

# Atrocities Against Buddhists in The Chittagong Hill Tracts



**T**he *Chittagong Hill Tracts* is the largest district of Bangladesh. In this area live 12 different ethnic groups though the majority are Buddhists. Racially they are Mongoloid, linguistically Tibeto-Burmese. They have many links with numerous ethnic groups of S-E Asia. The people of the *Chittagong Hill Tracts* have been described as being so different from the Moslem Bengalees as the American Indians were from the early American European settlers.

Despite the fact of the *Chittagong Hill Tracts* (CHT) annexation to the British Empire in 1860 for administrative purposes, the people

of this area have nothing in common with the Indo-Aryan population of the Plains of Bengal.

The British Administrators were seemingly aware of this dissimilarity and they placed the CHT peoples under a separate jurisdiction than that employed in the Plains of Bengal. This separate jurisdiction was also known as an "Exclusive Area" and was made a district of the Bengal Presidency Commissioner under Statutory Regulation, Act 1 of 1900, known as the "*Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation*".

The regulation provided *Autonomy* for the CHT peoples and encouraged them to preserve their district social laws, cultural dignity and lands.

By regulation people from other geographic areas or districts were not allowed to settle in the Exclusive Area. They could not purchase land from tribal people and outsiders could be expelled from the District if they were thought to be undesirable or if it was felt they were doing anything prejudicial to the interest of *CHT peoples*.

After India's Independence, the CHT lands were included for administrative purposes under the jurisdiction of E. Pakistan. The traditional representatives of the *CHT peoples* voted to be integrated into India where in Assam and Tripura peoples of the same backgrounds lived. The traditional CHT representatives feared for the future of the *CHT peoples* (Buddhists, Christians and Hindus) under a Moslem controlled Pakistan.

Despite their desires to be included as part of India they were not. At the same time the Pakistan Government started moving great numbers of Moslem Bengalees into the *Chittagong Hill Tracts*, and CHT tribal police were transferred to other Districts and replaced with Moslem police. This of course was completely contrary to the original intent of the *Chittagong Hill Tracts Act* of 1900 which provided for CHT autonomy, but with the independence of Pakistan and India all legal safeguards of the tribal peoples were abolished and the Pakistan Government treated the *CHT peoples* as dis-enfranchised people within their own lands.

For these reasons, during the Pakistan's rule over the CHT people and lands, great numbers of Bengali Hindus and thousands of Buddhists were forced to cross the Pakistan-India Border seeking shelter and security. Because of this mass movement of people, religious and racial riots occurred on many occasions. In 1964 due to flooding of 40% of CHT lands to create hydro-electric energy for the Plains of E. Pakistan 45,000 CHT tribal people fled to India to settle in Arunachal Pradesh. where they remain without rights to this day.

Bangladesh took its independence in 1971 from an orthodox Moslem and racially natured nation; Pakistan. Bangladesh now seems to be more racially prejudiced and more conservative in its Moslem beliefs and ultimately more cruel.

Soon after its independence the Bangladesh Army killed 400 tribal Buddhists. It appears

that Moslem Bangladesh has plans to accomplish the uncompleted task of Moslem Pakistan through a campaign of genocide of the Buddhists of the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

The Moslem Bangladesh Army burned thousands of homes. Many tribal women and girls were abducted, tortured and raped and about 200,000 tribal civilians slaughtered or crippled in the CHT (*Cf, B.P.F. Newsletter vol. 10, Nos. 3 - 4, 1984*)

Thousands of tribal Buddhists were uprooted from their homelands and pushed into India. At the same time the Bangladesh government helped the new Moslem Bengali settlers occupy the Chittagong Hill Tracts lands belonging to the Buddhists, this resulted in a mass exodus of Buddhist people, repeated violation of Tribal Cultural Norms and ecological deterioration including deforestation.

In their efforts to violate the rights of the *CHT Buddhists*, the Bangladesh Government has established three Army Cantonments at Dhighinal, Ruma and Alikadam along with innumerable Army Camps.

It now appears the whole might of the Bangladesh Government and Military Machinery has been mobilized to eliminate the Tribal Buddhists of the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

In 1986, 50,000 Buddhist refugees crossed from Bangladesh to India in an attempt to seek shelter and safety. Thousands have been killed and some have been left stranded in the Jungle and died of starvation.

In May of 1989, a large number of refugees from the *Chittagong Hill Tracts* crossed the Bangladesh-India Border through the Tripura States. Estimates are that 90,000 are in Tripura State of India.

Moslems atrocities upon Buddhists are not a new thing for past Moslem Governments in Mogul period in India.

Indian history reveals much evidence of torture and other atrocities by Moslems upon Buddhists of this situation I have just described continue for the *CHT peoples*, the Buddhists of the *Chittagong Hill Tracts* will be completely eliminated by the Moslem Government of Bangladesh.

A similar destruction of Buddhism by Moslems occurred in India from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the

18<sup>th</sup> century. That age has been called the "Dark Age" of Buddhism in India.

To a large degree the Moslems are habituated towards genocide of the Buddhists. Agressive Moslems take advantage of the non-violence of Buddhists and as history shows millions of Buddhists were compelled to convert to Islam during Moslem rule (Mogul) of India.

## The present facts are:

1. If the International Community does not look after the tribal Buddhists, Hindus and Christians of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, these people will either be forcibly converted to Islam or subjected to numerous atrocities and probable death.

2. It is absolutely necessary to protect the Tribal peoples from genocide and secure for Buddhists, Hindus and Christians of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, their basic human rights.

3. The aim of Bangladesh policy has been made clear by a statement from a representative of the Military Government in 1979 when he said publicly; "*We want only the land and not the people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts*" (Cf. Survival Internataional 1984. 21).

4. This statement and evidence of brutalities against CHT people show the violation of *CHT people* over the last 18 years, is aimed at expelling or eliminating the tribal population rather than neutralizing political adversaries.

5. For this reason members of the *CHT people* should receive international protection from the violent and agressive tactics demonstrated by the Bangladeshi Government and Bengali Moslems.

P. J. Chakma

Thai Inter-Religious Commission  
GPO Box 1960,  
Bangkok 10501,  
Thailand.

for Development,

## A PLEA TO STOP THE GORY VIOLATION IN SRI LANKA

**A**mnesty International issued, on 14th December 1989 a report on extra judicial execution in Sri Lanka which report, incomplete as it is bound to be under the circumstances, will shock the conscience of the civilised world. (AI index ASA 37/21/89).

The *dramatic surge* - the meteoric rise - in the number of dead bodies that float down the rivers and waterways into the sea - has sent fish prices tumbling down. The reason is that people do not eat fish because fish eat people.