

24TH ANNIVERSARY OF CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS PEACE ACCORD

Why is peace still missing in the CHT?

MANGAL KUMAR CHAKMA

It has been 24 years since the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Peace Accord was signed, yet the situation in the region is still overwhelmingly fragile. In October 2019, the home minister, during a visit to the area, also highlighted the situation in the hills at a special meeting of the three hill districts in Rangamati.

The questions that arise are these: When the CHT Accord was supposed to

being conducted against the Jumma community with arbitrary arrests, search operations, extrajudicial killings, and innocent villagers ensnared in false cases. Even after the Accord, the suppression and oppression are increasingly taking on ugly shapes. Conflicts between the hill people and Bengali settlers due to land disputes or under the indulgence of state machineries, and organised communal attacks against the Jumma people, are

national forces, including the settlers and fundamentalist groups, are being incited against the Jumma people and the CHT Accord. In 2019, a single organisation named "Parbatya Chattagram Nagorik Parishad" was formed, dissolving all the other organisations of the settlers, ultra-nationalists, and ultra-communal groups. The CHT land commission meetings held in Rangamati and Bandarban in December 2019 and

is being obstructed by stooge elements from within the Jumma community. Anarchy has been created in the area by allowing conflicts, fighting, killings, abductions, extortions, etc, through sheltering and indulging anti-Accord elements and fundamentalist groups.

Needless to say, the Jumma people are discontent because of the non-implementation of the CHT Accord over the years. Nothing but the non-implementation of the Accord can be held responsible for the situation we see in the CHT—the obstruction in ensuring rights, returning lands, acceding to right to self-determination, and giving employment in Accordance with the Accord.

The CHT Peace Accord was signed in 1997 between the government and the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS) with the promise to resolve the crisis in the region through political and peaceful means. To that end, the provisions that were brought into the Accord include: preservation of indigenous features of the CHT region; introduction of a special administrative system comprising the Regional Council and three hill district councils, and devolving political, administrative and economic infrastructures, including general administration, law and order, police, land management, forest and environment, tourism, communication, etc, to these councils; preparing voters' list with the permanent residents to hold elections in the councils; withdrawal of all temporary camps, including the military ones, from the area; resolution of land disputes through land commission; rehabilitation of those who returned from India and internally displaced Jumma people in their respective lands properly, returning their lands to the respective owners; cancellation of leases of lands given to the non-resident people; appointment of permanent residents in all jobs available in the CHT area, prioritising the Jumma people; bringing amendment to all laws and regulations existent in and applicable to the CHT in Accordance with the Accord; and rehabilitation of settler Bengali people outside of the CHT with dignity.

But it is a fact that none of these provisions have been properly and fully implemented so far. It is because these core issues have not been properly dealt with that peace has yet to find its way to the region. Take the special administrative system, for example: instead of devolving the authority of political and administrative functions to

the regional council and the hill district councils, they are being directed by the district and upazila level bureaucrats, i.e. deputy commissioners, superintendents of police, and special forces.

If a community is promised the right to self-government, returning of land rights and the lands illegally occupied, establishment of democratic governance through demilitarisation, proper rehabilitation of refugees and the displaced people, and rehabilitation of political migrants (settlers) outside the CHT region with dignity and so on, and then the commitment is not fulfilled, it is quite natural that there would be anger, discontent and despair among the said community. Since the political entity in power right now—that has been in power for 13 years—is the same entity that was in power when the Accord was signed, it is natural that the victimised community would feel non-confidence and distrust because of the lack of initiative to implement the Accord.

If, instead of resolving the CHT crisis through proper implementation of the Accord, a policy of suppression and oppression is followed to end the crisis, surely resistance will grow within the community that suffers from it. When your back is against the wall, all you can do is take a stance of defensive resistance. If the powers that be opt for oppressive tactics instead of recognising the democratic movement demanding the Accord's implementation over the last two decades, it is no one else but them who should be held responsible for the situation that prevails in the CHT region today.

If the Accord had been properly implemented, if the regional council and the three hill district councils had been in control of general administration, law and order, police, land management, etc, if the occupied lands had been returned to their original owners, if there had been democratic governance available through the withdrawal of military camps, if the indigenous residents had been given all the jobs available in the CHT—it can be said for certain that the anger, dissatisfaction and despair among the Jumma people would have never appeared. If the Jummas' hope for their rights, as envisaged in the Accord, had been met, the existing fragile situation in the CHT region would have never been created to begin with.

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If the CHT Peace Accord had been properly implemented, there would be no violence and conflicts in the region today.

PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

put an end to the conflicts and violence in the hills, why are they still taking place? What is the reason behind this situation, and who is responsible for it? From the state authorities, it is often claimed that the Jana Samhati Samiti, one of the signatories of the CHT Accord, is responsible for the violence. How true is it in reality? Or is it because the CHT Accord, which was aimed at resolving the crisis in the hills, is yet to be fully implemented?

In fact, at present, drives are

taking place every now and then. Even after the Accord, Jummas are being evicted from their lands—the post-Accord era has witnessed the eviction of 30 Jumma villages. Continuous illegal occupation of lands and homesteads belonging to the Jumma people are being perpetrated by both state and non-state entities. Violence against women has not decreased at all—it has escalated over time, as a weapon of illegal land occupation and ethnic cleansing.

The ultra-communal and ultra-

February 2020, respectively, were surrounded under the initiative of this organisation. All those communal attacks by fanatic groups were perpetrated with a view to illegally occupy the lands of the Jumma people, and evict them from their ancestral lands. To this day, the perpetrators responsible for even a single event of those brutal attacks have not been brought justice.

It is clear that the process of fully and properly implementing the CHT Accord

'Nazrul initiated our awakening'

Professor Rafiqul Islam was a writer, linguist, researcher and an educationist. He was the first Nazrul professor and director of Nazrul Research Institute at the Bangla department of Dhaka University (DU). His glorious contributions towards society and the nation have been recognised with the Independence Day Award, Ekushey Padak, Bangla Academy Literary Award and Nazrul Academy Award. He was announced as the National Professor on June 19, 2018. Professor Islam was working as the chairman of Bangla Academy until he breathed his last on Tuesday, November 30. To honour his memory, we reprint an interview of the revered national professor, where he spoke to Emran Mahfuz of The Daily Star on the occasion of Kazi Nazrul Islam's birthday on May 24 this year.

You have been conducting research on Nazrul for a long time. What introduced you to Nazrul's world? Did anyone else conduct academic practice in this regard before you?

Poet Abdul Quadir did a lot of independent research regarding Nazrul, but I started the academic work from 1957. Professor Muhammad Abdul Hye was my teacher and he instructed me in this regard. After I completed my masters, he mentioned to me that no one had done any academic research regarding Nazrul but that it needed to be done. "You can do your PhD on this topic," he had advised me. That is how I started researching our national poet. First, I went to Kolkata. There, I started looking for his acquaintances in every nook and cranny. I talked to comrade Muzaffar Ahmad, poet Abdul Quadir and many others. Eventually, I went to Nazrul's village home, Churulua. I interviewed his family members, neighbours and other seniors in Asansol. I cross-checked all the information I obtained and highlighted new evidence.

Meanwhile, I was awarded with the Fulbright scholarship. I got leave on the condition of resuming my PhD work after my return. Then, I did research work at the University of Minnesota, Michigan Ann Arbor Campus and the East-West Center. I returned and earned my PhD degree on the work I had done on Nazrul's life and poetry. Afterwards, based on the chronological and descriptive order of Nazrul's work, I authored the *Nazrul Nirdeshika*, an instructional text which was published by the Bangla Academy.

Have you ever met Nazrul? If yes, then where was it and what did you talk to him about?

In 1958, I met Nazrul for the first time in Kolkata. As far as I can remember, his home was close to Shyambazar. The poet stayed lying down and was unable to talk. He kept on giving me blank stares. I interviewed his wife. She complained to me about how the publishers were cheating them of his money and how the gramophone company was not sharing the proper calculations, among other things.

Nazrul wanted to come to Dhaka due to different reasons, but the Pakistan government did not allow him to do so. While I was conducting the interview, Nazrul sat upright with calmness. He looked helpless, which made me feel uneasy. I did not expect to see the rebel poet in such a state, because he was the one who had initiated our awakening.

Afterwards, I also talked to Nazrul's sons, Kazi Sabyasachi and Kazi Aniruddha. At that time, I stayed in Kolkata for almost a whole month and tried visiting Nazrul's house almost every day. Whenever I went there, I would get some new information, which helped my research immensely.

What is the state of academic practices regarding Nazrul in Bangladesh? Can we acquire quality knowledge about him using the current resources?

In 1958, when I was acting as the first Nazrul professor and the director of Dhaka University's Nazrul research institute, four researchers obtained their PhD degrees studying different aspects of Nazrul's life. They worked under my supervision. Apart from this, a lecture series was also available. Writers and researchers from different nations used to join us and together, we would discuss various aspects of the rebel poet's life. Along with research, publications came out too. However, the overall quality of these activities started declining over time. Now, I am no longer a part of the proceedings, so I don't have a clear idea on how things are being run.

Along with the University of Dhaka, positions for Nazrul professors were created in other universities, too. Research centres were also inaugurated in some universities. Besides these, research activities about Nazrul took place in other departments, too. Soon the Nazrul Institute, Bangla Academy and the Nazrul Research Center were inaugurated, and the National Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam University was also founded in Trishal. In all of these institutes, different kinds of research activities are being conducted. I supervised a lot of research work at the Bangla Academy and the Nazrul



Professor Rafiqul Islam (January 1, 1934 - November 30, 2021)

Institute. Based on the variety of the research, I have published many high-quality books. Kazi Nazrul Islam's *Geeeti Sahitto*, *Nazrulur Jibon o Sristi*, and *Kazi Nazrul Islam: Jibon O Srijan (Life and Creations)* are ones worth mentioning.

I have noticed that your book *Kazi Nazrul Islam: Life and Creations* has been published under the supervision of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs. However, it contains many spelling mistakes. How did this come about?

That book was published long ago, and it's a huge book. You have likely seen the fourth edition. Whenever a new edition comes out or it is reprinted, I am supposed to review the draft. However, this didn't always happen. Currently, I have no idea about how the book is being printed. Someone else has already informed me about this issue. As a result, the book was withdrawn from the market and a three-member probe committee was formed. I have asked them to be more vigilant and have specifically asked them to ensure that no writing of Nazrul is deformed similarly.

Abdul Quadir is treated as an expert in the different dimensions of Nazrul-related research. How would you evaluate his work regarding Nazrul?

You can't find too many researchers like Abdul Quadir. His practices and research related to Nazrul go quite deep. His

name inevitably comes up in any related discussion. Without Abdul Quadir, the carefree lifestyle of Nazrul would have meant that the *Nazrul Rochonaboli* would not exist. This book was published when Pakistan was ruling over us, by the central Bangla Development Board (which is currently Bangla Academy). The articles Quadir wrote were also of very high quality. Even before Partition, he searched for and collected a lot of information on Nazrul's life and literary work. Those who knew him, myself included, remember him with deep respect.

You actively participated in the Language Movement. However, we don't often see your name associated with the term *Bhasha Shoinik (Language warrior)*. Is there a specific reason behind this?

"Language warrior" is not really an appropriate term! We can call them language workers or language activists. A certain group of people have coined this term for their own benefit. They mostly wanted to take some credit for the movement. No one should use the term "language warrior". At that point of time, our population was between four to five crore people. Young and old, everyone was a part of the Language Movement. Everyone was anxious and restless about the outcome. After Partition, the Language Movement

gained momentum. However, after the shooting incidents of February 21, people became so emotionally charged that, from February 22, almost everyone went out to the roads. No one cared about the curfews. Everyone fought for the language. So, how come only a few of us became language warriors by merit of being physically present there? I don't agree with this way of thinking.

You clicked many rare photographs of the Language Movement. Did you take any special preparation beforehand? What kind of emotions went behind taking those photos?

I did not take any special preparation. My father was a doctor. Thanks to his job, we were living in the Railway Colony of Dhaka. Since 1948, I have

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seen activists, most of whom were students, taking part in processions. I was a Class 10 student back then. In 1951, I got admitted to DU. Then, as a student, I became directly involved with Bangla language, literature and cultural activism. At that time, I owned a Voigtlander camera, which conveniently came in handy for taking those photos.

Nazrul's poem, Bidrohi, is now 100-years-old. It is a milestone creation. What is your opinion on this poem?

Bidrohi was first published on January 6, 1922 in the magazine *Bijli*. In the last 100 years, this poem has inspired Bangalees during many movements and struggles. We will remember Nazrul for years to come, even if it is just for this one creation.

Translated from Bangla by Mohammed Tshtiaque Khan