

Political Economy of Unpeopling of Indigenous Peoples: The Case of Bangladesh

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Abstract: This paper is a treatise on understanding political economic essence of unpeopling of indigenous peoples. In understanding the essence of unpeopling of indigenous peoples – historical evidences and manifestations of the phenomenon have been drawn. And based on the Bangladesh experience of socio-economic and politico-cultural dynamics of indigenous peoples – attempts have been made to formulate the politico-economic essence – in the form of a conceptual framework – of their pattern of “development”(!). This paper, forwards a few suggestions towards the accelerated development of the indigenous peoples in congruence with the basic principles of human right and the basic premises of the Constitution of Bangladesh and argues baldly that increasing alienation of the indigenous peoples may lead to an inevitable cataclysm. Based on global experience, this paper argues that the movement to establish the justicible rights of the indigenous peoples may fall into the trap of neo-liberal framework of empowerment of elites that keeps on marginalisation of the majority of the indigenous peoples, if *class* issues are ignored. In case of Bangladesh, similar to many other countries, over the decades, the untold and ceaseless waning on our part to rationally ponder on the lives-livelihood-ecology-society-economy-values-culture of indigenous peoples has made a reverse of the fortune for this community. In Bangladesh (and elsewhere all over the world), by any development indicator – irrespective of hill or plain – the indigenous peoples are subject to and victims of perpetual exploitation-distress-destitution-deprivation-inequality. From the view point of political economy, at the origin of increasingly seizing of rights and the sprung up poverty (multidimensional – not poverty of hunger only), inequality, alienation, and finally, exterminating and unpeopling the indigenous peoples there lies two distinct features of centre-periphery nexus. The first dimension in that nexus is attributable to the period of primary accumulation of capital needed for the formation of capitalistic socio-economic system, where free market exploits the periphery to strengthen the centre, and, obviously, in that exploitation, weak periphery gets priority in targeting. Indigenous peoples definitely are the most impuissant people of that periphery, not only because they are the weakest ones but they are rich in natural resources. Grabbing their wealth-assets-properties using different means and ways is one of the many intrigues of both primary accumulation of capital and increasing that capital through various means of rent seeking, and at the same time keep a peaceful space ‘disturbed’ for decades to maintain politico-economic interest of vested interest groups of both in the country and of imperialist countries (or their ‘proxy’ countries) for geo-political and economic reasons. The second dimension in the nexus is related to the growing imperial ambitions of the West to divide the world among themselves headed and guided by the epi-centre of imperialism – the USA. It is natural that the periphery, in this process, will become more peripheral over time. Simultaneously, it is indicative of an appalling historical overturn. Because, in the end, the whole society will have to bear more disgruntled price for it. The issue is basically a structural one. It is, albeit, possible to resolve a greater part of the riddle by reforming (but not by keeping the local structure and global neo-liberal order as it is) the socio-economic structure providing a strong political system which will respect human rights and pursue true human development. In that case, the pace of people-mediated development must be accelerated in a planned way. In this case we must get rid of the current ‘business-as-usual’ rent seekers’ based free market neo-liberal centre-periphery system operating within the broader global capitalism and ultimately serving their interest. The subject may be of social and economic nature, but the solution is political. The responsibility lies with the State of a specific nature which will not promote the rent seeking centre-periphery free market neo-liberal system. To the contrary, such State shall have to be people’s welfare-oriented and respectful to the rights of all excluded people, and in this case, to the indigenous peoples – irrespective of countries, and irrespective of hill or plain lands. This paper finally argues that a paradigm shift is warranted to understand and resolve the issue of unpeopling of indigenous peoples.

The essence of the shift is to transform our understanding about unpeopling of indigenous peoples from “ethnicity-centred” issue to a ‘class-based’ issue.

1. Introduction: Raising the Issue

In a world of 7 billion people, the indigenous peoples¹ constitute about 400 million² i.e., ‘only’ 5.7 per cent of the global population is indigenous people. This numeric figure of ‘only’ 5.7 per cent becomes a ‘grand’ number if we consider the fact that the indigenous peoples are their in 90 countries and they represent more than 5,000 distinct groups and languages, and they have rich indigenous culture – a best example of diversity and an hallmark of human civilization. This “only 5.7 per cent” becomes significant, on many ways, if one considers that they live in jungles and protect the nature, they live in hills and protect the biodiversity, they live alone the major water sources and protect water and living organisms in and around, they live in deserts and devote all their efforts to maintain much needed ecology of desert. In other words, the indigenous peoples, whatever their population size is (“only” 5.7 per cent of the global population) – are the true protector of human civilization and the ensurer of balance of the nature. They are the blessings of the nature. And this is just one side of the story – the “blessing side”. The other side of the story is that the places and territories the indigenous peoples live – the jungles, the hills, the deserts, the waterbodies – are geographically of high geo-strategic values and at the same time they are rich in endowment with invaluable scarce natural resources including oil, gas, minerals (e.g., uranium, gold, diamond), fresh water, plants and trees, various living species, and so on. In view of the “only 5.7 per cent of the global population” coupled with historically weak political and economic strength of the indigenous peoples on the one hand, and demand for grabbing of their resources by outsiders (the colonialists, the imperialists, the in country grabbing-elites or ‘proxies’ of colonial and/or imperial power through corporatocracy) on the other hand – the rich resource endowment of the indigenous peoples has become a historical ‘curse’ for the indigenous peoples. Therefore, the political economy of indigenous peoples could best be termed as “political economy of curse” and/or “political economy of unpeopling of indigenous peoples”.

This paper, at the outset, highlights the rationale of dealing with these politico-economically least explored and sensitive socio-political, economic, and cultural issues with special reference to the indigenous peoples of Bangladesh. This section deals with raising the pertinent issues. In epitome, section 2 provides historical evidences about unpeopling of the indigenous peoples around the world, and thereby, sets the stage for further analysis and understanding the issue holistically and not fragmented, not compartmentased, not devoid of true history from political economy perspective. In section 3 an attempt is made to develop a conceptual framework of political economy of unpeopling and undevelopment of indigenous peoples. This section is intended to construct a politico-economic theoretical framework of understanding the essence and mechanisms of unpeopling the indigenous peoples and ethnic conflicts within a rent seeking centre-periphery free-market global order of capitalism. Section 4 maps out a few of the ground realities concerning the life and livelihood of indigenous peoples in Bangladesh. This section,

¹ In most time in Bangladesh, the category of people known as “Indigenous Peoples” (in Bangla ‘Adibashi’), was never recognized as indigenous peoples. Officially, the indigenous peoples have been identified with different categories, namely ‘ethnic groups’, ‘ethnic peoples’, ‘small ethnic groups’, ‘small minority groups’, ‘tribal peoples’, ‘small tribes’ and the alike. Whatever are the reasons for terminological dispute, these people must be identified as indigenous peoples, not because of their habitation in hill-plain for a number of years having their own indigenous identity, religion, culture, customs and traditions, and socio-economic status but because, the concept “Indigenous Peoples” is discernibly a distinct and intricate ‘psycho-social historical construct’.

² The UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, in their 2002 report, mentioned 370 million as the global population size of indigenous peoples living in 70 countries and representing 5000 different languages. However, in 2013, in his message to International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples, the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon reported “Indigenous peoples represent remarkable diversity – more than 5,000 distinct groups in some 90 countries, making up more than 5 per cent of the world’s population, some 370 million”. With a 3 per cent annual growth rate, the 370 million population in 2013 comes to about 400 million in 2015 (author’s estimates).

among others, provides an account of the unjust politics surrounding the statistics of number and population size of different indigenous peoples' communities in Bangladesh, and argues that this "statistical politics" should be removed to at least to show respect to the indigenous peoples as citizens of the People's Republic. Section 5 explores different manifestations of underdevelopment and deprivation of indigenous peoples, irrespective of hill and plain. Section 6 lay out the scenario of unpeopling through land dispossession and alienation of the indigenous peoples coupled with their root causes and mechanisms. This section provides analysis on the same by some of the individual indigenous peoples' community, case-by-case. Some first order conclusions enthralled with some feasible suggestions towards human development of the indigenous peoples by five broad groups have been put forward in section 7. This section provides an in-depth analysis into the possibilities of "from unpeopling to peopling" of the indigenous peoples. A final caution that increase in the further alienation of indigenous peoples can inevitably lead to many cataclysm has been exposed in section 8. This section also provides a critical analysis about positive movement towards establishing rights of the indigenous peoples. Finally, the section 9 deals with the most thought provoking issue – the issue towards the resolution of the problem, and raises the question "Are we fighting a losing battle?". This section argues with informed confidence that a paradigm shift is necessary in the philosophy of the whole struggle of establishing rights of the indigenous peoples – a complete shift from "ethnic" dimension to "class" dimension is warranted.

Keeping the historical backdrop about unpeopling indigenous peoples in view, this paper, based on both qualitative and quantitative analysis of the economic, social, and political dynamics of life and livelihood of the indigenous peoples of Bangladesh, purports to unveil the politico-economic essence of development and underdevelopment of the indigenous peoples, and to come-up with a conceptual framework towards understanding the causal dynamics of such development and underdevelopment. This paper also forwards some key suggestions towards possibilities of progress of the indigenous peoples as equal citizens enshrined with all types of substantive freedoms in congruence with the constitution of Bangladesh. The paper, finally argues the possibility that alienation-in-perpetuity among indigenous peoples may lead to an irreversible cataclysm, and at the same time argues that a "non class" view might lead to institutionalization of a neo-liberal framework of empowerment of indigenous elites and marginalisation of majority people.

2. "Unpeopling" Indigenous Peoples: Meaning, Evidences, Manifestations, and Essence

The concept or category or terminology "un-people" or "unpeople" is not widely used concept in social, economic, political, and historical literature. Therefore, at the outset, it is necessary to describe, what is 'un-people', who are 'un-people', and why is the concept (or at least the terminology) of 'un-people' is a useful construct. The term "unpeople" has its origin in the term "unperson". The term "unperson" or "unpersons" was first coined by George Orwell in his dystopian novel "Nineteen Eighty-Four" (Orwell 1949). George Orwell used the term *unperson* to denote a person who has been "vaporized"; who has not only been killed by the state, but effectively erased from existence; he (Orwell) mentioned further that such a "*unperson*" is a person who would be written out of existing books, photographs, and articles so that no trace of their existence could be found in the historical record. Orwell wrote "Yet he feels that Syme himself is the sort of person who is in danger of becoming an "*unperson*", of being vaporized as he knows too much, has read too many books and is too intelligent" (Orwell 1949, chapter 5). People residing outside Europe, the United States and a select few Asian countries had been described by George Orwell as "unperson". Half a century after George Orwell's concept of "*unperson*" Noam Chomsky transformed the term "unperson" into "unpeople" or "un-people" to denote those natives, indigenous peoples, and exploited mass people who have been eliminated,

exterminated or at least whose land and settlements have been destroyed by imperial societies. As maintained by Noam Chomsky, “The world is divided into people like us, and unpeople – everyone else who do not matter. There are parallels with the treatment of indigenous populations of the so-called Anglosphere, the offshoots of England: the United States, Canada, Australia. These are unusual imperial societies in that they didn’t just rule the natives, they eliminated them. They took over their land and settlements and virtually exterminated them in most cases. We don’t think about them, we don’t ask what happened to them in the past. We deny it in fact” (Chomsky and Vltchek 2013, p. x, 4).

“Unpeopling” indigenous peoples is a historical reality without doubt, globally. This process of “unpeopling” of indigenous peoples has been done using many different means and ways of forcibly grabbing their wealth, resources and properties by the powerful *rent seeking class* backed by the state and politics serving that class, and thereby, ultimately exterminate, vanish, “effectively erase from existence”, and “written out of books” the indigenous peoples and natives from their own motherland – the ancestral land. There are many other peculiar ways showing “vanishing” of indigenous peoples. Among many such examples one peculiar example is: In reality not vanished but reported as vanished in the official population statistics. This has been termed as “enumeration politics”, “demographic politics”, “population politics” and “official intentional act to show less than the actual population size” by Barkat et al. (2010). The “demographic politics” in the Population Census is clearly evident in the case of enumeration of indigenous peoples in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in Bangladesh. A recent study reports that, “In the Population Census of 2001, population in 31.3 per cent of the villages (locally known as ‘Paras’) of CHT were not enumerated ... In 2009, the rural population of CHT according to estimates based on extrapolation of Population Census 2001 was 1.17 million, however, considering the ‘intentional non-enumerated villages’ the same should have been 1.68 million” (Barkat et al. 2010, p. 214-215).

The historical evidences and manifestations of unpeopling indigenous peoples are many and multidimensional, but the causes are more or less the same: “Grab resources of the weak by any means”. Here, before delving further deep in to the political economy of unpeopling indigenous peoples, it would be appropriate to put on record some of the historical evidences. Some of the thought provoking historical records showing glaring examples of unpeopling indigenous peoples and natives are as follows:

1. The indigenous populations of so-called Anglosphere, the offshoots of England: the United States, Canada, Australia were unpeopled. These are unusual imperial societies in that they did not rule the natives, they eliminated them. They took over their land and settlements and virtually exterminated them in most cases (for details see, Chomsky and Vltchek 2013, p.4).
2. When Columbus landed in the Western hemisphere, there were probably 80-100 million people with advanced civilizations commerce, cities, etc. Most were indigenous peoples, tribes and natives. Not long afterward about 95 per cent of that population disappeared. In today’s territory of USA, there were may be 10 million or so indigenous peoples or so Native Americans, but by 1990, according to the census, there were only 0.2 million in the country (see, Chomsky and Vltchek 2013, p.2).
3. In 1910 or so, the Belgian King Leopold II, during his colonial rule in Congo, conducted super-genocide killing 10 million Congolese people – all are natives with a large part being indigenous peoples. So, Belgian killed more people in Africa than what was then population of their own country (see, Chomsky and Vltchek 2013, p.13).
4. During French colonialism, in some places the French managed to massacre the entire native population, such as on the islands of Grenada. Those they did not kill were jumping from the cliffs to escape the horror of falling into their hands (see, Chomsky and Vltchek 2013, p.18).

5. In Rwanda and Uganda 10 million people were killed – most were natives, indigenous peoples and tribes (Huto, Tutsi and others). Behind these murdering of 10 million innocent people by ‘proxies’ were always Western geopolitical and economic interests (see, Chomsky and Vltchek 2013, p.7).
6. People in Western Sahara – the Shahaawi, are real unpeople! It was the last official colony in Africa, so it is under UN administration, for decolonization. But as soon as decolonization was declared in 1975, it was invaded by Morocco, which is a French client. Morocco threw out the independent government and began settling the county with the Moroccans, so that if there is ever a referendum, as the UN has demanded, the Moroccans would be able to dominate the referendum (see, Chomsky and Vltchek 2013, p.138-139). The similar is the current possible scenario (after “demographic engineering” which began in mid 1970’s) of the indigenous peoples in the Chittagong Hill tracts of Bangladesh (this will be discussed later).
7. The Holocaust that was performed by Germans on European Jews and Roma was not the first German holocaust; they were involved in terrible massacres in the Southern cone of South America and in fact all over the World. Germany had already exterminated the majority of the Hereto tribe in Namibia (see, Chomsky and Vltchek 2013, p.5).
8. In 2011, the final bombings in Libya, even after the adoption of UN resolution (in March 2011) of “no fly zone” (implying protection of civilians, a cease fire and negotiations) – the imperial powers (USA, Britain, and France) heavily bombed the area around Sirte, which is the base of the largest tribe in Libya – what happened to those? There were pretty awful effects. Some observers said it remained them of Grozny (see, Chomsky and Vltchek 2013, p. 123).
9. Ecuador’s Amazon Jungle – 8,000 feet lower than Quito, Ecuador’s capital – is inhabited by many indigenous peoples and tribes namely, the Shuars, Kichwas, Achuars, Zaparos, Shiwiars and so on. The US oil companies backed by US military (there are US military bases around) in their quest for oil have destroyed Amazon and the tribes. A vivid description of unpeopling of Amazonian indigenous peoples for oil by the US corporatocracy, a one-time CIA insider John Perkins wrote “Quito – the city of Shell... A steaming city, it is inhabited mostly by solders, oil workers, and the indigenous people from the Shuar and Kichwa tribes who work for them as prostitutes and laborers. I was on my way to meet with Shuars, and the Shiwiars – tribes determined to prevent our (US) oil companies from destroying their homes, families, and lands, even if it means they (the indigenous peoples) die in the process. For them (the indigenous peoples), this is a war about the survival of their children and cultures, while for us (USA) it is about power, money, and natural resources. It is one part of the struggle for world domination and the dream of a few greedy men, global empire” (Perkins 2006, p. xvi-xvii). What is the consequence of all these act of unpeopling the indigenous peoples from Ecuadorian Amazon for greed-for-oil? Perkins continues, “Vast areas of rain forest have fallen, macaws and jaguars have all but vanished, three Ecuadorian indigenous cultures have been driven to the verge of collapse, and pristine rivers have been transformed into flaming cesspools” (Perins 2006, p. xviii). And what really happened with the economy of Ecuador? Following is precisely what happened: “Since 1970, during this period known euphemistically as the Oil Boom, in Ecuador, the official poverty level grew from 50 to 70 percent, under-or unemployment increased from 15 to 70 percent, and public debt increased from \$240 million to \$ 16 billion. Meanwhile, the share of national resources allocated to the poorest segments of the population declined from 20 to 6 percent “(Jochnik 2001, Martin 2002, Wirpsa 2002 and Palast 2000, quoted in Perkins 2006, p. xviii). Thirty years after the US oil companies started their oil grabbing from Ecuadorian Amazon (once) the CIA insider John Perkins who confessed his anti-people role in unpeopling Amazonian indigenous peoples visited Ecuadorian Amazon in 2001. Some indigenous rights-movement

activists told him, “We are now preparing to go to war with you... we have seen what your (US) oil companies backed by your military forces did to the Huaorani³ tribe. They destroyed their forests, polluted the rivers, and killed many people, including children. Today the Huaorani hardly exist as a people anymore. We won’t let that happen to us. We won’t allow oil companies into our territory, any more than we would the Peruvians. We have all sworn to fight to the last man” (see, Perkin 2006, p.190).

To conclude, the politico-economic essence of the historical evidences presented above is pretty clear and full of inconceivable and “uncomfortable truth” with all forms of atrocities, massacres and genocides done to the indigenous peoples all over the world by the global empire, irrespective of time and space. It is clear that, in order for to increase “unearned” wealth (i.e. grabbing wealth away from others) of colonial and global empire (initially headed by Britain, and then after the Second World War by USA) and perpetuate their imperial ambitions they have conducted and performed all possible forms of inhuman, immoral, and unethical act of plundering against the indigenous peoples. The colonial rulers, the imperialist countries and their ‘proxy’ countries serving colonial and imperial interests have done the following (one act or more acts in combination): unpeopled and exterminated the indigenous peoples by all means using all routes because the territories of indigenous peoples are rich in natural resources and they are weak and defenseless people; in many instances they did not bother about even ruling them – they just eliminated them; they took out and grabbed their land and settlements to exterminate them and always thought (or perceived) that they possess the natural right of doing so; they believed the postulate – never give them (indigenous peoples) liberty and freedom (Monroe doctrine) but use these two ‘holy’ concepts as and when convenient; they believed that the all the resources in the globe shall belong to the global empire and therefore keep the indigenous people within tight control of corporatocracy (Corporations *plus* governments *plus* banks and other financial institutions) based on neo-liberal framework of empowerment of elites that marginalizes the majority of the population.

3. Political Economy of Unpeopling and Underdevelopment of Indigenous Peoples: A Conceptual Framework

While viewing from the real perspective of political economy of indigenous peoples in Bangladesh, arguably, I am rather reluctant in switching over to the current definitional debate and discourse on development. But it is necessary to raise a stentorian voice that in the conventional sense, what the relevant experts often tries to make us understand—that is, ‘development’ implies an increase in gross domestic product (GDP) and/ or increase in gross national income (GNI) and/or increase in *per capita* income (even ‘real’ per capita) – all these ideas, to my understanding, are one-quarter glassfull, or to be more blunt, are simply misleading. The prime reason for my saying so is that the *per head* of anything including per capita production or per capita income can be increased even by excluding those people who are already excluded, and even by excluding them more than before, whereas they constitute greater number of heads (i.e., larger share of the population). These are all simple arithmetic of statistical average, where ‘average’ hides the reality at micro level or at the level of household or family.

Next, emerges the issue of the supreme law of the Republic – The Constitution. At this juncture, it is absolutely necessary to mention some key articles of the Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh. As stated in the Constitution, “All powers in the Republic belong to the people”[Article7(1)]; Constitution stipulates that “through planned growth, the state shall make the provision of the basic necessities of life, including food, clothing, shelter, education and medical care for its citizens” [Article 15(a)]; Constitution upholds that, “The State shall endeavour to ensure equality of opportunity to all citizens”[Article 19(1)];Constitution states that,

³ For more details about the changing life situation of the Huaoranis, see Joe Kane (1995).

“The state shall adopt effective measures to remove social and economic inequality between man and man and to ensure the equitable distribution of wealth among citizens, and of opportunities in order to attain a uniform level of economic development throughout the Republic” [Article 19(2)]; Constitution clearly mentions that, “The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth” [Article 28 (1)]; “No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth be subjected to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to access to any place of public entertainment or resort, or admission to any educational institution” [Article 28(3)]; and “Local government in every administrative unit of the Republic shall be entrusted to bodies, composed of persons elected in accordance with law” [Article 59 (1)].

Therefore, based on the above stated, many basic issues must be raised. The first basic issue to raise is related with the implications of statistical average – an issue of simple arithmetic. The essence of this issue of arithmetic or statistical nature is that while measuring in terms of averages many discrepancy surfaces, and average (or arithmetic mean) accounting conceals the real truth. The second basic issue is related with the Constitution. The issue is that, People – irrespective of race, religion, castes, male-female – shall be the real owners of the Republic and all powers of the Republic shall belong to them only; people and only the people shall be sovereign. Here the most relevant question to raise is – Are the indigenous Peoples ‘PEOPLE’ in the truest sense of the term as enshrined in the Constitution? Studying history, probably, this will not be baseless to raise with loud voice the above pertinent question – are *indigenous peoples* really considered as people? The straight answer is NO, they are not. Officially also, as an integral part of the people, the indigenous peoples are highly deprived of “food, clothing, shelter, education, medical facilities and other opportunities of life”, and they are poor and distressed to that extent that they can be easily termed as ‘development deprived’ and truly undeveloped (or to use tuned down language “underdeveloped”). The third issue is the issue of “equality of opportunities for all”. Where is the provision of this equality of opportunity for the indigenous peoples? The fourth fundamental issue is that whoever be the citizen – state shall not demonstrate any discrimination and/or inequality to him or her? How far these Constitutional promises and obligations are applicable in case of the indigenous peoples? That is, if any particular race, or religious community, or caste, or ethnic community becomes compelled to conduct their life with intergenerational food-deprivation, shelter-deprivation, education-deprivation, health-deprivation, cloth-deprivation, opportunities-deprivation, property rights-related deprivation, safety and security-related deprivation then, it will be most appropriate, true and valid to conclude that the lives of those communities are not at all run in congruence with the basic principles of the Constitution of the Republic.

In this context, it should be borne in mind that the political history of the indigenous peoples in Bangladesh, for example those living in the territory of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHTs) is the history of political domination, ill-motivated intervention and economic exploitation by the outside forces who represented higher modes of production and production relations than the indigenous peoples who represented a backward social and economic system since invasion by the Arakans in the Seventh century A. D. till recent events of British intervention in later part of the 19th and early 20th century, and Pakistani and Bangladeshi exploitation in the latter half of the last century and onward. The Bangalee settlers here can be treated only as the physical means in the above mentioned process of exploitation. Therefore, the ethnic conflict in the CHT, in essence, is not a conflict between the two broad groups – the Bangalees and the tribal – as very often propagated (this is just an appearance), rather it is, in real sense, a conflict originating from the inter-actions of two modes of production, namely the peripheral capitalism with the

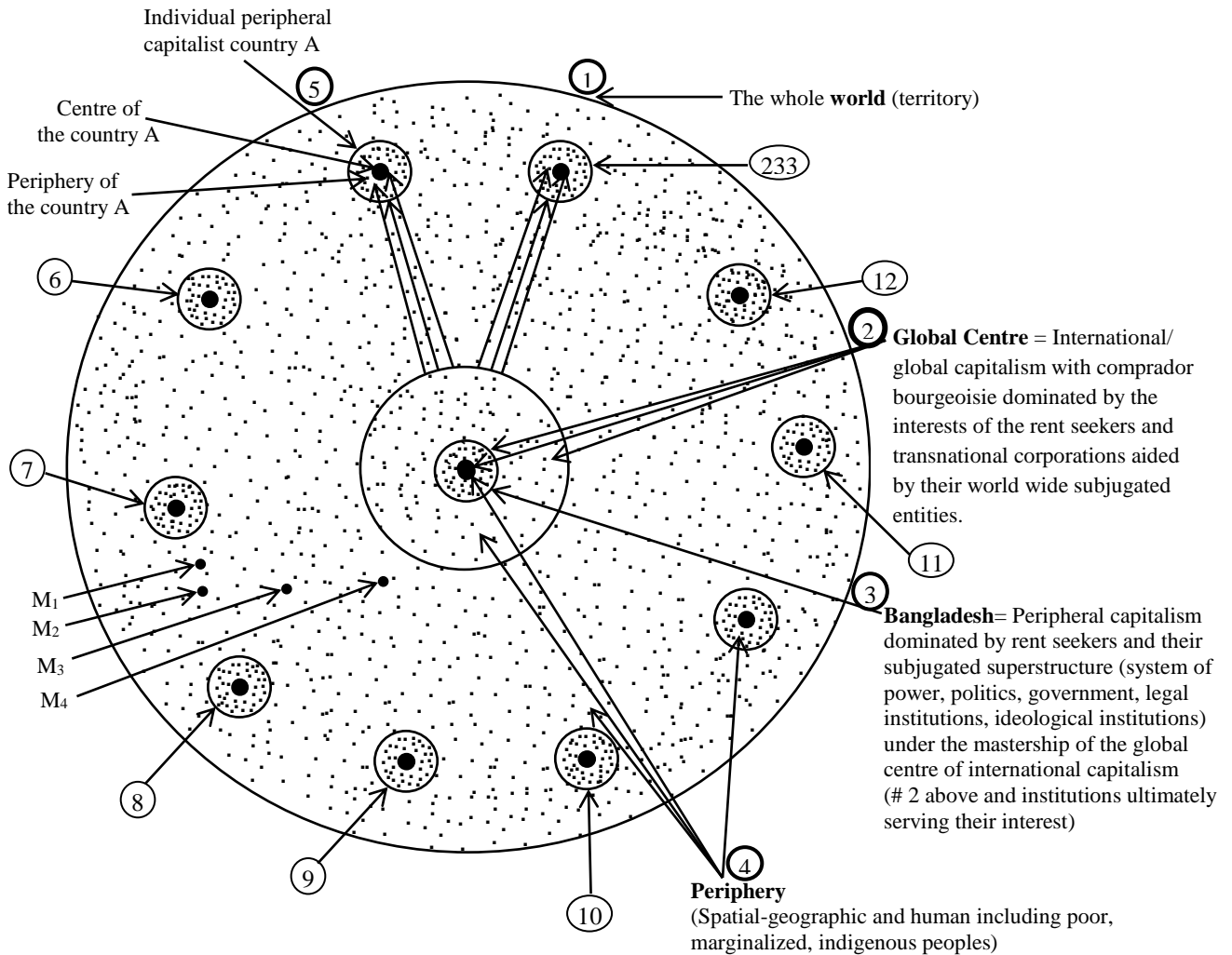
comprador bourgeoisie led by the rent seekers⁴ dominating the superstructure and the archaic economic system of the indigenous peoples.

The essence of the politico-economic model that has been developed and applied in this study to unearth the causes and consequences of ethnic conflicts in Bangladesh (especially more acute in CHT) is that, the socio-economic formation of Bangladesh with her peripheral, backward, fringe, distorted, ‘proxy’ capitalism is dependent on the flow of finance capital of international capitalistic centers and global market rules and rules of global politics dominated by them, who, in turn, exploit the main land Bangladesh (and other similar countries all over the world). The main land Bangladesh, in turn, dominated by the rent seekers and aided by their grand alliance with all the super structural institutions including the government and anti-people politics within a distorted free market system which is an integral part of the international capitalistic centre itself is exploiting, on their behalf, as ‘proxy’, all poor and marginalized people of Bangladesh including the indigenous peoples. The latter characterizes an archaic-primitive economic system, whose productive forces – human power with skills, technology, and all instruments of labour – are less developed than the former one, but who possess a rich tradition of indigenous knowledge and culture, and a much higher standard of moral and ethical value systems than that in the West.

It is therefore, in assessing politico-economic essence of life of the indigenous peoples as well as real causes and consequences of ethnic conflicts one has to confront a three-tier system of inter-related and inter-dependent economic structures which represent the forces of integration and each of the upper-tier is exploiting the lower ones i.e., centre exploits the peripheral-centres (or sub-centres) and peripheral-centre exploits the peripheral-periphery (in this case the indigenous peoples). Here, for ease of understanding it would be pertinent to present the above stated politico-economic model in a diagram. Before that, a caveat is in order, which is as follows: knowing fully well that presenting a complex system with all her intricacies in a diagram is almost an impossible-task-to-accomplish, an attempt has been made here to present the politico-economic essence of ethnic conflicts in a rent seeking dominated centre-periphery free market system (which is never free, let alone poor friendly) within the broader system of international – global capitalism (or capitalistic centre). The outcome of such an attempt to devise a complex centre-periphery system in a picturesque form is depicted in Diagram 1. It is absolutely important to note here that the legend notes of the diagram are important to understand the essence of the model. Therefore, it is highly suggested to read and internalize the diagram alongwith the legend notes.

⁴ “There are two ways to become wealthy: to create wealth or to take wealth a way from others. The former adds to society. The latter typically subtracts from it, for in the process of taking it away, wealth gets destroyed... Suffering at the bottom – stems from wealth transfers instead of wealth creation... This is rent seeking, getting income not as a reward to creating wealth but by grabbing a larger share of the wealth that would otherwise have been produced without their effort” (see, Stiglitz 2013, p.39-40; and for greater elaboration of the same applicable for Bangladesh see, Barkat 2014a).

Diagram 1: Political economy model showing essence and mechanisms of unpeopling the indigenous peoples and ethnic conflicts within a rent seeking centre-periphery free market global order of capitalism



Notes on Legends:

①= The biggest circle; outer orbit = the whole world (a part of the solar system – the sun) with a total territory of 510, 100, 500 sq.km (30% surface and 70% water bodies) having 5 oceans, 7 continents, over 7 billion population (in 2013) distributed in to a total of 233 states (in 2013) with 203 sovereign states and 195 independent states. Most of these states represent peripheral capitalism and few are under feudalism. ②= The inner bigger circle = the global capitalistic centre = not all the countries representing the masters of global capitalism are geographically located in the centre as shown in the diagram, they are in reality geographically dispersed in 6 out of 7 continents (except in Oceania). However, one thing is common in them, i.e. they have global alliance-of-interest among them to exploit their own periphery and all other peripheral countries including the periphery of the peripheral countries (see items # 2 and 5 as example). That’s what they do in all 233 states (see item # 233 in diagram). ③ = Bangladesh. The outer orbit shows the territory of the country; the inner whole black circle within the large black circle for that shows the centre, and the ‘black dots’ show poor, marginalized including indigenous peoples. Also shown here the link between Global capitalism (item # 2) and Bangladesh (item # 3) in terms of the global centre exploiting the peripheral Bangladesh, peripheral centre, and peripheral-periphery. ④= black dots just show the periphery of any centre irrespective of global centre or other nation-state centre’ i.e. (the smallest) black dots everywhere in the diagram represent peripheral entities irrespective of spatial-geographic locations and/or human entities located at the bottom of the global and/or national socio-economic class ladder (irrespective of ethnicity, caste, creed, religion, sect, sex, occupation and so on. (5-233) = Individual countries/states (in total 233) as shown in the diagram. ⑤= Individual peripheral capitalist country showing little details about the centre-periphery links (applicable for all other countries). M₁, M₂, M₃, M₄ = Black dots showing periphery, but each may be under different peripheral country as well as within the Centre. One will always find poor and marginalized people in both rich and poor countries, and rich in both rich and poor countries. This is sometimes called as “South in North, and North in South”.

Before delving further in to the proposed model of political economy of indigenous peoples in Bangladesh (applicable to all countries), it would be absolutely necessary to understand the real *essence* (and not the *appearance*) of the rise of classical capitalistic socio-economic formation. In understanding that, it should be accepted as a plain truth, which, based on objective analysis of genesis and history of capitalism, the all time great political economist, social critic and philosopher Karl Marx, in his Das Capital has prophetically concluded that “plundering has played immense role in the primary accumulation of capital”. This conclusion holds true for capitalism of all sorts – old or new, global powerhouses of capitalism or peripheral capitalism, higher order international capitalistic centre or lower order emerging national capitalism, highest form of capitalism – the imperialism with ‘imperial ambitions’ as denoted by Noam Chomsky (2005) or lower form of capitalism (where the capitalistic mode of production is still in its infant stage and at the same time the feudal production relations are still not that weak to pave the path of capitalistic system a smooth landing), and technologically highly advanced capitalism or technologically less advanced capitalism. Now applying this scheme of essence of political economy of capitalism in to the already presented equation of centre-periphery nexus with dominance of global rent seeking imperialism (the highest stage of capitalism) and epi-centre of all sub-centres of capitalism, it would be most appropriate to quote what a one time top-echelon executive at the US-National Security Agency (US-NSA) John Perkins in his book “Confessions of an Economic Hit Man” (2006) has candidly and truthfully written: “Economic hit men (EHMs)” are highly paid professionals who cheat countries around the globe out of trillions of dollars. They funnel money from the World Bank, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and other foreign “aid” organizations in to the coffers of huge corporations and the pockets of a few wealthy families who control the planet’s natural resources. Their tools include fraudulent financial reports, rigged elections, payoffs, extortion, sex, and murder. They play a game as old as empire, but one that has taken on new and terrifying dimensions during this time of globalization. I should know; I was an EHM⁵. And, what Perkins have said is absolutely important to understand the real essence of the complex political economy of indigenous peoples within the multi-tiered global capitalistic ‘order’, or more appropriate to term the same as ‘disorder’ or ‘chaotic order’ or ‘order in chaos’.

Politico-economically speaking, the centre exploits the periphery – both spatial-geographical periphery and human periphery meaning the poor and marginalized sections of the population. This exploitation multiplies discrimination and inequality, which, in turn, through mechanisms of ‘lack of equal opportunity’ produces and reproduces more discrimination, higher inequality, high extent of insecurity, and instability of the whole system. This centre- periphery system within the so called distorted free market economy works through a mechanism which can best be described as following: In order to keep the exploitation-based centre going and strengthening the centre further – the centre needs agents. The “rent seekers” as already discussed, are those agents, who by themselves do not create wealth but become wealthy by exploiting those who are situated at

⁵ To understand the deeper reality of global capitalism and how it works it would be of great use to know the following as also written by John Perkins, “I wrote that in 1982, as the beginning of a book with the working title, Conscience of an Economic Hit Man. The book was dedicated to the presidents of two countries, men who had been my clients, whom I respected and thought of as kindred spirits – Jaime Roldós, president of Ecuador, and Omar Torrijos, president of Panama. Both had just died in fiery clashed. Their deaths were not accidental. They were assassinated because they opposed that fraternity of corporate government, and banking heads whose goal is global empire... Things are not as they appear... Our system... is fueled by something far more dangerous than conspiracy. It is driven... by a concept that has become accepted as gospel: the idea that all economic growth benefits human kind and that the greater the growth, the more widespread the benefits. This belief also has a corollary: that those people who excel at stoking the fires of economic growth should be exalted and rewarded, while those born at the fringes are available for exploitation... Our media is part of that corporatocracy. ... they (both electronic and print) are owned by conglomerates and gigantic international corporations... they (those who control all communication outlets) are taught throughout life that one of their most important jobs is to perpetuate, strengthen, and expand the system they have inherited. They are very efficient at doing so, and when opposed, they can be ruthless.... I could give you a list of practical things to do..... Protest against “free” trade agreements and against companies that exploit desperate people in sweatshops or that pillage the environment (see, Perkins 2006, pp. ix, xii, 221-222).

the bottom of the class-ladder (all poor, all marginalized people, all indigenous peoples and alike), and in the process the government and politics turns into an entity subordinate to the rent seeking system.⁶

In the terminology of political-economy, the main reason of this deprivation is a kind of centre-periphery nexus in free-market economy where centre constantly works to make periphery more peripheral; which produces and reproduces alienation and inequality among people living in the periphery. As a result, the speed of development in the centre will be at a higher rate and greater speed than that of the periphery. All these takes place through the process of pilfering-dispossession of wealth and assets mainly of the weaker communities during the initial period of capitalistic socio-economic system (for details see, Barkat and Huda 1988). In this case, the responsibility of a people-oriented state would be to create an environment in which the constitutional obligation of development aiming at reduction of inequality and institutionalization of equality of opportunity is directed and operated in the interest of those communities. Again, if the matter becomes so, that the process of deprivation is continuing relatively for a longer period, then the responsibility of the state would be to accelerate the process of removing these deprivation-inequalities and institute equality in opportunities. To the contrary, if the process of deprivation is created and nourished by the state itself, then, that's the end of development dream. The issue is not unnatural, rather a symptom of a deadly historical catastrophe. In my opinion, the indigenous communities⁷ in Bangladesh – both in the hill and in the plain land – is such a community among whom the above mentioned process of deprivation-inequality has got higher momentum in 1947 during the partition of India and formation of Pakistan on the basis of two-nation theory, when majority of the non-Muslims were compelled to leave the country, and many of the indigenous peoples (specially, of plain land) left the country leaving behind their ancestral land, forest, asset and properties. This, to me, was the first substantive historical time of unpeopling the indigenous peoples in Bangladesh, especially those living in the plains.

Subsequently, the speed of this continuing process has received further higher momentum during the Muslim-Hindu communal riots of 1964. That is, the process has been started back in about 70 years from now, and it has become more critical during the last 50 years. Besides, the free market philosophy acted as a powerful catalyst, which is directly related with this process. In respect of hill indigenous-CHT, the process has been started, so to speak, from the decade of 1950 when Kaptai barrage was constructed to generate electricity by destroying the most fertile one-third of agricultural land of CHT. In case of plain-land indigenous peoples, the same process of unpeopling and exterminating them worked probably from the same time through dispossession of their land-waterbodies-forest which was historically under universal-social-customary ownership. It implies that the history of unpeopling of indigenous peoples as becoming more acute dates back at least to sixty years. Along with this, in case of hill-CHT indigenous peoples a new and most covetous form of unpeopling became visible from the decade of mid-1970 when the process of “demographic engineering” was started in a planned way as an integral part of “political engineering” by the centre. And, this “politico-economic engineering” has deeply ingrained roots not only “economic” by nature (which is most apparent on surface), but also social, political, strategic, geopolitical, and global (which is difficult to see).

Not the objective-but the means then, is marauding the inborn, customary and historical rights to life-property-land-waterbodies-forest resources of indigenous peoples permanently aiming at reaching the objective of gradually unpeopling the majority indigenous peoples into minorities.

⁶ For details about this nexus of rent seekers, politics, and government including the mechanisms about how this nexus works and what are the possible regressive outcomes, see Barkat 2014(a).

⁷ Recently, they are treated as minor ethnic sects or tribes. There is a debate on this. But, as said earlier in footnote 1, I personally, on reasonable ground, prefer to identify this community as “adibashi” or ‘indigenous peoples’. It is pertinent to add here that the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, in their estimates of the population size of indigenous peoples, considers all tribal population as indigenous peoples.

This is again not the full story. There are many other facets of this story. For example, (1) The aggravated ethnic conflicts in the CHT is a “good” plea to justify increasing military budget; (2) The ethnic conflict in CHT has many things to do with geo-politics (the Indian seven sisters; China politics; using China politics by US imperialism etc.); (3) The extermination of indigenous peoples and replacing them by Bengali (mostly poor) Muslims – as a method of “demographic engineering” – has the potential to shape the whole CHT politics as “politics of religion” which may conveniently turn into breeding ground of Islamist fundamentalism (the Islamic religious schools – the number of madrasas are disproportionately high in CHT as compared to population size of the Muslims in CHT; and in many places including the Madrasas there are the arms training centres of the Islamist fundamentalism); (4) In the process of unpeopling the indigenous peoples from their own land and settlements the outsiders (may be called invaders, as already mentioned the case with decolonized Western Saharian Sahwaris who were invaded by the Moroccan settlers) non-indigenous peoples, mostly the Muslims, were driven down to settle there who are now the majority population⁸. Therefore, the ‘beauty’ of democracy may be evident if there is ever a referendum in CHT, the Bangali settlers would be able to dominate the referendum. If that be the situation then there will be no alternative but to “Sworn to fight to the last man” (as already mentioned in Section 2 in the case of indigenous peoples of Ecuadorian Amazon). The process, same as in the CHT, took place among the plain land indigenous peoples, however, the form being slightly different. The essence remains one and the same.

Regardless of Government, it is claimed that by different indicators, a good progress has taken place in education-health-social security (protection) along with economy. This is a blatant lie. However, in this so called process of development whatever has happened, in almost all sense, true development of indigenous peoples has not taken place at all. It stands to reason that the purport of true development is to ensure five substantive types of freedom for the indigenous communities. These include: 1) political freedom, 2) economic opportunities, 3) social facilities (mainly education, health, and welfare of children and older people), 4) transparency guarantee, and 5) protective security. However, in the “development process” of at least during the past five decades, no effective process was found visible at all in ensuring any of the above five freedoms of indigenous peoples. If development means “inclusion of excluded” in the development activities, then this process of development for indigenous peoples, in my opinion, has never been started really. By ‘development’ if we mean ensuring constitutional rights, the process of establishing justiciable rights, the effective resistance and removal measures against racial dispossession and alienation, paying respect to the minor ethnic-sects, the well-intended strategies for reducing inequality-deprivation irrespective of race-religion-caste-female-male, and the like, then it can be concluded without any hesitation that the indigenous peoples have, still, not been ‘included’ in the effectual domain of development process. And, it is made consciously. Because, in the free market, to serve the interest of the centre it is necessary to keep the periphery in force as periphery; free market is never poor-friendly, it never becomes welfare-oriented for the people at the periphery; free market produces and reproduces discrimination-deprivation-inequality, and because of these reasons the society is to pay much bitter price for such inequality-discrimination – both in the short and long run.

The politico-economic model explaining the causes and consequences of unpeopling of indigenous peoples and of ethnic conflicts and related arguments forwarded above can be further substantiated using Stiglitz’s research on causes and consequences of inequality presented in his seminal work “The Price of Inequality” (2013). Stiglitz maintains the following: “Markets by themselves, even when they are stable, often lead to high levels of inequality, outcomes that are

⁸ Finally, this has resulted that in case of casting vote in the so-called democratic method who once upon a time were the minorities now on account of becoming the majorities, to cast votes at different levels, they are becoming people’s representatives. My apprehension here is that, those who developed the theory of “demographic engineering”, they, along with other impacts, also thought over this unjust outcome well ahead of time.

widely viewed as unfair... The power of markets is enormous, but they have no inherent moral character... Capitalism is failing to produce what was promised, but is delivering on what was not promised inequality, pollution, unemployment, and most important of all, the degradation of values to the point where everything is acceptable and no one is accountable... The political system seems to be failing as much as the economic system... Greater inequality led to less equality of opportunity, leading in turn to more inequality. Inequality fosters instability, which itself gives rise to more inequality... One of the darkest sides to the market economy that came to light was the large and growing inequality the rich were getting richer, while the rest were facing hardships that seemed inconsonant... Inequality is the result of market distortions, with incentives directed not at creating new wealth but at taking it from others... Inequality's apologists – and they are many – argue to the contrary that giving more money to the top will benefit everyone, partly because it would lead to more growth. This is an idea called trickle-down economics. Higher inequality has not led to more growth; the riches accruing to the top have come at the expense of those down below... The rich are getting richer, the richest of the rich are getting still richer, the poor are becoming poorer and more numerous, and the middle class is being hollowed out... Decline in opportunity has gone hand in hand with our growing inequality... Much of the inequality that exists today is a result of government policy... Inequality is the result of political forces as much as of economic ones” (see, Stiglitz 2013, pp. xlii, xliii, xlvi, 2, 7-9, 22, 35, 38, 103).

Indeed, by numerous criteria, Bangladesh is a potentially prosperous country. But it has not witnessed the prosperity of the common people, especially the downtrodden. The country is prosperous, because it owns ‘4 jo’⁹ where the 1st ‘jo’= *Jomi* (land); the 2nd ‘Jo’= *Jola* (water bodies); the 3rd ‘jo’= *Jungle* (forest), and the 4th ‘jo’= *Jono-manush* (people). Here, the problem is: the people, who, by their labour, create wealth through the production and reproduction of crops by cultivating land (the farmers) – are not the owner of those land; the people who create wealth through the production and reproduction of fish by putting their labor in the water bodies (the fishers) – are not the owner of those water bodies; and the people who by rendering their hard labor in the jungle- forest (mainly indigenous peoples) produces wealth by creating, recreating and protecting forest – are not the owner of those forests. Here lies, to my understanding, the real basis of underdevelopment as well as the basis for rising inequality. This greater and increasing inequality fosters instability; and all these combinedly in a distorted free market dominated by rent seekers inevitably create necessary conditions for conflict, which, in turn, forms an unending cycle of underdevelopment→rising inequality→ conflict→ underdevelopment. The higher is the position of a group or community in the ladder of marginalization the more acute is the strength of the cycle implying more difficult to break the cycle; and this is most acute for the indigenous peoples, among others.

It might be pertinent to point here a good news(!) (whatever apparent the goodness is) that, getting out of the above stated whirlpool of underdevelopment and rising inequality, we are now absorbed into a new thinking of humanizing development. Because, we are talking about some all encompassing vision in congruence with the basic principles enshrined in our Constitution (such as, Vision 2021; or Vision 2041) illuminated with the spirit of liberation and freedom. Apart from this, in the National Parliament Election of 2008, the government being inspired by the spirit of liberation war with absolute support of the people in favor of “Vision 2021” got mandate towards ‘humane development’. People have given their verdict that by the 50 years of Independence i.e., by the year 2021, Bangladesh will turn into a secular, progressive, liberal democratic welfare state; Bangladesh by the year 2021 will be a middle income country (!) with less inequality; Bangladesh of 2021 will turn into a Bangladesh (what is called ‘digital’ Bangladesh) with healthy people enriched with knowledge-science-technology. In building up this state, it is urgent to show

⁹ ‘Jo’ is a Bangla alphabet comes after ‘cho’ and ‘choo’.

due respect to all deprived-distressed-poor-marginal people of the country, and ensure their full inclusion in the development process along with guarantee of their constitutional and justiciable rights. Hopefully, in the election manifesto which Awami League (afterwards in power) placed before the National Parliament Election in 2008 and in the National Parliament Election Manifesto of 2014, the development of indigenous peoples was recognized as a priority area of developmental intervention (manifesto 2008, article 18.1, 18.2; and manifesto 2014, article 22.1,22.2). Regarding this, what was explicitly mentioned in the two manifestos are presented in Table 1. Notably, the government in power has made many promises in the election manifestos, but in 2008 manifesto people who were rightly mentioned as indigenous peoples those same people in 2014 manifesto were termed as (minor) ethnic sects and tribes. It would not be illogical to ponder whether this change is merely a definitional one or something somewhere for some reason went wrong! For reasons, at least not known to me, are we trying to prove that Bangladesh is a uniraical, unireligious, uniculture, unilingual country? Are we ready to not to appropriately and truly recognize the cultural, religious, racial and linguistic identity of Bangladeshi citizens other than the Bangalees? If so, then we are in fools paradise. Here, it would be most pertinent to remind what the Founder Father of Singapore Lee Kuan Yew said, “Nationhood cannot be achieved by pressure-cooking.... If we try to put all these different background cultures into a blenderiser, we will end up with a non-descript melange” (Yew, Lee Kuan 2013, pp. 86-87).

Table 1: Pledges and promises towards development of indigenous peoples as contained in the election manifestos of Awami League in the National Parliament Elections of 2008 and 2014

Election Manifesto of 2008	Election Manifesto of 2014
<p>Article 18.1: Terrorism, discriminatory treatment and human rights violations against religious and ethnic minorities and indigenous people must come to an end permanently. Security of their life, wealth and honor will be guaranteed. Their entitlement to equal opportunity in all spheres of state and social life will be ensured. Special measures will be taken to secure their original ownership on land, water bodies, and their age-old rights on forest areas. In addition, a Land Commission will be formed. All laws and other arrangements discriminatory to minorities, indigenous people and ethnic groups will be repealed. Special privileges will be made available in educational institutions for religious minorities and indigenous people. Such special privileges will also apply for their employment.</p> <p>Article 18.2 The 1997 Chittagong Hill Tract Peace Accord will be fully implemented. More efforts will be directed toward the development of underdeveloped tribal areas, and special programmes on priority basis will be taken to secure their rights and to preserve their language, literature, culture, and unique lifestyles.</p>	<p>Article 22.1: Through enacting the 15th Amendment to the Constitution in the Parliament, Awami League has re-established the four state principles of the '72 Constitution. As a result of this granting of constitutional right and honour to all religions, small national entities, ethnic groups and tribes, there will be an end to discriminatory conduct towards religious and ethnic minorities and violation of human rights. Constitutional obligation to safeguard their life, property, places of worship, distinctions of their life-style and culture will be strictly upheld. Landed property, homestead, forest property, water-bodies and other properties will remain well-protected. The work of the Hill Tracts Land Commission will continue to take special measures for protection of small ethnic groups' rights to land, water-bodies and forest-property including rights of those of plain land. Special quota for the children of non-advanced and non-developed ethnic groups, <i>dalit</i> and tea-garden workers will be there in the matters of education, job and facilities and advantages.</p> <p>Article 22.2 The still-unimplemented pledges and clauses of the CHT Peace Accord shall be implemented. The development of the Hill districts will be sped up, geo-natural features of the three Hill districts will be protected and forest areas, animal resources and the beauty of mountain peaks will be saved.</p>

Source: (a) Election Manifesto of Bangladesh Awami League-2008 (Article 18.1 and 18.2).
(b) Election Manifesto of Bangladesh Awami League-2014 (Article 22.1 and 22.2).

4. Indigenous Peoples in Bangladesh: Some Ground Realities

Indigenous peoples in Bangladesh are inhabited in the hills and in the plains. In the case of the indigenous peoples in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), the argument about ‘low population density’ in the hills in a ‘high population density country’ is highly hegemonic, immoral, and grossly flawed. Because, officially, this argument has been used in the past, especially since mid 1970’s as the key plea to outnumber indigenous people from their ancestral land and settlement, and export Bangalee settlers (mostly Muslim and poor) there, which subsequently caused a form of unfreedom when the indigenous peoples of CHT became “guest in their own country”. This is a dangerous form of unfreedom mediated through unpeopling the indigenous peoples!

Out of the total over 150 million populations in Bangladesh (in 2012-13), officially, an approximately 2.5 million people (1.7% of total population) are indigenous peoples belonging to 27 different ethnic groups representing about 26 different languages¹⁰. These official figures are incorrect. The related figures close-to-reality, conservatively speaking, depending on my own research and in-depth discussions with the knowledgeable informants would be as follows: the total population of indigenous peoples in Bangladesh would be around 5 million, the number of different indigenous peoples’ community would be at least 49, they use over 40 different languages, and they are dispersed in 48 districts (out of 64 districts in Bangladesh).

As mentioned above that all official figures related to the indigenous peoples population size, number and name of their individual communities, number of languages they speak, and places of their inhabitation are grossly incorrect. This is primarily due to the official disrespect and neglect towards the indigenous peoples – the official figures need to be contested. The figures presented below contesting the official figures are outcome of many research works on indigenous peoples in Bangladesh conducted by the author and his co-researchers. These research works, in addition to review and scrutiny of relevant literature and historical records included field survey across the country and more importantly repeat consultation meetings with the leaders of two nationally representative indigenous peoples forum, namely, the Jatiyo Adibashi Parishad and Bangladesh Adibasi Forum and indigenous peoples community leaders of three CHT Districts. Authors inquiry about the inhabitation of indigenous peoples by district revealed the following (districts are alphabetically ordered and figure in the bracket shows the numbers of different indigenous peoples’ communities living in that district): Banderban (CHT district, 12), Bagerhat (2), Bogra (15), Barguna (1), Chandpur (1), Chapai Nawabgonj (15), Chittagong (4), Comilla (1), Cox’s Bazar (2), Dhaka (4), Dinajpur (13), Faridpur (3), Feni (1), Gaibandha (3), Gazaipur (3), Habiganj (3), Jamalpur (3), Jessore (4), Khagrachari (CHT district, 11), Khulna (2), Kishorgonj (2), Kushtia (4), Joypurhat (15), Jhenaidah (3), Lalmonirhat (2), Magura (2), Mymensingh (3), Meherpur (4), Moulvibazar (12), Naogaon (16), Narail (2), Natore (8), Satkhaira (1), Sherpur (4), Sirajgonj (5), Sunamganj (2), Sylhet (10), Tangail (2), and Thakurgaon (12). Here, at this outset, in order to avoid unnecessary debate, discussion and provocation about non-substantive issues (which is a preoccupation of rent seeker’s subservient ‘bad’ politicians and ill-intended academician class), it is important to note the following: (a) The statistics of number of different indigenous peoples’ communities by districts presented above, to the best of our knowledge, is the first time of its kind statistics in Bangladesh; (b) The number of different communities may

¹⁰ The neglect and disrespect towards indigenous peoples in Bangladesh is evident in not only from the fact that these people should or should not be recognized as indigenous, but may be more so from the lack of consensus about the total number of various indigenous communities and population size in each such community. While, I am in full agreement with the Bangladesh Adivasi Forum and Jatiyo Adibashi Parishad (both are nationally representative forums of indigenous peoples) that the number of different indigenous peoples in Bangladesh would be 47, the Government of Bangladesh in a most recent document titled “Small Ethnic Minority Cultural Institution Act 2010” reports the same as 27. In this 2010 Act, the Section 2(1) of 23 Schedule a list of 27 small minorities in Bangladesh has been provided, which reports the same community twice with different names e.g., Lusai and Khumi; and which did not include many others, e.g., Banai, Hodi, Mandai, Raj-Bangshi, Mahato etc.

vary if further targeted research on this issue is conducted. However, the number will not be less than what is presented; (c) Nothing is known about the specific indigenous peoples' community wise population size by geographic and administrative locations i.e, by districts and below (municipality, mohalla, upazila, union, ward, village). Therefore, in order to design any meaningful development intervention towards ensuring well-being of the already unpeopled indigenous people, it is a necessary precondition to conduct a census on indigenous peoples in Bangladesh which shall provide location wise statistics about the size of population by age-sex-education-occupation-health status-poverty status-land and homestead ownership status by specific indigenous peoples' communities by name, at the least. And, this endeavor shall be initiated and funded by the government, and be done ensuring full participation of all the indigenous peoples' communities in the country.

In Bangladesh, most of the indigenous peoples live in the rural settings of Chittagong Hills and in the regions of Mymensingh, Sylhet and Rajshahi; many others are dispersed throughout the country (see, Map 1). Most of them are of Sino-Tibetan descent, and have distinctive Mongolian features. These indigenous peoples, in their social organization, marriage customs, birth and death rites, food and other social customs, traditional knowledge and practices – differ from the people of the rest of the country. Each indigenous community, however small it may be, has a distinctive culture and heritage of her own.

Map 1: Inhabitants of Indigenous Peoples in Bangladesh (by District), 2015



Most of the indigenous peoples – around 80 per cent of all – are concentrated in the North and in the South-east of the country – the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). The indigenous peoples of Bangladesh remain among the most persecuted of all minorities, facing discrimination not only due to their ethnicity and religion but also because of their indigenous identity and their location at the bottom of the country’s socio-economic and ‘class’ ladder. The largest number of indigenous population (around 50 per cent of the total) lives in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The

parts of Bangladesh outside of the CHT are generally being referred to as the ‘plains’ region or the ‘mainstream’, in contrast to the Chittagong Hill Tracts, even though some of these areas also contain hilly land and have indigenous peoples.

In understanding the ground realities of the indigenous peoples in Bangladesh, to avoid slightest possible confusion, it would be most appropriate to mention about the accepted definition of indigenous peoples. The United Nations human rights bodies, International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Bank and international law apply four distinct criteria to distinguish indigenous peoples. These are as follows: (1) Indigenous peoples usually live within (or maintain attachments to) geographically distinct ancestral territories; (2) They tend to maintain distinct social, economic, and political institutions within their territories; (3) They typically aspire to remain distinct – culturally, geographically and institutionally, rather than assimilate fully into a national society, and (4) They self-identify as indigenous. Here, at the very outset, it is necessary to mention that all the 47 indigenous peoples’ community in Bangladesh conform fully to the above four criteria of indigenous identity. It is, therefore, no one (individual or institution) has the moral, ethical and lawful right to rename the indigenous peoples of Bangladesh by putting the name tag as “tribe” or “small minority” or “small ethnic groups”, and alike. This will tantamount to accept “unpeopling indigenous people as a natural rule” and/or to accept that “indigenous people are low order people”, and therefore, shall be disrespected and neglected.

The rights of indigenous peoples are often violated both by the government and by many Bangalees having vested interest. Irrespective of hill-plain, in terms of any development indicator, the indigenous peoples of this country are victims of exploitation-destitution-distress-discrimination-deprivation-inequality. The constitutional rights, justiciable rights, birth rights, right to tradition, customary right, social rights and kinship rights of indigenous peoples have never been respected, rather terribly plundered. If other conditions remain the same, then along with this gross disrespect and intense plundering of rights – the extent and profundity of this distress, destitution, discrimination, deprivation, inequality and alienation will continue in perpetuity. Poverty, deprivation, inequality and alienation, in all its forms, are fully applicable for indigenous peoples. They are simply the object of extermination and unpeopling.

In addition to facing discrimination due to their indigenous ethnic identity, the members of indigenous communities face hardship in access to education, employment, and basic amenities of life, which are guaranteed for every citizen by the Constitution of Bangladesh. Lands and settlements of the indigenous peoples have been encroached upon and settled by non-indigenous ‘imported’ newcomers-settlers (which I will discuss at length later). With little or no legal protection, indigenous peoples can rarely recover the lands and settlements they traditionally enjoyed. Sometimes government agencies in the name of development work take over lands and forests belonging to the indigenous people. All over the north and south-east of Bangladesh, indigenous people are rightly concerned about what they call “encroachment onto their traditional homelands by Bengali settlers”.

Decades of violent discrimination have trapped the indigenous people in to a vicious cycle of unpeopling and impoverisation, thus further reducing their already grim opportunities (if any!) for empowerment and freedom of life. It is not at all an exaggeration to say that, with very few exceptions, Bangladesh's indigenous peoples are, by and large, the poorest among the poor. No one, even the government officials (of course unofficially!) can deny that they face discrimination in accessing education, health, employment, and civic rights. Decades of infighting between the indigenous-led resistance movement (popularly termed as ‘insurgencies’) and the government security forces in the Chittagong Hill Tracts resulted in to a deeply ingrained social tensions there which still persist despite the signing of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord (CHT Accord, which is popularly known as “Peace Treaty”) between the Government and the *Jono Sanghati Samity*

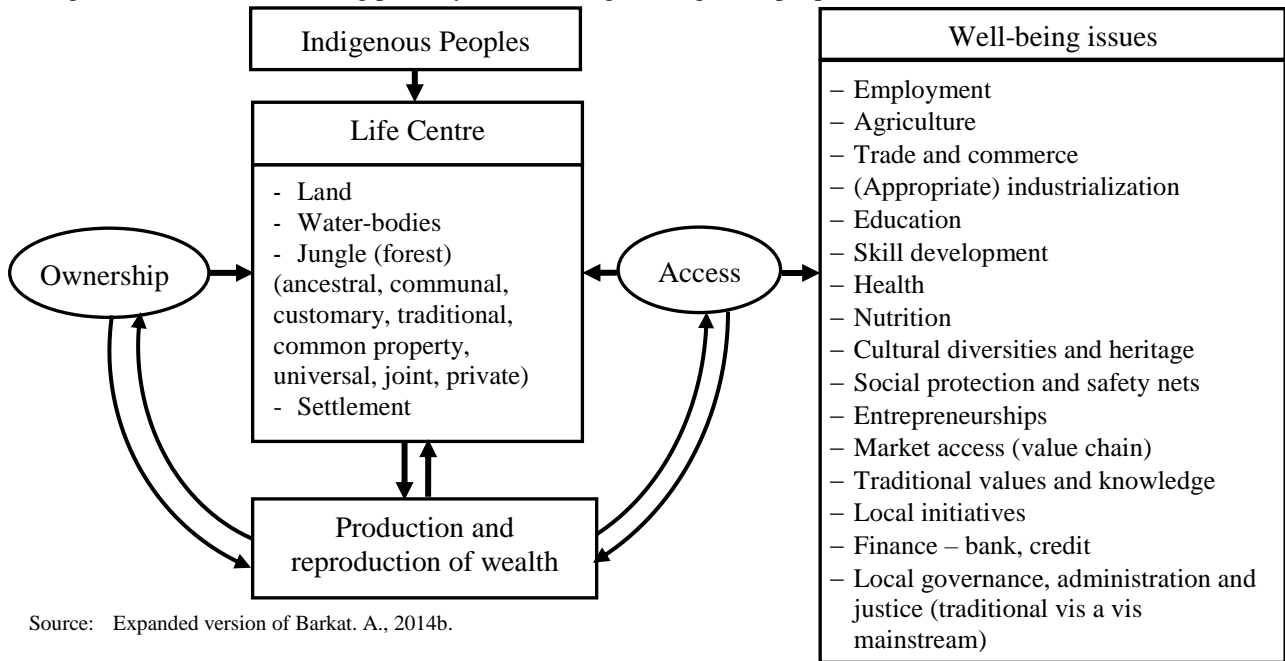
(Peoples Solidarity Committee – leading organization of the indigenous peoples in CHT) on 2 December 1997. Even after almost two decades of signing the CHT Accord, allegations of serious human and civil rights abuses against the members of indigenous communities surface every now and then.

5. Nature, Extent and Implications of Unpeopling of Indigenous Peoples and their Deprivation-in-Perpetuity: Overall and by Indigenous Peoples Community

Irrespective of hill or plain, judged from any criteria of development, the indigenous peoples are not at all well-off as human being, and as time goes on, their ‘ill-being’ (in all its forms as opposite to well-being) is multiplying. By any criteria of ownership of and access to – universal, social, customary, communal, common property, traditional, joint, clan, individual – land-water bodies-jungle (forest) and settlements, the status of indigenous peoples has deteriorated drastically. These land-waterbodies-jungles (forest) are the broad key variables which determine the pathway of well-being of the indigenous peoples. As depicted in Diagram 2, the life line or the life centre of the indigenous people depends primarily on their effective ownership of and access to natural resources comprising land, water and forest and settlement, which is instrumental in production and reproduction of wealth – a *sine qua non* for their well-being. Institutionalization of this system is the only guarantee to foster all other well-being issues, namely employment generation, promotion of agriculture, development of appropriate industries, rise in trade and commerce, development of entrepreneurship and local initiatives, promotion of education and skill development, ensuring good health and nutrition, protection and development of traditional values and cultural heritage, guarantee of social protection, efficient use of finance and credit through appropriate functional inclusion, justice-based access to market implying getting right share in the value chain, positive inclusion (not adverse inclusion) in the system of local governance, administration and justice (see, Diagram 2). The reality, however, is relative straight that in education, health, employment, industry, trade and commerce, local enterprise and entrepreneurship, finance and banking, and local administration – they are still nowhere in the “mainstream”¹¹; it has not been possible to include the indigenous peoples in development process; they are not only included rather excluded-in-perpetuity.

¹¹ Certainly, there may be debate on the connotation of ‘mainstream’ within a centre-periphery system. If the term ‘mainstream’ denotes something related with people’s welfare then, it carries one progressive message but if it becomes the free market reproducing discrimination and inequality as analysed in Section 3 and also mentioned in the essence of the concept of ‘unpeopling’ in Section 2, then it will certainly carry another message – a regressive one. In the latter case, the process of inclusion of the indigenous peoples in the mainstream will be an “adverse inclusion” which will shape the periphery as more peripheral for strengthening the centre. There is scope for social thinkers to think more deeply on this politico-economic issue of so-called mainstreaming indigenous peoples. In the case of indigenous peoples of Bangladesh, I hold the opinion that in order for to establish their rights they need to be mainstreamed through solidarity with all the poor and marginalised people of Bangladesh, irrespective of cast-creed-religion-ethnicity-age-occupation-male-female. That is to say, to me, the whole issue of unpeopled indigenous peoples of Bangladesh is more of a ‘class’ issue than an issue of ethnicity (or minority in population size). This is one of the areas on the subject where I firmly differ with most in the relevant academia, politics and activism. I have clarified my own position on this later.

Diagram 2: Factors determining pathway of well-being of indigenous peoples



Source: Expanded version of Barkat. A., 2014b.

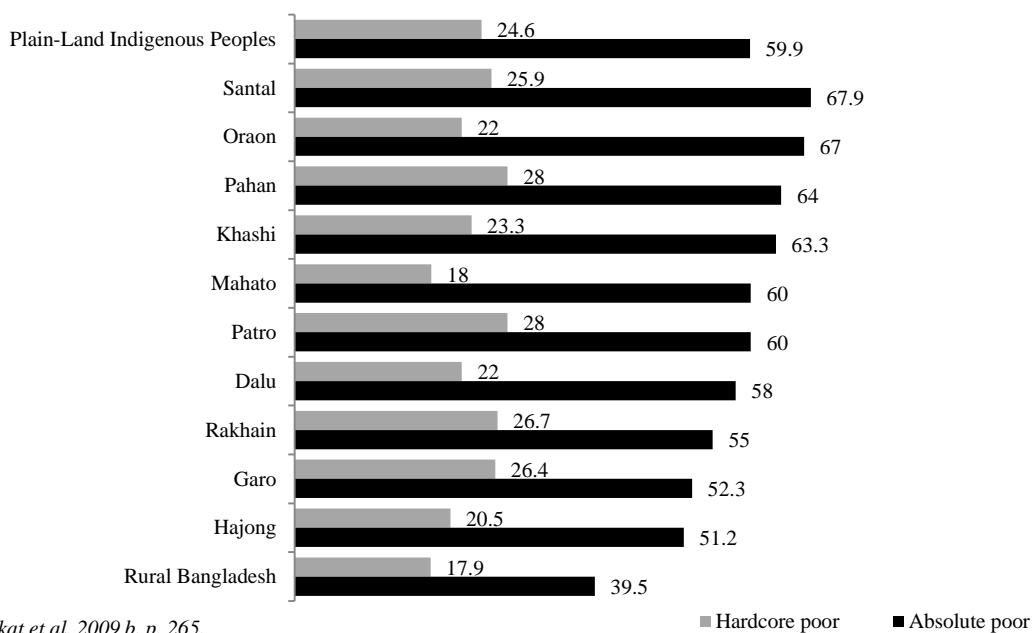
All the above stated are more about ‘what should be’ rather than ‘what is’ on ground. On ground, even after about almost two decades of signing the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord (popularly known as CHT ‘Peace Treaty’) in the year 1997 (02 December) until today nothing significant has been done in line with the above mentioned well-being issues (presented in Diagram 2), and more so, to put it baldly, still now very littleray of hope is evident towards people’s welfare-oriented long-lasting development that can reduce the deprivation and inequality of indigenous peoples, and minimize the ill-effects of centre-periphery relationships. This is an unwarranted reality, the continuation of which might generate alarming outcomes for all (this is analyzed in the subsequent section).

Officially, reliable representative data and information about the changing socio-economic status of indigenous peoples are not available. Even how many different indigenous communities are really there in this country, what is the total population size by each such community, and how they are living according to various indicators of human development – officially acceptable data on these are also not available. But, dispassionate research makes it explicit that, indigenous peoples well-being is at stake. As measured by different indicator of development and well-being, the average condition of indigenous peoples are significantly worse than the average condition of total population of the country. Not only that – but also, a downward trend is observed in the different indicators of development. In this connection, some important relevant information along with its analysis as explored from the research about the indigenous peoples of hill and plain land is worth mentioning here. It is to note that the relevant reference years are 1977, 1978 and 2007, 2008, 2009 – these reference timing is important from the view point of analysis. This is because, the state-sponsored mass scale settlement of Bengalis into the indigenous peoples land of CHT started in late 1970’s during 1976-78, the CHT Accord (“Peace Treaty”) was signed in 1997, and 2007-2009 is sufficiently long time since the late 1970’s characterized by state-sponsored unpeopling of the indigenous peoples from CHT. Keeping all these in view, the relevant status and changes in the life and ‘development’ of the indigenous peoples during this period are presented below:

1. For overall rural Bangladesh, the rate of absolute poverty is 39.5 percent (estimated by the author on the basis of “Household Income-Expenditure Survey 2010”; direct calorie intake method) while it is 65 per cent in case of indigenous peoples of Chittagong Hill Tracts and

60 percent for the plain-land indigenous peoples (Figure 1). This rate of absolute poverty for some indigenous communities, however, is even 70 percent or more than that. Among them are Lusai, Chawk, Khian, Pankhua and Bom in CHT, and Santal, Oraon and Pahan in plain-land. In addition, in terms of hardcore poverty which is a subset of absolute poverty, whereas, the rate for overall rural Bangladesh is 17.9 percent, it is about 25 percent for plain-land indigenous peoples. There are variations in the prevalence of poverty among the indigenous communities. In terms of hardcore poverty, Pahan (28% hard core poor), Patro (28.5%), Rakhain (26.7%), Garo (26.4%) and Santal (25.9%) are in the worst situation among the plain-land indigenous peoples (Figure 1). It implies that be it absolute poverty or hardcore poverty, the poverty situation among indigenous peoples is high and over time has not been reduced at all. This is just about poverty measured only in terms of food consumption. The situation is graver if other forms of poverty are considered (analysed later).

Figure 1: Poverty situation of plain-land indigenous peoples, 2008 (%)



Source: *Barkat et al. 2009 b, p. 265.*

As observed, food poverty is highly pronounced among the indigenous peoples (Barkat et al. 2009b). They basically consume rice as their staple food, and can afford only small amounts of vegetables and potatoes. They rarely consume fish or meat. Their intake of pulse is infrequent. All these combinedly indicate a distinct high probability of protein-energy malnutrition (PEM) among the plain-land indigenous peoples. The protein-energy malnutrition is also highly pronounced among the indigenous peoples in the hills.

‘Food Poverty’ is widespread among the indigenous peoples in the hill – the CHT. According to Direct Calorie Intake (DCI) method, 62 per cent households in the region, irrespective of ethnicities, are living below absolute poverty line (consuming below 2,122 kcal per person per day), while about 36 per cent are hardcore poor (consuming below 1,805 kcal per person per day).

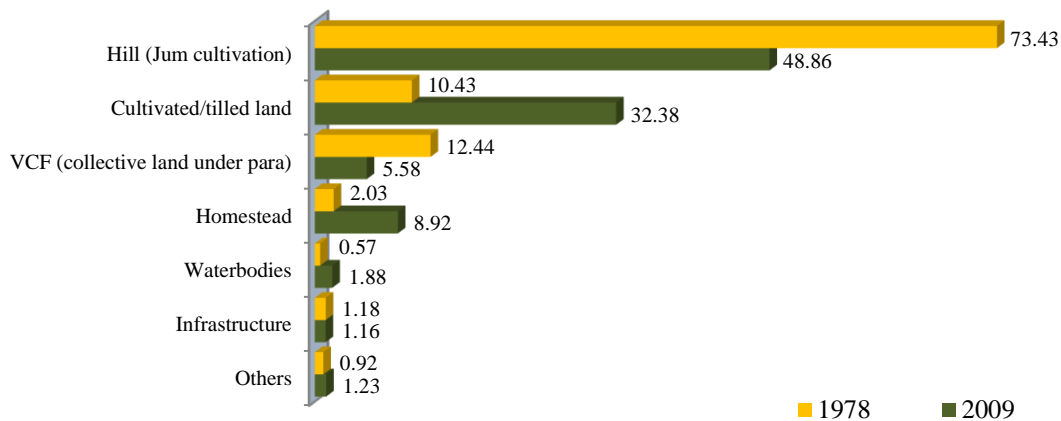
According to ‘Cost of Basic Need’ (CBN) method, poverty incidences have been found graver than those measured using DCI method. Using CBN method, estimates show that on average, almost three-fourth of the households (74%) live below the lower poverty line (<Tk.866 per person per month) and 86 per cent households live below upper poverty line (<Tk.1,025 per person per month). The average household living below lower and upper poverty lines is 78 per

cent and 89 per cent respectively among indigenous peoples. However, the situation is alarming if such poverty data is disaggregated by separate communities of indigenous peoples. Community-wise data indicate that the households below lower poverty line range between 100 per cent of Lushai and 71 per cent of Chakma; and households below upper poverty line range between 100 per cent of Lushai and 84 per cent of Chakma. The other indigenous communities in CHT lie somewhere in-between the Chakmas and Lushais.

The gender disaggregated poverty status is alarming. Poverty status of women, as found in the survey, is indicative enough to denote the situation a highly precarious one. Almost all women in CHT (94%) are living below the absolute poverty line and about 85 per cent below the hardcore poverty line.

2. During the past 30 years (1978-2009) a massive change depicting extermination and unpeopling of indigenous peoples has occurred in the land use method and land ownership pattern in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). As for instance, during these 30 years (1978-2009), the amount of land under the control of hill Paras (used by paras/villages) has declined by 51 per cent. At the same time, of the total land, the share of land under hill jum cultivation has substantially declined reaching at 49 per cent in 2009 from 73 per cent in 1978 (Figure 2). Besides, at the same time, the amount of land under plough cultivation has increased dramatically from 10 per cent in 1978 to 33 per cent in 2009.

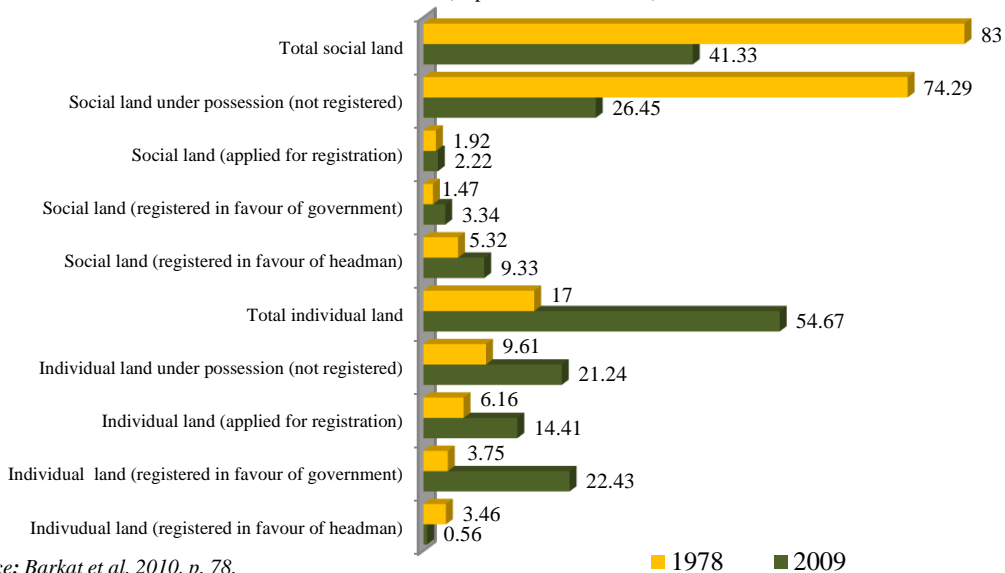
Figure 2: Changes in the land use pattern under hills CHT, 1978-2009 (in per cent of total land)



Source: Barkat et al. 2010, p. 74.

The most visible changes which have occurred in the land ownership pattern are the transformation from social (customary/traditional) ownership to individual ownership. During the last 30 years (1978-2009), as shown in Figure 3, land under social (customary/traditional) ownership has decreased dramatically from 83 percent in 1978 to 41 percent in 2009. To the contrary, the land under individual ownership has increased from a low at 17 per cent in 1978 to a very high level at 55 percent in 2009 (Figure 3). It implies that within the centre-periphery nexus dominated by the rent seekers and their subjugated superstructure within global capitalism (which has already been discussed and analysed at length in Section 3) the “never poor-friendly” free-market has acted as a powerful mechanism to pave the way for the grabbers to grab the ancestral land property of the indigenous peoples. The most recent highly pronounced addition in land grabbing and regressive changes in the land use pattern in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) is evident in the tobacco cultivation by the multinational companies through their national agency system comprising the rent seekers at both local and national levels aided by the government and anti-indigenous peoples’ political forces.

Figure 3: Changes in the land ownership pattern in CHT, 1978-2009
(in per cent of total land)



Source: Barkat et al. 2010, p. 78.

- In Khagrachari district of CHT, due to grabbing of land by the migrant Bangalees (“the imported settlers”) in a mass scale (during late 1970’s and 1980’s) as an integral part of “demographic engineering” under broader plan of “political engineering”, a spectacular change in the land use pattern took place. In Rangamati district, the amount of land acquired by government’s forest department has consequently brought widespread change in the land use pattern of this district. The forest department of the government has acquired about 40 percent of all land which previously belonged to the jurisdiction and control of paras of Rangamati. A large portion of that land in which indigenous peoples were accustomed to jum cultivation has been leased-out and this process is still continuing. It sounds that in the free market, on the one side, the so-called social afforestation of natural forests and, on the other, marketization and commercialisation of universal-social-customary land-water bodies is continuing irresistibly. All these are the medium through which land rights of the indigenous peoples are being violated, and as a consequence inequality in the society has aggravated and perpetuated, especially for those segments who constitute the weakest of all weaker communities.
- During the last three decades, the extent of jum cultivation in the Chittagong Hill Tracts has declined substantially, whereas, side by side, the commercial cultivation has gradually increased. In the past 30 years, the rate at which the amount of natural forests has been reduced – to put it bluntly, has destroyed – the commercial cultivation has increased exactly at the same rate. In Chittagong Hill Tracts, the commercial cultivation of tobacco and rubber is increasing extensively. This is due to commercial cultivation, that the natural bio-diversities like different species, trees, birds and animals are decaying; and some species have already extincted. This implies that commercial cultivation under free market is not only creating alienation among indigenous peoples but also destructing thousand years’ old bio-diversities and ecological balance which are just non-renewable. This is precisely the suicidal price of what has been done with the life and livelihood of the indigenous peoples – irrespective of hill and plain.
- Different quarters like forest department, army and paramilitary forces, various government institutions, Bangalee migrants constructed settlements, Rohingya (from Myanmar) and Peace Force, all having common interest are involved with this process and have played a role in these regressive changes contrary to indigenous peoples’ human development necessitating

institutionalization of their ownership of and access to their own land-water bodies-forest. As a result, land-related intricacies in Chittagong Hill Tracts have been mounted and became manifold complex and complicated. The leasing out process itself and because of leasing out land under state patronization, the extent of dispossession of land of a large number of indigenous peoples is increasing day by day. The land dispossession, discrimination and alienation are on the rise. It is noticeable, however, that there is, hardly any hard-to-resolve land-related disputes between the indigenous peoples and the *adi*-Bangalees (the long-time-settlers and not the recent settlers i.e. who started settling since mid 1970's). The problem of land dispute relates to the "engineered Bangalees" – the settler Bangalees. The problem is so acute that, even in some cases, the long-time-settler Bangalees have been affected by the recently settler Bangalees. Besides, grabbing of land by the settler Bangalees and land acquisition by the government forest department have brought about remarkable regressive change in the land use and land ownership in CHT. By losing control over the only means of livelihood, the indigenous peoples are now passing through precarious life, and many of them were forced to outmigration and dwelling abroad. Consequently, due to this unpeopling process the well-being status of indigenous peoples has been downgraded over time.

6. There is a wide diversity in type of land, ownership of land, unit of measurement, and land management in CHT, as compared to that in the plain-land Bangladesh. Irrespective of category of indigenous communities, about 95 per cent households own some land (including common property). An average rural household in CHT owns about 235 decimals of land (all types of land including common property). An indigenous household owns about 318 decimals and a Bangalee household owns 132 decimals. Agricultural land (plough and *jum*) is owned by about 27 per cent households.

Ownership of *jum* land is significantly (46%) pronounced among indigenous communities than that among Bangalees (5%). Out of about 364,000 acres of cultivatable land about 73,000 acres are under plough cultivation and about 99,000 acres are available for *jum* and about 66,000 acres of land is used as homestead. Among the indigenous communities, a large part of the land (55%) falls under the category of traditional- customary property. Over half (52%) of the land property has been categorized as 'registered ownership' for Bangalee which is remarkably higher than that of indigenous people (21%).

7. During the last 30 years (1977-2007), a 22 percent of the indigenous peoples' households in Chittagong Hill Tracts have been displaced or dispossessed from their ancestral land at least once. Chakma people are mostly affected by land dispossession (41%) followed by Tanchangya (22%). Majority of dispossession incidents have taken place during the life time of father of the current owners (11%) and about 6 per cent lost their lands during his/her own ownership period. On an average, a CHT household has lost about 90 decimals of land during ownership of three generation (the current owner, father, and grandfather of the current owner). The average amount of land dispossessed per household is 115 decimal. It is worth noting that, 82 per cent of the land grabbers are non-indigenous Bangalee. This signifies that within the planned domain of 'political engineering' the 'demographic engineering' has operated in a very immaculate manner.
8. A 67 percent households of CHT are landless (registered individual ownership of land; Apart from this, there is traditional-customary ownership, and universal ownership rights). On the contrary, 69 per cent households of plain-land indigenous peoples are functionally landless (Table 2). The plain-land indigenous peoples, among whom the degree of landlessness is very high indeed, mentionable are Patro (92% households are functionally landless), Pahan (85%), and Santal (75%). Keeping this vast majority of land-based life-centred population as

landless within the free market centre-periphery nexus, ensuring their well-being is just an impossible proposition.

Table 2: Plain-land indigenous peoples’ households’ who are functionally landless and without own homestead, by individual communities in 2008.

Plain-land indigenous peoples communities	Functionally landless * (%)	Households without own homestead (%)
Garo	66.7	57.0
Hajong	65.0	56.6
Orao	56.0	56.1
Rakhain	66.7	55.4
Dalu	60.0	54.2
Khasi	12.0**	46.3
Patro	92 .0	48.4
Pahan	85.0	51.9
Mahato	25.0	51.3
Santal	75.0	51.3
Total (average)	68.8	54.5

Source: Barkat et al. 2009b, p. 280-291.

* If a household’s owned land is less than 50 decimals (excluding the land for the homestead), then the household is considered as functionally landless.

** The mean amount of land possessed by an average Khasi household is 219 decimals- but if the amount of homestead land is deducted from it, then a 12 per cent of Khasi households becomes functionally landless. This seemingly larger land possession among the Khasi households is simply because of hilly geographical nature of area where Khasis live- where both the economic exchange value and use value of land is much less than that in the plain-land areas of Bangladesh.

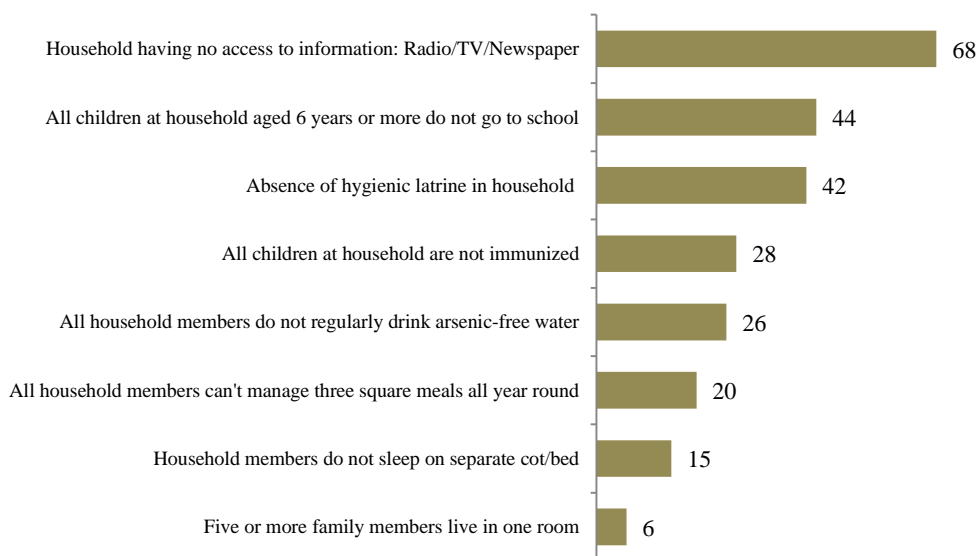
9. During the last 30 years (1977-2007) in total 38 percent of the indigenous peoples’ households have been compelled to change their permanent address at least once. Prior to signing the CHT Accord, out of every 13 rural households at least one household member was compelled to flee away from ancestral residence relatively for a long time due to security reasons and ethnic conflict. This is an unprecedented and uncivilized instance of unpeopling and alienation created by the decision and dictation of the state. However, only about 10 per cent of CHT households’ out-migrated member(s) returned back home after the signing of the CHT Accord (on 2nd December 1997).
10. A predominant part of unpeopling took place during 1976-2007 periods. This is also evident from the timing of transmigration of Bangalee population from mainland to the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). A 62 per cent of the Bangalee population living in CHT is transmigrated to CHT in the last 30 years (1977-2007) through “demographic engineering” as an integral part of “political engineering”. Around 31 per cent of the indigenous peoples’ households had to ever change their usual place of residence in their life-time, and the average time of such displacement is 1.7. This is one of the glaring examples of transforming indigenous peoples of CHT from majority population to minority, which, to put it baldly, can be termed as “political economy of forced migration” or “political economy of demographic engineering aiming at outnumbering the indigenous peoples”.
11. Within the span of last 30 years (1978-2009) a pervasive change has taken place in the population structure of CHT. The indigenous peoples, who 30 years before, were majority, now in terms of population size they have become minorities. This change has been started from 1978-79 through planned “population transfer” from mainland. This planned population transfer is the most visible way of unpeopling and out numbering the indigenous peoples in CHT. There has been other not-easy-to-trace ways also. One of those “innovative” ways was that many of the indigenous peoples were not even included (i.e., not counted) in the

enumeration of population census; as a result of which, the size of the total indigenous population published in the Census is found less than their actual population size. This issue is not just a subject of grave concern, but a clear and gross violation of constitutional, human and justiciable rights towards a citizen of the Republic.

Our own research revealed that in the Population Census 2001 out of total 4,426 paras (villages) of CHT, population has not been enumerated at all in 31 percent paras (see, Barkat et al. 2010, p. 214). Extrapolation shows, had the excluded population been enumerated then in 2009 the estimated population of CHT would have been 2,492,348 which is 1,731,401 according to projection based on Population Census data. It implies that the officially enumerated population in CHT is 44 percent less than the actual population. Therefore, it can be said with alacrity that in the population census, the population of CHT have been shown much less compared to actual population. This is undoubtedly indicative of worst form of demographic politics with indigenous peoples and clearly contradictory to the basic principles of human development. To put it more explicitly, this is one of the most widely used method in shaping periphery into a more peripheral-in-perpetuity form in the nexus of centre- periphery free market model exposed in Section 3.

12. Deprivation of indigenous peoples is multiple and multidimensional. An attempt has been made to understand the extent of multiple deprivations of the indigenous peoples. In doing so, a composite Deprivation Index based on eight indicators¹² was constructed for its application on the plain-land indigenous communities (Barkat et al. 2009b). The deprivation index of plain-land indigenous peoples is high alike that of CHT. As shown in Figure 4, the plain-land indigenous peoples of Bangladesh are deprived of many basic necessities of life. In one-fourth of the plain-land indigenous peoples’ household, all household members do not regularly drink arsenic-free water. Of about slightly less than two-third plain-land indigenous peoples’ household, all children are not fully immunized. In two-fifths of the households, there are no hygienic latrines. In over two-fifths of indigenous peoples’ household, all children (aged 6 years or more) do not go to school. Over two-third of the indigenous peoples’ household do not have access to information (Radio/TV/Newspaper).

Figure 4: Status on deprivation indicators in the plain-land indigenous peoples, 2008 (in %)



Source: Author's estimation based on data in Barkat et al. 2009b, p.275.

¹² Indicators used to construct Deprivation Index include the following: (1) five or more household members live in one room, (2) household members sleep on separate cot/bed at night, (3) absence of hygienic latrine in household, (4) household's having no access to information (Radio/TV/Newspaper), (5) all household members cannot manage three square meals all the year round, (6) all the children of 6 years or above do not go to school, (7) all the children have not completed the doses of vaccination, and (8) all the household members do not drink arsenic-free water regularly.

On a scale of 0-8, where ‘0’ indicates the most deprived and ‘8’ indicates the least deprived, implying that the lower the score obtained by a community the worse is the deprivation status of that community and vice versa. An average plain-land indigenous peoples’ household scored 4.6 (ranging between 3.7 meaning relatively more deprived and 5.6 meaning relatively less deprived by different indigenous communities). This deprivation index, as can be seen in Figure 5, is highly pronounced (i.e. deprivation index value at lower side) among the Patro, Santal, Pahan, Oraon, Dalu, Hajong, and Khasi. The Patro community scores 3.7 – the most deprived community (where, ‘0’ score indicates ideally “the most or the highest deprivation score”). This highest or relatively most deprivation score by patros is followed by Santal (3.9), Pahan (4.2), Oraon (4.3), Dalu (4.4), Hajong (4.6) and Khasi (4.7). This pattern of deprivation index indicates that by most index the life, standard of living, and human development status of plain-land indigenous peoples are really alarming (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Deprivation Index of plain-land indigenous peoples, 2008
(on a scale: 0-8; 0=most deprived, 8=least deprived)



Source: Barkat et al. 2009b, p.276.

13. It is not only the case that among the plain-land indigenous peoples landlessness is highly pronounced, but also, relatively a large number of households among them have no homestead of their own (i.e. private ownership of homestead). About 55 percent households of plain-land indigenous peoples have no homestead of their own (Table 2). This rate of lack of ownership of homestead is relatively higher among the Garo (57%), Hajong (56.6%), Oraon (56.1%), Rakhain (55.4%), and Dalu (54.2%) (see, Table 2 already presented).
14. During the last 30 years between 1998 and 2008, at least ten indigenous peoples communities of plain land have combinedly lost (in most cases forcibly evicted from their own land) a total of 0.2 million acres of land, the present market value of which amounts approximately to Tk. 92.4 billion equivalent to US\$1.19 billion (for details see, Table 3 in subsection 6.2). Or, in other words, this amount of loss due to grabbing of land alone (not other immovable and movable assets which were also grabbed) is equivalent to 11.5 per cent of the FY 2014-15 Annual Development Budget of the Government of Bangladesh¹³.

The indigenous peoples have lost their lands, which have been forcibly dispossessed. But who has grabbed these lands, who are the occupants? A 90 percent of these lands have been grabbed forcibly by the non-indigenous peoples – the Bangalees; and interesting to report

¹³ For the Financial Year (FY) 2014-15, the total national budget for Bangladesh is Tk.2,505 billion with Tk.1,603 billion as Revenue budget, Tk.863 billion as Development budget and Tk.803 billion as budget for the Annual Development Programme (ADP).

that the grabbers are not large in number. They are basically the rent seekers¹⁴ having close contact with government and politics; they are the active agents of free market economy; they are those who are responsible for creation and pro-creation of inequalities and associated discontents and instability in the society; they are those who belong to the classes responsible for criminalization of both economy and politics. To put it bluntly, restoring justice with equality of opportunity and ensuring liberty and freedom as a prime precondition for the progress and well-being of the indigenous peoples will necessitate getting rid of the rent seekers and their subordinate superstructure including politics and governance; or alternatively, disassociate the rent seekers from government and politics. This is an issue of pro-people political commitment. This is ultimately a ‘class’ issue.

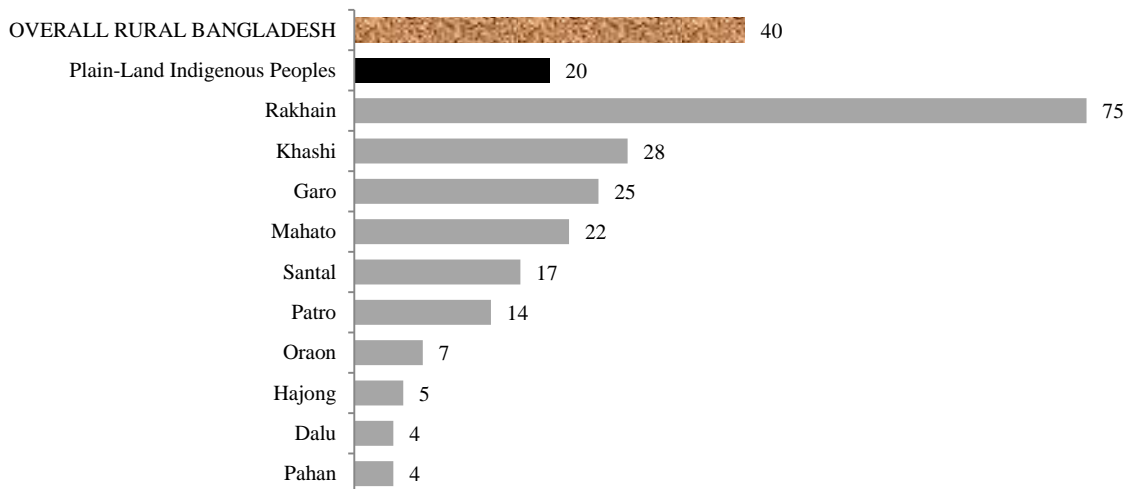
15. The plain-land indigenous peoples generally have access to information mainly not through media¹⁵ but through *adda*/community gatherings. A relatively large portion of the indigenous peoples have reported TVs as their primary source of information, followed by radio. Those who do not possess TVs and/or radios at their residence usually go to neighbor’s house or gather at market place where TVs and/or radios are available. Male indigenous peoples are predominantly found at market places/tea-stalls at evening to watch TVs. Newspaper/magazines are rarely reported as source of information, most likely, a reflection of their relatively low literacy. It should be noted that Bangla is reported as medium of instruction in respect of all three modern sources of information i.e., radio, TV, and newspapers/magazines.
16. The plain-land indigenous peoples have their access to some types of service provider institutions (e.g., Union Parishads, NGOs, indigenous peoples’ local organizations etc.). But, in most cases, they have to pay extra money to these institutions in order to expedite their receipt of services, often coupled with low-quality services and embedded with discrimination against them.
17. Access to electricity (synonymously “access to power”) in the households is not just a matter of lighting, it is rather a most powerful medium to enlighten and empower people. Even in this respect, irrespective of hill or plain land, the indigenous peoples are in dark, and no planned and effective measures have so far been undertaken to liberate them from darkness due to lack of electricity at their household. In this regard, whereas in rural Bangladesh, 40 percent of the households are electrified, the same is 20 percent in case of the plain-land indigenous peoples. An insignificant portion of Pahan, Dalu, and Hajong households are electrified (below 5% each; see, Figure 6). Among the other communities, except for the Rakhains, the scenario is significantly worse than the overall rural scenario of Bangladesh. The unacceptable low level of household electricity or high level of in-access to electricity to

¹⁴ It is also worthwhile to report that irrespective of country, everywhere in the world, the number of rent seekers is limited, and the number of super-duper rich rent seekers is not more than 5 per cent of all rent seekers (or at best 0.5 per cent of the total population – across countries and all over the world).

¹⁵ It is a matter of serious rethinking that whether access to electronic and/or print media is good or bad. Media matters! This is more so when the question comes to choose a media in the struggle to fight injustice, where now-a-days most media are not unpeople-friendly. Most of the Western media and their subservient in the developing countries are good in “colonizing people’s mind and mind of the perpetrators”. They are experts in dis/misinformation propaganda and media terrorism; media has high level of expertise in promoting “selective blindness”; they rarely talk about “uncomfortable truth” (details about role of media propaganda in support of Western imperialism, see Chomsky and Vltchek 2013, p. x, xi, 9-11, 13, 28). The media – mass media including electronic and print and all e-media including SMS, internet, twitter, websites, facebook, and so on serves specific purpose of specific interest group in specific time. An objective and truthful account of the essence of the propaganda role of Western media is essential for our understanding how are world has been controlled and governed, as well as to know how the media “manufactures” public opinion, ideology and perception. Western media – developed through a long process – is a complex and “sophisticated” (media) propaganda system aimed ultimately at serving the interests of their masters – the Western imperialism – by way of masking the truth (“under-carpeting truth”) through deliberately disseminating wrong information, distorted information, partial information, over information, mis-information, tight lipped gesture, determined disinformation campaign against “uncomfortable truth” and ideological manipulation.

indigenous peoples is most likely a planned effort to not to enlighten them or not to empower them through provisioning of electricity at their households. Not to empower the indigenous people by providing them access to electricity is equivalent to not to enlighten them, which in turn, can be treated as one of the indicators of unpeopling the indigenous people.

Figure 6: Household electrification status of plain-land indigenous peoples, 2008 (in %)



Source: Barkat et al. 2009b, p.270.

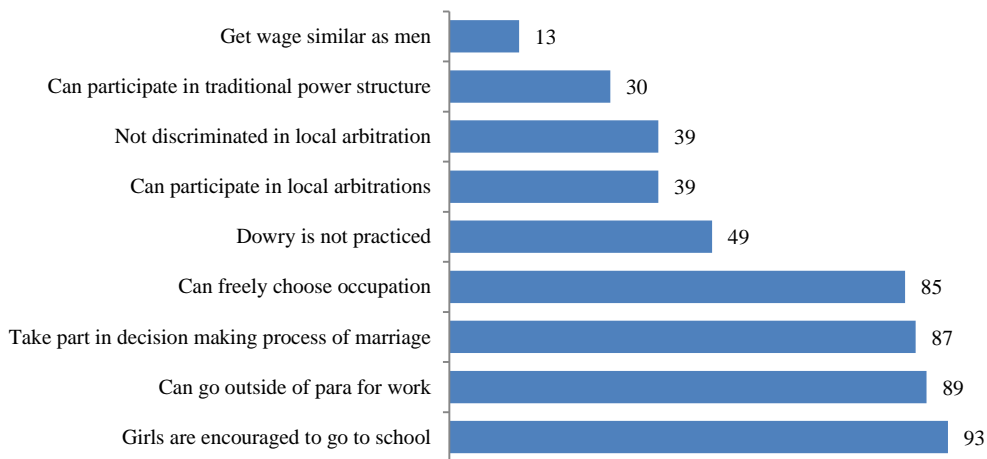
18. Women across nations is one of the most crucial agents of development. Women's active agency role is a prime condition for social, economic, political and cultural changes and progress of any country.¹⁶ The overall status of women empowerment in Bangladesh is not satisfactory¹⁷. This scenario is more frustrating among the indigenous women. Indigenous women are deprived of and discriminated in all phases of life cycle – from womb to death. Even in the matrilineal system of Garos and Khashis, the women are deprived and discriminated only because of the fact that they are female within the broader society dominated by patriarchy and feudal norms.

As depicted in Figure 7, in almost in all the cases, plain-land indigenous women get lower wages than their counter part males. Only around a one-third of the plain-land indigenous women can participate in local arbitrations (locally known as *shalish*) and in their traditional power structures. Two-thirds of them are discriminated in local arbitrations. Still in more than a half of the plain-land indigenous peoples' household, dowry is practiced. However, it has been reported that a large part of the plain-land indigenous women can freely choose occupation and can go outside of para for work. It is also reported that plain-land indigenous women can take part in marriage-related decision making process. One important point to note is that despite all odds, as reported by the parents that the indigenous girls are encouraged to go to schools.

¹⁶ For details about women's agency role and social change, see, Amartya Sen 1999, pp. 189-203. With regard to the link between active agency role of women and well-being, Sen argues the following: "The active agency of women cannot, in any serious way, ignore the urgency of rectifying many inequalities that blight the well-being of women and subject them to unequal treatment; thus the agency role must be much concerned with women's well-being also. Similarly, coming from the other end, any practical attempt at enhancing the well-being of women cannot but draw on the agency of women themselves in bringing about such a change. So the *well-being aspect* and the *agency aspect* of women's movements inevitably have a substantial intersection" (Sen 1999, p.190).

¹⁷ However, a most recent work by Drèze and Sen reports: "Bangladesh's rapid progress in living standards has been greatly helped by the agency to women, and particularly the fact that girls have been rapidly educated and women have been widely involved – much more than in India – in the expansion of basic education, health care, family planning and other public services as well as being a bigger part of the industrial labour force" (Drèze and Sen 2013, pp. 58-64).

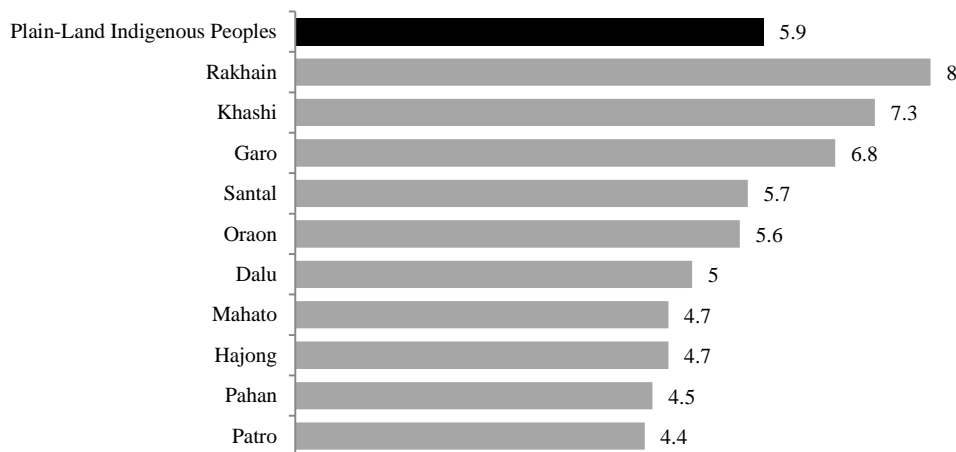
Figure 7: Status of indigenous women's empowerment in plain land, 2008 (in %)



Source: Barkat et al. 2009b, p.271.

The overall scenario of women’s empowerment among the plain-land indigenous communities resembles similarity to the average countrywide scenario. However, there are some variations in women’s empowerment by different communities of plain-land indigenous people. Though around one-third of the plain-land indigenous women can participate in local arbitrations, this practice is almost absent among the Dalu and Hajong community. Rakhain women are less discriminated in the local arbitrations as compared to the other plain-land indigenous communities. The practice of dowry is relatively high among the Khashi, Garo, Patro and Rakhain communities than among other plain-land indigenous communities. In this backdrop of differences, when women empowerment is scored by different indigenous communities, the Patro, Pahan, Mahato and Hajong community scores less as compared to their other counterpart communities. The score on women empowerment is relatively high among the Rakhain, Khashi and Garo communities (see, Figure 8). Women carrying low empowerment scores among plain-land indigenous communities belong to Patro (4.4 in a 0-9 scale), Pahan (4.5), Hajong (4.7), Mahato (4.7) and Oraon (5.6). On the other hand, the same women empowerment score is high among Rakhain (8.0), Khashi (7.3) and Garo (6.8) communities. Notably, on the one hand, the method of conducting social history-tradition-life is related with the level of women empowerment of indigenous peoples, and on the other hand, it is also true that those who have low score, they really lag behind in their empowerment status.

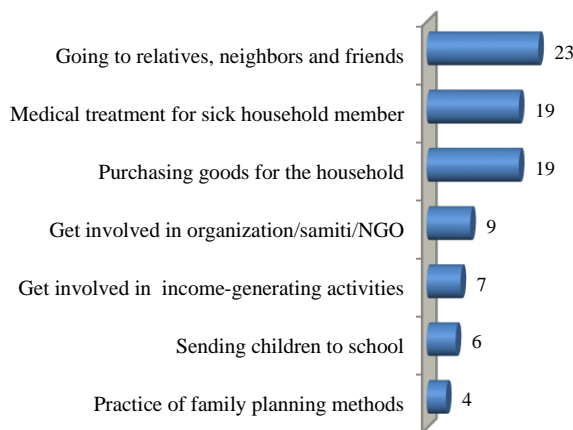
Figure 8: Indigenous women's empowerment score in plain land, 2008 (in %) (on a scale: 0-9; 0=min, 9=max)



Source: Barkat et al. 2009b, p. 272.

19. The power of independent decision-making by women on various socio-economic issues is indeed an integral indicator of women’s empowerment. It has been reported that, in most cases, indigenous women in plain-land cannot take decision independently on various household issues (Figure 9).The process and practice of decision making on key household issues is an exclusive domain of the male members. The plain-land indigenous women are barred from taking independent decisions over their children’s education. Almost no indigenous women can independently decide on adoption of any family planning methods. A negligible portion of plain-land indigenous women can independently decide to get involved in any income-generating activity. Most of them, with some exception, cannot take independent decisions over getting involved in any organization/samiti. The scenario is almost similar among indigenous women in the hills with some minor exceptions for some communities.

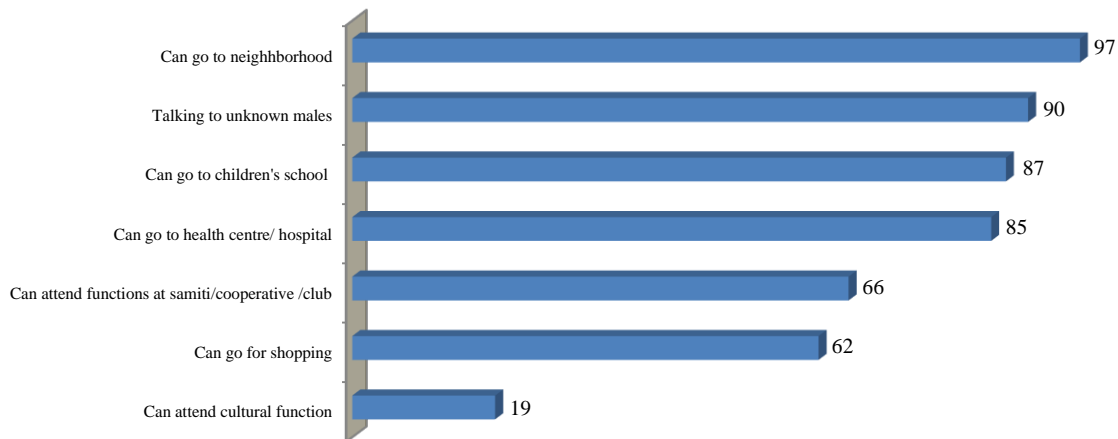
Figure 9: Independent decision making practice among plain-land indigenous women, 2008 (in %)



Source: Barkat et. al. 2009b, p.273.

20. Participation of women in socio-economic and cultural activities requires frequent movements to different places considered as socio-economic and cultural hubs. In a country, like Bangladesh, where traditional social norms are highly pronounced, women’s mobility – in its own right – is a critical empowerment indicator. The reported mobility status of plain-land indigenous women appears to be from high to moderate depending on the specific indicator of mobility. For example, as shown in Figure 10, almost all the plain-land indigenous women can go un-accompanied to various places in their respective para; majority can go alone to health centers independently; majority can independently attend children’s school; however, majority cannot attend cultural functions, unaccompanied. This mobility pattern of women is more or less similar among different communities of plain-land indigenous peoples. Despite this similarity, a significant portion of Rakhain, Patro and Khashi women have reported that they can attend cultural functions independently; this practice is found less pronounced among other indigenous communities.

Figure 10: Plain-land indigenous womens' mobility status: Whether can go alone, 2008 (in %)



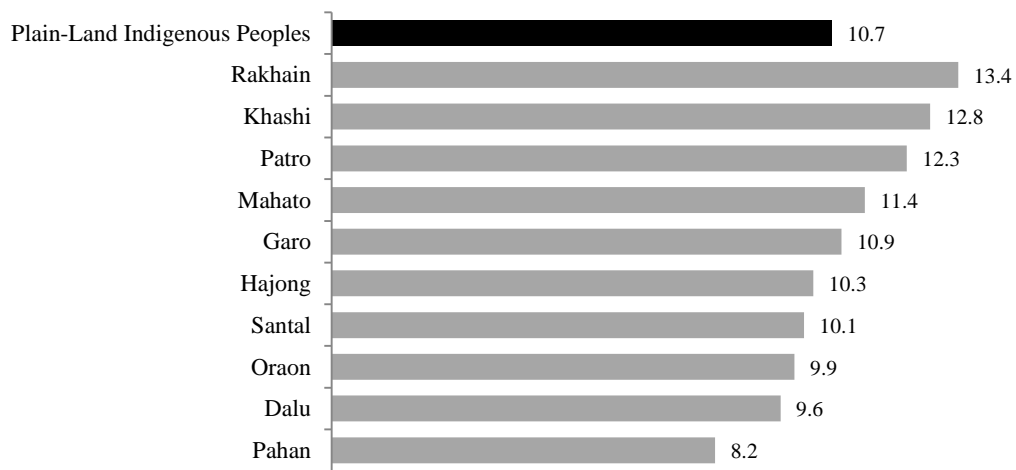
Source: Barkat et al. 2009b, p. 274.

21. Violence against Women (VAW) is highly pronounced among the plain-land indigenous peoples, and it is true for both at the level of family and society. In most indigenous peoples' households, women are frequently victims of verbal abuse. A majority of the indigenous women are manhandled. Dowry-related torture is also much pronounced. Violence against Women at society level like sexual abuse, workplace harassment etc. has also been found prevalent among indigenous communities – irrespective of hill or plain. However, it is worth mentioning that the Rakhain women, as compared to others, have reported lesser extent of Violence against Women. This is most likely reasoned by Rakhain women's higher extent of involvement in income earning activities (both in hill and in plain) than women of other indigenous communities. There are other reasons as to why the Victim against Women is less pronounced among Rakhain women. Here two empirical findings are worth mentioning: (1) The women empowerment score is the highest among Rakhain community (the obtained score is 8 out of a maximum obtainable score of 9; see, Figure 8), and (2) The household electrification status of Rakhains is very high, and even almost two fold higher than average rural Bangladesh (75% of Rakhain households are connected with electricity as against 40% for rural Bangladesh. See, Figure 6). Therefore, it can be concluded that in terms of Violence against Women the Rakhain women are much better placed than women in the other indigenous communities, and this is most likely attributable to Rakhain women's higher extent of proactive agency role generated through relatively higher status on account of all indicators of women's well-being.
22. Human rights as well as the ways and means to apply rights or realization of human rights by the poor and marginalized people is one of the basic preconditions for their decent life. However, in a class society dominated by the rent seekers and their subordinate government and politics – consistent denial of human rights becomes a game-rule. As individual consciousness about various rights is a necessity for lasting human development, some indicators related to conscientization¹⁸ has been designed and applied in empirical survey

¹⁸ “Conscientization’ refers to a type of learning which is focused on perceiving and exposing social, political and economic contradictions and injustices. Conscientization also includes taking actions against oppressive elements in one’s life as part of that learning. Conscientization is a process by which the learner advances towards critical consciousness which is necessary for *informed actions* (social praxis) – the key goal of development education. Conscientization should not be equated with just consciousness raising because the latter may involve transmission of pre-selected knowledge in congruence with ‘dominant culture’, ‘cultural hegemony’, ‘status quo’ etc. Conscientization is the heart of liberatory education. Conscientization means breaking through prevailing mythologies to reach new levels of awareness – in particular, awareness of oppression, being an ‘object’ of others’ will rather than a self-determining ‘subject’. Conscientization means ‘breaking the culture of silence’ in a class society. This process of conscientization involves identifying contradictions in experience through dialogue and becoming part of the process of changing the world” (Barkat et al. 2008b, pp. 40-41). The indicators of conscientization based on which the estimates in Figure 11 is

with the indigenous peoples to understand their conscientization scenario. As depicted in Figure 11, on a scale of 0-17 (where ‘0’ is minimum and ‘17’ is maximum conscientization score), an average indigenous peoples’ household scored only 10.7 (ranging between 8.2 and 13.4 in different indigenous communities). The Pahan community scored merely 8.2, which is the lowest conscientization score among the plain-land indigenous peoples’ communities, followed by Dalu community (9.6), Oraon community (9.9), and Santal community (10.1). The conscientization score is highest among the Rakhain community (13.4), followed by the Khashi (12.8) and the Patro (12.3). The highest conscientization score among the Rakhain community is most likely reasoned by the analysis already presented (see, item 21). It has been found that, among the indigenous peoples’ communities, knowledge about the right to get VGF cards is high, while knowledge about right to get relief during disasters is significantly low. It has been noticed that the knowledge about legal age at marriage for boys is relatively low among the indigenous communities.

Figure 11: Conscientization score of plain-land indigenous peoples, 2008
(on a scale : 0-17; 0=min, 17= max)



Source: Barkat et al. 2009b, p. 277.

23. Confidence status of the indigenous peoples has been assessed using a number of indicators¹⁹. The confidence score by different indigenous communities is presented in Figure 12. The level of confidence among the Garo, Hajong and Santal communities on the public services provided by government agencies is relatively low. The Mahato people are discriminated against in many ways; besides, being a relatively more disadvantaged indigenous community (they are not even included in the official list of indigenous peoples) – they have considered it obvious that they will not get any recognition or can exercise or obtain only a few of the necessary rights-based services. The Oraon people feel that their basic rights are not at all recognized in the existing system. The confidence level of the Patro and Pahan community people over the existing social-structure is significantly low (see, Figure 12).

constructed include right to get VGF Cards, right to get relief during disasters, right to get crop-seeds from the local agriculture office, State’s responsibility to keep prices within purchasing power of the citizens, State’s responsibility to ensure shelter to the citizens, right to study at school, State’s responsibility to provide stipends to girl students, right to get health services from the local public hospital, right of mothers and children to get vaccination, right to vote without interruption, right to get allocation of khas land/water-bodies, State’s responsibility to ensure indigenous peoples quota for employment, State’s responsibility to ensure indigenous peoples quota for education, legal age at marriage for boys is 21 years, legal age at marriage for girls is 18 years, responsibility of law-enforcing agencies (Police, BDR now BGB, Ansar-VDP etc), and right to get organized and form Clubs/NGOs.

¹⁹ Indicators used for assessing confidence status include perception about proactive support from the local government (Union Parishad) at times of need, perception about security forces (police, BDR now BGB, Ansar and VDP), perception about proactive support from the local traditional organizations (e.g., Mantree, Punji Prodhon etc.), perception about enjoyment of cultural freedom, perception about enjoyment of religious freedom, and perception about the freedom to participate peacefully in various celebrations of own community and of other communities.

Figure 12: Score on confidence building issues of plain-land indigenous peoples, 2008
(on a scale: 0-28; 0=min, 28=max)



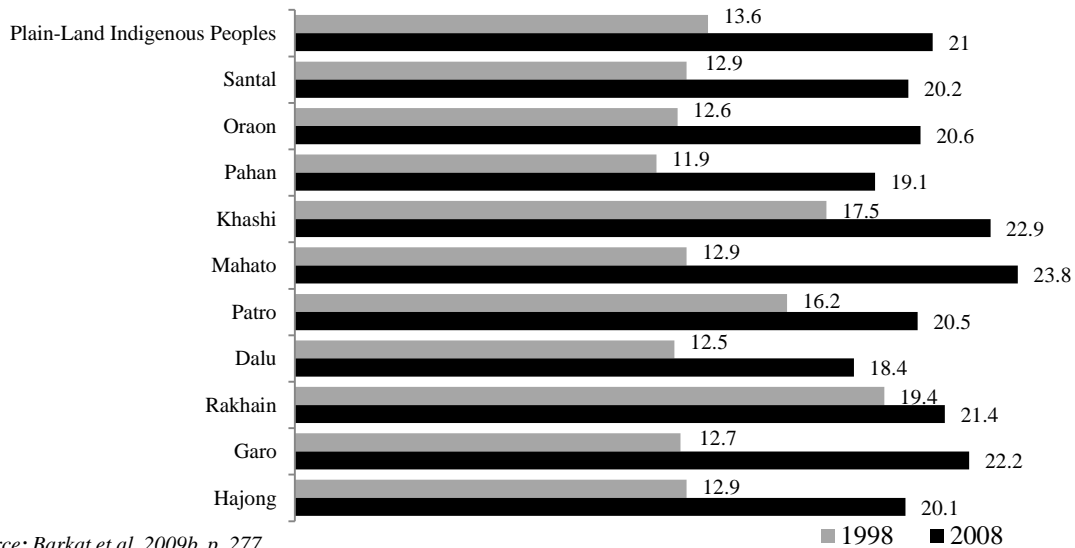
Source: Barkat et al. 2009b, p. 279.

In a nutshell, the confidence level is somewhat moderate among the indigenous peoples with some relatively bad perception about some services and rights. On a scale of 0-28 (where '0' indicates least confidence and '28' indicates highest level of confidence), on average, the plain-land indigenous peoples' household scored 16.6, ranging between a low at 14.5 for Pahan and a relatively high at 17.7 for Mahatos. The Pahan scored the least with 14.5, followed by Patro (15.1), Rakhani (16), Khasi and Santal (16.4 each), Dalu and Hajong (16.7 each), Oraon (16.8), and the Garo (17.3) (see, Figure 12).

24. The well-being status of the indigenous communities and the dynamics of their well-being have been assessed using various indicators. As perceived by the interviewee households of the indigenous peoples, the well-being status of majority of the indigenous peoples has improved during the last ten years (1998-2008). Using nine relevant indicators²⁰ an attempt is made to understand the trend of well-being status, i.e., changes that have occurred in the last 10 years between 1998 and 2008 among the indigenous peoples. On a scale of 0-36 (where '0' indicates minimum and '36' indicates maximum level of well-being), according to the opinion of indigenous peoples, the average score (average of all 9 indicators) was 13.6 in 1998, which in 2008 had reached at score 21 (see, Figure 13). Apparently, it is explicit from the analysis that: (1) During the last 10 years all the plain-land indigenous communities reported upward change in their well-being status, whatever the extent of upward change is; (2) Among all communities, such change for Rakhains was insignificant (most likely because their 1998 base was already high at 19.4); and (3) On average, Dalu and Patro are still lagging behind others. The overall and by specific communities, the well-being status, as perceived by the indigenous people themselves, have improved in the last ten years, between 1998 and 2008. Here, two pertinent questions of merit to be raised include: (1) Is it true that real well-being status has improved in spite of increasing alienation and exploitation of the indigenous peoples by various agents of rent seeking groups?, and (2) If so, then what is/are the reason(s) that they have expressed a positive perception regarding changes in their well-being?

²⁰ Indicators of well-being include nine broad issues such as (1) economic, (2) social, (3) housing/shelter, (4) health, (5) education, (6) household asset, (7) clothing, (8) food, and (9) security. The well-being status of individual household in the survey has been ascertained in terms of the interviewee households perception about changes (positive, negative, or status quo) in each indicator of well-being applicable to that household in the last 10 years, between 1998 and 2008.

Figure 13: Dynamics of well-being score of plain-land indigenous peoples, 1998 and 2008 (on a scale: 0-36; 0=min, 36=max)

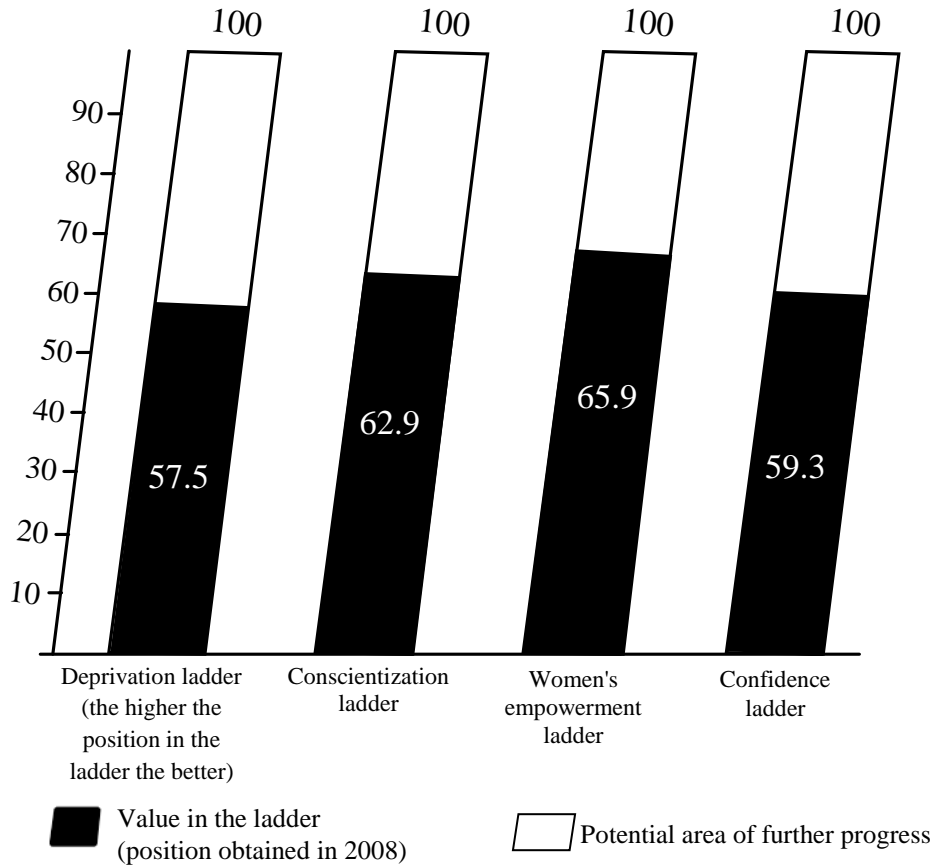


Source: Barkat et al. 2009b, p. 277.

In real sense, even the perceived current (2008) well-being score is just 58 per cent of the maximum attainable score (21 out of 36). Which implies, in terms of higher level of well-being in the ladder of well-being status – the plain-land indigenous peoples in general lags much behind the upper level of well-being. In spite of that, most of the plain-land indigenous peoples have reported positive and upward changes in their household well-being in the last ten years (between 1998 and 2008). There must be some reasons to explain that perception. The cogent core reasons, as I comprehend are most likely as follows: (1) The indigenous peoples are simple; (2) They are highly satisfied with very little, and that is due to the fact that they have been dispossessed and alienated almost in-perpetuity; (3) Due to long term historical injustice done towards their life and property they have developed a “fear factor” when they even fear to tell outsider their real life situation; (4) Most of the indigenous peoples are not aware about their human and justiciable rights; (5) A specific sort of mental frame of feelings of an unequal citizen and a built-in psychology of deprivation is highly pronounced among the indigenous peoples which prompts them to think that no more change should be expected from the present structure than what has been already obtained or reached. Here, from political economy point of view, further analysis is warranted as to why the indigenous peoples – irrespective of hill or plain – are satisfied with a 58 per cent score in the well-being ladder, and what causes such relatively low well-being. First, the indigenous peoples are “happy” with low well-being status, and this “sense of acceptance” is nothing but just a consequence of their own life-experience of living permanently with ill-being. Second, one can very well assume that positive well-being is a function of low deprivation, high conscientization, high empowerment of women, and high extent of confidence.²¹ Viewing from this construct of well-being, the indigenous peoples at the plain-land (identical is the scenario with the indigenous peoples at hills CHT) with their historically shaped mind-set of “very happy with very little” are hovering around 60 per cent level in each of the above stated broad functional components of well-being (see, Figure 14). It is to mention here that for each broad functional component – the higher the position in the ladder the better is the status (and 100 minus the position attained show the potentials of progress).

²¹ Mathematically speaking, well-being = f (low deprivation, high conscientization, high empowerment of women, high confidence). The essence of all these functional elements has already been discussed in the relevant parts of this article.

Figure 14: Plain-land indigenous peoples’ average attained extent of well-being by ladder of broad functional components, 2008*



*Note: This figure has been constructed by the author using relevant data containing in Figures 5, 11, 8 and 12 respectively. For each of the broad functional components of well-being, the maximum obtainable score has been transformed in to 100, and accordingly the maximum score obtained in 2008 has been estimated and presented in ladder form.

The discussion and analysis presented in this section distinctly revealed that the indigenous peoples of Bangladesh are deprived in-perpetuity. It also follows that Bangladesh is not a state of unique national identity. According to the Government estimation, 1.7 percent people (or family or household) of the total population in Bangladesh is comprised of 27 different communities of indigenous identity, while I have argued (in Section 4) the same as at least 49 different communities. Unfortunately, whatever the number of different indigenous communities in Bangladesh might be, the more serious issue is that as “indigenous peoples” they are not recognized constitutionally. Besides, it is also true that “one-percent-mentality” (i.e. mentality associated with the 1% share in the total population – is directly detrimental to the interest of indigenous peoples) is very strongly built-in into the psyche of the politicians, the government, and many in the academia. At the same time, regarding marginality and reform related with the land and forest of indigenous peoples, it should be admitted that our knowledge-base about various forms of ownership of their land-water-forest, especially, “common property rights” is still not up to the mark. Indigenous peoples equate their land, forest and water as their own “mother”. These are also the basis of their own rich culture, customs and tradition. But the land rights of indigenous peoples in the truest sense of the term ‘rights’ are not only not recognized but also as it exists can be grabbed easily. The instances of forced grabbing of land, forest and even the geographical space of the indigenous peoples –using various means and ways (not limited to “demographic engineering” only) – are pervasive. They have been exterminated from their own

land and settlements and this process of unpeopling has never been stopped, rather on-going unabated using various types of weapons of unpeopling.

6. Unpeopling through Land Dispossession and Alienation of Indigenous Peoples: Root Causes and Consequences

6.1 Processes, mechanisms and reasons of land dispossession and alienation: Overall and by indigenous peoples' community

Denial of the land rights of the indigenous peoples has a long historical background. The indigenous peoples, irrespective of hill and plain land, have been dispossessed of their own land and still becoming so attributable to various reasons and multifarious means and ways. The instances of land dispossession suffered by the indigenous peoples of the plain land, in many ways, are perhaps even more widespread than among the indigenous communities of Chittagong Hill Tracts. Numerous land laws were enacted over time keeping special provisions for the “protection of tribal” land. But the special provisions in these laws were never ever enforced (consciously) to serve the interest of the indigenous peoples. In practice, grabbing of land and related alienation goes on unabated. Some of the reasons-processes-methods have been mentioned and analysed earlier in Sections 4 and 5. However, due to high significance, this area of inquiry merits further elaboration, though, it is not easy to make an account of dispossession by timeline.

Among many direct and indirect causes, reasons and mechanisms – as described and analysed by Barkat and Barkat et al. (see, Barkat 2014c, Barkat et al. 2009a, Barkat et al. 2009b, Barkat et al. 2010, Barkat and Roy 2004) – the most destructive and prominent ones are: (1) Out-migration due to 1947 partition of India; (2) Repeat out-migration including during the liberation war of 1971 (e.g., for before 1971, the communal riot in 1964 prompted forced out-migration of people from plain-land indigenous areas) made their economy and social life highly fragile and vulnerable; (3) Planned “demographic engineering” or population transfer as an integral part of “political engineering”; (4) Construction of Kaptai lake in CHT in 1950s; (5) Promulgation of Enemy Property Act in 1965 during Indo-Pakistan war (afterwards renamed as Vested Property Act); (6) Fake documents of land grabbers; (7) Forceful eviction by act of terror, threat, and rumor; (8) Declaring the traditionally occupied and used land as khas land including reserve forest without informing the indigenous peoples; (9) Establishing national park on the land and forest of indigenous peoples without consultation with them; (10) Construction of eco-park and tourist centres; (11) Initiation of antisocial so called “social a forestation” projects; (12) Harassment by serving eviction notice and false litigation; (13) Ignorance of indigenous peoples about land related laws, rent, land tax, dismiss or substitute the name of one tenant in place of another in the rent roll; (14) Non-implementation of Tenancy Act; (15) Non-existence of any indigenous peoples official in the concerned land offices including in the district administration; (16) Multi-dimensional corruption and attitude antagonistic towards indigenous peoples; (17) Corruption and bribe in land survey and declaring the land as khas; (18) Not getting any possession on land even after getting court’s verdict in favour; (19) Becoming pauper due to lingering of land litigation and loss of millions of suffering-years due to litigation etc. This list indicating core reasons, processes, mechanisms, means and ways of dispossession of own land and resources by the indigenous peoples and associated alienation can be extended further. However, I see no necessity to do so, because what has been listed above provides adequately enough materials towards understanding the essence of root causes of undevelopment and deprivation-in-perpetuity of the indigenous peoples in Bangladesh. Interesting to note here that, a close scrutiny of each of the above stated 19 reasons, process, mechanism, means and ways of losing land and other properties by the indigenous peoples would reveal that each item (in the list of 19) is a weapon of destruction of indigenous peoples life and destructive enough to exterminate and unpeople them or at least to transform them as a “Guest in their own home”!

The process of dispossession of land of plain-land indigenous peoples, in many instances, is much more rapid than that of plain-land Bangalees. A majority of Patro (92%), Pahan (85%) and Santal (75%) are still functionally landless (see, Table 2). Similar is the condition of hill indigenous peoples; in some cases, the situation is even worse. During the last three decades, the number of CHT people has decreased fast, whereas, at the same time, the number of imported Bangalees (known as settlers and not the adi-Bangalees) has dramatically increased. The hill people-highlanders-hill tribes have lost their land and forests while some rent seeking miscreants in connivance with the bureaucracy-administration have grabbed the land. Some fifty years back, 75 percent of the total population in CHT was indigenous people, which now stand at 47 percent only. The CHT Accord (“Peace Treaty”), albeit, have been signed (on December 02, 1997), the process of its implementation is slack-spine. Land Commission though exists, it is neither effective nor at all consistent with the basic spirit of the CHT Accord (Peace Treaty). The major task of the Commission was invariably to resolve land disputes but the Commission gave more emphasis on land survey (which was not at all a part of the Commission’s Terms of Reference). Furthermore, the issues concerning formation of a separate Land Commission for plain-land indigenous peoples have never been raised effectively with loud voice²². What has been said above are indicative enough to show that land-water bodies-forest and other natural resources of the weaker sections – the indigenous peoples have always been the target of the rent seeking upper echelon of the mainstream society, wherein politics and government as their subordinate entities have played facilitative role in permitting such land grabbing ceremony.

Extermination, marginalization and deprivation, in all forms and dimensions, are fully applicable for indigenous peoples of Bangladesh. Different forms of violent activities in grabbing land, forests and settlements of indigenous peoples have now become a “development game rule” and a subject of usual – natural practice. In this respect, the state machinery sometimes plays the role of an instigator and sometimes remains quite indifferent implying playing of facilitative role in alienation through land dispossession of the indigenous peoples. And this is perfectly in line with the political economy model of rent seekers dominated centre-periphery nexus within the global capitalistic order or disorder (detailed analysis on this is presented in Sections 2 and 3).

In order to understand further the politico-economic essence of “development”, “underdevelopment”, “undevelopment”, and “unjust development” of the indigenous peoples, it is essential to delve deeper into the major reasons, processes, and periods of dispossession of land and other resources including moveable and immovable properties experienced by the indigenous peoples. The content of which, in brief, are as follows:

- a) Unjust political influence and local class-based hegemonic culture coupled with simplicity and ignorance of the indigenous peoples had been the major reasons for their dispossession of land-forest and other resources including moveable and immovable household assets.
- b) The ‘rent seeker’ based criminalized political-economy is the key reason behind inhuman act of forced dispossession of land and other resources. In addition, historically shaped class structure played an immense role in creating and procreating huge disparities and inequalities among different classes of people, and that even within a specific indigenous community.
- c) Grabbing land by influential Bangalee with political back up has been a major pathway in grabbing land of the plain-land indigenous peoples.
- d) Though the indigenous peoples live in specific areas of Bangladesh for generations, many (in some cases, most) of them do not possess legal ownership documents of their land.

²² Except in the Press Club and/or in some procession of a few activists during observance of Indigenous Peoples’ Day or alike. Most of these events are concentrated in the capital Dhaka city.

Due to this non-availability of ownership documents, they always face unsurmountable problems in retaining possession on their own lands. And no government, so far, has properly acknowledged the traditional and customary land rights system of the indigenous peoples in Bangladesh.

- e) The majority of the indigenous peoples are still illiterate. Thus, they often become victims to frauds. In many instances, differences occur between the verbal agreements and the written ones about the sale-and-purchase of their lands. Reportedly, some of the government officials in the various Land-related Departments (e.g., Sub-register office, Office of the Assistant Commissioner Land, Tehsil office) are accomplices in this kind of fraudulent documentations. Land grabbing through forged documents and forgery during land survey, or recording of land ownership are well established facts.
- f) There are *khas* lands including khas water-bodies and khas forests in areas where the indigenous peoples live, but it is very rare that *khas* land has been allotted to the landless and marginal indigenous peoples. To the contrary, in most cases, the influential Bangalees – the agents of rent seekers – have rather taken possession of such *khas* lands using various unholy means and ways²³.
- g) Most cases of land dispossession among the plain-land indigenous peoples took place in 1964/65 when a communal riot between Hindu and Muslims broke out. At that time, a number of indigenous peoples fled to India to save their lives. When they returned, many of them found that their lands and other immovable and movable properties were grabbed by local influential Bangalees. That is to say, after returning back to their own home they became “guest in their own home”! In this process, the State acted as an uncivilized catalyst by promulgating the Enemy Property Act, using which a huge amount of land property of the religious minorities and indigenous peoples were declared as ‘enemy property’. Later, after the Independence in 1971, the same ‘enemy property’ was renamed as ‘vested property’, and thereby, the process of unpeopling, extermination, marginalization, deprivation and pauperization of the indigenous peoples continued²⁴.
- h) Following the Independence of Bangladesh in 1971, the indigenous peoples who had left for India for shelter and security returned back home, but a large part of them could not get back their lands and other immovable and moveable properties which were looted and plundered by the anti-liberation elements. The Government declared their lands as enemy/vested property and backed by power and muscle the rent seekers literally grabbed huge amounts of their lands and other properties. Even during the 1971 War of Liberation, some local influential Bangalees who acted against the liberation grabbed lands and properties of the indigenous peoples. These anti-liberation elements plundered the moveable and immovable assets of the common people in a massive scale.
- i) During the India-Pakistan War in the year 1965, land grabbing of some of the indigenous peoples’ communities increased in an unprecedented massive scale.
- j) Government acquisition in the name of arrangements for a ‘reserve forest’ and an ‘eco-park’ state-sponsored land dispossession of the indigenous peoples has already been taken place, and there has been no stop to that.

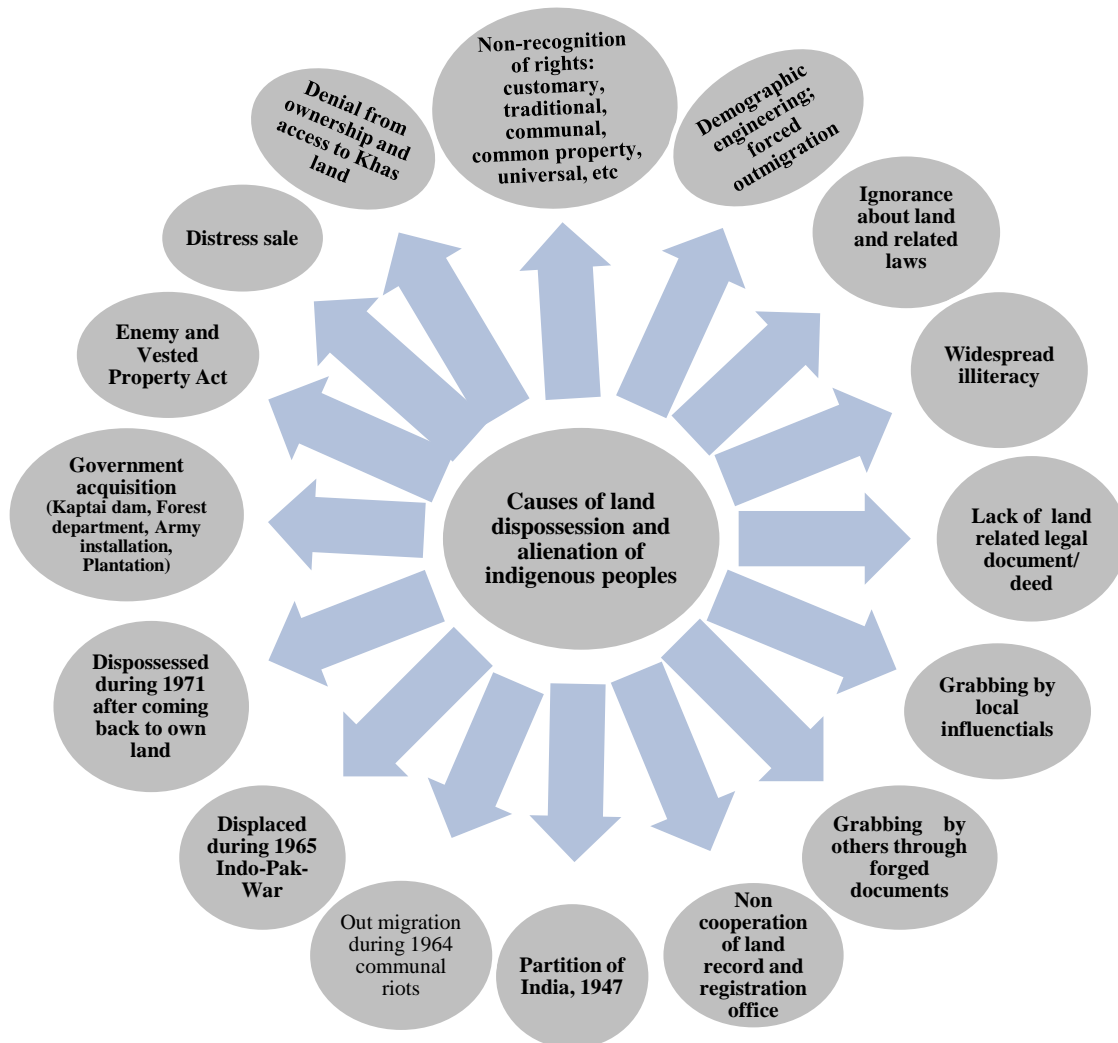
Now based on what has been presented above – the causes and reasons, the means and ways, and the complex mechanisms of land dispossession and alienation of plain-land indigenous peoples

²³ For details about who owns khas land and khas waterbodies, how do they own, what do they do, why poor people’s retention of khas land is low, why ‘adverse inclusion’ occurs in case of poor people’s owning of khas land etc. see, Barkat et al. 2001, pp. 114-158.

²⁴ For details about the genesis, causes and consequences of Enemy and Vested Property Acts on the life of religious Minorities including the indigenous peoples, see, Barkat 2014c, pp. 1-57; Barkat et al. 2008, pp. 45-161.

are depicted in Figure 15. The same is true – to a large extent – with the land dispossession and alienation of the indigenous peoples residing in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Figure 15: Major causes and mechanisms of land dispossession and associated alienation of indigenous peoples



Source: Prepared by the author based on information contained in Barkat and Huda 1988, Barkat and Roy 2004, Barkat et al. 2008a, Barkat et al. 2009a, Barkat et al. 2009b, and Barkat et al. 2010.

At this stage, it would be of high utility to briefly present an analysis of land dispossession and associated alienation by specific communities of indigenous peoples in the plain-land. This analysis presented below separately by specific communities of plain-land indigenous peoples (following alphabetic order of those communities) will show, among others, the diversity and uniqueness of the sources and mechanisms of such dispossession of land and associated alienation, and ultimately, the scenario of extermination and unpeopling²⁵.

The unpeopling scenario of the *Dalu* people is grim and distressful. A 60 per cent of the Dalu households are *functionally landless*²⁶ (see, Table 2). Land dispossession among the Dalu community has been a major issue for a long time. This community, in the last three generations (including the present upto 2008), has dispossessed a total of 188 acres of land worth Bd. Tk. 81.2 million (in 2014 current market price; see Table 3). The poverty status of this community

²⁵ Most data and information about the various plain-land indigenous communities are drawn from Barkat et al. 2009b, Chapters 4-13, pp. 281-291.

²⁶ If a household's own land is less than 50 decimals (excluding the land for the homestead), then the household is considered as "functionally landless".

deteriorated over time basically attributable to land dispossession. Undue political influence and local class-based hegemonic culture in addition to simplicity and ignorance of the Dalu people had been the major reasons for their land dispossession. The land dispossession phenomenon among the Dalu community reached its peak in 1964/65 when riot between Hindu and Muslims broke out. At that time, due to insecurity, a large number of Dalus fled to India to save their lives. When they returned, many of them found that their lands were grabbed by local influential Bangalees. In addition, huge amounts of their lands were declared by the then government (in 1965 and onward) as ‘Enemy Property’, which later renamed as ‘Vested Property’ by the post 1971 government. With these the process of their marginalization and pauperization got further momentum. Currently, the major reasons for land dispossession among the Dalu households are grabbing by local influential persons from other communities and grabbing through forged documentation. For the parents of the first generation Dalus, grabbing by local influential persons from other community and grabbing through forged documentation were the major reasons for dispossession of land. For the generation of the grandparents of the current generation, the major reasons for land dispossession were: governmental acquisition and forgery during land record. After independence of Bangladesh in 1971, the Dalus who had left for India for shelter and security returned back to their homeland, but many of them could not get back their lands. Even during the Liberation War in 1971, some local influential anti-liberation Bangalees grabbed lands of the Dalus. They are often victims to frauds. Reportedly, some of the government officials in the Department of Land are accomplices in this kind of fraudulent documentations. There are some *khas* lands in areas where the Dalus live, but no *khas* land has ever been allotted to any Dalu who is landless or a marginal farmer. Though the Dalus live in Bangladesh on specific areas for generations – mostly in Haluaghat and Nalitabari upazilas of greater Mymensingh district – many of them do not possess proper legal documents on their ownership of these lands; and knowing this fully well no government has made attempt to acknowledge the traditional land rights system of Dalu community.

The *Garos* belong to a matrilineal society and have a long episode of land dispossession and plenty of sufferings for establishing their land rights. A Garo household, on average, possesses 153 decimals of land. Two-thirds of the Garo households are *functionally landless* (see, Table 2). Forced eviction of the Garo community from their lands is not at all a new phenomenon, which has been rather continuing historically. The estimated total amount of land dispossessed by the Garo community in the last three generations (including upto year 2008) would be about 13,640 acres and the estimated present market value (at 2014 current price) of those lands would be Bd. Tk. 5.66 billion (see, Table 3). The criminalized political-economy is the key reason behind this inhuman act against right to land and forest of the Garo community. In addition, historical class structure in this region played a major role in creating huge disparities and inequalities among different classes of people – both inter and intra Garo communities. The process of land dispossession and alienation of the Garo community varies from place to place. In the Madhupur upazila in Tangail district the Garos have been exploited historically. In 1962, the Garo forest was declared as a National Park without any consultation with the local Garo people. The incidence of dispossession of land increased during 1960s. Following the emergence of Independent Bangladesh, the rate of incidence of land dispossession increased more than that in the previous decade. It is to note that three-fourths of the total dispossession of land of the Garo community has occurred after the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, and since then the alienation process got higher momentum. In 1977-78, a bombing range for the Bangladesh Air Force was formed which acquired around 1,000 acres of Garo land, evicting 29 Garo households from a village called Rajbari without having any prior consultation and without paying any compensation for the eviction. In 1984, the Government of Bangladesh classified major areas of the Madhupur forest and stopped taking tax from the indigenous peoples by way of a gazette notification. When this issue was raised in the Court, the Land Settlement Office refused to legally recognize the occupancy documents regarding their lands in possession of the Garos. Most regrettably, the land on which the Garos were living for generations were outright declared as *khas* lands. In the name

of social forestry, the Government with support from the Asian Development Bank, has acquired lands of the Garos affecting the total eco-system. Moreso, trees are being felled everyday with the unholy alliance between the Forest Department and the law-enforcing agencies- which is destroying the traditional nature-based livelihood of the Garos. The government has a plan to construct wall surrounding the 3,000-acre area earmarked for social forestry which is not only environmentally unjust but also suicidal. This is a common feelings among the local Garos that the proposed “eco-park” concept is nothing but a blueprint to grab rest of the remaining lands from the Garos, and, thereby, further marginalizing them and turning them from pauper to beggar. In 1986, rubber plantation was initiated on a total area of 700 acres and that again without consultation with the local Garo community. There is also another plan for rubber plantation on 8,000 acres of land at Pirgachha in the local Garo neighborhood. The land-grabbing phenomenon against the Garo community is not a new one; it was found at an increasing rate even during the *Tebhaga Movement* in the 1930s-40s. Afterwards, during the Pakistan period (1947-1970), the lands of the Garos were acquired by tainting them as communists. During the India-Pakistan war in 1965, land-grabbing against the Garo community regained higher pace. During the Independence War in 1971, the local influential Bangalees grabbed significant amount of Garos’ lands. Most household heads of Garo community reported the following as the major causes and mechanisms of dispossession of their lands: governmental acquisition; grabbing by local influential from other community; grabbing through forged documents; grabbing by settlers; and grabbing by influential people of own community. Garos are often victims to frauds, and some of the officials in the Government’s Land Offices are accomplices in such frauds and forgery. In many instances, the Garos take high-interest loans from the *mahajans* (traditional moneylenders). Failure to repay such loans simply means usurpation of the borrower Garos’ lands by the lender *mahajans*. Among the Garo community, a group of planted deceivers exists as reported by themselves. These deceivers, in collaboration with some of the Bangalees, play active role in the evil process of land-dispossession and associated alienation of the Garos.

The *Hajong* belongs to the mongoloid stock, and are linguistically and culturally close to Southeast Asian ethnic groups. Along with extreme poverty, Hajongs have always been subjected to ceaseless repression, deprivation of social justice and land rights. Hajongs had a long history of fighting against exploitation, extermination and unpeopling. The mean amount of land possessed by an average Hajong household is only 66 decimals. About 65 per cent of the Hajong households are *functionally landless* (see, Table 2). The phenomenon of forced dispossession and alienation of the Hajong community from their land, on which they had been living since long, has become a protracted truth. The extent of land dispossession has been severe throughout the British, Pakistani and Bangladesh periods. They have been repeatedly displaced from their ancestral homes and from their agricultural lands. The Hajong community have disposed an estimated 2,730 acres of land during the last three generations (upto year 2008) and the estimated current market price of such dispossessed land would be Bd. Tk. 1.23 billion (see, Table 3). The land-related problems among the Hajong people have many deep-rooted dimensions. The criminalization of politics and economy in the Hajong region along with religion-based communal riots and class conflicts have contributed significantly to the rise of this inhuman problem. Political influence against Hajong has been reported as the key reason for their land dispossession and associated alienation. The land grabbing of the Hajong in disguise of politics started at around 1946, and has continued till date. During the 1964 communal riot between the Hindus and the Muslims, a huge amount of land of the Hajong was declared ‘Enemy Property’ by the then government, and as a consequence, most of the Hajongs, became landless and marginalized. As in the case of others, later, the ‘enemy property’ was renamed as ‘vested property’, but the process of marginalization and pauperization continued unabated. This phenomenon started during 1965 Indo-Pak War. Hajong people contributed much in the *Tebhaga Movement* or the land rights related Communist Movement between 1946 and 1952. During this period, lands of the indigenous peoples related to the movements were confiscated by the Government and also grabbed by the influential criminalized quarters by way of unlawful legal

suits. During 1962-65, the lands on which the Hajong had been living on for generations together were declared 'forest land'. This, not only, threatened the livelihoods of the Hajong, but also challenged their very survival and existence. Afterwards, Hajong, who went to India for shelter and security during the 1971 Liberation War, many of them, after returning back from India to their own homeland did not get back possession on their homestead and land. First, the Government declared their land as 'enemy property', after 1965 and then after 1971 as 'vested property', and people having more access to power and ability to use physical intimidation, literally grabbed a huge amount of Hajong's land. According to the Hindu law, if one has no children, then the nephew will inherit his or her land property- but lack of practice or application and enforcement of this law among the Hajong has played a significant role in distraction of land ownership from the legal heirs to others, resulting in dispossession of land of a number of such legal heirs in this community. Reportedly, the '*Kaderia Bahini*', a military outfit and a part of the liberation fighters' army during the year 1971, also filed false court cases in 1975 against the Hajong' land ownership and forcibly dispossessed them from their ancestral land. In several instances, survival forced the Hajongs (as in the case with the Garos) to take high-interest loans from the local *mahajans* (moneylenders). In this process, when a marginalized *Hajong* fails to repay the loans as per contract, the land of the borrower is occupied by the lender *mahajan*. This phenomenon reportedly started in around 1920, reached its peak during Pakistan regime, and still continues today. They are often victims to frauds, in which the connivance of government officials is an open secret. Hajongs believe that there is also group of frauds among themselves who, under the influence of and in connivance with the Bangalees, are dispossessing them from their own land. Most of these cases of land dispossession (are) were politically influenced with the back-up of the government machineries. In almost all cases, the victims of land dispossession in the Hajong community have reported that their lands were grabbed by a few local influential persons of other communities- mostly the Bangalees.

The *Khashi* people, over the decades, suffered much due to lack of their land rights, grabbing of land by outsiders and they still continue to suffer. The mean amount of land possessed by an average Khashi household is 219 decimals and 12 per cent of them are *functionally landless* (see, Table 2). This apparently relatively larger amount of land possession among the Khashi households is simply because of hilly geographical nature of area where Khashis live- where use value of land is much lower than that in the plain-land indigenous peoples' areas of Bangladesh. Land dispossession among the Khashi community has continued throughout history- both in the Pakistan period, and now in the Bangladesh period since independence. During the last three generations (including the present generation upto year 2008), the Khashi community have dispossessed an estimated 1,400 acres of land worth Bd. Tk. 658.2 million at current (2014) market price (see, Table 3). The Bangalees, by taking advantage of the 'fear-factor', illiteracy and simplicity of Khashi people forcibly grabbed their lands in most cases in connivance with land officials. Khashi people, for various reasons, were forced to sell their land at very low prices – which resembles just "distress sale" (i.e., selling with much less than market price due to distress). *Khas* lands have never been distributed properly among them. It has already been almost impossible for anyone in this locality to get possession of *khas* lands without financial and political influence. Most Khashi people who got some *khas* land became object of "adverse inclusion". Almost all land dispossessions in the Khashi community took place after the independence of Bangladesh. In the 1970s, the incidence of their land dispossession increased alarmingly. The major reasons, means, ways and mechanism through which the lands of the Khashis have been dispossessed are as follows: land grabbing by local influential Bangalees; grabbing through forgery during land record; grabbing through forged documents; lack of proper land-right documents; and possession of lands by Bangalees through frauds by taking advantage of 'fear factor'; and simplicity and illiteracy of the Khashi people.

The *Mahato* community is not only highly disadvantaged among all plain land indigenous peoples, but also not even officially listed as 'small minorities' or 'small ethnic groups'. The

Mahato community presents the classical case of unpeopling and extermination. A Mahato²⁷ household, on average, possesses 130 decimals of land. Every fourth Mahato household is *functionally landless* (see, Table 2). Landlessness-mediated poverty of the Mahato households is the key reason for their multidimensional deprivations. Land dispossession among the Mahato community has continued both during the Pakistan period and the Bangladesh period. The Mahato community, in the last three generations (upto year 2008), have dispossessed 2,040 acres of land, and the estimated current market price (for 2014) of these dispossessed land would be about Bd. Tk. 1.31 billion (see, Table 3). The major reasons and mechanisms through which the Mahato lands have been dispossessed include: land-grabbing by local influential Bangalees; lack of proper land-right documents; grabbing through forged documents; possession of lands through frauds by the Bangalees; and forgery during land record. Most Mahatos are illiterate, simple, and have developed ‘fear’ and high sense of insecurity – these, among others, are the facilitating factors for the influential Bangalees to grab Mahatos land in connivance with the government land and revenue officials. Land dispossession in the Mahato community has been taking into place since long. This had been increasing from the 1960s; between 1971 and 1980 a 28 per cent of all dispossessions took place; and between 1991 and 2000 almost one-third of all dispossessions occurred. As in the case of most other indigenous peoples, the *Khas* lands were never distributed properly among the Mahatos.

The *Oraon* is a non-mongoloid indigenous group. The actual tale of land rights deprivation of the Oraon people is no less distressing than other indigenous peoples in Bangladesh. An Oraon household, on average, possesses 85 decimals of land. Over 50 per cent of Oraon households are *functionally landless* (see, Table 2). Oraon people, although small in terms of population size with around 12,000 people (Barkat et al. 2009b, p. 27), have been a major target of land dispossession. During the last three generations they have lost an estimated total of 30,450 acres of land, and the estimated money value of those dispossessed land would be Bd. Tk. 13.3 billion in 2014 current market price (see, Table 3). It is important to note that during the last three generations upto the year 2008, the ten plain-land indigenous communities combinedly lost an estimated total of 0.2 million acres of land, of which, the Oraons alone have lost 15.1 per cent of the total implying a disproportionately high extent of dispossession of land by the Oraon people (estimated based on data in Table 3). As compared to the size of the population, the amount of land dispossessed by Oraon people is very high. It is precisely the reason as to why they consider this process as an ‘inevitable fate’, and as a consequence they are highly fatalist. As majority of Oraon households are landless, the present status of land-dispossession among them is relatively less frequent, and this is simply due to the fact that they have almost no more land to lose. During Pakistan period, and more specifically in 1965, there was a threat-and-rumor that the Pakistan is not for the Hindus; Hindustan (i.e. India) has been created for Hindus, and therefore Hindus will not be allowed to stay in Pakistan. As a result of such threat-and-rumor, many of the Oraons, out of fears, left Pakistan leaving behind their land, homestead and other immovable and movable properties. The rent-seeking Bangalees, by taking advantage of this fear-factor, forcibly grabbed lands and homesteads of the Oraon people. During the same time, due to potential distress situation, lands were being sold by them at a very low price (“distress sale”). This is one of the major reasons for which the marginalization process of the Oraon community got aggravated. It has been a common phenomenon that the Bangalees, using various forms of forgery, frauds and threats easily grabbed the lands and homesteads of the Oraons. In this process, the grabbers had connivance with the local land and revenue officials. As marginalized sections of the community, according to the law of the land, though they are entitled to *khas* lands, the richer class actually gets the possession, as the Oraons cannot influence the process of that entitlement requiring bribes and political power in which they (the Oraons) are distinctly deficient. Even those Oraons,

²⁷ As a separate indigenous peoples’ community, the Mahato’s name do not appear in the 2010-list of indigenous peoples of Bangladesh. This list has been published by the Government of Bangladesh in section 2(1) of schedule 23 of the “Small Minority Cultural Institution Act, 2010”.

who have been living on particular plots of land for generations together without proper legal documents, do not currently get any support of the local government or the land officials to get entitled to their otherwise legally owned lands. A relatively high portion of the land dispossessions of the Oraon people have occurred after the independence of Bangladesh, though the process started in the 1940s. This process of dispossession reached its peak during the period between 1971 and 1980 when one-third of all the dispossessions occurred. This evil process still continues. The major causes and mechanisms of land dispossession, as reported by the Oraon people, are as follows: grabbing by local influential Bangalees; grabbing through forged documents; government acquisition; grabbing of khas lands by powerful local people; lack of proper land-right documents; and forced possession of their lands by others through frauds and forgery taking the advantage of simplicity of the Oraon people.

The story of losing land and associated alienation by the *Patro* community, is in many ways, similar to those of other plain land indigenous peoples. The lands of Patro have been encroached upon and settled by Bangalee settlers. With little legal protection, they can rarely recover the lands they traditionally occupied. Patro communities' land possession status is extremely distressful. An average Patro household possesses 34 decimals of land. Almost all Patro households are indeed *functionally landless* (see, Table 2). There are manifold land-related problems among the Patros. Land dispossession and alienation has become a bare truth and an almost inevitable reality for the Patros. Land dispossession among the Patro community has been a two century long history. During the last three generations (upto year 2008), the Patro people have dispossessed an estimated total of 2,171 acres of land worth Bd. Tk. 1.3 billion in 2014 market price (see, Table 3). The degree of land dispossession and related to that alienation of the Patros increased in 1947, 1964-1965, and after 1971. After abolition of the *Zamindari* System in 1951, the lands of the Patros were handed over to their religious leaders- *Purohit*, as *debottor* properties in the name of God. The lands were being used like the *khas* lands by the Patros; but they had no legal land-rights documents. During 1947 partition of India and after, the Bangalees – by taking advantage of Patro peoples fear-factor coupled with their low population size generating high sense of insecurity – forcibly grabbed lands of the Patro community. This is how, a major part of the Patro households became totally landless. Due to fear and insecurity, the Patros were forced to fall into the trap of distress sale. The Patros thus became totally alienated from their own ancestral and customary lands. During the communal riot in 1964-65, a large amount of lands of the Patros was grabbed by the rent seeking Bangalee Muslims. The land dispossession among the Patro community was visible around 1947, which peaked in 1971. Even during the 1971 War of Liberation, some anti-liberation local influential Bangalees grabbed Patro lands and other assets without any resistance. After the independence of Bangladesh, land dispossession through fraud and forgery also increased. In the late 1970s, this kind of land dispossession through land grabbing and forced sales at very low prices got amplified. No *khas* lands have been distributed among the landless Patro community people. Forgery during the land records by the local influential persons having anti-people political background in connivance with the government land officials has been reported by a large majority of Patro community as the key reason behind their dispossession of land. Many Patros living on specific plots of land for generations do not have proper land-right documents, and this causes such serious problems, which results finally their complete dispossession of land. Even some 'innovative' Bangalees use the intricacies in meanings or interpretations of many words in Bangla language as the ploys for grabbing Patros land. As for instance, in Bangla 'half' (*adh*) and eight (*aat*) sound similar but have different meanings – such Bangla words are sometimes used by the Bangalees to cheat the Patros while the latter sell lands to them (the Bangalees). The government officials are also allegedly involved in such fraudulent activities. Land dispossessions of Patro people got high momentum, as mentioned earlier in the late 1970's i.e., after the assassination of the Father of the Nation and institution of autocratic rule. Though incidence of cases of land grabbing prior to the independence of Bangladesh (in 1971) was at a relatively less frequent level, there are instances of some large amounts of land being grabbed during those days. In fact, this evil process in the

pre-1971 had been a mere sequel to the incidences left especially during the years 1941-1950. The major means and ways through which the lands of the Patros have been dispossessed are as follows: forgery during land record; land grabbing by local influential Bangalees; grabbing through forged documentations; grabbing by settlers. It is to be noted that the Patros have reported 'grabbing by influential people of their own community' as the reason in 10 per cent cases of total land grabbing.

The deprivation-in-perpetuity of land rights of *Pahan* has a protracted historical context. The incidents of forceful land grabbing and dispossession endured by them is perhaps even more extensive than among other plain-land indigenous peoples. Possession of land by Pahan community is meager. On average, a Pahan household possesses only 20 decimals of land. Most of the Pahan households are *functionally landless* (see, Table 2). As compared to their low population size the land dispossession among Pahan is very high. During the last three generations (upto year, 2008), the total amount of land dispossessed by the Pahan community would be 19,425 acres and the current (2014) market price of those lost land would be Bd. Tk. 11.8 billion. It is also worth noting that out of total of 0.2 million acres of land disposed combinedly by 10 plain-land indigenous communities the Pahans alone shares 9.6 per cent of the total (see, Table 3). The major problems related to land among the Pahans are reportedly: land-grabbing; taking possession of lands through forgery; and not getting possession of *khas* land by those who are entitled to them. Land grabbing by the influential local "rent seeking" Bangalees is a typical phenomenon among the Pahans. As in case of other indigenous peoples, the Pahans often fall victims to frauds and forgery; 'rent seeker' local influential Bangalees grab their land by taking advantage of their simplicity, weaknesses, fear-factors as minority, and distress sale. It was reported that even those Pahans who do not agree to sell lands are threatened by all means which forces them to sell their lands. As in the case of other marginalized communities, in many instances, the *Pahans* take high-interest loans from local *mahajans*, and failure in repaying the loan as per the contract means *mahajan's taking away the borrowers land forever, which is the usual case*. There are many instances when Bangalees offer alcohol-based drinks to the Pahan landowner and by making use of the Pahan's dizziness, take thumb impression of the Pahan landowner to take possession of the land. Later, the victim comes to learn everything of the reality, but can do nothing as they are poor, voiceless, powerless, and rightless. During 1946-1952, lands of Pahans had been taken over by the Government. Many of the Pahans land was declared as 'enemy property' after 1965, and then as 'vested property' after 1971; and people with power and muscle – the rent seekers – literally grabbed huge amounts of land of the Pahan community. Even during the liberation war in 1971, the anti-liberation local influential Bangalees grabbed Pahans lands. After independence, Pahans lands were grabbed by 'rent seeking' Bangalees through forgery done mostly during land survey. The dispossession of land in the Pahan community has been a continuous process for last hundred years. The rate of dispossession had been relatively low before the 1930s; the same started increasing after 1960s, and reached its peak in the late 1970s. After the independence of Bangladesh till 1990, the land dispossession rate among this community was high. Then mainly because of "no more land to grab" – the process slowed down a bit during the period between 1991 and 2000. The major reasons reported by the Pahans as causes and mechanisms of dispossession of their land are as follows: grabbing by settlers; grabbing by local influential from other community, namely-Bangalees; forgery during land record; governmental acquisition; and grabbing using forged documents. Survey revealed that Pahan community never got *khas* land though – after losing most of their own land they are poor enough to have entitlement towards *khas* land and *khas* water-bodies. The Pahan community, in the process of dispossession of land and other assets during the last one century, have been transformed from once land owned community to landless, then from landless to pauper, and now from pauper to beggar.

Notably, the situation of land grabbing in case of *Rakhain* is unpropitious and more disgraceful. Oftentimes, they have become the victim of forced dispossession from their own land. On

average, a Rakhain household possesses 167 decimals of land. Two-thirds of the Rakhain households are *functionally landless* (see, Table 2). The Rakhain community historically faces deep-rooted problem of land dispossession and alienation. Their ancestors had vast areas of land but as they were fewer in number (their population size according to 1991 Census was 16,932), they were deprived in every aspect of life. The Rakhains are becoming marginalized everyday due mainly to land dispossession. They pass their routine life in agony and in fear due to land dispossession-mediated alienation. The Rakhain community have dispossessed an estimated total of 13,720 acres of land during the last three generations (upto the year 2008) and the estimated current market price of those dispossessed land would be Bd. Tk. 5.1 billion (see, Table 3). In the recent days, it appears that the extent of land dispossession among Rakhains has declined, and increased in a few scattered places and cases. This is due to the bare truth that by now, most of the lands of Rakhain households has already been dispossessed; and they currently have almost no land to lose further. Their livelihood and existence are being threatened by dispossession of land. The lands of the Rakhain community are being grabbed by the powerful people, basically Bangalees, for decades together. When these Rakhains' ancestors arrived at the location where they stay at present for hundreds of years, they basically found just vast tracts of forestland. In the forests, they built their houses and started farming. Though they basically were the owners of the lands, in most cases, they did not have any legal documents. In addition, even those among them who had some kind of documents, could not preserve them properly due to ignorance and/or for being affected by natural calamities. The local Bangalees – the rent seekers – had been grabbing their lands historically simply because they are few in number. In addition, the Government did not put in any justice-based efforts to ensure the land rights of the Rakhain community. In many instances, it has been observed that a number of houses have been erected overnight on the land of a Rakhain household. In most cases, the Rakhain household could do nothing against the powerful land grabbers – the rent seekers having political power and access to relevant administration. Most of the incidents of such land grabbing have been (and is being) assisted by the Government's land officials and law-enforcing agencies. The land-dispossession phenomenon among the Rakhain community started at a large scale in the year 1965. Unfortunately, no government has yet taken any pro-active positive initiatives to eliminate or mitigate the problem. Taking possession of land through preparation and use of fake ownership documents is also a common phenomenon. By taking bribes from the land-grabbers, the Government's administrative personnel and even the courts of law act in favor of the grabbers. The simplicity of the Rakhain people has also been treated as their weaknesses and the grabbers used this weakness for exploiting them. No *khas* lands have been distributed among the landless Rakhain people, and the Government's land officials have rather distributed these among the influential Bangalees by taking bribes from them in exchange. The land dispossession phenomenon among the Rakhain community started in 1960s and then got high momentum in 1964-65, which has increased and continued so far even after the independence of Bangladesh. In the period between 1991 and 2000, this process of land dispossession reached its peak. The major reasons reported by the Rakhain community as to the causes and mechanics of dispossession of land are as follows: grabbing by local influential from other community, namely- Bangalees; grabbing using forged documents; governmental acquisition; and forgery during land record.

The *Santal* is one of the largest non-mongoloid indigenous groups. The story of unpeopling the Santals through forceful grabbing of their land and settlements is alarming. A Santal household possesses, on average, 63 decimals of land. However, three-fourths of the Santal households are *functionally landless* (see, Table 2). It would not be an exaggeration even to conclude (with informed carefulness) that among the ten plain-land indigenous communities dealt with in this sub section the Santals portrays the most distressful state in terms of dispossession of their own land. During the last three generations (upto year 2008), the estimated total amount of land dispossessed by the Santal community would be about 116,400 acres, which is 57.4 per cent of the total land dispossessed by the ten-surveyed plain-land indigenous communities combinedly, and the estimated money value of those land lost by the Santal community would be about Bd.

Tk. 51.9 billion in 2014 current market price (see, Table 3). It is, therefore, not difficult to conclude that the prime reason for the marginalization and pauperization of the Santals is their dispossession of land. Undue political influence and local class-based hegemonic culture, in addition to the simplicity and ignorance of the Santal people have been considered as the reasons for their dispossession of land. Though the Santals have been living in Bangladesh on specific geographic areas and lands for many centuries, most of them do not possess proper land-right documents. No government has acknowledged the traditional land right system of the Santal community. Attributable to this, the Santals have always been facing serious problems in establishing their land rights and preserving possession on their own land. The land dispossession phenomenon among the Santal community started basically in the year of 1947 when a large number of Santals had to go to India to save their lives and then repeated the same outmigration during the period of increasing tension ensuing from riots between the Hindus and Muslims (1962-65) in this region. When some of them eventually returned back home, many of them found that their land, homestead and moveable assets have already been grabbed and looted by the local influential Bangalees – the emerging rent seekers. After independence of Bangladesh in 1971, those Santals who went to India for shelter and security returned back to their own homeland. However, most could not get back their own lands and, in some cases, even their own homestead. Even during the Liberation War in 1971, a few anti-liberation local influential Bangalees grabbed lands of the Santals. At that time, the occurrences of land dispossession among the Santals reached its peak. Illiteracy among majority Santals make them un-empowered and easy prey of fraud and forgery. The government officials are reportedly often been instrumental in making and shaping this kind of frauds and forgery. As such, no *khas* land has been distributed among the landless Santals. Land dispossession had been increasing from the 1950s; and around 23 per cent of all dispossessions took place in between 1961 and 1970. In the late 1970s, 23 per cent of all dispossessions took place. After the 1980s, this rate of land dispossession decreased. However, whatever little amount of land remains, the dispossession has been continuing. The major means, ways and mechanisms through which the lands of the Santals have been dispossessed are as follows: land grabbing by local influential Bangalees; land grabbing through forged documents; and forgery during land survey and/or land recording in connivance with land officials, general administration, law enforcing agencies, legal systems, and the politicians. Santals are targeted by almost all anti-people forces.

6.2 Unpeopling through dispossession of land, settlement and associated alienation: How much, extent and outcomes

In a survey conducted with the plain-land indigenous peoples in 2008 (Barkat et al. 2009b), an attempt was made to estimate the amount of total land dispossessed by each indigenous community during the past three generations including the present generation (upto 2008), and then the money value of those dispossessed land at 2014 current market price was ascertained to understand one of the significant dimensions of the gravity of the situation. This exercise on amount of land dispossessed and the money value of the same has been conducted keeping in view the fact that land is a special type of scarce and non-renewable immovable asset which is the key source of live, livelihood, power and status, and is being used inter-generationally; and the loss and cost of dispossession of land not only continues for generations, but also such dispossession of land creates and procreates accelerated alienation among indigenous peoples. For the purpose of this article, the 2008 survey data on land dispossessed by the plain-land indigenous communities during the last three generations (including the present generation upto year 2008) have been used, and the money value of those dispossessed land has been estimated at current market price of 2014, which then – in order to know the extent of gravity – have been compared with some macro-economic level information.

Here, before presenting the outcome of the exercise on amount of land dispossession by specific plain-land indigenous peoples communities and money value of those land, it is important to note

that the actual extent and amount of dispossession and the related money value would, most likely, be much higher than what has been presented below (in Table 3). This is because of the fact that the indigenous peoples have lost not only land; they have lost many other movable and immovable assets, and also have developed feelings of all sorts of ill-being including insecurity, unfreedom, injustice, and ‘inequality in opportunities’ for which ascertaining money value is almost impossible.

Outcome of any quantitative survey, and more so, survey on sensitive issues must go through objective scrutiny before drawing conclusion based on such survey outcomes. Here comes the significant dimension related to the conduct of the survey itself. In this connection, it is to note that in the process of the face-to-face data collection with the individual indigenous peoples, although all-out efforts were made to elicit information from the past as much as possible by tracking down history based on the memories of the household heads, one cannot exclude at-least three issues responsible for underestimation of reported data on amount of land dispossession: First, problems associated with memory recall; Second, outcome of ‘fear factor’ associated with providing such information to outsiders; and Third, in some settings of interview with the indigenous people it was not possible to avoid the presence of adi and/or settler Bangalees. More so, certain very old aged heads of household obviously had difficulties in responding.

So, what are the estimates we have arrived at regarding the amount of land dispossessed by various communities of plain-land indigenous peoples in the last three generations, and what would be the money value of those lost land? Estimates presented in Table 3, show a total of 0.2 million acres of land has been dispossessed by the ten-surveyed plain-land indigenous peoples communities. The estimated current-2014 market price of these total dispossessed lands would be Tk.92.39 billion which is equivalent to US\$ 1.19 billion. This present money value of land dispossessed by the ten-surveyed plain-land indigenous communities is equivalent to 0.68 per cent of the 2014-GDP of Bangladesh²⁸, or 3.7 per cent of the government’s FY 2014-15 budget, or 10.7 per cent of the FY 2014-15 FY development budget, or 11.5 per cent of the Annual Development Plan (ADP) outlays of the government for the FY 2014-15. What a colossal loss? What a grand national wastage? Although may not be of high significance in terms of political economy, notable is that, the money value of loss due to dispossession of land was not the same by individual communities of plain-land indigenous people. As can be seen in Figure 16 (pie chart), the money value of such loss was the highest for the Santals sharing 56.2 per cent of the total loss incurred due to dispossession of land by the ten-studied plain-land indigenous communities. This is followed by Oraon (14.3%), Pahan (12.8%), Garo (6.1%), Rakhain (5.5%), Patro and Mahato (1.4% each), Hajong (1.3%), Khasi (0.7%), and Dalu (0.09%). However, viewing from the lenses of “political economy of justice” (including human rights, land rights, right to own and access to customary and traditional wealth and resources) it is of real significance to access various dimensions of forced land dispossession by individual communities of indigenous peoples. These dimensions include total physical amount of land dispossessed, physical amount of per capita land dispossession, economic-social-political outcomes and impacts of such forced land dispossession on the life and standard of living of each and every individual persons, households, family and community of indigenous peoples.

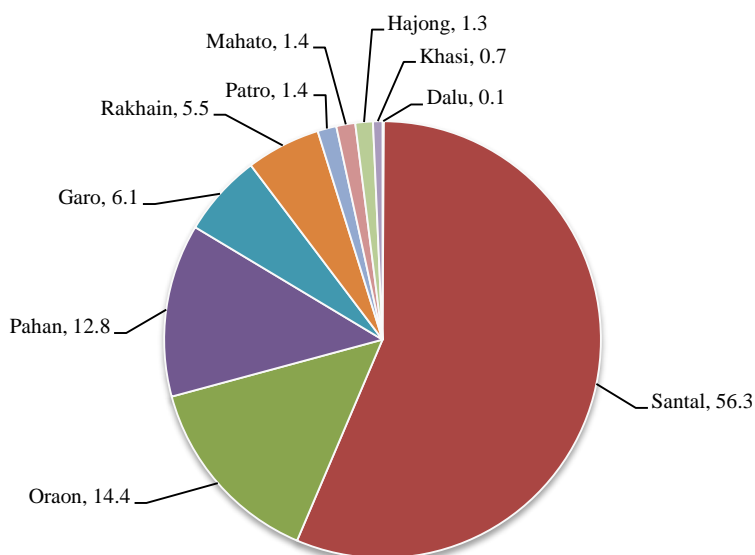
²⁸ The estimated GDP of Bangladesh for FY 2014-15 is Tk. 13,395.7 billion (equivalent to US\$ 172.29 billion with exchange rate being US\$ 1= Bd. Tk. 77.75 as on 30 January 2014).

Table 3: The physical amount of dispossessed land (in last 3 generations upto 2008) by plain-land indigenous peoples’ community and their money value (at 2014 current price)

Plain-land indigenous peoples community	Amount of land dispossession (in last 3 generations upto 2008) and their money value		
	Physical amount (in acres)	Money value (at 2014 current market price)	
		BD.Tk. (in million)	US\$ (in million)
Dalu	188	82.2	1.1
Garó	13,640	5,657.3	72.8
Hajong	2,730	1,227.3	15.8
Khashi	1,400	658.2	8.5
Mahato	2,040	1,313.1	16.9
Oraon	30,450	13,325.1	871.4
Patro	2,171	1,318.0	17.0
Pahan	19,425	11,836.0	152.2
Rakhain	13,720	5,096.0	65.5
Santal	116,400	51,880.8	667.3
Total	202,164	92,393.9	1,188.3

Note: The data on physical amount of dispossessed land during the last three generations (upto 2008) by individual communities of plain-land indigenous peoples are obtained from Barkat et al. 2009b, p. 291. These amounts have been converted into acres. The money value of those dispossessed land has been valued at current market price for January 2014 using FY 1995-96 as base year. The official exchange rate applied is US\$ 1 = Bd. Tk. 77.75 as on 30 January 2014.

Figure 16: Share of total monetary loss due to dispossession of land in the last three generations (up to year 2008) by individual communities of plain-land indigenous peoples (in %) (Total money value of loss in 2014 market price = BD. Tk. 92.39 billion = 100%)



Source: Prepared by the author based on data in Table 3. For rounding purposes to make the total 100 percent slight changes after decimal point has been made.

The issues raised here to understand the essence of “political economy of injustice” attributable to the forced dispossession of land by each community of the indigenous peoples are significant on their own merit. In spite of the fact that although highly representative and valid answer is difficult to ascertain, the following are indicative – to a large extent – towards understanding the essence of the above stated “political economy of injustice”. First, in terms of total physical amount of land dispossessed, among the ten-studied indigenous peoples of plain-land, the highest amount was dispossessed by the Santal community sharing 57.4 per cent of the total amount of land dispossessed by the above ten communities combinedly (estimated based on data in Table

3). This is followed by the Oraon sharing 15.1 per cent of the total dispossession; and then in high to low order – Pahan (9.6%), Rakhain (6.8%), Garo (slightly less than 6.8%), Hajong (1.4%), Patro (1.1%), Mahato (1.0%), Khashi (0.7%), and Dalu (0.09%). In understanding the essence of “political economy of injustice” pertaining to the individual communities of indigenous people, it is not at all enough to provide estimates of total physical amount of land lost and share by individual indigenous community. This is simply because of the simple arithmetic that, other things remaining the same, those having more land will lose more. Therefore, a better indicator would be to take per person or per household (assuming that household size is more or less same across the various indigenous peoples communities) dispossession of land by individual indigenous communities. Second, the per household dispossession of land varies widely by individual indigenous communities. For example, as shown in Table 4, the highest amount of per household land dispossessed was 2158.3 decimal and that by the Pahan community, followed by Oraon (898.5 decimal), Patro (289.5 decimal), Rakhain (270.1 decimal), Santal (191.4 decimal), Hajong (79.3 decimal), Garo (66.7 decimal), Dalu (41.8 decimal), and Khashi (34.6 decimal); the average per household of these 10-selected plain-land indigenous peoples being 201.4 decimal (Table 4). Third, the outcome of this per household dispossession of land by different indigenous community is, more or less a straight forward one, the more the per household land dispossession the relatively higher is the extent of landlessness. And, finally, the impact of this per household land dispossession is also understandably so, the higher the per household land dispossession the lower is the standard of living and well-being, as well as the higher is the degree of ‘fear’ and sense of insecurity among them, the lower is the extent of participation of those people in development activities due to their position in the society as highly excluded people.

Table 4: Estimated population, number of household, and per household land dispossession (in three generations upto 2008) by selected plain-land indigenous peoples, 2008

Plain-land indigenous peoples' community	Population 2008*	Number of household, 2008*	Amount of land dispossession (in last three generations upto year	
			Total (in decimals)	Per household (in decimals)
Dalu	2,250	450	18,800	41.8
Garo	102,315	20,463	13,64,000	66.7
Hajong	17,216	3,443	273,000	79.3
Khasi	20,216	4,043	140,000	34.6
Mahato	5,301	1,060	204,000	192.5
Oraon	16,944	3,389	30,45,000	898.5
Patro	3,750	750	217,100	289.5
Pahan	4,500	900	19,42,500	2158.3
Rakhain	25,398	5,080	13,72,000	270.1
Santal	304,116	60,823	11,640,000	191.4
Total	502,006	100,401	20,216,400	201.4

*Note: The population size by individual communities of indigenous peoples presented in the Table are not available in the Bangladesh Population Census. Authors of an earlier research have estimated the population size of those communities based on Bangladesh Population Census, 1991 (see, Barkat et al. 2009b, p.27). To arrive at the population size of 2008 by individual communities, the author, based on many relevant assumptions including through discussion with knowledgeable persons assumed that 2008 population size will be 1.5 times higher than that in 1991 (assumptions included outmigration of certain portions of population by individual communities from Bangladesh; relatively higher total fertility rates among the indigenous peoples who are still living in Bangladesh). The assumed household size is 5.

From political economy view point, the most important is which has already been mentioned that this is just a part of the story! Because many other losses due to extermination and unpeopling, such as loss of immovable properties other than land is not included in the estimation; not included are the losses of movable assets; and most importantly not included are losses (costs) associated with factors such as ‘fear’, ‘severance of family ties’, ‘permanent feelings of insecurity’, ‘loss due to non-interest in participating in broader social and community life and

development” – all these losses or costs to individual, family, community, and nation are difficult-to-measure, but these losses reflect lack of opportunity to participate in the process of conscientization, liberty and freedom-mediated process of development by the indigenous peoples. These are not just losses to the indigenous peoples, rather these constitute ‘foregone values’ or true colossal losses (costs) preventing making of a secular and progressive human society – the Bangladesh enshrined with the true spirit of 1971 Liberation War.

6.3 What did they do to revert unpeopling towards regaining their lost land: Processes and outcomes

As argued above and substantiated by empirical evidences that the indigenous peoples have already been unpeopled and exterminated. However, some of them, especially in the plain land had made some attempt to recover lost land and settlements. Some of them resort to land litigations and requested the local elite to support their cause. Some of them sought *shalish*/arbitration as an attempt to recover their dispossessed lands. In this process of attempt to regain the lost land they required money to meet the costs of litigation and related conveyance. Some of them did not attempt to recover their lost lands because of feeling of insecurity of life and lack of money to run the litigation. Despite their all-out efforts to recover the lost lands and settlements, almost no piece of land could be recovered. This is obvious because of the fact that the grabbers represent the rent seeking system and the whole governance system is subjugated to the rent seekers. Therefore, in essence, regaining lost land implies praying and bowing down to those who have grabbed the same. This is a highly improbable possibility for the indigenous peoples who have been exterminated and lost their land and settlements but want to regain under the prevailing centre-periphery distorted free market system controlled by the wealth-destroying rent seekers operating under the auspices of the mono-polar imperialist system which has been adequately portrayed in Section 3.

The indigenous people who lost their lands and settlements, in many cases, as reported by themselves, could not even think of going to the court for justice due to ‘fear factors’, lack of security, financial insolvency, and lack of knowledge. Even most of those who went to the court for justice did not get any justice. The local government, Members of the Parliament (MPs), Deputy Commissioners (DCs) and the Land Offices, in most cases, did not play any positive role; to the contrary, they became an integral vested interest part to maintain and keep the problem as problem-in-perpetuity. The net outcome of this process for those indigenous people who tried to get justice and get back their dispossessed land was just the opposite; they, in the process became poorer than before – became pauper. This was obvious within the nexus of free-market oriented rent seeking system, and this is also the essence of “political economy of injustice” with the poor and marginalized people, of which the indigenous peoples is just an integral part.

The indigenous peoples who have lost their land and settlements have already gone through a process of negative transformation – transformation from landowning and landholding to landlessness, then from landlessness to pauperization, and then from pauperization to beggarization. In this process of beggarization, among these, who wanted to regain their land paid speed money (bribe) at every step in regaining their lost lands. Even after paying bribes, they do not get any relief as they are a voiceless and powerless – the indigenous peoples! It is to mention that some of the NGOs are working in a limited scale towards resolution of this issue, but the outcome so far is insignificant. Some international organizations and commissions are active in pursuing the rights of the indigenous peoples. The outcome of activities of these organizations is not much mentionable from the viewpoint of restoring rights of the indigenous peoples. It is learnt in the whole process that commitment and pro-active support of the government and the court of justice are the basic preconditions to maximize the benefits to those who have lost their land, and that is always absent. In essence, that will always be absent if ‘political economy of injustice’ prevails, and this will prevail so long rent seeking based centre-periphery equation

within free market capitalism as an integral part of global capitalism prevails (as discussed and analysed in Section 3 explaining the proposed conceptual framework of political economy of unpeopling and undevelopment of indigenous peoples).

7. From “Unpeopling” to “Peopling” of Indigenous Peoples: Is their Any Possibilities?

7.1 From ‘unpeopling’ to ‘peopling’ of indigenous peoples: Some first order conclusions

Indigenous peoples, irrespective of hill or plain, have already been unpeopled and exterminated through grabbing of their own land, settlement, forest, and other resources. Many communities, in the process, have been alienated to the extent to become pauper and beggar. This dispossession of land and other resources by the indigenous peoples has taken place within the distorted free market centre-periphery nexus dominated by the rent seekers who have subjugated the superstructure including politics and government in a broader global capitalistic order creating and procreating inequality and injustice in all spheres of the society.

Historically, many of the human rights and justiciable rights including the land right of the indigenous peoples of Bangladesh has been grossly denied. No government has properly acknowledged the land right of the indigenous peoples in this country. All the indigenous communities – irrespective of hill and plain – have been severely affected by land and settlement dispossession. In addition to the undue political influence and local class-based hegemonic culture, government-connived initiatives are major reasons for land and other natural resource dispossession of the indigenous peoples. Laws, apparently, in order to stop such processes of land dispossession of the indigenous communities, has also been enacted- but in practice, land dispossession goes on unabated. Various issues related to such traumatic incidents in the past- such as the Partition of India in 1947, the communal riot in 1964, the Indo-Pak War in 1965, the promulgation of Enemy and Vested Property Acts, the agents of anti-liberation during the Liberation War in 1971 etc- have supported and encouraged the grabbers to surreptitiously grab the lands, forests, and other resources of the indigenous peoples. The major reasons, means and mechanisms of land dispossession, as reported by the indigenous peoples themselves include grabbing by local influential persons from other community mostly Banglaee; grabbing through forged documents; governmental acquisition; forgery during land record; lack of proper land documents; and grabbing by settler Bangalees.

Almost all the indigenous peoples who dispossessed their land have made some attempt to recover those dispossessed land. Many went for land litigations seeking justice and sought support of the relevant government administration and local influentials to get back their land. Many sought *shalish*/arbitration as an attempt to recover the dispossessed lands. In the process of regaining the lost land, they required financial means to meet costs of litigation and related legal and illegal expenses. Most of those who went to the court of justice did not get any justice. They had to pay bribe at every step to regain their lost lands. Even after paying bribes, they did not get remedy. This is due to the fact that, in one hand, they constitute voiceless and powerless section of the population and, on the other, fighting with the rent seekers – the grabbers – is an unequal fight. Most of the indigenous peoples did not attempt to recover their lost land because of lack of security of life and lack of money for litigation. Despite all efforts no piece of land could be recovered. Eventually, most of them became more marginalized due to loss of work days and distress sale of remaining assets, if any. The local government, Member of the Parliament, District Commissioners and the Land Offices – none was helpful. Most NGOs are dormant on this issue. Government’s support on this is almost non-existent. Knowledge and awareness level of indigenous peoples on various land-related laws is still at embryonic stage. A major portion of the indigenous peoples’ household heads are aware only about the law of inheritance and law on

transfer of land ownership- which is regarded as basic knowledge. A smaller section have limited knowledge about laws on mortgaging, law on sharecropping, law on land auction, and processes of getting access to khas land. Knowledge level is very poor about other relevant laws, such as land laws on declaration of personal property, acquisition act, ownership and allocation of khas land, Vested Property Act, ownership through possession, allocation of khas land, and leasing.

The indigenous peoples themselves have suggested various ways and means to mitigate the issues pertaining to their dispossession of land and associated alienation. On the basis of their own life experience, the indigenous peoples have pointed out some meaningful and implementable steps towards resolution of the long-standing problems pertaining to their dispossession of land, increasing alienation and associated inequality, insecurity and discontents. These steps are presented below which merit consideration by all competent authorities including the government and the civil society:

1. Establish a transparent and pro-active Land Reform Commission for the indigenous peoples (for both hill and plain).
2. Ensure cross section of indigenous peoples representation and pro-active participation in the said Land Reform Commission.
3. Assign adequate emphasis on the land and life of indigenous peoples by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Land and Parliamentary caucus of indigenous peoples.
4. Design appropriate advocacy materials and conduct adequate advocacy by the Government and the civil society toward accelerated progress of the indigenous peoples.
5. Raise awareness of the indigenous peoples on land-related Laws and Acts.
6. Arrange all-out efforts towards enforcement of those Laws and Acts
7. Organize pro-active advocacy towards recognition of customary ownership of indigenous peoples.

7.2 From ‘undevelopment’ to ‘development’: A few suggestions towards human development of indigenous peoples

Since ‘development’ is a constitutional-justiciable-human rights related concept, then all citizens, as part of the people, irrespective of ethnicity-religion-caste-creed-women-men, are the owner of the Republic; since within next six years (Vision 2021) we are dreaming to develop a secular, progressive, liberal democratic welfare state illuminated with the spirit of 1971 War of Liberation; since CHT Accord (Peace Accord) has been signed in 1997; and since we are determined to make the four pillars of our 1972 Constitution (democracy, nationalism, secularism, socialism) stronger, then, it is my informed opinion, that to create an environment to realize the above dream of development and well-being including ensuring the land rights of already “unpeopled” indigenous peoples, a set of specific “well-wished” suggestions categorized into five broad groups may be actively pursued (in this context can be treated as priorities). The suggestions (or recommendations) categorized in to five broad groups (A, B, C, D, E) are as follows:

Group A: Related to Constitutional recognition of indigenous peoples

1. Regardless of hill and plain-land, to all indigenous communities, it would be logical to give Constitutional recognition as ‘indigenous peoples’ including preservation of their language-art-culture-lifestyle-tradition-heritage-knowledge.
2. It is urgent to give legal recognition of customary and traditional rights to land, forest and waterbodies of indigenous peoples.

Group B: Related to compliance with the spirit of 1997 CHT Accord (Peace Treaty) especially Commission (Land, Law etc)

1. The Peace Accord signed (02 December 1997) between the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and the *Jana Sanghati Samity* (People's Solidarity Organization) of indigenous peoples of CHT is necessary to implement in totality and in no way in a fragmented and compartmentalized fashion, and that should be implemented expeditiously.
2. The implementation process of the clauses of CHT Accord (Peace Accord) that have not been still effective should be given importance on priority basis. In this regard, especially, the Land Commission (or the same, the Land Dispute Resolution Commission) will have to take care of the activities in conformity with the fundamental spirit of CHT Accord. The fundamental task of Land Commission should be to deal with the issues related to resolution of land dispute, and not the land survey. The rules and regulations regarding Land Commission which is defective or faulty (implying not in line with the spirit of CHT Accord) it is reasonable to make them consistent with the basic spirit of the Accord (that is, it is necessary to modify the clauses that are contradictory or inconsistent). The complaint that out of 13 rectifications to be made in the Land Dispute Resolution Commission, 3 have been totally omitted is to be resolved and in no way to ignore the recommendations of CHT Regional Council regarding related issues.
3. It is urgent to send the issues related with forcibly grabbed land to Land Dispute Resolution Commission and resolve those according to the process as mentioned in the Peace Accord.
4. In CHT and plain land areas it is urgent to formulate relevant Land Laws, Land Policy and Land Use Policy keeping in mind the common indigenous peoples' interest as supreme.
5. In CHT, the three district councils of hill areas perform various functions in three different ways. This needs uniformity and harmonization keeping common indigenous peoples' interest above everything.
6. To institutionalize the land rights of indigenous peoples (which is partially recognized in CHT Regulation 1900) undertaking of proactive and implementable legal and administrative steps are essential on the part of the Government.
7. Formation of a separate Land Commission for plain-land indigenous peoples is essential. In this regard, the "lessons learnt" (better to say, the "bad experience" of) from CHT Land Commission should be taken into consideration.
8. A National Adibashi Commission should be formed. The fundamental objective of the Commission, regardless of hill-plain, will be to think over all provisions concerning human welfare including constitutional-provision for justice in all economic, social, cultural and administrative matters of indigenous peoples and to ensure more speedy solution of historical misdeeds done with the indigenous peoples in exterminating and unpeopling them.

Group C: Related to proactivating Regional Council, Hill District Council, Local government, Transferrable subjects

1. Through adjusting and harmonizing Hill District Council and Regional Council with the foundational spirit of CHT Accord and maintaining distinct opportunities for work will have to be created. In order to comply that, in conformity with the fundamental spirit of the Accord, measures need to be adopted and implemented to expeditiously formulate, modify, approve and make effective the laws, rules of procedure, rules of business, and regulations. Transferrable matter which is not transferred till now shall have to be transferred.
2. As rapidly as possible, it is urgent to give a legal shape and make implementation of those moral and ethical understanding that have been made by this time between government and hill regional council on different conflicting and debatable issues concerning hill Land Commission.

3. In order to ensure the rights of indigenous peoples over land-water bodies-forest coordinated steps of highest order among local government, local administration and customary administrative structure is warranted.

Group D: Related to planned progress, budget, human development

1. In special sessions of National Parliament and Parliamentary Caucus on Indigenous Peoples it is suggested to hold serious result-oriented discussions towards time-bound accelerated human development of the indigenous peoples. The issues of discussion shall include, among others, unpeopling and extermination of indigenous peoples irrespective of hill and plain, dispossession of land-settlement and associated alienation, pathway of accelerated resolution of the problem of indigenous peoples' land rights and associated factors determining their life-livelihood-tradition-art-culture-heritage-indigenous knowledge. The suggested result-oriented discussion, debate and dialogue shall be based on the following fundamental spirits enshrined in the 1972-Constitution of Bangladesh: "All powers in the Republic belong to the people" (article 7), "Removal of disparity" (Constitution, article 16); "Equality of opportunity" (article 19); "Equality before law and equal protection of law" (article 27); "Non-discrimination to any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth" (article 28), "Protection of right to life and personal liberty" (article 32), "Freedom of thought and conscience, and of speech" (article 39), "Local government in every administrative unit" (article 59, 60), among others. And the result should be to accelerate the process of development of the indigenous peoples, reach consensus regarding distribution of responsibilities towards time-bound specific targets and expeditious implementation of those targets including measures to be taken if targets are not attained.
2. Including guarantee of land and related rights, formulation of a time-bound road map is necessary for implementation of CHT Accord where short-medium-long term plan and its implementation strategies shall be mentioned.
3. Within the purview of Perspective Plan (2010-2021) and the upcoming Seventh Five Year Plan (2015-2020) of the Government for balanced development attaching special importance the issue of overall development of indigenous peoples shall have to be implemented on priority basis.
4. To guarantee well-being of indigenous communities separate allocations in the national budget is needed. In the initial years, the amount of per capita allocation for the indigenous peoples should be at least three times higher than the per capita overall national allocation.
5. The matter relating to method of imparting schooling lessons to indigenous children in their own mother language shall have to be given importance. At the same time, in accordance with needs of the specific communities of indigenous peoples it is necessary to institutionalize relevant primary, secondary, higher secondary, technical, vocational, and higher studies educational institutions.

Group E: Related to resolution of unjust acquisition of land and forest, outcomes of demographic engineering

1. From now onwards, the individual or collective requisition of land-forest by the government agencies (including development project), Bangalee settler, forest department, and military-paramilitary related departments should be declared as complete moratorium.
2. The Bangalees of plain land those who have settled in the CHT but reluctant to live or reside in hill areas it is necessary to think about provisioning of incentive for their coming back in the plain land voluntarily.
3. All those agreements such as non-resident of hill areas but have taken land on lease for plantation including rubber plantation and are not cultivating for last 10 years should be cancelled.

4. Exemplary punishment should be given to those who have forcibly grabbed the land of indigenous peoples.
5. Dispossession of forest indigenous peoples from land should be stopped and harassment case filed by the forest department should be withdrawn.
6. Put a stop forever on deforestation in the name of eco-park. In line with the objective of being free from the negative impact of world-wide climate change preservation of forest-jungle-water bodies inhabited by indigenous peoples – it is suggested to undertake research and advocacy programmes with full participation and ownership of all communities of indigenous peoples – hill and plain, small and large in terms of population size; no one should be left out or excluded in this process.

8. A Final Caution: Further Unpeopling of Indigenous Peoples May Lead to Inevitable Cataclysm

The basic characteristics of the life of indigenous peoples, in epitome, is the “*Political economy of unpeopling*”; “*Political economy of extermination of people*”, “*Political economy of perpetual deprivation and discrimination*”, “*Political economy of undevelopment*”, “*Political economy of underdevelopment*”, and “*Political economy of injustice*”. Regardless of hill-plain, the inborn right, traditional right, social right, right by clan and justiciable right, right to have justice have not just been curtailed, rather plundered, and plundered murderously. The factor that worked behind this plundering is the free market philosophy which is never poor-friendly, let alone indigenous peoples-friendly. This neo-liberal free market philosophy dominated by rent seekers is a dangerous reality, because the later has managed to make politics and government subjugated, and thereby, criminalized the whole economic and political system. It has created and procreated a centre-periphery nexus within the unjust global capitalism. The plundering of constitutional, justiciable and human rights has now become a usual practice. As a result, by any criteria of human progress, the well-being of indigenous peoples (and all other marginalized people) could not have been ensured. Indigenous peoples have become the victim of deeply ingrained alienation. They are the subject of alienation from power, public resources, and their own resources. This perpetual alienation have produced and reproduced uncertainty-disbelief-unreliability-envy-hatred among indigenous peoples. And this process within the above stated nexus of rent seekers, government and politics has taken the shape of a force towards accelerated production and reproduction of ill-being among the already very ill indigenous peoples.

The above explanation about this plight of indigenous peoples is enough to conclude that with a sinister motive for *political engineering* this right which is inseparable from indigenous people’s life has been plundered and alienation has been created and pro-created. Besides, including *demographic engineering* all the means and ways of plundering of human rights have been used as methodical device. Irrespective of hill-plain, the drama that has been staged is nothing sort of a sheer historical deviation; it is rather a man-made historical catastrophe of unpeopling the indigenous peoples. In solving the long-lasting and complex land issue and the issue of alienation –the CHT Accord 1997 (‘Peace Treaty’) is no denying an encouraging historical Accord. In congruity with the original foundational spirit of this Accord, it was expected that the process of accelerating the progress and increasing the well-being of indigenous peoples will take-off. This process has not been quickened and the process of positive discrimination has not been instituted during the last 17 years since the signing of the CHT Accord in 2nd December 1997. These are not auspicious sign at all. As observed in many countries of the world, failure to resolve this type of historical issue after signing of Peace Accord leads to the repetition of catastrophe, and that with more detrimental outcome than the pre-accord stage within 10-20 years time and the degree of national loss becomes much more than the pre-accord stage. Considering this historical truth, it is the best way for all the parties to move forward being mutually respectful to the original spirit of the Accord. There is no scope to search for any other alternative. The issue is absolutely politico-

economic. The State, without any wavering, must take this responsibility to ensure all kinds of constitutional-human rights for indigenous peoples, no matter hill-plain, and create a better world for them.

Finally here, to put it bluntly, the “political economy of unpeopling of indigenous peoples” in Bangladesh shall most appropriately be termed as the “political economy of injustice”. And this injustice-in-perpetuity has been created logically within the broader global capitalism in a distorted free market economy at the early stage of capitalistic mode of production, in which, within a centre-periphery nexus production and reproduction of distress-deprivation-destitution-inequality based on exploitation of the poor and marginalized is a norm, and the best and most appropriate agents to accomplish and complete this process are the “rent seekers” (of various forms) who does not create wealth (rather destroys wealth), who are there to grab the wealth of others and who are located at the top of the socio-class pyramid, and who, in the whole process, make the dominant politics and government as their subordinate, subjugated, subservient entities. Therefore, the whole issue of transforming ‘political economy of injustice’ in to ‘political economy of justice’, which is a necessary precondition for ensuring true well-being of the indigenous peoples as well as all poor and marginalized people of Bangladesh is ultimately a high order political issue in which government and politics must divorce the ‘rent seekers’ and the ‘rent seeking’ system forever. This is an issue of establishing a pro-people state, in which, the Government shall be adequately concerned, committed and competent to uphold people’s interest, especially the poor and marginalized people’s interest above all other interests in the social-economic-political-cultural ladder of interests.

9. An Objective Thought on Solution. Are We Fighting a Losing Battle?

In conclusion – based on political economic analyses of unpeopling of indigenous peoples within the unjust national and global order – it is difficult to draw any straightforward conclusion pertaining to the possibilities of resolution of the problem, meaning here that the indigenous peoples, in near future, will get justice in having back their land, settlements, forest, waterbodies, and other resources plundered by the vested groups of rent seekers aided by the state and politics. The normative conclusion is that the indigenous peoples have all the inherent rights to get back their plundered land-forest-settlement and other resources. However, the objective practical conclusion is that the distance of the indigenous unpeople is still far away from the frontier of reaching the point when they will get back their resources and wealth grabbed by the rent seekers.

In the relevant literature and in political parlance, the whole issue of injustice towards the indigenous peoples has so far, been presented just as an ethnicity issue or ethnic problem, which is just an appearance on the surface. To put it bluntly, the issue of unpeopling of the indigenous peoples, in essence, is primarily not a ethnicity-based issue. This is clearly a “class” issue (not in the classical-traditional sense of the term). This is a ‘class’ issue wherein the upper class of rent seekers grab everything from natural resources to verdict of the court, from labour of weaker sections of people to product of their labour etc, and in doing so they use all possible means and ways including ethnicity, religion legal and extra-legal instruments and institutions, power, politics, muscle. The aim is simple: To become wealthy by taking away wealth from others who are weak; and not become wealthy by creating wealth by themselves and to multiply that grabbed wealth (not only during the period of primary accumulation of wealth under capitalism, but also throughout all the stages of capitalism including under imperialism) and, thereby, create a condition in which the State, Government, Politics become subservient to them – the rent seekers-grabbers (in this case grabbers of resources of indigenous peoples). Therefore, there should not be any doubt, that the whole issue of unpeopling and extermination of indigenous peoples, both politically and economically, is a class issue. And, fighting class issue using ethnic identity is a misnomer, and such struggle is destined to fail; such battle is inherently a losing battle.

Reversal of “political economy of injustice” into “political economy of justice” is history in and by itself. It is worth keep in mind that the process of unpeopling of indigenous peoples began over 60 years back; the process got high momentum since the time of acute communal riots in early 1960’s and then during demographic engineering since mid 1970’s – all during military autocratic rule. However, after a protracted armed struggle, in case of indigenous peoples in the hills (CHT) the CHT Accord (Peace Accord) was signed in 1997 during a democratically elected government. This should be treated as a historically welcoming attempt to rectify historical misdeeds of the past. However, this should not cause complacency. This is primarily due to the fact that after 60 years of grabbing land, settlement and forest of the indigenous peoples giving those back to them is unprecedented in history and making this history can never be an easy route. Here, it is important not to remain oblivious of the unpalatable truth that the extermination operation of the indigenous peoples had its root in distinct historical doctrine in the religion-based state-craft of Pakistan. Depriving religious and ethnic minorities through various ways and means was not an historical accident *per se*. It was rather an outcome of conscious decision by the Pakistani rulers to *Pakistanize* the East Pakistan, to use “Islam is in danger” as a means to obstruct development of secular culture and associated human capital formation in East Pakistan, to un-people a large part of East Pakistanis from their roots based on their non-Muslim identity, and to try to establish military-feudalistic-elitist Pakistanized hegemony over East Pakistanis and, thereby, to create their politico-economic allies in East Pakistan. In materializing these, the Pakistani rulers used all means and ways to divide people based on their religious and ethnic affiliations. The anti-secular forces – both in Pakistan (during 1947-1971) and in independent Bangladesh (especially after the killing of the Father of the Nation in 1975) – used all means towards oppressing people, especially the religious and ethnic minorities. The consequences have been, simply, gross denial of freedom and liberty, and institutionalization of systematic social, cultural, economic, political, and psychological deprivation of the religious minorities and indigenous peoples in Bangladesh. The fuelling of religious fundamentalism in politics, economy and culture has been an obvious consequence as well as an objective.

The national disaster has been so huge that over two million people (out of five million) belonging to 49 different communities of indigenous peoples have been directly and severely affected by the weapons of unpeopling and extermination, and have lost a large part of their land, settlement, forest, and other resources. In addition, there has been unmeasurable extent of national losses in terms of forced mass out-migration, stresses and strains, mental agonies, severance of family ties, loss of human potentials, disruptions in communal harmony, un-freedom, and disintegration in the process of national human capital formation.

It is, therefore, in order to ensure a true environment for humane development in Bangladesh, there is no alternative but to successfully and expeditiously implement the CHT Accord 1997 maintaining the core spirit of the Accord, and return back the land and other resources taken away forcibly from the indigenous peoples. This demands political commitment towards ensuring the well-being of the people who have been made ‘unpeople’ coupled with substantive public actions. And all these are absolutely necessary to institutionalize liberty, freedom, and choice – as both means and ends to true humane development in Bangladesh. Therefore, in order for to revert the conscious historical misdeeds done towards the indigenous peoples – *political economy of injustice* should be transformed into *political economy of justice*, and in ensuring that the accelerated implementation of the CHT Accord (in case of CHT) has no second best alternative. Since the issue of “unpeopling” is ultimately a class issue – the question remains: “Are the “unpeopled” people going to get back their properties in a class society dominated by the grand alliance of the agents of an unholy triangle– the Rent Seekers-Grabbers, the State(with governance agents), and the Politics serving rent seekers interest”? A difficult question to answer!

However, my answer to this question is a straight ‘No’. No; not in the near future. There is plethora of reasons of my concluding so. The first and foremost is: We have accepted the battle

based on *appearance of things* and not *essence of things* – and fought and still fighting the battle as a battle between ethnic groups (Bangalees versus the indigenous peoples) and, so far, acted accordingly. This battle is destined to be a losing battle. To the contrary, we have never get in to the *essence of things* to think the issue of unpeopling of indigenous peoples as a “class issue”, as an issue of wealth and resource grabbing by the rent seekers aided by their super-structural ideologies and institutions (state, government, religion, politics – local, national, international), as an issue that all forms of violence have played immense role in both establishing and perpetuating capitalism. In order to establish lawful, constitutional, fundamental and human rights of the indigenous peoples who have become ‘unpeople’ – these ‘unpeople’ people themselves are not involved (or remotely involved) in the movement. To put it baldly, there is no relevant true movement *per se* in which, irrespective of religious or ethnic identity people, especially people who are exploited in a class society are fighting unitedly to establish their rights to liberty, freedom, equality, fraternity, and solidarity.

Is resolution possible? Are we fighting a real battle – the way we are fighting it? Based on my thirty years of research experience on political economy of indigenous peoples coupled with my relatively proactive participation in advocacy movement against “unpeopling” the indigenous peoples – my informed reply would be both ‘NO’ and ‘YES’. To put it objectively, the resolution depends on the readiness of the two sides – the supply side (meaning the state, the government, the grabbers, the global empires) and the demand side (meaning the affected people, their community, their organizations, and exploited people at large). To my knowledge, the directly affected people comprising people representing ethnic minorities – indigenous peoples is not ready or yet to be ready – they themselves are divided in to different interest groups in a class society having “kingship”!; their unity in diversity is yet to be consolidated; many of their leaders and/or activists suffer from elitism (and there is no historical evidence of elitist leaders serving ultimately the causes of the poor and marginalized “unpeople”); many of their leaders are not that really serious about the poorest of the poor unpeople who have become landless and/or shelterless and/or pauper-beggar (such seriousness has never been expressed in public or, in reality, that has been conveniently used for own purpose); most of their leaders and activists are yet to internalize the politico-economic essence of unpeopling the indigenous peoples; most of them are not in a position – in terms of their thoughts and actions – to accept the issue as a matter of rights, establishing which requires a serious movement of class struggle in essence and which in no way should be a subject of begging to the grabbers-grand-alliance; most of their ‘movement’ is purely Dhaka-centric urban and to be more precise, Dhaka press club-centric; some of their ‘movement’ is at best district-level-centric and almost never reached the rural areas (where 90 per cent of the indigenous peoples live); most of them, in reality, do not believe in their core of their heart that the unpeople will get back their resources grabbed and lost in the process, however, for reasons not known to me somehow some of the leaders are comfortable and complacent with the pathing-up system of Accord and Commissions; most of them are most likely suffer from a gross misperception that their organization – as it is performing now will be adequately strong enough to resolve the problem; most of them think that some of the NGOs active in the field especially those that are getting funding support from outside Bangladesh (“donors” or currently politely renamed as “development partners”) and the foreigner-headed commissions will be the saviours and will do everything to resolve the problem; many of them still believe and believe strongly that the mighty European Union and United Nations will come forward and resolve the issue; most of them perceive the problem as an issue of the indigenous peoples only, and not as a national issue in which irrespective of caste-creed-religion – all citizens shall participate in the “battle for justice”. Each of the abovementioned is not only unhealthy for the growth of the real movement, but also provides dividend to the grabbers-grand-alliance without investment. This has to be realized and recognized carefully by the movement makers and opinion leaders who want to really fight the “battle for justice” and ‘win the battle’. The movement towards resolution of the unsurmountable destruction done in the process of unpeopling the indigenous peoples although morally and ethically correct in its own right is not all-encompassing and politically still

in her infancy. Involving European Union, United Nations, foreign diplomatic missions and donors (“development partners”) will be both ethically and politically incorrect, counterproductive and may be suicidal.

Upholding the whole issue of ‘unpeopling’ of indigenous peoples as an issue of ‘ethnic rights’ will ultimately imply getting in to an unresolvable trap. Because, if the battle for justice somehow perceptively turns into a battle for fighting the religion of majority – that will end up with getting into a trap-in-perpetuity. The problems grown out of unpeopling the indigenous peoples, in that case, will never be resolved; on the contrary, those problems will multiply. It is therefore, my suggestive conclusion towards getting rid of destructions done in the process of unpeopling would be as follows: (1) Do everything to transform ethnicity-related thoughts and actions from *appearance of things* to *essence of things*, i.e., leave aside the “ethnicity” part (but do not forget that identity) and uphold the ‘class’ dimensions as prime. (2) Involve people from all walks of life, especially all affected people and exploited people at large (irrespective of religion and ethnicity) to shape the movement as “mass movement” against the rent seekers-grabbers grand alliance. In which case, the movement of right to land of the indigenous peoples (or at least to get back those lands which were lost) should be transformed into an integral part of the nationwide Agrarian Reform (or at least land reform) movement, which will unite all the poor, marginalized and exploited people. This should be treated as the only pathway towards resolution of the relevant problems associated with the unpeopling of the indigenous peoples once for all. And, walking through this pathway towards substantive change will require a paradigm shift in the whole philosophy of indigenous peoples rights-based movement (including the changes in the mindset of the leaders and movers). Finally, this philosophy of rights-based movement should uphold the politically correct and substantive class-oriented slogan: “*All poor and marginalized people unite*” or, to be more correct in a globalized mono-polar imperialist world, “*All poor and marginalized people of the WORLD unite*”. Any deviation from this ‘class’ approach may generate a temporary victory in the battle for justice, but, subsequently may get into a different kind of trap like in South Africa. That is, as argued by Chomsky (2013), would be as follows: “South Africa changed for the better after the end of apartheid, but not on class issues. That remained pretty well fixed. You have black faces in the limousines, but for the poor majority, miserable conditions remain” (Chomsky and Vltchek 2013, p. 141).

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