

BANGLADESH ELIMINATES ITS BUDDHISTS

by Rick Heizman, July, 2013, San Francisco

Ongoing Slaughter, Ethnic Cleansing, Extermination

Arakan is a Continuation of the Expulsion and Elimination of Buddhists

Historically, the land that is now called **BANGLADESH** was Vedic, Hindu, and Buddhist kingdoms for nearly 2000 years. The great Buddhist **Pala Empire**, centered in Bengal, ruled a very large area from the 8th to the 12th centuries. The Pala period is considered as the golden era of Bengal, with stability, prosperity, colossal temples and exquisite works of art. This remarkable Buddhist Empire eventually disintegrated in the 12th century, most drastically with the invasion of Muslim armies that swept through India, killing or pushing Buddhists to the edges of their rule. Bangladesh - for a long time a Buddhist majority land, is now down to less than 1% Buddhists, and those remaining Buddhists are subject to attacks, destruction of temples, rapes, killings, burning of homes, kidnapping and converting women to Islam, and more. In the last 6 months there have been dozens of Buddhist temples destroyed, hundreds of Buddhist homes burned, many Buddhists killed.

The **Buddhists of Bangladesh** number about one million, out of a total population of 160 million people - almost all Muslim, except for small populations of Hindu, Christian and Buddhists. The Buddhists live almost entirely in the hills of the southeastern part of Bangladesh, bordering Rakhine and Chin States of Burma, and Tripura and Mizoram States of India. The British - already ruling most of the surrounding Burmese, Arakanese, and Indian lands - annexed the hills area in 1860 and created an autonomous district known as 'The Chittagong Hill Tracts' (also known as the CHT).



From the distant past, before the existence of Islam, the Chittagong Hill Tracts (hereafter CHT) has been the home of thirteen indigenous ethnic groups: Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Tanchangya, Mro, Murung, Lushai, Khumi, Chak, Khyang, Bawm, Pankhua, and Reang. Collectively they all can be referred to as **the Jumma people**. They are distinctly different from the majority Bengali population of Bangladesh in terms of race, language, culture, religion and history. At that time that the British annexed the CHT the population

of that area was almost 100% Jumma people, and almost entirely Buddhist.

In 1900, the British enacted '**Regulation 1**' of the '**1900 Act**'¹ in order to protect the Jumma people and their cultures from economic exploitation by non-indigenous people, ie: the Bengali Muslims from the greater flat lands. Throughout the British colonial period the '1900 Act' functioned as a safeguard for the Jumma people, prohibited land ownership and migrations of non-indigenous peoples into the CHT. Against better judgement, against the wishes of the Jumma people, and in violation of the principles of partition (the splitting off from India by the Muslims of present day Pakistan and Bangladesh), the CHT was ceded to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) at independence from Britain in 1947. The Jumma knew their future would be better if they were part of India or Burma (other than being independent) and vehemently protested the decision, but to no avail.

Since that time, there has been a steady, sustained and brutal campaign to push the Jumma off their land, or simply kill them, and award the Jumma villages and land to the multitudes of Bengali Muslims whom are increasing very rapidly due to a very high birthrate.

DISPOSSESSION OF JUMMA LAND

There were various ways in which the Jumma people have been, and still are being dispossessed of their lands. In some cases, Bangladeshi settlers move into an area and gradually encroach on the lands of their Jumma neighbors, in other cases it is done by rounding up and slaughtering the Jummas. A Chakma refugee from Panchari describes the initial process as follows:

Jumma refugees describe being dispossessed of their ancient homeland:

"In 1980-81 the Bengalis moved in. The government gave them rations of rice etc. and sponsored them. The settlers moved into the hills, then they moved the Jummas by force with the help of the Bangladesh Army. The Deputy Commissioner would come over and say that this place was suitable for settlers so Jumma people must move and would receive money in compensation. But in reality they did not get money or resettlement"

"Muslims from different parts of Bangladesh were brought in by Bangladeshi authorities. Before that our village was populated only by Chakma, Tripura and Marma. They took all the food grain. Whenever we seek any justice from the army we don't get it. All villagers lived under great tension due to various incidents all around. Three days after an incident when six persons had been killed, just before getting dark, many settlers came to our village, shouting '*Allah Akbar*' (Allah is Great). When they arrived we escaped, so the settlers got the opportunity to set fire".

"Settlers came and captured my land. They burnt our houses first. They came with soldiers. This took place on 1st May 1986 at Kalanal, Panchari. My house was in a village with a temple. The whole village of 60 houses was burnt. After seeing this we ran through the jungles and eventually reached India."



Buddhist Monks Tell of Atrocities by Bangladeshi Army Soldiers and Bengali Settlers:

- "Thirteen of us went to the market. I was not a monk then. The Bangladesh Rifles (paramilitary force) and settlers caught us and out of 13, nine were killed and four of us escaped. The reason was that we were not Muslims; they wanted us to be Muslims - to convert to Islam. Among the people whom they caught was my wife. They cut her with daos (machette) - some of the marks on her neck are still there. They also tried to cut me with daos on the neck. Luckily my shirt collar was thick and I escaped from being killed. As they killed the others they shouted: 'Oh Chakmas, will you not become Muslims? If you refuse we will kill you now.'"
- "The day before yesterday the Muslim settlers came to the village and rounded up the households. The settlers were accompanied by Bangladeshi soldiers. I took shelter in a nearby latrine when the villagers were rounded up. Later I tried to leave the latrine to go somewhere else. The village had been surrounded. As I was trying to escape, the Muslim settlers shot me. After getting the bullet injury I ran away into a safe place. I don't know what happened to the other villagers. I ran away from the place for about half a mile. Then I fainted and lost consciousness. Two refugees went there to collect indigenous vegetables and brought me to the camp about 10 o'clock. I have been twice attacked to be taken to a cluster village, the second time I was shot."
- "For many months now soldiers have been regularly visiting us and slaughtering cows in our shrine.... They always said that if we did not agree to this (conversion to Islam) they will come one day and kill us. On the morning of 1 May they carried out their threat by escorting a group of two to three hundred settlers, some of whom were dressed in the uniform of home guards, to our village and began their depredations by attacking Buddha Vihar (the temple). Most of us were, however, able to flee but soldiers pounced on Purnananda Bhikku (one of the monks) and after beating him with rifle butts handed him over to the Muslims who threw him into the shrine which was by now on fire. He died. Later when I met more people from my village they said that two young girls of the village had been raped mercilessly by troops and Muslims and then killed with bayonets."
- "On that day first the settlers and the army surrounded the temple. I was caught and my hands were tied with rope as were my legs. Water was poured through my nostrils. I was kicked with boots and my leg was cut. People came into the temple and caught all the girls. They took the girls a little way from the temple. I heard the cries of the girls - maybe they were raped but I did not see it with my own eyes. After a few days I met one of the girls but as a monk I have some restrictions and could not ask her what had happened."
- "They bring animals into the temple and slaughter them: goats and cows. Buddhist people never kill animals so you cannot worship in the temple after that has happened. I have witnessed it."
- "They cooked inside the temple and burnt wood on the dirt floor and brought wood in. They killed the animals outside the temple but within the boundary of the temple. They did this to crush Buddhism and establish Islam. There was no other reason for this."



RAPE: a Weapon of Shame, Terror, Death, Suicide

Rape is used frequently as a weapon - a horrific weapon - against Jumma women in the CHT. Many women are raped or gang-raped by Bangladesh Army soldiers and Bengali settlers, often in front of their children.

Women who have been raped may be rejected by their husbands or their families, or may not be able to get married. The trauma of rape remains with these women forever, and even drives some to suicide.



Accounts of Rape by Jumma Women:

- "About 50 army personnel came in the night and rounded up the whole village and gathered us in one place. In the morning all the men were arrested. I was tied up hands and legs, naked. They raped me."
- "They raped me in front of my father-in-law. After that we were tied up together, naked, facing each other. Then they left. Three other girls were raped in front of me. This happened in the month of Ashar (June/July) of 1985."
- "In the early morning 5 to 6 groups of soldiers encircled the village and some entered the huts. They caught all men and brought them to the fields and tied them with rope. My husband had his teeth beaten out of him, all blood. My son ran to his father and he was thrown to one side. The army ordered me to go into my hut and pointed guns at me. One grabbed me by the neck. My husband was near. My husband was almost beaten to death. I was raped by three soldiers in the room. After this I didn't want to live anymore, but what am I to do? I am still suffering from it. My husband is still injured in the lungs and can't work. I want to go back if there is peace, otherwise not. I want medical treatment as I am still suffering from the rape. I am still afraid of Muslims. My ribs were broken and my skin burns there. This happened in June 1986. I am still like mad, disturbed."
- "They (the army) surrounded the village early in the morning, we had not yet got up. Then they shouted to come out of the houses and concentrated all the people in one place. Then they started asking whether we had helped the SB (Shanti Bahini). All of us kept silent. ...Then they started beating the men and the women. One girl was taken by three soldiers. I don't know where she was taken. Then it was my turn. Two soldiers took me and subjected me to abuse. I was fully naked, they harassed me, they even poked me with a bayonet. I was left alone. I didn't know what to do. Somehow I managed to cover my body with some cloth and went to the jungle and kept walking till I reached India."
- "The army raped some of the women, especially college students and women working in offices. Many girls were taken to the army camp. After this incident (1989), intellectuals of the village were arrested by the army so as to prevent them from taking shelter in India. ...The girls who were taken away to the army camps were released after one week. In the camp the army raped them repeatedly."

Many Jumma women have been kidnapped, forcibly converted to Islam and forcibly married -and murdered if they refused. One victim tells: *"I was walking along the road to go to the fields with my six-year old niece to plant some seeds. A man appeared before us, bound my mouth with a piece of cloth and took me away on his scooter. I was kept for three months. I was forcibly converted to Islam and forced to marry."*

Major Massacres of Buddhists in Bangladesh - Ongoing Genocide

These are just 5 of the 13 large massacres of Buddhists in Bangladesh:

- **1971 - Bangladesh War of Independence:**

3 million people killed in one of the largest genocides in history. The war had nothing to do with the Hindus and Buddhist minorities, but the opportunity was taken to eliminate many many Hindus and Buddhists. They were killed by Muslim Pakistanis and by Muslim Bengalis.

- **June 26, 1981: Banraibari-Beltali-Belchari Massacre:**

Bangladeshi settlers (Muslims), under the protection of the Bangladesh army, invaded the Jumma area in the vicinity of Banraibari, Beltali and Belchari, murdered 500 Jumma men, women and children, then seized their homes, belongings, and farmland. The Jumma are the indigenous people of the area. They are Buddhist.

- **Sept 19, 1981: Telafang-Ashalong-Gurangapara-Tabalchari-Baronial Massacre:**

The Bangladesh army and Bangladeshi settlers attacked 35 Jumma villages including Telafang, Ashalong, Gurangapara, Tabalchari, and Baronial, in the Feni valley of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, and plundered and burned the villages, and killed many thousands of Buddhists men, women and children. The surviving villagers fled to the adjacent forests. Bangladesh was forced by the international community to repatriate them. These Jumma people were met by hostile Bangladeshi officials and were given the equivalent of \$18 and were left to their fate. Return to their native villages was impossible because their homes and possessions had been appropriated by Muslim Bangladeshis. Many of them died of starvation and of diseases.

- **June-August 1983: Golakpatimachara-Machyachara-Tarabanchari Massacre:**

Bangladesh armed forces and Bangladeshi immigrants from the flatlands massacred the Jumma people of the villages of Golakpatimachara, Machyachara, Tarabanchari, Logang, Tarabanya, Maramachyachara, Jedamachyachara etc. Hundreds of houses were looted and burned, and 800 people were murdered. Most of the victims were old men, women and children. After clearing the area of the Jumma people the government settled Bangladeshi families there.

- **May 31, 1984: Bhusanchara Massacre:**

A total of 400 Jumma and Chakma Buddhists including children and women were killed. Many women were gang raped and later shot dead. Seven thousand refugees crossed the border into the Indian state of Mizoram. A villager from Het Baria told Amnesty International: *“Even now I sometimes wake up in a cold sweat remembering the sight of the soldiers thrusting bayonets into private parts of our women. They were all screaming ‘No Chakmas will be born in Bangladesh’.”*

All of this is relative and important to know, because, this is what is going on in neighboring Arakan, and this is what the Rakhine Buddhists (and the Burmese Buddhists) are up against.