

# A Story That Eye Witnessed: Revolution Through Art in Bangladesh

## An OSUN Case Study

### Executive Summary

What kind of discrimination do Indigenous communities that are culturally different from the majority face in a country like Bangladesh? How do members of ethnic minorities tell the stories of their marginalization? Can art become an effective medium to give a voice to the voiceless? This Open Society University Network (OSUN) audiovisual case study explores these questions.

This case is based on the documentary “A Story That Eye Witnessed” that was directed by students of BRAC University in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The documentary puts a spotlight on the work of two Indigenous artists in Bangladesh whose visual work has been instrumental in raising awareness of the plight of marginalized communities in the country. The case is based on interviews with the two artists Tufan Chakma and Julian Bawm, who live in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh.

The case includes the following elements:

- § [Video Interviews](#)
- § Interviews
- § Written Case Study: This Document
- § Annex A: Contextual Pictures and Graphs

### Introduction:

The student film “A Story That Eye Witnessed” documents the struggles of Indigenous people hailing from the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh. The documentary showcases the silent battles Indigenous people have to fight every day and the injustice and discrimination that have become a part of their daily lives. The film focuses on two artists hailing from Indigenous communities in the region who are using their work to fight against the prejudice encountered by their people.

The People’s Republic of Bangladesh is a small country located on the Bay of Bengal in South Asia. With a population of over 165 million, it is the eighth most populous country in the world. One of the most densely populated regions in the world, Bangladesh is surrounded almost entirely by India, however, it shares a small border with Myanmar and is located close to Nepal, Bhutan, and China.

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*This case was written by Nishtha Gupta with inputs from Nancy Rualzapar Bawm and is based on the video case by Nancy Rualzapar Bawm, Tanzil Talat Anonto, Muntaqa NRB Hakim, Bayazid Hossain, and Antara Farnaz Khan. The faculty advisor is Michelle Murray.*

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## Revolution Through Art in Bangladesh

Bangladesh formed the eastern portion of the Bengal province of British India along with the current Indian state of West Bengal. With the partition of India in 1947, it became the Pakistani province of East Bengal (later East Pakistan), separated from the main landmass of Pakistan by 1,100 miles (1,800 km) of Indian territory. Present-day Bangladesh became a sovereign country in 1971 after gaining independence from Pakistan in the Bangladesh Liberation War. Dhaka, Bangladesh's largest city, became the political, cultural, and economic capital of the new republic.

### *Geography*

The physical geography of Bangladesh is varied and has an area characterized by two distinctive features: a broad deltaic plain subject to frequent flooding, and a small hilly region crossed by swiftly flowing rivers. Seventy-nine percent of the landmass of the riverine nation of Bangladesh is formed by the delta plain of the Ganges (Padma), Brahmaputra (Jamuna), and Meghna Rivers and their tributaries. The Chittagong Hill Tracts lie in the southeastern part of Bangladesh adjoining international boundaries with Myanmar on the southeast, the Indian states of Tripura to the north and Mizoram to the east. In its southern region, Bangladesh is fringed by the Sundarbans, a huge expanse of marshy deltaic forest.

Bangladesh has a tropical monsoon climate characterized by heavy seasonal rainfall, high temperatures, and high humidity. Natural disasters such as floods and cyclones accompanied by storm surges periodically affect the country.

### *People*

The Bengali language, the predominance of Islam, and a largely rural agrarian economy characterize much of Bangladesh. The ethnolinguistic group of Bengalis makes up 99% of Bangladesh's total population<sup>1</sup>, and its large Muslim population makes Bangladesh the third-largest Muslim-majority country in the world. Approximately 83% of the population is Muslim, 16% Hindu, and 1% Buddhist, Christian, or other. Non-Bengalis—consisting primarily of smaller Indigenous groups—constitute only a tiny fraction of the population. Most of these peoples inhabit the Chittagong Hill Tracts in the southeast, the most sparsely settled area of the country.

The population is relatively young, with 34% aged 15 or younger and 5% 65 or older. One of the fastest growing economies in the world, Bangladesh has made remarkable progress in reducing poverty supported by a demographic dividend, strong ready-made garment (RMG) exports, remittances, and stable macroeconomic conditions. According to the World Bank, poverty declined in the country from 44.2% in 1991 to 13.8% in 2016/17 (based on the international poverty line of \$1.90 per person per day)<sup>2</sup>. From being one of the poorest nations in 1971, Bangladesh reached lower-middle income status in 2015. It is on track to graduate from the UN's Least Developed Countries (LDC) list in 2026.

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<sup>1</sup> Mintu Deshwara and Pinaki Roy, "Ethnic Population in 2022 Census: Real Picture Not Reflected," *The Daily Star*, August 9, 2022, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/ethnic-population-2022-census-real-picture-not-reflected-3090941>.

<sup>2</sup> "Bangladesh: Reducing Poverty and Sharing Prosperity," World Bank, November 19, 2018, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/results/2018/11/15/bangladesh-reducing-poverty-and-sharing-prosperity>.

### *History*

While the modern state of Bangladesh only came into existence five decades ago, the history of Bengal is deeply intertwined with that of India, Pakistan, and other South Asian nations. Ancient Bengal was settled by the Austroasiatic, Tibeto-Burmans, Dravidians, and Indo-Aryans in consecutive waves of migration. The Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna rivers were natural arteries for communication and transportation, and estuaries on the Bay of Bengal permitted maritime trade.

Bengal was governed by the Mauryan Empire in the third and second centuries CE. With their citadels in the Bihar and Bengal territories, the Mauryans established the first geographically widespread Iron Age empire in ancient India. The empire promoted Buddhism and Jainism, reaching its apex under emperor Ashoka. Under the Gupta kings, who reigned from the early fourth to the late sixth century CE, Hinduism re-established its hold, but Buddhism did not fully disappear. By the end of the 11th century, the Senas, who were strongly Hindu, had gained control over a large part of Bengal.

Merchants from the Middle East, Sufis, and missionaries brought Islam to the shores of Bengal towards the end of the first millennium. Muslim invaders from the northwest overthrew the Senas. Muslim rule culminated in the Mughal dynasty (16th–18th century). Eastern Bengal was a thriving melting pot with strong trade and cultural networks. Mughal rule brought about agrarian reforms, economic prosperity, and thriving external trade, especially in silk textiles and muslin. The agrarian reforms transformed Bengal into the rice basket of the Indian subcontinent.

During the 18th century, the Nawabs of Bengal became the region's de facto rulers. The Nawabs forged alliances with European colonial companies, making the region relatively prosperous early in the century. Bengal accounted for 50% of the gross domestic product of their empire. During the rule of Emperor Aurangzeb (reigned 1658–1707), the English East India Company was permitted to establish its base at Calcutta (now Kolkata). The British gained strength in the region as the Mughal empire weakened.

Though threatened by Indian expansion and Portuguese raiders, the land remained largely autonomous until June 1757 when the British sent soldiers under Robert Clive to defeat a force led by local ruler Nawab Siraj-ud-Daula at the Battle of Plassey (known locally as Polashi) and the East India Company emerged as the dominant political power in the province. Historians often describe the battle as "the beginning of British colonial rule in South Asia."<sup>3</sup> A new land settlement system was established in the territory—now called the Bengal Presidency—whereby property rights were granted in perpetuity to local *zamindars* (landlords). This property policy indirectly stimulated the growth of a new landed middle class—especially in Calcutta—called the *bhadralok* (gentlemen). This new class was primarily composed of upper caste Hindus who extracted rent from peasants for tilling their lands.

Bengal was the wealthiest region in the Indian subcontinent and its proto-industrial economy showed signs of driving an industrial revolution while its inhabitants' living standards and real wages were

<sup>3</sup>

Willem van Schendel, *A History of Bangladesh* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

among the highest in the world.<sup>4</sup> The capital amassed by the East India Company in Bengal was invested in the emerging Industrial Revolution in Great Britain.

However, Bengal proved a difficult region for the East India Company to govern. Economic mismanagement, alongside drought and a smallpox epidemic, directly led to the Great Bengal famine of 1770, which is estimated to have caused the deaths of between 1 and 10 million people. Several rebellions also broke out during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Several towns in Bangladesh participated in the Indian Rebellion of 1857 and pledged allegiance to the last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, who was later exiled to neighboring Burma (now Myanmar).

The challenge posed to company rule by the failed Indian Mutiny led to the creation of the British Indian Empire as a crown colony. As the British established schools, colleges, railways, and other services, Bengal underwent a “renaissance” period of liberalism and modernity. However, the British recognized that Bengal, with some 85 million people, was much too large for a single province and determined that it merited reorganization.

In 1905, at the behest of Viceroy Lord Curzon, the region was divided into two provinces – the Hindu majority Western Bengal (which included Bihar and Odisha) and the Muslim majority Eastern Bengal (with its capital in Dhaka). The first partition of Bengal set the precedent for the emergence of Bangladesh. But they met with such fierce resistance – led by, amongst others, the great Bangla poet Rabindranath Tagore – that they had to reunite the province in 1912. The protest was largely led by the Indian National Congress which was governed by Hindu leaders. In response to growing Hindu nationalism, the All India Muslim League was formed in Dhaka during the 1906 All India Muhammadan Educational Conference. Following the reunification of Bengal, the Congress Party and the Muslim League worked together for self-government.

By 1946, it was clear to the British that they were going to have to quit India – and that a united India was going to be impossible to preserve. While Bengali leaders called for a united independent Bengal, the British decided to partition India on the basis of religion and not ethnolinguistic identities. When British colonial rule ended in August 1947, two new countries—India and Pakistan—were born, and Bengal was split between them. West Bengal went to India, and East Bengal formed the eastern wing of Pakistan, which was bisected by a vast tract of northern India. The Chittagong Hill Tracts went to East Pakistan. The partition catalyzed large-scale migration on both sides of the new boundary as hundreds of thousands of people sought a new place of refuge.

The Dominion of Pakistan was created on 14 August 1947. East Bengal, with Dhaka as its capital, was the most populous province of the 1947 Pakistani federation which was led by Governor General Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Owing to a large geographical distance and differences in language and culture, the links between the two wings of Pakistan remained tenuous after independence. While Jinnah sought to unify the two regions using a common language—Urdu—Bengalis began to resent the imposition of a foreign language, a predominantly non-Bengali bureaucracy, and the appropriation of provincial functions and revenue by the central government.

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<sup>4</sup> M. Shahid Alam, *Poverty From The Wealth of Nations: Integration and Polarization in the Global Economy Since 1760* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2001).

In 1958, the government of Pakistan came under military control, and Bengali discontent continued to fester. The movement for Bengali self-determination found a leader in Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who was jailed repeatedly by the military while campaigning for autonomy. In 1971, Mujib's Awami League won 167 of 169 seats in East Pakistan. The Awami League claimed the right to form a government and develop a new constitution, but was strongly opposed by the Pakistani military and the Pakistan People's Party.

In March 1971, Pakistan's army launched a genocidal attack on East Bengal, killing thousands (in particular students, intellectuals, political figures, and Hindus) and arresting Mujib. Some 10 million Bengalis, mainly Hindus, fled over East Pakistan's frontier into India while the Indian government watched with alarm. Several Awami League leaders also fled to India and formed a government-in-exile in Calcutta, declaring independence from Pakistan on March 26, 1971. Dogged guerrilla resistance began until finally, in December 1971, the Indian army invaded and ejected Pakistani forces. An estimated three million people were killed in the war to free Bangladesh.

Under international pressure, Pakistan released Rahman from imprisonment in January 1972 and he was flown by the British Royal Air Force to a hero's welcome in Dhaka and soon became the first prime minister of independent Bangladesh. Bangladesh's constitution of 1973 provided for a secular state, a parliamentary form of government, a bill of rights, and a strong commitment to local government. By 1974, though, the Mujib government was in trouble. Poor economic planning along with a devastating famine led to the government becoming unpopular. With the country spinning out of control, Mujib assumed dictatorial powers and banned all opposition. On August 15, 1975, Mujib was assassinated along with most of his family. In the same year, two army uprisings took place, and the system of power underwent reorganization.

In 1977, army chief Zia ur Rahman became president of Bangladesh. Rahman reinstated multiparty politics, privatized industries, newspapers, and held the country's second general election in 1979. He was assassinated in 1981 and soon army chief Hussain Muhammad Ershad became the country's de facto leader and assumed the presidency in 1983. In 1985, he held the founding summit of SAARC in Dhaka, bringing seven South Asian nations, including the Maldives, Bangladesh, India, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and Nepal, into a regional union. He also extended Bangladesh's road network and began significant projects, for instance, the Jamuna Bridge.

However, opposition to the Ershad regime grew steadily in the late 1980s and he eventually resigned after weeks of violent demonstrations in December 1990. An election was contested between two parties headed by women: the Bangladesh Nationalist Party's Khaleda Zia, widow of assassinated military leader Zia ur Rahman, and the Awami League's Sheikh Hasina, daughter of Mujib (the current prime minister). The BNP emerged as the single largest block, and Khaleda became the first woman prime minister of Bangladesh. The next general elections were held in 1996 and the Awami League led by Sheikh Hasina came back to power after 20 years. The years since have seen these two parties trade places.<sup>5 6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> "Bangladesh: A Brief History," *New Internationalist*, March 2001, <https://newint.org/features/2001/03/05/history>.

<sup>6</sup> Syed Sajjad Husain and Hugh Russell Tinker, "History of Bangladesh," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, August 30, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/history-of-Bangladesh>.

### The Chittagong Hill Tracts

The southernmost tip of Bangladesh is a picturesque landscape surrounded by chains of mountains, waterfalls, and panoramic stretches of the horizon, a unique territory where the sky touches the land. Lying to the south of the Feni River in southeastern Bangladesh is the Chittagong region, which has many hills, hillocks, valleys, and forests and is quite different from other parts of the country. The hilly area known as the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), in the far southeast, consists of low hills of soft rocks and borders India and Myanmar.

Covering an area of 13,295 square kilometers, the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) consists of three districts—Bandarban, Rangamati, and Khagrachari. While most of the population of Bangladesh is Bangla-speaking Muslims, the Chittagong Hill Tracts are home to a small yet ethnically diverse population of indigenous tribes. Home to eleven Indigenous ethnic groups and collectively known as the Jumma people, these groups are distinct from the majority Bengali people of Bangladesh in respect of race, language, culture, heritage, religion, political history, and economy. These differences have been a source of permanent conflict in the region.

While the CHT is Bangladesh's largest administrative district, it remains the least developed to date.<sup>7</sup> With a population of 1.7 million people, the region is highly diverse. About 54.5% of the population are tribal people and mainly followers of Theravada Buddhism, while other religions include Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. Two Indigenous groups dominate the region – the Tibeto-Burman Chakmas and the Arakanese Marmas. The Tripura (Tipra), the Mro; the Khomoi (Kumi), the Kuki, and the Mizo (formerly called Lushai) are among the smaller groups present in the region.

The early history of the Chittagong Hill Tracts is a record of constantly recurring raids by the eastern hill tribes and the operations undertaken to repress them. The region was ruled independently by the Jumma people until 1787, when the British East India Company made the region its tributary after battling tribal leaders. Between 1787 and 1860, the British did not interfere in the internal administration of the region. However, in 1860, CHT was brought under the administration of the Bengal province. A special regulation in 1900 declared the district an "excluded area" under the direct control of the Provincial Governor of Bengal. From then on, the three administrative subdivisions of the district were controlled by tribal chiefs (*rajas*). Revenue collection and dispute settlement functions were allocated to the chiefs/*rajas* (one Chakma and two Marma), who exercised these roles through a hierarchy of sub-collectors and village headmen.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Nazila Ghanea-Hercock, Alexandra Xanthaki, and Patrick Thornberry, *Minorities, Peoples, and Self-Determination* (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> Peter J Bertocci, "Chittagong Hill Tribes of Bangladesh," *Cultural Survival*, March 1, 1984, <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/chittagong-hill-tribes-bangladesh>.

As India and Pakistan were partitioned in 1947, Chittagong Hill Tracts were awarded to Pakistan despite their non-Muslim majority population. However, the Pakistani government viewed the CHT with suspicion, considering the Jumma people to be anti-Pakistan and un-Islamic. It soon began discriminating against the district, first by disbanding the Jumma police force in 1948 and then launching a Bengali Muslim settlement program which lasted until 1966. Resentment among the Jumma people worsened when as many as 100,000 native people were displaced due to the construction of the Kaptai Dam in 1962.

When Bangladesh finally became independent from Pakistan in 1971, the Jumma people hoped the new regime would recognize their aspirations for autonomy. However, the new constitution of Bangladesh did not recognize the ethnic identity and culture of non-Bengali peoples. Immediately after independence, the CHT underwent militarization in 1972. The Jumma rebellion was led by MP Manabendra Narayan Larma, who founded the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS) as a united political organization of all native peoples and tribes in 1973. The armed wing of the PCJSS, the Shanti Bahini (Peace Force) was formed to resist government policies.

The Shanti Bahini led attacks on Bengali police and soldiers, government offices, personnel, and other Bengalis in the region. In response, the Bangladesh government launched counter-insurgency measures and would detain and torture any CHT native suspected of being affiliated with the Shanti Bahini. At the same time, the government continued settling Bengalis in the region, causing the eviction of many natives and a significant alteration of demographics. According to reports, at least 400,000 Bengali Muslims were moved to the CHT region and settled on the land of the Jumma people.

Following years of unrest, an agreement was formed between the government of Bangladesh and the tribal leaders which granted a limited level of autonomy to the elected council of the three hill districts.<sup>9</sup>

### *CHT Peace Accord*

After years of conflict, peace negotiations between the Jumma and the Bangladesh government began after democracy was restored in the country in 1991. Little progress was made under the Khaleda Zia administration and a fresh round of talks began when Sheikh Hasina took over as prime minister in 1996. The Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord was finalized and formally signed on December 2, 1997.

The CHT Accord provided recognition of the CHT region as a tribal-inhabited region, introducing a special governance system based on an institutional structure formed by the CHT Regional Councils and three Hill District Councils (HDCs), and transferring competencies on general administration, law and order, police (local), land and land management, development, education, health, environment and forestry, demilitarization of the region, resolution of land disputes, rehabilitation of returnee Jumma

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<sup>9</sup> Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization. *Member Profile: Chittagong Hill Tracts*, 2018.

refugees and internally displaced persons, and the setting up of a CHT Affairs Ministry at the national level.<sup>10</sup>

Once the treaty was signed, the Shanti Bahini formally laid down their arms, and more than 50,000 displaced tribals were able to return to their homes.<sup>11</sup>

### *Current Issues*

The CHT is one of the most disadvantaged and isolated areas in Bangladesh as its development was blighted by 25 years of civil war. The long-standing instability of the area – exacerbated by the insurgency – has meant that the CHT has largely been excluded from mainstream development programs. A strong military and police presence remains in the area, with checkpoints located at regular intervals on all major roads. Furthermore, the area’s remoteness, poor communication, and unique socio-economic characteristics have made it difficult to provide basic social services to inhabitants of the CHT.<sup>12</sup>

Traditionally, the livelihoods of rural Indigenous communities mostly depended on subsistence farming. Due to the increasing dispossession of land and resources caused by conflict, land grabbing, and climate change, their livelihoods have become highly vulnerable.<sup>13</sup> The worsening economic conditions drove many of them to out-migrate to urban areas, and take up seasonal or contractual work in precarious working conditions, forcing them to live in perpetual marginalization and poverty. Illiteracy rates, in an area where there is a multiplicity of languages, are high. While there is now better awareness about the benefits of education, access and quality issues remain high. Health care centers in some cases remain located a long way from remote villages and there are transport challenges in reaching them.

Moreover, the lack of implementation of provisions in the CHT Peace Accord has led to an increase in tensions between the central government and Indigenous communities. Indigenous peoples still face challenges in areas such as the return of power and functions to the Chittagong Hill Tracts institutions, the preservation of the characteristics of the tribal area of the Chittagong Hill Tracts region, and the demilitarization and rehabilitation of the internally displaced.

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<sup>10</sup> “Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord,” United Nations Development Programme Bangladesh website (December 2, 1997), <https://peacemaker.un.org/node/1449>.

<sup>11</sup> “Chittagong Marks Peace Anniversary,” BBC News, December 2, 1998, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\\_asia/226373.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/226373.stm).

<sup>12</sup> Alastair Lawson Tancred, *Many Tracts One Community: UNICEF’S Work in the Chittagong Hill Tracts* (Bangladesh: UNICEF, 2019), <https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/sites/unicef.org.bangladesh/files/2019-09/CHT-report-LR-August20-website.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Kazi Ali Toufique et al., *Baseline Assessment of Skills and Employment of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Bangladesh* (Bangladesh: International Labor Organization, 2017), [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-dhaka/documents/publication/wcms\\_618856.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-dhaka/documents/publication/wcms_618856.pdf)

The repression of Indigenous communities is institutionalized as the government of Bangladesh refuses to acknowledge that the country has an Indigenous population. While the constitution makes a reference to “tribes, minor races, ethnic sects, and communities,” a 2012 Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development memo stated “steps should be taken to publicize/broadcast in the print and electronic media that there are no Indigenous people in Bangladesh.”<sup>14</sup>

Clashes between the Jumma and Bengali settlers in the region over land use are all too common. Thousands of Bengali settlers who moved to the Chittagong Hill Tracts during and after the conflict gradually occupied and encroached on traditional Indigenous land, giving rise to renewed violent clashes. According to a report, the proportion of ethnic population in the CHT region was 91% in 1959. By 1991, the settler population had risen to 48% in the region, displacing much of the Indigenous population, which dropped to 51%.<sup>15</sup> “This violence is likely to continue as long as these serious land disputes remain unresolved. It is also indicative of the Bangladeshi authorities’ failure to adequately protect Indigenous people at risk, despite the huge security presence in the region,” says Andrew Erueti, Amnesty International’s Researcher on Indigenous Peoples’ Rights.<sup>16</sup>

Indigenous groups and activists say the communities suffer from gross human rights violations and disparities. They have been ambushed and brutally murdered, stripped of their land and driven from their homes. Their villages have been destroyed, women and children have been and still continue to be systematically raped and killed, religious buildings have been vandalized, and people have been displaced and resettled in cluster villages against their will. Collective rights have been neglected in infringement of modern international law and norms, and their self-determination has been refused. Abductions, enforced disappearances, and extrajudicial killings committed by individuals associated with law enforcement have created a sense of fear and insecurity among the people of the CHT.

Jumma women have become the greatest casualty in the ethnic conflict in Bangladesh. Despite several laws and policies to ensure the safety of women, 42 cases of violence against Indigenous women and girls were documented by Kapaeeng Foundation, a human rights organization based in Bangladesh, in 2021.

The displacement of Indigenous people in the name of development continues. Between March and June 2020, at least 6,504 acres of land belonging to Indigenous peoples were either occupied or undergoing the process of occupation.<sup>17</sup> In September 2020, the land of the Mro people, amounting to 20 acres, was announced as the site for the construction of a luxury five-star Marriott resort. The project violates existing land laws and was approved without any consultation with and consent of the villagers. The affected

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<sup>14</sup> “Censoring the Indigenous,” *Netra News*, August 1, 2022, <https://netra.news/2022/censoring-the-indigenous/>.

<sup>15</sup> Zobaida Nasreen and Masahiko Togawa, “Politics of Development : 'Pahari-Bengali' Discourse in the Chittagong Hill Tracts,” Hiroshima University Institutional Repository, September 1, 2002, <https://ir.lib.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/00014392>.

<sup>16</sup> “Bangladesh: Indigenous Peoples Engulfed in Chittagong Hill Tracts Land Conflict,” Amnesty International, June 23, 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2013/06/bangladesh-indigenous-peoples-engulfed-chittagong-hill-tracts-land-conflict/>.

<sup>17</sup> Trimita Chakma, *A Rapid Assessment Report The impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Bangladesh*, Kapaeeng Foundation and ILO, 2020, [https://www.iwgia.org/images/news/COVID-19/Bangladesh-Kapaeeng/COVID-19\\_Report\\_on\\_IPs\\_in\\_Bangladesh\\_KF.pdf](https://www.iwgia.org/images/news/COVID-19/Bangladesh-Kapaeeng/COVID-19_Report_on_IPs_in_Bangladesh_KF.pdf)



However, Tufan decided to use art to tell the world the stories of his community and their struggles. "People use various means to express their emotions, some sing, some organize protests and such. I felt as if I could not sing, or I am not by nature an orator or a singer, but art and drawing have always attracted me. Although without formal training, I was always attached to art since childhood," he says.<sup>21</sup>

Tufan creates art that brings forward the colorful life and festivities of Indigenous culture as well as the struggles, pain, and horrors inflicted upon such minorities. As an Indigenous person, Tufan realized it was crucial to focus his artworks on the injustice and prejudice that the ethnic communities of Bangladesh have been subjected to for decades.

As the world came to a standstill due to Covid in 2020, Tufan created his art page "Tufan's Artbin" online while working on a project. The responses he received from the audience were overwhelming and he gradually noticed that the message he aimed to convey was leaving an impact on people's minds.

Through his work, Tufan has told the story of those displaced during the construction of the Kaptai Dam in 1960 as well as the impact rapid urbanization has had on the ecological balance in the CHT region in recent years. Tufan's page has gone viral on social media, bringing attention to issues neglected by mainstream media.

### *Julian Bawm*

Julian Bawm uses his platform to bring justice to the subjugated communities of the hills. His art depicts the living conditions of the people in the Chittagong Hill Tracts as he aims to create awareness regarding the untold suffering of the Indigenous population. Working as a graphic artist and an animator, Bawm has displayed his works in several art exhibitions in the country. His art page "Julian's Creation" showcases the turmoil and tranquility, sadness and serenity of Indigenous people and their life in the hills. He seeks inspiration from the natural beauty of the land he calls home.

A fine arts graduate from the University of Dhaka, he contributes to the cause of the Bawm community through his art. "Many people write, many write poems. Many protest in the streets. But I want to protest through my art," he says.<sup>22</sup>

Hailing from Bethel Khua (village) situated in Bandarban District, the young artist uses various mediums of art that include sculpting, painting, animation, and graphic designing. Unlike Chakma, Bawm comes from a family of artists. His grandfather, brother, and cousins are also artists. Interested in art since childhood, he dedicated himself to producing Indigenous-based artworks as he became more exposed to other Indigenous people, cultures, and traditions during his school days in Rangamati.

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<sup>21</sup> Tufan Chakma, interview

<sup>22</sup> Julian Bawm, interview

“If you see my artwork, you’ll notice it’s about Indigenous people. I try to illustrate every aspect of Indigenous people’s life in my artwork – their culture and their struggles,” he says.<sup>23</sup>

### **Conclusion**

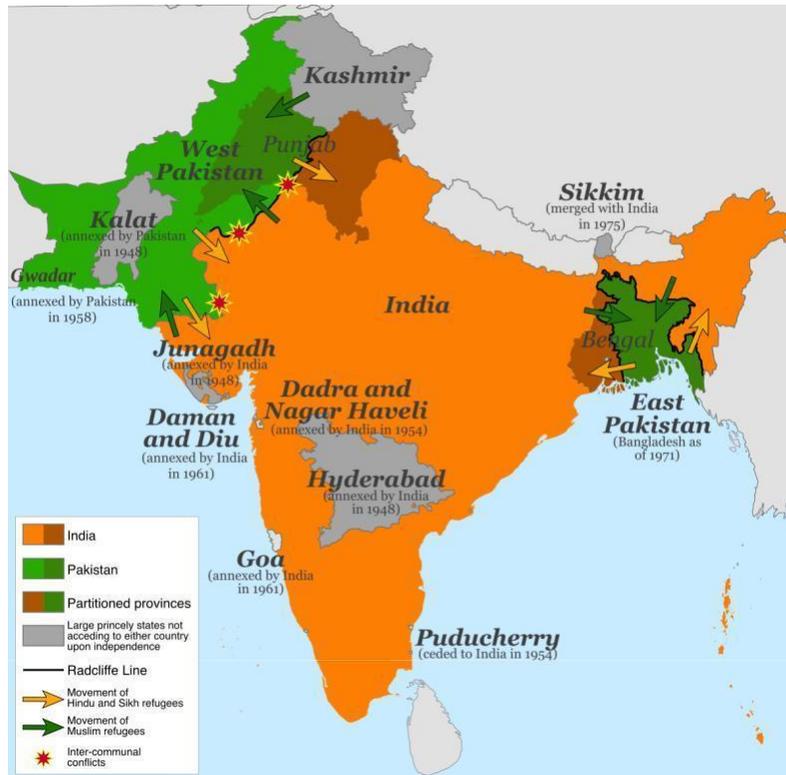
Bangladesh has made many strides as a young nation, combatting a colonial legacy, a history of communal division, years of authoritarianism, and poverty. However, it has been unable to help realize the aspirations of the ethnically diverse Indigenous communities that reside in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Forced to accommodate the culturally different Bengali Muslim majority, dispossessed of their land, and subjected to human rights violations and heavy militarization, the Jumma tribes of the CHT have struggled for a long time to have their voices heard. A new generation of Indigenous youth is effectively using art and social media to spread the message about their cause.

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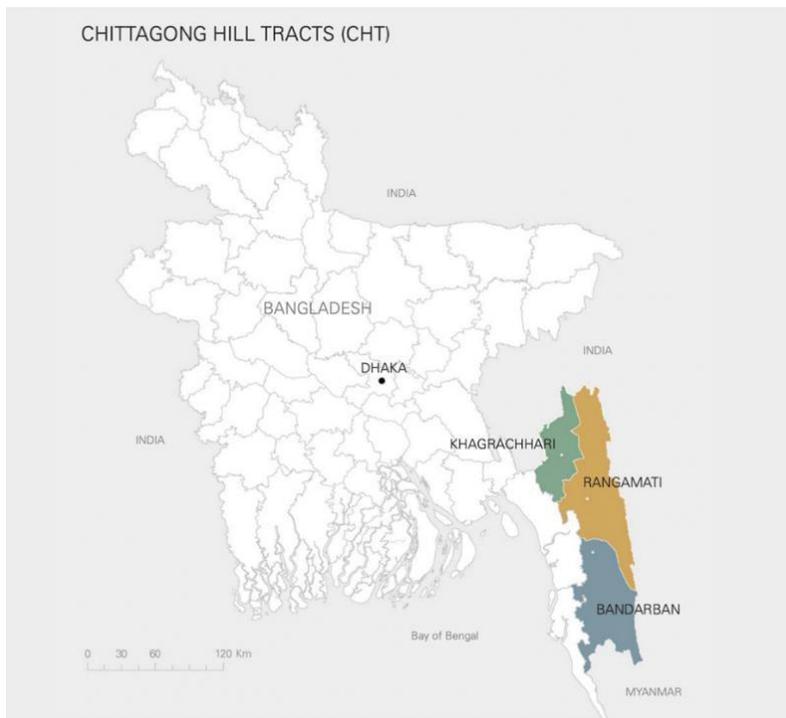
<sup>23</sup>

Ibid.

ANNEX A: Contextual Pictures and Graphs



*The regions affected by the extended Partition of India in 1947.*



*A map depicting Chittagong Hill Tracts district*



Tribal leader Jyotirindra Larma (right), hands over a rifle to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina during a weapon-surrendering ceremony following the signing of the CHT peace pact in February 1998.



Members of the Greater Chittagong Hill Tracts Hill Students protest the militarization of the region in 2003.



*Artwork by Tufan Chakma titled "Unexpected Future" represents his fears over the destruction of the natural habitat of the CHT due to rapid urbanization.*



*Untitled artwork by Julian Bawm.*