

The Consequences of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Peace Accord at the Village Level: Case Study of Khagrachari Hill District in Bangladesh¹

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1. Introduction

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) represents a region of ethnic diversity, ethnic conflict and dynamics of ethnic relations. The CHT is the home of twelve different ethnic groups² who call themselves the “Jumma” nation. The region differs from the rest of the Bangladesh in terms of history, landscape, ethnic composition, social organization, language, occupation, eating habits and religious practice of life. These differences are not black and white rather getting blurry. Due to the intrusion of the British (1860), Pakistan (1947) and Bangladesh (1971), the Jumma people have gradually been marginalized in the context of social, cultural, economic and political placing in the state. The problem of the CHT largely began when the government of Bangladesh initiated militarization in order to control the insurgent movements of Jumma people. Besides, the Bengali resettlement program between 1979 and 1987 was quite successful to create a massive and almost self-sustaining conflict between the resettled Bengalis and the local Jumma people. After a long process of political negotiation, a major turning point occurred when the Bangladesh government and the PCJSS signed a Peace Accord in 1997. Drawing my interviews with local people in the rural villages, I aimed to address the question how the local Jumma people negotiated with the peace process in their everyday lives.

In recent decades, while the notion of peace has been used as a key concept in many disciplines, the aim of this paper is to address the understanding of peace in relation to the disciplinary approach of anthropology. In this article, I adopted two interrelated conceptual issues. First, the idea of peace and conflict in a particular region are shaped through its particular histories where cultural context and political economy are crucial (Fry & Kaj, 1997; Oda, 2007; Schmidt and Ingo, 2001; Montagu, 1994). Second, to understand local peoples' role as cultural innovators which is particularly important in the study of peace and conflict. Here the relationships between people, places, beliefs and practices are continually in flux (Ferguson, 1984; Lederach, 1997). Grounded in these conceptual lenses, I try to locate the history of relationship, everyday negotiation, agency and conflict dynamics of the local people. While the Peace Accord was evidently signed in the CHT, I argue that the peace process remained detached from the local people. The Peace Accord was submerged by ideas and practices which were far from meeting the demands of the indigenous people, who had been struggling for their ethnic identities, land rights, and anti-militarization, a form of connection that was discordant to discourses on peace building and sustainability.

I begin this discussion by adopting and re-conceptualizing the holistic approach of peace in theory and practice. After that I draw the historical background of CHT peace accord with recognition of the lived experiences of local people. My purpose is to understand the root causes of conflict. The next section addresses the consequences of peace accord in the village level. Finally, I conclude this article with the argument that a holistic understanding is essential to identify the peace dynamics of CHT.

2. The Holistic Approach of Peace: A Brief Conceptual Note

In conventional peace studies, the conceptualization of peace is mostly focused on the state, politics, and structural factors, with importance given to dialogue and negotiation between political parties. This approach has long been criticized for the lack of attention to the cultural milieu. However, since the decade of the 1980s, several investigations of peace and conflict have looked within particular cultures, emphasizing the culturally-specific nature of peace and conflict. Although Galtung's (1990) efforts opened a space in which to identify the root causes of conflict in the cultural context, this space has been vigorously rearranged by academic scholarship in recent decades. More specifically, the anthropological contribution to peace studies is the research

direction toward cultural anthropology which has been very accessible to the paradoxes and disputes-related study of culture and peace (Sponsel, 1994; Oda, 2007).

Actually, the transition between non-violent and violent forms of conflict in Galtung's structuralist paradigm is grounded in the recognition of indirect forms of conflict. Violence is often labelled as two discrete forms: direct and indirect. Galtung went on to say that "[s]ymbolic violence built into a culture does not kill or maim like direct violence or the violence built into the structure. However, it is used to legitimize either or both" (Galtung, 1990:292). The structural categorization of cultural violence (e.g., religion, art, language, etc.) is constructed as evidence of the normative hegemony of the Western value system with its goal for peace, in comparison to the values of the 'other' society (Martin, 2005). Yet this categorization does not accurately reflect that underlying social norms regarding violence may exist on a continuum running through society. More specifically, Galtung identified cultural violence in relation to the "structure of peace" and limited his scope to inter-state relationships, with the non-state cultural contexts yet to be investigated. By over-emphasizing the role of structure, the grassroots people were made to appear as mere tools. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize that the grassroots people may experience different types of suffering during and after conflict—in some cases, the local people may view their situation as improving, in others, as deteriorating.

The recent post-structuralist approach, in particular, reveals numerous important problems that can arise if transitions to a post-conflict era are not implemented with a holistic understanding of society. Adrian Little (2014), in looking at countries involved in conflict transformation, developed the idea of "enduring conflict", referring to both the enduring nature of political conflict and the endurance of people in conflict-ridden societies. He challenged the idea that absence of conflict is the foundation and norm of a stable political environment. Little argued that political processes need to be understood within their social and cultural contexts. In this vein, Coulter (2010) challenged the dichotomous approach of peace versus conflict which has been used in mainstream peace studies for a long period of time. She raised at least three arguments: firstly, within the peace—conflict dichotomy, people either belong in peace or in conflict—anything in between does not fit into these two roles—a rigid scope that defines the roles of people in society. Secondly, the dichotomous approach relies on an assumption that with the arrival of a politically-determined end to conflict, so too comes an improvement in the lives of those affected by the conflict. Thirdly, the dichotomy raises the controversial question of whether participants' positions relative to society improve or worsen as a result of conflict. Rather than seeing conflict as a state of exception or a period of turmoil that can be contrasted with politics as usual, Coulter attempts to show how the social interactions that drive conflict, including forms of hierarchy, are deeply connected to pre-conflict and post-conflict social order. Coulter offered the initial assumption underlying her analysis: "War is not exempt from the social but creates its own social orders" (Coulter, 2009:9). Thus, Coulter suggested dealing with the performativity in ordinary people's accounts, the reiteration and citation of existing discourses, as well as the new possibilities that emerge. In this way, the recent scholarship (post-colonial or post-Cold War theory) re-conceptualizes the notion of peace by interrelating with other phenomena, such as history, politics, and the everyday experiences of ordinary people. This transformation considers the cultural diversity which underlines the important influence of the global view, cultural values, and relationships among the people in a particular society.

The scholarship (e.g., post-structuralism, post-colonial or post-Cold War theory) has influenced many anthropologists investigating the peace process in a particular society. Thus, in *The Anthropology of Peace and Nonviolence*, Sponsel and Gregor (1994) proposed that the peace initiative should be adjusted in a holistic way. Looking beyond the study of history, culture, and politics as separate entities, the holistic approach examines how this entire social phenomenon involves interaction between these contexts (Little, 2014; Sponsel and Gregor, 1994; Douglas, 1992). Such a perspective requires identification of the root causes of conflict in a broad historical, political, social, and cultural context, given the fact that options for peace and conflict are largely the products of existing social structures. Grounded in these theoretical perspectives, I trace how all these discursive practices contribute to the materialization of the existing peace discourse of CHT.

3. The Milieu of Peace Accord in the CHT

The conflict of CHT originated in the British colonial period, when it was adopted in the state apparatus as a policy (especially the tribalism policy) to deal with the CHT region. The colonial government first used sub-names, such as 'tribe' or 'hill man', separating the Jumma people from the majority of Bengali people in the country. The notion of 'tribal' is not only related to the identity issue, but also to the governing policy through which the colonial administrator began to control the whole political economy of the local people. The Jumma people, for the first time, came to experience a different kind of political economy which influenced changes to their own culture and society. The colonial administration started the process of land alienation by taking over the ownership of land rights in the CHT through the creation of reserved forest (Schendel, 1992; Uddin, 2010).

The problems in the CHT largely began with the building of the Kaptai hydroelectric dam between 1957 and 1963, during the era when the area was administered by the Pakistan government. This dam flooded at least 54,000 acres of settled cultivable land

farmed by the Jumma people (Nasreen, 2002). The Kaptai hydroelectric plant project, undertaken by the state, permanently displaced thousands of the indigenous Jumma people without any compensation (Jenneke, 1997). While the policy of exclusion was adopted by colonial and Pakistan governments, it has continued to dictate the development of identity and the livelihood policy of the CHT people in the Bangladesh period.

After the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, a group of indigenous people formally placed their demands for autonomy to maintain their self-identity. However, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, rejected the Jumma people's demands by advising them "to forget ethnic identities" and "to be Bengalis" (Al-Ahsan and Chakma, 1989:967). The denial of constitutional recognition of the Jumma people's diverse ethnic identity and regional autonomy by the independent state of Bangladesh brought social, political, and cultural chaos to the CHT. A portion of the Jumma people started strong resistance by forming the political party PCJSS, with its armed wing Shanti Bahini ("Peace Force"). From 1976, the CHT became an area under military occupation and a training ground for counter-insurgency. Moreover, approximately 400,000 Bengalis moved into the region between 1979 and 1987 under a government transmigration program. The indigenous Jumma people now risk being outnumbered by Bengali settlers who have continued taking over their land and attacking their religious and cultural values. The civil administration and the military have appeared to be concerned bystanders, while, at times, being the direct patrons and protectors of the Bengali settlers (Mohsin, 1997). Since 1980, 13 major cases of sectarian attacks by the Bengali settlers on the Jumma people have been reported (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs [IWGIA], 2012; Amnesty International, 2013).

During the period of counter-insurgency, almost a hundred thousand Jumma people have been forced to cross the border into India, or have become internally displaced as a result of the armed conflict (Jenneke, 1997; Barua, 2001). Around 8,000 people, including security members, have been killed from both communities³. After a long process of political negotiation, a major turning point occurred when the Bangladesh government and the PCJSS signed a Peace Accord in 1997. However, the Accord has not settled the situation: rather, several issues have arisen in the CHT region.

4. From Conflict to "Peace" in CHT: Materials from Field Research

I now turn to my own research. My work with local context including everyday experiences of people rather than the political process, has adopted a more anthropological methodology. Where possible I have attempted to meet individuals within the context of their families and wider social groups as well as in the interview and focus group settings to get a sense of not only how people talk about political negotiations, but also how they actually experienced the peace process in the village contexts. In the following sections, I present material from two interconnected circumstances. The first is related to the experiences of conflict before the enactment of the Peace Accord and the second is related to the post Peace Accord context.

4.1 Experiencing Conflict in the pre Peace Accord Context

During the 1970s and, in particular, the mid-1970s, the villages of the Khagrachari district were surrounded by temporary army camps. Of those living in the Khagrachari district, the people of the Matiranga village suffered the most from the militarization project, with the ordinary villagers suffering from these circumstances in various ways:

Firstly, during the period of armed conflict, the army frequently searched and arrested villagers, assuming them to be members of the Shanti Bahini insurgency. Mass tortures were also meted out to Jumma villagers during the hunts for Shanti Bahini members. Many Jumma informants claimed that since the beginning of militarization, the Jumma people had frequently been tortured by the army. The situation was often unbearable for many of the Jumma people.

Secondly, the army's "road protection camps" were another source of threat to the Jumma villagers. The road protection camps were established to prevent Shanti Bahini attacks in the daytime, and the ordinary villagers suffered. From evening to the next morning, all roads in the CHT were closed to any movement, and especially to vehicles. The Jumma people could not move freely in their lands. At the rural level, local people had to finish their entire daily chores before evening. As stated by one of the interviewees:

We couldn't move freely in our lands. There were road protection camps [at] almost every hilltop along with the main roads in the village. We had to finish all our outside tasks before evening time. We had become isolated at night and could not move anywhere. The army searches all roads for explosives before opening them in the morning. We were in very much suffering [from] such kinds of army activities.

Thirdly, the people whose relatives or family members had joined Shanti Bahini or the PCJSS were in a more vulnerable position. Relatives of Shanti Bahini members were picked out and tortured in front of the assembled villagers. When security

forces were searching the villages, many villagers escaped into the jungle away from their localities.

Beyond above circumstances, the ethnic and religious connections of the army personnel also need to be noted. Almost 100% of the security personnel in the CHT are ethnically Bengali, and the majority of them are believers of the state religion, Islam: similar proportions prevail among Bengali settlers in the CHT region. In comparison, the Jumma people religiously are non-Islamic, practicing Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, and traditional faiths: they belong to ethnic and linguistic groups that are different from the Bengalis. Although a small number of the Jumma people have joined the army, the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), the police and Ansar (an internal security and law enforcement force), rarely have any of them been posted to the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) (IWGIA, 2012). This leads to prejudiced and discriminatory conduct among these forces, and security personnel who often sympathize and act in favor of the Bengali settlers, and against the Jumma people.

On the other hand, during the militarization, Shanti Bahini members and their initiatives were portrayed as “anti-state activities” and “a conspiracy against Bangladesh sovereignty” (Jenneke, 1997). However, members of Shanti Bahini do not consider that they or their insurgency were fighting against the state but to establish their rights. In this context, a former Shanti Bahini activist explained:

From the colonial period, our loyalties always have been suspected. Thus, [the] British ruler identified us as ‘tribal’ and ‘savage’. Similarly, Pakistani rulers suspected us as [being] Indian supporters. In [the] independent state, Bengalis think that our movement could diminish the sovereignty of state. It [is] the way in which state authorities have separated us from the mainstream. Our identity rights and demand [for] autonomy always had been rejected. But we are not terrorists, just want to establish our rights and protect ourselves.

Like the state authorities, the state security forces also believed that the ‘tribal’ people were very dangerous and were trying to break up the country. I heard similar views from the Bengali people throughout my CHT fieldwork. A Bengali schoolteacher in Khagrachari expressed his opinion this way: “[t]he tribal [people] are extremists and criminals. They [are] fighting against Bangladesh and kidnapped our Bengalis.”

On the other hand, the Jumma people, even the armed Jumma activists, considered that their demands were very rational. During my fieldwork, most respondents were unsure about the reason why the army and the government did not trust the Jumma people. Even they did not believe their activities to be dangerous to Bangladesh in any sense. Interesting information was provided by a former member of the Jana Sanghati Samiti (JSS) (People’s Party of the Chittagong Hill Tracts) who had been involved in the armed movement in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). He explained through one example, denying that they were anti-sovereignty activists:

In the time of armed movements, we had established many schools in the remote hilly area. If you check there you will be find out [the] Bangladesh national anthem was always sung in those schools under the national flag of Bangladesh. So how can they portray us [to be] terrorist and anti-Bangladeshi?

The Jumma people believe that militarization was a strategy to make them a minority in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). Such an ‘anti-state’ categorization assisted in the process of controlling the region through the use of the national armed forces. On the other hand, not only was the army involved in controlling Shanti Bahini insurgents, but it was also involved in governing the everyday lives of the ordinary Jumma villagers. Human rights organizations have frequently reported army violence against the Jumma people. For example, Amnesty International (2002) has mentioned numerous instances of unlawful killing of the Jumma people by Bangladeshi armed forces and Bengali settlers in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). With the support of the army, many organizations were set up to counter the Jumma people’s movement. The army has often stood by to back-up the Bengali settlers when they initiated communal attacks or tried to grab land. The ordinary Jumma villagers were under army surveillance which created a circle of fear at the village level. The following fieldwork experiences in the village level allow the investigation of this context.

4.2 Bengali Resettlement Project

After the independence of Bangladesh, the government realized that the CHT was a major opportunity to resettle landless Bengalis from the plains. About 400,000 Bengalis moved into the CHT region between 1977 and 1987. This resettlement project has dramatically changed the demography. The percentage of Bengalis in the CHT rose from 26% in 1974 to 47% in 2011.

Table provides the 100-year population transition of the Jumma and Bengali communities in East Bengal, East Pakistan, and Bangladesh as per the census results. The 1901 census, compiled when the British outlined the partition of India and Pakistan,

Table 1: Bengali Resettlement Project

Year	Jumma	%	Bengali	%	Total
1872	61,957	98	1,097	2	63,054
1901	116,000	93	8,762	7	124,762
1951	261,538	91	26,150	9	287,688
1981	441,776	59	304,873	41	746,649
1991	501,144	51	473,301	49	974,445
2011	845,541	53	752,690	47	1,598,231

Sources: Bangladesh District Gazetteer (1975); Population Census of Bangladesh (1974, 1981, 1991, 2001, 2011)

indicates that the Jumma population formed more than 90% of the total population of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). The CHT was under a colonial regime when the British administration enacted the *Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation, 1900*, decreeing the CHT to be a “special tribal dominated area” and restricting permanent settlement and acquisition of land by outsiders. This provision of the “special status” of the CHT was further highlighted by the *Government of India Act 1935* that designated the district as a “Totally Excluded Area”. This was intended to be a formal recognition for the region and its indigenous populations, providing them with the right to specific legal provisions as their safeguard, including restriction on the settlement of Bengalis from outside the CHT region. At this time, the proportion of Bengali people in the region was only 9.61%. However, the Pakistan government changed to a new law in 1964, abolishing the “special status” of the CHT and opening up the region to outsiders. The new law of the Pakistan government has encouraged many Bengalis to come to the CHT region. Bengali people started to migrate to the region for business purposes. After the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, the CHT scenario dramatically changed due to different government strategies. The Bengali resettlement project was the most important factor in this demographic change. The percentage of Bengalis in the CHT rose from 9% in 1951 to 41% in 1981. In 1991, the total Jumma population of the CHT had increased in number, but had decreased as a percentage to 51.43% of the total population of the area. The declining trend of the Jumma population, in terms of its ratio, is due to Bengali resettlement.

Thus, the Jumma people started to realize that they would soon become a minority in their own region. Officially, Bengali resettlement of the CHT was presented as an exclusive policy to resettle landless Bengalis from the plains or as an initiative to achieve a demographic balance between the plains and the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). However, the ethnographic study of the three villages shows many complex scenarios extending beyond these factors. The following ethnographic pictures of the Khagrachari district allow the investigation of this scenario.

4.2.1 Sociocultural perspective

Bengali resettlement has affected the sociocultural lives of the Jumma people in various ways. These include changes to the original names of Jumma localities, dominating the economic system, and disobeying the traditional political system, all of which are causes for communal conflict between the Jumma people and Bengali settlers.

Changes to the original names of localities

Changes to the names of localities are one of the most important examples of Bengali cultural dominance in the CHT region. Settlers have changed the names of localities which were originally in Jumma languages. In most cases, the settlers have imposed a new Bengali name as a symbol of their settlement and claim over the Jumma region (Nasreen, 2002). Cases of changing the original names of localities are often found in the Khagrachari Hill District as well as in the whole CHT region. Although the changes were not initiated by any administrative body, these new names have generally been used by the local administration and Union Councils.

Table 2: Changed names of localities

Original Name	New Name
Majan Para	Mahajan Para
Kedachara Bon	Palashpur
Chilla Pro Chowdhury Tilla	Shalbon
Lamuchari	East Lamuchari, West Lamuchari, Boro Para, Muslim Para and others

Source: Fieldwork 2011-2014

The new names for some localities have reinforced the dominance of the Bengali language and Muslim religious values. As stated by an elderly Jumma person of Lamuchari village:

Though the place of Muslim Para was previously known as Khas (unused lands), it was used for the agricultural purposes of Jumma people. After the construction of many new houses, the Bengalis turned the place into a residential area. The settlers imposed a new name in Bengali as a symbol of their settlement, as they claim[ed] the region very easily. By enacting an Islamic name 'Muslim Para', they denied our existence and religions. It is an aggressive journey of the Bengalis, a way of abolishing the Jumma culture from the region. These attitudes not only demolished our economy but also marginalized our religious values.

The new naming of localities has also violated the traditional religious values of the Jumma people as the new names are, in most cases, inspired by the majority of the population, and used as a means of establishing Bengali and Muslim religious dominance. The most alarming context of the religious domination by Bengali settlers is their attacking of the religious festivals and temples of the Jumma people. During my fieldwork, I was informed that several new mosques were built in Khagrachari district after the Bengali resettlement project was initiated; however, many temples were destroyed in the same period. The religious festivals of the Jumma communities were also vandalized. There are common and frequent cases of harassment of the religious leaders of the Jumma communities. In the context of Shalbon, Lamuchari, Babupara, and Mahajan *Para* villages, approximately 10 mosques and *madrashas* (Islamic religious schools) have been newly built since the Bengali resettlement was initiated. On the other hand, although five temples were built by different religious groups of Jumma communities, at least four temples were destroyed by communal attacks of Bengali settlers between 1979 and 2012. As claimed by a Jumma person:

Many mosques and madrashas were built in Khagrachari district; however, temples were destroyed and many of our religious programs were attacked by the settlers. Their separate Islamic religious schooling systems are now in a strong position but our children have little scope to study in our own language.

The Jumma people claim that their religious values and practices are in danger. Army surveillance and the dominance of the Bengali Muslim religion have disrupted the celebration or practice of any religious function by the Jumma people at the village level. Thus, the Jumma people have survived by fighting the dominant Muslim Bengali settlers to enable the survival of their religious values.

The rise of the Bengali-dominated economy

Since the resettlement period, the local economic system has been significantly altered. It is noteworthy that the Bengalis are different from the Jumma people in terms of language, occupation, eating habits, dress codes, and religious ways of life. Massive-scale Bengali resettlement has dramatically increased the demand for consumer goods to which Bengalis are accustomed. While the settlers are not sufficiently economically solvent to invest in business, business-oriented Bengalis are still migrating to the CHT area for their commercial interests. The migration of Bengali businessmen has also drastically increased since the resettlement period. They have completely dominated the CHT business sector. For instance, although the Mahajan *Para* village area is not the major commercial area, different kinds of shops, a transport business, and hotel businesses have been established. Statistically, only nine of the 34 shops are owned by the Jumma people in the Mahajan *Para* area of Khagrachari town. Because the Bengali-owned shops sell products that suit their own tastes and habits, the majority of consumers are also Bengali, including settlers, government and NGO officials, and security officers residing in Khagrachari.

It is, however, important to note that the Bengali people of the CHT are not homogeneous, especially in terms of status and economic conditions. Beginning from the British colonial period, Bengalis have had a long history of business activities in the CHT region. While the social relationship between Bengali settlers and the Jumma people is one of conflict, good neighbor relationships have existed between Bengali businessmen (locally known as *adi Bengali*) and the Jumma people. Although the *adi Bengali* migrated from the plains, their socio-economic status is different from that of the landless peasants who have settled in the cluster villages. Accommodation for the migrated Bengali businessmen was not included in the resettlement areas. Many are living in Jumma areas like neighbors. Good social relationships have been found between the Jumma people and the migrated Bengali businessmen. However, the context has also significantly changed. Compared to the resettlement period, the commercial activities of Bengalis in the region were diminutive. Although new migrated businessmen also have had a separate identity, many have started to live in the cluster villages. This new group has had good social relationships with the settlers rather than with the Jumma

people. While they have capital, they have been trying to expand their economic dominance in the CHT region. This group has invited many tourism companies and corporate chain shops into the Hill region. This context has dramatically changed the political economy of the CHT, with the local economy of the Jumma people marginalized by the dominant Bengali establishment.

Effects on traditional laws

The Jumma people have their own traditional political system which is completely different from that in other parts of the country. Traditionally, local law and order of the Jumma villages have been maintained by a Jumma leader called *Karbari*. The position is deeply rooted in the customary system. However, under the British colonial regime, the CHT region was divided into three revenue circles, each headed by a hereditary chief. These circles were subdivided into *mauzas* (“revenue areas”), each headed by a headman. At the village level, the communities were usually structured on the basis of kinship and, as stated above, had an officially recognized leader called the *Karbari*. In addition to functions related to administering land and revenue, the *Karbari* and headmen also resolved public disputes following the customary practices of local communities.

However, different types of crimes and social diseases came with the Bengali settlers. While the Bengali way of life was different to that of the traditional Jumma system, the customary system of the Jumma people has been denied by the settlers for its “anti-Islamic values”. As stated by the *Karbari* of Lamuchari village:

Legally, I am the authorized person to maintain law and order of the village but my powers have been decreasing day by day. Bengali settlers don't know the traditional administration system. Some of the settlers believe that the *Karbari* is part of a traditional religious system. Some of them treat me as an anti-Islamic leader. Bengali settlers ignore us. In the cases of settlers-Jummas disputes, the military has always imposed the taking of the decision of justice. I cannot continue my leadership in the village. I am losing my power day by day.

During my fieldwork, I saw that the *Karbari* and headman are playing important roles in the Jumma-dominated areas. However, they have been playing a minimal role in the Bengali-dominated areas. The surveillance of the state administrator, the dominance of the Bengali Muslim religion, and intrusion of political leaders at the village level, have all disrupted the ability of the traditional administrator in continuing to carry out their role in maintaining law and order.

Thus the causes for increasing violence in the CHT are multifaceted and linked with land, customary rights, religion, militarization, Bengali resettlement, and cultural antagonism. The increasing number of Bengali population in the region not only violated the land rights system, but also affected the traditional political and cultural system in the region. However, on the 2nd December 1997 a major turn of episode occurred when the PCJSS and the government of Bangladesh signed a Peace Accord. Let me discuss the consequences of peace accord in the grassroots level.

5. The CHT Peace Accord 1997

The CHT peace accord was signed on behalf of the government of Bangladesh by Mr. Abul Hasnat Abdullah; head of the parliamentary committee formed to resolve the issue while Mr. Jotyirindro Bodhioriyo Larma, the chair of the PCJSS signed on behalf of the Jumma people of the CHT. The accord is comprised of four parts: (1) General part, (2) Hill District Local Government Council, (3) The Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council, and (4) rehabilitation, general amnesty and other issues. In the following sections, my analysis is not related to institutional process of implementation of peace accord. Rather, I investigate the everyday circumstances of the grassroots people of the CHT in relation to the peace process. Because of the limited space allowed for this paper I will confine my analysis to some of the critical features like lands rights issue, demilitarization process and communal relations between two groups.

5.1 The Land Rights Issue

Land-based violence between settlers and the Jumma people has been a growing problem in the CHT region. In recent years, the picture has become more complicated due to the settlers' new pattern of land grabbing: this has involved the violation of customary laws, manipulation of land documents by government officials, and the overall support of the military for the Bengali settlers. These complex conditions have negatively affected the everyday lives of the Jumma people. The conditions created have resulted in land-based violence, displacement, and the fearful mindset of the Jumma people

The Peace Accord recognized the land rights issue without any special consideration of the Jumma people's customary rights over their lands. Thus, conflict between settlers and Jumma villagers over land and other resources has become an ongoing problem

in the CHT region. As has been claimed by some Jumma people, new settlers, with the help of previous settlers, have continued to grab their land. Although the Jumma people's land rights are based on a customary ownership system, without legal documents to their lands, the Jumma people cannot claim their ownership rights with government authorities. In this way, they have merely become victims. The manipulation of land documents by government officials has extensively affected the customary rights of the Jumma people. Newly-arrived Bengali settlers, with the help of Bengali officers, have created false documents for Jumma people's land. In Lamuchari village, I interviewed some Jumma people who have lost their land through the manipulation of land documents by government officials. The case of Joy Ram Chakma is relevant in this regard:

Joy Ram Chakma (45) is originally an inhabitant of the Cutting Tilla village under Mahalchari Upazilla, a few kilometers from the Lamuchari village. After massive communal attacks in Mahalchari in 2003, he lost his original house which has [been] occupied by a settler. Then Mr. Chakma constructed a new house in Lamuchari. After migrating to Lamuchari, he went to the police station to recover his previous house. However, he did not recover the land as the settlers made a false document of land with the help of land officers. According to him, "I tried hard to recover my ancestral land. I went to the police station to recover my previous house. But, [by] showing some documents of the land, a Bengali claimed he is the original owner of this house, which he bought from me in 2003. I was astonished. Lately, I was informed that the Bengali made a false ownership document of this possessed land [with] the help of a Bengali land officer. When I went to [the] police station again to inform the situation, the police treated me badly and told me not to bother them again. The settler who took over my land also threatened to attack me again if I do not stop complaining about the matter.

In addition to manipulation of land documents, some government officials are directly involved in the process of resettlement on the Jummas' agricultural land. As reported by villagers from Lamuchari, settlers took much of the forest land in Lamuchari village which was previously occupied by the Jumma people. After moving to the forest, they destroyed all the trees and made it look like a residential area. When this was reported to government officials by the Jumma people, the officials took the position of supporting the establishment of Bengali people on customary land.

Dispute resolution in Jumma tradition is usually a process of mediation between parties based on oral testimony. Written evidence is almost entirely absent from the proceedings. Written records of the decisions are not maintained by the *Karbaris* or headmen. Detailed written records are kept only when an appeal is brought before the chiefs, which is a rare case. Taking this into account, the CHT Regulation provided only for oral interview or witness examination of the parties by the District Commissioner (DC). However, as indicated in the above cases, the position of the District Commissioner (DC) is not neutral. In times of dispute resolution, he has taken the position of siding with the Bengali settlers. The authorities have actively participated in the creation of multiple interest groups competing over the same land by depriving the customary landowners. In another example, in recent times, Bengali survey officials have manipulated the boundaries of land given to settlers to include plains and hilly land owned by the Jumma people. Some Jumma people protested about the manipulation process and some had fully registered ownership deeds. In this context, the legal framework has discriminated against the land management system of the Jumma people in at least three ways: (i) violation of customary rights; (ii) introduction of private ownership based on title deeds as opposed to customary law; and (iii) continuous illegal settlement and grabbing of customary land with the help of government officials. Thus, the customary land rights of the Jumma people are dependent on a complex discriminative system which does not follow the formal legal order but rather the numerous offices created by this law. In this systematic process of discrimination, the Jumma people have continued to survive and to shape their identity in order to fight against the dominant Bengali settlers.

5.2 Self-recognition issue: demands for indigenous rights, "indigenous, not tribal"

As has been seen, the root cause of the CHT conflict is centered on the demand for self-recognition of the Jumma people. Commencing from the colonial period, they have been identified as 'tribal'. Furthermore, based on International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 169⁴, the Jumma people have always tried to identify themselves as *adibashi* ("indigenous people"), instead of being regarded as 'tribal'. They have been demanding constitutional recognition for a long time. The revival of cultural identities became one of the central agenda items of the Peace Accord. However, the notion of the "upholding of cultural rights" did not fulfill their demands. The interview of Asim Chakma (34) is mostly related to this argument. As he explained:

We hoped that the Peace Accord would recognize the self-recognition issue: we saw that the Accord recognized [the] cultural rights issue but it was not free from [the] tribalism policy as the Accord treated us as 'tribal'. Such tribalism never recognizes our self-identity: upholding of our cultural identity is only publicity. It's a colonial attitude of the state authorities which has persisted in the Accord.

The situation has not changed much in recent years. Even 15 years after the signing of the Peace Accord, it has been reported that the identity recognition issue continues to be a central demand of the indigenous Jumma people. In the 1997 signing of the Peace Accord, the agreement was contracted on behalf of the Bangladesh government by Mr. Abul Hasnat Abdullah, chair of the parliamentary committee formed to resolve the issue, while Mr. Jotyirindro Bodhipryo Larma, chair of the PCJSS, signed on behalf of the Jumma people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) (Chowdhury, 2012). Many other local political parties, such as the Hill People's Federation, CHT Students' Federation, and Hill Women's Federation had refuted the treaty. They protested that the Accord failed to endorse many important demands including the self-recognition of the Jumma people. They had demanding recognition as *adibashi* ("indigenous people"), instead of being regarded as 'tribal'. The cultural rights context of the resistance of the Jumma people created further conflict between security forces and the Jumma people. The account of this continuing conflict is reported as follows:

Khagrachari College is one of the biggest colleges in [the] CHT area, located in the central Khagrachari district. Students of both communities are studying here. Many cultural and political programs are organized by the students of both communities. However some peaceful programs have turned into incidents of violence. On August 7, 2011, hundreds of students of the college organized a peaceful demonstration for demanding the cultural rights of [the] Jumma people: "not as tribal but as indigenous". However, the security forces did not permit the activities of [the] Jummas. As the procession left the college gate, more than 60 policemen, including the Assistant Superintendent of Khagrachari police station and the Officer in Charge of Kotowali police station, created a barrier to direct the flow towards Chengis Square in Khagrachari town. There, they suddenly attacked the students with batons, kicking and slapping them. Twenty-two students were injured: among whom four were severely injured. As the procession was heading back, officers and army men surrounded the college gate and the hospital; they picked out one student, and indiscriminately beat him, resulting in severe injuries.

From the interview of a Jumma college student, I learnt that several kinds of peaceful processions had been initiated by Jumma students. Some processions were located in the college grounds and others in the town areas. From his account, incidents, such as several small-scale attacks, were initiated by the police or Bengalis during these processions. The question thus arises: with the involvement of the state's legal forces who have taken the position of opposing the Jumma people's cultural rights, who will then establish their cultural rights?

5.3 The milieu of everyday conflict

The cultural differences of the Jumma people and the Bengalis have often created everyday forms of conflict or violence in their localities. In recent decades, commonalities between the people of the two communities can be found everywhere, and in the everyday life of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). The forms of everyday violence are extensively found in public places, such as roads or bus stands, marketplaces or offices, wherever the members of both communities interact with each other. Sometimes a personal matter between two persons of the two groups can expand to an immense scale. Even a simple verbal conversation between two persons can be blown up out of proportion. The Jumma people are visibly harassed, often physically and mostly verbally. Bengali settlers often use insulting names for Jumma people, for example, *Chakku* for *Chakmas* or *Moghs* for *Marmas*. Ethnic identity is often the most important factor by which other people are treated, rather than simply using their economic status.

Unemployment or the economic insolvency of Bengali settlers is one of the reasons for everyday forms of violence. Increasingly, this can often be attributed to the unfolding aggressive ethno-religious ideologies of the Bengali settlers. Settlers have admitted that they have often been involved in heinous acts, such as stealing cows, goats, poultry, and agricultural products to meet their economic needs. Moreover, in the case of Lamuchari village, settlers have always targeted the houses of the Jumma people for these purposes. While the Bengali businessmen of Lamuchari village are well established with well-furnished homes and other properties, they are rarely targeted for such activities. Along with economic reasons, such occurrences are supposed to be caused by the denial of any sense of ethical existence within Jumma society. The overall scenario of ongoing violence in the CHT has indicated that the Jumma people have been losing not only their economic properties but also losing control over their traditional culture. The context cannot be understood without discussing the connection between economics and religious issues in a holistic manner. However, the Accord has rarely focused on everyday forms of violence and no provision was made for punishment of the guilty. Thus, these types of occurrences have continued to occur.

5.4 The Regional Politics

Although the Peace Accord disarmed the Shanti Bahini rebels, the dissatisfaction of different stakeholders has increased with conflict distributed in multiple layers. More specifically, conflict between the UPDF and the PCJSS has seriously affected the

livelihood of the ordinary Jumma people. It is noteworthy that, as claimed by the UPDF, the Accord has failed to address the basic demands of the Jumma people. These demands have actually been articulated by the PCJSS and are as follows: regional autonomy, constitutional recognition of the indigenous Jumma people of the CHT, restoration of land rights, withdrawal of the military, and withdrawal of the settlers from the CHT. Moreover, in the Accord, there is no reference to accountability for the human rights abuses that have bordered on genocide. The UPDF has argued that, without fulfillment of these basic demands and accountability for human rights abuses, a genuine and permanent peace cannot be established in the CHT. The UPDF was born as a result of this perception.

In recent decades, by showing their armed power, both of these groups have illustrated their desperation to control the Hill region. According to the villagers of Mahajan and Lamuchari *Paras*, to maintain their parties, the activists and leaders of these groups have collected money through extortion under the name of “protection money” from the ordinary Jumma people. This scenario is prominent in the whole CHT region. When a village is dominated by the UPDF, UPDF activists forcefully squeeze money from the inhabitants. Similar practices can be seen in the PCJSS-dominated areas.

In the CHT, it is hard to find a village where the people are not dominated either by UPDF members or PCJSS members. However, their dominated areas are not the same areas. If a village is captured by the PCJSS, the UPDF workers are not able to collect extortion money from the PCJSS-controlled area. Moreover, opposition workers have no scope to go into the village for any ordinary purpose. The dominant activists are on patrol all the time searching for opposition workers in the respective villages. In the case of ordinary people who do not belong to either side, they cannot go to other villages at night due to the patrolling activities of the activists or their leaders. As stated by a villager from Mahajan *Para*:

Last year [in the] winter season (January 2014), at night-time, when I was coming back from Mahalchari, my brother in-law’s place, some young people captured me by saying “you look like a member of an opposition party”. I was forced to stay [the] whole night in a house. Next morning, when they found my details as I am an official of [a] non-government organization, I was free from them.

In the case of Regional council and Hill District Councils, to date, these have continued to be highly political, dominated by the PCJSS and government-nominated members. When the chair of the PCJSS is selected as the head of the Regional Council, this selection violates the clauses of the Peace Accord which state that this post is to remain unelected. As argued by a Jumma person,

Political leaders do not want to lose their dominance in the CHT. The fear of losing domination under the emergence of a strong regional political group like PCJSS makes them apathetic to the Accord. They are acting in a manner that actually violates the spirit of the Peace Accord.

The signed CHT Peace Accord could not satisfy other ordinary people in the CHT due to the domination of the PCJSS in the Regional Council (RC) and Hill District Councils (HDCs). The Jumma people, who were not actively involved in regional politics, felt deprived and betrayed due to their poor representation on the Regional Council.

Similarly, the stakes of the competition between the PCJSS and the UPDF have helped to institutionalize political violence as an instrument of political pursuits. In this political culture, the rest of society is forced to go with the more powerful party if they wish to participate in and receive benefits from the system. The constant support of the extended process of elitism and the related political beneficiary group have made the ground-level reality an unbreakable cycle which only brings suffering to the Jumma people. A low level of trust has become a common feature of Jumma society. In general, the people of the CHT possess a low and declining degree of trust in their political institutions and political leaders. People at large do not believe that their fellow members are engaged in politics for the mutual benefit of society. The people are disappointed and bewildered by the performance of the members of the UPDF and the PCJSS in activities and their oversight of the dualistic operations.

Since 1997, groups of Bengali settlers have opposed the peace process by arguing that the Peace Accord is too concerned with the Jumma people. Sama Adhikar Andolan (“Equal Rights Movement”) was later established to ensure the rights of Bengali settlers. The number of Bengali organizations has now increased to six. As the Jumma people have claimed, the growing numbers of Bengali organizations is a military idea. It is important to note that, while the Peace Accord promised that all temporary camps of the army and other paramilitary forces would be withdrawn and resettled in permanent cantonments, no time limit was fixed for this withdrawal. To date, approximately 240 of more than 500 military camps in the CHT have been withdrawn (IWGIA report, 2012). To justify the military presence in the CHT, the Bangladesh government has established its position by explaining that, in the post-Accord context, to improve law and order, the army continues to be needed. Thus, the army still grasps the power and control over the CHT region by the name of Operation *Uttaran* (“Operation Upliftment”). The Unrepresented Nations and Peoples

Organization (UNPO) (2005) clearly noticed, just after the signing of the Accord, that the government imposed “de facto military rule” through its Operation *Uttaran* in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). The prolonged and continuous military presence in the CHT has affected the livelihood of the Jumma people in multiple ways: interfering with the civil administration; providing support to Bengali settlers; controlling forest administration, road maintenance and construction; and, most importantly, in the name of maintaining law and order.

The Bengali organizations have been receiving support from the army to create conflict in the CHT region. The reason behind this strategy is that it would enable the army to find a suitable justification for its continued presence in the CHT region in the name of maintaining law and order. The constant military support to Bengali settlers has made these grounds a reality and have created an unbreakable cycle which only brings suffering to the Jumma people.

The main objective of the Bengali organization was actually to motivate its respective populace with its ultra-nationalist and communal slogans to achieve its desired objectives. The leaders of Sama Adhikar Andolan, that demands “equal rights” for Bengali settlers in the region, demanded the re-establishment of army camps in the CHT region in order to establish “equal rights” for the settlers. When the government initiated actions to implement some clauses of the Accord, the Bengali organizations protested against this by observing a day-long strike in the whole CHT region. This context was variously observed during the period of my research. As evidence, after the Bangladesh government initiated the CHT Land Dispute Resolution Commission, the Bengali organizations enforced a dawn-to-dusk general strike in Khagrachari on June 2, 2013 in protest against the government move to amend the CHT Land Dispute Resolution Commission. All modes of motor vehicles stayed off the roads and highways in the eight sub-districts, and all shops and markets were closed during the strike.

According to informants from Mahajan *Para*, the administration has not been active enough to tackle the groups from both sides. Moreover, the Bengali organizations have gained strength, spreading their members and branches all over the CHT region, and leading the settlers into violence.

6. Conclusion

In accordance with the preceding arguments surrounding the root causes of conflict in the CHT, it is clear that the causes for increasing violence in the CHT are multifaceted and linked with land, customary rights, religion, militarization, Bengali resettlement, and cultural antagonism. From my experience and field observation, I understand that these components continue to play the same role in different conditions. Although the militarization policy and Bengali resettlement are seen as separate at the policy level, the ground-level realities have shown that both state policies often mutually intervene in the lives of the Jumma people. The military have continued its operations in the CHT, and also continue to provide support to Bengali settlers. However, this ‘support’ also has complexities of its own. The rights of the Jumma people have continuously been compromised by improper administrative operations. While the armed conflict was initiated between Jumma political activists and the army, the ordinary villagers have adopted many strategies to save their lives and to continue their livelihood. The agency and experience of grassroots people have at times helped them to escape conflict or have pushed them to participate in further conflict in the CHT region.

In this article, the consequences of the Peace Accord have been investigated: special reference was made to the dynamics of the negotiation process among the local people through their everyday life experiences and realization. Ethnographic evidence has suggested that different stakeholders were not playing the same role at the grassroots level. The process of surveillance and the power apparatus have been mostly executed by military operations: at the same time, it was interesting to observe the negotiation between different stakeholders at different levels. On one hand, the Peace Accord has reduced the extent of the armed conflict between the army and Shanti Bahini (“Peace Force”), but, on the other hand, many in-group feuds have been ignited through the issue of dissatisfaction between various Jumma political stakeholders. The ordinary Jumma people have believed that the government was seeking to provoke or support these various Jumma political organizations in an attempt to ‘divide and rule’. Thus, the Jumma people have become victims of many crimes, for example, forceful eviction, police and army harassment, false police cases, and severe insecurity for their families, especially for the Jumma women.

Safety has been a major issue that not only surrounded the Jumma people but was also present among the Bengali settlers. While the settlers have had a privileged relationship with the army, they have had to negotiate under the historical legacy and the current reality. Ownership of land has continued to be perceived as the key example of conflict between the Bengali settlers and the Jumma people. Everyday conflict, such as communal violence, verbal abuse, physical torture, vandalized religious programs, etc. has been very much about disrupting the basic rights of ordinary people. Like the UPDF, some Bengali organizations have also not been in favor of the Peace Accord. Although their narration of the same event has been different, the position they have taken has shared the same goal. In this regard, it is important to remind ourselves how identity politics plays its role in the real-life setting. Structural bipolarity, as I have argued, is not that bipolar in the field: surveillance has not only created fear for certain groups of

people, it has also affected the whole community in that particular region.

Notes

- ¹ This paper is based on anthropological field work in the three villages (Mahajan Para, Shalbon and Lamuchari) of Khagrachari district in CHT area from September to October 2011 and from February to March 2013. The research methods were largely qualitative, involving interviews and in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and, participant observation. During my fieldwork I have not only gather information about the personal experiences local population. Rather I have collected various data about conflict situation of Khagrachari district. A particular incident, a particular conversation, a particular comment, a particular person, a particular institution, life in a particular village, sharpened and redirected my research. During the fieldwork, the informant asked me not to disclose their name and address. Thus most of the names in the text are therefore pseudonym.
- ² The Jumma people are not homogeneous in terms of their religious and ethnic backgrounds. Hierarchical relationships exist within the 12 ethnic communities. Although the Jumma people have several ethnic factions, politically they are more collective and active in establishing their rights in the region. The PCJSS was formed as a political party by activists who came from different ethnic groups of the Jumma people. The PCJSS was also the key stakeholder of the CHT Peace Accord 1997. On the other hand, when constitutional recognition of the Jumma people was not achieved by the peace agreement, many of the Jumma activists formed a separate political party called the UPDF. Like the PCJSS, the UPDF was formed under the banner of Jumma nationalism by members of the different ethnic groups of the Jumma communities. From the perspective of political ideology, although many differences are to be found between PCJSS and UPDF activists, ethnic variations have rarely interrupted their activities. However, this political divide has severely interrupted the social relationships of political activists as well as the ordinary Jumma people.
- ³ On July 18, 1996 the Government of Bangladesh declared that about 8,000 Jumma, army and civilians had been killed in CHT to date. However, PCJSS challenged the above figures claiming the number is much higher than declared. See detail, Mohaimen 2010.
- ⁴ Convention No. 169 is a legally binding international instrument open to ratification, which deals specifically with the rights of indigenous peoples. Today, it has been ratified by 20 countries. The Convention does not define who the indigenous and tribal people are. It takes a practical approach and only provides criteria for describing the peoples who it aims to protect. However, “self-identification” is considered as a fundamental criterion for the identification of indigenous and tribal peoples.

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