

Wolfgang Mey
Königstr. 14
1 Berlin 42
FR-Germany

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Development Strategies and Social Resistance in the Third World.
The Chittagong Hill Tracts Case: Genocide in Context.

Although there live 12 different ethnic groups in the Chittagong Hill Tracts/Bangla Desh, who are all to a different degree affected by the current events in the hills, I shall concentrate in this contribution on the Chakma because they are worst hit.

To start with, I shall give a few general informations on the hill tracts. In order to understand the current situation, I have to go back into the history of the relationship between Chakma and Bengali and British.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts are situated in Bangla Desh, bordering Assam and Upper Burma to the east, Tripura to the north, Arakan to the south and the Chittagong District to the west. This hilly area is inhabited by 12 different ethnic groups who have mostly immigrated into this part of the country during the last 400 years. Most of them belong to the tibeto-burman language family and display mongoloid features. Their cultures have much resemblance to those of the ethnic groups of Upper Burma and Assam.

The history of the relationship of the Chakma with the Bengali population of the plains shows two contradicting aspects: These relationships are marked by a strange ambiguity towards the plains civilization. Simultaneously the ethnic groups try to imitate the cultures of the plains (by adopting technical

informations and patterns of economic and political centralization) and to oppose the consequences originating from these adaptations (oppression, inequality).

Continuity and change of the foundations of the Chakma society

Shifting cultivation was the dominant type of production among the Chakma. The land belonged to the kinship groups, the returns from the swidden fields were, however, private property. The decreasing returns from the fields compelled the Chakma and few other groups to take to plough cultivation from the end of the last century onwards.

Chakma society is formed by 40 kinship groups (goza) which were/are independent of each other and enjoy mutually equal status. The goza is the most important, largest form of their organization and the framework of economic, political and social integration. Each goza had its own representative whose office descended usually but not always from father to son. The community took care that no man unfit for the post was appointed. Originally, the "dewans", the representatives of the gozas were independent of the Chakma Chiefs, but by the application of Bengali tax-systems to the Chakma society, the "dewans" were made subordinate to the Chiefs.

Originally, there was no Chief among the Chakma but during the continuous fights between Chakma, Arakanese, Bengali and Moghul soldiers in the hinterland of Chittagong during the 17th century the Chakma were made to acknowledge a military leader (the first one of which was probably a Bengali) who had no position in the kinship system. This office holder succeeded in dominating a large number of gozas by monopolizing the trade between the plains and the hills and by acting as intermediary to the Moghul authorities. He was acknowledged as tax-collector by them and received repeatedly grants of lands. Thus he was partly integrated into the Moghul administrative system, partly into the tribal system.

From the 1930s onwards, the Chakma Chiefs succeeded in applying the Bengali tax-system (taluk-system), based on private ownership of land to the collectively owned lands of the Chakma swidden farmers. This led to a breakdown of the social system of the Chakma. This development brought in its train considerable influences from the plains.

The British policy to the CHT-population was contradictory: on one side it was the aim to link the tribal economies and tenancy rights with the system prevailing in the plains and to establish tribal hierarchies, on the other side they made provisions to safeguard the hill tribes from economic exploitation through plains people and to isolate the ethnic groups in the hills from the political development in the plains. The result of the British policy in the hill tracts was in the long run the implementation of a territorial system of administration as opposed to the kinship-based system of self-management of the ethnic groups: By and large, this policy centered around the land policy. Already in the 1860s, the British administration tried to discourage shifting cultivation which was opposed to British norms of land use. One major aspect of restricting shifting cultivation was the restriction of free movement of the swidden farmers who had to shift their fields in order to allow for long fallow periods of the swidden lands. Segmentation, hitherto a very effective check against usurping Chiefs and "dewans" was thus abolished. The British aim was to restrict and penalize migration, the object being to consolidate and localize each tribe around its chief.

Plough cultivation was favoured instead. Various attempts to induce the shifting cultivators to take to plough cultivation failed, only from the end of the 19th century onwards, plough cultivation became accepted because of the increasing shortage of swidden land (the British administration had set apart 1/3 of the hill tracts' forests as Reserved Forests for economic exploitation) and the decreasing carrying capacity and fallow-cycles. This meant the introduction of new concepts of land use.

Swidden farmers were the possessors of the soil, the ultimate owner. was the tribe/clan/village or the spirits. Returns from swidden fields were private property. Plough cultivators, however, had to acknowledge State proprietorship in the land, they became tenants under the State with restricted rights of land use only. Chiefs and "dewans" were given considerable economic privileges to secure their cooperation. Thus the "dewans" were able to transform their social function and position into economic power, they exercised enormous influence on the Chakma society. They were simultaneously agents of change and innovation among the Chakma and targets of intense hatred from the part of the cultivators.

With the partition of the subcontinent, the Chittagong Hill Tracts were forcibly integrated into East Pakistan and continued to be administrated according to the provisions of colonial law.

This process of economic and political centralization is but one aspect of the social history of Chakma society. On the other side, Chakma peasants resisted these changes wherever they could. The increasing powers of the "dewans" which were marked by an ever increasing exploitation of the Chakma farmers were counterpoised by segmentation. In British times, participation in formal education was another means of emancipating from economic and political subordination: Those who finished their education successfully got posts in the administration of the district and were not liable any more to render services to the "dewans" and Chiefs. Expansion of production was another possibility to escape the power of the "dewans".

These facts reveal a contradictory situation: The social organization of the Chakma (goza-system) is marked by equal relationships between and within the gozas. On the other side this organization has experienced various steps of centralization both from within and from outside.

Until the 1960es, Chakma notions of equality and reciprocity (though they could not always be realized) and resistance prevented to a large degree an overall centralization which mainly originated from the plains.

Development projects and the destruction of the Chakma society

Until the late 1950es, the policy of the Bengal Provincial Government towards the hill tracts' population may be called a "laissez-faire, laissez-aller" policy. The local authorities cared for the upkeeping of law and order and the tax collection and did not interfere significantly with the self-management of the ethnic groups. During the late 1950es, the population explosion in East Pakistan became so severe that the population density reached an average of 1215 people per square mile and the soils resources of the country were being pushed to its limits. By applying development models of industrialized countries for the development of the Third World, which emphasized large, capital intensive projects, preferably industrial ones to facilitate economic growth, the Pakistan Government directed special attention to the CHT and its only partly tapped resources. On this background the plan to construct a hydro-electric plant in the hills materialized, financed largely by American capital. The catchment area of this lake now covers 50 000 acres of the best plough land in the hills, 40% of the district's total cultivable area. The lake displaced 100 000 persons, few of them were rehabilitated, none of them adequately. 40 000 persons, mostly Chakma migrated to India.

The construction of this dam marked the first step of large scale Bengali intervention in the CHT and the destruction of the "tribal systems" in the cloak of "development".

The lake with its different effects (disruption of the economic and social structure of the Chakma society and the development of new economic potentials as fish farming and fish industries for Bengalis) gave incentives for further reorganization of the hill tracts' resources use.

In 1964, the Pakistani Government enlisted an 11-man international team of geologists, soil scientists, biologists, foresters, economists, and agricultural engineers to devise a Master Plan for the integrated development of the CHT based on what they considered to be optimum land use possibilities. The team worked for two years with helicopters, areal photographs and a computer.

Backed by the findings of this team two new development projects were implemented, the "Pilot Scheme for Control of Jhuming" ("jhum" is a Bengali term for shifting cultivation) and the "Standard Horticulture Holdings Program".

Shifting cultivation has (with a few exceptions) ever since met the rejection of both British and Pakistani/Bengali authorities. It has been considered a primitive and backward technique of agriculture which should be substituted by more advanced methods of production though it has been shown that as far as the productivity is concerned, the returns from a good swidden field are as good as from plough land. Shifting cultivation with its diversity of crops feeds a population a whole year whereas rice production on non-irrigated fields allows for one harvest a year only.

Nevertheless, this method of production "can no longer be tolerated" (Webb, W.E., Land capacity classification and land-use. Planning the Chittagong Hill Tracts of East Pakistan; in: Proceedings of the Sixth World Forestry Congress, Vol.3:3232) The findings of this team paved the way to intervention into tribal (e.g. non-market economies) on an even larger scale: Regardless of how well the traditional system of land use in the hill tracts may have been in the past, the "research team decided that the hill tribes should allow their land to be used primarily for the production of forest products for the benefit of the national economy" (Bodley, J.H. Victims of Progress, 1975:6). However, it "is realized that a whole system of culture and an ageold way of life cannot be changed overnight, but change it must, and quickly. The time is opportune" (Webb 1966:3232). Correct. Time was opportune.

100 000 persons were on the move already.
Why not 450 000 more?

With this "scientific" argument, the Bengali grip to the resources of the hill tracts was prepared and given a legitimation. Accordingly, the Pilot Scheme for the Control of Jhuming which aimed at restricting and finally abolishing shifting cultivation was implemented. 5 mouzas (smallest administrative unit in the hills) covering more than 35 000 acres were declared a Protected Area. 21 000 acres were to be planted with fast growing soft wood, 14 000 acres were to become fruit gardens. It was the plan that the plantations should be worked by the tribal people for 5 years. After that time they should be either sold or leased to private, non-tribal persons. An extension of the programme aimed at the afforestation of 500 000 acres which should also be worked compulsory by members of the ethnic groups living in this area besides their daily work in the swidden fields. The programme, however, failed. Finally, 2000 acres fruit gardens were planted by the inhabitants of Belaichari mouza, but this was done without any Bengali help or support. This, however, did not prevent the Forest Department from showing these plantations repeatedly to foreign delegations as a result of its benefactory development work in the CHT. It is important to note that although this project failed, the Bengali grip to the hill tracts' resources was legitimized for the first time in terms of national interests, the interests and rights of the indigenous population were not even mentioned.

The second project pursued an identical aim. The Standard Horticultural Holdings Program aimed, to cut it short, at nothing less than the transformation of the CHT into a fruit garden of East Pakistan/Bangla Desh. It was to be implemented in the Rehabilitation Areas, those parts of the hill tracts, where many of the peasants who were evicted by the Hydroelectric Project were compelled to go. Every household was to get

6 acres where bananas and pineapples (1 1/2 acres), cashew nuts (2 ac), palm trees, guavas, papaya and citrus fruits were to be raised. Officials expected a yearly income of 15 000 Rs. from these gardens after 10 years' time.

Apart from the fact that no reason was given for the fruit-combination, there was no detailed project planning, the project did not even include the implementation of market facilities.

But the true face of this project turned up in a different aspect: Rice production was to be given up entirely in favour of fruit production. This meant the withdrawal of a sound economic basis of the concerned villages and the integration of nearly self-sufficient groups into the Bengali market-economy. The results came soon: As people were compelled to work in these fruit gardens, they had no time to work in the swidden fields. Shortly afterwards lack of foodstuffs was reported, then the first cases of starvation.

The practical implementation of this program showed already at that time (in the mid-sixties) the same patterns of Bengali development policy: destruction of tribal economy and eviction of tribal settlers. After a few years the mouzas where this program was put into practice were practically deserted by its inhabitants due to harassment and exploitation by the Forest Department personal.

The same pattern of action was employed later, too. The inhabitants of the mouzas which were left in charge of the Forest Department personal were told what to plant at what time and where. The Chakma peasants were compelled to render unpaid labour in the forests and in the settlements of the Department's personal, they were forced to buy in "special" shops the Bengali owners of which had come to some profitable agreement with the Department's staff. Those Chakma who resisted these practice were publicly beaten up, arrested and handed over to the Rangamati jail. (Rangamati is the district capital). In no single case between 1962 and 1970, were it harassment, exploitation, embezzlement, theft, even rape of tribal women or blackmail by Bengali personal, the culprits, though known, were brought to court.

To curb guerilla activities (the concerned ethnic groups had in the mean time set up a freedom force to check Bengali intervention which took the shape of genocide) more development projects were initiated in the hills and partly completed. At that time, there were a.o. 6 foreign aided projects in the hills implemented:

1. the Sida-financed forestry project,
2. a UNICEF sponsored drinking water supply program,
3. a WHO organized malaria eradication project,
4. a livestock and fisheries program assisted by the Asian Development Bank and
5. an Australia-aided road building program.

The forestry project turned out to mean the ruthless extraction of timber. SIDA pulled out of the project as Bengali authorities failed to guarantee and safeguard the interests of the tribal people.

The drinking water supply scheme benefitted only army camps, Bengali colonies, urban centers and the Joutha Khamar settlements (see below). The

Livestock and fisheries project benefitted the Bengali newcomers to the district only. (During the 70es and early 80es, a large number of Bengalis were settled in the hills after the tribal owners of the land were evicted. In 1980 alone, 100 000 Bengali were settled in the CHT through Government initiative. This violent eviction-and-new-settlement-policy is still going on.)

The road-building program had two objects:

1. to facilitate army movements in the hills and
2. to enable Bengali settlers to push deep into the hills in a short time.

The three northern valleys of the CHT (Chengri-valley, Myani-valley and Kasalong-valley) were "developed in 1979/80, e.g., the communication systems and marketing facilities were improved Trade and commerce is monopolized by the Bengali.

So far, it has become clear that all development projects in the hills were directly related to Bengali interests only.

6. This also applies to the Joutha Khamar project, the joint-farming project. In the late 70es, 2758 families out of 14 000 shifting cultivators' families who had lost their land due to the Hydroelectric Project were "rehabilitated" in special villages. Money, seeds and technical assistance was given to the tribal farmers to induce them to join this project. Though villagers are not compelled to settle in these villages, they are kept under surveillance once they are there. The tribal guerilla claim these villages to be concentration camps, an independent Bengali observer compared them to the "strategic villages" the American army constructed during the Vietnam war. These model villages, as they are called, are partly financed by the Asian Development Bank. The aim of these resettlements becomes clear when we take into account that in the late 70es guerilla war against the Bangla Desh army had reached a very effective level.

To sum up, I am compelled to say that so far all development projects in the hills never served the interests and the well-being of the local population. They were implemented to

1. realize Bengali economic interests,
2. to suppress and evict the tribal population and
3. to finance genocide in the hills, carried out by the Bangla Desh army. A British military mission is part of this development project, as one may call it after all: It is assisting the martial law authorities in enforcing military rule and provides military equipment for dealing efficiently with tribal insurgents, as they call it.