

JUMMA NATION AND PERSECUTION IN BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the religious and political persecutions that have become a serious concern to the religious and ethnic minority groups known as 'Jumma' people of CHT in Bangladesh namely, the Chakma, Marma, Thangchangya, Tripura, Rakhine, Chak, Bawm, Phangkhua, Khumi, Khyang, and Mro.¹ The Jumma people practice Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, and a few others are animists while the majority mainstream population follow Islam, and Islam has been constitutionally adopted as the state religion. Wide-scale exclusion in association with religio-political persecution became forceful soon after the constitutional adoption of Islam as the state religion a few years after independence. Hence, from the perspective of religious studies, this study tends to focus on the plight of religious persecution linked to violence being meted out to the Jumma people. As per the information available, violence in CHT is multi-faceted and multiple in nature. Usually, the ongoing violence and conflicts occur as one-sided communal attacks inevitably leading to rioting, arson, plundering, killing, rape, land occupation, and finally interference by the army and law & order forces that resulted in arbitrary arrest, torture, fabricated cases, and putting in unbailable imprisonment.

Introduction

This article focuses on the political persecutions inflicted upon the religious and ethnic minority groups living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh. Preceding studies by scholars, researchers, writers, and columnists have widely ignored the religious and political persecution against the Jumma people in CHT. Many studies depict the sequential and chronological events of the injustice being exercised upon the ethnic indigenous people, but there are no specific studies that focus directly upon how the Bangladesh government uses religion and race as a political tool to discriminate, persecute, and brutalize the Jumma people. This article seeks to correct this gap in scholarship through a baseline exploration of the history data alongside interviews with minorities in the region. In particular, the article seeks to explore how religion, race, and politics are linked to the violence and conflicts occurring in the CHT since the 1970's, and to expose how the Bangladesh security forces, law & order agencies, and other state machinery are involved in such violations of rights. The main research contribution of this study is the inclusion of interviews with 26 adults aged between 20 to 60 years from the ethnic communities in CHT. Altogether, the analysis and the interviews demonstrate serious violations of human rights which have occurred repeatedly over the past fifty years, such as rape, forced marriage, gang rape, murder, and more generally, the forced conversion of Buddhist, Christian, and other ethnic minority women and girls to Islam.

The findings so obtained, clearly reveal that in Bangladesh religion and politics are used by the state to ensure their control over the CHT and the various communities that live there. The findings also unveil the mechanisms of control and abuse used by the Muslim Bengali settlers, the Islamic fundamentalist quarters, and ruling Islamic party that control the government. Importantly, the goal of this study is not to blame Islam for the violence in the region or to essentialize Islam as a religion of violence, but to highlight the xenophobic nationalism that has taken hold of Bangladesh and how the supporters of this nationalism use religion and race to control and terrorize minorities in the CHT.

Much like Mark Juergensmeyer argues about the rise of religious nationalism in *Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges to the Secular State from Christian Militias to Al Qaeda* (2009), what I want to emphasize in this article is that the source of the violence inflicted upon the minorities in Bangladesh has nothing to do with religion, per se, but the xenophobic nationalism that has risen to power in various parts of the world, from North America to Southeast Asia. In Bangladesh, this nationalism was introduced by the Pakistan government immediately after independence in 1947 but it transformed into a more radical form of nationalism after independence in 1971. This new form of radical nationalism in Bangladesh is best called Islamofascism and its primary victims have been the Buddhist, Christian, and other minority groups in the CHT. In what follows, I will unpack this by first summarizing the history of religion and politics in the region and then summarizing the findings of my interviews with minorities in the CHT.

The Historical Context

To begin, the on-going violence in CHT needs to be understood in relation to the two-nation theory that had divided India into separate nations. During the partition, the Bengal Boundary Commission (BBC) that was chaired by Sir Cyril Redcliff, annexed CHT to Pakistan,

despite the fact that it has a 98% non-Muslim population.² This violated the core ethics of the India Independence Act by ceding CHT to Pakistan and put the minorities there at risk of persecution, which is exactly what happened. From that point onward, persecution of ethnic-religious minority groups in CHT began to develop in a phased manner from 1972 to 1997, and from 1997 to the present. These two phases of persecution may be subsequently described as Pre-Accord and Post-Accord eras, respectively, which I will unpack in more detail below.

The Pakistan authorities initially began to intervene in the internal issues of CHT after its annexation to Pakistan. The administrative status of CHT as “Excluded Area” under the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation of 1900, was redefined in the Pakistan constitution as “Tribal Area.” In the 1960s, the inner-line permit provisions that would safeguard the region from the external threat of infiltration were abrogated, and in their place an amendment to provide free access to the region for settlers was introduced. Prior to this development, the CHT regulation of 1900 had safeguarded the region from such infiltration, declaring that only native Jumma people were allowed to enter, unless they had been granted permission by the deputy in control of the region. As the regulation clearly stated: “No person other than a Chakma, Mogh or a member of any tribe indigenous of CHT, the Lushai Hills, the Arakan Hill Tracts or the state of Tripura shall enter or reside within CHT unless he has a permit granted by the Deputy Commissioner at his discretion”.³

When such principal provisional sections were amended, the CHT faced a slow erosion of rights and the Jumma people faced many challenges as a persecuted minority surviving in their region.⁴ Chief among this persecution, was the violent way that the Pakistan authorities promoted Islamic culture, language, and religious practice, and tried to impose its culture on non-Muslim tribal communities. As some scholars have pointed out, Pakistan authorities began a process of Islamification and tried to integrate all the distinct tribal people in the region through cultural hegemony, education, and economic influence in CHT.⁵

In addition, the Pakistan government also adopted a discriminatory policy in the name of industrial development, one example being the Kaptai Hydro-Electric Dam and the Karnaphuli Paper Mill. In 1960, the government constructed the Kaptai Hydro-Electric Dam and wiped out 54% of the plough lands that belonged to the Jumma people when 688.84 square kilometers of forest lands got completely submerged with the construction of the dam. The human rights reports of 1991 reads that some 100,000 Jumma people became internally displaced by this development, especially the Chakma Buddhist community.⁶ The studies show that 40,000 Chakma Buddhist families sought refuge in Mizoram, and 55,000 Chakma Buddhist families entered Tripura after the construction of the dam between 1983-1986s.⁷ In addition, more than 65,000 Chakma Buddhist families also sought refuge in outer provinces of

² Hassan, Md. Zahid, *Institutional Responsiveness to Indigenous Rights: The Case of Chittagong Hill Tracts Land Dispute Resolution Commission*, (Tromso, Norway: The University of Tromso Press, 2011).

³ Roy, Raja Devasish, *The Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation, 1900*, (Dhaka: Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD) Press, 2010), 130-131.

⁴ Emran, Ali M. “Land right of Indigenous People of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh,” *The fourth World Journal* 5 (2002): 63-79.

⁵ Singh, Deepak K, *Stateless in South Asia; The Chakmas between Bangladesh and India*, (New Delhi: New India Foundation and SAGE Publications India Ltd Press, 2010).

⁶ Siddiqi, Dina M, *Human Rights in Bangladesh 2003*, (Dhaka: Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK) Press, 2004).

⁷ Kamduk, Jumgam, “Rise of Chakma Ethnic Consciousness in Arunachal Pradesh: An Instrumentalist Approach,” *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 5 (2016): 24-29.

India, like Assam and Arunachal Pradesh in 1984. And many hundreds more Jumma families settled down in the reserved forest areas of CHT after losing their arable lands.^{8, 9} Of course, persecution of the Jumma people started with Karnaphuli Paper mill that brought out a lot of Muslim Bengali settlements to CHT in 1949.

One of the most strategic policies of the Bangladesh regime is the mass migration of Bengali Muslims from different plain districts to CHT. This state policy helps achieve the political goals of the government through “religious” means, as it permits a settler led Islamification of the CHT that appears to be a grassroots movement. However, since the illegal Bengali settlers collaborate with army personnel and security forces in communal violence and arson attacks, and because such acts are encouraged by the state policy of excluding the Jumma people from the governing of the state, it is hardly an innocent affair.

On 14 August 2020, I interviewed one veteran indigenous politician, aged 61, from the PCJSS party. He gave a similar explanation as found in some scholarship, suggesting that the Bangladesh government persecutes the religious minority groups through discriminatory and tactical policies enforced by law enforcement agencies and military authorities. He stated several things of importance for this study. One, the law enforcement and security personnel conduct arbitrary arrests, mass detentions, extra-judicial killings, tortures, rape, abductions, and forced marriages of Jumma women and girls, which creates an overwhelming terror and fear among the Jumma ethnic communities. Two, the government directly sponsors the Muslim Bengali settlers to move to the CHT, and then they are organized and incited by the joint forces to get involved in caustic forms of violence against indigenous peoples. Third, the military or security personnel collaborate with the Muslim fundamentalist groups to unify the Muslim settlers and encourage the continued discrimination practices in daily life, such as, offering hateful behavioral dealings to the natives. Four, the government implements targeted political policies and objectives that ensure discrimination from the top down, such as denying the Jumma people's national identity.¹⁰

Nasreen Chowdhury also notes that Bangladesh employs two universal models of state-building at the same time: forced assimilation and exclusion of minority groups from full protection under the constitution. The system of the national building through assimilation is slightly misleading though, as only citizens that can be recognized as having “Bengali identity” are given full protection under the law, a policy which does disservice to all minorities, especially those of Jumma ethnicity.¹¹ These kinds of offensive practices against minority groups on the basis of religion are deemed to be a practice by the state are a perfect example of what Mark Juergensmeyer calls the political ideology “national radicalism,” whereby the primary goal is absolute control of national boundaries and the purification of the governing majority. Simply put, it is a way of excluding any group deemed to be other or different from the dominant majority and defining national identity on the basis of that exclusion.¹² This helps

⁸ Gain, R. W. Timm Philip, *Bangladesh State Human Rights 1991*, (Dhaka: Co-ordination Council for Human Rights Bangladesh Press, 1992).

⁹ Ashrafuzzaman, Md, *The Tragedy of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh: Land Rights of Indigenous People*, (Lund, Sweden: The University of Lund Press, 2014), 47-48.

¹⁰ Jr, Karl DeRouen and Uk Heo, *Civil Wars of the World: Major Conflicts Since World War II*, (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO Oxford Press, 2007).

¹¹ Chowdhury, Nasreen, Refugees, *Citizenship and Belonging in South Asia*, (New Delhi: The Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd Press, 2018).

¹² Juergensmeyer, Mark, *Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges to the Secular State, from Christian Militias to Al Qaeda*, (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2008), 255.

us understand the situation in Bangladesh because as Md. Shamsul Islam argues in his work on political violence, most of the common religio-political acts of violence in Bangladesh are perpetrated by political activists, extremist groups, or by the state itself. What we find in Bangladesh is the implementation of various laws directed against minorities in total, but against indigenous Jumma people in particular.¹³

For example, on 9 October 2020 I conducted an interview with one former leader of CHT Hill Women Federation, who revealed that the way the government persecutes, threatens, and intimidates the Jumma people is through the intolerable decimation of human rights and caustic violence. The Bangladesh military and Muslim Bengali settlers directly get involved in gross rights violations that include killing, raping Jumma women and girls and atrocities, which remain out of reach of justice. On the other hand, the ruling Awami League party local leadership is also involved through its leadership of the Bangladesh military. The racial and religious reasons for the persecution can be subsumed under the two-nation theories referred to above, absolute assimilation and exclusion of any group other than the dominant Bengali majority. In some cases, the violence committed seems almost positive, as it embraces all through assimilation to Islam, and in other cases it is violent as Islamic and nationalist extremists use extreme religious ideals mixed with racial sentiments to purify the country and achieve their vision of political sovereignty. For this reason, various scholars have categorized Bangladesh as a “hotbed of Islamist militancy”.¹⁴

After independence, the Ultra-Bengali nationalist government began to axe the welfare of Jumma people by imposing secondary citizenship status upon the ethnic and religious minority groups with an offer to accept Bengali national identity – as an obligatory provision conferred in the constitution. As exemplified by the religio-political policy of Mr. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (1920-1975), the Father of the Nation of Bangladesh, “One Country, One Nation Theory.” Rahman wanted to integrate and assimilate the races, religions, and distinct ethnicities with mainstream Bengali Muslims.¹⁵ For this reason, Rahman tried to impose “Bengali” national hood upon the eleven distinct ethnic groups in CHT. When he first visited the tribal area in 1973, he assiduously proclaimed, “Right now, from today, I have upgraded you to the national identity of Bengali”.¹⁶

The Jumma people were opposed to the given national identity because they are distinct from the mainstream Bengali population and wanted to be identified as such. In 1973 when the Jumma leader Manabendra Narayan Larma, alias M. N. Larma (1939-1983), confronted Mr. Rahman in a dialogue and tried to solve the problems through discussion, he was told the following: “Larma, what do you think? You people are roughly 5/6 a million in population, do not go beyond what you deserve and keep silent! If you exaggerate, in need, I will not kill you by weapon, but I will evict you by way of shifting 10 million Bengali Muslims into your land to destroy you .”¹⁷

¹³ Riaz, Ali, and C. Christine Fair, *Political Islam and Governance in Bangladesh*, (New York: Routledge Press, 2011).

¹⁴ Peters, John. E. et al, *War and Escalation in South Asia*, (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation Press, 2006).

¹⁵ Panday, Pranab Kumar, and Jamil Ishtiaq, “Conflict in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh: An Unimplemented Accord and Continued Violence,” *Asian Survey* 49 (2009): 1052- 1070

¹⁶ Chakma, Sneha Kumar, *My Life and Struggle for Peace, Rangamati*, (Bangladesh: Shibli Offset Press, 2014).

¹⁷ Ibid

This attitude of ultra-nationalism held by the ruling class precipitated the total exclusion of the Jumma people, and it did so by combining ideas of religion, race, and acts of extreme violence. As Theodore Vial notes in his book, *Modern Race, Modern Religion*: “Religion is always a racialized category in the modern world”.¹⁸ Sadly, Bangladesh is a perfect example of this, as religion and race are used to further the political agenda of the Muslim Bengali majority blended with ideals of Islamic fundamentalism. What we find in Bangladesh is religio-political persecution that extends from the bottom to the very top of the government, as is evidenced by the personal policy of the founder of Bangladesh himself, cited above. It is for these political reasons that the Jumma people have been being persecuted for religious and racial differences. As Vial also notes, the political demand for more land to capitalize and more capital to make available to the ruling elite, has been wrapped up with religious and racial ideas since they were first written about in the colonial period. The interconnection between religion, race, and violence have been the cornerstone of both colonial and neo-colonial policies since the origin of the modern world.

Religious and Political Persecution

My field-work data reveals five findings that emerged from 26 research subjects, which confirm the above claims and shows how religion and politics have a direct link to communal violence in CHT. The first finding shows how communal violence ensues from hyper Bengali nationalism, racialism, and communalism, and how the state authority adopts the policy of migrating Muslim Bengali populations from different plain districts of the country to the CHT. The second finding shows that law enforcement personnel, intelligence agencies, and law & order agencies incite the Muslim Bengali settlers to commit violence upon the ethnic groups under indulgence of the state machinery. The third finding strongly indicates and proves that caustic forms of violations have been being committed by the military personnel in collaboration mainly with the Muslim Bengali settlers in CHT. The result is in line with scholarship by Kamala Visweswaran¹⁹ and Naeem Mahaiemen²⁰ that most of CHT violations are committed by military personnel with the collaboration of Muslim Bengali settlers. Moreover, that the violence against ethnic women and girls is most serious and troubling in CHT, as females are victims of rape, gang rape, and sometimes forced marriage or forced conversion to Islam.

The fourth finding shows the evidence for extra-judicial killing meted out to the ethnic rights activists and political leaders. Eight respondents who gave testimony made claims of extra-judicial killings of Jumma people. It was claimed that the security forces and law enforcement personnel sometimes pick up the victims from their homes, streets, and marketplaces, and while under detention, the victims are taken outside and killed in 'crossfire' in the name of 'gun fight' or 'encounters' with the armed terrorists. Second, the military and law enforcement personnel engage the anti-accord 'armed gangs' in killing the targeted political and rights activists. According to the respondents, the army ensures logistical support to these armed groups and escorts them in army vehicles to the destinations to carry out actions. The military-backed terrorist groups are usually referred to as the self-styled UPDF (Democratic), JSS (M.N. Larma) Reformists, and Mogh Party of Arakan Liberation Party or ALP - a foreign

¹⁸ Vial, Theodore, *Modern Religion, Modern Race*, (New York: The University of Oxford Press, 2016).

¹⁹ Visweswaran, Kamala, *Everyday Occupation: Experiencing Militarism in South Asia and the Middle East*, (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

²⁰ Mohaiemen, Naeem, *Between Ashes and Hope: the Chittagong Hill Tracts in the Blind Spot of Bangladesh Nationalism*, (Dhaka: All Rights Reserved Press, 2010).

armed group from Myanmar, each of which openly collaborate with the Bangladesh army to carry out violence in CHT.

Muslim Bengali settlers also carry out a number of killings in organized communal attacks upon the Jumma people without provocation. For example, the Muslim Bengali settlers carry out communal clashes over land disputes and kill the Jumma people. Sometimes, the squabble between the two communities also breaks out over social issues that involve kidnapping and forced marriage after coercive conversion, communal tension, overspreading of rumors, or incidents of communal-line violence. This observation is similar to that found in the work of Richard A. Gray,²¹ who describes 13 major massacres and genocidal crimes and the killing of 4938 unarmed Jumma civilians by the military personnel and settlers. Gray called this the: “wholesale massacres of tribal peoples” in CHT between 1980-1990s.

The result of my research and interviews are also in line with some reports of rights organizations like International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs²² and the Kapeeng Foundation.²³ Between 2018-2019 alone, 1,284 human rights violation cases have been reported that include fabricated cases against the rights activists to murder by military officials. There were reportedly 13,686 incidents of land-related violence and 588 incidents of violations against the Jumma women and girls, including the allegations of rape, gang-rape, killing after rape. Not to mention, sexual harassment, molestation, and human trafficking.²⁴

Regarding the present human rights situation, I had the opportunity to interview the Information and Circulation Department Secretary of an indigenous Regional Political party. According to him, the present human rights situation of CHT is too formidable and serious for the indigenous people to bear any longer, and their national identity and existence is endangered. He added that the government, in association with the state machinery, security forces, ruling party local leadership, and Islamic fundamentalist quarters, are involved in the human rights violations. Since CHT is being administered under quasi-military rule, the army acts as the supreme authority and decides all general administration, law & order, and developmental policies.

According to one interviewee, the army-backed groups are incited to carry out extortion, killing, looting, kidnapping, and arson upon the natives at the indulgence of the security forces. He mentioned that the members of their organization are witnesses of hundreds of rights violations and incidents perpetrated by the army, BGB, RAB, Muslim Bengali settlers, and other army-backed terrorist groups in 2020 alone. Moreover, the PCJSS Annual Human Rights Report in 2020 observes that there were 139 human rights violations perpetrated by the army, BGB, and police personnel. In these incidents, 3 people were extra-judicially killed; 50 were arrested and 49 were detained, 54 were beaten up causing serious injuries to 6 detainees, 104 houses were searched and 25 houses including 20 temporary shops were vandalized. Despite the extreme calamity of the COVID-19 pandemic, repression and military operations of the army, BGB, and law enforcement forces in the CHT did not stop, and the land grabbing and eviction of Jumma people by the state and non-state parties continued.

²¹ Ibid.

²² International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), *Militarization in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh: The Slow Demise of the Region's Indigenous Peoples*, (Copenhagen: Organizing Committee CHT Campaign and Shimin Gaikou Centre Press, 2012).

²³ Kapeeng Foundation, *Human Rights Report 2018 on Indigenous People in Bangladesh*, (Dhaka: Kapeeng Foundation Press, 2019).

²⁴ Ibid., 12-13, 30-32, 58.

Discussion of Results

I would like to reiterate at this point that the findings show a direct linkage between the way religion, politics, race, and violence are connected in CHT. It is clear the persecution, discrimination, and at times atrocities committed upon the Jumma people are done to achieve the political goals of the self-identified ‘Islamic’ Bangladesh state, ideas about religion and race are merely the tools of the state. The violence and conflicts — from the state capital down to the settlers living in the CHT — all serve the political end of the forced assimilation of minorities to the state. This is apparent from the militarization of the tribal areas — which ensures the subjection of these peoples when violence breaks out — to the Banalization and Islamization of these peoples when there is no conflict. The point here, of course, is that political action in Bangladesh is often inter-connected with certain sentimentalities that can be identified as religious, and in no way can these be clearly separated from politics.

Importantly, these results are in line with several earlier studies conducted on armed conflicts and political integration²⁵ and militarization in the CHT region.²⁶ For example, the data suggests that the government applies two models for employing religio-political violence upon the minorities: the first is state-led, often coming from legislation and government settlement projects, and the second is military or law enforcement led, which carries out the brutality of the state at the ground level. As noted in numerous studies, the Government brings mostly poor and landless Muslim Bengali populations from different plain districts or parts of the country to the hilly tracts under its projects, and grants the migrants monthly rations, lands, and security in CHT. Secondly, the government entrusts the military and law enforcement agencies to complete the projects under extensive military coverage without facing any problems. Later on, these settler migrants are incited against and backed by the military and other forces to inflict various caustic forms of violence that includes communal attacks, rape, arsons, land grabbing from the ethnic people, killing, abductions, forced marriage, and religious conversion. In fact, sometimes communal attacks were conducted in collaboration with the military. The result is consistent with the recent studies conducted on strategies of integration,²⁷ violence, and ethnocidal.²⁸ According to their research, communal violence has become a common practice of the Muslim Bengali settlers and is often practiced with the aid of the military.

The Muslim Bengali settlers are used as a chess pawn by the state to achieve their political goals. Most of the migrated settlers are landless day laborers, taking advantage of their poverty and helplessness, the government brought them into CHT, assuring them 2 acres of land and monthly rations to each family. The government of Bangladesh began this practice in part to seek temporary relief from the country’s population explosion. When the population went up to 163,046,161 on a total of 147, 570 square kilometres of landmass, it became one of the most densely populated regions on earth. In this overcrowded environment, it doesn’t take much to impel communities and individuals to act out of self-interest and hatred towards another group of people, and that is what the government encourages.

²⁵ Ahmed, Aftab, *Ethnicity and Insurgency in the Chittagong Hill Tracts Region: A study of the Crisis of Political Integration in Bangladesh*, (Chittagong: The University of Chittagong Press, 2008).

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Chakma, Sneha Kumar, *My Life and Struggle for Peace*, (Rangamati Bangladesh. Shibli Offset Press, 2014).

²⁸ Chakma, Bhumitra, “The Post-colonial State and Minorities: Ethnocide in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh,” *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 48 (2010): 2810-300.

The second objective aims to explore the persecution of minorities by the military, law & order forces, intelligence agencies, and security forces, and how they collaborate with the Muslim Bengali settlers under the supervision of the state machinery. The results show that violence in CHT is state sponsored: the Bangladeshi army and law enforcement authorities are the main actors of random violence in CHT. The migrated settlers are used as human shields as well as striking forces at the frontline for communal violence, who the security forces back by providing full coverage during the communal attacks in the CHT.

The study also indicates that the Muslim Bengali fundamentalist and ultra-communal regional parties play crucial roles in carrying out violence and conflicts in CHT. After all, the settlers cannot be blamed for the large-scale communal violence on their own. They are stooges in the mass spread of intended communal attacks. As cited earlier, the migrated settlers are completely dependent upon the security forces and their strategies, and therefore have to listen and comply with the dictation of the army authority in order to receive continuous support. Therefore, this study emphasizes that the Bangladesh army is supposedly responsible for all kinds of human rights violations and the status of the implementation process of the Accord in CHT. However, it also happens that the settlers individually get involved in conducting violent acts like raping, land grabbing, abduction, and sexual harassment in particular areas, but unless the army takes over the situation or unless any legal action is taken up, no communal violence is recorded by the media and the government gets to tell the narrative. In fact, in most cases, the military authorities get involved in rights violence incidents by siding with the perpetrators and promoting communal tensions, encouraging massive communal violence under its guidance in line with racist religio-political views of the state. All previous major violence, conflicts, and communal attacks have been conducted under the extensive support of the military personnel and paramilitary forces.

All these findings are consistent with the Annual Human Rights Report, published in 2018 by the Kapaeng Foundation.²⁹ However, very little is ever done about these issues, internationally or locally. Whether it be government officials, military or security forces, or even mere settlers, no one is ever really held accountable or charged with committing crimes against the Jumma people. A great number of victims and rights activists complain to authorities that no one takes up any legal action against the perpetrators who engage in violence against the ethnic minorities, but still nothing is done. In sum, what is happening in the CHT is state-sponsored violence, full stop. It is a disgraceful legacy that the current Bangladesh government is leaving to future generations. The government denies the ethnic welfare and fundamental basic human rights of the minorities in the CHT, and the Muslim Bengali arouse all kinds of caustic forms of violence under the military and law enforcement's instructions. As a result, the ethnic groups are being pushed towards the border lines of the country, which is why scholars such as Gray (1994) have labelled what is happening there as a form of ethnic cleansing, or ethnic-religio-political cleansing.

The third finding I want to discuss is the violence against indigenous women and young children, which has become a serious concern over the last three years in CHT. Ethnic women and children are the most disadvantaged and vulnerable parts of the country's population, yet the state fails to do anything to help them. They often face multi-faceted discrimination and deprivation from financial resources, proper education, healthcare, political and religious

²⁹ Kapaeng Foundation, *Human Rights Report 2018 on Indigenous People in Bangladesh*, (Dhaka: Kapaeng Foundation Press, 2019).

participation, and all this is on top being visible minorities in a county run by xenophobic nationalists. In my study, I only had time to focus on women and girls who were raped and was not able to investigate all the wider forms of abuse women endure. The initial plans I had for my study were excessively restricted by COVID-19, which made security inside CHT impossible to get around. The six key respondents who claimed to have been raped were victims and eyewitnesses for the study. Like the studies by Amnesty International and Kapaeeng Foundation, which I cited above, the women's responses provide a sort of report on the current living conditions for many disadvantaged within CHT, but in a far less abstract manner. In particular, I think the interviews display the brutality that the females endure. They made it possible to see the way that the women are deeply undermined by the state attitude towards the indigenous people, as well as Bangladeshi culture in general. For example, just as the state denies the Jumma citizenship by denying their ethnic status, so many people in the general population do not consider the ethnic people to be human beings in the same sense as themselves, but as lower-class humans that are not worthy of the same level of rights and dignity. This is what it is like to be a woman in the CHT.

The study also exposes the unlawful killings of several ethnic political leaders and rights activists in CHT. The interviews seem to provide evidence for a three-way unlawful killing conducted by the military, law enforcement personnel, and security forces. According to one respondent, the military personnel, and Repeat Action Battalion (RAB), picked up (abducted or kidnaped may be more appropriate terms) several Jumma political leaders and rights activists from their homes and later claimed they were killed in 'crossfire.'

Apart from this, the study has made clear that the government and the army encourages domestic armed groups to abduct, kidnap, or kill the targeted ethnic politicians and rights activists. The military-backed groups are usually referred to as the self-claimed UPDF (Democrats'), JSS (M.N Larma's Reformists), and the Mogh Party (an offshoot faction of the Myanmar group APA (Arakan Liberation Party, a foreign armed group from Myanmar). Moreover, it is clear that there is a history of Muslim Bengali settlers often inciting violence and carrying out unlawful killings individually, and sometimes this seems to be in collaboration with the security forces in CHT. The precise degree and nature of this collaboration will have to await further study.

All this leads ethnic minority leaders and rights activists of CHT to spend most of their days in constant fear and insecurity. PCJSS alleges that in most cases, the army directly raids the targeted houses and picks up PCJSS leaders and workers. These people are often detained and sent to jail under fabricated cases, and sometimes they are reported to be killed in fabricated 'crossfire.' The data available is from the early days starting from 1971 to the present 2020, which suggests unlawful killings as well as other gross human rights violations that began with the Bangladesh Mukti Bahini (Bangladesh Liberation Force) in CHT. According to the interviewees and other related data available with me, hundreds of thousands of unarmed ethnic civilians were killed by the Bangladesh Mukti Bahini and subsequently, by the Bangladesh army and migrant Muslim Bengali settlers since the emergence of Bangladesh as a new nation. The result is in line with the work of Gray³⁰ and Amnesty International, both of whom revealed and documented a number of unlawful killings and rights violence against ethnic people before the CHT Accord 1997.

³⁰ Gray, Richard A, "Genocide in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh," *Emerald Insight Reference Service Review* 22 (1994): 59-79.

The result of the fifth finding shows that communal violence is a common and key theme in the persecution of the Jumma people in Bangladesh. It usually emerges from the communal outlook based on race and religious diversities, and it gets transformed into multiple violence during communal attacks when the military personnel incite the Bengali settlers to grab or snatch off a large scale of lands from the possession of the Jumma people through violence. According to the results, most of the previous major communal attacks have been organized, pre-planned and collaborative actions carried out by Muslim Bengali settlers under the guidance of the military personnel against the ethnic minority groups. Numerous forms of minor and major communal violence have been reported to have happened every year, most of which could not be investigated owing to having limitations during this study. For example, in 2020, two communal attacks against the Buddhist communities have been reported to have occurred in Manikchari Upazilla (sub-district) of Khagrachari hill district, but the area could not be reached due to covid restrictions. However, I was able investigate two of the most serious communal attacks, which were jointly carried out by the military personnel and settlers in 2003 and 2017 in CHT. According to the key informants, in 2003, the organized communal attack upon the Jumma ethnic people living in Mahalchhari Upazilla under Khagrachhari Hill district was carried out by the Muslim Bengali settlers under army protection. In this incident more than 350 Buddhist houses and 4 Buddhist temples were completely burnt down, 2 people were killed, 10 women and girls were gang-raped, and hundreds of Buddhists got seriously injured. The result significantly builds on extensive evidence of communal violence against the Jumma people, which revealed the involvement of security forces, military, and law enforcement personnel with the collaboration of settlers in CHT.

The communal attack of 2017 was also organized, equipped, and led by a contingent of joint forces comprising of army and police. Some 400-500 Muslim Bengali settlers were collected from different settlements of Muslim Bengali settlers under Longadu Upazilla and gathered in front of the Longadu Upazilla Council office. The assembly was briefed by the Army Zone Commander and equipped and led to the rally site. At the rally, while shouting anti-communal slogans, marched forward while the joint forces followed behind. As soon as reaching the Tintila village, the rally got split into mobs and began to set fire to the deserted houses of the natives. At least 250 houses were completely burnt to ashes and one 75-year- the old lady who was just thrown into the flames alive It was reported that a total of 6,000 families had been affected, losing all their belongings. The result is comparable to the early documented report³¹ on the communal attack carried out on 2 June 2017.

Conclusion

The study has investigated the religious and political persecution of the Jumma people from four aspects: to examine the religio-political links to the violence, to explore the ways of persecution under state machinery, to examine the caustic forms of rights violence and its incidents and draw the global attention to the ongoing conflicts and violence in CHT. The study has applied a “qualitative research” methodology by conducting interviews with twenty-six research subjects from eleven distinct ethnic groups of CHT, Bangladesh. The study highlights the necessity of understanding the intricacy of enforced Muslim Bengali culture to comprehend the cause of conflict in CHT. The state's constitution does not recognize or emphasize the ethnic minority rights and secular outlook and in fact, the word “secularism” was removed from the

³¹ PCJSS (Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhiti Samiti), *Longadu Communal Attack, Plundering and Arson*, (Rangamati, Chittagong: PCJSS Press, 2017).

constitution during the Fifth Amendment to the constitution in 1977. Later on, 'Islam' was made the state religion in the constitution in 1988. At the same time, instead of the word 'indigenous' meant for the ethnic groups, different words, such as, 'small ethnic groups,' 'ethnic community' and 'tribes' have been adopted in the Fifteenth Amendment to the constitution. However, the names of the specific ethnic groups have not been mentioned in the constitution, which gives an ambiguity. The fierce incidents usually take multiple formations of rights violence that includes raping, killing, abduction, arson attacks, communal attacks, coercive religious conversion, internal displacement, illegal land grabbing, forced marriage, torture, arbitrary arrests, and extra-judicial killing of the ethnic political leaders and rights activists and supporters. Hence, it may be safe to conclude that the state intends to cleanse all ethnic minority groups physically not only from CHT but also from the country. Therefore, this silent way of religio-political persecution against minority groups in CHT should be paid special attention by the national civic polity and the international communities. If it is ignored, these precious minority groups may soon disappear.

To establish a stable, peaceful, harmonious, and prospering development amongst the multi-ethnicities, the state authority should respect and fully implement the 1997 CHT Accord and remove the military and security forces from their involvement in administration, politics, and business sectors in the region. Implementation of the CHT Accord is the only remedy to resolve the ongoing CHT conflicts and it is the only hope for the survival of the ethnic people. The longstanding crisis should be resolved through political negotiation rather than using the military might. I would propose that alongside implementation of the Accord, the state must adopt inclusive policies and widen the opportunities for the ethnic and other minority groups so as to enable their participation in the nation of Bangladesh as equal citizens under the law. If not, the persecution and violence against the ethnic people will continue to increase until nothing remains in the country but Islamofascism radicals.

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