

The Bengali Settlement and Minority Groups Integration in Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh: An Anthropological Understanding

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Abstract: Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) the only extensive hilly area in Bangladesh lies in southeastern part of the country. There are three categories of people living in the CHT. Firstly, the ethnic minorities— popularly known as Phahari. Secondly, the Bengali communities— who have been living in the CHT along with the Phaharis since the very beginning. Thirdly, Bengali settlers— who have been migrated from plain land as a part of government policy and sponsorship. The settlers in the CHT have been alienated from their land due to river erosion, flooding and natural disasters. Additionally, the minority groups in the CHT have also been marginalized economically. There are many Phahari people who have been withdrawn from their land while establishing the Kaptai Hydel Project and the process is still going on. Undoubtedly, the withdrawal process has been affecting their economic, cultural and social lives. This study is conducted to conceptualize the above mentioned theme. Data was collected from both primary and secondary resources. Some important issues such— how the ethnic minority groups might perceive the Bengali neighbors, what are the attempts government has made to integrate the CHT groups and minority people as a part of integration process, and who are the beneficiaries of the various Governments initiated programs are clearly discussed. Moreover, this study addresses the issues of Bengali settlers and CHT groups within the development dynamics and socio-political context. Therefore, this paper provides few recommendations for incorporating all the groups in the development paradigm in CHT.

Introduction

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (henceforth CHT) is a distinct region in terms of its ethnic, cultural and ecological diversity to the rest of Bangladesh. The CHT is only extensive hilly area in Bangladesh, combining three hill districts; Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban. The area of the CHT is about 13,184 sq km, which is approximately one-tenth of the total landmass of Bangladesh. The inhabitants of the CHT are composed Bengalis and non-Bengalis who are known as *Phahari*. Bengalis are two categories such as settlers and permanent resident Bengalis. Each *Phahari* has own dialect, social organization and cultural distinctiveness.

The CHT's Settlers are poor landless Bengali speaking Muslims. They have been shifted from the plain land particularly Chittagong, Noakhali, Comilla, Sylhet districts. The Government provides them with rations of rice, khas land, money and shelter. Settlers began to migrate in small numbers into the Hill Tracts as early as the seventeenth century. In the mid nineteenth century and later the Chakma chief Dharam Bux Khan and his successor, Rani Kalindi, brought Bengali cultivators to work on the chief's land and to teach flat land farming to the Chakmas in general. These cultivators later became permanent resident of CHT. During the nineteenth century only tribal chiefs had their

own land and the Bengali became sharecroppers, they were then not settlers. Later, some of them purchased land. Nevertheless, the Bengali population remained small in terms of quantity. Once the CHT became the part of Pakistan the government launched a policy, which might be described as 'internal colonization' through on the limited scale, by the settling non-tribal Muslim families in the area. After independence a large number of Muslim refugees from India were rehabilitated in some areas of CHT. The abolition of special status in 1964 opened up the CHT to outsiders. Bengali Muslim families started settling there in large numbers.

Eight years after the independence of Bangladesh, President Ziaur Rahman presided secret meeting in mid 1979 and decided to settle 30,000 Bangladeshi families during the following year. A total of BDT 60 million was allocated to the scheme. During 1980, some 25,000 Bengali families were migrated to the CHT. Under the second phase of the plan each family received five acres of hill land or four acres of mixed land or 2.5 acres of wet rice land. They also received two initial grants of BDT 700 altogether, followed by BDT 200 per month for five months and 11 kg of wheat per week for six months to build their own houses, and reclaiming their lands. In July 1982 a third phase of settlement was authorized under which a further 250,000 Bengalis were transferred to the area (Anti Slavery Society, 1984: 39). According to USAID in July 1980, the government decided to resettle 100,000 Bengalis from the plains in the CHT in the first phase of this scheme. From the government's viewpoint the settlement plan was successful from the start. In 1947 the *Phahari* peoples constituted 98 per cent of the total population of CHT whereas the Bengalis were less than 2 per cent. By 1951 the Bengalis had risen to 9 per cent of the total population. This increased to 31 per cent in 1961, 41 per cent in 1981 and 49 per cent in 1991. On the other hand, the *Phahari* gradually declined from 91 per cent in 1951, 49 per cent in 1981 and to 51 per cent in 1991. As a result, the *Phahari* and Bengalis became nearly equal as of now (Barua, 2001: 92).

Though their population percentages are near about the same but their social context, understanding and acceptability to each other is not equal. The perception of researchers and development dimension of GOs and NGOs are also questionable.

Objective

As mentioned above there are three categories of people living in the CHT, the minority Ethnic groups, Non Ethnic Bengali communities and Bengali Settlers. In this research I have tried to focus those people who have shifted from their own villages and now settled in the CHT as settlers and *Phahari* people who are living in the hills before huge Bengali settlement. The main objective of this study is to understand and explain the nature of Bengali settlement and how minority groups might perceive the Bengali neighbors in the CHT.

In preparation to the present paper there have some major objectives these are:

- How are Bengali settlers and ethnic majority groups living together and what are the integrating process within the development discourse in the CHT?

- Understanding and analyzing the extent of Bengali settlers as well as ethnic minority groups within the historical and socio-political context.
- To find out and analyze the aspects of mutual perception of Bengali and ethnic minority groups.
- To figure out the Government attempts to integrate the CHT groups and who are the beneficiaries of the various Governments initiated programmes in CHT development.

Methodology

This anthropological research on the proposed theme and for a comprehensive understanding the methods have been applied for collecting data all integrated methodological approaches (combining both the qualitative and quantitative methods) have been used in collecting and analyzing data. Both primary and secondary data has been collected from a variety of sources using both qualitative and quantitative techniques. The information has been gathered through small-scale empirical study through intensive fieldwork. Data have obtained through both participant and non-participant observation method. Primary data have been collected from different individuals as well as from key informants who have knowledge about settlers and development works in the CHT. Specific information has been gathered through case studies to supplement the data obtained from other sources. Hence this study has included different types of methods and techniques and some of which are intensive fieldwork and focus group discussion or FGD, life history, structured and unstructured interviewing. During the fieldwork emphasis has given on collecting qualitative information in order to understand the dimension of development and perception of relationship between Bengali Settlers and *Phahari*. Special attention has also been paid to the neutrality and ethical issues.

Importance and Significance of the Study

Anthropological perspective ethnographic research and investigations about the Bengali settlement and minority group integration in the CHT is almost unfocused issue. The Bengalis are of mixed Proto-Australoid and Caucasoid origin. The early Bengali settlement in the CHT took place during the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth, and the first half of the twentieth century's for various reasons. Settlers were basically farm laborers, small businessmen, fishermen, etc. However, subsequent settlement of Bengalis during the Pakistan and Bangladesh periods was large enough to give rise to resentment and hostility. The *Phahari*- Bengali integration process and their actual conditions are academically unknown. Few of the published Settlers related studies and commission's report said many Bengali settlers have become victims of the whole process, particularly settlers in the Bengali cluster villages. Many would happily return to the plains if there was a place for them to go back. But they have no better alternatives. They had come from worse circumstances. Being citizens of the country, they too have equal rights, whereas they are being treated as second class citizen in the CHT. The government has not sufficient attention to create a peaceful environment for both the ethnic minorities and Bengali settlers where they can integrate in national interest and development issues.

Anthropological researchers and development practitioner's attention has not received a lot in this regard. Therefore as above mentioned issue would be a more relevant and significant study in anthropology.

Literature Review

For the conceptualizing research framework and the purpose of this research some literature have been reviewed thoroughly which are relevant to the proposed study. Some reviewed related books are given here. *Ethnicity and National Integration in Bangladesh: A Study of the Chittagong Hill Tracts* is a renowned research book of B. P. Barua (2001). In this book the author tried to explore real scenarios of the ethnic groups as well as Bengali Settlement and Internal Colonization procedure in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. He focused on the Ethnicity and National Integration, total ethnic groups and their population, their practices and rituals, political system, economic conditions of both Settlers and Ethnic. The Emergence of the Parbattya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti/Santi Bahini also highlighted in this book.

Prashanta Tripura (1992) raised some important issues. In his study entitled *Culture, Identity and Development*, he explained the notion of development of the hill people. In this regard, he raised some questions, such as the meaning of development to different individuals, groups, or institutions, the appropriate development approach needed for the people of the CHT and how and by whom these development projects to be planned and implemented. In the study he suggested the need of the 'local' people to involve in all steps of the development process undertaken by government local NGOs to international funding agencies etc. Although this was important his study demands importunacy to know the notion of development, he did not give concentration on displacement as an affect of development.

Amena Mohsin's (1997) book *The Politics of Nationalism: The Case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Bangladesh* is a pioneer book for understanding he Chittagong Hill Tracts and its people, politics and nationalism. The author has given a clear conclusion of politics of nationhood both in British and Pakistan period. She also focused on Politics of Bengali Nationalism and the CHT during the 1971-1975 and 1975-1996. As an outgrowth of this book Politics of development, Politics of security issues also presented in a neutral way. Thus the understanding of this book has been from a socio-political perspective to politics of a nation-state towards the other cultural groups.

Schendal, Mey and Dewan (2001) book *The Chittagong Hill Tracts: Living in a Borderland* explained the ethnic traditional administration as well as colonial aristocracy in CHT historically. Pictographic presentation was an additional dimension of their study. They presented many interesting items such as, religions of the hill, nature destruction, and the implementation of development on the hill people and the overview of the state regarding hill people through the picture from the British periods to present time. They argued that when the state started thinking of the area, it thought of timber, bamboo, hydroelectric power, rubber and oil of the area. As the local ethnic people of the uncivilized for whom the development was necessary, 'development' was a bundle of

activities carried out in the hills and legitimized rhetorically as beneficial to the hills, but largely without participation, let alone leadership, by the hill people.

Counting the Hills: Assessing Development in Chittagong Hill Tracts. This book is edited by Mohammad Rafi and A. Mushtaque R. Chowdhury (2001). One of the author Mohammad Rafi has given an introduction about Chittagong Hill Tracts with some information such- Geographical location, topography, climate, administration system, religion, literacy, and socio- cultural activities of selected Pahari groups. In this book the authors also focused on Immigration and Politico-Development history, Land ownership and Cultivation, Water and sanitation, Health Seeking Behavior and others related issues of CHT. In *Ethnic Insurgency and National Integration: A Study of Selected Ethnic Problems in South Asia* Mahfuzul (1998) has focused on the crises of national identity and integrity of selected ethnic groups of Bangladesh, SriLanka and India. It also aimed at examining organizational structure of the groups and their struggle for self-determination.

Theoretical Framework

Without a clear conceptual framework it is not possible to describe and explain how settlers and majority group members living together. In this regard, the Bengali settlement and ethnic groups integration in CHT has been intensively studied, and in recent years the results of these studies have been thoroughly reviewed. However in the last decade, a substantial literature on the integration, internal migration or settlement, and development discourse in the context of CHT has appeared, and on this the present review focuses. This literature encompasses theoretical contributions. Study of internal migration and new settlement is a key importance in social sciences as well as economics and it emerges not only the movement of people from one locality to another for new settlement inside the country but also influences on livelihoods and betterment of life. Internal migration depends on the socio-economic, demographic and cultural factors like high unemployment rate, low income, and high population growth, unequal distribution of land and dissatisfaction with housing.

The In this study, an aim has been made a combination of theoretical frameworks. There are some perspectives on integration of different groups confront themselves in the social sciences: assimilation theory, multiculturalism, and structuralism theory. Not only is each framework useful in its own right in addressing my research problem, the all complements one another, giving rise to a more dialogical and interdisciplinary tool in understanding oppression in the context of the Bengali settlement and minority groups integration. More importantly, these frameworks help to contextualize the development paradigm in the context of CHT.

Assimilation theory:

In the literature on the cultural integration of ethnic groups, the perspective of assimilation theory has dominated much of the anthropological thinking for most of the twentieths century. This approach builds upon three central features. First, diverse ethnic groups come to share a common culture through a natural process along which they have

the same access to socio-economic opportunities as natives of the own country. Second, this process consists of the gradual disappearance of original cultural and behavioral patterns in favor of new ones. Third, once set in motion, the process moves inevitably and irreversibly toward complete assimilation. This view is exemplified by Gordon (1964), who provides a typology of assimilation patterns to capture this process. In Gordon's view, settlers begin their adaptation to their new place through cultural assimilation, or acculturation. Though cultural assimilation is a necessary first step, ethnic groups may remain distinguished from one another because of spatial isolation and lack of contact. Their full assimilation depends ultimately on the degree to which these groups gain the acceptance of the dominant population. Socio-economic assimilation inevitably leads to other stages of assimilation through which ethnic groups eventually lose their distinctive characteristics. This approach turned out to lead to the development of alternative approaches to the study of cultural integration.

Multiculturalism:

One such alternative approach is multiculturalism, which rejects the simple integration process proposed by assimilation theory. Scholars from this perspective view multicultural societies as composed of a heterogeneous collection of ethnic and racial minority groups, as well as of a dominant majority group. This view has been forcefully illustrated by Glazer and Moynihan (1970). They argue that immigrants actively shape their own identities rather than posing as passive subjects in front of the forces of assimilation. These authors also emphasize that some aspects of the cultural characteristics of immigrants may be preserved in a state of un-easy co-existence with the attitudes of the host society. The multicultural perspective offers then an alternative way of considering the host society, presenting members of ethnic minority groups as active integral segments of the whole society rather than just outsiders.

Structuralism:

As the structuralist approach in social science, the economic analysis of cultural integration emphasizes the role of economic incentives and opportunities. Incentives and opportunities are in particular affected by the size of the minority group. Indeed, assimilation to the dominant culture is likely to provide scale benefits in terms of economic interactions. The structuralist approach emphasizes how differences in socio-economic opportunities relate to differences in integration of ethnic groups. Unequal access to wealth, jobs, housing, education, power, and privilege are seen as structural constraints that affect the ability of immigrants and ethnic minorities to socially integrate. This leads to persistent ethnic disparities in levels of income, educational attainment, and occupational achievement of immigrants (Blau and Duncan, 1967; and Portes and Borocz, 1989). Consequently, the benefits of integration depend largely on what stratum of society absorbs the new migrants.

To summarize, assimilation theory, multiculturalism, and structuralism provide different views of the same phenomenon. The focus of assimilation theorists is on immigrants' succeeding generations gradually moving away from their original culture. Multiculturalists acknowledge that the cultural characteristics of immigrants are

constantly reshaped along the integration process and therefore may never completely disappear. Structuralists emphasize the effects of the social and economic structure of the host country on the ability of immigrants to integrate into its cultural attitudes and to share its economic benefits.

Areas of the Study

The present study has been conducted in the Khagrachari sadar and Panchhari Upazilla area of Khagrachari districts in the CHT. The geo position of the district is between 22°38' to 23°44' North latitudes and between 91°42' to 92°11' east longitude. The area of Khagrachari is 2749.16 Sq Km. It is under Chittagong Division. The number of Upazilla (sub district) in Khagrachari district is 09, named- Khagrachhari, Mohalchori, Manikchori, Panchori, Luxmichori, Dighinala, Matiranga, Ramgor and Merung containing 38 Unions. The total population of Khagrachari district is 6,13,917 (Male- 3,13,793 and Female- 3,00,124), sex ratio is 105:100, tribal and Phahari and Bengali ratio is 52:48, population density 223/Sq Km. There are three important places (in terms of respondents) for conducting fieldwork namely Mohammedpur of Shalbon, Comilla Tila, Bhai- Boon Chora of Khagrachari sadar area. About 200 (two hundreds) respondents including ethnic minorities, Bengali settlers, students, teachers, intellectuals, professionals, and political activists have been taken for conducting fieldwork. Khagrachari is the natural wild beauty of Bangladesh. It is a hill district of east-southern region of Bangladesh. The landscape is very charismatic. Khagrachari is one of the most naturally rich areas with the life of inhabitants and spectacular landscapes in Bangladesh. Most of the settlers and their residence 'Bengali cluster villages' situated in the khagrachari sadar and Panchori Upazila area of Khagrachari district.

Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHTs)

An unique geographical setting in Bangladesh:

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh- is a unique territory with mountains and beautiful landscapes. While most of the country is flat and a few feet above the sea level, the CHTs in the Southeast is completely different in physical features, landscapes, agricultural practices and soil conditions from the rest of Bangladesh (Gain, ed., 2000: 1). The geographical features of the CHTs with the mixture of hill and valley densely covered with forest and luxurious vegetation have the spectacular scenic beauty to attract people to the life and nature this area.

Once part of the Chittagong administrative district, the three districts of the CHTs- Rangamati, Khagrachhari and Bandarban- are surrounded by the Chittagong and Cox's Bazar plains stretching along the Bay of Bengal on the West, by the Indian states of Tripurs and Mizoram on the North and East and by the Arakan region of Myanmar (Burma) on the South and Southeast. The main rivers of the CHTs- the Feni river in the North, the Karnaphuli river in the central region and the Sangu and Matamuhuri rivers- are found respectively in the central and extreme South (Ibid, 2000: 2). Although 96 persons live per sq. kilometer in the CHTs compared to the national average of 827 persons, there is a myth that there exists a vast amount of land in the region that are not in

use. Apart from the plain land, the cultivation process in the region is based on the slash-and burn cultivation, locally known as the *Jum* cultivation. However, the CHT is also the place for the inhabitants of some of the major ethnic communities along with the Bengali population in Bangladesh which has further made the region a platform for the people of diversified cultural origins.

Historical, social and political perspective of Bengali settlement in CHT:

Similar to other indigenous peoples of the world, the indigenous people were also independent before the British colonial period. The British annexed the CHT area in 1860 and created an autonomous administrative district known as 'The Chittagong Hill Tracts' within the undivided British Bengal. In 1900, the British enacted the Regulation 1 of the 1900 CHT Act in order to protect the indigenous people from economic exploitation of Bengali Muslims and to preserve their traditional, social, cultural and political institutions based on customary laws, common ownership of land and so on. Throughout the British colonial period the 1900 CHT Act functioned as a safeguard for the indigenous people, prohibited land ownership and migrations of Bengali Muslims in the CHT. In 1947, Indian subcontinent was partitioned on the basis of religion, Pakistan for Muslims and secular India for non Muslims and Muslims alike. Despite 98.5% of the population of the CHT were indigenous people and thus non Muslims, the Pakistani leadership conspired with the British Boundary Commission. The British Boundary Commission ceded the CHT to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in violation of the principles of partition and against the wishes of the indigenous people. The indigenous vehemently protested against the decision, but to no avail. On 15 August, 1947 the indigenous youths under the leadership of Sneha Kumar Chakma hoisted tricolor Indian flag in Rangamati and Burmese flag in Bandarban. Six days later the Indian flag in Rangamati was lowered by the Pakistani Army at gun point (Chakma, S. K. 1986: 86-87).

From the very outset the Pakistani Government looked at the indigenous people with an eye of suspicion for being anti Pakistani during the partition. Indigenous people were discriminated in jobs, business and education. During the Pakistani rule, the Government of Pakistan amended the 1900 CHT Act several times against the wishes of the indigenous people in order to find a legal excuse for migration of Bengali Muslims into the CHT. It deliberately ignored the fact that the 1900 CHT Act was an indispensable legal instrument for ensuring the safeguard of the indigenous people, and that it could not be amended without mutual agreement. On contrary, Pakistani Government interpreted the 1900 CHT Act as a legacy of British colonial administration which helped separating the CHT from the rest of the country. The predicament of the indigenous people began with the building of a hydroelectric dam in the early sixties which flooded 1,036 Square Kilometers of land, submerged 40% of the best arable land and displaced 100,000 indigenous people from their ancestral homes.

The Bengali settlement and aftermath:

In a resource poor and agrarian country ownership of land is associated with the power structure of the community. In the CHT the Minority Groups have been alienated from their land through a state sponsored project of settlement of Bengalis into the hills.

The *Phaharis* are the people who had migrated to the hills in a natural way in search of jobs, or as farmers and traders. This migration, initiated from the pre colonial period continued after independence in 1947. There is no record of ethnic violence between the *Phahari* and the other hill people. This suggests that the hill people did not oppose the natural migration of Bengalis for they had not come as land grabbers or posed any threat to their survival (Hohsin, 2000: 66-68). The pattern of migration changed from natural to political in the Bangladesh period. In 1979 the government, through an amendment to Rule 34 of the CHT Manual, did away with the restrictions against settlements of CHT lands by non-residents. It was decided to settle 30000 landless Bengali families on government owned Khas land in the CHT the following year and Taka 60 million was allocated for the project. Each family was to be given five acres of land, Taka 3600 in cash and provisions to support them for the first few months. In the north, major settlements were built in Kaptai and Rangamati and along the valleys of the Chengi, Myani and Fenirivers, in lands traditionally farmed by the Chakma and the Tripura people. In the south Bengalis were settled in Lama, Bandarban and Naikhyangchhari areas. By the end of 1980, about 25000 families had been settled. The second phase was initiated in August 1980. The Divisional Commissioner of Chittagong issued a secret memorandum on 5 September advising district administrators that this time the grant of Khas land would be reduced. Each family was to be given either 2.5 acres of plain land or four acres of plain and bumpy mixed land, or five acres of hilly land, since most of the prime land had already been distributed among the first batch of settlers. Each family was to receive an initial grant of Taka 700 and, thereafter, Taka 200 a month for five months. Each family was also given twelve kg of wheat weekly per family for the first six months. In July 1982 a third phase of settlement was launched. By the end of the third phase another 250000 Bengalis were settled (Ali, 1993: 189-190). According to one estimate around 400000 Bengalis were settled in the CHT by 1984 (The Guardian, 1984).

The settlements proved popular with Bengalis for obvious reasons. In Bangladesh the per capita land today is 29 decimals. In such a land hungry situation the settlements were bound to be popular with the Bengalis. It is posited here that the real motive of the government in making this move is to colonize the CHT by bringing about a demographic shift in the region.

The government claims that Bengalis have been settled on Khas lands i.e. government owned lands is also subject to interpretation. Differences exist in the conception of Khas land between the hill people and the Bengali elite. What the government regards as Khas land is essentially the hill people traditional jum land and forest land. For the hill people this land is common property, belonging to the community, kinship groups and even members of the spiritual world. The roots of the conflict between these contradictory notions lie in the British colonial period. The colonial state had declared all land in the CHT government property; the indigenous people were given tenancy rights. This, however, did not create any conflict as according to the hill people's notion of land ownership, individuals and individual families cannot own land; they only have the right to use it. The government ignores this indigenous view of Khas land, which is regarded by the hill people as a gross violation of their inalienable rights.

Minority groups reaction to Bengali settlement:

The settlement plans offered an opportunity for landless or poor Bengali families. Landlessness is on the increase in the country in general. Land ownership has become increasingly concentrated and 10 per cent of the population owns half of the whole country land. There has been no attempt on the part of any Bangladesh government to assist landless laborers or marginal farmers anywhere in the country. So it is no surprise that the poor Bengalis will seize any opportunity for survival they are presented with. The Bengali peasants who moved to the CHT during the Zia and Ershad regimes came from the plain districts and have no experience of *Jhum* cultivation. Consequently, they encroached on *Phahari*-owned wet-rice land when they could not make a living from the land they had been given.

The crux of the CHT problem is the Bengali settlement along with the land dispossession of the *Phahari*. There have been dramatic changes since the partition of India and particularly after the creation of Kaptai Dam and the artificial lake. The act of planned Bengali settlement associated with other development activities has complicated the land problem. The plough lands at Kaukhali, Dighinala, Panchari, Rangamati etc. have been taken over by the Bengali settlers. Some hill people demanded that their grabbed land be returned to them. But generally they did not get back their land. Bengali settlement including mosques have been built in and around what used to be *Phahari* land. Sometimes they lose their land due to their lack of understanding of its commercial value and ignorance of the concept of private property, but for the most part it is a result of trickery by Bengali entrepreneurs and government officials. As a result, many *Phahari* have move up in the hills to practices *jhum* cultivation. They have become much poorer and face starvation. Some have used their land as security for loans from Bengali money lenders. Being unable to pay the high rates of interest, they have lost their land. Both the Ziaur Rahman and Ershad regimes followed a conscious policy of encouraging people from the plains to settle in hill areas with the obvious objective of outnumbering *Phahari* in their homeland. Many *Phahari* took refuge in India after their lands were usurped by settlers from the plains. The *Phahari* saw the officially sponsored influx as a deliberate attempt to destroy their distinct culture and heritage and turn them into a minority in a place where they enjoyed majority status for centuries. The Chakam chief Devashish Roy echoed the views of the *Phahari* in 1981: I do not want settlers from outside the CHT. The headmen are also against it. I have asked the government not to settle Bengalis in the CHT. Those who settle here are creating conflict with the *Phahari* people. Many are compelled to leave their ancestral homelands, some even going to India ((Anti Slavery Society, 1984: 26). Goutam Dewan, former elected chairman of the Rangamati LGC, said that our main problems pertain to land. Because our culture, life, livelihood, customs, economy, everything is related to land.

The Bangladesh government argues that settlement in the CHT is necessary because much of the land there is uncultivated and therefore in its view wasted. It has officially claimed that most of the Bengalis who came to the CHT between 1978 and 1985 have been settled on khas land (government-owned fallow land) under government programmes. What the government regards as khas land is essentially hill people's traditional Jum land and forest land. The concept of khas land is anathema to Jumma

notions of landownership. For the Jumma people this land is common property, belonging to the community and kinship groups. The *Phaharis* further argue that under the 1990 Regulation, which is still in force, settlement of outsiders in the CHT is highly restricted and transfer of land needs the approval of the DC, in consultation with the local headmen (CHT report, 1994: 26). These rules have been grossly violated by the government. The government maintains that it would be against the Bangladesh Constitution to prevent any citizen of Bangladesh from residing and settling in any part of the country (Article 36). This argument, however, ignores the economic or political realities of the CHT where little of the land is suitable for farming and where the traditional owners are coerced into giving up their property. Later, the Ershad regime realized the gravity of the situation and gave up the policy of Bengali settlement in the CHT region in 1985. But settlement still continues on a regular basis.

Bengali perception towards minority groups:

Writings about the population of the CHT in post-war Pakistan and Bangladesh perceive the economic, social and political structures and institutions in the perspective of evolutionary approaches: They give a picture of isolated and stagnant societies, hidden in the jungles, averse to changes, who hardly had or have contacts with the outside world. Being so 'wild, crude, primitive and aboriginal' (Sanar 1971: 193), they are 'in the lowest ladder of primitive tribals' (Husain 1967: 159). The Shendu (Lakher) are suspected to 'relish cannibalistic diets' on the ground that they 'take meat of all animals' (Sattar 1971: 269). Their economies are regarded as crude and primitive (Ahmad/Rizvi 1951: 20), wasteful, unscientific etc. In 1870, the whole bodies of the tribes are in a low stage of civilization, better described by the term 'barbarous' (Hamilton 1870: 270). There are many other tribes in the Chittagong Hill Tracts which lack this culture dynamism. Consequently, they are lost in the wilderness of pre-civilized cult, belief and customs. They have not been able to involve any kind of culture.

Those are only very few examples of how the ethnic groups of the CHT, their economy, and political organizations have been interpreted in the course of time. We easily could add many more passages. This short list, apart from being a collection of prejudices, shows something very interesting, viz. the continuity of ethnocentric concepts. It shows, too, the continuity of colonial models of thought in Bangladesh. There is no difference between the trouser and shirt distributing missionary or administrator of Victorian times and the progress-preaching, 'scientifically'-arguing progress and development planner of today (Qureshi, 1984: 84.). These ethnic groups are pushed out of the realm culture and placed into the realm of nature instead. And as they are stubborn, the right to administer the benefits of civilization belongs to those who are more developed, more progressive minded and powerful.

Bengali – minority conditions to the development discourse:

The development discourse of CHT has been analyzed in a historical way. From British period, the state has been treating the ethnic community as '*backward class*' and thus justifying its intervention through development policies. But the nature of dealing of state with ethnic communities has been changed from time to time. During British period,

the state controlled the ethnic communities through Bengali middlemen. But the nature of controlling has been shifted from Pakistan period when the state started controlling the ethnic communities directly under the banner of various development projects. Along with various government development projects, the state has been permitting the donor agencies to take their development activities. This development discourse has been working as a cultural discourse of the state because the ethnic communities have been losing their own cultural identities due to unfriendly development activities initiated by the state. The resettlement program of government for the landless Bengali people in CHT also added a new dimension in the sufferings of ethnic communities. The effects of the intensity are easily observed in the decreasing trend of the number of ethnic people in CHT.

CHT development board is an institution of government that exercises power on the ethnic communities through development programs. The beneficiary of these development programs is not the ethnic people but the Bengali people and military forces. Military power is related to the development planning of this area. These programs are indirectly influencing the lives of the people of the communities as these programs are compelling them to merge with the greater culture of Bengali people.

The Govt. development Programmes so far undertaken could not properly involve the target groups as much as they could act as putting factor for Bengali settlers. And this, in fact, is one of the important contributing factors to the political instability of the minority group areas which has become evident from the more intensive and frequent violation of the law and order situations. The govt. on the other hand, has been trying at least not to discourage the plain land settlers to come to the minority group areas. One would be surprised to see that most of the development projects are administered and manned by the people outside the *Phahari* areas. The Govt. has failed to take account of the past historical background of the *Phahari* people and develop technical and vocational skills to preserve the efficiency of their children and youths (Qureshi ed. 1984: 306). This could not only make them comfortable with their traditional culture and beliefs but also make them efficient in their own preferred professions and aptitudes. The benefits from such development did never trickle down to those disadvantage *Phaharis* who used to live very interior from the urban towns. Some *Phahari* like Chakmas and Lusais were fortunate to have undergone changes in their values, beliefs, attitudes towards life, life pattern etc. However no effort has so far been made the Govt. for equal benefits and either to take stock or to preserve the hills resources for the future benefits of the next generation.

The state of integration in CHT:

The CHT group's view of national integration ranges from the extreme of near independence to the moderate demand for protecting traditional *Phahari* rights. It is not possible to give a detailed analysis of the former view, because separatists under the banner of the Shanti Bahini work very secretly, and their insurgencies have mostly been confined to the deep forests, except for the recent bomb-blast at the Kaptai Hydro-Electric Project. The deployment of one army division and the regular unreported losses and casualties, can only suggest the extent of the movement in the CHT. Fortunately, it is still felt by most minority groups that such extremism could be stopped if the threats to

the existence of their culture and identities were removed, and scope given to them to flourish and expand. It then appears to be futile to try to accomplish the process of integration through military operation not to speak of the resulting loss to the nation of the spirit and vitality of perhaps the most distinctive cultural region in Bangladesh.

The government efforts to integrate the ethnic minorities in the CHT:

The Government Efforts to Integrate the Ethnic Minorities in the CHT through preferential policies and other remedial measures, such as amnesty offer, package of small measures for the development of the region, increased job facilities and reservation of seats for the tribal students in the educational institutions and even the formation of LGC,s by ignoring the main socio-economic and political demands, do not seems to have produced the desired result. The crisis has acquired political significance over the years and as such it requires a political solution. The socio-economic and political issues may be resolved through meaningful dialogue and integration on the basis of national consensus. A round table conference of all concerned parties- the Bangladesh government, representative of ethnic minorities, Bengali communities and settlers, may be convened to find a mutually acceptable solution of the CHT groups integration crisis (Barua, 2001: 133). In general there are two policy strategies for the achievement of integration. First, the elimination of the distinctive cultural traits of minority ethnic communities into some kind of national culture usually that of the dominant cultural group- a policy generally referred to as assimilation, or melting pot. Second, the establishment of national loyalties without eliminating subordinate cultures- the policy of 'unity in diversity'.

Conclusion

The issues of Bengali settlements and land alienation in the CHT are most critical for the minority groups. In view of constants protests by the Hill people the government has put a ban on the establishment of new Bengali settlement in the CHT area. The government however is uncompromising on the issue of withdrawal of Bengalis from the region. The major obstacles in the way of minority groups and Bengali settlers in the CHT: non *Pahari* settlement, deployment of army and its atrocities, denial of political rights and economic interests, threats to minority groups religion, culture and language, and the splitting of CHT into three districts. Some respondents have mentioned illiteracy, lack of communication facilities, cultural differences, social distance, heated and hostility between Bengali settlers and minority groups, inter ethnic differences, infiltration of Bengali culture and the communal attitude of the government as the other impediments. It is therefore evident that the state hegemony in the CHT remains unabated. In an agro based economy like Bangladesh where 51 percent of GDP comes from agriculture and 60 percent of labor force are employed in this sector alone (The Daily Holiday, 13.03.1992), the economic importance of land can hardly be overemphasized. Apart from being the

principles means of production, land is also the hallmark of social prestige and power in Bangladesh. Ownership of land largely determines power configurations and power relationships. In CHT the ownership of land today by the Bengali community is symptomatic of the dominant of this community. This position however has been acquired through a state sponsored project of settlement of Bengalis into the Hills.

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