

# The Chakma Voice

**Newsletter of MCDF**

Global Edition

Vol. II, Issue No. 4, Nov-Dec 2010

Contribution: Rs 99/-



For Private Circulation Only

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**Acknowledgment:** The painting used in the cover page of this edition is one of famous paintings of well known artist Suniti Jiban Chakma, France, and has been used with his prior permission.

Further, MCDF acknowledges the financial contributions made by numerous people without which this publication would not have been possible.

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# Message from the MCDF President

Dear Chakma Community,

Mizoram Chakma Development forum (MCDF) has turned one year on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2010. As I look back I am happy to note that we are no longer a small group of people but now have thousands of people with us and behind us – enough to give confidence and momentum to march ahead. I bet we have just scratched the surface of what's possible together.

What an amazing journey together. In just a single year MCDF has done numerous activities which have started giving result and as these begin to bear fruits the outcome will lead to improved condition for the Chakmas in Mizoram and develop greater ties among Chakmas across the globe. Please turn to page 4 to know some of the important activities undertaken by MCDF so far. Each day people are willing to join us which is very encouraging sign.

What brings us together, I think is the fact that we all are concerned about our situation, we all care to be developed, care to be educated, care to earn a good living, and care to be free from all sorts of oppression. Over thousands of us have under the aegis of MCDF now resolved to seek our right to development and resolved to conduct our responsibilities as members of great Chakma Community, as an exemplary citizens, protecting our right to be educated, confronting systematic discrimination in any nature and form, eradicate corruption, work for peace and harmonious co-existence with our fellow communities like Mizo, Mara and Lai etc. Let us take the pledge to not only be demanding citizen but also contributing citizen towards peace and development of the state and the country.

Many of us think every day that certain things need to be changed. Let us begin by changing ourselves, by endorsing pro-active attitude, by cultivating progressive thoughts and by supporting leadership that has a potential to change our uncertain condition into certain, just & progressive Future. Many a times we thought that had our forefathers and leaders acted in some favourable ways/took proper decisions we would have been in a better situation today. But History can't really be changed; what can be changed is our future by acting in the present.

To get all these done, we need each one of you to step forward and contribute in any ways that you can and conduct your responsibilities that not only benefit you but also benefit the society at large. MCDF has for the last one year worked with very meager financial resources; yet it could do so many things. Special mention however must be made here that MCDF enjoyed full support and confidence of the Chakmas in Mizoram and elsewhere who have made financial contributions. While providing funds to MCDF they know that it was an investment that they are making for their children and future of the Chakma Community as a whole. Every contribution also builds our community that will be making changes for decades to come.

In a nutshell, we at MCDF witnessed the meeting of ordinary minds for an extra ordinary vision. To build a world where each one of us can live with dignity, where every human life is precious in equal measures, where every effort is directed towards development & peace rather than worrying about the safety of our Fundamental Rights, Language, Culture, Identity, family, farm land, homes and villages just because we happen to be "Chakma".

Someone rightly said, "the World belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their Dreams". I believe the finest qualities of endeavors are born out of difficult situation and time. So let's put our finest of minds to build a stronger, united and progressive Chakma Society.

Long Live Chakma!

Hemanta Larma  
President, MCDF



## Editorial

In the recent memory there has been no publication carrying articles from Chakmas from across the world in a single edition. It has been 17 years since the World Chakma Conference took place in Kolkata, India, in 1993. Since then, the world has changed beyond recognition and the Chakma society too has transformed. Almost all of Mizoram's sleepy villages now boast of having produced at least a graduate and are ready to discuss fundamental issues of rights and good governance. The Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh who suffered worst human rights abuses in 1990s are now nearing to a negotiated political solution. In Tripura, the Chakmas are demanding the official recognition of Chakma language in Chakma scripts. The continued brutal forms of repression in Bangladesh failed to falter the courageous Chakmas who now along with other Jumma communities are willing not to settle with anything less than a constitutional recognition of their identity and rights. There have been also increased exchanges of information and increased bonds amongst the Chakmas across the borders in recent times. This was clearly evident from the protests that took place in India including in Delhi, Agartala, and Kamala Nagar (CADC, Mizoram) against the communal attacks against Chakmas in CHT in February 2010. Hundreds of Chakmas came out to join the Kamala Nagar rally, which was never seen before, even when worst human rights violations took place in Mizoram.

With a view to provide impetus to the efforts of cooperation and to create awareness amongst the Chakmas in Mizoram, the MCDF has been publishing *The Chakma Voice*, a bi-monthly newsletter since November 2009. It is important to note that this newsletter is published both in print and online editions.

The world knows the Chakmas for their sufferings. Yet, it is not the complete story. What went unnoticed are the golden qualities they possess: an indomitable spirit and resilience. The more they suffer, the more they are likely to bounce back and progress. This has been witnessed in Mizoram as well as in Arunachal Pradesh. Across the world, Chakmas have achieved highly in various fields but these achievements have hitherto remained unknown to the world and even to Chakmas themselves. For example, how many Chakmas in Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh villages know that Chakma Raja was recently elected to represent Asia in the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues or that a Chakma heads a prestigious university in Canada? Or for that matter, how many of us in Bangladesh or India know that a Chakma scientist/doctor in India is a United Nations expert in Fluorosis and received certificate of excellence in medical research from USA? The fact that a Chakma diplomat entered the Indian Foreign Service way back in 1959 is ample evidence that Chakmas were way ahead of many others. In Bangladesh, a Chakma diplomat retired as country's ambassador and two others are Bangladesh's current ambassadors. As we go to the print, Mrs Chandra Roy-Henriksen (the Chakma princess) has taken over as the Chief of the Secretariat of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Hence, our story is not only of sufferings but also of glory. But the neglect of our rich past and ignorance about our present glories has let the Chakmas down as a community.

The main theme of this special edition is, therefore, to capture "the sufferings, hopes, achievements and aspirations of the global Chakma community in the 21st century". I am happy that we have been able to do that up to some measure. Any community is incomplete without its history and therefore, in this edition we have also tried to explain Chakma history comprehensively. The Chakma as a community must together aspire to improve our situations worldwide. This edition is just a small step towards that direction.

MCDF has received overwhelming response from across the globe. We are thankful to Raja Devasish Roy for his blessings and his kind consent to publish his article, and to Suniti Jiban Chakma for his kind permission to use one of his wonderful paintings to adore the cover of this issue. We are also grateful to all of those who have taken time off their busy schedule to contribute articles that have definitely enriched this edition. I express deep regret that a few beautiful articles could not be published due to limited space.

I sincerely thank my colleagues in the Editorial Board for their tireless efforts to give to the world this brilliant edition of *The Chakma Voice*. Indeed, by all means, the effort is no less than gigantic!

Paritosh Chakma  
Editor

# MCDF's Activities Report (2009-2010)

## I. What is MCDF?

On 11 October 2010, the Mizoram Chakma Development Forum (MCDF) celebrated its 1st birth day. The group was formed on 11 October 2009 when about 20 spirited individuals came together at Ashok Buddha Vihar at Rajghat, New Delhi - on the auspicious day of Buddha Purnima. The individuals consisted of students, government and private sector employees, activists, and housewives. The objectives are to undertake developmental and welfare activities, to promote the human rights and fundamental freedoms of the Chakmas of Mizoram, and to build a bridge of love and unity with Chakmas living in other parts of the world.

## II. Activities undertaken by MCDF

In the last one year, MCDF has carried out a number of activities and took several initiatives that found profound support from the masses. Some of the most important activities are as follows. The list is by no means exhaustive.

### 1. Education tour to Indian Parliament

The first activity was undertaken just after two days of MCDF's birth: an educational visit to Indian's Parliament House. On 13 October 2009, a group of 11 Chakmas, including students and their parents participated in this educational tour and visited the Indian Parliament House, New Delhi. The group visited the Lok Sabha, the Rajya Sabha and the Central Hall inside the Parliament.

The aim of the visit was to understand India's Parliament—the institution that runs the country, and its heritage. It perhaps remains the only occasion when Mizoram Chakmas have witnessed the inside view of the India's Parliament.



A visit to Indian Parliament organized by MCDF

### 2. Memorandum submitted to Mizoram Education Reforms Commission

MCDF was the only NGO to have submitted a petition highlighting Chakmas' educational problems to the Education Reforms Commission constituted by the state government of Mizoram in May 2009 to suggest measures to improve the quality of education from primary to university level. This Commission was headed by Prof. AK Sharma, former chairperson of National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). On 31 October 2009, a three-member delegation of MCDF met the Chairperson of Mizoram Education Reforms Commission at his residence at Noida, Uttar Pradesh and submitted a memorandum. In its memorandum, MCDF pointed out the denial/lack of access to education for the majority Chakma children and sought suitable recommendations for improvement of educational condition in the Chakma inhabited areas.

An important outcome of this engagement is that Mizoram Education Reforms Commission recommended, inter alia, that primary education be imparted in "mother tongue" which was one of the primary demands of the MCDF. The Commission in its report submitted to the Mizoram government on 30 July 2010 recommended that *"In schools where there is concentration of minority community children, mother tongue of the child should be used as medium of instruction in Class I and II."* (For details, turn to Page 69)

In a first ever case, the Mizoram Education Reform Commission has recommended to Mizoram government to introduce "mother tongue" in primary schools where there is concentration of minority community children. This recommendation came from the MCDF's petition.



### 3. “THE CHAKMA VOICE” and “MCDF Pogodang”

“The Chakma Voice” and the “MCDF Pogodang” are two pet projects of MCDF. Since November 2009 the MCDF has published five issues of “THE CHAKMA VOICE” (bi-monthly) without a break. Each issue has highlighted contemporary problems/issues affecting the Chakmas (in particular in Mizoram state) and provided critical analysis with a view to generate public awareness. This newsletter remains the only of its kind which reports exclusively about Chakma related issues, and is available both in print and online versions. It reaches to most of the Chakma inhabited villages in Mizoram, and in Aizawl, Shillong, Guwahati, Kolkata etc. It is also sent electronically to several readers across the world.

The Chakma Voice is the only newsletter in English language which reports exclusively on Chakma issues. It is read by Chakmas across Mizoram, and in Shillong, Guwahati, Kolkata, Delhi etc in India. It is also sent electronically to several readers across the world.

“MCDF POGODANG” is a daily news service through SMS. This is MCDF’s own innovation and perhaps the first of its kind in India. This is a very simple and effective way to communicate with the mass and deliver important messages instantly. It is totally free of cost. Presently, MCDF has over 10,000 subscribers. MCDF has sent “MCDF Pogodang” on different issues such as: admission, career guidance, results, scholarships, job vacancies, politics, economics, religion, Border

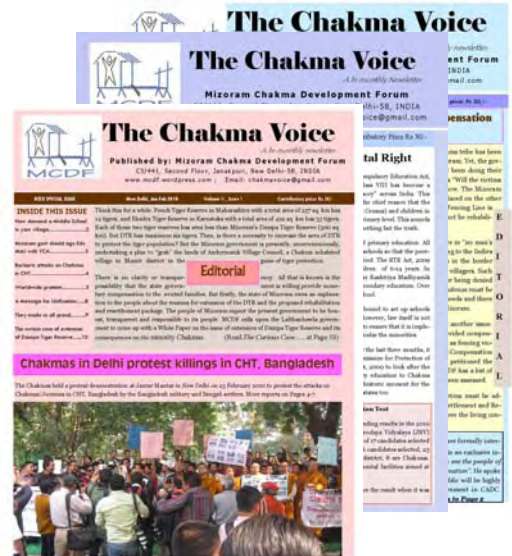
Fencing, various schemes/programmes like Border Area Development Programme (BADP), New Land Use Policy, etc besides MCDF’s own activities. It has also been found extremely useful in times of medical emergency.

### 4. Celebration of “New Year 2010” in Delhi

As an initiative to bond the Chakmas hailing from different geographical locations (e.g. Mizoram, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, and Bangladesh) the MCDF organized a “New Year 2010” party at Raghu Nagar, Janakpuri area in West Delhi. Importantly, the programme was organized with the collection of participation fees from the participants. In high spirit the programme saw participation of 39 Chakmas, including women, men, girls and boys from different states like Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura, and Bangladesh. The New Year 2010 was celebrated in a Chakma style, with food, dances and Chakma music.

### 5. Social work

MCDF conducted three social work programmes in cooperation with Arunachal Pradesh Chakma Students Union and Chakma Buddhist Society, Delhi at Ashok Buddha Vihar, Rajghat, New Delhi. The three social work programmes were held on 28 March 2010 (Sunday), 4 April 2010 (Sunday) and 11 April 2010 (Sunday). Each time, between 50-70 youths participated.



Above: A voice of the voiceless;  
Below: Social work



## 6. “Bizu 2010” organized for the first time in Delhi

MCDF in cooperation with other Chakma social organizations organized “Bizu 2010” festival at Ashok Buddha Vihar, Rajghat, New Delhi on the occasion of Phul Bizu on 13 April 2010. About 400 Chakmas participated in this “first -of-its-kind” affair.

## 7. Census 2011 Awareness Campaign in Mizoram

The Census 2011 started in Mizoram from 15th May 2010 onwards. This year’s census, for the first time, had “National Population Register” (NPR) on the basis of which the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) will issue a Unique Identity (UID) Number to each citizen. MCDF along with Mizoram Chakma Students’ Union (MCSU) Aizawl Zone launched “Census 2011 Awareness Campaign” in several villages and distributed about 2,000 leaflets.



A section of the gathering during Buddhist prayers at Bizu Festival 2010, Delhi

## 8. Campaign to establish Middle Schools and High Schools

MCDF started “Education Mission” in Mizoram. This programme seeks to establish Middle Schools and High Schools wherever there isn’t any and fight “institutionalized” discrimination against Chakmas. According to MCDF’s independent survey in 2009, it was found that of total 111 Chakma villages in three districts namely Mamit, Lunglei and Lawngtlai, only 31 villages have Middle Schools, and 5 villages have High Schools. That is, 80 villages (72%) do not have Middle Schools and 106 villages (over 96%) do not have High Schools.

Based on this finding, MCDF submitted a petition to the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights on 22 October 2010. NCPDR is the nodal agency to monitor implementation of the Right to Education Act 2009. If MCDF is successful, all Chakma villages are going to have access to at least up to secondary education soon.

MCDF also wrote to Mizoram’s Education Minister Mr Lalsawta demanding urgent steps to improve literacy amongst Chakmas and establish Middle and High Schools in each and every Chakma village. If Mizoram govt shows no interest, MCDF will take legal measures.

## 9. Campaign to establish Hostels

MCDF has been campaigning for establishment of Hostels by the government of India in Chakma inhabited villages. As part of this campaign, MCDF submitted a petition to Union Minister of Minority Affairs, Mr Salman Khurshid and Chairperson of MsDP Empowered Committee, Mr Shri Vivek Mehrotra demanding establishment of boys and girls hostels for Chakmas at Kamala Nagar and Borapansury in CADC, Lawngtlai district, and Rajiv Nagar and Marpara villages in Mamit district. MCDF will demand more such hostels.

## 10. Old Age Pension

The Chakma senior citizens have been denied Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme although they belong to below poverty line (BPL) families. As a pilot project, MCDF took up the matter for two aged Chakma villagers of Silsury village, Mamit district and on 18 November 2010, officials from Social Welfare Department, Govt of Mizoram visited Silsury village and enrolled the two Chakma senior citizens for old age pension. The SWD officials also distributed enrolment forms in the village. MCDF is committed to ensure old age pension to all eligible aged persons on a large scale. ■

Based on MCDF’s efforts to ensure old age pension to two senior Chakma citizens of Silsury village in Mamit district, officials from the Social Welfare Dept, Govt of Mizoram visited the village on 18 November 2010 and enrolled the two senior citizens who have been deprived of old age pension.



# One year of MCDF's existence: What it has achieved

By- Hemanta Larma



The Mizoram Chakma Development Forum (MCDF) was formed in New Delhi on 11th October 2009 by a group of spirited individuals from diverse backgrounds – students, government and private sector employees, professionals, human rights activists and housewives. On 11th October 2010, MCDF is one year old, and it is time to take stock of what we have done and what we have achieved so far.

The MCDF recognizes the fact that the Chakmas face discrimination and neglect by the State which has retarded the development of both the Chakma community and the state of Mizoram. The problems facing the Chakmas in the state can be stated as under:

- Institutionalized discrimination and neglect faced from the State
- Extreme backwardness in all spheres
- High level of illiteracy and lack of educational facilities
- Lack of jobs and sustainable means of livelihood
- Lack of awareness on the rights guaranteed to them

- Lack of access to the right to information

The MCDF was born with the aim to solve these problems in order to facilitate a “developed, secular, democratic and peaceful state” called Mizoram, and an advanced Chakma society.

It won't be an understatement to say that within the first 1 year, MCDF has become a house-hold name amongst Chakmas in Mizoram. This is because of MCDF's ability to bring “fresh air” and a ray of hope in the life and struggle of the Chakma community that faces institutionalized discrimination, neglect, antipathy, apathy and deprivation and yet suffer silently without any ability to raise a voice of protest or concern. Many would argue that the entire Mizoram faces lack of development, unemployment, lack of access to basic healthcare, sanitation, water woes, etc and there is no discrimination against Chakmas per se. But, when the state government has made recruitment rules that bar candidates having

Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, the first set of discouragements came from a few Chakma leaders. MCDF expected it, as the Chakma society in Mizoram, as it is today, lacks the courage even to register a protest against injustice. Even to demand development is a fearful proposition!

no knowledge of Mizo language from state employment, and when Chakmas' literacy is only 45.3% against Mizos' staggering 95.6%, MCDF believes that there is something wrong in the policies of the state government that deny the minorities the right to development.

Since its birth, MCDF has taken the “less travelled road” and questioned the current set up that discriminates, neglects and denies the Chakmas their human rights including the right to development. Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, the first set of discouragements came from a few Chakma leaders. MCDF expected it, as the Chakma society in Mizoram, as it is today, lacks the courage even to register a protest against injustice. Even to demand development is a fearful proposition! Some leaders initially tried to misinform the people that MCDF is creating a rift with the state government by dint of its demands for development that irks the officials. But luckily the villagers across Mizoram could understand the need to demand food, water, schools, roads, jobs and development. People are increasing contacting MCDF in times of any need or just to congratulate or send short message of encouragement via mobile phones.

Before we proceed further, one thing must be told. All the Office Bearers of MCDF are professionals in their respective fields and are employed elsewhere. Meaning, they do not have so much of free time but they devote at least one hour every day to the works of MCDF. And, the financial resources are limited.



The enormous amount of activities it has undertaken means that MCDF Office Bearers had to shell out from their salaries every time there is need for money. MCDF gathers hitherto unknown information through the Right to Information Act, but it involves a lot of money. For example, a set of information under a single RTI application has cost MCDF Rs 4,000 (four thousand)!

Mindful of the fact that education is the backbone of the society, MCDF has started a campaign to establish Middle Schools and High Schools in all Chakma villages and hostels in some strategic locations so that students get opportunity to continue their education uninterrupted. MCDF's initiative to ensure that all Chakma aged citizens get old age pension has already started to bear fruits. On 18 November 2010, officials from Social Welfare Department of Mizoram visited Silsury village in Mamit district and enrolled an aged couple for old age pension. This is historic!

MCDF is the only organization to have consistently highlighted the issue of India-Bangladesh Border Fencing and how this is going to affect the Chakmas.

In order to raise awareness about the problems of Chakmas in Mizoram, MCDF uses the media and Social Networking Sites (SNS). The online and offline discussions have raised the understanding of the Chakma problems in the right perspective. Today the Chakmas' problems and issues no longer remain unknown or restricted to our sleepy villages in the peripheries of India-Bangladesh borders but are prominently highlighted and discussed in the internet - Facebook, orkut, twitter and blogs.

During the past one year, the MCDF has conducted substantial research

on the issues of education, health-care, border fencing, discriminatory Recruitment Rules, and various development schemes of the government such as Border Area Development Programme, Multi Sectoral Development Plan for Minorities, Old Age Pension, Backward Region Grant Fund, NREGS, etc. We have been the only NGO to have highlighted the educational problems of the Chakmas before the Mizoram government-constituted Education Reform Commission (ERC). The ERC has recommended to the Mizoram

The MCDF uses the Social Networking Sites (SNS) to create awareness. Today the Chakmas' problems and issues no longer remain unknown or restricted to our sleepy villages in the peripheries of India-Bangladesh borders but are prominently highlighted and discussed in Facebook, orkut, twitter and blogs and newspapers.

government that "mother tongue" should be taught in primary level to minority students.

The bi-monthly newsletter *The Chakma Voice* is the *only* English language periodical in India which reports exclusively on Chakma related issues. It is published both online and in printed editions. It has received rave reviews from all quarters. The village people liked it for its contents, explained in the simplest way. However, MCDF soon found out that a bi-monthly newsletter was not enough and started what is known as "MCDF Pogodang", a medium to send updates on daily basis via SMS. This

was an instant hit and today most Chakma villages are beneficiaries of India's mobile revolution. Thereby, MCDF has broken the jinx that information should be restricted to the hands of the "the few". Now information is accessible on daily basis by the common people who are subscribers to the MCDF Pogodang service. The empowerment is clearly visible when MCDF Office Bearers in New Delhi receive SMSes from villagers about what they were eating in their Jhum fields!

Clearly, the flow of information is now two way traffic: not only MCDF sends information but also receives crucial information from the villagers immediately. This has been the greatest achievements so far.

The exchange of information has raised the stake of the common people. All of a sudden, they seem to have awoken from a deep slumber. Gradually, they will start demanding to know what their elected leaders have done for them, or about the Village Plan or District Plans or where the development funds meant for them are flowing. MCDF passionately believes that only this kind of transparency and accountability will be able to bring efficient administration that in turn will deliver justice and development to the people.

In short, a silent democratic revolution is in the offing. ■

(The writer is the President, MCDF, Delhi)

# Multiculturalising Secularism through Constitutional Recognition of Adibashis



CHAKMA RAJA DEVASISH ROY argues the case for recognition of Adibashis, indigenous peoples, in the Constitution of Bangladesh.

## The idyllic non-communalism

Thanks to the Supreme Court's judgment in the fifth amendment case, we are on board the ship of state, about to journey back to a secular Bangladesh. Anyone who believes in non-discrimination -- which is a peremptory norm of international human rights law -- cannot but be happy with this. We would, however, be living in a fool's paradise if we thought that we could return to that idyllic land that the framers of our Constitution dreamed of in 1972: a society free of "communalism (o-shamprodayikota) in all its forms" and one in which there is no "abuse of religion for political purposes" (original Article 12, Constitution of Bangladesh). Freedom from the various forms of 'communalism' (read racism) can only come if our Constitution not only gets back its stolen pillar of secularism, but is also supplemented with provisions that expressly, accurately and respectfully acknowledge the identities of the different peoples that have lived in Bangladesh since time immemorial.

## Our secular heritage

No doubt, communalism -- or religion-based discrimination, or racism (especially where perpetrated through state power) -- was the greatest threat to social progress and democratic practices from 1947 to 1971, when we found ourselves huddled into the state of Pakistan, which had religious identity as its *raison d'être*. Our tryst with 'Pakistanihood' was necessarily uncomfortable at best and stifling and oppressive at worst, because the legacy bequeathed to us by the forbears of our ancient heritage im-

pelled us, as a society, to remain tolerant and multicultural. We could, and still do, recall the proud heritage of the multicultural and secular Bangladeshi rulers of the past: of the Buddhist Pala civilisation, the Hindu Sena rajas, the Muslim sultans and nawabs and Adibashi rajas and chiefs. Blood was spilt over land, wealth and people, but never over religion. The torch of secularism was carried, equally vigorously by so many of our poets and philosophers: from Lalon Fakir to Hasan Raja, Nazrul Islam to Shamsur Rahman.

## From 1972 to 2010

However, the circumstances of 2010 are so very different to those of 1972, at least in some very fundamental respects. In 1972, we were trying to rid ourselves of the hangover of a religion-based identity that purported to subsume the cultural identities of the different peoples of Bangladesh. The medicine given was secularism. It did make sense in many contexts. Or so some would say. But where it concerned the identity of those peoples who now choose to call themselves Adibashi, it was regarded as assimilative. We may recall Manobendra Narayan Larma's one-man walkout from the Constituent Assembly in 1972, when his demands of multiculturalism fell upon deaf ears. Larma rejected the Constitution because the national identity that was espoused in 1972 was monocultural; oriented around an identity based upon Bangaleeness, which again minoritised the indigenous peoples; this time on account of ethnicity and language, rather than religion (while in 1947, it was religion). But let me come to that later.

The challenge that we face in 2010 is that, while we still need to combat religious intolerance that stifles cultural expression, democratic practices and women's rights, our greatest nemesis is not a colonial state ruled by foreigners. Our nemesis now is the proverbial "shorshete bhoot" (the ghost in the mustard), of a homegrown variety, albeit with occasional foreign links and loyalties. However, if we pursue our non-communal ideals based upon a national identity that blindly espouses a monocultural Bangalee identity, we not only continue to do a great disservice to those citizens who are not ethnically, linguistically and culturally Bangalee (the Adibashis,

primarily, and the far smaller number of Urdu-speakers), we also risk incurring the wrath of those who feel insecure in a national identity that draws its values from a heritage that to them is insufficiently distinguishable from the identity of the similar cultural and ethnic groups that live across the international borders to our west and east. How then -- some would say -- do we assert our distinctiveness from the Bangalees of West Bengal and Tripura, and justify the partition of the then East Bengal from a united Bengal in 1905? What we therefore need to espouse is a national identity that asserts its uniqueness in positive terms, based upon the multicultural heritage of the peoples and communities of Bangladesh, and not an identity that focuses upon the non-Muslimness or non-Bangaleeness. This way we get out of the quagmire of the false dichotomy of Bangalee versus Muslim. In other words, what many in Bangladesh -- including Adibashis -- espouse is a multicultural state that discards the ideals of the Westphalian nation state as much as it rejects the medieval theocratic model of statehood.

### **The Adibashi vision**

The indigenous peoples of Bangladesh, including the Paharis of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and the Adibashis of the plains regions, dream of a Bangladesh in which their distinctive identities are constitutionally recognised and protected. They wish to reshape the country so that they are a part of the structure and process of state-led governance and development instead of being mere spectators, or worse, victims. Apart from their cultural identities based upon strong collectivist traditions, their traditional dependence upon, and stewardship roles in managing, natural resources and eco systems, and self-governance and internal dispute

Constitutional reforms for Adibashis would help ensure that the protection of the identity and rights of Adibashis is part of the regular policy of the Bangladeshi state, as opposed to the fickle policies of successive governments with wavering levels of interest or apathy towards indigenous issues.

resolution based upon customary law, indigenous peoples the world over share one historical experience: they are one segment of humanity that has had little or no role in designing the modern states' administrative architecture and resource ownership regimes. In other words, indigenous peoples did not frame the 'rules of the game' in the modern state (unlike in pre-modern indigenous civilisations like that of the Mayas, Aztecs, Kiratas, Sakyas, Boroks), and not unsurprisingly, remain among the most marginalised groups with regard to access to education, healthcare, drinking water (now a globally recognised human right), sanitation, electricity, communications, capital and market access. Therefore, in order to make the 'playing field' somewhat more 'level', indigenous peoples are demanding a say in state-led governance and development, in order to rid themselves of their subaltern status. Thereby, they are not seeking to hegemonise state power (a tall order, you might say, especially in states like Bangladesh, wherein they are not only microscopic minorities but are also socio-politically and economically disadvantaged) but are merely seeking a right to exist with their identities, and to be able to speak, and to be heard.

### **Constitutional recognition of Adibashis and safeguard provisions**

Ever since 1972, Adibashis have been seeking constitutional recognition, something they lost in the constitutional reform processes of 1956, 1962 and 1972, wherein they were not consulted.

This is not to say that their status is not recognised by the Bangladeshi state today. In fact, their status as 'indigenous', 'aboriginal' and 'adibashi' is already recognised in several legal instruments, including the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation of 1900, the State Acquisition and Tenancy Act of 1950, the Finance Acts of 1995 and 2010, and in the Small Ethnic Groups Cultural Institutes Act of 2010 ("Khudro Nrigoshtthi Sanshkritik Protishtthhan Ain", 2010). These laws are however deemed insufficient to protect their identity and rights because they are ordinary laws that often remain unimplemented or under-implemented and subordinated on the basis of the political exigencies of succeeding governing coalitions or on account of discrimination by state functionaries (whether based upon intolerance, bias or ignorance). At other times, legal provisions that contain safeguard measures are subject to constitutional challenges under threat of being declared ultra vires of the Constitution or otherwise illegal (as happened to the Regional Council Act of 1998, parts of the CHT



Hill District Councils Acts of 1998 and parts of the CHT Regulation of 1900, on the ground that they violated the Equal Rights and Non-Discrimination clauses of the concerned constitutions). Thus Adibashis demand the recognition of their status as Adibashis, constitutional protection of safeguard measures like the aforesaid CHT laws of 1900 and 1998, and re-interpretation of the Equal Rights clauses to protect affirmative action measures that might otherwise be deemed unconstitutional. A mere reference to non-discrimination on the basis of "religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth" (Articles 28 and 29, Constitution of Bangladesh) was recently deemed, by a Division Bench of the High Court, to be insufficiently objective to accommodate affirmative action provisions for quotas for tribals in class III and class IV jobs in the hill district councils of the CHT! We thus need to spell out in unequivocal terms that procedural equality is not substantive equality and, that differing administrative measures to accommodate disadvantaged groups like Adibashis do not offend the spirit of non-discrimination.

Constitutional reforms for Adibashis would also help ensure that the protection of the identity and rights of Adibashis is part of the regular policy of the Bangladeshi state, as opposed to the fickle policies of successive governments with wavering levels of interest or apathy towards indigenous issues. Thus, after the hitherto repealed article on National Culture (article 9) is re-introduced, it is perhaps cogent to consider replacing the term "Bangalee Nationalism" with suitable alternative language.

### **Recent initiatives for constitutional reform**

The present Awami League-led government has been showing interest in incorporating measures to protect Adibashi interests. Leading members of parliament from the ruling Awami League, including Suranjit Sengupta (also the Co-Convenor of the Constitution Reforms Committee), Dipankar Talukdar (State Minister, Ministry of CHT Affairs) and Promode Mankin (State Minister for Culture), have openly announced their support for constitutional reforms on Adibashi issues, and have even referred to positive signals from none other than the prime minister herself! It is to be hoped that such expressions find fruition. Other

Awami League and left-leaning party MPs who recently formed the Adibashi Parliamentary Caucus, including such respected political leaders as Rashed Khan Menon and Hasanul Haque Inu, have also added their voices for the Adibashi causes. Equally vociferous prominent civil society figures include Justice Golam Rabbani (retired), Advocate Sultana Kamal, Selina Hossain, Ajoy Roy and Abul Maksud, to name a few. Such dedicated individuals would surely not have supported the Adibashis' demands if there were any risks of compromising the interest of the people of Bangladesh.

### **Constitutional recognition as 'adibashi'**

Despite the spate of positive interest mentioned above, the issue of 'adibashi' or 'indigenous' identity has also on occasion sparked controversy and sensitivity and given rise to misconceptions. This is perhaps grounded in the misplaced belief that constitutional recognition of adibashis as 'adibashi' would somehow compromise national unity and adversely affect the rights of citizens who are not Adibashi. Such fears are baseless and misconceived. Similar recognition of indigenous peoples has been provided in national constitutions in several countries of the world, including in Asia (Nepal, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines, for example). In all of the aforesaid countries, such recognition has helped reduce discrimination and conflict, integrated indigenous peoples into the national 'mainstream' without artificially assimilating their identities and cultures, and promoted overall development and stability. Bangladesh would not be an exception to this trend.

### **International human rights standards and Adibashi rights**

Constitutional recognition of Adibashis would also be in accordance with Bangladesh's international obligations under such global human rights instruments as the ILO's Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention (No. 107) of 1957, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights all of which have been ratified by Bangladesh. It would also be in tune with the spirit of the UN Declaration on the Rights Indigenous Peoples, which has been garnering growing support internationally, with even the few governments that opposed it in the UN General Assembly (USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) are now demonstrating a willingness to accommodate this document. This is the only international human rights instrument that was adopted with substantive indigenous participation, and with the free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples from all the continents.

## Constitutional recognition: A just cause in the national interest

Constitutional recognition as Adibashi is a just and reasonable cause grounded in a desire to achieve appropriate status with which Adibashis may access their rights, without discrimination. The Adibashis are among the earliest inhabitants of the country. When they started their settlements in the areas that they now live, they did not displace the Bangalee people. No wonder they are called "adibashi" in Bengali, implying 'original inhabitant'. The Chakmas, Manipuris, Lushais, Santals and several other adibashi peoples resisted British colonisation by fighting against the colonisers with their meagre arsenals in the 18th and 19th centuries, as did Bangalees. The Adibashis supplied the much-needed cotton to their Bangalee brethren from their jum (swidden) fields, when cotton imports from foreign countries were unheard of. They fought alongside Bangalees in the war of liberation. They protected, and still protect, much of the forest resources of the country. They sacrificed their lands to give electricity to the nation through the Kaptai Dam. They work in factories in Chittagong and Dhaka and have proved their contribution to the national economy. They have produced soldiers, policemen, diplomats and bureaucrats to protect the national interest. It is time that the historical wrongs are righted, at least in part, through constitutional amendments. This would help protect adibashi identity and rights, which are additionally threatened by globalised market capitalism. It would also promote national unity, integrity and stability, and enhance Bangladesh's international image in the comity of nations. ■

(This article first appeared in *The Daily Star* and is being published here with kind permission from the writer, Chakma Raja Devasish Roy. Raja Roy is an advocate at the Supreme Court of Bangladesh and member to the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues)

## Demographic Disaster of CHT

By- Kulottam Chakma, Australia

In 2007 I visited the Chittagong Hills Tract after a long absence from the place of my birth. In some respect I had found stark difference between the CHT I had left and the CHT I have found.

Of course, there were many settlers from the plain land of Bangladesh. They were concentrated not only in big cities like Khagrachari and Rangamati but they also in remote villages and towns. Khagrachari and Rangamati became more like plain land cities, full of business concerns owned and operated by the Bengalis. The cities were dirtier, noisier and smellier. Once pristine water of Karnafully lake is now dirty and unfit to swim, let alone drink. The Bengali settlers have settled on highways and waterways. 30 years ago these highways and waterways were either empty or inhabited by the indigenous peoples. The indigenous people are now almost invisible or insignificant in bazaars, buses and boats.

The demographic balance in the CHT has truly shifted in favour of the Bengalis. The indigenous peoples are now minority in their own land. If the current trend continues, the indigenous peoples will be only 10% by 2051. Following table approximately demonstrates the population trend.

Year	Indigenous People
1947	98%
1951	90%
1961	88%
1974	76%
1981	58%
1991	60%
2001	52%
2011	41%
2021	34%
2031	24%
2041	18%
2051	10%

Of course the ideal solution would be to send the settlers back to where they came from. But failing to do that, we have to increase our own population to keep the balance stable or in our favour. It's like in famine we not only try to grow more food, we also try to conserve food.

The consequence of 10% of the CHT population will be enormous. We will live on the mercy of the settlers and authorities. We will wield little power in politics and elections. Our neighbours will be mainly Bengalis. There will be high rate of land dispossession. Many beautiful Buddhist temples and monasteries of the CHT will disappear or fall into disrepair due to lack of donation and patronage. We will not be able keep our language and culture. There will be high rate of extra-national marriage.

There had been concerted efforts on the part of the indigenous people and leadership to prevent the Bengali settlers from entering the CHT. I have tremendous respect for their efforts. However their efforts so far have yielded very little result if any. The settlers are still there and will be there in the foreseeable future. The authorities of whatever political hue are unwilling and unlikely to remove the settlers from the CHT.

I was sad but not surprised by the dilution of our people and dominance of the Bengalis in the CHT. I heard and read many times about the demographic shift in the CHT. However, I was surprised by the lack of mobilization- I mean demographic mobilization. There was no general awareness or motivation to increase our own population by high birth rate. Of course, the ideal solution would be to send the settlers back to where they came from. But failing to do that, we have to increase our own population to keep the balance stable or in our favour. It's like in famine we not only try to grow more food, we also try to conserve food. In economic crisis we not only try to earn more money, we also save money by reducing expenses. In outbreak of disease we not only seek cure, we also prevent further spread by adopting hygiene. Yet in the

case of demographic crisis our effort is solely concentrated on demanding the withdrawal of the settlers. There is no effort to increase our own population by high birth rate.

It's better to be late than never. For the sake of our land and culture, it's time to mobilize the men and women of CHT. It's time to encourage men and women to have many children and help our nation survive. We have no control on our borders, but we at least have control on our own procreation. Why not make use of it? ■

(The writer currently works in Sydney, Australia. He passionately believes in the economic development and growth of the indigenous/Chakma population)

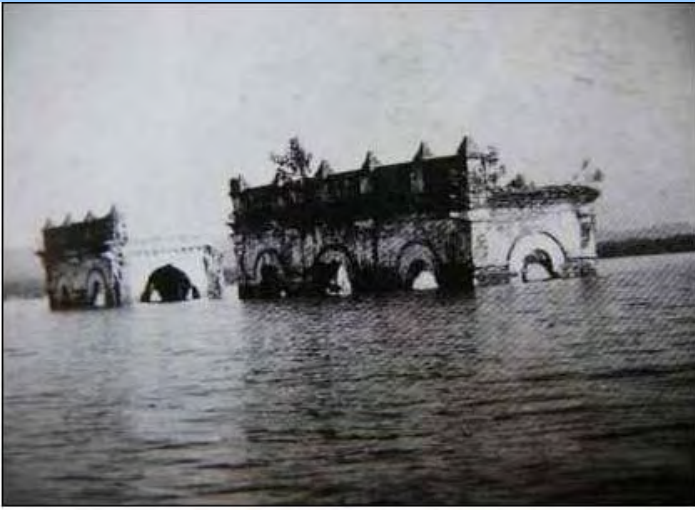
## Brief history of Chakma Kingdom

By - MCDF Research Group

For centuries the Chakma people had an independent kingdom. The origin of the Chakmas and whereabouts of their original kingdom is veiled in legends. According to one legend, they came from a place called Champaknagar and descendants of one of the King named Bijoygiri. (Turn to Page 52 to know about the Chakma kings and queens) The recorded settlement of the Chakmas in the CHT is as early as the 16th century. In 1550 a map drawn by a Portuguese cartographer named Joa De Barros showed a people called "Chakomas" and their kingdom as the Feni river to the North, the Namre or Naf river to the south, the Lushai hills to the east and the sea to the west. In 1763 Mr. Henry Verlest, the representative of the East India Company at Chittagong, issued a proclamation recognizing the jurisdiction of the Chakma Raja over "All the hills from the Pheni River to the Sangu, and from Nizampur Road (Dhaka-Chittagong Road) to the hills of the Kuki Raja (now in Mizoram, India)".

In 1712, there were several battles between the Chakma King and the Mughal Governor of Chittagong because of a border dispute and the Chakma king captured two canons, which are known as "Kalu Khan" and "Fatheh Khan". However, in 1713 the Chakma king, Fateh Khan made peace with the Mughals and obtained permission





The old Chakma palace being submerged under the Kaptai lake (above) and the old Chakma palace

from the Mughal Emperor, Farrukshiyar to allow 'Beparies' (traders) to trade with the Jummas on payment of 11 mounds of cotton. It also gave access the Jumma people to Chittagong for buying their necessities i.e. salt, dry fish etc.

But there had been no external interference by any outside power in the affairs of the CHT until 1787 when an agreement was signed with the British and the British colonization started since 1860.

After the battle of Palassy in 1757 the East India Company became the virtual master of the whole of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. The East India Company took over the administration of Chittagong on 15 October 1760 and led several military expeditions against the Chakma king to establish their colonial footing in the region. In 1777, Ronu Khan, the general of the Chakma King, formally declared war against the British. The war ended in 1787 when the British had imposed an economic blockade and forced the Chakma Raja Jan Bakhsh Khan to a ne-

gotiated settlement. Chakma Raja Jan Bux Khan signed a peace treaty named 'Cotton Treaty' with the company at Fort Williams, Calcutta. Under this treaty the quasi-independent status of CHT was recognised. The subject matter of the treaty between the Governor General and Chakma King was as follows:

- (1) The East India Company recognised Jan Bakhsh Khan as the Raja of the Chakmas.
- (2) It was agreed that the collection of revenue was the responsibility of Raja.
- (3) The British government would preserve tribal autonomy and migration from the plains.
- (4) Jan Bakhsh Khan was bound by the treaty to maintain peace in his country.
- (5) British troops would remain in the Chakma territory not to terrify the Chakmas but to protect the land from the inroads of the fierce tribes.

As part of the treaty, the Chakma king agreed to pay 500 maund (about 2000 kg.) of cotton to the Company as revenue. However, despite this episode of war, British role in the region remained very marginal, being mainly limited to a collection of annual tax in cotton or in cash.

In 1860, the British annexed the CHT. During this time the ruler of the Chakmas was a woman, Kalindi Rani (1832-74). Her reign was one of the most tumultuous periods. Kalindi Rani disliked Captain Lewin who described her as being a thorn for the British.

In 1900 the British government enacted the CHT Regulation and declared it as an Excluded Area, in order to protect the Jumma people from economic exploitation by non-indigenous people and to preserve their traditional socio-cultural and political institutions based on customary laws, community ownership of land and so on. In the CHT Regulation of 1900 it was clearly stated that:

"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 is in possession of a permit granted by the Deputy Commissioner at his discretion."

*(Continued at Page 22)*

# The Untold Story of the CADC

By - MCDF Research Group

## I. Introduction:

The Chakma Autonomous District Council in Lawngtlai district of Mizoram is the only autonomous political set up which the Chakmas have in this world. It did not come out of naught but it was the outcome of a long political movement by Chakmas in Mizoram. It was the result of a mass movement since 1952.

Unfortunately, not all the Chakma inhabited areas have been included in the present CADC. The Chakmas in two other districts namely Lunglei and Mamit although they too participated in the political demand have been excluded. Yet, this "limited CADC" is quite significant given the fact that the Constitution of India was amended to pave way for its creation in 1972. The Chakmas administer this area with a large degree of autonomy in executive, legislature and judiciary.

## 2. Historical background of Chakma areas in Mizoram

Very small section of the Chakmas, let alone people of other communities, is aware of the fact that the western and southern parts of Mizoram historically belonged to the Chakma kingdom which extended from "All the hills from the Pheni River to the Sangu, and from Nizampur Road (Dhaka-Chittagong Road) to the hills of the Kuki Raja". "The hills of the Kuki Raja" is most probably referred to the South Lushai Hills (now part of Mizoram). The ancient trading centre called Demagiri (the name itself indicates Chakma settlement) and its surrounding areas were once part of the Chittagong Hill Tracts which is presently in Bangladesh but were transferred to the South Lushai hills for administrative convenience by the British.

The provincial gazetteer of India Volume V at page 413 states that:

*"The station of Demagiri is not situated within the present area of South Lushai*

*Hills. It is topographically within the area of Chittagong Hill Tracts. But under Sir Charles Elliot's order passed in 1892, it was declared that for administration purposes Demagiri should be considered a part and parcel of South Lushai Hills."*

On 1st April 1898, Demagiri and other villages from CHT together with the South Lushai Hills were brought under the administration of the Chief Commissioner of Assam. As a result, the Chakma Raja "had to forego some of his land and subjects, who had been inhabiting beyond the river *Thega Kha'*". [1]

## 3. The Chakmas' movement for autonomy

There is no proper written document about the story of the Chakmas' political struggle for autonomy. Several authors have written essays about Mizoram Chakmas' movement for autonomy but these are in parts; and no one has been able to provide the complete picture so far. There has been no objective analysis either. Some writers have sought to explain that CADC was granted to the Chakmas by Indian government to score a moral high ground before the international community with regard to the Chakmas to whom Pakistan was massacring in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Some others still believed that the Chakmas got an Autonomous District Council of their own by sheer luck!



The map of CADC

The facts are however on the contrary. The first political delegation was made by the Chakmas to Shillong demanding Chakma Regional Council way back in 1952. This proves that the Chakma community leaders were politically conscious. The first delegation to Shillong, the then capital of Assam, was led by Kristo Mohan Chakma, and the other member was Gura Nitai Chakma. They met Assam Chief Minister Bishnu Ram Medhi in Shillong, which was then under Assam in 1952. That was when Mizo District Council (1952) and the Pawi-Lakher Regional Council (1953) were being created. Subsequently, three other delegations to Shillong were made by Kristo Mohan Chakma who was accompanied by Hari Kristo Chakma, Satya Priya Dewan and Banerwar Chakma in the second, third and fourth delegation respectively. They demanded Chakma Regional Council with headquarters at Demagiri.

It must be mentioned here that it was not easy in 1950s to travel to Shillong as even today there is no proper communication facilities from the Chakma areas in Mizoram. Therefore, the pain they endured and their insurmountable determination can be easily imagined.

However, the Chakmas failed to get a Regional Council of their own. They were included in the Pawi-Lakher Regional Council (PLRC) which was constituted on 23 April 1953 to safeguard the interests of Pawi (now Lai), Lakher (now Mara) as well as the Chakma minorities.[2] The numerical strength of the Chakmas was evident as in the very first election held to the PLRC in 1953, two Chakma members were elected. And, to give due recognition to the Chakma community, one Chakma was nominated to the Mizo District Council to represent the Chakmas. [3]

The PLRC could not function from day one. The main reason was that there was no common language among the three tribal communities namely Chakma, Mara and Lai which they could understand. The first meeting was reportedly held without understanding each other's language. Mizo was used as official language but Chakmas and Maras could hardly understand anything, and ultimately in 1958 the Maras decided to boycott the Regional Council's meetings.[4]

The Chakmas too were not happy with a joint Regional Council. Moreover that did not include most of the areas historically inhabited by the Chakmas in Mizoram. The Chakmas made their first demand for the Chakma Autonomous District Council in 1967.

The demand of the Chakmas included the Chakma inhabited territory from Tuipuari (Amsury) in the North to Parva in the south. A four member delegation led by Kristo Mohan Chakma, President, Demagiri Block Congress Committee (DBCC), met then Union Home Minister YB Chavan in Guwahati, Assam on 21 May 1967 and submitted a memorandum demanding Chakma Autonomous District Council. The other members were Hari Kristo Chakma, Vice President of DBCC, Banerwar Chakma, General Secretary of DBCC and Jina Ratan Chakma, President, Demagiri Buddhist Association.

On 12 September 1971, a meeting was convened by the Central government wherein it was made known that the Mizo District Council would be abolished to form three Regional Councils each for Mizos, Lakher (Mara) and Pawis (Lai). The Chakmas firmly declined to be under either the Pawis or the Lakher.[5]

In November-December 1971, Kristo Mohan Chakma, President, Demagiri Block Congress Committee and Hari Kristo Chakma, Vice President of Demagiri Block Congress Committee and Member, Mizo District Council submitted a petition to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi making a case for an Autonomous District Council for Chakmas.

The memorandum stated –

*“ While we welcome the decision of Government of India to constitute Mizo Hills into a Union Territory, we feel very strongly that along with the making of Mizo Hills a Union Territory, there should be a separate District Council consisting the areas inhabited by 31,000 Chakmas on the western side of Mizo Hills.....In order to protect their interests, language, culture, and tradition, it is in the interest of the nation and security of the country that the Chakma District Council should be constituted.”*

Importantly, the memorandum demanded that “The preponderantly Chakma-inhabited western Mizo Hills from Tuipuari in the north to Parva in the south and including Silchari, Marpara, Punkhai, Demagiri, Tuichang Ghat, Lungsen, Barapansuri, Chawngte, Jarulsari, Vasilong, New Jaganasuri, etc should form the territorial jurisdiction of the autonomous district council for the Chakmas. This area should also be carved out as a separate administrative district in Mizoram.”



Many other Chakma leaders worked day and night to get Autonomous District Council for the Chakmas. Among them, mention must be made of Atul Chandra Chakma.

However, the dream of the Chakma leaders was never totally fulfilled as far as the Chakma District Council is concerned. As a transitional measure the Chakma Regional Council was formed on 2nd April 1972 with the nominated members namely Atul Chandra Chakma, Arun Kumar Chakma, Gunadhar Chakma, Mayurdhaj Chakma, Satya Chakma and Ananda Kumar Chakma and its headquarters was at Borapan-sury. Atul Chandra Chakma was appointed the interim Chief Executive Member of Chakma Regional Council.[6]

On 29th April 1972, Chakmas got full-fledged Autonomous District Council but it was only carved out of the Pawi-Lakher Regional Council. As a result, the majority of the Chakma areas remained excluded from the CADC. For 15 days, the Chakmas led by Kristo Mohan Chakma refused to accept the limited CADC area. Chief Commissioner of Mizoram, S J Das tried to appease the Chakma leaders by stating that it was just an ad hoc arrangement and assured that their demand for inclusion of all the Chakma populated areas would be considered later.

But tomorrow never came for the Chakmas of Mizoram. ■

#### Endnotes:

[1]. SP Talukdar, The Chakmas: Life and Struggle. Also see "Movement for Autonomy: A Case Study of the Chakmas of Mizoram" by P. Chakraborty in "Autonomy Movements in Mizoram" edited by RN Prasad

[2]. "Encyclopedia of North East India" by Col. Ved Prakash

[3]. "Movement for Autonomy: A Case Study of the Chakmas of Mizoram" by P. Chakraborty in "Autonomy Movements in Mizoram" edited by RN Prasad

[4]. "Movement for Autonomy: A Case Study of the Chakmas of Mizoram" by P. Chakraborty in "Autonomy Movements in Mizoram" edited by RN Prasad

[5]. "Movement for Autonomy: A Case Study of the Chakmas of Mizoram" by P. Chakraborty in "Autonomy Movements in Mizoram" edited by RN Prasad

[6]. "Mizoram – Dimensions and Perspectives: Society, Economy and Polity" by Jagadish Kumar Patnaik

## Border Fencing: No Rehabilitation, only IAY?

By - MCDF Research Group

The government of India is erecting barbed wire fencing along the India-Bangladesh border, including in Mizoram to curb infiltration, smuggling, trans-border movement of militants and other anti-national activities. An independent survey conducted by the Indo-Bangladesh Border Fencing Affected Families Resettlement Demand Committee (IBBFARDCOM) under the chairmanship of MLA Mr Nirupam Chakma found that 35,438 Chakmas from 5,790 families in 49 villages in three districts have been affected. According to Ministry of Home Affairs, a total of 158.27 km out of sanctioned 352.33 km in Mizoram at the cost of Rs 691.02 crores has been completed as of 31 March 2010. The victims have been provided compensation but there is no word of assurance about their resettlement and rehabilitation. On 27 September 2010, Mizoram's Home Minister R Lalzirliana stated in the State Assembly that over 35,000 people from 45 villages have fallen outside the fence and are required to be relocated inside the fence.

Mizoram Chakma Development Forum (MCDF) has been creating awareness amongst the affected people about the consequences of being left outside the border fencing – an area often referred to as "no man's land". Through this newsletter MCDF has consistently enlightened the villagers about the stands taken by the Mizoram government and the government of India with regard to the fencing victims, relevant laws and policies existing in India.

Almost half of the Chakma population (2001 census) has been affected by the border fencing in Mizoram but the Chakmas have failed to put any kind of concerted pressure or demand for rehabilitation. There have been on and off protests in several villages but there is at all no organized effort to secure their right to rehabilitation.

In India, such meek protests won't work. It is not to suggest use of any violent means of protest but the movement, once started, must be consistent, regular and must be done with some well-planned strategies. None of that sort is happening in Mizoram as of now.

MCDF has observed the following two weaknesses: First, there is a lack of coordination between the state level fencing committee (led by MLA Nirupam Chakma) and the village committees constituted in every affected village, and amongst the village level committees. It seems that each village committee is fighting only for the rights of that particular village. Second, the Indo-Bangladesh Border Fencing Affected Families Resettlement Demand Committee (IBBFARDCOM) has failed to provide any pressure on either the government of Mizoram or the government of India.

The statement of 27 September 2010 in the Mizoram Assembly by Home Minister R Lalzirliana is the first ever official statement on the border fencing issue in the Assembly House after about four years since the construction of the border fencing started in Mizoram. This was also the first time that the issue of rehabilitation came up for discussion in the Mizoram Assembly. The Hon'ble Home Minister was bound to reply to a question put forward by opposition Maraland Democratic Front (MDF) Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA), P P Thawlla. It is interestingly to note that all the fencing affected are Chakmas and belong to those constituencies from where Chakma electorate elects two MLAs in every general state elections. In the current cabinet, one of the two Chakma MLAs is a Minister. Mr Nihar Kanti Chakma who represents the West Tui-pui constituency where border fencing is taking place, is not only a Minister but he is the Minister of Disaster Management and Rehabilitation. Given that he is the Rehabilitation Minister he is duty bound to walk the extra miles. But not a voice of concern did echo from any of these two Chakma MLAs in the Assembly House before 27 September 2010. Finally, the question has to come from an MLA whose constituency or community people has nothing to do with the border fencing!

Participating in the discussion, Chief Minister Lal Thanhawla informed the House that the state government of Mizoram had approached the Central

government of India many times but each time received the same reply: "We have not done any relocation in other states."

The statement of the Chief Minister must be examined properly. Has the government of Mizoram (Mizo National Front from 1998-2008 and India National Congress from 2008- till date) placed any formal demands before the Centre asking for rehabilitation? If so, has the Mizoram government submitted any rehabilitation plan/ proposal to the Centre which the Central government rejected? Or was the communication only verbal and not serious?

These questions assume significance on the backdrop of the response under the Right to Information Act received from the Ministry of Home Affairs (Border Management) vide letter No. 11013/52/2009-BM.III dated 16th December, 2009 wherein the MHA (BM) clearly stated - *"Neither this Ministry has prepared any plan for rehabilitation nor any proposal has been received in this Ministry from Govt. of Mizoram"*.

In 2007, the Governor of Mizoram asked the Deputy Commissioners of the fencing affected districts to prepare rehabilitation plans for their respective districts. But no survey has been conducted to prepare the rehabilitation scheme or plan. The then Zoramthanga government (MNF) even refused to recognize the out-fenced Chakmas as "displaced". On 17 July 2008, Mr Romawia, Deputy Secretary (Home), Mizoram government, replied that *"those families placed on the other side of the Fencing Line may not be called 'displaced' since the Fencing Line is not the boundary of Indo-Bangla Border..... and that there was no objection of dwelling outside the Fencing Line."*

The message was loud and clear.

The Central government is reluctant to provide rehabilitation to the out-fenced victims. But the question is: has the government of Mizoram (Mizo National Front from 1998-2008 and India National Congress from 2008- till date) placed any formal demands before the Centre asking for rehabilitation? If so, has the Mizoram government submitted any rehabilitation plan/ proposal to the Centre which the Central government rejected? Or was the communication only verbal and not serious?



women. (Paragraph of 6.14.1 of the National R&R Policy, 2007)

The lands of the Chakmas have been acquired under the Land Acquisition Act of 1894. Hence, the provisions of the National Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy, 2007 shall apply in Mizoram.

Shri Mulla pally Ramachandran, Minister of State in the Ministry of Home Affairs stated in the Rajya Sabha on 11 August 2010 that the government of India is providing financial assistance on the pattern of Indira Awas Yojana (IAY) for construction of alternate house inside the fencing. Under IAY scheme, the government has already provided 7744 houses in Tripura and 186 houses in Assam for the out-fenced families for

A Chakma family sailing down the Sajek river, India-Bangladesh international border. In the absence of road, this river is the lifeline for several border villages in Mizoram. But the river won't be accessible any more after the border fencing in complete. PHOTO: MCDF

It is evident that no rehabilitation plan has been prepared till date. Had it been done, the respective Village Council authorities would have been consulted. Their ignorance about any rehabilitation plan suggests that "Rehabilitation Plan" has not been prepared at all. That the Mizoram government has not submitted any such proposal is clear from the reply of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Delhi.

### **No legal guarantees**

In India there is no any legal guarantee against displacement or for rehabilitation after displacement. However, the National Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy, 2007 says that wherever there is displacement of more than two hundred families en masse in tribal or hilly areas, or Sixth Schedule areas due to acquisition of land, the state government shall declare, by notification in the Official Gazette, that area of villages or localities as an "affected area" and then the Administrator for Rehabilitation and Resettlement (who shall be an officer not below the rank of Deputy Commissioner) shall prepare a draft scheme or plan for the rehabilitation and resettlement of the affected families after consultation with the representatives of the affected families including

bringing them inside the fencing.

This means that the Chakma fencing victims in Mizoram will need to be satisfied with the financial assistance under IAY i.e. Rs 38,500 per family. It is to be noted that IAY money will only be given to those whose houses have fallen outside the fencing line, not to those whose houses are inside the fence.

It is time that the fencing victims understood the difference between the financial assistance under IAY and resettlement & rehabilitation. IAY is meant only for construction of a modest house inside the fence. This can be said to be similar to "resettlement". But the provisions of "rehabilitation" go beyond monetary compensation. Rehabilitation means providing all kinds of facilities and amenities such as schools, health care institutions, roads, electricity, water facilities, and source of livelihood. In short, rehabilitation is aimed at improving the living conditions of the displaced persons. On the other hand, IAY is mean to b given to the poor and homeless to have a roof above their heads. ■



# Sajek: Some Questions and Looking Back



By-

Tandra Chakma,  
Bangladesh

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) comprises the south-eastern region of Bangladesh. It shares international boundaries with the Indian states of Tripura to the north and Mizoram to the east, and Chin and Rakhain states of Myanmar to the south-east and south. To the west lies the Chittagong district of Bangladesh, from whence originates the term Chittagong Hill Tracts.

The total surface area of the CHT is 5089 sq. miles (13,189 sq. km). It includes three Hill Districts of Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban.

Sajek is a union of Baghaichari sub-district under Rangamati district. It is surrounded by Mizoram. I went to Sajek many times to see, observe, and help the people of Sajek. This narration is mostly my first two visits of Sajek. The place is beautiful for its natural beauty for hills surrounded by Mizoram.

On 20th April 2008, there was an arson attack in the seven villages by Bengali settlers. 76 houses were torched by the Bengali settlers. They not only torched the houses but also beaten the Jummas. Most of the villagers took shelter in nearby forests. I decided to go to Sajek in the 1st week of May 2008 to understand the real situation.

I started for Sajek early in the morning from Rangamati town with one guide and some of my colleagues who work there. On our way to Khagrachari we had to face six check points. We were questioned. I had to answer the same reply six times. Most of the questions were useless and silly. Finally we reached at Khagrachari and then after a brief stop in a restaurant for breakfast we headed towards Sajek. When we

arrived at Dighinala we were stopped by army again. At the check post they asked so many questions and told us that we must get permission to visit Sajek. The soldiers sent wireless message to the officer. He told us to go inside and wait for few minutes. Inside the cantonment one Major arrived with a camera in his hand. All of a sudden he took 5 to 7 snaps of us. After that I asked why he was taking our pictures. He answered that it was for our safety. After few more minutes our permission was granted via wireless and we moved from there as early as possible. But when he was talking with me he tried to discourage me. Several times he told me, 'Madam two weeks back there was arson attack done by some miscreants, they could harm you, and you must rethink'. I told him not to worry.

When we arrived near Ganggaram Mukh, we were stopped again by a slender guy. He introduced to me as NSI (a security agency) and he asked us who we were and where we were going and why. He let us go. We decided to visit the whole areas to see the burned houses in the area. And, from what we saw it was clear that this attack was done in planned manner.

In one place we saw two Jumma houses were burnt but one house of Bengali nearby was still standing there, not burnt. But next to it some burned houses. So it was clear.

Later, I went to Gangaramukh Bazaar to meet with the local leaders of Sajek. At that time they were gathered in a meeting with MSF representative. I took my seat near by meeting room. All of a sudden I discovered that I am followed by DGFI informer. After the meeting of MSF, I started my discussion with the leaders, before that I told him (DGFI) please leave me alone, cause I need to discuss very personal issue with the women group, they might not feel comfort in front of you. Finally, he compelled to leave the place. Later, I asked them about the incident and they described how it happened. They told me they needed help to build their house and need clothes and utensils. Before torching the attackers looted their belongings. Women leaders told me young women are not safe in the open air. So for security and shelter is important now. After knowing their problem and facts of the incident I left for Rangamati.

I came back to Dhaka on the next day. After few days we arranged a meeting at Dhaka where I proposed all to help the people of Sajek and shared my experiences. Everyone agreed. Later, we formed a working team, people selected me as convener. We divided our responsibilities and decided to collect money from people whom we know.

We got tremendous response from all over in our network. Even so many organizations or persons that we really do not know before they also send money to us. After collection of all the money and materials we decided to distribute relief on 21st May. I will never forget Pankaj Dada, leader of Ganatantri party. He arranged transport for us. As everything was done we formed a team to distribute relief. Advocate Sultana Kamal, former Adviser Caretaker Government, agreed to lead the team. The other team member's were, Md, Nur Khan (Ain-O- Salish Kendra) Anirban Saha (Ain-O- Salish Kendra), Dr. Saifun Nahar (Member cadet College association), Dr. Salma Akter (Member cadet College association), Pavel ( still photographer), Munira Akter (Dristi, Samaj Kallyan Songstha), Shahinara Jesmin (Dristi, Samaj Kallyan), Kajali Islam (journalist Daily Star), Omar Faruq (journalist Daliy Samakal) and Choitali Tripura (human rights activist).

We started for Sajek on 20th May 2008 and reached at Khagrachari at 8 PM. After arrival of Parjatan motel a team of Chittagong University students and teachers greeted us. They joined with us for relief activity. The citizens' committee of Khagrachari arranged dinner for us at Mohajanpara.

We also visited Monindra Lal Tripura, the then honorable District Council Chairman. He greeted us with some of his members. Within few minutes I discovered a very interesting thing: on his back was a window. Two men were standing behind him and taking notes on what we were saying. I was astonished because I never found anyone before standing behind and taking notes. I met several time with other two Chairmen. But I had not found it and to me it's a great mystery. Our discussion point with him was progress of Parbattya Chukti and his view about the arson attack at Sajek on 19 and 20 April 2008. His comment was nothing new. He just uttered the view's of government that's all. In the mean time we finished our tea and left his resident. Later, we went to Mahajon Para for dinner. We were greeted by the citizen committee member. They arranged dinner at the resident of Chunchu moni, member of Citizen Committee. We ate so many local food and chat with Citizen Committee members. By this time we planned how to distribute relief. Our volunteers already prepared family pack of clothes. I thing I forgot to mention earlier that, one of garments owner gave us mosquito nets for distribution. We also decided to distrib-

ute money equally to 50 Jumma family and 20 settler families.

After dinner we arrived at Parjatan. We found that leaders of Sama Odhikar Andolan were waiting for us. They mainly complained about Jummas of Sajek and other's part of CHT. They discouraged Sultana Apa from visiting Sajek. Sultana Apa told them that as a human rights activist she must go there to listen the victims and distribute relief. They told Apa that Jummas were leading Regional Council, District Council and serving bigger post at the UN. The funniest thing they uttered was that the Jummas are holding royal post too. Finally, Apa replied, 'Raja' position in CHT was always hereditary and anyone cannot be a Raja.

We started for Sajek early in the morning. But before we left, a very interesting thing happened. One NSI guy was searching for me. He asked me what our whole day schedule was and finally told me he would like to go with us. I told him he can't go with us.

After one hour journey two we reached at Sajek without any halt at army check post. But when we were at Gongarammukh, we were halted by groups of settlers. They blocked the road with wooden logs and human chain. We halted there and called the leader of the group, after long debate finally they had to remove our blockade and we reached at Buddhist temple where we decided to halt for our relief activity. Our volunteers informed the villagers to meet with us. We started to distribute relief in groups. One group started to look after the patients. Our medical officers found that people here suffering fever, allergy and dehydration. We also found some eye and malaria patients. Doctors gave them free medicines and referred them to the Khagrachari hospital. Along with relief we distributed oral saline, medicine, sidol (fish pest) and first aid materials. They were just astonished when they heard the whole stories of arson attack. We distributed relief among fifty Jumma families. We distributed money, clothes, medicine and mosquito nets.

After distribution of relief we visited the whole area. We saw that most of the burnt houses were not very far from army camp. We were astonished that although whole area was under tight controls of army how can this incident happened? For whom this security is?

We also visited some settlers' villages where they claimed that their houses were also burnt, but we found that it was fake. Finally we went to the settlers group to distribute relief. We distributed relief among twenty families. When we started to distribute relief some of the settlers complained to Apa that we

distributed a plastic container to the paharis, but not giving them. Then Apa told them that it was sidol fish pest which the Jummas eat.

After distribution of relief we start for Baghai-chari. After half an hour we reached at Baghai-chari UNO office. He was not present in his room. His colleagues informed us that he was at Rangamati for official meeting. After half an hour rest we started for Khagrachari. On our way back Sultana Apa told me, "Tandra did you see that there were distrust and furiousness among the settlers. It was not their fault, situation made them like this."

We arrived at Khagrachari 3 PM. We had our lunch at a restaurant. Later in the evening NGO group of Khagrachari district entertained us with dinner. On the next day early in the morning we started for Dhaka.

This year on 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> February, another arson attack took place at sajek and Khagrachari. Some seven people were believed to be killed and hundreds of people were homeless. For this heartless incident we arranged a black flag possession in the streets of Dhaka. Many people participated with us. Finally there was a committee formed for relief distribution. I went with the relief team on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2010 and distributed relief. Again I went to the same Buddhist temple, where I distributed relief two years back. What I had found there was no trace of temple, only some of the statue of burnt Buddha. They were the real witness of the incident. I was not so much courageous in the year 2008, but I gained my courage this year and lead the relief team. What I thought that I am not doing any crime. I am doing a humanitarian job, so whom to afraid. I will write details about this experience later.

Finally, here are some questions for readers. Why this incident happened again and again? Why always with this people? I heard government will establish land port. If the government establish land port what is the fate waiting for the people of Sajek? Eviction? or killing or dignified settlement. What else? ■

(The writer is a noted Human Rights activist and Member, South Asians for Human Rights. She is also working as Program Manager with Manusher Jonno Foundation)

*Continued from Page 14...*

## **How Chakmas lost their "homeland" in India:**

Despite Chakmas' contribution in the freedom movement, their homeland CHT was in the most unjust manner "awarded" to Pakistan, against their wish. At that time CHT's population was 97% non-Muslim. Chakmas led by Sneha Kumar Chakma passionately appealed to the Congress leaders and before the Bengal Boundary Commission headed by Sir Cyril Radcliffe, a British judge, to remain with India. SK Chakma was a co-opted member in the Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas (Other than Assam) Sub-Committee of the Constituent Assembly of India. Radcliffe did not hear them. Lord Mountbatten, the Viceroy, cheated them. Great leaders like Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel and Mahatma Gandhi dumped them.

Radcliffe submitted his report to Mountbatten on 12 August 1947, but when Mountbatten came to know that CHT was given to Pakistan, he chose not to make the report public fearing "the disastrous effect" as Nehru and Patel had assured a delegation from the CHT that there "was no question of their being allotted to Pakistan". Thus, India and Pakistan celebrated their independence without knowing their actual territories. On the dawn of 15 August 1947, like any other free Indians, the Chakmas too celebrated their freedom by unfurling the Indian tricolour at Rangamati (now in Bangladesh). The Marmas, the second largest ethnic group in CHT, raised the Burmese flag at Bandarban on the same day.

The Chakmas' celebration of India's independence was official. On the midnight of 14 and 15 August 1947, about then thousand people marched to the residence of the Deputy Commissioner Col. G.L. Hyde at Rangamati. The Deputy Commissioner gave them a warm reception.

"Sir, is not India independent now?"

"Yes, you are independent now and on".

"Is not, Sir, CHT a part of India under the Independence Act of India?"

"Yes, according to the Independence Act of India 1947 Chittagong Hill Tracts is a territory of Indian dominion".

"So, should we not hoist our national flag?"

"Yes, but we the British people generally hoist flags at sunrise. Please come at dawn and hoist the Indian national flag publicly in the football ground, and I will go and salute it. Thereafter I shall flourish the Indian flag in my office and residence where I invite you all. Please come here to attend my flag hoisting ceremony."

*(Continued at Page 32)*



# BODHI and the Jumma Community



BODHI has met many Chakmas over the years, from students to Raja Deva-sish Roy. From our perspective, the Jumma community have been the easiest and most rewarding to work with, writes **SUSAN WOLDENBERG BUTLER** from Australia

We at the Benevolent Organisation for Development, Health & Insight (BODHI) are pleased to congratulate the Mizoram Chakma Development Forum (MCDF) on completion of its first year of production of *The Chakma Voice*.

Like you, we flinch at the injustice and inequality rampant in the world. Unlike you, an accident of birth aided our good fortune in not being forced into a daily, at times savage struggle for existence. Encountering the Jumma community has enabled us to participate in a new way in the battle for basic human rights.

BODHI's constitution and the laws that govern tax-deductible charities limit our direct engagement with human rights work, but we can work behind the scenes with the Jumma community, such as by helping to provide basic health and education. These vital weapons will aid the struggle of Jummas and other disadvantaged communities to achieve fair treatment by bigger powers that are often indifferent and sometimes actively culpable.

I'd like to tell you a little about BODHI before detailing our involvement with the Jumma community.

## IDEALISTIC BEGINNINGS

BODHI was founded during teachings by His Holiness XIV Dalai Lama in Los Angeles in 1989, to start to realise Colin's several years of wishing for a non-government organisation influenced by the Buddhist ideals of compassion and kindness. In 1985, before finishing medical school, Colin took a year's leave to work at a Christian mission hospital in Nigeria and the British Nepal Medical Trust in Nepal. He felt strongly that health care

and education should not be tied to religious indoctrination. It was on this trip, in Delhi, that he met Susan. Four years later they founded BODHI in both Australia and the United States, and the Dalai Lama became Founding Patron.

From the beginning, BODHI's goal has been to work with people who are voiceless, marginalised, discounted or unknown. We are small and, though tax deductible, have never received direct government funds, which we rather like. This independence gives us more freedom to fund people neglected by Western governments, many of whom are curiously fearful of offending totalitarian governments and dictatorships. Our familiarity with Tibetans exiled in India meant that BODHI's first projects were with this group, initially in India and then in Tibet.

We first heard about the plight of the Chakma people in 1993. From that time we formed the aspiration to expand our work to include Chakmas. Our first encounter with Chakmas in India and other indigenous Bangladeshis in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) occurred around the mid-1990s, when we received a letter from a social worker in Bodh Gaya (which we misplaced and cannot find to this day. If you're out there, sir, please contact us to say hello! Contact details are at the end of this article.).

The year 2005 was pivotal for BODHI's involvement with the Chakmas. Colin met Mr Susanta Chakma following a meeting with Dalits in Delhi, in preparation for the first meeting of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists to be held in Nagpur, India later that year. He then shared a room in Nagpur with Ven. Sumanalankar Mahathero. From those meetings began our association with the Chakma community, which has continued to expand to the present day.

Along the way, Ms Kabita Chakma and Mr Kulottam Chakma became Community Advisers, roles in which they are active and valued.

## INDIA

### **SNEHA School in Diyun, Arunachal Pradesh**

In 2005, BODHI began funding supplements to the teachers' salaries, together with library and reference books, in both Hindi and English. We also provided funds for musical instruments, including harmonium, tabla, guitar and drumset. Over the years, we have expanded to encompass teachers' salaries, deworming, health education and teacher training.

BODHI has also funded some administrative expenses in the Delhi office — those unglamorous but vital expenses that no one wants to fund but that keep the show on the road! BODHI has increased support of SNEHA by providing more funds for teachers' salaries and Delhi office expenses, and emergency funding as needed. We will continue to support health education and are exploring both carpentry classes at this school and the use of volunteer teachers from the community (such as retired and elderly, and university students on vacation).

### **Chakma Mahila Samity, Mizoram**

In 2007, we discussed Mizoram at our annual general meeting in Australia. Colin has long been interested in health care in Northeast Indian states. Kulottam agreed to research potential health care projects. In 2008, we began working with the women's group, Chakma Mahila Samity (CMS). They did a splendid job of organising and running two mobile medical camps. Unfortunately, communication is very problematic and our work with CMS is currently discontinued. We hope this is only temporary.

Please see Kulottam's trip report to Mizoram in BODHI Times, Issue No. 38 (<http://www.bodhi.net.au/pdfs/bt-38e.pdf>).

## BANGLADESH

### **Parbatya Bouddha Mission**

Ven. Sumanalankar Mahathero's development, social and peace work in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) is well-known. Through Colin's room-sharing experience with Ven. Mahathero, BODHI began supporting Parbatya Bouddha Mission (PBM). We funded school supplies,



A BODHI medical project in Mizoram. Photo: BODHI

medical care for residential students and free mobile medical camps in the CHT. That petered out after several years, unfortunately, again due to poor communication.

### **Moanoghar Mountain Home**

BODHI had no more projects in the CHT until 2008 or 2009, when our Community Advisers Ms Kabita Chakma and Mr Kulottam Chakma suggested developing a project with Moanoghar Mountain Home (<http://www.moanoghar.org>). We donated to the orphanage and medical clinic while developing mobile medical camps, which started in 2009. We are expanding our support for the medical camps as well as funding the position and expenses of a nurse/educator to travel with the medical team and to work at the home clinic. Part of her role will be health education, which will include tobacco use and drug addiction.

BODHI is instituting an annual scholarship in the name of Dr Denis Wright, our treasured director who is gravely ill. He requested that his old friend Dr Tahsinah Ahmed, Programme Manager for the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) at the Embassy of Switzerland in Dhaka, help to choose potential recipients in Bangladesh. She suggested Moanoghar independently of BODHI. This scholarship will go to the girl who excels academically in Grade V and who is not related to teachers or staff.

### **Hazachara School**

At Kabita's request, BODHI also provides teacher and student funding for the Hazachara School in the CHT.

## CHT POSITION PAPER PREPARED FOR INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF JURISTS

On a different note, BODHI legal volunteer Emilia Della Torre, a human rights lawyer, and Susan as editor worked with Kabita on the CHT Position Paper, 'The Human Rights Situation of the Indigenous Peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh', for the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), in Geneva, Switzerland. It was submitted on 14th March, 2008 to the ICJ.

## FUNDING MORATORIUM DUE TO LIMITED TIME AND FUNDS

As you can see, BODHI has been active in funding Jumma projects in India and Bangladesh. We have decided, for the time being, not to fund any new Jumma projects, only because our time and funds are limited. Instead, we are deepening our commitment to existing projects.

## MORE ON WEBSITE

Please visit our website (URL below) for articles on BODHI's involvement with the Jumma community in Bangladesh and India. Of particular interest are BODHI Times Nos. 28, 29, 30, 31, 36, 37 and 38. (<http://www.bodhi.net.au/html/bodhitimes.html>).

BODHI Times No 39, available online in December, 2010, is also noteworthy. BODHI may be contacted at <http://www.bodhi.net.au>.

## BEST WISHES

We have met many Chakmas over the years, from students to Raja Devasish Roy. From our perspective, the Jumma community have been the easiest and most rewarding to work with, due to their ceaseless dedication, commitment and generosity of pocket book and spirit. Once again we at BODHI wish MCDF and *The Chakma Voice* every success in your worthwhile endeavours. Long may you thrive. ■

(The writer is President, BODHI, Australia. She along with her husband Colin co-founded BODHI in 1989. Susan can be contacted at [csbutler@sctelco.net.au](mailto:csbutler@sctelco.net.au). Colin may be reached at [colin.butler@anu.edu.au](mailto:colin.butler@anu.edu.au). Susan is also a published writer of fiction and non-fiction. To know her literary works, visit <http://www.susanbutler.com.au>)

## MLCSU: The Beacon in Shillong



By-

Suman Chakma,  
Shillong, INDIA

The Meghalaya Chakma Students' Union (MLCSU) was registered in 1987 under the Registration of Societies Act 1983. MLCSU has been doing tremendous services to the Chakma community in Meghalaya for the last 23 years.

### Activities of MLCSU during July 2009-Nov 2010:

#### 1. Social work

MLCSU conducted social works at Polo Buddhist Temple, Polo Hills, Shillong on 18 October 2009. Around 100 students participated.

The corpses of Miss Mati Chakma and Mr Ritun Chakma were delivered by MLCSU to their parents in Mizoram on 24 March 2010 and on 31 August 2010 respectively. Both were from Kamalanagar, CADC. While the first died in a road accident about 70 kms away from Shillong, the other died due to illness. MLCSU also helped Mrs Jhunun Chakma, W/o Mr Nikhil Talukdar of Nunsury village in Lunglei district, Mizoram, who underwent kidney operation on 24 August 2010 in Shillong.

Mr Jyoti Muni Chakma, S/o Mr Chitra Muni Chakma, a student from Ugudasury Village was also helped by the MLCSU on 8 October 2010 while he was hospitalised. An Assam Rifleman named Lokhi Ranjan Chakma from Bajeisora Village also thanked MLCSU for helping his son in his admission in a school in Shillong on 16 October 2010.

#### 2. Annual Function cum Fresher's Meet

On 25 September 2010, MLCSU celebrated 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Functions cum Fresher' Meet at Savio Hall, Don



Bosco Square, Shillong. More than 200 students participated. On the same day we met many families who were unknown to us before. They told us that they came after reading about the function in *The Shillong Times* and *The Meghalaya Times* (popular dailies of Meghalaya).

The function was attended by Ajay Kumar Chakma, Executive Member, CADC as Chief Guest and Indralal Chakma, former president of Young Chakma Association. There were also representatives from several student bodies like Guwahati Chakma Students' Union and Barak Valley Chakma Students' Union. More than twenty programmes were showcased which included a Traditional Fashion Show, Cultural Dance, Folk Song and Drama which were deeply appreciated by one and all.



MLCSU leaders submitting memorandum to the CEM, CADC demanding a hostel for students in Shillong

### 3. Demand for a hostel at Shillong

Representatives of the MLCSU submitted a memorandum to Mr K K Tonchangya, Hon'ble Chief Executive Member, Chakma Autonomous District Council on 19 May 2010 demanding a Students' Hostel at Shillong.

Currently, more than 500 students are studying in Shillong. Of them 70% students are studying in College, 27% students in schools and 3% students in Universities (like NEHU, Annamalai University and Sikkim Manipal University). They face a lot of problems with regard to accommodation.

Mr K K Tonchangya, CEM, CADC praised our works and assured us that if we can get any land the CADC Government would be able help us to buy the land and construct a hostel. But so far, no initiative has been taken by the CADC govt.

Through this newsletter *The Chakma Voice*, we the students of Shillong would like to once again appeal to the Hon'ble CEM, CADC to kindly take personal interest and initiate necessary actions to set up a Hostel in Shillong for the interest of the student community. Doing this would be seen as an act of a great visionary. ■

(The writer is the General Secretary of Meghalaya Chakma Students' Union)



Chakma girls (Above) and Chakma kids (below) performing at MLCSU function in Shillong, 25 Sept, 2010. Photo sent by MLCSU

# Show us the Money



Presence of plethora of targeted developmental schemes have failed to bring development to Chakmas in Mizoram. For development, there must be transparency, accountability and efficiency in the administration and citizens must know where the funds are going, writes **PARITOSH CHAKMA**

## I. Introduction

Many might be surprised when I say this, that I find the Chakmas in India a bit luckier than some other similar smaller communities. (Except that, while making this remark I would like to wishfully leave aside what had happened to the Chakmas during the 1947 partition of India.) The reason why I feel so is that in some ways the Chakma community enjoys special status/preference in India. While several communities are waging protracted – and sometimes bloody - wars for official recognition as Scheduled Tribes (STs) in several parts of the country, the Chakmas have been quietly officially recognized as STs in five states, including Mizoram and Tripura. In three other states namely, West Bengal, Meghalaya and Assam they have been recognized as STs though their population is really negligible. Most importantly, in 1972 the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India was amended to pave the way for creation of an Autonomous District Council (ADC) for the Chakmas in then Chintuipui district (now Lawngtlai district) in Mizoram. For how many communities has the Constitution of India been amended? The homes of the Chakmas in Tripura also fall under the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council.

The Chakmas in Mizoram inhabit contiguous areas along two strategic international borders – mainly with Bangladesh and a slight portion of Myanmar in West and South Mizoram respectively. Across the world the international borders are often conflict zones marked with entrenched poverty, backwardness, remoteness and inaccessibility of those who inhabit it. So is the condition of the Chakmas in Mizoram along Bangladesh and Myanmar borders. They are acutely backward, most illiterate and ignorant about the hu-

man rights and fundamental freedoms they have in the largest and one of the most successful democracies in the world. There are plethora of development and welfare schemes and programmes available to the Chakmas as enjoyed by other citizens. In addition, being minorities, and inhabiting in the backward, international border areas, the Chakmas are beneficiaries to at least three targeted development programmes which have been specifically designed for their development: Border Area Development Programme, Multi Sectoral Development Plan for Minority Concentrated Districts and Backward Region Grant Funds.

But the plethora of schemes and these three targeted programmes (BADP, MsDP for MCDs and BRGF) have failed to develop the Chakmas, who are finding themselves more at odds by every passing year. With the change of times, their life has visibly become more difficult.

## II. Little welfare from welfare schemes

India is a “welfare State”. And, as such, India is committed to the welfare and development of its people, particularly the vulnerable sections. It is the duty of the State to ensure that no one goes hungry, shelter-less and remain illiterate or denied fruits of India’s economic growth. In this regard, the Central government has been implementing a number of welfare schemes. The Central Sponsored Schemes include the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) (providing guaranteed 100 days of employment to each rural family per year), Integrated Child Development Scheme (for pre-school children, adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women), Mid-Day Meals (for all students in government and aided schools), Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (universalization of primary education), Drinking Water Mission, Indira Awas Yojana for the homeless to construct houses, National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) etc. This year the Central government has sanctioned Rs 2,873.13 crore for implementing Mizoram government’s flagship “New Land Use Policy” (NLUP) programme for poverty alleviation to be implemented over a period of five years.

Yet, the manner in which these schemes are being implemented is questionable. The rural health-care system does not exist despite Mizoram being one of the “priority” states under the NRHM. Lack of basic health care facilities in Chakma areas is palpable. There is no road or vehicle for immediate transportation of the critical patients.

Other schemes are plagued with corruption and nepotism. As a matter of fact, in matters of recruitment the Mizoram government and the government of CADC practices the “spoils system” once in vogue in the United States until 1883. The SSA teachers, for example, are selected on the basis of their affiliations with the ruling party. A change in the government in Aizawl will see a number of terminations of the relatives of the opposition party workers. Several Mizo SSA teachers have been appointed in Chakma areas but “attached” to offices in the District Headquarters. This means that they work in the offices in the District Headquarters, instead of the village of their posting while the schools remain without teachers! The list of Indira Awas Yojana beneficiaries is decided on the basis of whether a particular BPL family had voted for the ruling party or not in the general elections or at the village council elections.

Despite allocation of millions of rupees under Rajiv Gandhi National Rural Drinking Water Programme (Rs. 495.93 crore was released to Mizoram during 2009-2010 alone), there is no safe drinking water facilities to rural habitations. Only the ruling Congress party supporters are being enlisted as NLUP beneficiaries, as if only

The Guidelines of MsDP say that minorities means the “non-Christians” in case of Mizoram. Hence, Buddhist Chakmas must be given first priority. By diverting the lion’s share of funds to the majority concentrated areas, can Mizoram really say that it is developing the Minority Concentrated Districts or doing justice with the minority funds?

Congressmen are the only poorest in Mizoram or that the Government of India has selectively sanctioned Rs 2,873.13 crore only meant to be distributed amongst the Congress party supporters. Go to any village, and you will know what I mean. This is not to suggest that these things only happen during Congress rule but take place during any party regime.

### **III. Three targeted development programmes for Chakma areas**

In addition to the budget allocation for the Chakma Autonomous District Council each financial year (discussed below), the Chakma inhabited areas (both within and outside CADC) are also beneficiaries of at least three other major specific development programmes: Chakmas are the direct targets of Border Area Development Programme (BADP), Multi Sectoral Development Plan (MsDP) for Minority Concentrated Districts, and Backward Region Grant Funds (BRGF).

Chakmas inhabit three districts of Mizoram, namely, Mamit, Lunglei and Lawngtlai (CADC). All these three districts are covered under BADP (Mamit, Lunglei and Lawngtlai), MsDP (Mamit and Lawngtlai), and BRGF (Lawngtlai). It is interesting to note that CADC has been identified as one of the most backward areas in India. A total of Rs 54.88 crore has been released by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj to Lawngtlai and Saiha districts under BRGF. In addition, under Rashtriya Sam Vikas Yojana (RSVY) scheme which has been subsumed under BRGF, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj sanctioned a total of Rs 45 crore for Lawngtlai district during 2004-05 to 2007-08.

The BADP is a 100% centrally funded programme “to meet the special developmental needs of the people living in remote and inaccessible areas situated near the international border”. It is important to note that most of the villages nearest to the Mizoram-Bangladesh border are inhabited by the Chakmas for centuries. The BADP is being implemented in 16 rural development blocks in 6 border districts of Mizoram. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) released Rs 233.72 crore to Mizoram from 1993-94 to 2010-11 under BADP. This is a big amount considering the population of the border people in Mizoram is not that huge (the state has only nearly 9 lakhs population). The MHA stated that the Mizoram government “utilized funds under BADP mainly on construction of school buildings, Public Health Centres (PHCs), Community Centers, roads, paths, culverts and bridges, social infrastructure, drinking water facilities, agriculture sector etc”.



Yet, in reality no substantial development has taken place all through these years. 72% of the Chakma villages still do not have Middle Schools and 96% Chakma villages are without High Schools. As stated above, health care and safe drinking water facilities are simply non-existent. Most villages still lack road connectivity and most of the people do not have any livelihood. According to MHA sources, the state of Mizoram failed to utilize Rs 2.73 crores during 2008-09 and not a single penny was spent during 2009-10 out of total release of Rs 24.94 crores and 24 thousands! This a clear case of criminal negligence.

The BADP guidelines provide for preparation of village wise “baseline survey” by the authorities but no such baseline survey is prepared (or at least not known in the public domain). As the state governments failed to utilize the funds in the areas nearest to the international borders, the Ministry of Home Affairs was forced to tighten the guidelines and issued a revised BADP guidelines in February 2009 to provide that the funds could be used only for the development of those villages which are located “within 0-10 km” from the international border.

The February 2009 Guidelines stated:

*“The border block will be the spatial unit within which the State Government shall arrange to utilize the BADP funds only in those villages of the blocks, which are located ‘within 0-10 km’ from the international border. Those villages, which are located nearer to the international border will get first priority. After saturating these villages with basic infrastructure, the next set of villages located within 0-15 km and 0-20 km need to be taken up. If the first village in a block is located at a far away location from the international border, the first village/hamlet in the block may be taken as “0” km distance village for drawing the priority list.”*

Since BRGF and BADP programmes do not specifically target minorities who are the most marginalized section, in 2008 the Central government introduced Multi Sectoral Development Plan (MsDP) for the Minority Concentrated Districts (MCDs). Among the 90 MCDs across India, two districts in Mizoram, namely, Mamit and Lawngtlai have been identified by the government as having “a substantial minority popula-

*tion ..(who) are backward, with unacceptably low levels of socio-economic or basic amenities indicators, requiring focused attention and specific programme intervention”. The main thrust of the MsDP is to address the ‘development deficits’ that were either not met fully by existing schemes/programmes or catered to by any scheme/programme of the State or Central government. Schemes and programmes for poverty alleviation, education, health and other welfare schemes are focus of the MsDP.*

Mizoram is a Christian dominated state (87% are Christians) followed by Buddhists who are nearly 8%. Since Christians are also officially notified as “minority” in India, there is ambiguity as to whether Christians or the Buddhists and other religious minorities should get the benefits of the MsDP funds. This question is significant as Mizos are too far more developed than the Chakmas who are the only Buddhist community in the state. Therefore to dispel any ambiguity the guidelines of the Multi Sectoral Development Plan at para 1.7 (viii) has made it clear that -

*“In the minority concentration districts in the States of Jammu and Kashmir, Meghalaya and Mizoram, where a minority community [read as Christians] is in majority, the schemes and programmes should be focused on the other minorities.”*

Therefore, under the MsDP Guidelines, minorities means that “non-Christians” in case of Mizoram. It should be noted that Buddhist Chakmas are the largest non-Christians in Mamit and Lawngtlai districts.

The funds tentatively allocated for Lawngtlai district and Mamit district under the MsDP was Rs. 24.30 crore and Rs 21.60 crore respectively for the 11th Five Year Plan period. During 2009-10, the government of India released Rs 109.42 lakhs as 1st installment in Mamit and Rs 287.98 lakhs as 1st installment in Lawngtlai district. The state government of Mizoram has been directed to ensure that villages having highest proportion of non-Christian minorities should be selected for the projects under MsDP with priority.

Therefore, virtually the funds are meant for the Chakmas’ development. But clearly, development is not taking place. Just like the BADP funds, there is no accountability for the utilization of the MsDP funds. Of course it is true that development should take place in the whole district. But by diverting a lion’s share of the funds to the majority concentrated areas, can Mizoram really claim that it is developing the Minority Concentrated Districts or doing justice with the minority funds?

#### **IV. Where are the Village/District Plans?**

The BADP Guidelines provides for preparation of a village-wise “baseline survey” in order to assess the gaps in basic physical and social infrastructure. The village plan should indicate the projects/funding through State Plan Schemes/the Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS)/Flagship Schemes of Government of India and the BADP.

The planning and execution of the MsDP is supposed to have been on the basis of a “District Plan” which is “prepared in such a manner that these districts are saturated with schemes included in the Prime Minister’s New 15 Point Programme for the Welfare of Minorities within the Eleventh Plan period”.

Similarly, under BRGF, each district (Lawngtlai and Saiha) is supposed to have a District Plan which will accommodate the village level “participatory plans”. The implementing mechanism for Mizoram is that the Village Councils will be given the responsibility to take up the planning and implementation at village level. At district level, there shall be a Planning and Implementation Committee with the Deputy Commissioner as the Chairperson and having representatives from MADC and CADC (in Lawngtlai district). Funds will go to a separate bank account of the Planning and Implementation Committee, which shall be operated under the control and supervision of the Deputy Commissioner in his capacity as Chairperson.

But there is total lack of transparency and inclusiveness. Neither the village-wise baseline surveys are carried out nor any plans at the village level are made to carry out these development programmes under which millions of rupees are allocated and spent without a trace. Let alone the general public, even the elected Village Council authorities do not have any access to the District Plan, nor do they have any idea about it. This means that the local authorities are not taken on board at any stage – plan formulation, implementation and monitoring. Mere occasional meetings, if any with the Village Council Presidents don’t really help.

#### **V. Development in CADC: 1972 – till date**

Specific mention must be made about Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) as it is a special arrangement made for the Chakmas un-

The three Autonomous District Councils (Chakma, Mara and Lai) in Mizoram are rightly demanding direct funding from the Central government. But before that CADC will need to learn the skills of proper management of funds, bring transparency, efficiency, accountability and discipline in the administration. CADC will also need in place a sound Recruitment policy to recruit efficient and dedicated public personnel.

der the Constitution of India to provide the Chakmas “a State within a State”. Created on 29 April 1972, the CADC has separate legislature, executive and judiciary. The laws of the state government do not apply to CADC. But the Chakmas have failed to utilize this authority. Chakma leaders totally lacked management skills and soon the CADC government faltered.

A total mismanagement of the funds led to the suspension of the CADC Executive Committee and assumption of all executive, financial and administrative functions of the Council by the then Lt Governor, on the basis of the report of the RM Agarwal Committee, vide order No. LAD/A-9/76/45 dt.27.9.1976. The Executive Committee remained suspended till 22.1.1978.

After 38 years rule the achievements of the successive governments in the Council are negligible. There is still not a single hospital for the 40,000 people of CADC. The Primary Health Centre in Baraponsury, one of the biggest villages in CADC, is yet to be fully operational. To its credit, the CADC government has made a big leap in primary education. From just 7 primary schools in 1972 all the villages have primary schools today. But in CADC as many as 51 villages (72.8%) out of 70 villages still do not have Middle Schools and 67 villages (95.7%) do not have High Schools.

The funds received by CADC increased from Rs 4.22 lakhs in 1972-73 to Rs 3187.77 lakhs in 2009-10. But funds are routed through the state government. The three Autonomous District Councils (Chakma, Mara and Lai) in Mizoram are rightly demanding direct funding from the Central government. But before that CADC will need to learn the skills of proper management of funds, bring transparency, efficiency, accountability and discipline in the administration. CADC will also need in place a sound Recruitment policy that meets national standards to recruit efficient and dedicated public personnel.



## VI. The mantra for Chakmas' development

Crores of rupees are flowing each year into our districts but do our leaders care to know how the funds are being spent? And, if they know, do they care to tell the people how the funds are being utilized or mis-utilized? As no development in the minority inhabited areas/international border villages is visible which is evident from the lack of basic facilities and amenities, three things are probably happening. First, the funds are not reaching to the target population (i.e. minorities as defined in para 1.7 (viii) of the MsDP guidelines or the population living nearest to the international borders) which suggest siphoning off the funds by the officials and politicians, and/or (2) large scale corruption is taking place at official level in CADC, and/or (3) the funds are being spent largely on majority (i.e Christian/Mizo in Mizoram's context) concentrated areas. For us to develop, we need to urgently address these three critical flaws.

The political leaders and officials running the government (at all levels) must be accountable on the nature and ways of funds being spent. Given that there is little development and that people have no idea whatsoever about the spending of the welfare funds, it is imperative for the civil society and the general public to demand transparency in the administration. Accountability for any misdeed will inexorably take place, gradually.

Therefore, the success of the development and welfare schemes/ programmes will depend upon the amount of transparency, increased awareness and community participation.

It is a fact that the Chakma minorities are discriminated against by the state government of Mizoram which practises an "a policy to exclude the minorities" from development. However, the authorities in CADC must also have a thought to ponder over. This is: why the socio-economic and educational conditions of the Chakmas living within the Council area are not being significantly improved since the Council has all the means to transform the lives? If any means is not available, the CADC government must create them. For this the government must be responsive and responsible towards the people.

Apart from limited resources, the problem for our backwardness seems also to lie elsewhere. Is it a myopic vision? Or, the lack of a political will. Or, both? ■

(The writer is Editor, The Chakma Voice)

## Chakma Students Associations



Members of Meghalaya Chakma Students Union, Shillong



Members of Kolkata Chakma Students Association, Kolkata



Members of Guwahati Chakma Students Union, Guwahati



# Importance of Education



By- Rup Kumar Chakma

Education is the backbone of any society. It is a means by which we achieve our long term strategy for the welfare of human kind. Therefore, it is very certain that where there are no educational facilities there will be lack of development and backwardness and ignorance.

Education is also a source of knowledge. An educated person can always contemplate any situation better and meet the challenges of modern life while the uneducated people are often disadvantaged. In Mizoram, education has given the Mizos superiority and development over the Chakmas.

Even within the same ethnic community, educated persons are intellectually superior to their fellow villagers who are illiterate. This leads to social inequality and exploitation in some cases. For example, in my own village Boranpansuri in CADC, there was a man with little education but he could keep the illiterate villagers under his influence. Whenever anyone requested him to write an application, he did not touch the pen unless he was blessed with a bottle of double distilled wine and a big fat hen! It was a time when most people in the village were illiterate. From this example, we can easily understand the importance of education.

Now with the flow of education the villagers are increasingly getting awareness about their rights. They now demand justice for any wrong.

In our legal fight for justice and democratic space, education is the main weapon. We all remember how much injustice we have suffered. But no one in the Chakma community dared to even protest. And we continued to suffer, silently. As a Chakma proverb goes: "Maanuj buji pugeh haamaaraai". Now, things have changed a bit with education and development. Several students have come to study I Delhi and many are employed. Last year a group of Chakmas from Mizoram studying or employed in Delhi formed Mizoram Chakma Development Forum (MCDF) which is doing excellent works to bring awareness to the people in the villages. Previously such institution didn't exist.

We know that teachers are the pillars of the education system and therefore they should be respected, treated well and given their due. But unfortunately in CADC, education is also involved with politics. I am very disappointed that the "opposition punishment" is virtually imposed and targeted on the teacher community by transferring them from one place to another place frequently. If we snub teachers it basically means we snub our own sons and daughters as teachers are those who will make the future of children. Frequent transfer makes them demoralized and subsequently poor in teaching quality as they have to change their subjects from one school to another. Hence, I fervently request both ruling and opposition intellectual leaders and others that education should be kept outside politics and in this regard give a deep look to find a fruitful solution keeping in mind that "students are our future beacon" ■

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At sunrise on 15th August 1947, Sneha Kumar Chakma hoisted the Indian tricolor at an official function graced by the Deputy Commissioner Col. G.L. Hyde at Rangamati. On 17 August 1947, the Radcliffe Award was announced on the All India Radio and heaven broke open for the Chakmas. CHT went to Pakistan, not India. On 21 August 1947, the Pakistan Army marched to Rangamati and pulled down the Indian flag and hoisted the Pakistani flag. Crackdown against Chakma leaders was launched. Chakma leaders convened emergency meeting and resolved to oppose the Radcliffe Award, through armed resistance, if necessary. Sneha Kumar Chakma escaped to India and sought help from Patel and Nehru. Patel was willing to provide even military assistance but he said he was only "deputy" to Prime Minister Nehru. It took Sneha Kumar Chakma 50 days to get an appointment with Prime Minister Nehru in his office in Delhi. Nehru refused to help the Chakmas. In the words of Sneha Kumar Chakma, Nehru got up in anger and shouted – "Do you propose to bring India again under foreign rule?" ■

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# Buddhist Traditions and its Development among the Chakmas: A Historical Perspective



Due to absence of any authentic historical documents, nothing definite can be said when and how the Chakmas converted to Buddhism. However, that Chakmas are Buddhists since long is a historical fact, writes JYOTIR MOY CHAKMA, from Mizoram

The objective of this essay is to trace the development of Buddhism and its tradition among the Chakmas in different phases with the help of available existing literatures and by observing the various religious practices of the Chakmas.

## Development of Buddhism Among the Chakmas:

Due to absence of any authentic historical documents, nothing definite can be said when and how the Chakmas converted to Buddhism. However, the fact that Chakmas are Buddhists since long is a historical fact.[1] According to Risely, 'Chittagong Hill Tracts is a professionally Buddhist District, and the inhabitants seem to have adhered to their Buddhism since ancient time'. [2] Regarding Chakma Buddhist, Haraprasad Sastri wrote that the Buddhists in Rangamati still possessed many earlier Buddhist elements which indicated that they are the ancient Indian Buddhist community but now they inclined to Hinayana by coming in to contact with the neighbouring Buddhists of Chittagong.[3] The *Agartara*[4] of the Chakmas also well testified the same. There are some works referring to the spread of Buddhism in the countries east of India from ancient time. The countries like Aparantaka (Bhamgala or Bengal and Odivisa or Orissa), Girivarta i.e. the countries surrounded by mountain (Kamarupa or Assam, Tripura, Hasama) and Namgata i.e. the countries on the slopes of the northern mountain bordering sea (Phukan or Pagan, Balaku, Rakhan or Arakan, Hamsavati, Marko, Munans, Cakma or Chakma, Kamboja or Cambodia), etc. are collectively called Kuki countries where Buddhism spread from the time of Asoka.[5] The Ceylonese

Chronicle Mahavamsa as mentioned by Sengupta that Asoka sent Buddhist Mission under Sonaka Thera and Uttara Thera to Suvamabhumi or Burma[6] from Magadh to propagate the Dharma after the Third Buddhist Council.

Further, Buddhism spread extensively in these countries when most of the Buddhist scholars fled from Madhya-desa to the Kuki countries after the invasion of Magadh by the Turuskas (Turkish).[7] During this period, the Chakmas converted to Buddhism.[8] One of the Namgata country as mentioned above was Cakma or Chakma where Buddhism spread during Asoka, which amply clear that the Chakmas are Buddhist since ancient time. Thus, there can be no doubt that the Chakmas are Buddhist since long time. However, they practiced two different Nikayas or schools in two distinct phases.

## First Phase (Before 1857)

From earliest time to 1857, the religion professed by the Chakmas was Mahayana (great vehicle) Buddhism and simultaneously they inclined to Mantrayana and Tantrayana. Prior to the period of Queen Kalindi (1844-1973) they (Chakmas) believe in Mahayana.[9] The Buddhism as practice by the Chakmas belongs to southern school of Buddhism mixed with *Tantric*

The Chakmas adhered to Theravada Buddhism since mid-19th century and now almost cent percent Chakmas profess Theravada Buddhism. Buddhism is very deeply rooted in Chakmas and 99% of them profess Buddhism. It is probably due to this strong conviction in Buddhism, the Christian Missionaries failed to convert Chakmas as they baptized the Lushais, Nagas and Khasis.

Buddhism.[10] There are works referring to spread of different sects of Buddhism in the Kuki countries. According to Taranatha-

“Vasubandhu disciples propagated Mahayana Buddhism (5th Century A.D), while during the reign of Abhayakara, Mantrayana went on increasing and during King Balasundra Tantrayana extended in the Kuki countries.[11] Balasundra sent about two hundred panditas to maha-siddha Santigupta and others in Dramila and Khagendra in the south to learn the practice of the Guhya-Mantra (works of Tantric Buddhism) and restored in these countries. His sons Chandravahana the king of Rakhan (Arakan), Atitavahana the king of Ca-ga-ma (Cakma or Chakma) and Balavahana the king of Munan (Burma) where Buddhism flourished extensively during this period”. [12]

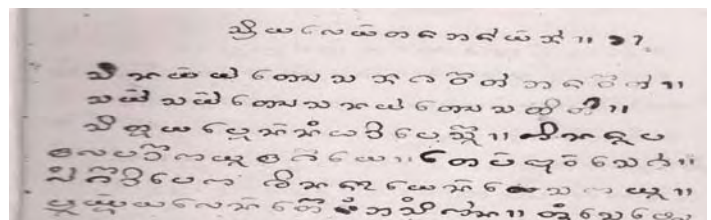
The Chakmas are the followers of Mahayani Buddhist also well proved with their Tantric Buddhist priests called Lori or Ruri or Thar and their religious practices. Similar Tantric Buddhist priests are also found in the Barua community called Raulee[13] and in the Burmese community called Ari or Ariya.[14] Such Tantric Buddhist priests of the Chakmas are still found in the remotes areas. It is not possible to ascertain the exact period when and how the terms Loris came into existence in the Chakma community. It is said that the term Lori is derived from Rahula, the only son of Buddha who asked his father for parental inheritance.[15] Accordingly, to administer the Ariya Midingya era, Buddha preached 45 rules regarding the Dhamma and 46 Kshatriya rules. [16] The names of 28 Buddha with their sermons were mentioned in these principles and the Chakmas adopted the same in their holy scriptures called Agartara.[17] However, the Buddhist literatures are silent about the formation of a separate sect of Buddhism after Rahula. Another theory is that the term Lori or Ruri derived from Raul or Rauli (a kind of Buddhist priest) of the medieval period.[18]

The Loris resided in the Kiyong (village monastery) which is usually outside the village and up stream of a river. They can take meal even after mid-day and can lead a family life after marriage. They have five stages of life- Samni, Sikkya, Gatyā, Lokhtak and Upatya. They wore yellow robes by tugging it behind like the Hindu Sanyasi. During extermination of the Buddhist from its

mainland, the monks tugged their robes behind so that they could run faster to save their life and since then the Loris started tugging it behind.[19] They performed all the religious rites viz. Parek or Mangal Sutta, death rites, marriage, Bhatdya Puja (ancestor worship), etc. by chanting the suttas from Agartara, the holy scriptures of the Loris. There are three kinds of Lori or Raulee-Mathe, Kame and panjang and while attending religious rite, Mathe wear hutuk, a similar robes worn by Theravada monk, Kame cover up their shaven-head with a piece of yellow cloth and Panjang hold a large umbrella. [20]

After the renaissance of Buddhism in Chittagong Hill Tracts during the mid 19th century, the life-style of the Loris and their religious practices changed considerably. “Now they, like samanero (novice) get ordained with Theravada monks and observe dasasila, ten precepts for only a week. After one week, they abandon their robes and again return to common lay-life. However, they properly keep the robes in their house. Then they work like ordinary laymen. They wear those robes when they perform religious functions as priest”. [21] It is said that the Loris are the lowest order of Buddhist monks since they observed only 10 precepts whereas the present Bikkhus observe 227 precepts. “To become a Raulee one must first become a Samanera or novice from a Bikkhu where the intended Rari must observe 10 sheelas meant for Samanera for at least seven days. After which only he becomes an Upashatta or Rari and change his robes. The robes of a Rari is yellow plain cloth and without stitched in a special design. The Raris wear their robe with back tug and the Bhikkhu without tug”. [22]

The Agartara is the ancient holy scriptures of the Chakmas. There are 28 Taras and all these Taras collectively known as Agartara. Each Tara has been used in a particular religious and customary rite of the Chakmas. Apart from Agartara, there are some Tantric Buddhist literatures viz. Buddha Sudang (like Doha in Bengal), Yog Sadhan O Pogiri Aalam Ved, Gyanamala and Gjenalama written by Sibsaran, a Tantric Buddhist Priest. The Agartara originally written on palm leaves and later transferred to paper. But due to copying from one person to another, the language became more distorted and as a result at present it is difficult to ascertain and understand its language fully. Here is an excerpt of one of the Tara called Malemtara:





*Sri Malemtara Arombha  
Si Nammo Teisa Bhagawato Arawato,  
Sammo Sammo Teisa Nammo Teisa Ti Ti.*

*Si Tahma Peinnangya Dipesu, Kinarapa  
Jalapadha Kama Jagame, Tepbuosego.  
Longha Dipeka Kinarya Mensekama,  
Prammh Malen Terang Asingkona.*

The first two lines is the Buddha Bandana (Prayer). The last four lines which roughly can be understand that Malen (Mohendra) visited Tamra Dipa (Srilanka) through Jalapadha (sea).

Some scholar tried to interpret the term Agartara and its language. According to Bechert, Tara means Dharma or religion.[23] *Agartara* means ancient religion.[24] According to other Agar means old or ancient and Tara means religious literature which means ancient religious literature and he further added that *Agartara* means Holy Scriptures.[25] While interpreting its language Bechert wrote 'these texts consist of two main elements: excerpts of Pali passage which undergone extremely distorted and long passage in an unknown language which shows similarities to Burmese language'.[26] According to Biraj Mohan 'many of the Taras are Pali Sutta and nothing else'.[27] Similar view also expressed by Bankim Chandra Chakma and Bankim Krishna Dewan who further said that the *Agartara* was transcribed from *Tripitaka*. [28] It is said that the Loris (priest-the custodian of *Agartara*) can understand the meaning of the language of *Agartara* in the early days. Regarding the formation of Tara and Loris, Bechert further added that the Chakmas confessed Theravada Buddhism while they were in Burma where they took over the religious literature from their neighbour including Pali text and commentaries. In course of time, the tradition of monk ordination broke down and still some priests retained the outer forms of Buddhist religious life who wear yellow robe, live in jungle, meditate and recite Paritta text. Consequently, a kind of Buddhist priest (Loris) came into existence which did not form part of the sangha.[29] However, the above assumption contrasts with the Chakma Bijag (history) which stated:

*"Bijoy Giri somare anya Tara Agare,  
Mani labang egemeh, solibang sagale su-dine".*

The above lines said that during the Arakan expedition, king Bijoy Giri was accompanied by four scholars (pandit) and seven monks (Thar)[30] who brought the *Agartara* along with them. The above lines suggest that the Chakmas were Buddhist be-

fore entering into Arakan.

## **Second Phase (1857 and after mate)**

During the mid 19th century A.D, the Chakmas embraced Theravada Buddhism of Hinayana School. It was mainly due to renaissance of Buddhism in CHT and its neighbouring areas by a renowned Arakanese monk named Samedha or Saramitta Mahathero. In 1856, Samedha visited Sitakunda from Harbang, south of Chittagong where he met Radhu Mathe or Radharam, a Rauli of Barua Community.[31] In 1857, Samedha along with Radharam attended Mahamuni Mela (Buddhist Festival) in Chittagong where he noticed that the Vinaya of local Buddhist monks (Raulis) far below the standard, as practiced by monks in Burma and in other Theravada Buddhist countries.[32] He had religious discourses and propagated the true -Vinaya- (monastic disciplines) and Dharma (religion) in CHT with whom the people were immensely impressed. Chakma Queen Kalindi Rani invited Samedha at her palace at Rajnagar to deliver religious discourse. The queen was deeply impressed with his sermon and embraced Theravada Buddhism. [33]

In 1857, Samedha was honoured by the Chakma Queen with a royal title 'Sangharaja Vinayadhara' or the head or king of sangha and repository of monastic disciplines. The Queen also honoured Samedha by introducing a seal in his name which read as:

"1219 A. E. The Seal of Arakanese Sangharaja and Vinayadhara". Since then, Samedha was popularly known as Sangharaja Samedha Mahathera.[34] Thereafter, Queen Kalindi patronized for the development of Theravada Buddhism in Chittagong Hill Tracts and its neighbouring areas. She constructed a Buddhist temple named Sangharaja Vihara in her capital in honour and memory of Sangharaja Samedha and built an image of Buddha named as Sakyamuni. Subsequently, under the royal patronage many temples and images of Buddha were built throughout the Chittagong Hill Tracts.[35]

During this period, though the people inclined to Theravada Buddhism but the Loris or Raulis could not organize themselves properly according to Theravada doctrine and they still retained former Tantric traditions. However, Sangharaja was again invited to Chittagong and in 1864 he arrived at Pahartuli where he decided to reform the sangha according to Theravada Vinaya doctrine. This time he stayed at Chittagong Hill Tracts for one year preaching and propagating the Vinaya-Dharma. He reformed the sangha

and many Raulis were re-ordained according to Theravada doctrines. As a result of this reform movement by Sangharaja, there emerged a Buddhist nikaya or sect in Chittagong Hill Tracts and its adjacent areas called *Sangharaja-nikaya*. [36]

However, a small section of Loris or Raulis did not accept the Sangharaja's reformation and still adhere to their old tradition. This section is led by Radhacaran Mahathera and thereby they are known as Mahathera-nikaya (Sect of the Great Elders). [37] (Prajnalankar, 2008:87, Dharmadhar, 1974:20)

Sangharaja-nikaya has an apex governing body called Nikaya-Thera headed by a High Priest called Mahanayaka-Thera and four Deputy High Priests called Anunayaka-Thera. Under the Nikaya-Thera, there was a Karakasanghasabha (Ecclesiastical Council) consisting of 30 members. The members of Nayaka-Thera are appointed for life time whereas the members of Karakasnghasabha are elected for a term of three years. Karakasanghasabha has branches to which the monasteries are affiliated. Each of the circle of the Chittagong Hill Tracts forms one branch headed by the respective Rajguru (Royal Priest) who is appointed by the Raja of the circle viz. the Chakma Raja in Rangamati, the Bohmong Raja in Bandarban and the Mong Raja in Manikcheri. [38]

Sangharaja reform movement had a great impact upon the Buddhist communities especially the Chakmas and the Baruas. The Theravada-based religious reformation movement inspired the monks and people of the region. Eventually, they discarded their Tantric practices and other superstitions and the monks were given fresh ordination and initiated into the Theravada monastic disciplines. Such was the success of the reformation movement that more than 95 percent of the total number of Buddhist monks in Chittagong and CHT and other Buddhist populated regions came under the fold of the newly reformed Theravada Buddhist Sangha. [39] Due to this reformation and also due to royal patronage under queen Kalindi, the Theravada school of Hinayani Buddhist rose to prominence and the old Tantric Buddhist (Loris) has gradually been disappeared from the Chakma and the Barua communities. According to Bechert, 'nearly all the monks in CHT belong to Sangharaja-Nikaya. [40]

### **Recent Trends of Buddhism Among the Chakmas**

The Chakmas adhered to Theravada Buddhism since mid 19th century and now almost cent percent Chakmas profess Theravada Buddhism. Buddhism is very deeply rooted in Chakmas and 99% of them profess Buddhism. [41] It is probably due to this strong conviction in Buddhism, the Christian Missionaries failed to convert a single Chakmas as they baptized the Lushais, Nagas and Khasis. [42]

In every Chakma villages, there exists at least one Buddhist temple called Mondir or Kyong. Further, every family constructs a worshipping place, a small temple with an image of Buddha either in front of their house or in a corner of the house where they worship every morning and evening by lighting candles and incense. The Chakmas originally called God as Gojen and the statues or images of Buddha called Goi. However, now the Chakmas called God as Bogabhan and the images of Buddha as Murty due to influence of Bengali.

If more than one Bikkhu (monk) reside together in a particular temple, the senior most becomes the head monk of the temple. The Bikkhus in a particular region are governed by an organization called Sangha, viz. Mizoram Bikkhu Sangha in Mizoram and Tripura Raja Bikkhu Sangha and Sangharakkita in Tripura. However, the monks in Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh were divided into two groups due to ideological differences- 1) Parbattya Bikkhu Sangha and 2) Bana Bikkhu Sangha. It is to be noted that the monks in Tripura are also greatly influenced by these two groups.

The members of these Sanghas are elected from amongst them. The temple is managed by a trustee called Village Mondir Committee whose members are elected from amongst the general public. Further, the temple is run by monthly public donation only where every family of the village contributes either cash or kind according to their capacity. Every family offers food called Palla Siyong in a rotation as fixed by the Mondir Committee. However, during ceremonies, everyone can offer Siyong. In every temple, there is a Kiyongthaga and a Kharaga appointed by the Mondir Committee. The Kiyongthaga manages all the necessities in the temple and the Kharaga toils in the daily temple works.

There are numerous Buddhist religious festivals and rites of both community and household performed by the Chakmas throughout the year where attendance of at least one monk is a must. Few of the religious rites and festivals of the Chakmas are mentioned below:

**Purnima:** The Chakmas observe full moon days called Purnima of certain months. They are Baisshaki Purnima, Ashari Purnima, Modhu Purnima, Ashini Purnima, Kadi Purnima and Maghi Purnima. Generally, with the advent of night on the Purnima day, the Chakmas go to the temple and pray and vow to the triple gems-Buddha, Dhamma and Sanga after lighting candles and incense, receive five precepts and hear Dhamma Desana (religious discourse) and then oblate the offerings, thousand candles called Hajar Batti Dan, Phanaj Batti Dan (balloons) and other materials. Thereafter, they light the thousand candles fixed on the Chirag Ghar. Simultaneously, they also raise the balloons by putting smoke inside it and lighting the wick fixed on its mouth.

**Bhatdya/Adhara Poi:** This is one of the ancient customs retained by the Chakmas. The origin of this rite can be traced back to King Bimbisar who offered food and other articles to Buddha for the salvation of souls of his 84 thousands departed ancestors.[43] The Chakmas offer food and other articles for the liberation of their ancestors by performing Bhatdya Pujo or Adhara Poi.

**Mangal Sutra or Parek:** It is performed in a house for the welfare of the family. The house owner arrange a Pujo with coconut, rice, banana, incense, candles, sweets, betel nuts and leaves, etc on a wide container with a Ghath (a jar filled with water) over which a branch of mango leaves is kept. With the advent of darkness, the Bikkhus come and then the ritual starts. The assembled people first vow to the triple gems and then receives five precepts. Thereafter, the priests recite sutras (incantation) and then give advice in the form of religious discourse for the welfare of the family and its members. Then the offered materials are oblate by dropping water. The next day, the priests are invited in the house for Siyong (offering of food). However, sometime, the owner takes the food to the temple instead of home.

**Ashta Porikkar Dan:** Here Ashta means eight, Porikkara means items/articles and Dan means offering. Therefore, Ashta Porikkar Dan means offering of eight articles to the Bikkhus. The eight articles includes-1) Antarbash (lower garment of monk's dress), 2) Chibor (upper garment), 3) Dobashik (upper garment made with double chibor), 4) Kotibondoni (belt), 5) Razor/blade, 6) Savek (bowl used for alms), 7) Sagoni (Stein of water) and 8) needle with thread roll.

**Katin Chibor Dan:** Katin (difficult process), Chibor (robes) and Dan (offering) is performed once in a year in a particular temple. This ceremony is performed between the months of Ashhin and Kadi of Bengali calendar. Generally, the Chibor is prepared within 24 hours starting from spinning, weaving and dyeing and hence it is called Katin Chibor. The offering Katin Chibor is performed in the presence of at least five monks, which is called Sangha (virtuous association) who represent all the monks.

### **Conclusion:**

Considering the above facts, it can be assumed that the Chakmas are the ardent follower of Buddha since long. However, some non Buddhist elements are also observed in their socio-cultural life like sacrificing animals, strong drinking, etc. which are against the Buddhist principles. They also worship numerous spirits and appease them by sacrificing animals. Further, it has also been noticed that the Chakmas praying and worshipping some Hindu gods and goddesses. According to P. K. Mohanty, "The Chakmas practice Theravada Buddhism mixed with elements of Hinduism and Animism".[44] In *Gozenalama*,[45] the author Siv Charan prayed to some Hindu Gods viz. Barkamal, Fulkamal and Nilkamal identified as Barma, Bishnu and Siva, though the prayer is mainly dedicated to Buddha. *Gozenalama*, the author Siv Charan prayed to some Hindu Gods viz. Barkamal, Fulkamal and Nilkamal identified as Barma, Bishnu and Siva, though the prayer is mainly dedicated to Buddha. In *Chandobi Baromash* and *Chtira Rekha Baromash*,[46] the authors are also found to pray to Hindu god and goddesses like Narayan, Brahma, Bishnu, Shiv, Saraswati, Loxsmi, etc. Besides, the observation of a number of customary rites viz. Shindi Pujo, Ma Lokkhi Pujo, Burpara, Chumulong, etc, also support the aforesaid fact. Thus, it can be assumed that the Hindu religion also strongly influenced the Chakmas in course of time.

Apart from the practice of the above forms of religion, Chakmas are also found to be animist as is evident from the fact that besides Lord Buddha, they offer the first collection of Jhum cultivation to river, sky and hillock before their own consumption. Prajit Kumar Palit observed, "Their (Chakmas) religious cults are combination of ancestor worship, worship of nature deities and spirits".[47] Thus, an instance of the simultaneous practice of Buddhism, Hinduism and animism are found among the Chakmas. ■

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## End Notes:

- [1] D.C. Ahir, *Buddhism in Modern India*, Sri Satguru Publication, Delhi, 1991, p-129.
- [2] H.H. Risely, *Census of India 1901*, Vol. I, India Part-I, p-369.
- [3] Haraprasad Sastri, *Bichay: Buddha Dharma*, Koruna Prakashani, Kolkata, 2002, p-72.
- [4] *Agharatarata* is the oldest Buddhist literature of the Chakmas written in Chakma script in distorted form of Pali. It was originally written on palm leaves and later transferred to paper. There are 28 *Taras (Volumes)* and all these *Taras* collectively known as *Aghar tara*.
- [5] Lama Chimpa and Alaka Chattopadhyaya (trans.), *Taranatha's History of Buddhism in India*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, New Delhi, Reprint-2004, p-330
- [6] Sukumar Sengupta, *Buddhism in South-East Asia*, Atisha Memorial Publishing Society, Calcutta, 1994, p-5.
- [7] Taranatha, op. cit., p-330.
- [8] Dr. Heinz Bechert, *Contemporary Buddhism in Bengal and Tripura*, Educational Miscellany, Vol.IV, 1968, p 10
- [9] K.S. Sing (ed), *People of India -Mizoram*, Vol. XXXIII, Anthropological Survey of India, Calcutta, 1995, p-51.
- [10] S.P. Talukdar, *The Chakmas Life And Strug gle*, 1988, Gian Publishing House, Delhi, p-133.
- [11] Taranatha, op. cit., pp-330-331.
- [12] Lop Cit..
- [13] Dharmadhar Mahastavir, *Buddher Dharma O Darshan*, Sritara Press, Calcutta, 1974, p-6.
- [14] S.P. Talukdar, *The Chakmas: An Embattled Tribe*, New Delhi: Uppal Publishing House, 1994, p-38.
- [15] Dr. Prajnalankar Bikkhu, *Buddhism in Chittagong Hill Tracts: Past and Present*, Swaranika, Coxton Printer, Agartala, 2008, p-82.
- [16] Indralal Chakma (ed), *Malem tara Artasar*, Sibali Offset Press, Rangamati, p-13.
- [17] *ibid*, p-13.
- [18] Bankim Krishna Dewan, *Chakma Puja Parban*, Tribal Research Institute, Rangamati, 1989, p-4.
- [19] *Ibid*, p-5.
- [20] Dharmadhar Mahastavir, op. cit., p-6.
- [21] Dr. Prajnalankar Bikkhu, op. cit., p-83.
- [22] L. B. Chakma, *A Brief Sketch of the Chakmas*, 1997 *Aalam*, Vol. II, Chakma Autonomous District Council, Kamalanagar, page-59-98.
- [23] Dr. Heinz Bechert, op. cit., p-13.
- [24] C. R. Chakma, *Chakma In Ages (Medieval Period)*, 1988, Pustak Bipani, Calcutta, p-28.
- [25] Bankim Chandra Chakma, *Chakma Somaj O Sansskriti (Society And Culture Of The Chakmas)*, 1998, Tribal Cultural Institute, Rangamati, p-20.
- [26] Dr. Heinz Bechert, op. cit, p-12.
- [27] Biraj Mohan Dewan, *Chakma Jatir Itibritta (The History of Chakma Tribe)*, 1969, Saroj Art Press, Rangamati, p-216.
- [28] Bankim Chandra Chakma, op. cit., p-20.
- [29] Dr. Heinz Bechert, op. cit, p-13.
- [30] Jeevansar Bikkhu, *Surjyobangsa O Chakma Raj Bijag*, Rafi Printers, Dhaka, 2007, p-76.
- [31] Dharmadhar Mahastavir, op. cit., p-17.
- [32] Dr. Prajnalankar Bikkhu, op. cit., p-86, Dharmadhar, op. cit., pp- 17-18.
- [33] Prajnalankar Bikkhu, op. cit., p-87, Dharmadhar, Lop Cit. p-18.
- [34] Lop Cit.
- [35] Prajnalankar Bikkhu, op. cit., p-87.
- [36] *ibid*, p-86, Dharmadhar, op. cit., p-18, Bechert, op. cit., p-6.
- [37] Lop Cit.
- [38] *ibid*, p-7.
- [39] <http://www.parami.org/duta/bangla.htm>, 02,09,2009.
- [40] Heinz Bechert, op. cit., p-7.
- [41] S.P. Talukdar, op. cit., p-134.
- [42] Prajnalankar, op. cit., p-87.
- [43] *Tirokuddha Suttang*.
- [44] P.K. Mohanty, *Encyclopedia of Scheduled Tribe in India*, Vol. V, Isha Books, New Delhi, 2006.
- [45] *Gojhenalama* is a hymn written by Sib Charan, an ascetic poet. It was written in Chakma dialect mixing with distorted form of Bengali. *Gojhenalama* is a book of prayer to god in a narrative form. There are seven *Lamas (parts)* in all in the *Gojhenalama*.
- [46] *Chandobi Baromash* and *Chtira Rekha Baromash* written by Dharma Dhan and Pushpa Mani respectively throw political, social, economical and religious life of the Chakmas. Basically, *Baromash* is a lyrical description of love story of particular legendary Chakma women. There are more than seven famous *Baromash* prevalent in the Chakma society.
- [47] Prajiti Kuamr Palit, *History of Religion in Tripura*, Kaveri Books, New Delhi, 2004, p-183

# Who is Mr Roy?

By - NALORI DHAMMEI CHAKMA

I guess he is becoming a fading memory. And in fact the existence of him as a “Chakma Raja” is virtually unknown to the present Chakma generation who are moving ahead at a faster rate in the 21st century. Taking pride on my heritage, about our scripture, my culture, religion, language, I wouldn't want to let go of this fact that we the Chakmas have a King of our own— RAJA TRIDIV ROY. A king is such an impeccable figure that it will be heartrending for such a figure to fade away from our memory.

The present Chakma King is Raja Devashish Roy. He was crowned in 1971 when his father RAJA TRIDIV ROY opted to remain with Pakistan when Bangladesh got its independence in 1971. Raja Tridiv Roy was born on 14th may 1933. His tenure as a Chakma raja was from 1952-1971. He served as a Federal Minister in the Government of Pakistan and Pakistan's Ambassador to Mexico; he was conferred the emblems of the Sri Lankan Ranjana National Award; leader of the All Pakistan Buddhist Association; author of “The Departed Melody”, a book on the history and culture of the people of the Hill Tracts and the Chakma Rajas. There are heaps of unsettling questions to why a Raja of so much talent and grandeur settled in Pakistan and left his people in such an unsettling situation in Bangladesh. I am not in a state to judge (or rather I am 'not suitable' to judge) on this issue but I am definitely going to put on some light towards this for the reason that like me there must be hundreds among the community who are quizzical about Raja Tridev Roy's settlement in Pakistan.

As seen in pictures, the 77-year old Raja Roy is graying with a lot of grace, keeping a lot to himself. Raja Roy is a mystery to me. The calm and obscurity behind this face seem to me as if there

In an interview to The Hindu in 2009, Raja Tridev Roy stated that he left East Pakistan on November 11th, 1971 much before the actual Bangladesh Liberation war began.

are hundreds of tales to tell us and pass on the wisdom to his people. I will always wonder as to why he left his people in such an upheaval state, after all what is a king without his subjects? No doubt there must have been disappointment among the Chakmas when he let them down by leaving for West Pakistan in the year 1971. But I believe that we have come a long way since then, as a Chakma community. The people of CHT have learned to endure the tortures and the harassment since then.

There is a popular notion that ‘Mr. Roy ran off to west Pakistan after the surrender of Pakistani forces on December 16th’. I personally feel that this claim is bogus and nothing but a rumor. A person with such substantial illustrious achievements cannot be so fragile. In *THE HINDU*, a leading national daily in India, an article on Raja Roy on the December 16th 2009 by Nirupama Subramanian was published; there he said that he left East Pakistan on November 11th, 1971 much before the war began. However, Bangladesh did made early attempts to reclaim Mr. Roy when he went to New York as a Pakistani delegation in 1972 but then he refused. So the only question here is why Raja Roy turned down this one opportunity he was given to be with his people in his own land.

He kept away from the Chakma issue for the last 39 years. He said that he is concerned about the Chakmas but not involved in any of the Chakma politics; there are no political groups who seek advice from him nor does he give any advice of their conduct. Human beings get



Installation of Raja Tridiv Roy as Chakma king: Photo by Lt Col Angus Hume, Deputy Commissioner of the CHT, East Pakistan. PHOTO courtesy: www.chakmaraj.com

accustomed to its surroundings in time. They say time heals all wounds. The hurt and the disappointment of the Chakma community towards Raja Roy are long gone; now is the era where the Chakmas are going beyond the original caliber to find a result to their problems. Though Raja Roy must have made a home out of the place he chose to be; he must have been forlorn all these years. A person is not complete without its people after all 'our people are our identity'.

All these years Raja Roy never visited his home place, Rangamati, Chittagong hill tracts. It's time for the king and his people to bring back its long lost bond to show the world a glimpse of our tribe's ethnicity and the problems which we are facing from every corner. Certainly we need to seek out for Raja Roy. Raja Roy who is a character of a distinguished personality shouldn't be forgotten from the hearts of the Chakmas. For decades the people of CHT are facing a lot of atrocities in their land; perhaps this is the time for Raja Roy to step in and make a difference. There is always time for new beginnings. ■

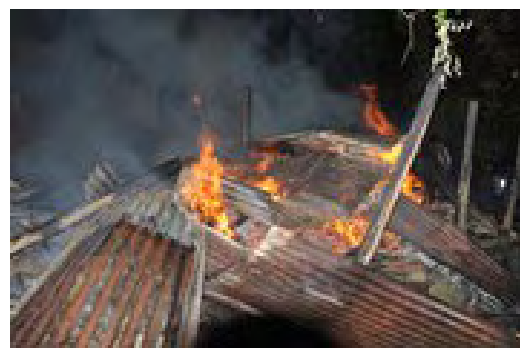
(The writer is an Assistant Editor, The Chakma Voice. The views expressed are of the author)

## Chakma Rajbari gutted

In a tragic and mysterious fire that engulfed the residence of Chakma Raja Devasish Roy in Rangamati, CHT on the night of 10 November 2010, almost everything was burnt into ashes.

The Rajbari was totally destroyed. The losses were irreparable.

Chakma Circle Heritage Council has been formed to reconstruct the palace.





# Let's know our own scripts

By- Cidhon Bor Tunya Chakma, France

The Chakmas have their own scripts (“Arog”). But the question is: Can we read our own scripts? Our language is incomplete without the scripts which together are our identity. First of all, I would like to note the differences between Sangma (Chakma) and Burmish alphabets. Then, the digits and « joda okkor » will be shown. At the end, Ojhapath'un, Prononciation and « ekar-okar » or the vowel signs will be described.

Differences between sujoyan (designed by Sujoy Changma), chadigang (designed by Hogendro-Changma (Hagendra Chakma)) fonts, and burmish alphabet:

Sujoyan	ᳵ	ᳶ	᳷	᳸	᳹	ᳺ	᳻	᳼	᳽	᳾
Chadigang	ᳶ	᳷	᳸	᳹	ᳺ	᳻/᳼	᳽	᳾	᳿	ᳺ
Burmish	ᳵ	ᳶ	᳷	᳸	᳹	ᳺ	᳻	᳼	᳽	᳾
Transcription	ka	kha	ga	gha	nga	ca	cha	ja	jha	gna

Sujoyan	ᳶ	᳷	᳸	᳹	ᳺ	᳻	᳼	᳽	᳾	᳿
Chadigang	ᳶ	᳷	᳸	᳹	ᳺ	᳻	᳼	᳽	᳾	᳿
Burmish	ᳶ	᳷	᳸	᳹	ᳺ	᳻	᳼	᳽	᳾	᳿-ᳺ
Transcription	ta	tha	da	dha	na	ta	tha	da	dha	na

Sujoyan	ᳶ	᳷	᳸	᳹	ᳺ	᳻	᳼	᳽	᳾	᳿
Chadigang	ᳶ	᳷	᳸	᳹	ᳺ	᳻	᳼	᳽	᳾	᳿
Burmish	ᳶ	᳷	᳸	᳹	ᳺ	᳻	᳼	᳽	᳾	᳿
Transcription	pa	fa	ba	va	ma	za	ra	la	ha	sa



Sujoyan	ᳶ	᳷	᳸	᳹	ᳺ					
Chadigang	ᳶ	᳷	᳸	᳹	ᳺ					
Burmish	ᳶ	᳷								
Transcription	ya	a	e	i	oa	u				

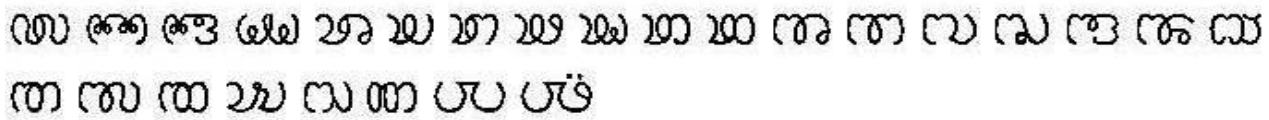
**The digits are:**

Sujoyan	୪	୨	୭	୧	୩	୫	୬	୮	୯	୦
Chadigang	୧	୨	୩	୪	୫	୬	୭	୮	୯	୦
pronociation	eg	dui	tin	cer	paj	cho	sat	adtyo	noi	cunyo
Burmish	୦	୧	୨	୩	୪	୫	୬	୭	୮	୯
Transcription	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0



**« joda okkor » the old « style »**

For example the sound

« nna =  » or « kla =  »...







































But in modern style, one writes, for example, the sound « konna » like this

«  » instead «  ».

**Ojhapath'un:** old and new consonants

A buddhist monk of Rangamadtya (Rangamati), Sroddhalongkar Bhikkhu (Sradhdhalangkar Bhikkhu) has designed the following as Nuoram Changma (Chakma) has done it before him:

				
Chucengya-ka	guzongya-ka	chandya-ga	tin dhelya-gha	cilamo-nga
				
Di dhelya-ca	mojora-cha	di podola-ja	urho-urhi-jha	ciloc ya-gna
				
Diyadat-ta	fudo diyat-tha	adu vanga-da	lej vorat-dha	pedtua-na
				
Ghongodat-ta	jogodat-tha	dolonit-da	tolmuat-dha	far banya-na
				
Palya-pa	ubor fadala-fa	ubor muo-ba	cer dhelya-va	bug 'ot padala-ma
				
Jilya-za	di dajya-ra	tolmuo-la	vudi vughya-sa	ubor muo-ha
				
Cimujya-ya	pekfujua	delvanga-i	lej ubo-u	laye-e
				
		bajo nya-oa		

## Pronunciation

sangma	ᄁ	ᄂ	ᄃ	ᄄ	ᄅ
	ᄁᄂᄃᄄᄅ	ᄂᄃᄄᄅᄆ	ᄃᄄᄅᄆᄇ	ᄄᄅᄆᄇᄈ	ᄅᄆᄇᄈᄉ
transcription	chuscengya-ka	guzongya-kha	chandya-ga	tin-dhelya-gha	cilamo-nga

sangma	ᄆ	ᄇ	ᄈ	ᄉ	ᄊ
	ᄆᄇᄈᄉᄊ	ᄇᄈᄉᄊᄋ	ᄈᄉᄊᄋᄌ	ᄉᄊᄋᄌᄍ	ᄊᄋᄌᄍᄎ
transcription	di-dhelya-ca	mojora-cha	di-fodola-ja	urho-urhi-jha	cilocya-gna

sangma	ᄋ	ᄌ	ᄍ	ᄎ	ᄏ
	ᄋᄌᄍᄎᄏ	ᄌᄍᄎᄏᄐ	ᄍᄎᄏᄐᄑ	ᄎᄏᄐᄑᄒ	ᄏᄐᄑᄒᄓ
transcription	diyadat-ta	fudo-diyat-tha	adu-vanga-da	lej-vorat-dha	pedtua-na

sangma	ᄐ	ᄑ	ᄒ	ᄓ	ᄔ
	ᄐᄑᄒᄓᄔ	ᄑᄒᄓᄔᄕ	ᄒᄓᄔᄕᄌ	ᄓᄔᄕᄌᄍ	ᄔᄕᄌᄍᄎ
transcription	gongodat-ta	jogodat-tha	dolonit-da	tol-muat-dha	far-banya-na

sangma	ᄕ	ᄌ	ᄍ	ᄎ	ᄏ
	ᄕᄌᄍᄎᄏ	ᄌᄍᄎᄏᄐᄑ	ᄍᄎᄏᄐᄑᄒ	ᄎᄏᄐᄑᄒᄓ	ᄏᄐᄑᄒᄓᄔ
transcription	palya-pa	ubor-fodola-fa	ubor-muo-ba	cer-dhelya-va	bug'ot-fodola-ma

sangma	ᄕ/ᄌ	ᄌ/ᄍ	ᄍ	ᄎ	ᄏ
	ᄕᄌᄍᄎᄏ	ᄌᄍᄎᄏᄐᄑᄒ	ᄍᄎᄏᄐᄑᄒᄓ	ᄎᄏᄐᄑᄒᄓᄔ	ᄏᄐᄑᄒᄓᄔᄕ
transcription	zilya-za	di-darjya-ra	tol-muo-la	ubor-muo-ha	vudi-vughya-sa

sangma	ᄕ	ᄌ	ᄍ	ᄎ	ᄏ	ᄐ
	ᄕᄌᄍᄎᄏᄐᄑᄒ	ᄌᄍᄎᄏᄐᄑᄒᄓᄔᄕ	ᄍᄎᄏᄐᄑᄒᄓᄔᄕᄌ	ᄎᄏᄐᄑᄒᄓᄔᄕᄌᄍ	ᄏᄐᄑᄒᄓᄔᄕᄌᄍᄎ	ᄐᄑᄒᄓᄔᄕᄌᄍᄎᄏ
transcription	cimujya-ya	pekfuju-a	laye-e	dhel-vanga-i	Bajonya-oa/ wa	lej-ubo-u



« Ekar-okar » or vowel signs are:

Sujoyan	ᳵ	ᳶ		᳷	᳸	᳹	ᳺ	᳻
Chadigang	ᳶ	᳷	᳸	᳹	ᳺ	᳻	᳼	᳽
Trascription	Egfudo-kang	dhelavanga-kai	rofola-kra	hofola-kha	ubortulya-ko	ekar-ke	oafola-koa/kwa	chandfudo-kä

Sujoyan	᳼	᳽	᳾				᳿	ᳺ
Chadigang	᳼	᳽	᳾	᳿	ᳺ	᳻	᳼	᳽
Trascription	egthan-ku	dithan-kuu	bani-ki	bani-fudo-kii	okar-ko	oikar-koi	Mazya path - k	zofola-kya

With the « mazya-path », for example, we will have the following transcriptions of the Ojhapath.

mazya-path	᳾	᳿	ᳺ	᳻	᳼	᳽	᳾/᳿	ᳺ	᳻	᳼
transcription	k	kh	g	gh	ng	c	ch	j	jh	gn

mazya-path	᳾	᳿	ᳺ	᳻	᳼	᳽	᳾	᳿	ᳺ	᳻
transcription	t	th	d	dh	n	t	th	d	dh	n

mazya-path	᳾	᳿	ᳺ	᳻	᳼	᳽/᳾	᳾/᳿	ᳺ	᳻	᳼
transcription	p	f	b	v	m	z	r	l	h	s

mazya-path	᳾	᳿	ᳺ	᳻	᳼	᳽	᳾	᳿
transcription	y	o	e	i	o	u		

(The writer is based in France)

# Straight talk on Chakma language/script in Tripura



In this well researched article, KUSUM KANTI CHAKMA tells us how the Chakma language and script in Tripura face gross indifference and neglect not only from the government but also from the Advisory Committee for Development of Chakma Language whose members are all Chakmas.

Chakma script is a symbol of Indian civilization. Yet, it is horribly neglected. If Indian government can spend crores and crores of rupees to safeguard its heritage, why can't it spend some lakhs to protect the endangered Chakma language/script?

The preservation of Chakma language is extremely important. Article 29(1) of the Indian Constitution says that – “Any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same.” Therefore, the Centre as well as the state governments must come forward to protect the Chakma language and script.

History has scattered the Chakmas. In the 14th century, a group of Chakmas stayed back in the Arakan hills of Myanmar and they came to be known as “Doinakye”. They call us (Chakmas of India and Bangladesh) “Aanakye”, meaning “those who reside in the west” (to Myanmar). In 16-17th century a group of “Doinakye” came from Arakan and joined us and they came to be known as “Tongchangya”. During 1947 our land was divided at will. A part of land fell under Tripura, a part under Mizoram. The CHT was given to Muslim Pakistan against the will of the people. In 1964, nearly 40,000 Chakmas turned into refugees in Arunachal Pradesh (then NEFA) in India after their land went under the waters of Kaptai dam. According to locations the Chakmas’ food habits, dress, dialect got influenced. But two things have remained constant – the religion and the Chakma script. Like the Aanakye, the Tongchangya and Doinakye also use the same Chakma script. So our script is our identity and medium for unity.

One community cannot have two different scripts. If this happens, there will be division amongst us. If we use Bengali, Chakmas in Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh won't be able to read. And, if they write in Roman scripts, it is not comfortable with

## 1. Introduction:

The population of Chakmas in Tripura is about one lakh which is 3% of the state's population. Amongst the 19 tribal groups in the state, Chakmas are numerically the second (12.5%) and linguistically the third largest. Majority Chakmas inhabit in Dergang, Manugang, Fenigang and neighbouring villages. Historically, Chakmas' existence in Tripura can be traced to the reign of Raja Krishna Manikyā (17th AD). Even though Chakmas have made progress in education, they have not been to achieve coveted posts. There are only 15 Tripura Civil Service/Tripura Police Service, 4 college lecturers, 1 advocate but no Indian Administrative Service officer. Politically they are most backward. Chakmas are numerically in a position to decide the fate of candidates in 4-5 Member of District Council (MDC)/ Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) constituencies but they are not able to win more than one seat. Chakma political leaders are dependent on the non-Chakma leaders who do not give opportunity to Chakma leaders to climb the political ladder. Hence, Chakma politicians instead of giving priority to Chakmas' interests are more concerned about how to keep their political bosses happy. This shapes the policy and situation of the Chakmas in general and the Chakma language/script in particular.

## 2. Why Chakma language/script is important?

India has over 1,000 languages but only some 20 of these have scripts which they can call their own. This means that most major Indian languages which do not have their own scripts express themselves either in Roman (English) or Devanagiri (Hindi) or Bengali scripts. Chakma language is unique in that it has its own script.

Chakmas in Tripura and Bangladesh. Divided scripts will divide us further.

Educationalists have noted that education in the mother tongue of the child is most effective. Hence, we have been trying to introduce Chakma mother tongue at primary level. And, to teach Chakma mother tongue, Chakma script is essential. Chakma expressions cannot be properly written in other scripts including Bengali.

In India's census, Chakma has been recorded as a branch of Bengali. With a population of only 25 persons, Andermanese language is noted in the census. So is Khamiyang, Godavari, West Gurung, Onge, Mugom. These tiny languages have not more than 100 speakers. On the other hand, despite having speakers of more than 4 lakhs, Chakma language is not recognized as a distinct language. Even the Commissioner of Linguistic Minorities of India does not consider Chakma as a "classified language". This is mainly because Chakmas use Bengali in written communications.

### 3. The movement for Chakma language/script in Tripura

There is no any movement for Chakma language/script in Tripura as such. Rather, demands are made on ad hoc basis and petitions/representations are submitted from time to time.

Sometimes it appears amazing that Chakmas are demanding Chakma language/script from Chakmas! This is because the state government of Tripura has stated that it has no objection with Chakma language being taught in schools if the Advisory Committee for Development of Chakma Language (hereafter Advisory Committee) under the Tribal Language Cell

agrees to this!

When for the first time in 1974-75, Mohini Mohan Chakma and others demanded introduction of Chakma language in schools they didn't have Bengali script in mind. The problem surfaced on 11 November 1983 when the state government appointed Anil Kumar Chakma, then Member, Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council, as Chairman of the Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee de-

India has over 1,000 languages but only some 20 of these have scripts of their own. Chakma script is a symbol of Indian civilization. Yet, it is horribly neglected. If Indian government can spend crores and crores of rupees to safeguard its heritage, why can't it spend some lakhs to protect the endangered Chakma language/script?

decided to introduce Chakma language but there was no press to print the books in Chakma script. It was at this time that the demand for Bengali script was made. The Advisory Committee held a conference at Machmara on 21-22 January 1984 to discuss the issue. At the conference, all supported the Chakma script. Yet Chakma language/script failed to take off during the tenure of Anil Kumar Chakma (TTAADC Member, 1983-88).

During 1988-92, Tripura was ruled by Congress-TUJS coali-

tion government. Sushil Kumar Chakma was the lone MLA from Chakma community. He did make some efforts but he too failed.

In 1993, Anil Kumar Chakma returned as MLA. The most significant turn took place in the Chakma language/script movement at this time. On 8 October 1993, four decisions were adopted at the Advisory Committee meeting: (1) Publication of books in Chakma language and appeal to government for official recognition of Chakma script, (2) to send a team to Chakma Autonomous District Council, Mizoram to gather their experiences, (3) to bring on deputation 2 Chakma language experts into the Tribal Language Cell (TLC) and (4) to shift the office of TLC to a new location.

Surprisingly, the first two decisions were never implemented. Instead, the state government vide letter No. F.19(8-11)-DSE/88 (2-3)/850-58, dated Agartala, the 05 September 1995 announced that Chakma subject will be taught in Bengali script! There was disapproval all around. Incidentally, All India Chakma Cultural Conference was held at Perchartal on 11-12 November 1995. The election for TTAADC was nearby. Anil Kumar Chakma reportedly rushed to meet Chief Minister Dasharat Dev, and Education Minister Anil Sarkar. Anil Sarkar, without consultation with the Cabinet, assured Anil Kumar Chakma that Chakma script will be introduced up to Class III. Government notice No. F.19(8-11)-DSE/88(L-3)/1061-73, dated Agartala the 02-11-1995 was issued in this regard. At the Advisory Committee meeting held on 13-11-1995, it was decided to recommend the book "Chakma Patam Paidye" to the Education



department. The print media was abuzz with the news and announcement to the effect of adoption of Chakma script was made in the radio. But neither the book nor the Chakma script was introduced as of date. The Chakma community was left anguished, disappointed and bruised. The Advisory Committee on 10 August 1998 secretly decided to embrace the Bengali script. The government quickly agreed to the proposal vide letter No. 256/Min/Edu/99 dated 01-04-99. Thereafter, Chakma language in Bengali script was introduced for the first time in 9 schools on 21 May 2004. Presently, Chakma language in Bengali script is being taught in total 58 schools in Chakma areas. But no teacher has been appointed while the Advisory Committee pays no heed to it.

Some of the reasons why the Chakma language/script is a non-starter are discussed below:

**Chakmas' enslaved mentality:** Chakmas are heavily influenced by others' culture, political and economic views. As a result, "Radhaman" has become "Radha Mohan" and "Pejaattol" has become "Pechartal". If our meetings are attended by a single non-Chakma, we do not speak Chakma in the meeting. If "they" do not understand, it won't help, we tend to say. If the demand for Chakma script is raised at any meeting or seminar, our Advisory Committee members remind us that "If we start demanding too much, we will end up losing even what we present have got". Because of this Chakmas can't demand anything, not to speak of Chakma language/script.

**Inefficient Advisory Committee:** A change in the ruling party will see change in the Advisory Committee chairperson and other members. The members are hand-picked by the Chairperson and of-

ten such members are appointed who have neither the expertise nor the appetite for the job.

**Members can't read/write the Chakma scripts:** Majority of the members in the Advisory Committee can't cipher the Chakma script and they have no genuine love and affection for the Chakma script. When the responsibility rests upon such members who can't read or write Chakma script, it is only natural that publication of books in Chakma script does not inspire them. There is conspiracy to disappear the text books written in Chakma from the Tribal Language Cell office. For example, two text books for Class I namely "Sadarak" by Chitra Malika Chakma and Gangajoy Chakma, and "Ganit" (Arithmetic) by Anil Kumar Chakma and Fuleswar Chakma which were handed over to the Advisory Committee on 15-10-1987 have gone missing.

Now let's see who has told what about the adoption of Bengali scripts for Chakma language. Below are view points of three parties:

**SCERT:** The Chakma Language Development Advisory Committee works through the State Council for Educational Research and Training (SCERT). The SCERT is responsible for preparation of textbooks in Bengali, Kokborok, Chakma, Bishnupriya Manipuri, Manipuri etc. The Director of SCERT in his reply to an RTI query vide No.F.21(3-1)-TLC/SCERT/97(L)/6049, dated 25-03-2008 informed the Tripura Chakma Students Association that Bengali script has been adopted for the Chakma

In March 2008, the SCERT Director claimed that Bengali script has been adopted for the Chakma language at the behest of the Advisory Committee. Earlier in October 2007, the same claim was made by then Education Minister Keshab Majumdar. If this is not true, why is the Advisory Committee silent?

language at the behest of the Advisory Committee. Earlier, the same was stated by then Education Minister Keshab Majumdar to Chakma youths who submitted a deputation to him on 17 October 2007. The Education Minister even stated that if the Advisory Committee advises the state government to adopt Chakma script, the state government will have to problem with it.

**Members of Advisory Committee:** The Advisory Committee consists of nine members, one Chairperson and one Convenor (Shyamali Debbarma, Deputy Director, SCERT). None of them oppose Chakma script openly. They say that they also want introduction of Chakma script but if the government does not agree what can they do?

**Chairperson of the Advisory Committee:** The Chairperson is a respected MLA. He too does not oppose Chakma script. A group of Chakma leaders including MAADI representative Kusum Chakma, Anirudda Chakma and Pradip Chakma from the Tripura Chakma Students Association went to meet the Chairperson at his Machmara residence with

regard to the statement made by Education Minister Keshab Debbarma on 17 October 2007. When he was confronted with the statement of Education Minister that it was the Advisory Committee which recommended Bengali script, the chairperson shot back – “If Chakma script is adopted who will teach? Give me Chakma language certified teacher, I will introduce the Chakma script instantly.” Thereafter, with the help of CADC, a three-month Chakma language certificate course was started at Little Flower School at Pechartal on 5 January 2008. 38 matriculates passed the Chakma language certificate course. Yet, on 12 September 2010 our respected MLA and Chairperson stated that a three-month certificate course is not enough. He claimed that there are no scholars to teach the Chakma subject to the students! It needs to be told here that a simple matriculate is enough to teach Kokborok and Bishnipriya Manipuri language subjects. Then, why scholars are needed to teach the Chakma subject?

#### 4. The way forward:

From the above narrative it is evident that the Advisory Committee has definitely tough questions to answer. Instead of leading from the front in the demand for the Chakma script, the chairperson of the Advisory Committee has been taking elusive and oscillatory stands. Some members in the Committee even fear to raise the issue but they won't resign from their posts. One member even won't mind humiliating any one who will raise the issue in the open forum. Bimal Mamen Chakma, Fuleswar Chakma (both former members of Advisory Committee) and Kusum Kanti Chakma did not escape humiliation from the member. This is despite the fact that he is aware about the mistakes committed by the Manipuris who had embraced the Bengali script. They now along with the state gov-

ernment are trying to use their own script instead of Bengali but are facing challenges.

The need of the moment is to extract an assurance from the Advisory Committee regarding adoption of the Chakma script. This effort has already begun. On 31 October 2010, representation was made to every member of the Committee. Representations have also been made on 28 November 2010 along with collection of signatures of the general public and another will be made on 25 December 2010. If this is not enough, then we will have to carry out sit-in protests, fasting, and demonstration in front of the houses of the members of the Committee. The movement could see a huge motor cycle rally in the entire Chakma inhabited areas in Tripura in February 2011. If the Advisory Committee passes a resolution with regard to demand for Chakma scripts, then the next step will be taken.

It is true that only to officially introduce Chakma script is not enough. If majority Chakmas themselves are not able to read and write in Chakma script, if writers do not use it, if books and newspapers are not published in Chakma script then mere official recognition of Chakma script would mean little. ■

(The writer is a poet and columnist. He is a Member of Publication Board of MAADI, a monthly newspaper in Chakma language published from Dharmanagar, Tripura. He is also a Member of Advisory Committee of Tripura Chakma Students' Association.)

## Read “MAADI”



“MAADI” is a monthly newspaper in Chakma language published from Dharmanagar, Tripura. It is a wonderful effort from the Chakmas of Tripura to promote the Chakma language. Presently, the newspaper is written in two scripts—Bengali and Chakma. It is edited by Dangu Debal Chakma and Dangu Matilal Chakma.

It is priced Rs 5 (five) only.

The contact details are as follows:

*Email:*  
chakmamaadi11@ymail.cm,  
*Phone Nos. -*  
9436721772/9436482808/  
9436535883

The Chakma Voice of MCDF and MAADI cooperate with each other in exchange of information. MCDF feels that this relationship is very very special and useful. We at MCDF wishes MAADI all the best in their endeavours to promote the Chakma language and literature.

## Being a Chakma is special



**VICTOR TALUKDAR** tells us why being a Chakma is a special feeling despite Chakmas being victims of all kinds of suppression and oppression in this world

Being a Chakma is a special feeling. Apparently it is a feeling which every individual feels for his own race or nation. The Chakma way of life is do distinct and so beautiful which only a Chakma can feel, admire and appreciate. That is what being a Chakma is all about. Imagine how the sight of a woman in traditional Chakma attire in a cosmopolitan city attracts your attention and generates instant charm. Similarly the sound of two individuals speaking to each other in Chakma language in a busy market place leaves you inquisitive and eager to befriend with them. The special feeling of bond and the experience of pull is intrinsic because of the sense of being a Chakma.

Every race and nation of the world has some distinct common characteristics that establish their identity and to which they associate pride. It is evident that we Chakmas across the world also have some common traits that show similitude and resemblance and at the same time these traits also distinguish us from other races and nations of the globe.

The Chakma language by which the 21st century Chakma community across the globe communicates can be considered the most important

element that identifies and defines a Chakma. The Chakma language is a distinct and indigenous language of richness. One million Chakmas on the globe communicate using the language. However the Chakma language is changing with time and is losing its original vocabulary and is being influenced by other languages. Being a Chakma we must encourage measures towards preservation and promotion of the use of Chakma language and literature.

It is a common belief among the Chakma that we belong to the Sakya clan to which the Great Lord Buddha was born. No wonder why 99% Chakmas are Buddhist and follow the noble teachings of the Lord Buddha in our daily life. The Buddhist principles provide us spiritual and inner strength to follow the path of non-violence, peace and prosperity despite economic, political and social challenges. Being a Chakma we should embrace and propagate the teachings of the Great Lord Buddha and through Buddhism we must unite and bring social changes for the prosperity of the Chakma nation of the world.

The Chakma script is our pride. The Arog is the script used to write the Chakma language. It is the element that establishes the fact that Chakmas are an advanced civilization and knew the art of writing from ages. The

art of writing has been used to preserve our knowledge from ages so that it can be passed on to the next generation. The best example is the use of Chakma script to preserve the knowledge of medicine in the form of Taalik. However, the use of the Chakma script in the modern times is almost lost and limited only to the use by the traditional practitioners of medicine. Therefore, being a Chakma we must encourage measures to promote the language and use of the learning and use of the Chakma script in order to preserve our heritage.

Another very important element that establishes our similitude is our distinct food habits and taste. One of the ingredients that is common to the Chakma kitchens across the globe is the fish paste called Sidol. Sidol is used for cooking the dishes that soothes the Chakma taste buds. A meal without a Sidol-dish for a Chakma is incomplete. The taste of fish paste and other fish products is inherent in Chakmas across the globe and it reflects the Chakma way of life and culture.

The original territories of settlement of the Chakmas have always been along the rivers and the hills. This is a well known characteristic of the Chakma way of life. Due to the traditional jhum cultivation the Chakma people shift the cultivation site every year but after the harvest season they return to their village. Because of



Chakmas believe themselves to be descendents of the Sakya clan to which the Lord Buddha was born. No wonder why 99% Chakmas are Buddhists. The Buddhist principles provide us spiritual and inner strength to follow the path of non-violence, peace and prosperity despite economic, political and social challenges.

Being amiable, peaceful, helpful and adaptable to change are the characteristic features of a Chakma.

the practice of jhum cultivation it has often been assumed that Chakmas are nomadic tribes. However being a Chakma we should realize and establish the fact that we are not a nomadic tribe but a civilized civil society.

The inter-winding relationships and kinships are also a unique characteristic of the Chakma community. When we introduce ourselves and our clan and sub-clan (Goja-Gutti), someway or the other each and every Chakma is related to the other. It is so wonderful when you reveal your identity and find a relationship that you were never aware of before. Therefore being a Chakma we should know about our Goja-Gutti and should try to find out relationships and nurture these relationships according to the traditional norms and therefore strengthen the Chakma brotherhood across the globe.

The Chakma traditional attires (Pinon-Haadi) are one of the best in the world. Every beautiful Chakma girl knows that she looks best in no other attire than the Pinon-Haadi. It

is worn by Chakma women with pride and enthusiasm. The color and patterns of our traditional Chakma attire has been appreciated by not only Chakmas but have also been recognized by others on numerous prestigious social occasions by declaring it as Most Beautiful Dress. Thanks to Soz-Podor for beautifying the Chakma women across the globe and inspiring thousands of Chakma women to wear their true colours with pride. Being a Chakma we should promote our identity through dress, culture, values and tradition.

The partition of 1947 is the black blot on the fate of our Chakma Community. Our history, present and future would have been totally different had we not been politically divided. It is a common belief in the Chakmas across the globe that we are victims of the partition of 1947. Thousands of Chakmas feel nostalgic about the beautiful life of togetherness and harmony. We must not be discouraged and must bravely face the struggles and hardship of life and bring prosperity and advancement in our lives. At the same time we must not forget about our brothers and sisters who are deprived of their basic human rights. Being a Chakma we must be socially and politically aware and ready. We must encourage selfless endeavors by individuals and organizations that devote time and energy for the reconstruction of the Great Chakma Dream of a life of basic human rights, equality and dignity. Such a Great Chakma Dream demands blood, energy and time. Being a Chakma we must not wait till we are asked to contribute, but we should contribute before we are asked for.

Another Characteristic of our Chakma community is our helpful nature. Chakmas always participate in social causes and help each other in time of need. We assemble and get together in times of religious occasions, in the times of festivals and other important social events of birth, marriage and death. We always help each other in the hour of need. There is a popular proverb in Chakma language- "Bala dhaarey leh, bala Paay", which means if we help someone in advance we shall also receive help in the hour of need. Therefore we must all keep this Chakma Helping Spirit alive and practice it in our lives despite busy schedules, dead-lines and time-tables. Being a Chakma we must build on this social network to help someone in advance, just like the popular Networking Business theory of Pay-it-Forward.

The over-flowing hospitality is another characteristic of our Chakma society. Chakmas' hospitality is very well known and is considered to be an important element of a happy and disciplined family. The status of a guest in Chakma homes is equivalent to a God. The Chakmas greet their guests with utmost affection and respect, and take great care of their food, clothing and shelter during their entire stay. Chakmas are not accustomed to staying in hotels and prefer to stay at the house of a friend or relation when away from home.

The nature of being amiable, peaceful and adaptable to change is a very important trait of being a Chakma. The Chakmas are very simple, shy and amiable people.



A Chakma woman in Mizoram weaving traditional clothes. Photo: MCDF

The Chakma etiquette teaches to be polite and stay dignified in all situations. Chakmas are Buddhist and follow the Panchasheel prescribed by the Great Lord Buddha for the practice by the common people. If strict adherence to the five principles is not possible, the basic principles are followed by the majority and it ensures a harmonious and dignified social life. Being fast learners of languages and the inherent sociable nature make the Chakmas highly adaptable to the different cultures across the globe. Being a Chakma we must follow the Panchasheel and peacefully co-exist with the other cultures of the world and spread Lord Buddha's message of world peace.

Chakmas hold great respect for the old and relationships and kinship. Service to the old is considered to bring blessings to enhance the beauty of a youth according to the Traditional Chakma Wisdom. Relationships and kinship also holds great importance in the Chakma society. An individual may be

smaller in age but is considered with respect because of his position in the relationship hierarchy. Being a Chakma we must respect the old and preserve the institution of relationship and kinship according to the traditional conventions and practice.

One of the unique characteristic of the Chakma society is the gender equality practiced for generations. The Chakma women are independent and enjoy equal rights and freedom in the society. The Chakma women play important role in the family and economic and agricultural activities, therefore they enjoy respect, command and dignity in the society and are considered equal in status in the society. The leadership of Queen Kalindi Rani is an example that displays the role and status enjoyed by women in the Chakma society. Being a Chakma we must treat women with respect and dignity and encourage them to equally par-

ticipate and contribute to the struggle and progress of the Chakma society.

Love for knowledge, art, sports, dance, poetry, music and folklores form an intrinsic part of the Chakma character. The Chakma are the masters of the hills and rivers and are very knowledgeable about the environment in which they live. They are highly skilled in farming, hunting and fishing. The Chakmas are physically very strong and display great talents in sports and athletics. The art, dance, music, poetry and folklores of the Chakmas is inspired by nature, beauty, love and romance.

Folk music is a major aspect of the Chakma culture. It includes romantic love songs known as *Ubageet*. The *Genguli* ballads relate incidents from the past. There are also epic poems like Radhamon-Dhonpudi. Being a Chakma we must enhance our knowledge about our culture, folklores and music and associate pride with our culture and encourage the talents and spread of our culture, tradition and heritage.

The characteristics of the Chakma way of life that are so virtuous and admirable are as a result of the teachings of the Great Lord Buddha that we have imbibed for ages. Knowingly or unknowingly the gemstones of Buddhism has been set in the Chakma way of life, just like the sapphires set on a gold necklace. Being a Chakma we must be aware of our identity and practice and preserve these characteristics. ■

(The writer is Assistant Editor, The Chakma Voice)

# Chronology of Chakma Kings and Queens

## Introduction: Legend & History

Raja Tridiv Roy, the 50th Chakma Raja, has written thus about the early history of the Chakma Rajas:

“The genesis of the line of the Chakma Rajas, like that of many others, is traced back to antiquity, where it becomes more legendary than historical. There is the traditional beginning with the story of the ruler in an ancient land, who belonged to the solar race. Such a beginning, however, does not, obfuscate the reality of the Chakma rulers and the Chakma nation since centuries past, as there are several references to them in a variety of historical literature covering the area and its neighbouring countries”...

[Raja Tridiv Roy, *The Departed Melody (Memoirs)*, PPA Publications, Islamabad, 2003, p. 28]

The Raja writes further:

“The indigenous peoples and nations of the Chittagong Hill Tracts were wholly independent, leading their traditional lives Under their traditional leaders from time immemorial. The first tenuous contacts with the outside world began in the time of The later Mughals, before which the region was terra incognita. Akbar the Great only began his annexation of Bengal in 1574. Shah Jahan appointed his son Governor of Bengal in 1639, and Shaista Khan annexed Chittagong in 1660. In any case, it is a historical fact that the larger parts of Chittagong and the Hill Tracts did not form part of the diwani of Chittagong that was transferred by the Mughals to the East India Company.” (Raja Tridiv Roy, *op. cit.*, p. 28)

## Raja Bhuvan Mohan Roy’s History of the Chakma Raj Family

One of the earliest historical writings on the Chakma Rajas is the “History of the Chakma Raj Family”, written by Raja Bhuvan Mohan Roy (great grandfather of the incumbent Chakma Raja Devasish), who starts thus:

“Long ago, there lived at the foot of the Himalayas, a Kshatriya king named Shakya, who had his capital at Kalpanagar. He was succeeded by his son Sudhanya. Of the three sons of King Sudhanya, one became an ascetic, another a Buddhist Bhikshu but the third son, Langaldhan, became king....”. (Raja Bhuvan Mohan Roy, “History of the Chakma Raj Family” in Muhammad Ishaq (ed.), *Bangladesh District Gazetteers: Chittagong Hill Tracts*, Ministry of Cabinet Affairs, Establishment Division, Government of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1975, p. 33. )

Raja Bhuvan then narrates the story of several kings and describes himself as the 48th Chakma Raja. The full list of the Chakma Rajas, as given by Raja Bhuvan Mohan Roy, is reproduced below:

King Shakya is the first known name of an ancestor of the Chaka Raja (1st Raja). Then came Sudhanya (2nd), then his third son Langaldhan (3rd), then his son Kshudrajit (4th), then his son Samudrajit (5th), who became a Buddhist monk and thus ended his dynasty. Next came King Shyamal (6th), originally Samudrajit’s minister, but also of the same clan as Samudrajit, who left Kalpanagar and founded a new kingdom on south-eastern border of the Himalayas. Then came Shyamal’s son, Champakali (7th), who founded a new city on the eastern bank of the Irrawadi and named it Champaknagar. Then came Champakali’s son Sadanggiri (8th), who is known to have left this world and attained salvation. His son, Chengyasur (9th) became the next raja, and then Chengyasur’s second son, Chandasur (10th). Then Chandasur’s eldest son, Sumesur (11th), became the king. Sumesur’s son Bhimanjoy (12th) and grandson, Sambuddha (13th), became king one after another.

A new chapter of Chakma history started with Sambuddha’s eldest son, Bijoygiri (15th), who journeyed for six days by water, with a large army, up to a place called Kalabgha, on the banks of the river Tewa, and by his efforts, and that of his general, conquered a new territory. The account goes, “He received news that his father had died and his younger brother, Udaigiri (14th ), had usurped the throne. At this news he remained



remained in the new territory. But he left no descendant.”

Upon Bijoygiri's death, the Chakmas chose a new king, whom they named “Shakalia” (16th), meaning “selected by all”. Shakalia had no sons, and was succeeded by his daughter, Manikbi (17th). Manikbi's husband allied himself with the Bengalis and fought battles against the “Maghs” (sic) (1118-1119 AD). Manikbi was succeeded by her son, Manikgiri (18th). Manikgiri was succeeded by his son, Madalia (19th) and then by his grandson, Kamalchega (20th), under whose reign there was war and the Chakmas migrated into Roang (present-day Arakan/Rakhaing). Then came his son, Ratangiri (21st) and then his son, Kala Thongza (22nd). The next king was Sher Matya (23rd). During his time the Chakmas fought in Arakan under General Radhamon. The epical ballad “Chatigang Chaara” was composed. Then came his son, King Aranjug (24th), who had his capital at Maichagiri. Under his reign there were several engagements with the “Maghs” (1333-34 AD). He was succeeded by his third son, Chanda Thongza (25th), who was also known as Ghatya Raja or “Toll Collector”. Then came his son, Maisang (26th). Under King Maisang's son, Marikya's rule (27th), the Chakmas left Arakan and settled in Kadamtali.

In Kadamtali, the first new king was Marikya's son, Kadam Thongza (28th), so named after the new capital. Kadam Thongza was succeeded by his son, Tin Sureswari (29th) and then his grandson, Janu (30th). There were several battles with the “Maghs” during his reign. As King Janu's two sons, Chanan Khan and Ratan Khan were murdered, King Janu's Queen (31st) “took reins of government”. The next king was Raja Sathua (32nd), grandson of Janu (through his daughter, Rajembi) [see story on Raja Sathua by Raja Tridiv Roy]. Then came Dhabana (son of Raja Sathua's daughter, Amangali) (33rd). Dhabana was succeeded by his son, Dharamya (34th), who in turn was succeeded by his son, Mogalya (35th). Mogalya was succeeded by his son, Jubal Khan (36th). During Jubal Khan's reign there were several engagements with the “Mughls”. Jubal Khan's General Kalu Khan Sardar fought several battles with the Muslim Nawab. Jubal Khan being childless, his brother, Fateh Khan (37th), succeeded him as raja. “Fateh Khan made peace with the Nawab in 1713 AD and obtained permission from the Mughal Emperor, Farrukshiyar (1713-19) and subsequently from Muhammad Shah (1719-48) to allow the [Bengali traders] to trade with the Jumias on payment of tribute of 11 maunds of cotton (about 440 kilograms).

Fateh Khan's son, Shermust Khan (38th) became raja in 1737. “During his time, Mr. Henry Verelest, the Chief of Chittagong, proclaimed that the tract bounded by the Nizampore Road (Dacca Road), Kuki territory, the Feni and the Sungo rivers belonged to the Chakma Raja”. Fateh Khan's adopted son, Shukadeva (39th), became raja in 1757. He was childless, and the next raja was Sherdoulat Khan (40th), grandson of Raja Fateh Khan in 1776. There was war with the English, and two separate “expeditions” under Messers Lane and Trummers failed. Then in 1782, Sherdoulat Khan was succeeded by his son, Jan Bux Khan (41st). Battles with the English continued in 1783, 1784 and 1785. Finally, in 1787, the raja went to Calcutta and made peace with the Governor General, Lord Cornwallis, and promised a tribute of 500 maunds of cotton (about 20 metric tons).

After the death of Jan Bux Khan, his son, Tabbar Khan (42nd) became raja in 1800. He dug a big tank at Rajanagar. Tabbar being childless, he was succeeded by his brother, Jabbar Khan (No. 43rd) in 1801. Then in 1812, Jabbar Khan was succeeded by his son Maharaja Dharambux Khan (44th). Dharambux had no children. Therefore, upon his death, Shuklal Dewan of the Mulima clan was officially appointed as a Managing Trustee. However, since his management was not satisfactory, his chief Queen, Kalindi Ranee (45th), took over the affairs of state. “By her able and good administration Kalindi Ranee extended the zamindari. She built the Mahamuni temple, started the annual Mahamuni fair, dug the Mahamuni [tank] and thus became immortal by various other pious works”. In the Lushai Expedition, the Ranee sent her grandson, Harish Chandra (the future raja), to help the British, for which he received the title, Rai Bahadur. In 1873, on the death of Ranee Kalindi, Harish Chandra Rai Bahadur became the raja (46th). Harish Chandra moved his permanent residence from Rajanagar (in plains Chittagong district) to Rangamati. He died in 1885. Upon his death, his eldest son, Kumar Bhuvan Mohan being a minor, the Chakma administration was taken over by a Court of Wards, and finally in 1897, Raja Bhuvan Mohan Roy (47th) took over.

[NOTE ON RAJA BHUVAN MOHAN'S ACCOUNT: The Chakma Raja's archives at Rangamati, there is an English and a Bengali version of the History of the Chakma Raj Family. In one, the author is described as the 48th Chakma Raja while in the other he is described as the 45th Chakma Raja. The difference may arise

due to several reasons, including whether the “usurper”, Udaigiri is counted as one of the rajas. According to Late Ashok Kumar Dewan, Shukdev Roy was a Chakma prince and landowner, but not a raja. ]

### **Raja Bhuvan Mohan Roy & Later Rajas**

Raja Bhuvan Mohan Roy was educated at the Rangamati Government High School, which was established when he was a child. During his time several schools were established in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the benefit of formal education started to reach the people. He completed the construction of a new palace at Rangamati, along with the Gotammuni temple and expanded agriculture in Rangamati and Bandukbhanga. He attended the Delhi Durbar of King Emperor George V, where he was received with due honour. He took initiatives to get his sons married to members of educated and enlightened families of Bengal, Cooch Behar and Tripura. His eldest son, Kumar Nalinaksha Roy married Rani Benita Sen (born in Surrey, UK in 1902), daughter of Barrister Saral Sen and granddaughter of reformer Brahmananda Keshab Chandra Sen of Kolkata. Bhuvan Mohan died in 1934 at the age of 60.

Raja Bhuvan Mohan was succeeded by his eldest son, Raja Nalinaksha Roy, who graduated from Calcutta. Raja Nalinaksha consolidated the zamindari and other landed estates in Chittagong and the Chittagong Hill Tracts. During his time India was partitioned and the Chittagong Hill Tracts became part of Pakistan (1947). Before partition the Raja demanded to the British Constitutional Commission that the Chakma Chieftdom be accorded the status of a “state”, but the demand was not accepted. The Raja sent his children to be educated in English-medium institutions in West Bengal. His eldest son, Kumar Tridiv Roy was admitted to study for the English Bar at Lincoln’s Inn, London. In partnership with his wife, Rani Benita, he undertook reforms in education, literature, dance and music. Rani Benita was a cabinet minister of the Government of Bangladesh and died in 1990. The Raja died in 1951.

Raja Tridiv Roy, the eldest son of Raja Nalinaksha, took over as Raja in 1951, abandoning his formal studies that he was to have commenced in the UK. During his time, education spread even further, and the first tertiary institution, the Rangamati Government College, was established in Rangamati in the 1960s. Franchise was extended to the CHT for the first time, for the legislative bodies in the 1950s, and for local government institutions at district and lower levels in the 1960s. The Raja himself was elected to the provincial and national assemblies several times.

In 1960, the Kaptai Dam was built, flooding a large part of the Chakma Chieftdom, including the palace. The Raja helped rehabilitate his people, who had to evacuate the future reservoir area. The Raja was a keen horticulturalist, and following his lead, thousands of his subjects took up the new vocation of fruit growers, planting pine-apple, cashew, banana for the market (their options were now limited with the loss of their land to the Kaptai Dam reservoir). The Chittagong Hill Tracts Development project on horticulture was established at his initiative.

In 1956, Raja Tridiv Roy represented his people at the 2500th Buddha Jayanti Celebrations in New Delhi and then in Rangoon (now Yangon). In 1963, he represented Pakistan at the United Nations and travelled around the world. In 1970, the Raja was elected to the National Assembly of Pakistan from the entire Chittagong Hill Tracts, the lone successful independent candidate in the then East Pakistan. In 1971, Raja Tridiv Roy left the Chittagong Hill Tracts as a Special Envoy of the Government of Pakistan and has since not returned to his homeland, having settled down in Islamabad, Pakistan (later his son, Raja Devasish, succeeded him). He now lives in Islamabad, and holds the office of Federal Minister-without-Portfolio in the Government of Pakistan. Hitherto he has held other offices in the Government of Pakistan, including Federal Minister for Minorities Affairs (1971-1976?), Adviser on Tourism (1979-1981?), Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Argentina, Uruguay and Chile (1981-1996?), and Ambassador-at-Large (1996-2005?). Raja Tridiv Roy has published several books and articles, including a biographical account entitled *The Departed Melody (Memoirs)* [PPA Publications, Islamabad, 2003].

Raja Devasish Roy was installed as the 51st Chakma Raja at Rajbari, Rangamati on 25 November 1977. Raja Devasish had his early schooling in Chittagong, and concluded his secondary and higher secondary education at Rangamati. He graduated from Rangamati Government College in 1981 with a BA, and from the University of Kent at Canterbury, UK, in 1985, with a BA Honours. In 1986, he was called to the English Bar

(Lincoln's Inn). He joined the Dhaka District Bar in 1987 and the High Court Bar, Dhaka, in 1988.

Raja Devasish Roy has played active role both in Bangladesh and at international forums. He has participated in several United Nations and international forums dealing with human rights, environment and development. He took a leading role in the drafting process of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2007), including by being the Co-Chairperson of the Indigenous Peoples' Caucus at the last session of the Working Group on the Draft Declaration at Geneva in 2006. From January 2007 to January 2008 he was a member of the Bangladesh cabinet as Minister of State with the portfolios of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs and Environment & Forests.

Raja Devasish Roy was married to Rani Tatu Roy, daughter of Late Tripura Kanta Chakma of Kaokhali, Rangamati (retired as Deputy Superintendent of Police, a freedom fighter). Rani Tatu did her MA in English at Dhaka University. In partnership with her husband, Rani Tatu promoted development and education in remote areas of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. She also helped manage the Chakma Raj estate lands, and proved herself to be an able administrator. She died of liver ailments in 1998 at the age of 33, leaving behind a son, Rajkumar Tribhuvan Aryadev (born 11 January, 1990) and a daughter, Rajkumari Aradhana Ayetri (born 16 October, 1994). Rajkumar Tribhuvan was installed as the Chakma Yuvaraj in 2003. ■

(Source: [www.chakmaraj.com](http://www.chakmaraj.com))

## The One Rupee Solution



As an impoverished community, Chakmas must recognize the power of Re 1, by contribution of which by each family, most of our major problems with regard to denials and deprivations may be solved, writes **NIRU CHAKMA**, from Arunachal Pradesh

### 1. Introduction

The Chakmas are a microscopic community. They have deep problems wherever they are rooted – be it in Bangladesh or in India. I have been to Mizoram two years ago and I witnessed that the socio-economic situation there is more or less the same with Arunachal Pradesh.

In Arunachal Pradesh, the main problem is denial of citizenship rights although Chakmas migrated in 1964. We have been fighting legal battles for our rights. In Mizoram, we have Chakma Autonomous District Council but problems still remain.

Whether in Mizoram or AP or Tripura we face lack of development, State apathy, discrimination, illiteracy, acute poverty and lack of basic facilities. These are huge problems and there are no easy solutions.

However, we should not lose hope. India is a great democracy and problems can be solved through democratic means. One of the means is to go to court to get justice. For example, in the case of discriminatory Recruitment Rules in Mizoram (highlighted in the Chakma Voice first issue) the only way is to challenge them in the court of law, if they discriminate against the linguistic minorities. But as we all know legal battles are often protracted and require a lot of money. This means that we will also need to have patience and faith in the justice delivery system in the country. One negative habit we have is that we do not have patience.

But where do we get the money to fight legal battles or for that matter, to solve any other problems that



involves huge sums of money? My One Rupee per Family suggestion is that we need to create a Fund.

## 2. The “State Welfare Fund”

Each state will create “State Welfare Fund”. For example, Mizoram State Welfare Fund or Tripura State Welfare Fund.

These State Welfare Funds will be independent of each other. This means that Mizoram will have an independent Fund, and Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh will have their own. They will be independently managed by people of their own states. They can learn the best practices from each other.

A similar arrangement can be created in Bangladesh too.

The funds will be used only for the purpose of solving the social problems or for welfare activities. There will be clear cut list of “dos” and “don’ts”.

### The structure:

The State Welfare Fund will be run and managed by a Trust. There will be a “Chief In-Charge” at state level. He will be assisted by his deputies and other officials as necessary for proper and effective management and functioning of the Fund.

There will be a “District Coordinator” in each district to guide/ manage the village level in-charges.

At village level there will be at least two in-charges who will be responsible for collection of funds from the villagers.

All the men and women involved in the work from village level to state level will have to be persons with high moral integrity. The people must have faith on them.

### The system of collection

There are about 100,000 chakmas in Mizoram and the same number

If Re 1 is collected from each family per month, say in Mizoram, the total collection will be not less than Rs 20,000 per month which is (Rs 20,000 x 12 =) Rs 2,40,000 per year and in five years Rs 12 lakhs. This money will be deposited in the Bank Account of the Trust, and the income generated every year will be able to deliver good amount of welfare services to the people without the need to go on collection spree whenever there is an urgent need as the case presently is.

in Tripura and over 40,000 in arunachal Pradesh. At the average of five members in each family, it means that there are 20,000 families in both Mizoram and in Tripura and 8,000 families in Arunachal.

If Re 1 is collected from each family per month, say in Mizoram, the total collection will be Rs 20,000 which is (Rs 20,000 x 12 =) Rs 240,000 per year and in five years Rs 12 lakhs. This money will be deposited in the Bank Account of the Trust, and the income generated

every year will be able to deliver good amount of welfare services to the people without the need to go on collection spree whenever there is an urgent need as the case presently is.

This means that the Chakmas of Mizoram will be financially capable of doing anything they want with a little more efforts. For example, they can the best lawyer to fight cases in the court – even at the Supreme Court of India.

Similarly, the Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh will continue to face problems even after they get voting rights. They too will need money to solve their problems.

It is not only the court cases. A plethora of welfare activities can be carried out if money is available.

### 3. Final word

Our present arrangement is to hurriedly collect money from villagers if we are in need of funds.

As majority Chakmas are poor, they can’t afford to contribute/donate. Meaning, they find it difficult to participate in this ad hoc arrangement for collection of funds. This problem will be solved to a large extend as Rupee 1/- is quite affordable per month.

However, there is a caution: this idea can be successful in long term only if the right people are selected to manage the huge funds that one day this “One Rupee per Family” will generate. ■

(The writer is with Star Information Support Service (Stariss), New Delhi)

# In Quest of Unity

By- Sanchay Chakma,  
Switzerland

The Chakmas are one of the most suppressed and oppressed people in the world. Suppression and oppression have been chasing the Chakmas for centuries. They are living like foreigners in their main land Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh. They have been suffering from gruesome violation of Human Rights for long time since the partition of Indian Sub-Continent in 1947. The Chakmas are also one of the most scattered people in the world. Presently, they are living in many states of India such as Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, West Bengal and rapidly spreading other parts of India. They are also spreading in different countries of the world like, Australia and New Zealand, Korea, Japan, United States of America, Canada, France, Great Britain, Switzerland, Sweden, Germany etc. The main reason for fragmentation of the Chakma society is tremendous pressure and deadly attack by the then Pakistani and Bengali Rulers. In the last half a century, more than one hundred thousand Chakmas have lost their homesteads, main livelihoods and habituated-environments, numerous valuable lives and their beloved home land. As a result, they were compelled to flee and take shelter in the Indian States of Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh. While the refugees from Tripura returned after the 1997 Peace Accord in CHT, the Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh are still living without citizenship.

## **The Chronology of attacks against the Chakmas**

The first attack came from the British Colonial Ruler to the pre-dominantly independent Chakma Kingdom in early sixtieth of 18th century when the British Colonial Ruler wanted to increase their colonial boundary. The CHT was an independent kingdom namely 'Curpass Mahal' the name given by the Mugal Rulers of Pre-British India. The Chakma King had to pay cotton as honorary tribute to the Mugal Emperor only. In fact, the Chakmas fully enjoyed internal independence by dint of this tribute. The Chakmas did not welcome the British invaders at all. They had resisted the invaders under the command of Runu Khan, one of the main administrators of Chakma King Sher Daulat Khan. The historic hero of the Chakmas Mr Runu Khan had fought about two decades for the independent of the kingdom. But he

could not be able to protect the kingdom from the British domination. The successive King Jan Baksh Khan, son of Sher Daulat Khan had compromised with the colonial ruler in late eightieth of 18th century by signing an agreement in the Fort William at Calcutta (Kolkata). The resistance of Chakmas had been stopped and the kingdom came under the British Colonial Rule by including with the Bengal. This Resistance Movement is still famous as 'The Chakma Resistance to the British Domination' in the history of Indian Sub-Continent. It is notable to mention that though the resistant movement was in the name of Chakmas- but other indigenous inhabitants of CHT were also involved with that.

The second attack came from the then Pakistani ruler in late fiftieth of 20th century when the Kaptai Dam was build to produce hydro-electricity. The dam has made a big water reservoir in the heart of CHT where 54,000 acres cultivable lands of CHT were gone under the water. This amount of land is about 40% of the total arable lands in CHT. The reservoir did not damage only cultivable lands and house-holds of Indigenous People; but also damaged the balance of the natural environment of the region as well. The high profile flora and fauna of CHT have totally been damaged by the dam.

The third attack which is still continuing came from the Bengali Rulers immediately after the independent of Bangladesh in 1972. The Master of the Bangladesh Liberation War Mr. Sheikh Muzibur Rahman had dictated to forget the ethnic-identity of Indigenous People of CHT. And he advised to learn all Indigenous People how to be Bengali by demolishing own ethnical identity soon. He warned Mr. Manabendra Narayan Larma, the then parliamentarian of CHT, to decline his demands for CHT. Mr. M. N. Larma had demanded for the autonomy of CHT in the Bangladesh Parliament. Mr. Sheikh Muzibur Rahman warned in the Parliament that he would settle Bengali population in CHT if Mr. M. N. Larma would not give away his demands. He did not warn not only in the Parliament; but also took measure practically by building three cantonments in strategically important places like Dighinala, Alikadam and Ruma so that the Bengali settlement policy could be protected in future. After that, all successive Governments of Bangladesh have been following the policy of Bengali settlement to capture

the land area of CHT. And to protect the Bengali settlement policy they had deployed Armed Forces, Para-Military, Armed police, Ansars and VDP etc. The Indigenous peoples of CHT were never considered as same citizens like Bengali Muslim population of Bangladesh by the Bengali rulers. They want to occupy the lands of CHT only; but do not want the Indigenous inhabitants there. Though there was an agreement signed by the then Sheikh Hasina Government with the Parbotyo Chottogram Jana Samhati Samity (PCJSS) on 2nd December 1997 to bring peace and stability in the region; but the violations of Human Rights is still continuing there as because of non-implementation of the agreement.

The next possible danger is the bad-effect of Climate Change in Bangladesh. According to the World Climate Change Study Groups, one third land area of Bangladesh will go under water in the next fifty to hundred years. Bangladesh is already over populated country in the world. Even, there is no possibility to accommodate a proper room for all citizens in the moment. And where will go the people who will be evicted by the water? The possible places of accommodation of evicting people will be Indigenous Peoples' dwelling areas of the country. And the CHT will be the main target for these populations. The signal of the great danger over the Indigenous People of CHT should ring from now on. And we should approach to the Climate Change Protection Groups as early as possible for this possible danger. We will be the worse victims of Global Warming indirectly.

Numerous Indigenous Inhabitants of CHT who were mostly Chakma had to leave their home-steads by the reservoir and Bengali Muslim settlement policy in the region. Many of them were compelled to take shelter in different areas inside CHT and others in the neighbouring Indian states of

The Indigenous peoples of CHT were never considered as same citizens like Bengali Muslim population of Bangladesh by the Bengali rulers. They want to occupy the lands of CHT only; but do not want the Indigenous inhabitants. Though there was an agreement signed by the then Sheikh Hasina Government with the PCJSS on 2nd December 1997 violations of Human Rights are still continuing unabated while the Peace Accord is left unimplemented.

Mizoram, Tripura, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh etc. And what will be the situation of CHT when the next phase of huge Bengali settlement will start again? Either they have to assimilate with the Muslim populations or compel to take shelter in above mentioned neighboring states of India again. Besides, recently many Chakmas have been migrating in many countries of the world for political and economical reasons. It is very obvious that we might have lost our same origin, tradition, history, culture, language and religion etc. in future as because of living wide distance, lack of consciousness, adopting different cultures, learning different languages and educations etc. On the other hand, we have no rights to nursing and developing our tradition, history, culture, language and education in the main dwelling place CHT. The another problem of us is that we have no strong leadership to lead the society in the right direction. Our political leaderships are divided into many groups like, the JSS (Santu Larma), the JSS (M. N. Larma), the UPDF etc. in the main land CHT. As a result, the society is also divided into many ideological groups in home and abroad. On the other hand, the traditional and social leaderships are also very weak so that they can not lead the society at all. In this circumstances, how can we be united as a people or nation?

The national unity in a modern state does not necessarily depend on same origin, history, tradition, language, culture and religion etc. Rather, the nature of a modern state is pluralistic, multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-ideological etc.. The criteria of modern nation building do not applicable in the case of Chakmas as because, we do not still have any particular state. We are still an ethnic nationality who can also be considered as people. We are just in the stage of pre-nation building. So if we come to the question of unity among ourselves wherever we live in the world- we have to find some important factors by which we can be united. As because we do not possess a particular land area or country; our national unity will not depend on the basis of the theory of modern nation building. Rather, our national unity depends on the same origin, history, tradition, language, culture and religion etc. wherever we live. It will not necessarily depend on a state boundary or a particular country. The other factor might be the national feeling. Though the Chakmas are living scattered in many parts of the world; but our origin is the same. We all come from one ethnic group. We speak the same language and cherish same culture and believe as well. Moreover, we have strong feeling to be one people or nation.



Though the national unity mainly depend on living with the same land area or together in a country. But in the case of Chakmas has no opportunity to possess a particular land area where they can live together generation by generation. We are already fragmented and scattered so that we have to seek another alternative by which we can be stood together and continually keep alive our national unity generation by generation. And what I think is that scatterly living will not be an obstacle to be united as one people. According to my understanding, we have to follow the concept of unity among the Jews before the creation of Israel. The basis of unity among the Jews was same historical background, tradition, culture and religious believe among themselves wherever they were. The emotion is also one of the main factor to be united as one people or nation. And by cherishing all these elements of national unity; they could be able to maintain their strong brethren relationship. Of course, there are many differences between them and us. The Jews were rich, talent and possess many other noble merits as well. On the other hand, the Chakmas are poor, dis-organized, aloof and disrespectful to the central leadership. Moreover, we have no strong socio-political and traditional leadership to lead the whole society. But the basic elements of building strong national unity are same as the Jews. Though we are very fragmented, scattered, divided into few ideological groups and lack of central leadership; we have the same fundamental elements by which we can build national unity. And of course, most of the Chakmas have strong feelings to be one people or nation. The other instance what we can evaluate, the case of Saami People. They are also scattered in a few countries. But their history and origin are the same. They share also the same feelings that they are one people. The Saamis are most powerful Indigenous Group in the history of Indigenous Peoples' struggle of the United Nations to establish the rights of Indigenous Peoples around the world.

The reality is that the basis of our national unity will depend on language, culture, religion, history, tradition, origin and national feeling. Moreover, the ethnic identity will also be one of the most important factor of our national unity as well. When some one belongs to Chakma ethnic origin wherever he/she lives; he/she naturally bears Chakma feeling. Is there any contradiction with the term "Jummo"? I think not. Though the term "Jummo" is very practical in the perspective of CHT movement to unite all Indigenous inhabitants; but the utility of this term will no more be useful after final eviction from CHT. "Jummo" is totally a political term which is

essential only for the struggle of Self-Determination of all Indigenous Peoples of CHT. Otherwise, there is no functionality of this term except our joint movement with all indigenous inhabitants of CHT.

No doubt, a Chakma man can easily be a Jummo and accordingly the Jummo People comprise with all Indigenous People of CHT including the Chakmas. Of course, all Indigenous People of CHT can maintain heart to heart relation among themselves even after no importance of our joint movement later. Again, the main ground of our national unity as Chakma People will depend on language, culture, religion, tradition, history, origin and national feeling. But the language is the main factor of above mentioned factors. Therefore, we have to prefer to develop our language in all aspects. The Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) in Mizoram has been playing very important role in this regard. We all have to come forward to develop our language first and the CDC must be the centre point of developing our language. The contribution of 'The Chakma Voice' will definitely be great to build up national unity among ourselves. It becomes the pioneer of 'Chakma Renaissance' as well. ■

(The writer is an exiled ex-Chakma political activist of CHT. He now lives in Switzerland. Recently, he is trying to organize an international organization 'The World Jummo Voice' to keep alive the unity among all Indigenous People of CHT wherever they live around the world. The views expressed here are of the author)

# Maximum Social Benefit



SUMAN CHAKMA, a student of Economics, explains the role of NGOs in educating the less privileged ones, and how the poor end up spending more of their income on food than the rich

It's a great privilege for me to put forth two ideas rotting in my head for quite some time. First is to use our existing human resources innovatively and the second idea is borrowed from John Maynard Keynes. I shall name them respectively as Community wide mentoring program.

If Rs 100 crores of government money is meant for the Chakma areas, its actual worth is more than Rs 300 crores.

## COMMUNITY WIDE MENTORING PROGRAM

This idea occurred to me after a former classmate scolded me rather seriously because he did badly in his internal exam. We were not even classmates then and he was a senior at the time. Now that there is nobody to ask him questions, it seems he finds studies tedious and boring. Five of us from the North East managed to fail except two of them. In the earlier semester I had to regularly visit his room for solutions to assignments and for help with difficult concepts. Later he revealed that often the solutions would occur to him only when his pride was at stake otherwise he did not study much. He felt motivated to read particularly those topics which we felt were difficult because he would get one more opportunity to prove that he is more intelligent. The responsibility to guide us worked wonders for him not only in the grade card but also in the social milieu. He was demanding though, never lost an opportunity to voice his preference for lots of pork fry and a relatively costlier brand. Rest of us usually pooled in the resources required for the purchase of capital. Well, I am referring to the system of seniors mentoring juniors practiced in the Universities of the West. I have no knowledge this practice was ever tried with school students, however I am suggesting that it be tried with school students in our villages.

**THE PROCESS:** Meritorious students of higher secondary schools or middle schools could be asked to tutor the less privileged junior students who cannot afford private tuitions. The experienced teachers could decide what level the students could teach after assessing the quality of each mentor/volunteer. My view is, a mentor, tutoring students of his own class or the class immediately junior to his class is the most beneficial. The program has the potential that someday every Chakma child is studying for at least an hour everyday under able guidance. We all know how relaxing it is to learn from a competent classmate.

### REASONS:

- Peer pressure is the greatest motivation for a student. Depending upon the class, the mentors will be tutoring, the mentors ability would be known to all. Higher class would mean higher respect.
- Pride is at stake. The motivation to teach responsively would compel the students to thoroughly learn the lessons they would teach. Good Knowledge of junior class concepts they will acquire in the process will be immensely beneficial to the mentors when they will pursue higher education.
- Reduction in dropouts.
- Very good experience of leadership role.
- Communication skills of mentors would improve qualitatively.
- Mutually beneficial for mentors and students. Students would have access to a friendly teacher.
- Improvement in discipline particularly for students who lack ideal conditions for study at home.

- Sense of participation in community building for the mentors.

### **ROLE OF NGOs:**

Success or failure of this initiative would depend on the efficiency of the NGOs executing the project.

- NGO's could identify the students who cannot afford tuitions.
- Rope in teachers who would select the mentors and allocate batches to them according to ability. Teachers can help reduce effort and also time of the mentors by providing copies of solved answers. The mentors should be expected to only explain concepts and methods of solving answers since they have their own class syllabus to contend with.
- Arrange for cash incentives to be given to the mentors every month. The cash should be large enough for mentors to be able to pay for their school as well as private tuition fees. Rewards should be higher for female mentors.
- Ensure that mentors are allotted leadership responsibilities in the student organization.
- Arrange for space and time suitable for the compulsory study hour of all willing students. Convince parents to send their children to the compulsory study hour. Find respected individuals to volunteer to help maintain discipline during study hour.
- Arrange for stay and accommodation for personalities from outside the village who have excelled in their professions or higher studies who themselves want to volunteer to teach and share their experience.

It is a unique opportunity to take levels of brotherhood within the community to ever higher levels.

### **Rs 100 CRORES IS WORTH MORE THAN Rs 300 CRORES**

I just felt the need to illustrate the importance of money from the government for increasing employment and income levels. Perhaps everyone has an idea how jobs get created as money circulates but there is more to it. So, please bear as I attempt to explain the concepts of marginal propensity to consume and government expenditure multiplier which are crucial to understanding the impact of government expenditure on employment and per-capita income. If 100 rupees each were distributed to everyone in the society, everyone will definitely spend some amount of money and save the rest. If someone spends 50 rupees his marginal propensity to consume (MPC) is said to be 50 percent. Now, evidence suggests that poor people

Ideally, the government intends to give money (purchasing power) to the poor through its various welfare schemes. But the poor end up spending larger share of their income on food. The rich can save more.

spend larger share of their income on food and also have higher MPC than the rich.

So, out of the 100 rupees given to each of them, the poor will spend more on the locally available food while the rich may save more. Ideally, the government intends to give money (purchasing power) to the poor through its various welfare schemes. Suppose that poor person happens to be a Chakma, so he goes to the market and buys soule, sidol, suguni and dundhoh. Assuming one seller sells all these items to that person and earns 90 rupees. Because traders also compulsorily spend some amount of increased income (usually they are known to be stingy) lets assume he spent 50 rupees on pork. Pork seller will also spend on essential items. The process is infinite. Originally govt. spent 100 rupees but final expenditure is (100+90+50+....). 100 rupees got multiplied several times because of marginal propensity to consume (compulsory tendency to spend). Along with movement of money, persons engaged in various trades get meaningful employment. Consider an alternative scenario, rich person who already has sufficient food stocks will save more money from the 100 rupees he got from the government and may buy a mobile phone. Even if he buys the phone from the local market large amount of money is lost from the local economy and employment creating opportunity in the local area too is lost.

So it helps the rural economy create more jobs if more govt. money reaches the poor as they spend more on the locally produced commodities than the rich. ■

(The writer is in MA Economics, Delhi School of Economics, Delhi University)



# Chakmas of Arunachal Pradesh: As much Indians as other Indians

By MCDF Research Group

Due to brutal repression unleashed against them and after their lands went under the waters of Kaptai dam, about 35,000 Chakmas and Hajongs migrated from then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and settled in the then North Eastern Frontier Agency (NEFA), the present day Arunachal Pradesh between 1964 and 1969. Here two things must be borne in mind. First, Chakmas did not secretly sneak into India but were brought under the arrangements made under the direct supervision of then Prime Minister of India, Mrs Indira Gandhi. The government of India had granted them "migration certificates". Second, since they had not been paid any compensation or rehabilitation by the Pakistani Government the Chakmas and Hajongs could bring very little from their homelands during the Great Exodus (which is still in the memories of the Chakmas as "Bor Porong").

As any Chakma elder belonging to that generation will tell us, the dogs wailed as they left but those could not be brought along. They did not know where the road will take them as they gave the last glimpse of their villages where they lived for generations. They traveled for days on bare foot. As it was inevitable in any exodus, many members within families and relatives were separated during and after the Bor Porong.

At that time, NEFA was scarcely populated and majority of locals were Buddhists and of mongloid stock, and perhaps that is why the government ultimately decided to resettle them in that part of the country. Another point was that NEFA was administered by the Centre. In the mean-

while, in 1971 East Pakistan became a new nation called Bangladesh, and NEFA became a new state called Arunachal Pradesh in 1987. This changed the dynamics and the future of the Chakma and Hajongs. While their dream to go back to Bangladesh was never fulfilled as Bangladesh refuse to accept them as its citizens (they were citizens of East Pakistan!), they have turned "stateless" in India.

The Supreme Court of India, the Delhi High Court and the Election Commission of India have ordered for inclusion of the eligible Chakmas and Hajongs in the voters' list in Arunachal Pradesh

Until 1980, the Chakmas and Hajongs enjoyed all the facilities including employment as accorded to the fellow local tribals. But as anti-foreigner movement swept the North East India, the Arunachal Pradesh Government withdrew these facilities from the Chakmas and Hajongs. Since 1991, the Chakmas and Hajongs have been fighting for citizenship rights under the aegis of Committee for Citizenship Rights of the Chakmas of Arunachal Pradesh (CCRCAP) led by Mr Subimal Bikash Chakma. Thus another democratic movement was born in South Asia.

In the mid 1990s, there were efforts to forcibly evict the Chakmas and Hajongs. The CCRCAP approached the National Human Rights Commission of India (NHRC) to seek protection and security. In October 1995, the NHRC approached the Supreme Court (SC). The SC in its judgement on 9 January 1996 in the case of *NHRC vs. State of Arunachal Pradesh and Anr* (Civil Writ Petition No. 720 of 1995) directed the Central Government and the State government of Arunachal Pradesh to, inter alia, process the citizenship applications of those Chakmas and Hajongs who had migrated in 1964, protect their lives and liberties and not to evict them without following due process of law. About 4,000 Chakmas had submitted their applications to the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India in 1997 pursuant to the Supreme Court judgement but not a single application has so far been processed.

Legally speaking, the Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh fall under two categories: one who migrated from East Pakistan and the second who were born in India.

In its judgement on 28 September 2000 in Writ Petition (Civil) No. 886 of 2000, the Delhi High Court ordered the registration of all eligible Chakmas and Hajongs who are citizens of India by birth under Section 3(1)(a) of the Indian Citizenship Act 1955 which provides that every person born in

India on or after 26 January 1950 and before 1 July 1987 is a citizen of India. As this order was flouted by the authorities, a contempt petition (CWP 537 of 2001) was filed before the Delhi High Court.

Pursuant to the order of the Delhi High Court, the Election Commission of India (ECI) ordered special revision of electoral rolls in four Chakma and Hajong inhabited Assembly Constituencies of Doimukh, Chowkham, Bordumsa Diyun and Miao. A total of 11,360 claims were submitted but only 1,497 claims i.e. 13.19% were accepted and enrolled into the voter list. Yet, these 1,497 claimants were later arbitrarily deleted through a notification on 26 June 2003 pursuant to the decision of the cabinet of state government of Arunachal Pradesh of 14 May 2003 that their inclusion violates the Bengal Frontier Regulation, 1873 or Inner Line Regulation. On 2 January 2004, the angry ECI suspended all electoral activities in these four Assembly Constituencies for non-inclusion of the Chakmas and Hajongs who are citizens by birth. The ECI held that *“the preparation and revision of electoral rolls was a constitutional duty conferred on the Commission by Article 324 (1) of the Constitution and the preparation and revision of electoral rolls were governed by*

*the provisions of the Constitution and the Acts and the rules relating thereto and that the State cabinet resolution dated 14- 05-2003 in so far as it related to the preparation and revision of electoral rolls was not in consonance with the provisions of the constitution and acts and rules governing the matter”.*

The ECI in its order (No.23/ARUN/2003) of 3 March 2004 held that *“the names of the aforesaid eligible Chakmas in the State of Arunachal Pradesh have not been included in the electoral rolls mainly for the reason that **they belong to the Chakma tribe/race, which is violative of the Constitutional mandate of Article 325**”* and ordered the inclusion of 1,497 voters. For the first time, 1,497 Chakmas and Hajongs who are citizens of India by birth exercised the right to franchise in the parliamentary elections in May 2004 and the State Assembly elections in October 2004. However, more than 20,000 Chakma and Hajong who are citizens by birth and over 10,000 who had migrated from East Pakistan have been denied the right to citizenship.

On 9 August 2006, the Gauhati High Court (Itanagar Permanent Bench) dismissed the three writ petitions [WP(C) No. 154 (AP) 2006], [WP(C) 155 (AP) 2006] and [WP(C) 156 (AP) 2006] challenging the order of the Election Commission of India of 2 January 2004 directing the concerned Electoral Registration Officers to include names of 1,497 Chakma and Hajong voters in the electoral rolls.

The socio-economic conditions

of the Chakmas and Hajongs have been utterly pathetic. They have not access to state-sponsored education, basic healthcare services, drinking water facilities, and development. But the root cause of all these problems is the denial of India citizenship.

LK Advani who was born in Karachi (now in Pakistan) became India's Home Minister and present Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh too was born in Pakistan. Other migrants/refugees from Pakistan have also been granted Indian citizenship.

So, a solution in case of the Chakmas/Hajongs must be found. And, of course, efforts are being made. In February 2008, the High Power Committee on Chakmas and Hajongs headed by Speaker of the Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly, Setong Sena submitted its report to the Government of Arunachal Pradesh. On 10 August 2010, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) constituted a Four Party Committee consisting of the MHA, the state government of Arunachal Pradesh, the All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU) and the Committee for the Citizenship Rights of the Chakmas and Hajongs of Arunachal Pradesh (CCRCHAP) to find a solution to the decades old problem.

So, is a solution in sight? ■

On 10 August 2010, the Ministry of Home Affairs constituted a Four-Party Committee consisting of the MHA, Arunachal Pradesh government, the AAPSU and the Citizenship Committee of the Chakmas to find a solution to the decades old problem

# Achievements

## **Dr Amit Chakma**



Dr Amit Chakma is the President and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Western Ontario, Canada. He also was the Vice-President, Academic & Provost and professor in the Department of Chemical Engineering at University of Waterloo. Prior to that, he served as Dean of Engineering and then Vice-President (Research) and International Liaison Officer at the University of Regina. Dr. Chakma is a graduate of the Algerian Petroleum Institute (Dip. Ing., 1982) and the University of British Columbia (Master of Applied Science, 1984 and PhD, chemical engineering, 1987). He was recognized with Canada's Top 40 Under 40 Award.

## **Raja Devasish Roy**



Photo by Safin Ilias

The present king of the Chakma community and a prominent leader of the indigenous Jummas in Bangladesh, Raja Devasish Roy was recently elected as member to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (from Asia) for 2011-2013. Raja Roy is a senior advocate in the Supreme Court of Bangladesh.

## **Dr Bhumitra Chakma**



Dr Bhumitra Chakma is the Director, South Asia Project, Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Hull, UK. He is BA, MA (Japan) and PhD (University of Queensland). Before joining the University of Hull, he taught in International Relations Department at University of Dhaka and the School of History and Politics at the University of Adelaide. At the University of Hull he teaches in the areas of Security and Strategic Studies and International Relations.

## **Supradip Chakma**



A career diplomat, Supradip Chakma is Bangladesh's Ambassador to Vietnam. He also served as Director General in the Bangladesh Foreign Ministry. He joined the Bangladesh Civil Service (Foreign Affairs) in 1988.

## **Major Gen Anup Kumar Chakma**

Major General Anup Kumar Chakma is Bangladesh's Ambassador to Myanmar. In 2005 he was made Major General in the Bangladesh Army and appointed the Master General of the Ordnance of Army Headquarters.



## **Saradindu Shekhar Chakma**



Saradindu Shekhar Chakma was Bangladesh's ambassador to Bhutan from 17 September 1998 to 22 December 2001. He also has the distinction of being the second M.A. pass (1959) amongst the Chakmas in Bangladesh. Subsequently, he cleared both the Central Superior Service Examination of Pakistan and East Pakistan Superior Service Examination in 1960 and he joined the Provincial Civil Service. He went on to become an Additional Secretary to the Government of Bangladesh, the first among the minority communities. He is a columnist in various national dailies and has penned 19 books. He is a Life Member of Bangla Academy, Dhaka.

## **Nirupam Chakma**



A veteran political leader of the Indian National Congress, Nirupam Chakma is a sitting Member of Legislative Assembly, Mizoram. He was the first Minister in Mizoram from Chakma community.

## **M K Kisha**



Mukur Kanti Khisha is so far the lone Chakma diplomat in India. That he joined the Indian Foreign Service in 1959 speaks highly about the Chakmas as a community. He was the India's Ambassador to Congo, Chile, Columbia, Cuba and Argentina. He retired in 1993 after a successful career spanning nearly thirty-five years. Unfortunately, he passed away in Madrid, Spain in December 2007.

## **Suhas Chakma**



He is one of the best known human rights activists not only in India but across the world. He heads the Asian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR) based in New Delhi.

## **Kristo Mohan Chakma**



Kristo Mohan Chakma (born on 10 January 1912) is considered the Father of CADC. He led the first delegation to Shillong to demand Chakma Regional Council in 1952. In April 1967, he was appointed the President of Demagiri Block Congress Committee and elected to the Mizoram Pradesh Congress Committee in March 1973. In May 1967 he led a Chakma delegation to submit memorandum to Shri YB Chavan, Home Minister of India demanding Chakma Autonomous District Council for the first time. Subsequently, he led a three-member delegation to meet Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and placed a strong demand for a separate Autonomous District Council consisting of all Chakma populated areas in 1971. He also has the distinction of being the founder president of Mizoram Buddhist Association which looks after the Buddhist affairs and well-being in Mizoram.

## **Sandhya Rani Chakma**



Sandhya Rani Chakma is Executive Member (Social Education and Health Departments) in Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council. In 2005 she was elected as Member of District Council, TTAADC.

## **Nihar Kanti Chakma**



Nihar Kanti Chakma is Minister of Veterinary and Disaster Management & Rehabilitation in Mizoram. He represents West Tuipui Constituency.

Kanak Chanpa Chakma is one of the best artists. She has exhibited her paintings (both solo and group) all over the world, including in Germany, Japan, India, Canada, USA, France, Netherlands, Bhutan, and of course Bangladesh, her home country. She is member of International Miniature Art Society of Florida, USA; member of World Federation of Miniaturist; member of Latin American Art Museum, USA and General Secretary of Tone Miniature Art Society of Bangladesh.

## **Dipak Kumar Chakma**



Dipak Kumar Chakma (M.A, LLB) is Member (Technical) of Railways Claims Tribunal, Indian Railways in the grade of Special Secretary to Government of India since 1 October 2010. A cadre of the Indian Civil Service (Indian Railway Traffic Service), he served as a senior officer in the Indian Railways from 1986 to 2010. In 2006, he was elevated to the level of Joint Secretary to Government of India in the Indian Railways. He started his public service as Legislative Secretary, Chakma Autonomous District Council from 1978 to 1980 and as bank officer from 1981 to 1986.

## **Kanak Chanpa Chakma**



## **Kabita Chakma**



She has a Masters Degree in Architecture from the University of Sydney, Australia. She tutors and has been working as a guest lecturer at the School of Design, University of Technology, Sydney.

She is the Coordinator of the CHT Jumma Peoples Network of the Asia Pacific and the Human Rights Coordinator of the CHT Indigenous Jumma Association, Australia.

## **Suniti Jiban Chakma**

Suniti Jiban Chakma is one of the finest artists amongst Chakmas. He graduated from the Institute of fine Arts in Dhaka University, Bangladesh. In 1989 he went to France and since 1990 he has been participating in collective exhibition there. In April 1994 his paintings were exhibited in Japan for the first time and in 1995 he was invited by Hirakata Municipal Gallery to show his 47 paintings. During this exhibition Hirakata Municipal Gallery published a colourful catalogue with the collaboration of Board of Education of Hirakata City. He obtained French Nationality in 1995. Suniti Jiban is also the president of an NGO called "AJHA" and edits "Jumpada France", the Quarterly News Bulletin of AJHA.



## **Dr Tapas Chakma**



Dr. Tapas Chakma is a Scientist 'E' (Deputy Director-Medical) at the Regional Medical Research Centre for Tribals (RMRCT) at Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, India. He has held this position since 2004. From 1999-2004 he was Assistant Director in RMRCT. Having a Masters degree in Applied Epidemiology, Dr Chakma has 20 years of research experience in the fields of tribal health, nutrition & fluorosis and HIV/AIDS. He is a United Nations expert in Fluorosis. He published 24 research papers in peer reviewed national and international journals and co-authored a book titled "Integrated Fluorosis mitigation" a guidance manual. He is also the editor of "Tribal Health Bulletin".

Dr Chakma has received a number of scientific awards including "Certificate of Excellence in Medical Research" by Center for Disease Control, Atlanta, USA in 2006, "M.P. Young Scientist Award" in Medical Science conferred by Madhya Pradesh Council for Science and Technology in 1998 and "Vijay Narayan Memorial Award" for "Best Research Paper" in the 25th National Conference of Preventive and Social Medicine, 1997.

Snehadini Talukdar is the first elected woman Member of District Council in the Chakma Autonomous District Council, Mizoram. She was elected as an MDC from the Kamalanagar Constituency in General MDC Elections in 1998. She has shown a new direction to the Chakma women and is a symbol of women empowerment.

## **Justin Chakma**



Justin Chakma is a Research Officer at the McLaughlin-Rotman Centre for Global Health (<http://www.mrcglobal.org>), Toronto, Canada. He provides research and administrative support to the Ethical, Social and Cultural Program for Grand Challenges in Global Health Initiative, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

## **S P Talukdar**

SP Talukdar is a renowned author and historian. His works include "The Chakmas: Life and Struggle", "Chakmas : An Embattled Tribe", "The Sakyans of South-East Asia: An Introspection of Tracing Roots" etc. His latest book is "Genesis of Indigenous Chakma Buddhists and their Pulverization Worlwide"

## **Dr Sumedha Chakma**



Dr Sumedha Chakma is an Assistant Professor, Department of Civil Engineering, Motilal Nehru National Institute of Technology, Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh, India. He was a Research Scholar in Indian Institute of Technology Delhi (IIT Delhi) from 31st December 2001-20th July 2005 and received his PhD from the IIT Delhi in 2008.

## **Pulin Bayan Chakma**

Pulin Bayan Chakma is the author of first Chakma to English Dictionary (Khoda Tara) in India. The dictionary was published by the Art and Culture Department, Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC), Mizoram in 1993.

## **Snehadini Talukdar**





## Satyam Chakma



Satyam Chakma (Left) holding Indian flag during an international skating competition in China

Satyam Chakma, from Mizoram, is a skating instructor certified by WSSA (World Slalom Skater Association) Singapore. In 1999, he became North East India Skating Champion. He represented India in the World Freestyle Skating Championship held in Shanghai, China organized by Federation International De Roller Sports, on 17 -21 August 2009. His other achievements are:

- Participated in Singapore National Freestyle Skating Championship-2007 in Singapore and achieved 13th position
- Two gold medals, one silver medals, one bronze medals and overall Champion at 2000 Northeast India Zone Speed Roller Skating Championship organized by Roller Skating Federation of India (RSFI)
- Gold Medal in Roller Hockey at 24th Delhi State Skating Championship 2000
- Gold medal in Roller Hockey at 25th Super national Skating Championship organized by IRSS New Delhi
- Two Gold Medals at 13th Jagdeep Singh Memorial Skating Meet 2004

## Juny Chakma



Juny Chakma is a renowned Kabbadi player of Bangladesh. She was a member of Bangladesh's Kabaddi team in the recently concluded Asian Games at Guangzhou in China

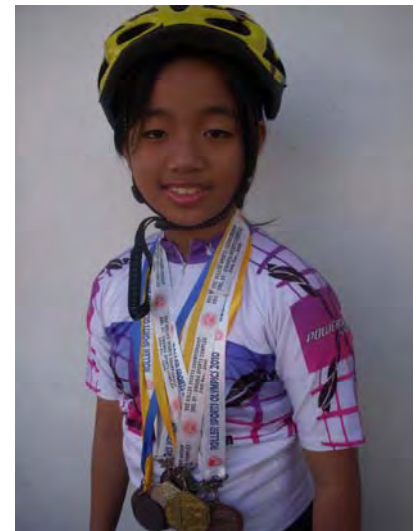
## Champa Chakma



Champa Chakma is is talented cricker. She is a left-arm spinner and was part of the Bangladesh's team in the recently held Asian Games at Guangzhou in China.

Manav Kumar Chakma, son of Dipak Kumar Chakma, is an ace tennis player. He has been playing tennis since the age of 5 years and reached up to the rank of 7th in the national ranking in under 14 years category. Presently he plays in the International ITF junior circuit under 18 years (which he can play up to 2012) and have an international ranking of around 1200.

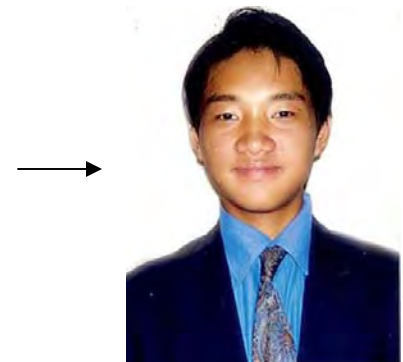
## Mahima Chakma



Miss Mahima Chakma (popularly known as Banshika), from Kamala Nagar, Mizoram, is a young talent in the field of sports. She has won prestigious awards in Roller Skating, including:

1. Gold medal in prestigious DSC Rollers Sports championship 2009, New Delhi
2. Gold medal in Roller Skating Championship 2008, held at Queens Valley International School, New Delhi
3. Two silver medal in Roller Sports Olympic 2010, Dwarka Sports Complex , New Delhi
4. Two bronze medals in 18th Jagdeep Singh Memorial Skating Meet 2009
5. Bronze medal in Roller Sport Olympic 2010, New Delhi
6. Bronze medal in prestigious Tekchand Maan Memorial Inter school championship. 2009

## Manav Kumar Chakma



# News in Brief

## Mizoram

### Three Chakmas assaulted

On 13 July 2010, three Chakmas including Sneha Kumar Chakma (son of Direndra Chakma of Silkur village) and his wife, were assaulted by a personnel of Mizoram Armed Police (MAP) and two other Mizos at Demagiri market place in Lunglei district. Sneha Kumar Chakma and his wife came to sell “dry fish” at Demagiri market. The MAP personnel forcibly took away “dry fish” without paying its price from them. Instead, the MAP personnel accused the Chakma couple of being Bangladeshi nationals and assaulted the Chakma couple. They both suffered injuries. Sneha Kumar Chakma was later again assaulted on the pretext of taking him to police station but he managed to escape. As Sneha Kumar Chakma could not speak Mizo language well, another Chakma tried to interpret but he was assaulted by the accused. On 18 July 2010, Mizoram Chakma Development Forum (MCDF) strongly condemned the assault.

### 227 Chakma families to be evicted by tiger reserve

227 Chakma families numbering around 1165 people are all set to be evicted from Andermanik village in Mamit district to pave way for extension of the area of Dampa Tiger Reserve (DTR) which is now 500 sq km. These Chakmas had been evicted earlier in 1989 from the DTR and resettled in Andermanik village.

On 18 August 2010, N R Pradhan, Field Director of Dampa Tiger Reserve submitted his field survey report of proposed Andermanik village relocation site at Sata Lui near Rajiv Nagar and recommended this site for the proposed resettlement village. On 28th September 2010, the Local Administration Department of Mizoram notified the relocation along with the “Map of Andermanik Resettlement”, and it was published in the Mizoram Gazette on 1 October 2010.

### 45 Chakma villages fell outside the border: Mizoram Home Minister

On 27 September 2010, Mizoram's Home Minister R. Lalzirliana informed the State Assembly that over 35,000 people from 45 villages have fallen outside the India-Bangladesh barbed wire border fence that is being constructed in Mamit, Lunglei and Lawngtlai districts. So far, the Government of India which is erecting the fence is reluctant to resettle and rehabilitate over 35,000 Chakma victims inside the fence.

### Teach in mother tongue

In its report to the Mizoram government submitted on 30 July 2010, the Mizoram Education Reforms Commission led by Prof A K Sharma recommended, among others, that *“In schools where there is concentration of minority community children, mother tongue of the child should be used as medium of instruction in Class I and II.”* This recommendation came after the MCDF had appealed to the Commission in letter dated 31st October 2009 to *“kindly recommend to the government of Mizoram to immediately*

*take steps to teach Chakma mother tongue to the Chakma children in Lunglei and Mamit districts in line with the syllabus prescribed in the CADC. Further the state government must be recommended to initiate research on Chakma Script & Literature under Mizoram University and Mizoram Tribal Research Institute to improve & develop proper syllabi for higher classes.”* MCDF argued that denial of education in mother tongue violated Article 30 of Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which provides that a child cannot be denied the right “to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practice his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language”. The Mizoram Education Reform Commission was set up by Mizoram government on 9 June 2009 to recommend ways and means to raise standards of education and improve its quality covering all sectors of education right from the pre-school level to higher and professional education.

### Campaign to set up Middle Schools and High Schools

On 22 October 2010, MCDF submitted a petition to the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights requesting its intervention to fully implement the Right to Education Act and establish Middle and High Schools in every Chakma inhabited villages of Mizoram. Chakmas are the most illiterate community in the state. MCDF also wrote to Mizoram's Education Minister Mr Lalsawta in this regard. In addition, MCDF has demanded hostels for boys and girls in Chakma areas from the Ministry of Minority Affairs.

## **MCSU-Lunglei in literacy mission**

A 15-member team of Mizoram Chakma Students' Union (MCSU), Lunglei Zone, conducted "Community Awareness Campaign cum Students Enrolment Right" programme from 15-25 October 2010 to highlight the importance of education amongst the Chakma villagers. The programme was sponsored by the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Lunglei office.

The MCSU team visited 7 extremely remote villages in Sajek Valley including Bogahali, Sumosumi, Samuksuri, Haolong-sora etc, and 5 extremely remote villages in Thega Valley namely Hojoisury, New Hojoisury, Deno Sora, Mojdyo Sora & Boronasury. Thereafter, the Chakma student leaders submitted the Findings Report to District Project Coordinator -SSA, Lunglei for necessary action.

## **Arunachal Pradesh**

### **How far is citizenship right?**

On 10 August 2010, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), Government of India constituted a Four Party Committee under the Chairmanship of Joint Secretary (NE), MHA to examine various issues related to Chakmas and Hajongs which include their settlement in Arunachal Pradesh and grant of Indian citizenship to eligible members. Apart from the MHA, the state government of Arunachal Pradesh, the All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU) and the Committee for the Citizenship Rights of the Chakmas and Hajongs of

Arunachal Pradesh (CCRCHAP) have their respective representatives in the Four Party Committee.

The state government of Arunachal Pradesh has also formed a Committee headed by C C Singhpho with Kamlung Mossang, C T Mein, Nabum Rebia and Superintendents of Police and Deputy Commissioners of Changlang, Papum Pare and Lohit districts as members to look into the Chakma-Hajong issue in the state.

## **Bangladesh**

### **Army attacks Buddhist temple in Rangamati**

On 26 October 2010, army personnel attacked and destroyed Triratna Bana Sadhana Kuthir (a Buddhist temple) at Amtoli village in Barkal-Jurachari border area under Subolong Union in Rangamati district. At least 10 cottages where Buddhist monks and novices live and meditate were destroyed. The Buddhist temple was established on 27 July 2007. Hundreds of people held protest demonstration to condemn the attack on religion.

### **Chakma royal palace gutted**

On the night of 10 November 2010, a mysterious fire reduced the Chakma royal palace into ashes in Rangamati. No member of the royal family was present during the fire. There was a huge collection of rare books, many of them in Chakma scripts, which have been destroyed in the fire. An investigation has been launched into the fire.

A 19-member Chakma Circle Heritage Council has been formed to rebuild the palace. The primary objectives of the Committee are as

follows-

1. To facilitate reconstruction of the destroyed Rajbari.
2. To prepare a master plan of the entire area of Rajbari island/compound.
3. To preserve properly the surviving historical documents and other archeological artifacts under Museum & Archive centre to be built.

(For pictures, see Page 40)

## **Tripura**

### **Demand for Chakma scripts**

On 28 November 2010, a group of Chakmas led by the Tripura Chakma Students Association submitted a memorandum to the Advisory Committee demanding official recognition and introduction of Chakma scripts in schools.

### **Buddhist Academy burnt**

On 15 October 2010 at around 11 PM, Dhamma Dipa International Buddhist Academy was burnt down by unidentified miscreants in Sabroom, South Tripura. Properties of the Buddhist Academy were destroyed completely in the fire, including the books of the novices. This is the second time that this Buddhist Academy has been burned to ashes. It was first burned down in June 2008. The Dhamma Dipa International Buddhist Academy was set up in March 2007 to provide Buddhist education.



## About The Chakma Voice

*The Chakma Voice* is the bi-monthly newsletter of the Mizoram Chakma Development Forum (MCDF). It is the only printed English newsletter reporting exclusively on Chakma related issues.

*The Chakma Voice* reports the contemporary issues and problems of the Chakmas from the rights based perspective. Particular focus is given to Mizoram where the Chakma minorities suffer myriad problems ranging from denial and deprivation of development and access to basic facilities to systematic discrimination; but no media ever reports about them. *The Chakma Voice* not only reports the problems but also analyses and discusses these issues threadbare and objectively with a view to raise the level of awareness and find solutions. No other NGO or media has done this so comprehensively in the context of Mizoram.

The MCDF also uses the Social Networking Sites (SNS) to create awareness. Today the Chakmas' problems and issues no longer remain unknown or restricted to our sleepy villages in the peripheries of India but are prominently highlighted and discussed in Facebook, orkut, twitter and blogs and newspapers.

The other objective of *The Chakma Voice* is to build a bridge of love and mutual respect between the Chakmas of Mizoram and the Chakmas residing in the rest of the world.

*The Chakma Voice* is available both in the print and online editions. It is also available on the Facebook. To read *The Chakma Voice* online, kindly visit: <http://mcdf.wordpress.com/newsletter/>

Readers can submit articles, letters or comments at: [chakmavoice@gmail.com](mailto:chakmavoice@gmail.com)

If you wish to contribute/donate to *The Chakma Voice*, kindly feel free to contact us at [chakmavoice@gmail.com](mailto:chakmavoice@gmail.com)



Published by:

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