construct. In some respects, the discrimination that the members of indigenous groups suffer may be similar to that of non-indigenous members of religious minority groups (e.g. Hindu, Christian and Buddhist) and ethnic and linguistic minority groups (e.g., Urdu-speaking people). However, in other respects, the nature of discrimination against indigenous people is usually far deeper (on account of racist attitudes towards indigenous groups) and grounded in more structural and historic circumstances.

### ***Jumma***

Based on the mode of cultivation, *Jumma* nationalism is the political ideology adopted by the PCJSS but dominated by the Chakma during the mid-80s. It attempted to unify indigenous ethnicities under its banner. It emphasises the cultural, linguistic, religious and the historical distinctiveness of the hill people. Though the term is still being used, the focus of attention has shifted towards their recognition as ‘*adibasi*’.

The most important law in Bangladesh for the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), the CHT Regulation of 1900, uses the term indigenous to refer to the peoples other than the *Bangali* inhabitants living in the CHT.<sup>130</sup> Most CHT laws from 1989 to 2009 use the term ‘*upajati*’ (for example in the Hill District Council Acts of 1989 and CHT Regional Council Act of 1998) or ‘tribal’ (for example, in the CHT Regulation [Amendment] Act, 2003). Similarly, the Finance

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<sup>130</sup>Rule 52 of the CHT Regulation, 1900 defined an indigenous person of the CHT as ‘a Chakma, Mogh or a member of any Hill tribe indigenous to the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the Lushai Hills, Arakan Hill Tracts, or the State of Tripura’. See also rules 4 and 6, CHT Regulation, 1900.

Acts of 1995 and 2010 use the term indigenous. The Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRSP) 2008 and PRSP 2010 use the term indigenous people', while the PRSP 2005 used the term 'ethnic minority/*adibasi*'. Also worthy of note is that three succeeding heads of government in Bangladesh, namely current prime minister, Sheikh Hasina (both as Prime Minister and as Leader of the Opposition)<sup>131</sup>, former prime minister and current opposition leader Khaleda Zia<sup>132</sup>, and then Caretaker Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed<sup>133</sup>, all used the term '*adibasi*' in their goodwill messages during the celebrations of International indigenous Peoples Day in Bangladesh (9th August). But this was their attempt to attract the indigenous people to their vote bank. However, when they are in power they never accept the demand of the indigenous people to be formally recognised as such.

On August 22, 2011, the Bangladeshi government replaced the word '*adibasi*' with *Khudro Nritgosthi* (ethnic minorities) in all laws, policies and government publications, thereby reducing the legal status and protection of the Chittagong Hill Tracts people. The Foreign Ministry opined that all the people living in Bangladesh territories were indigenous. As the British had not settled in the Indian sub-continent as they had in America and Australia, there was no benefit to identifying any particular group separately as '*adibasi*'. The government pointed out that the word '*adibasi*' was not used in the CHT Peace Accord. Instead, the term '*upajati*' had been used. Consequently, they argued, in the light of the 15th Amendment the phrase '*Khudro Nritgosthi*' should be used.

### **The Gendered Trajectory from '*Jumma*' to being' Indigenous'**

Today there are diverse claims to labels in different indigenous groups. Women political activists who were involved in either JSS or UPDF or other JSS reformists groups, generally supported their respective political leaders' stands on the identity issue. JSS has now shifted its claim about the identity of indigenous people from '*Jumma*' to '*adibasi*'<sup>134</sup>. UPDF fights for the recognition of their identity as '*Jumma Chakma*', or '*Jumma Marma*' etc., focussing on *Jum* cultivation. However, ordinary women look at the issue of indigeneity with a focus on the agony of their experiences of the cultural and material economy and how they were evicted from their homeland.

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<sup>131</sup>Sanjeeb Drong (2003:10-11).

<sup>132</sup>Sanjeeb Drong (2003:9). See also *Solidarity* (2004: 11).

<sup>133</sup>Sanjeeb Drong (2008:8).

<sup>134</sup>Though their manifesto still refers to the *Jumma* nation.

Interestingly, my respondents, while talking with me, said different things that denied the core concept of having a nation- and state-centric definition of ‘indigenous people’ set by the UN Declaration and ILO Convention. I met Saneshoi Chakma (71), a part time *jum* farmer, a female with lower socio-economic status who stated that they came from Arakan *Pahar* (Hill)<sup>135</sup>. Hill does not mean any boundary that can be a separator or a state border. She told me that she feels very upset when *Bangali* people say that she and her people are from Burma. She said she had never heard anything about Burma from her ancestors, but that she had heard a lot of things about the Arakan Hills. The Hill means a lot to her, her life, relationship, right to land ...everything. So to the indigenous people the Arakan Hill is not a nation-state boundary as framed as a definition of indigeneity by UN bodies. This UN definition is also considered as a colonial hangover which denies the cultural belonging of the indigenous people. I argue further that being indigenous is not a part of any territoriality, instead it is a matter of cultural belonging to a certain area.

When I was discussing the matter with Monimala, she said that she supported the JSS leaders’ position, and so she introduced herself as ‘*adibasi*’. She thinks that if the people gain this identity, they will be saved from various forms of discrimination. Interestingly as a part of identity politics, some Chakma, Marma and Tripura activists changed their names by adding indigenous or ‘*Jumma*’ before their own name (for example, the names indigenous Kabwa Marma, *Jumma* Hari Kishore Chakma’). However, among the four indigenous groups in my six field areas, women of different ages, professions, and economic backgrounds argued in favour of a different identity for themselves. Most of them do not agree with the position that the indigenous leaders have taken by supporting and advocating indigenous identity. Some women opined that they have heard the word ‘*adibasi*’ only in recent years, whereas, before that they were asked to fight for ‘*Jummo*’ rights and identity. Many times I was asked whether I was looking for any 'female' issues as I was interested in talking to women. Moreover, it is important to note here that out of fear, some women were voicing the opinions of either JSS or UPDF or the reformist group of JSS. In Shishirpur, while discussing this issue, Tripaty Chakma (52), a *Jum* farmer from a low socio-economic background, said:

*I do not understand anything about ‘adibasi’ or ‘upajati’. ‘Upajati’ is a term that Bangali people often use to address us. I want to refer to myself as a Chakma woman. I have been going through these sufferings as I was born a Chakma, and the pains I*

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<sup>135</sup>Arakan is a mountain range in western Burma (Myanmar), between the coast of Rakhine State and the Central Burma Basin, in which flows the Irrawaddy River. It is the most prominent of a series of parallel ridges that arc through Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram and Burma.

*suffered in the jungles while fleeing to India during the struggle to save my life as a pregnant woman, no man can imagine. Thus I am a Chakma woman, nothing more; I do not want to understand anything more than that.*

Her husband sitting near her countered her logic, saying: “As she suffered a lot, her suffering is influencing her opinions. You should not consider what she said.” He said that he wanted to introduce himself as ‘*Jumma*’ as he was a *Jum* farmer and he thought that his identity should be based on that. Therefore, the formation of identity can be based on their perception on themselves. Parfitt and Egorova (2005:216) in their work in E Bene Israel and the Lemba, requested the religious and group identity of their respondents and their outlooks on the history of their community. Nearly all of their respondents acknowledged themselves as practising Jews (though they belong to different schools of Judaism) and they made the argument that their ancestors were from ‘Israel’. Many said that DNA tests did not have any significance for them, as they always knew that they were Jewish.

The discourse of being indigenous has been developed as a collective identity, but indigenous women conceive it as part of their experience of being a woman and a member of indigenous groups. The difference between the experiences of being an indigenous man or woman belonging to different socio-economic groups and cultural practices creates separate worlds of identity. I take this discussion further to show that ‘indigenesness’ includes the experience of violence and victimhood which helps people to create their own identity rather than aligning themselves with the definition set by international agencies.

That Indigeneity is also about cultural resources becomes evident from the following ethnographic account. In the field I always wore the Chakma, Marma or Tripura dresses. The women in different field areas narrated to me various stories related to their dresses. I asked them why they were not interested in selling these in the local market. Binita Chakma (55), a housewife who occasionally made the *Pinon* and *hadi* (scarf) at her home and had a low socio-economic status, said that now she had only one ‘*alam*’ (handloom cloth) in her house. She told me that the designs they weave in the *pinon* are symbols of their identity. She showed me three pieces of cloth (*pinon*, *thaibung* and, *rinai*) and asked me to look at the designs in the side of the cloths. These were different in terms of design, colour and material. She told me that I could recognise a woman’s identity by seeing the design in the cloths of the lower portion. Every community has its own design which indicates their identity. Due to pressure from the *Bangali* community, now most young girls do not wear traditional dresses and some of them do not want to wear them to avoid disclosing their identity and it was clearly a violence toward their culture. Today due to less access in the forest these days, natural dying is rarely seen in

the CHT. Removing the right of indigenous women to make dye and this applying pressure to their culture and traditional cloths are a form of violence in their lives. Hence the politics of indigeneity can also be understood through the cultural context in which women have their own agency, and the fact that women have both lost and tried to regain it indicates that the politics of indigeneity is not about territoriality or the issue of inhabitants. Rather it is linked with the women's agency and the cultural traits related to that agency.

That women's diverse experiences shape their diverse identities is evident from a Santal respondent's perspective. Shila Murmu (56), a day labourer and with a lower socio-economic status, said:

*I have given birth to a child in the border area when we were waiting for the border to be opened for business. I was given shelter in the temple and then I felt that due to my identity I was placed in this situation. Because I was a woman, I had to give birth to a child, and because I was Santal, I was placed in a temple. Was it my sin to be born a Santal woman?*

Similar thoughts were expressed by my respondents from the Marma community. Shin Prue (49), a *Jum* farmer and from a lower socio-economic background, told me that she had left her child while fleeing to India. The army was firing, and the eight months old baby was crying. Everyone in her group was telling her that if the army could hear the sound, they would find out the location and everybody would be dead. She had left the baby in the dark, and when they reached the border area, they again faced the firing of the Indian army. She was caught by the Indian army and was taken to another place. The Indian soldier beat her and sexually harassed her by touching her breasts. She fainted and the army left her near the hills. Her family members were searching for her and there was a *Bhante* who found her naked. "Could they do it with their own women?" she said. "They did it because they thought that they could do it with us. It is our fate that we were born in this country and with breasts and a hole. We are not Bangali, this is our sin."

The politics of identity is not something that can be imposed by some organisation or the state in the expectation that people will accept it. It is something beyond their categorisations. It is something what the women feel through their experiences and their understanding about their identity and that they want to stand up for.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have discussed how indigeneity is conceived and shaped by academicians/scholars in different countries and international agencies in Bangladesh. It has

been a part of a colonial legacy and semantic politics. The indigenous leaders of the PCJSS have been fighting to get recognition for the identity as '*adibasi*' according to ILO convention, whereas most of my female respondents did not know about the ILO convention at all. It was not clear to them why their leaders were demanding to establish their identity as '*adibasi*'.

Hence, in this chapter I have argued that the indigenous women's narrative scan open a new way of thinking in the construction of indigeneity based on their experience as Marma, Chakma and Tripura as well as being women. They found that a combination of various identities (such as indigenous, religious, female, of a particular socio-economic status) made them vulnerable yet also gave them the authority to talk about these. Hence, these women map their own territories with their experiences and challenge the state-sponsored concept of indigeneity.

## **Conclusion: The Indigeneity Question**

There is a paradox in this globalisation of indigeneity: the concerns of most indigenous people remain local and are deeply rooted in particular colonial struggles, while, at the same time, the cultural politics of indigeneity continue to exert their greatest force in relation to the imagination of post-settler nationhood. During most of the twentieth century, indigenous images were being treated as the common property of the post-settler nations, freely available for use as symbols in the construction of nationhood. References to pre-colonial pasts, out of which distinctive post-settler nations had been constructed, abound in Maori carvings in New Zealand, Aboriginal people with spears and boomerangs in Australia, totem poles in Canada and scalp-hunting, tepee-dwelling Indians in the United States. Narratives of settler nationhood routinely employed indigenous imagery to create romanticised pasts that had been transcended or succeeded by the legitimacy of post-settler states (Sessions, 2005:7).

My research on the impact of state violence and displacement among common indigenous women has revealed that the dimension of state violence has transformed itself through the use of language, threats, religious domination and land-grabbing in the name of the national interest or other instruments that lead to the ecology of fear in the CHT. On the other hand, protest and resistance also find their voice through the use of language, self-surveillance by the community or at an individual level and through different forms of negotiation (as discussed in Chapter Five). The varied subject positions of the women or their intersectionality shapes their experience of violence, protest and negotiation.

What can be inferred from the foregoing narratives of hill women's negotiations with situation of their victimisation? First and foremost, negotiation was involved in the exigency of securing physical and social survival. Negotiation became a tool of survival and, as such, resistance occurred within the spaces of apparent victimhood. Resistance in this situation mostly took a hidden form which is hard to observe and classify (Ginwall and Ramanathan, 1996:4).

### **Kalpana's Warriors: An Exhibition**

*'Amader dhamanite biranganar rakta/Amader dhamanite Kalpana Chakmar rakta'* ('The blood of war heroines runs through our veins/The blood of Kalpana Chakma runs through our veins').



On the 2013 International Women's Day in Dhaka this was a common slogan. While commemorating the role of – war heroines – women raped during the 1971 Liberation War, which is central to the nationalist narrative in Bangladesh, the reference to Kalpana Chakma disrupts that nationalist narrative. The disappearance and lack of knowledge of what happened to her, remains a big point of pain and loss for the Bangladeshi activist community. She stands in as a symbol of CHT's resistance against the Bangladeshi state's violence on its communities and is the protagonist figure. Recently an exhibition 'Kalpana's Warriors' took place in different location in three countries, Bangladesh, India and UK. The portraits of Kalpana's Warriors were lawyers, bloggers and activists who have refused to let go of her memory and legacy, were created using laser etching on straw mats. The photographer Shahidul Alam speaking about his exhibition, said:

*“There are certain taboo areas that you do not talk about... One is the military, so in this particular case because [Kalpana's abduction] is something that directly implicates the military, there is a fear and there is a general culture of fear that prevents people from talking about it, but despite that these are people who have continued to talk, knowing that it's a repressive environment – those are the people we're celebrating.”* [Shahidul speaking about his exhibit; Jacob Bookman in the *British Journal of Photography*, 27 April, 2016]



Photo 11: The portraits of Kalpana's Warriors on display<sup>136</sup>

The technique of the strawmat was developed specifically for the exhibition, and is rooted in the everyday realities of the region. On that exhibition DNA India reported:

"You could call Kalpana Chakma Bangladesh's Irom Sharmila, the political activist from Manipur who has become the symbol of resistance against state-sponsored repression. With one important difference — unlike Irom, who's been forcibly kept alive by India, Kalpana has probably not lived to tell her tale. At any rate, no one knows what happened to her since June 12, 1996, the day this young political activist from the Chittagong Hill Tracts in the southeast reaches of Bangladesh bordering Myanmar was picked up from her home by Bangladeshi military and police personnel. ...Kalpana Chakma's is not an unfamiliar tale — the modern histories of many countries are full of instances of human rights abuse by the military. Abductions or forced disappearances, torture and rape, summary killings, wanton destruction of property are regular occurrences where armed forces have been given a free reign to put down insurgencies or separatists — think Kashmir, Naxal-affected or several parts of northeast India. In the case of Kalpana, she was leader of the Hill Women's Federation, an organisation of the indigenous communities (the Chakmas being the largest of them) of Chittagong who've been fighting for political autonomy from Bangladesh".

On the other hand, Autograph ABP reported:

*Kalpana's Warriors is both a deeply political and profoundly spiritual exhibition... It commemorates the life of this fiery, courageous, outspoken young woman who dared to speak out against military occupation and the way land belonging to the indigenous people from this part of Bangladesh had been taken over and distributed to Bangali settlers...At the same time, when you enter the gallery with these huge, striking portraits hanging from the ceiling like tapestries, illuminated by candles, it is a very moving, spiritual experience"*

Shahidul Alam the photographer said to Autograph ABP "The laser device used to create the portraits is more commonly found in Bangladesh's garment factories, notorious for their poor

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<sup>136</sup><http://www.dnaindia.com/lifestyle/report-this-photo-exhibition-is-an-extraordinary-tribute-to-missing-bangladeshi-activist-kalpana-chakma-2177466>

working conditions after tragedies such as Rana Plaza, where more than 1,100 workers died in 2013 when a factory collapsed.

*“Because of the situation of the workers, a laser device which is used in the garment industry being appropriated for something like this was for me very apt, because I think as artists we need to appropriate the spaces, we need to turn things around. It’s guerrilla warfare and in guerrilla warfare you have to use the enemy’s strength against them, which is what we are trying to do”.*

Beside the portraits, in Autograph’s upstairs gallery was a second part of the exhibition which focused on the internal displacement of the Paharis and the entrance of the government-backed *Bangali* settlers' personally visited the exhibition held in London. I found only the Chakma community has been represented in the exhibition and they are referred to as *pahari* or *Jumma*. Here not only Chakma is conflated with Pahari as if Chakma is the only indigenous group. The presence and role of any other CHT activists was conspicuously missing. Instead along with Kalpana Chakma, the role of the Dhaka activists who has been campaigning for her found prominence in the exhibition. In a way the exhibition repeated what I have been critical of: that primarily the role of activist CHT women has been focused on. The role of common indigenous women and their everyday experiences of state violence and displacement again finds no place in such an exhibit.

Therefore, it is interesting to observe how nonetheless, there is a continuing attempt by human rights activists to seek justice for Kalpana. For the first time, Kalpana’s abduction brought about an alliance between the HWF and mainstream women’s and human rights-based organizations, NGOs and civil society platforms to launch a joint-protest campaign. These groups included the Sammilita Nari Samaj (United Women’s Forum), the Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (Bangladesh Women’s Council), Nari Pokhkhoh (For Women), Nari Grantha Probotana (Introducing Women’s Writings), Adhikar (The Rights), Ain O Salish Kendra (Legal Aid and Arbitration Centre), SEHD(Society for Environment and Human Development), the Bangladesh Legal Aid and Service Trust (BLAST), female Students of Dhaka University and the Jouno Nipiron Protirodh Mancho (JNPM) (Platform for Resisting Sexual Harassment). A poignant slogan of the 2013 Women’s Day in Bangladesh was *'Amader dhamanite biranganar rakta/Amader dhamanite Kalpana Chakmar rakta'* ('The blood of war heroines runs through our veins/The blood of Kalpana Chakma runs through our veins').

Yulia Egorova (2005) looks at the role of “Jews” in the discourse of the “Hindu Renaissance” of nineteenth-century Bengal, especially in the English language works of Ram Mohan Roy, Keshab Chandra Sen, and Swami Vivekananda. She finds in the discourse of these Indian nationalist icons a deep ambivalence about Jews. On the one hand, Jews were seen as being “Asian,” like Indians. They were also not Christian; indeed, they were lauded for their resistance to Christian appropriation and disdain for proselytization. He also admired the intellectual achievements of the Jews and the emphasis their culture placed on education. And finally, as Vivekananda wrote, Jesus was a Jew, and Jesus taught a kind of spirituality akin to his own Hinduism. On the other hand, Jews are disparaged because of the anti-idolatry, ritualism, and “brutality” toward the Canaanite tribes and practice of human sacrifice (!). She also considers nationalist figures Dayanand Saraswati, who held unambiguously negative views about the Jews, the little known Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, of course Mohandas K. Gandhi, and woman poet Sarojini Naidu. Egorova’s work highlights how national and activist figures also can be rife with contradiction in terms of national politics.

Instead, the 2013 slogan among the younger generation in Bangladesh (with which I started this conclusion) shows that ethnic divisions which had separated previous generations would gradually give way to solidarities, based on a feminist counter-reading of nationalist history, solidarities that are based on resistance to militarisation and to state-sponsored violence against ‘other’ women, whether conducted by the Pakistani state during 1971, or the state of independent Bangladesh since then.

### **Remapping ‘The Indigeneity Question’:**

This research is particularly significant given the national myopia that is prevalent in Bangladesh about 'ordinary' indigenous women. I focus on ordinary women in the various indigenous groups instead of only activist women. The thesis explores women not only as victims but as participants. I also explore the internal dissensions among the indigenous women. I focus not only on displacement and dispossession, but also on conflict and state-induced violence and gendered displacement with detailed ethnographic accounts rather than generalised statements. Therefore I argue that indigenous women in the CHT have been affected by displacement induced by state violence across generations and decades, and that everyday life has been transformed by the engagement with violence. Their significant

contributions have not been recognised among their communities and they have been affected by the internal politics and dissensions that exist in their communities. In the face of this double set of oppressions, they have created a space for themselves in CHT politics by intervening and negotiating with their struggle. In the process they have contributed to the debate on indigeneity in complex ways: the use of indigeneity in the international branding of Bangladesh, while the government continues to say that there are no indigenous people. This can be juxtaposed with long term state violence and the suppression of CHT communities and Shantu Larma's comment that indigenous women's issues are not significant in the context of the overall political movement in the CHT. In this way common indigenous women are oppressed from both sides: violence is perpetrated on them by the state and their wider community; yet they do not want to address their issues in the face of the overall political movement. Overall this contradiction is central to the thesis. Women were not included in the entire process of Accord. Women's agency is not autonomous in MS and HWF, they are controlled by the leaders of JSS or UPDF. On the other hand, indigenous women are subjected to physical violence (including rape, kidnap, killing).

The chapters in this thesis have canvassed the varied and complex configuration of women's voices, gendered identity and testimonies, through narratives manifested in a conflict generated forced displacement. The protagonists in this story are women of the four indigenous communities of the CHT, who are perceived as being devoid of voice and action despite being quite active in the social and economic lives of their communities. From the point of view of the indigenous women the thesis examines the experiences of forced displacement arising out of decades of conflict, militarisation, land grabbing and exploitation perpetrated by the Bangladesh Army and *Bangali* settlers on the indigenous communities in the CHT of Bangladesh. Due to prolonged conflict over 25 years, the CHT became highly politicised and drawn into the armed conflict between the Bangladesh army and SB in varied and complex ways. Women's participation was in the form of direct and organised resistance as well as unorganised, everyday resistance and negotiation. However, the peace process neglected women's engagement with it. This thesis argues that the identities, viewed independently of each other, of the three groups –indigenous, '*Bangali*' and 'army' – are not homogenous. And the experiences which form the substance of this thesis vary in terms of socio-economic status, ethnicity, gender, occupation and other identities. It also argues that indigenous women cannot be reduced to victims of conflict; their voices could be heard over the reality of forced

displacement and relocation. Given the violent background of the CHT conflict, the ability of hill indigenous women to act as agents was undeniably restricted, yet did not cease completely.

One tough aspect of my fieldwork was that the field areas had been familiar to me for a long time. To deal with all indigenous people from various groups, I needed to negotiate with my identities as an activist and an academic. The indigenous people both trusted and distrusted me. The *Bangali* people had similar mixed feelings about me as I stayed in indigenous people's houses and in temples. My social and activist position as a researcher did raise certain questions amongst the *Bangali* community in the field areas, which I have discussed in chapters two, four and six. From the beginning they did not fully trust me, while also experiencing a dilemma within themselves about what to say and what not to say.

This thesis analyses the way the mind set of *Bangali* people toward indigenous people is constructed and sustained through cultural representations in text books (Bangladesh and Global Studies) published by the National Curriculum and Text Book Board and used in different classes at primary and secondary levels. I argue that this mindset can be changed through a journey of personal and political struggle with the indigenous people and a reconstruction of the self that makes a passage between the self and the reality of the field. I believe that this project makes a special contribution to a reconsideration of the different factors, culturally, politically and especially in relation to the contemporary debate between academics and activists or those whose identities overlap. I found that activism sometimes appears as a reality in the fieldwork. I also argue that indigenous women do not form a homogenous category as my field carries women from different cultural identities, socio-economic status, age, profession etc.

It was necessary in this thesis to discuss the history of the CHT. Through an analysis of historical documents, the thesis challenges the findings of some researchers (Mohsin, 1997; Ahmed, 1994) who talk about the 'simple' life of the indigenous people in the CHT in that era, and their accusation that it was the British colonial administrators who introduced the indigenous people to the market economy and steered them away from a subsistence economy. They are different from colonial perspective as colonial perspective described them as 'other' where as Bangladeshi scholarship (Mohsin, 1997; Ahmed, 1994) introduced them as 'minority' and brought out the idea of '*pahari-Bangali*' discourse. It also highlights the fact that the government of Bangladesh overlooks the indigenous people's perspective of development when they plan for development in the CHT. To discuss the nature of state-sponsored violence, we should first know the history of the CHT and people's struggles during the different eras.

The study explores various contested versions of the history of state violence and forced displacement. Some researchers have opined that state violence started in the British period when they introduced the 'Reserve Forest' and plough cultivation to the CHT. However, the majority of researchers argue that it is an outcome of the construction of the Kaptai Dam which left a good number of people displaced within a state initiated 'development' programme in the Pakistan period. State violence in the CHT is not a separate issue without a history; rather, it is connected to the non-recognition of the indigenous identity in the constitution of Bangladesh and its majoritarian politics. I have also argued that colonial attitudes prevailed in the Pakistan period as well as in independent Bangladesh in the treatment of indigenous people through various development programmes, which left some of them displaced, evicted from their land, with weaker rights of access to forests, and made them victims of military occupation.

As the thesis focuses on the issue of state violence the nature of physical violence on indigenous people by the army, security forces and *Bangali* settler people is discussed. Special attention is given to the physical violence against indigenous women. It argues that rape and physical violence (abduction, killing, sexual harassment, torture) against indigenous women is used as a weapon of nationalist and religious domination aimed at wiping out the indigenous movement and continuing the fear in the CHT. It not only addresses the physical violence against the indigenous women, it also covers the history of resistance and protest by indigenous women against the violation. I discuss the way women's organisations (MS, HWF etc.) among the indigenous people are controlled by the male dominated JSS. However, indigenous women make their way with responses of everyday actions in the context of their space and capacity.

I analyse the visible and invisible violence perpetrated by the army and *Bangali* settlers, and the consequence of fear which leads to distrust and suspicion in the CHT in Bangladesh. I discuss the changing forms of relationships in the community since the violence and how the state forces play a significant role in changing the relationship. However, self-surveillance is analysed in this thesis through the lenses of Foucault's theory in which self-control and being silent were used to avoid further violence. Semantic domination is also discussed in this thesis, which argues that language works simultaneously as a grammar of domination and resistance. There are contesting relationships within and among the indigenous groups and *Bangali* groups. The changing relationships of *Bangali* and *Pahari* and the military are also analysed in this thesis, which explores the state's perspectives on the CHT, the *Bangalis* living in the CHT, and the indigenous people. There is much dynamism in the relationship. Neither *Bangali* nor *Pahari* is a homogenous category. There are various groupings and divisions alive within the

*Bangali* people and indigenous people in terms of ethnic identity, religious persuasion, gender, socio-economic status, political beliefs and other interests. The study finds that the concepts of 'friend' and 'traitor' are very much complicated in the context of the CHT within the communities or outside the communities and even in the inter-communities relationships. Hence, this project argues that there is no way to put the '*Bangali*'- *pahari* discourses to understand the issues in the CHT what the other scholars (Guhathakurta, 2003; Mohsin, 1997; Adnan, 2001) brought out. On the one hand, it explains the relationship from the *Bangali* perspective, that is, how they treat other *Bangali* on the basis of settlement history transformation, religious platforms, political affiliation and socio-economic status; and on the other hand, it analyses the friction between the indigenous political parties such as JSS, UPDF and the Reformist groups, and their association with the army and the mainstream political parties, and various interest groups among the indigenous people. Furthermore, it highlights how the leaders of the indigenous groups belong to the mainstream political parties that serve the interests of the majority of *Bangali* people to ensure their own place in the political power structure. This research also depicts the pattern of communication between indigenous women and *Bangali* women and provides hitherto unknown views of indigenous women on SB from the women's perspectives. However, the relationships between the people belonging to various camps or even in the same camps are not the same. The study argues that there are no permanent friend and traitor relationships, since they are changing at every moment. It also reconstructs the concept of 'we' and 'they' on the basis of relationships they feel, though they belong to 'different' social camps. Context, power and space are very important to the weaving of this identity. However, the study also deals with the love, friendship and traitorous relationships among the triangular agents (*pahari*, *Bangali* and army), which tells us that human relationships cannot be categorised easily since they are very much constructed and contested.

I argue throughout the thesis that the socio-economic status, gender, occupation etc. of the respondents have shaped their experiences of violence-induced displacement. Violent situations perpetrated by the state before they were forced to leave, and the preparation of indigenous people for displacement, are discussed in the thesis. People have their ways of conceptualising violence and adjusting to its consequences. The difficulties and the negotiations of the indigenous women of the CHT in the six refugee camps in India are also discussed. First and foremost, negotiation was involved in the exigency of securing physical and social survival. Negotiation became a tool of survival and, as such, resistance occurred within the spaces of victimhood. Resistance in this situation mostly took a hidden form which is hard to observe and classify (Ginwall and Ramanathan, 1996:4). The negotiation strategies



forged by the refugees as well as others 'victims' exemplified this concept of resistance. Evidently, CHT women were engaged in a battle on two fronts: against the oppression of ethnic identity; and against the oppression of gender identity. There was no radical change achieved through women's agency exercised in this way, yet certain small and subtle modifications and critiques occurred. Having said that, there is no reason to romanticise these resistances, as they were very limited compared to the intensity of the oppression and did not necessarily involve all victimised women.

The experiences of women also reflect their heterogeneity, including their social positions, education, political orientations, as well as the kind of violence they suffered, their living contexts and so on. Examining these variables reveals number of things. Refugee women from well-to-do backgrounds had means or networks that provided support in using the educational facilities available in the places of displacement. The collective and individual dimensions of the experiences of refugee women were also perceptibly different from those of direct victims of physical violence (physically harassed by the local people). The collective dimension of experience provided scope for more and overt assertion. As a whole, it is discernible from the above account that women's will to live and rebuild lives has overcome their victimhood. Survival appears as a means of challenging 'victimhood' as well as demonstrating agency, at least for some women. This was paradoxical because the identity as 'victim' limited women's capacity to exercise agency. But simultaneously challenging victimhood gave them power, courage and the determination to live on.

As I have noted in the introduction, one must be careful in generalising about hill women: their experiences, both individually and collectively, are culturally specific and context-bound. Different indigenous groups residing in the CHT have had distinct processes of historical development with specific gender and spatial dimensions. Commonalities in experience, historical development and shared identity as women members of indigenous hill communities have nevertheless given us the scope of the general picture. In addressing the central theme of this theses, state violence and the articulation of women's resistance, negotiation and agency, I have especially looked at the strategies, issues and contexts involved in domination and women's agency. In what follows, I provide a summary of the major findings and arguments from earlier chapters, with an analysis of the broader implications of hill women's activism.

This thesis is an attempt to examine the process of constructing memories of displaced indigenous women in the CHT through their narratives of displacement and other relevant issues. It is a fact observed by many anthropologists that descriptive representations of a

particular context are much more common than representations of a knowledge-based, abstract, evaluative kind, or what Tulving (1972) calls ‘general world knowledge’. By observing their daily dialogue towards others and the material used in everyday life, the thesis explains how the memory of displacement of women is preserved and assimilated into culture and analyses traumatic events in relation to individual and cultural memory. Finally, it deliberates on the style and politics of representation through narrative.

The project analyses the process by which individual or collective memory is formed and how the transformation of a remembered event into a story or cultural memory takes place. It is an attempt to examine the process of constructing the memory of displaced indigenous women in the CHT through their narratives of displacement and other relevant issues. Regarding the transnational adoption of children by French families, the thesis argues that it was kept a secret among the communities rather than being widely known. However, it also explores the way that transnational adoption came about due to conflict by putting special focus on the children who had been sent to France for adoption.

However, the concept of identity is crucial in understanding these issues, as identity simultaneously serves as a source of gendered oppression and resistance. For instance, hill women were particularly targeted during the counterinsurgency period because they were seen as bearers and reproducers of indigenous identity (Mohsin, 2004:52). Simultaneously, their gender identity gave them the scope and strength to espouse forms of resistance or opposition different from those of men. Agency, however, is not always consistent: under conditions of abject adversity and armed struggle, hill indigenous women’s agency has demonstrated both strength and weakness (discussed in chapters seven, eight and nine).

In this research I have discussed how indigeneity is conceived and shaped by academics and scholars in different countries and by international agencies. In Bangladesh, this discourse has been a part of a colonial legacy and semantic politics. The indigenous leaders of the PCJSS have been fighting to achieve the identity of ‘*adibasi*’ according to ILO convention, whereas most of my female respondents did not know about the ILO convention and it was not clear to them why their leaders were demanding to establish their identity as ‘*adibasi*’. Hence, in this thesis I argue that the indigenous women’s narratives can open a new strand of thinking in the construction of indigeneity based on their experience as Marma, Chakma and Tripura as well as their experiences of being women. They found that a combination of various identities (such as indigeneity, religion, gender, socio-economic status) made them vulnerable yet also provided them with the authority to talk about these identities. Above all, these women map

their own territories with their experience, and in doing so they challenge the state-sponsored concept of indigeneity.

### **Contours of Violence and Resistance**

State violence and the resistance through the narratives of indigenous women, underpins the overall discussion of indigenous women's everyday forms of activism through language and behaviour and action, demonstrating the value of women in the overall politics of protest. There have been, on the one hand, 'partisan resistance' or major acts of defiance and, on the other hand, minor acts and deeds which may or may not have been intentionally organised but which have acted as subtle strategies of resistance. Women's agency has comprised two broad sub categories of action: opposition and negotiation. In the process of these actions, they have used multiple strategies, organised and non-organised, collective and individual, formal and informal, conventional and non-conventional, direct and indirect, overt and covert. I have discussed the MS and HWF who have mostly adopted formal, organised, direct and conventional forms of resistance (as discussed in chapters four and five). The thesis argues that the nature of state violence has changed since the peace accord. Arson has taken the place of shooting or other direct forms of killing or torture as a means of exhibiting the power of the state or of *Bangali* settlers. The government now deploys extra forces with multiple administrative functions (the traditional administration system, *Raja*, *Headman*, *Karbary*, Regional Council, District Hill Council, general administrators, Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board, Army) and has established the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) in the CHT in the name of security. My research has revealed that the dimension of state violence has transformed itself through the use of language, threats, religious domination and land-grabbing in the name of the national interest or other instruments that lead to the ecology of fear in the CHT. On the other hand, protest and negotiation also find their voice through the use of language, self-surveillance by the community or at an individual level and through different forms of negotiation (as discussed in chapter five). However, the memory of violence remains and contributes to the ecology of violence as we discussed, for example, in the case of the researcher's olive coloured bag which reminded respondents of the olive bags carried by army personnel, so that even when they see still the lights of a military jeep's at night they find themselves distressed with fear (discussed in chapter five).

Direct and formal political opposition or resistance were not always possible in the context of the heavy military surveillance and persecution and the gendered violence that prevailed in the CHT. Neither were those methods of resistance an option for all, nor were all

women voluntary participants in the struggle. At times, these actions contained potential for subversion and sometimes they were survival strategies. To illustrate such activities, I have presented and examined the types of survival strategy that pertained under military surveillance and in the refugee camps (discussed in chapters four, five, seven and eight). The survival strategies are always linked with the nature of violence and uncertainty.

However the study observed that in the context of state violence gender identity was also a crucial site of negotiation for non-partisan indigenous women. Their everyday activism tapped into a conventional 'apolitical' female image that gave them a kind of immunity from the suspicion of being politically active (discussed in chapters five and six). On the other hand, long term forced displacement provided some refugee women with new identities. Firstly, despite the often severe constraints of camp life, it provided these women with the scope to escape state control. MS were found to channel their political activism through trans-ethnic alliances built up through the common experience of eviction and shared gender identity. These women also used adapted to new situations, were resilient and had the capacity to make survival efforts, as a way of opposing the unwanted conditions imposed upon them by the oppressive state mechanism (discussed in chapter five). A similar observation can be made with respect to other women discussed, especially widows, physically assaulted women and those who discarded their babies on the way to India. The thesis has discussed the nature of forced displacement experienced by the indigenous people of the CHT. It has argued that the socio-economic status of the respondents helped to shape their experiences of the violence that came with induced displacement. It has also explored the violent situation initiated by state violence before they were forced to leave the Hill, and the preparation they made for the departure.

What can be inferred from the foregoing narratives of hill women's negotiations with the situation of their victimisation? First and foremost, negotiation was involved in the exigency of securing physical and social survival. Negotiation became a tool of survival and, as such, resistance occurred within the spaces of apparent victimhood. Resistance in this situation mostly took a hidden form which is hard to observe and classify (Ginwall and Ramanathan, 1996:4). The negotiation strategies forged by the refugees as well as 'victims' exemplified this concept of resistance.

However, this research also argues that violence has been portrayed most of the time in terms of trauma and victimisation (Mohsin, 1997; Chakraborty, 2006; Kamal, 2006) and has therefore led to a denial of the agency of the indigenous women who encountered the violence. Sex and sexuality have been discussed only in relation to sexual violence, including rape,

against the women. In chapter four I argue that their sexual relationships were a part of life even in displaced and conflict situations and participants were willing to talk about that.

Their experiences as indigenous women contest the stands of the leaders of the ‘political’ parties and confront the politics of indigeneity. The concept of *Jumma* nationalism was a historical reality for these women, not just an imagined element built up over the course of time to channel the desire and aspiration of the people. Thus, identity remains substantially fluid, open and evolving (as discussed in chapter nine).

### **Paradoxes of women’s agency**

From the previous discussion, it is apparent that the sense of community identity among the indigenous women is as strong as it is among men (chapters six, eight and nine). The bond between community members, including women, usually becomes ever stronger in the event of outside intervention and perceived threats to their culture. This is equally true for indigenous women. They are expected to uphold tradition more: for instance, they are expected to marry within communities, serve the families, and sacrifice their non-familial activities and so on. The indigenous community’s cultural identities thus are centred on certain images of women. Activist women are found to conform to that expectation. These factors have circumscribed the indigenous women’s capacity to address gender issues to a greater extent in the context of the indigenous identity-based struggle (discussed in chapter seven).

The nature of women’s organisation in the CHT is that it did not take the form of autonomous bodies with independent decision making powers. Not surprisingly, their capacity to address women’s issues has been substantially circumscribed by other priorities and by the concerns of the male-dominated groups with which they have been connected (chapter five). Furthermore, leftist ideology played a part: although it contained a long-term promise of equal rights in all respects which was a point that appealed to many women, it had a clear priority for the nationalist struggle and side-lined the subject of gender rights, saying that this was expected to be achieved once the struggle against all forms of oppression was won. Within this framework, Kalpana’s abduction added a new dimension to the political movements of both indigenous women and *Bangali* women. The figure of Kalpana, reshaped in the national women’s movement, bridged the gaps between the activists in *Bangali* and indigenous groups. The study has found that the abduction of Kalpana gave these movements the strength to seek justice for the sexual violence perpetrated against indigenous women in the CHT. It has also

highlighted ordinary women's everyday form of activism through language, acting, adopting strategies etc.

Another parameter employed has been to evaluate women's wartime losses and their gains in post conflict conditions (Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen, 2002a; Mookherjee, 2015). In this research the violence was observed in the pre- and postaccord situations and during and after the periods in which indigenous women were refugees. The study found that women's contribution in handling violence and their involvement in the movement for self-determination were not recognized during the process of signing the treaty, in which there was no discussion of the security of indigenous women. Women are often stripped of the benefits achieved during struggle when the necessity for mobilization is over. The history of national independence movements in many countries shows regression in women's position, and in many cases women's interests and needs just fade away after the struggle is over (Moore, 1988:171; Weiringa, 1995a:19). Of the many reasons for the failure to consolidate women's wartime gains, one is the tendency to conceptualize 'peace' as a return to the gender status quo; another is the devaluation of women's activism during the struggle as 'accidental activism' (Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen, 2002b:8-9). Consequently, the concept of 'aftermath' is especially problematic for women as in many cases the struggle is not yet over for them. The pressure on women to revert to their traditional roles, and the lack of sincere efforts to institutionalize their wartime gains, result in undoing their hard-earned achievements.

My study asserts that the label 'aftermath' does not fit the situation of the CHT. The end of armed conflict does not mean the end of struggle and the signing of the peace accord does not mean that peace has been established in the region. For most indigenous men and women, the struggle is not yet over. For the PCJSS and its auxiliary bodies, this is the struggle to materialize the agreement, while for the UPDF and its associated bodies, the old struggle has been renewed. For ordinary people, this is a period of uncertainty loaded with the possibility of further unrest and violence. The post accord situation is, in fact, another stage of the struggle (chapter six). Hence the necessity of mobilization of both women and men continues in the CHT. We are therefore unable to conclude anything categorically in this regard except to speculate on some recent trends. Even when the leaders of the indigenous political parties demand their recognition as indigenous or '*adibasi*', indigenous women want it differently (as discussed in chapter nine).

The collective strength, leadership skills and community solidarity of women that developed through the opportunity to work together in refugee camps, in guerrilla training and under mobilization, have dissipated since the accord due to repatriation and dispersal. Even

though women demonstrated strong independence, resilience and courage during the war, there has not been any serious attempt to institute those skills in order to consolidate them. In addition, there is a great concern about continuing violence against women. One serious flaw in the accord is that it did not include a trial of the perpetrators of violence, which would have at least provided recognition of the numerous sufferings of men and women of the CHT and which in turn might have checked the possibility of future violence that threatens the region. It is obvious that the record has also failed to live up to the expectations of women in other respects, such as the lack of proportional representation of women in local and regional administrative bodies, and the absence of female representation at the negotiating table, and the failure to address the issue of gender violence (chapter five).

Moreover, with the non-implementation of the Accord, the new struggle to make the non-functional peace deal functional has further side-lined gender issues. Total demilitarisation and the withdrawal of settlers are two demands repeatedly raised as crucial in halting violence against women. Yet none of the political parties has formulated any specific plan to combat the problem on an immediate basis. JSS believes the implementation of the accord will give them better grounds to deal with gender and human rights issues. On the other hand, the UPDF is yet to formulate any concrete plan and programme for the future of the CHT struggle—including gender and human rights concerns – apart from their rejection of the agreement and the demand for full autonomy. While women’s organisations associated with the parties stick to the usual means of protesting –and in some cases even become engaged in legal battles and social or political mediation in the wake of protests – there has been a serious lack of any regular, concerted initiative involving different social and political groups. Since neither of the women’s organisations has been independent, they have had insufficient power to advance those matters in the agenda. Rather, the current trend is toward greater integration of the women’s groups with ‘parent’ organisations and the division of the HWF on the basis of pro- and anti-Accord platforms (chapter five).

The study argues that the memories of indigenous women are testimony to the violence and forced displacement which have never been fully documented. The narratives of the indigenous women from the four communities confront the state discourse of violence and their memory constructs their own history and identity as indigenous women and questions the common representations of women in conflict situations by disclosing stories about their sexuality, love and romantic relationships during the time. The study further reveals that the indigenous women preserve their memory in various ways. They preserve the photographs of their beloved ones, the articles they used in their everyday lives, food items, dresses, and stories

of the camps during their times of togetherness (discussed in chapter eight). I found in this research that women's narratives are different from the men's narratives of violence and displacement as the women's memories are also different. They have agency while representing the substance of memory.

Clearly, the subject of gender is in a formative state within the greater context of the struggle for self-determination (Guhathakurta, 2001:282). The inclusion of women in the struggle and its history has carved out a space for them that is in the process of being made and remade. Not only that, women's experiences have never before been recognised in either indigenous or national history. Against this backdrop, it is worth asking whether indigenous women's resistance politics offers scope for a larger women's movement growing in the region. I think that it does. The post accord transition provides an opportunity for former women's groups to reorganise and become more proactive in relation to women's rights. It has also given space for other 'apolitical' rights-based women's organisations to flourish as may be observed in the emergence of groups like the Committee to Resist Violence against Women. Now they organise various networks such as the CHT indigenous Women's Network and they have also organised a three day congress in Dhaka with the help of Mahila Parishad and other women's rights platforms. Increased NGO activities in the region appeal to women's needs and contribute to gender awareness in general despite their operational limitations. All these developments have paved the way for heterogeneous and multidimensional women's groups to thrive by engaging different groups and platforms from different parts of the CHT.

This brings us to the question of the link between the indigenous women's movement and the national women's movement. In chapter five, I discussed the complexity of this relationship. The CHT problem and its rampant violence against women is usually neglected in the agenda of the national women's movement. As we have discussed, a breakthrough in this regard occurred with the movement that emerged due to Kalpana Chakma's abduction. The seeds of future collaboration and solidarity between indigenous women were thus sown, but their growth has dissipated with the signing of the accord. The division of civil society and political parties (both *Bangali* and Hill) over the treaty has influenced the national women's organisation to distance itself from political activity centred on the accord.

And so, despite all the ambiguities and oppositions, indigenous women have been able to make substantial interventions in the struggle through their participation, regardless of imposed limitations. Consequently, a space offering the potential for future action has been opened up.



Although it may appear disturbing to figure a positive aspect of war (Rajasngham-Senanayake, 2001:107), my task has involved a rethinking of the actions and agencies of a very marginalised group of women in a time and at a place of continuing vulnerability with the crisis of violence and forced displacement. As a result, I hope the CHT struggle is no longer seen in gender-free terms, for we have living instances of women who were and are making this history.



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## Glossary of local terms

*Adi Bangali*: Indicates those Bengali people who have been living in the CHT before 1947.

*Adibasi*: Indigenous People.

*Alam*: Handloom Cloth.

*Amagoli*: Inauspicious.

*Apni*: Meaning 'you'. The term is generally used for elderly person and strangers.

*Aurotha*: A Marma terminology to indicate a person who have the responsibility of looking after the parents.

*Bangaldhara*: Touched by Bengali people with negative connotation.

*Bangali*: The Bengali people.

*Bazaar*: Local market.

*Bhante*: Buddhist religious priest.

*Bhagao*: A Hindi word meaning seeing off.

*Bhatpilla*: A Chakma word for pot for cooking rice.

*Bijhu*: A word in Chakma Language indicates Chakma New Year celebration.

*Bindi*: A red dot women put on their forehead as decoration.

*Boisu*: Tripura word for New Year festival.

*Borgi*: A Bengali word indicates army.

*Borgi*: A Chakma term for a traditional quilt.

*Boro Porong*: The great exodus.

*Chaitra*: The last month in the Bengali calendar.

*Challi*: Chakma word to indicate digestion disorder.

*Chander Gari*: Local transport in the CHT.

*Chara*: A Chakma word, means stream.

*Chonga*: A Chakma word, means bamboo.

*Chu*: A traditional wine made by indigenous women.

*Dofa*: Tripura Clan.

*Derugoon*: Chakma word indicating army.

*Didi*: Sister, term used by Bangladeshi men and women to address women who are strangers.

*Dei jem*: A Chakma word indicating fleeing.

*Dharmo bon*: A Fictive relation indicating sister through religion.

*Dulo Dhajye*: A Chakma word for traitor.

*Durgapuja*: Bengali Hindu's biggest festival

*Gabur*: Helping hand.

*Gonoline*: Mass Line.

*Hadi*: Chakma handloom scarf.

*Hari*: Pot.

*Haram*: Arabic word, means Prohibited

*Halal*: Arabic word, means permissible.

*Headman*: Leader in small locality.

*Janti*: Sharp Knife.

*Jat*: Comes from the word *Jati*, can be interpreted with nation, caste, class, gender, profession, colour etc.

*Jirabo*: Taking rest.

*Jum*: Slash and burn production system of cultivation.

*Jumia*: *Jum* cultivator.

*Jumma*: Term used for all indigenous group using *Jum* cultivation.

*Jum ghor*: The temporary house made for the *Jum* cultivation.

*Jumbola*: The *Jumias* residing in the forest.

*Jouth Khamar*: Collective Farm.

*Kala Jor*: Fever.

*Karbary*: Leader of the Locality.

*Karpas*: Tax.

*Kajer Lok*: Helping hand.

*Kayang*: Buddhist temple.

*Kawaz*: Quarrel

*Khallung*: Basket made of bamboo

*Khas land*: State Owned land.

*Khudro Nri Gosthi*: Small ethnic group

*Kua*: Small pond.

*Lombasalam*: Greetings.

*Manthro*: Spiritual intonations.

*Mashima*: Aunt.

*Master*: Teacher

*Mojra*: Handmade small chair.

*Mouza*: Lowest revenue collection unit.

*Mukti*: Freedom. It means freedom fighter in the context liberation war in 1971.

*Mukhosh Bahini*: Masked force, since its members would take part in military-sponsored processions with their faces covered

*Omoi*: A Marma terminology for mother.

*Nappi*: A Chakma word, means dry fish paste.

*Pahari*: A term used mostly by Bengali people to indicate indigenous people in the CHT.

*Panchayet*: Local judiciary system.

*Pajra*: Dress of indigenous woman which is woven in the mill in India.

*Pauroti*: Bread.

*Pinon*: Traditional dress of Chakma women.

*Pizi*: Paternal aunt.

*Raja*: King.

*Razakar*: Collaborator.

*Rinai*: Lower portion of traditional dress of Tripura women.

*Sangrai*: Marma word for New Year festival.

*Tain*: A Chakma word for Vegetable.

*Tambala*: A pot for cooking vegetables.

*Tilla*: A small hill.

*Thaibung*: Lower portion of traditional dress of Bawm women.

*Tui*: Meaning 'you', generally the term it is used for close or younger one.

*Tumi*: Meaning 'you', generally the term is used for close or same aged one.

*Thengari*: Bicycle

*Thigthigi*: A Chakma word for lizard.

*Upajati*: A Bengali translation of the term 'tribe'

*Upazila*: A unit of local government.