

# The Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Process: A Review and Future Research Agenda

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## ABSTRACT

This systematic review article thoroughly analyzes and reviews the process of peacebuilding in Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and the efficacy of the CHT peace accord. The author accumulated findings from numerous articles on this subject, analyzed them, and made recommendations for further study. According to the review's findings, the root causes of conflict in the CHT are multifaceted and include land conflicts, human rights violations, militarization, Bengali immigration, and cultural animosity. To prevent confrontation in the hill area or to settle existing disputes, it is critical to embrace strategies of accommodation and inclusion rather than assimilation. Thus, this study contends that unanimity at the local and national levels is crucial for the Accord's implementation process to evolve into peace. Along with other considerations, peace initiatives will progress if mutual respect and a positive attitude toward one another are cultivated. This study will assist policymakers, key stakeholders, and peace and conflict scholars in understanding the CHT peace process's nuts and bolts and identifying pertinent areas that require further inquiry. Given the lack of an integrated assessment incorporating the inadequacies and aftermath of the CHT peace accord based on all works published in refereed journals, this review aims to provide better insights that add to the field's advancement.

**KEYWORDS:** Chittagong Hill Tracts, CHT Peace Accord, Peacebuilding, Intra-State Conflict, CHT Conflict, Systematic Review

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) are the only large hills in the southeast region of Bangladesh that occupy 13,184 square kilometres, or around one-tenth of the nation's entire territory. According to the 2001 Population Census, the CHT is home to roughly 1.35 million people. There are around 700,000 indigenous people in the nation, as well as 650,000 Bangali refugees, and 13 separate indigenous ethnic groups (Panday & Jamil, 2009). These people share stronger ethnocultural similarities with other Sino-Tibetans living in Myanmar and the Indian states of Tripura and Mizoram than with Bengalis, who make up a sizable majority of Bangladesh's population (Jamil & Panday, 2008). They have different religious views as well. The CHT debate dates all the way back to the Pakistani period for a myriad of reasons. To begin with, the CHT, which has a non-Muslim population of 97 percent, was ironically absorbed by Muslim-majority Pakistan, according to the controversial Radcliffe survey (B. Chakma, 2010b). Despite strong local resistance, the Boundary Commission was established in 1947 (Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission, 1992).

Bangladesh has faced insurmountable challenges in preventing the spread of conflicts and insurgencies in the form of political turmoil, religious violence, and ethnic tensions since the country won independence in 1971. Soon after independence, the CHT dispute grew intense owing to a range of fundamental incompatibilities, including nationality, identity, and sovereignty (Mohsin, 1997), and ultimately evolved into a prolonged low-intensity warfare in 1977. The government and the Parbatya Chittagram Jana Sanhati Samiti (PCJSS) signed the CHT Peace Accord (CHTPA) in 1997 to preserve the interests of indigenous people living in the hill regions (Chakma, 2017b). The Accord's principal purpose was to settle the centuries-old land feud and insurgencies in the hill region, thereby ensuring territorial integrity, national security, and regional peacebuilding. The number of field studies conducted on CHT people is still inadequate, even though the accord was signed in 1997, to provide more realistic and scientific input about the ground reality and to pinpoint what aspects of the CHTPA's policy performance and output are important to the targeted population. Nonetheless, several intellectuals and researchers have made significant contributions to the Accord's implementation (Ahsan & Chakma, 1989; B. Chakma, 2010a; N. J. Chowdhury, 2012; Mohsin, 1997; Panday & Jamil, 2009; Rashiduzzaman, 1998) are inarguably recognized and relevant in this regard. However, peace scholars and

policy professionals regard the 'peace accord' as a necessary and critical component of crisis management. An agreement strives to ensure collaboration and frequently benefits both parties through a win-win situation (Wallensteen, 2011). Moreover, the researchers argue that implementing such an accord is more challenging since it requires disbursing the parties' objective incompatibilities. As a result, enforcing such an Accord is usually more challenging. Proper identification of the underlying roots of the problem, resolution of aim incompatibilities, and guarantee of higher acceptance of the Accord's structure by the targeted people may all lead to the targeted individuals being more contented with the Accord's policy outcome throughout implementation. Otherwise, discontent among the policy's targeted beneficiaries might have a detrimental influence on the execution of the Accord (Pearce, 2005).

The CHT dispute was born out of a sense of endangered culture, political desire for liberty (Taras & Ganguly, 2010), systemic injustice and fear of extinction, and the state's lack of infrastructural control in exercising its hegemony over society (Horowitz, 1998). The Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, agreed to sign the CHTPA with Shantu Larma, the leader of the PCJSS, the political wing of the separatist rebels best known as the Shantibahini, to end the 25-year-long dispute in CHT. With the official signature of the peace agreement—often referred to as a "treaty", there has been substantial progress (Rashiduzzaman, 1998). It is not a treaty between sovereign states; the Bangladeshi people expressed both recognition and disapproval of the agreement on December 2, 1997. While the majority of Bengalis perceive CHT as their sovereign territory and hope to benefit economically and strategically from it, there is growing recognition that a violent military intervention in the protracted low-intensity battle would have been impractical. Thus, the CHTPA has failed to achieve the nation-wide acceptance that Bangladesh's political leadership needed. This agreement, however, did not satisfy all classes of hill people. The United Peoples Democratic Front (UPDF)-backed student wings have criticized the agreement, claiming that it fails to resolve the basic rights of hill citizens and that PCJSS has abandoned the call for CHT autonomy (Zahed, 2013). Due to governments' political commitment, the peace accord has not yet been implemented completely. The Bangladesh army's removal from CHT was a crucial provision of the 1997 CHTPA. However, according to the CHT people, only a few military camps were withdrawn, hence, indicating the failure of the implementation of the CHTPA (Dowlah, 2013). Prior CHT peace literature mostly consisted of case studies (Bala, 2018; Levene, 1999; Mohsin, 1997; Salam & Aktar, 2014; Uddin, 2019) and interview-based qualitative studies (Alamgir, 2017; A. Chakma, 2017a; Partha, 2016). None of those studies have attempted to conduct a systematic literature review on this topic. Thus, there is no extensive review article on the CHT peace process, while prior literature has covered several dimensions of the CHTPA in general. Hence, this review will encourage future research to conduct extensive research and advance the body of knowledge on peace and conflict.

In this perspective, the current paper's objectives can be summarized as follows. i) to assess the CHT's conflict history ii) to explore the 1997 CHTPA and its aftermath. iii) to demonstrate the post accord era and the current situation at the CHT iv) to specify the key criticisms of the CHTPA v) to identify the literature gaps and critical issues to be addressed in the future research. To accomplish these objectives, the remainder of our scholarship is organized as follows: Section 2 stipulates the research questions. The research method is outlined in section 3. Subsequently, the historical context of conflict in CHT is discussed in section 4. Section 5 demonstrates the peace accord and its aftermath. Section 6 deals with the post accord conditions, followed by a discussion of the criticisms of the accord in section 7. The findings of the study are discussed in section 8. Next, section 9 addresses a few directions for future research. Section 10 carries the concluding remarks.

## **II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The research objectives mentioned earlier can be summarized within the following overarching research question: To what extent the peacebuilding in CHT was successful and what were the consequences?

The research question was addressed with the following specific questions:

- How did the conflict emerge in the CHT?
- What involved in the CHTPA and what was the aftermath?
- What was the post accord condition in the CHT and how is the current situation?
- What are the major criticisms of the CHTPA?
- What are the crucial gaps in the extant literature and how can future research address them?

## **III. REVIEW METHODS**

The research method chosen for this paper was a systematic literature review (SLR). SLR guidelines are used in this paper, which is a type of secondary research with a well-defined procedure (Kitchenham & Charters, 2007). By being auditable and replicable, the SLR approach aims to be as inclusive as possible. The goal of an SLR, according to (Dwan et al., 2008), is to provide a comprehensive list of all research related to a specific field of study. Traditional reviews, on the other hand, seek to summarize the findings of a series of studies.

### 3.1 Review Design

Instead of searching specific books or technical reports, this SLR focused on searching scientific databases. It was assumed that most empirical findings in books and reports are either mentioned or cited in scientific articles. The author used the following 5 databases in this research to conduct the SLR search:

1. SCOPUS (<https://www.scopus.com/home.uri>)
2. Springer Link (<https://link.springer.com>)
3. Science Direct (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/>)
4. Google Scholar (<https://scholar.google.com/>)
5. Semantic Scholar (<https://www.semanticscholar.org/>)

While searching articles pertinent to the CHTPA in the scientific databases, the keywords or search terms below were used in title, keywords, and abstracts:

“CHT Peace Accord” OR, “CHT Peace Process” OR, “Chittagong Hill Tracts” and “Conflict in the Chittagong Hill Tracts” OR, “Peacebuilding in Chittagong Hill Tracts”.

### 3.2 ReviewConduction

The inclusion and exclusion criteria chosen and used in this research are illustrated in Figure 1. The figure shows that research articles that are not pertinent to CHT Peace Process were excluded in this study. Besides, duplicate articles of the same research were excluded from the article search process. This research excluded short papers (communications, viewpoints, and posters) and included peer-reviewed journal articles for SLR.

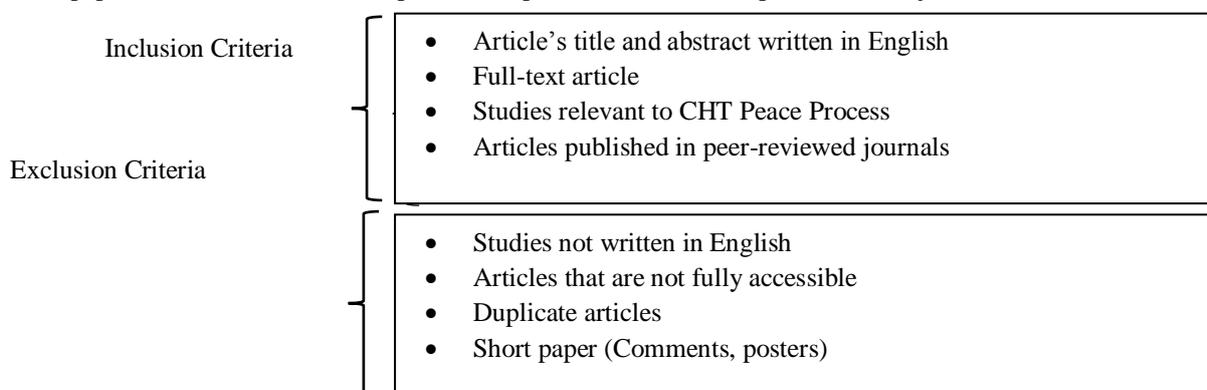


Figure 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Literature

### 3.3 Synthesis

The entire computerized article search strategy found 312 articles in both IR and non-IR journals. The final list comprised 39 peer-reviewed articles which were eligible for inclusion based on this study’s SLR inclusion criteria (Figure 2).

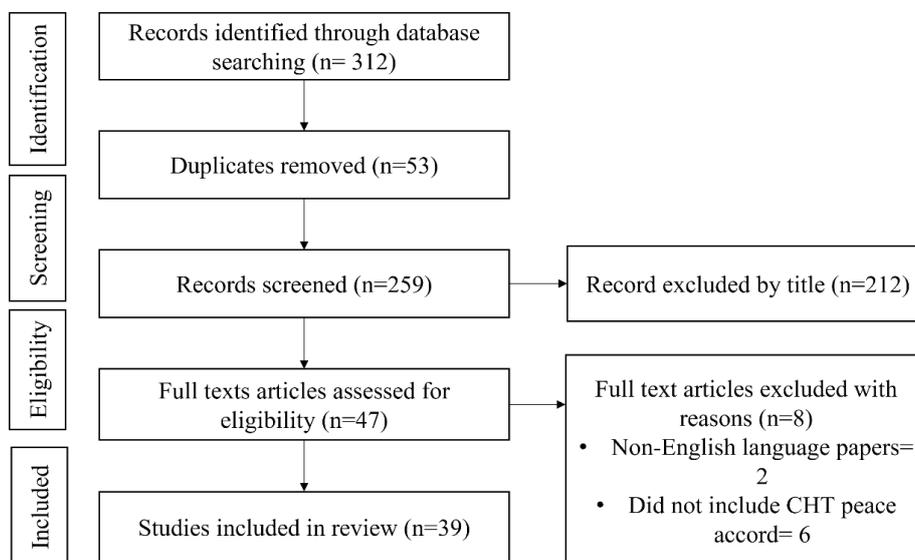


Figure 2: PRISMA flow diagram for Systematic Review

#### **IV. HISTORY OF CONFLICT IN THE CHT**

The CHT covers approximately ten percent of the country's overall land area. It is a separate region in Bangladesh, with its own special scenery and inhabitants. According to Dasgupta & Ahmed (1998), before 1950s, the hill area was populated by indigenous inhabitants who were ethnically, linguistically, culturally, and religiously distinct from the rest of the country's population. Because of their slash-and-burn agriculture, also known as 'Jhum' cultivating, these tribal groups are communally known as Jumma. From 1666 to 1760, the Mughal ruled the city. This area was handed over to the British East India Company in 1760.

During the Mughal era, the area was controlled by informal, partly independent self-governance mechanisms. The Mughal overlords did not interfere with the region's government system in exchange for taxes (Ahmed et al., 2013). The CHT Regulation of 1900 gave the area the distinct recognition of being an "autonomously controlled" district, following the Mughal rule. This statute establishes stringent entry and residence requirements in the CHT, effectively prohibiting persons from outside the area from obtaining land rights. As per the Regulation, the CHT was also split into three revenue circles, each governed by a rajah, namely the Chakma Circle, the Mong Circle, and the Bohmang Circle. Representatives from both tribes were included in these circles. (Mohsin, 1997) argues that the Government of India Act of 1919 and 1935 recognised CHT's status as a specially administered region. The "special status" was also preserved in Pakistan's 1956 and 1962 constitutions. However, a constitutional change repealed the "special privilege" in 1963, and by the 1960s, all native tribal government workers had been relocated to other regions of East Pakistan (present Bangladesh), leaving the local administration largely occupied by Bengalis. CHT locals also witnessed one of the most disastrous outcomes of "modernization" and "development" during this period, notably the building of the Kaptai Dam on the Karnafuli river in Rangamati, which exiled over 100,000 Jumma and inundated about 40% of the region's agricultural land. Over 40,000 indigenous people were forced to seek permanent refuge in India due to inadequate compensation for lost property (Amnesty International, 2000). The Jumma people perceived the liberation of Bangladesh as a curse for them in 1971. During the war in 1971, the Chakma king backed the Pakistani army, while the Mong king opposed the liberation fighters; the Bohmang ruler remained neutral. However, the Jumma citizens were labeled as pro-Pakistanis because of the Chakma Raja's decision. As a result, the Mukti Bahini—Liberation Bangladesh's Force—was enraged with the Jumma people: 16 people were assassinated on December 5, 1971, and bloodshed lasted throughout December (Ahsan & Chakma, 1989).

The Jumma citizens refused to consider Sheikh Mujib's point and seized control of the condition. Local youths recovered Pakistani weapons left in the CHT jungles, fought the Bengalis, and established an administrative structure for the villagers (Mohsin, 1997). The CHT inhabitants thought it was crucial to get constitutional guarantees for their safety as a distinct group because of their previous histories of exploitation and intense distrust of Bengalis. The government militarized the area as soon as violent clashes erupted, deploying 115,000 military troops in the 1980s. Between 1979 and 1984, the government launched a transmigration program to suppress the insurgency, taking over 400,000 poor Bengali migrants to the capital. The strategy had a significant effect on the CHT's demographic composition, since the number of Bengali migrants in the district escalated from 26% in 1974 to 41% in 1981 (UNECOSOC, 2011). The Jumma people's armed revolt lasted until the 1990s, and during that time massive and systematic breaches of the Jumma people's human rights occurred. Approximately 70,000 tribal people escaped to India during the revolt, while approximately 100,000 individuals were internally displaced. On December 2, 1997, the Bangladeshi government and the PCJSS negotiated the CHTPA, officially ending the warfare (Zahed, 2013)

#### **V. THE 1997 CHT PEACE ACCORD AND ITS AFTERMATH**

Within the context of Bangladesh's Constitution and with complete and unshakable confidence in the nation's sovereignty and integrity, the CHTPA covered a myriad of subjects spanning from bureaucratic to military status, the land question, immigrants, and displaced people, among many others. With an eye toward inspecting the Accord, some might contend that its provisions included a strong local government comprised of different indigenous tribal delegates, along with the chairperson; a reduction in military intervention in the region; the inclusion of community leaders in the CHT land use plan; and a sizable package for evacuated minority ethnic households (Bala, 2018). (Chowdhury, 2002, p.11) states that "With an objective to uphold political, social, cultural, educational, and economic rights, and to expedite socioeconomic development process of all citizens in the CHT, the two parties arrived at an agreement which is divided into four parts: General; Hill District Local Government Council/Hill District Council; Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council; and Rehabilitation, General Amnesty, and Other Matters".

Due to the PCJSS's dominance in the Regional Council (RC) and Hill Regional Councils, the CHTPA has not prioritized other ordinary people in the CHT. The residents of Jumma, who were not actively involved in local politics, felt cheated and misled as a result of their lack of representation on the Regional Council. Similarly, the repercussions of the conflict between the PCJSS and the UPDF have aided in the institutionalization of political violence as a way of accomplishing political objectives. If the remainder of

society wants to get involved in and benefit from the system underneath this political landscape, they would favor the more dominating party. Due to the prolonged practice of elitism and the ongoing support of the associated political benefit group, the underlying truth has developed into an irreversible loop that only causes suffering to the Jumma group (Partha, 2016).

In Jumma society, a lack of trust has become a regular occurrence. The public trust in their political groups and leaders in general is minimal and deteriorating. The public does not feel that their fellow citizens are involved in politics for the common good. The public are dissatisfied and perplexed by the UPDF and PCJSS members' performance in activities and monitoring of the dualism operations. Since 1997, the Bengali immigrants have heavily criticised the peace process, claiming that the CHTPA is overly focused on the Jumma community. The rising number of Bengali groups is a military plan, according to the Jumma people. It's worth noting that, while the CHTPA stated that all temporary camps of the army would be evacuated and replaced with permanent cantonments, there was no mention of the deadline for withdrawal (N. J. Chowdhury, 2012).

About 240 of the CHT's nearly 500 military bases have been decommissioned thus far (Partha, 2016). In defense of the military presence in the CHT, the Bangladeshi government argues that, in the post-Accord setting, the army is still required to improve peace and order. Shortly after the signature of the agreement with Operation Uttaran, the government implemented "de facto military control" at CHT. The deployment of the military in the CHT has disrupted the life of the Jumma people by interfering with civil governance, assisting Bengali people, forest management, infrastructure maintenance and building, and, most crucially, upholding law and order. According to Mahajanpara sources, the administration has not been aggressive enough in combating both sides' organizations. In addition, Bengali organizations have risen in prominence, extending their membership and offices across the CHT region and encouraging immigrants to violence (Barua, 2001).

## **VI. EMERGENCE OF NEW VIOLENT ACTORS & MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE POST-ACCORD PERIOD**

The CHTPA between the Bangladesh government and the PCJSS is not without blemishes, and the public views it suspiciously (Partha, 2016). According to the CHT agreement, the Bangladeshi government's aim is to gradually withdraw armed forces. However, there are fears that this has heightened the danger of a re-emergence of the matrix between organized crime and violence in the CHT, which has a porous and crucial terrain connecting South Asia and Southeast Asia. Bangladesh is currently at a crossroads, forced to find a careful balance between conflict resolution and security. Land ownership has been a source of contention in the CHT, frequently resulting in violent warfare. The indigenous residents and the Bengali immigrants are at battle for so long (1977-1997). The peace pact includes critical provisions for resolving regional land conflicts. It is true that implementation is moving at a snail's pace in this area, which has exacerbated resentment among the native population (Panday & Jamil, 2009). Armed indigenous renegades oppose the deal and engage in criminal activity. The agreement's delaying implementation has reignited nationalist sentiments and separatist tendencies among the Paharis, or indigenous hill people. There are stories of recurring tensions between the Bengalis and the Paharis, which have frequently resulted in violent clashes. The greatest threat to peace in the CHT now is the inter-group struggle between opposing groups, the PCJSS and the UPDF (Ahmed et al., 2013).

Soon after the signing of the CHTPA, it became evident that the Bangladeshi government had made a grave mistake in believing the hill communities were an ordinary, homogeneous, and cohesive entity. Instead, the hill communities are made up of ethnically and ideologically diverse groupings. This failure has resulted in the CHT's current divide and competition over local politics, as well as ongoing conflict inside and between several CHT regions (Partha, 2016). The provisions of the CHTPA have polarized violent players, and jungle warfare persists at considerable risk and expense to communities (Wilkinson, 2016). The current security situation has become increasingly complicated because of a variety of circumstances, ranging from ethnic tensions over land to the creeping emergence of a security vacuum. There are still several grievances and dissatisfactions. Indeed, similar views are growing among a sizable segment of the indigenous community that supported, sympathized with, or participated actively in the insurgency. A periodic outbreak of violence in this strategically critical region could be a symptom of a long-standing conflict that has not been addressed – at least in the views of those who have suffered from land alienation for a prolonged period, even before Bangladesh was formed.

It is critical to note that, while the departure of the Bangladeshi army and other security troops from the temporary camps and relocation to permanent cantonments were promised in the CHTPA, no deadline was specified for this departure (Partha, 2016). To defend the military involvement in the CHT, the Government has argued that the army is still required to ensure peace in the post-Accord era. Hence, the army still retains control and authority over the CHT territory through Operation Uttaran ("Operation Upliftment") (Ahmed et al., 2013; Partha, 2016). Recent conflicts between indigenous groups and Bengali immigrants have resurfaced, exacerbated by the AL government's approval of the CHT Land Dispute Resolution Commission (Amendment) Act 2013 in May 2013. Numerous human rights organizations, including the United Nations Office for the

Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, voiced concerns about the efficacy of state military in preventing conflict in the region (B. Chakma, 2010a; Dowlah, 2013). (Alamgir, 2017) argues that state actors legitimize continuous military engagement by portraying CHT as a border that jeopardizes national sovereignty. The military explains the camps' existence by claiming that there are still worries about the region's safety and peace.

## **VII. CRITICISM OF THE PEACE ACCORD**

Substantial investments in socio-economic development are needed for post-conflict reconstruction (Brown et al., 2011). Bangladesh, a developing economy, needs assistance from the international community for peacebuilding in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Local ownership and context-specific demand-driven peacebuilding initiatives are crucial while designing the peacebuilding agenda (Doyle & Sambanis, 2000; Pearce, 2005; Shinoda, 2008), but local priorities and needs are not prioritized over donor interest and motivations (Duckworth, 2016) as seen in post-conflict reconstruction of Somalia, Myanmar, Timor-Leste, and Indonesia (Dibley, 2014). The CHT also portrays a similarly bleak picture of peacebuilding.

Despite having many positive aspects, the CHT Accord sparked a lot of debate and criticism, ranging from ideological and literary to political and practical issues (Nasreen, 2017). The lack of legal protections, the efficacy of the Land Commission's roles and operations, and its incapability to address some justice and human rights violations issues, and the limited representation of small communities and women's interests (Roy, 2003). According to (A. Chakma, 2017a), firstly, the CHT accord is innately flawed since it fails to address some of the crucial aspects of the conflict. The Bengali settlement dispute, which is the structural origin of the conflict, was unresolved in the Accord (B. Chakma, 2010b). Secondly, the implementation process of this Accord has revealed an apparent lack of commitment. Thus, the central provisions of the peace deal have yet been unimplemented despite 13 years of peacebuilding initiatives. The CHTPA could not resolve and was not even intended to address some of the significant root causes of conflict, including militarizing and settling land ownership conflicts. The gender issue has yet remained unsettled, both within hill politics and between hill organizations and Bengali civil society organizations. Hill women are also working to carve out a place for themselves within the organizations and communities. Although a strong leadership ability exists, it has yet to manifest itself in a more institutionalized way (Guhathakurta, 2004).

During the initial stages of negotiations between Shanti Bahini and government officials, confidentiality was strictly upheld. As a result, intellectuals had little opportunity to examine issues such as obligations, power-sharing, and regional council leadership, among other things (Zahed, 2013). The responsible bodies involved in the agreement lacked mutual trust. The BNP and Bengali settlers in CHT were not pleased with the agreement and opposed its implementation. Following the signing of the agreement, there have been conflicts between PCJSS and other Hill people who claim the CHTPA failed to give CHT full sovereignty. In the HT, there are still tensions between hill people and settlers. Concerning the Accord, a communal dispute erupted between the PCJSS and the UPDF in December 1998, in which approximately 500 people were killed. The UPDF followed the kidnapping strategy. Thousands of people have been abducted in recent decades. Security forces, on the other hand, have arrested members of the PCJSS and the UPDF. As a result, those two HT groups have set out to abduct and kill members of the security forces as well as Bengali settlers (Amnesty International, 2000).

## **VIII. DISCUSSION**

According to the preceding arguments, the CHT's underlying causes of conflict are diverse and include lands, civil rights, militarization, Bengali relocation, and cultural antagonism. CHT researchers argue that these factors continue to perform the same function in diverse situations. Despite the fact that the military approach and Bengali displacement are viewed as distinct political goals, reality on the ground demonstrates that both state policies frequently have an impact on the lives of the Jumma community (Mohsin, 1997). The military troops have resumed operations in the hill tracts, as well as aiding Bengali settlers. However, this 'assistance' comes with its own set of complications. Improper administrative procedures have consistently jeopardized the Jumma people's rights. While the violent battle between Jumma political activists and the military erupted, ordinary people employed different ways to safeguard their lives and livelihoods. Grassroots agencies and experience have allowed them either to flee from violence or to engage in future conflicts in the CHT region (Partha, 2016).

Prior literature (Saha, 1999; Sajib & Sohad, 2018; Uddin, 2019) has investigated the CHTPA's ramifications, with an emphasis on the mechanics of the negotiation process as experienced and realized by the indigenous people. According to the peace researchers, diverse stakeholders did not play a similar role at the grassroots level. Although the monitoring procedures and military actions primarily served the power apparatus, it was intriguing to observe the talks between several players at various levels. While the CHTPA has reduced the degree of violence between the military and Shanti Bahini ("Peace Force"), discontent among different Jumma political figures has generated multiple intra-group feuds. The majority of Jumma believed the

government was aiming to 'divide and rule' by instigating or backing several Jumma political parties. As a result, the Jumma people have faced a range of crimes, including coercive evictions, law enforcement and military harassment, falsified police charges, and extreme insecurity for their families, especially Jumma women (Partha, 2016). Not just for the Jumma, but also for the Bengali immigrants, safety was a major issue. While the settlers had a particular bond with the soldiers, they were constrained by history and reality. Between Bengali settlers and the Jumma people, land ownership has been a source of disagreement, as has communal tensions, verbal harassment, physical torture, vandalized religious events, and other types of everyday conflicts (Jamil & Panday, 2008).

After conducting a comprehensive SLR, the author of this scholarly work argues that the CHTPA failed to resolve the root causes of conflicts in the hill area. Extant studies in this domain note that, the government included a few regional political elites ignoring the indigenous Pahari people in the peacebuilding and conflict resolution process (Jamil & Panday, 2008; Sajib & Sohad, 2018). Thus, the CHTPA eventually turned into a bilateral agreement between a few influential ethnic communities and the government while ignoring the voice of the indigenous tribes residing in the hill area. As a result, this peace accord arguably failed to represent all hill dwellers notwithstanding their ethnicity (Ahmed et al., 2013; Panday & Jamil, 2009; Sajib & Sohad, 2018). Past research contends that the strategic and economic considerations make it exceedingly difficult for the people of Bangladesh to cede total sovereignty over 10% of their precious small nation to a mere 1% of the population. Simultaneously, the tribal issue cannot be brushed off; it has become extremely political and internationalized, and indigenous tribes have demonstrated that they are not simply pliable to assimilation initiatives (Dowla, 2013).

This findings from the existing literature suggest that sustaining peace concerning the CHT dispute will need the cooperation of local groups, since they would be the recipients of the Accord's consequences. If they work together, it will be simpler to convince the government to agree to the Accord's implementation as soon as feasible. For instance, if the PCJSS and the UPDF cooperated, peace would be more likely to emerge or, at the least, their unity would reduce the likelihood of government agencies finding reasons for the CHTPA's non-implementation. Simultaneously, the CHT leaders must persuade the government, that includes the military, the civil bureaucracy, dissident political personalities, and many other stakeholders, that they are not challengers for unified state power or sovereignty. If there is shared understanding and sufficient engagement among all parties (or factions) involved in resolving the issue, and most importantly, if the government leaders have compassion, implementation will indeed be reasonably straightforward (Bala, 2018).

The study's results and arguments have substantial policy implications. Our research reveals that in order to avoid the emergence of such conflicts or to settle existing ones, it is critical to promote policies of accommodation and inclusion rather than assimilation. Unless and until such a plan is implemented, the risk of ethno-national conflicts will prevail. This literature contends that unanimity at the local and national levels is vital for the Accord's implementation to evolve into peace. Along with many other considerations, peace initiatives will progress if mutual respect and a good attitude toward one another are fostered. In this respect, the GOB must address the complaints of the indigenous groups of CHT; the PCJSS leadership must recognize the UPDF's existence while mobilizing other local groups; and the UPDF leadership must admit the PCJSS's accomplishments in the CHT independence movement; and hence, a productive remedy will emerge.

## **IX. DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The purpose of this scholarship was to provide a complete and extensive review of the CHT peace process over the last decades. Our systematic assessment and discussion of past research identified several potential areas for further study. While the current literature provides several viewpoints on the history of the peace accord, the CHT land dispute, the accord's aftermath, and the CHT Jumma insurrection, I believe that the domain is still dormant with numerous untouched areas for future study. This research proposes that peace and conflict scholars follow this lead in examining the unresolved questions concerning the CHT peace process.

First, research on CHT peace process is still scarce compared to its importance in the field of peace and conflict, and indigeneity. The number of articles published in international refereed journals on this topic is quite inadequate to draw any conclusion based on past research. Hence, future International Relations and peace and conflict scholars should conduct extensive research on this critical issue. Second, the extant literature lacks from proper theoretical foundation. Our extensive review reveals that only a handful of studies were backed by any theory (A. Chakma, 2017b; Partha, 2016). Future research should incorporate both theory and practical evidence to depict a comprehensive picture of the issue. Several theories pertaining to peace and conflict, and endogeneity can be underpinned to explain the peace process in the CHT. Third, primary data driven empirical studies should be given more priority to investigate the problems of the hill people and the shortcomings of the CHTPA. Future studies can conduct extensive field surveys to identify the major issues that impede peace process in the hill area of Bangladesh. Policy papers and other secondary resources are not adequate to understand the accurate phenomenon. All the relevant stakeholders should be surveyed and interviewed today

deep into the core of the issues. Inclusion of different stakeholders like the indigenous people, the political organizations, the NGOs working there, members of the rebel army, policymakers of the government would bring forward the differences of opinions and perspectives that can be further analysed to mitigate the major problems.

## X. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This piece of research, which aims to comprehensively assess the current literature, offers valuable insights on the CHT peacebuilding process. The scholarly work reports numerous shortcomings of the CHT peace accord that was signed with an intention to resolve the conflicts in the hill area. Our extensive review of the extant scholarships unveils that the 1997 CHT Peace Accord remained mostly unimplemented, owing to a lack of widespread support among the populace, the country's major political groups, and several ethnic groups in the region. Hence, peacebuilding in the region remains evasive. Economic and strategic considerations make it exceedingly difficult for the people of Bangladesh to cede entire power over 10% of their priceless small nation to a mere 1% of the population. Simultaneously, the tribal issue cannot be brushed off; it has become politically driven and globalized, and indigenous tribes have demonstrated that they are not simply amenable to integration efforts. At the same time, a possible independence of the CHT would benefit neither the people of Bangladesh nor the indigenous communities' interests. To achieve a win-win situation, the current AL administration must develop support for the agreement, fully execute it, and guarantee that the institutions established on behalf of the CHT area and the Jumma people work effectively. At the very least, the state must renounce its oppressive and discriminatory policies in favour of a political solution. Without these components of a comprehensive solution, governmental legitimacy, regional security, and trust between settlers and indigenous peoples in the CHT will remain a long way off, and the violent conflict in the CHT will continue for a long time.

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