

THE
CHAKMAS

LIFE AND STRUGGLE

S P TALUKDAR

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THE Chakmas are a simple, peace-loving community, professing Buddhism and inhabiting the inaccessible hilly areas in India's north-east viz. the States of Tripura, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh and Arakan in Burma.

Over the years and due to their cultural interaction with the people of other races, mainly Bengalees, they have lost much of their original ethnic characteristics, and speak a dialect, Chakma dialect, which is almost the same as south-eastern Bengali, but there is much still which make them a distinctive cultural and ethnic entity.

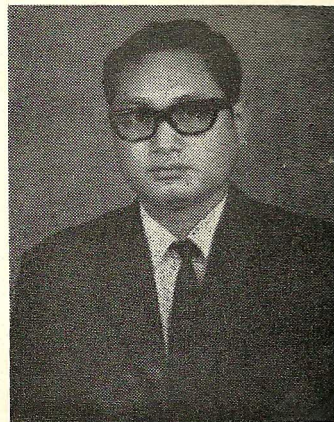
The present crisis of the Chakma community i.e. the ethnic threat which the Chakma inhabitants of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT, Bangladesh), their traditional homeland, are facing from the religiously prejudiced Bangladeshi rulers stem from the partition of Indian subcontinent in 1947. The Chakmas much against their will were merged with Pakistan though in their religion they were much closer to the Hindus than Muslims. Since then the successive rulers of Pakistan, and since 1972 of Bangladesh, have worked systematically for the obliteration of their separate ethnic identity which they have preserved all through their history. This has resulted in their being swamped over by the non-tribal Muslim Bengalees from the plains and their being reduced to minority status in their own homeland (CHT). Their saga of woes has stirred the conscience of the freedom-loving people the world over.

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The ethnographic literature hitherto has singularly lacked in a systematic and definitive study of this fascinating tribe and this great void has been now ably filled by S.P. Talukdar through the present work.

The book, fruit of the author's years of dedicated and painstaking work, has documented for the first time different aspects of the life of the Chakmas to a great degree of authenticity.



S.P. Talukdar was born at Barkal, a small town in Chittagong Hill Tracts (Bangladesh) bordering Mizoram. He is the son of Dr (Capt) P.B. Talukdar whose ancestors were members of the landed aristocracy during the reign of the Chakma Rajas.

He took up a career in the Indian Merchant Navy as an Engineer Officer after qualifying from the Directorate of Marine Engineering Training, Calcutta. He travelled around the globe during his stint in the Merchant Navy.

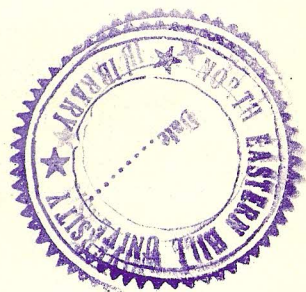
Later on he gave up the career of voyaging in favour of a more settled career in Civil Service with the Government of Assam. As a member of Mizoram Civil Service now, he holds the position of Deputy Controller, Printing and Stationery Department.

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Life and Struggle



S.P. TALUKDAR



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Foreword

The Civil Service, in India as also in other countries of the world, has the distinction of throwing up many authors of repute who have produced absorbing and informative literature. Many administrators and civil servants are credited with literary works of permanent value. Shri S. P. Talukdar, an officer of the Mizoram Civil Service, has kept up this tradition through his book on the Chakmas. He has brought out an authentic document on the history, culture and social life of the Chakmas who are little known and far less written about. He delved deep into the life and culture of this community, to which, incidentally, Shri Talukdar belongs, and brings out a plethora of interesting information which will greatly supplement our sketchy knowledge of the Chakmas.

For years the Chakmas roamed around in the Arakan region, later spread to Assam and to areas near the Bay of Bengal and finally came to settle down in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The partition of the country disturbed them both physically and mentally. For long years they were in doldrums and even today many of them have not been able to live a permanent settled life. Shri Talukdar's book will help us to know the Chakmas better and to appreciate their problems in the proper perspective. I have no doubt that readers in general will find the book most useful.

GOVERNOR MIZORAM
RAJ BHAWAN
AIZAWL

April 29, 1987.

Sd/-
HITESWAR SAIKIA

Message

I understand that Mr. S. P. Talukdar, an Officer of Mizoram Civil Service has brought out a book on the history, culture and social life of the Chakmas who are little known and far less written about. Though I have not gone through the book yet I hope this book will help us to know the Chakmas better and appreciate their problems in the right perspective.

**CHIEF MINISTER
MIZORAM**

Dated 13th May, 1987.

**Sd/-
(LALDENGA)**

Preface

During my long tenure in government service, I have met people of different states of our country on different occasions. They were drawn from all walks of life; politicians, government servants, students, academics, businessmen, journalists and even ordinary men. From the informal chats as also serious discussions with these people and also from some recent reports appearing in national and international media on the Chakma Shanti Bahini (an underground liberation organisation operating in Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh) I gather an unmistakable impression that there are many wrong notions, mostly bred by ignorance, prevailing about the problem of Chakmas.

What accounts, in main, for the prevalence of this state of affairs is that no systematic and comprehensive study of this little known tribe has been undertaken so far. This has resulted in circulation of wrong ideas, distorted facts, half-truths and in the delineation of a picture of this tribe diametrically opposite to the reality. Till date no intellectual effort has also been directed towards gathering a systematic knowledge of this tribe—their origin and historical past, educational and cultural status, socio-economic conditions, various problems faced by them and of course the aims and objectives of the “Shanti Bahini”.

This actuated me to prepare and present to the world a factual account of the different aspects of the life of Chakmas. Hence the present book.

In this book, I have put my best efforts to present a detailed description of the various facets of the life of the Chakmas mostly inhabiting the eastern parts of our country (the States of Tripura, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram) as also the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh and Arakan in Burma.

On account of the great geo-strategic significance of their habitation, the Chakmas' issue has become a serious concern to three different countries namely India, Bangladesh and Burma. India being a federal country, all the states of the Indian Union are also exercised about the problem of the Chakmas.

The root of their present problem, in fact, lay in the partition of India in 1947 and as a result of which the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the home-land of the Chakmas, were merged with Pakistan without first ascertaining the wish of its inhabitants. Subsequently, time to time, they had to leave their native place i. e. the Chittagong Hill Tracts and cross over international boundary to enter India and Burma. Ever since they have been branded as 'Nomads', 'Bengali Chakmas', 'Refugees', 'Foreigners' and 'Trespassers' by political leaders, administrators and even by some scholars.

Frankly speaking, I wonder how much justice do we do to them when we raise so many doubts about the Chakmas and sometime also paint a dark picture of them. Various questions generally heard about them are : Who are these people ? How and why they turned homeless ? Are they really the refugees in India ? What ethnic threat are they facing ? It was my strong desire to search probable answers to all such questions that led me to undertake a study of the Chakmas, to which incidentally I also belong. I have tried to be as much objective in my study as possible though subjectivity may not be completely ruled out in such type of work.

In the course of preparation of this study and collection of reference material I was helped by many of my friends and well-wishers to all of whom I pay my sincere thanks. Particularly, I would like to express my deep sense of gratitude to Mrs. Kalyani Maitra of National Library, Calcutta without whose cooperation and guidance in the collection of reference books this work would not have been completed.

My sincere thanks are also due to His Excellency Sri Hiteswar Sajkia, the Governor of Mizoram, who very kindly went through the script and also helped me throughout in the publication of this book.

Last but not the least thanks are also due to my wife Smt. Bindu Lata Talukdar for her untiring help, love and cooperation in fulfilling this mission.

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Abbreviations

CHT	Chittagong Hill Tracts
AP	Arunachal Pradesh
CEM	Chief Executive Member
MDC	Member District Council
CDC	Chakma District Council
MNF	Mizo National Front
PC	People's Conference
NEFA	North Eastern Frontier Agency
BSF	Border Security Force
CRPF	Central Reserve Police Force
JSS	Jana Samhati Samity
MU	Mizo Union

INTRODUCTION

A BRIEF CHRONOLOGY OF CHAKMA HISTORY

About 5000 B.C. and earlier

It is a rather difficult task to present a chronological and lucid account of the history of the Chakmas though the dates are not missing altogether. From the Indian and the Chinese historical records we learn about the mass exodus of the people of different races from Central Asia who moving to West and after traversing across different lands finally settled down in Burma. The first to settle down in this manner were the people of the Tibeto-Burman Race followed by those of the Mon-Kamer Race and last to come were the Tai-Chinese people. The Tibeto-Burmans entered Bengal through the north-eastern passes and maintained a corridor link with Burma through these mountains. These passes which served as gateway to enter India for these people are still in existence.

The Burmese and the Arakanese ethnically belong to the Tibeto-Burman race. The progenitors of these tribes are known as Tsak, Shak or Thek. The Chakmas belong to a tribal clan of the Tibeto-Burman race. The distinctiveness of the people of the Tibeto-Burman race which is an inseparable part of the 5000 years old glorious Indian heritage and culture can be conspicuously noticed to this day.

About 2000 B.C.

One branch of the Shak Tribes moved gradually westward reaching Central India and established its rule in the foot-hills of the Himalayan ranges. According to the Buddhist religious beliefs, a son of the king of Benaras, Sakkyawaddi, who in his future life was to be born as Gautama Buddha, established his kingdom at Arakan. Although it is hard to establish this as a historical fact, we see that the earliest signs of the Buddhist culture are to be found among the people of this race.

About 500 B.C.

The Chief of Tha-kya (Sakya) clan Dhaja (Daza) and Raja of Kapillavasthu emigrated from Central India to live with the people of their clan in the upper region of Burma. Dhaja Raja along with his numerous followers established his kingdom first at Mara Mau-re-ya (a country West of Khyengdweng river now called the Kabaw/Kubo Valley). After sometime thence he moved and established his dominion in the country of Theng-dwai (Thiutwe) but the place did not suit him. Ultimately he moved to Male area and married the queen Na-ga-tsheim (widow of Binnaka Raja) who like Dhaja Raja belonged to the Tha-kee-ya (Sakya) race. They then built the city of upper Pagan. There a son named Wee-ra-ga was born to them. The royal family once again moved to the ancient capital of the Tha-Kee-ya race of kings called Ta-goung or Theng-ga-Tha-ra ta and renamed it as Pin-tsa-ta-goung and Dhaja Raja set up a regular Government there.

About 250 B.C.

Since the conquest of Kalinga (261 B.C.), a strong and independent kingdom on the Bay of Bengal, by Asoka the Great and spread of Buddhism in South India and Ceylon, Buddhistic elements began to strike roots in lower Burma around 241 B.C. The Buddhist missionaries worked their way farther into the mountainous regions in northern Burma.

During king Asoka's reign, a prince called U Cancha Uparaja came to Arakan and led a pious monastic life which

was considered highly symbolic of the rejuvenation of people's faith in Buddhism and its traditions.

5th Century A.D.

In 5th century A.D., Buddha Ghosa, a famous Buddhist sage from Gaya brought Buddhistic religious relics to Thaton in southern Burma and worked for strengthening Buddhism there. Till then the Burmese language had no alphabet or script and the Burmese for the first time adopted this script and Pallava alphabet for their written language.

11th Century A.D.

Anawratha, king of Pagan or Pagan, the kingdom established by Dhaja Raja, invaded Thaton in 1057 and carried away the sacred religious relics which were kept in a jewelled casket along with a large number of Buddhist monks who were mainly the followers of Hinduism. Anawratha conquered Arakan and perhaps also visited southern Bengal as far as Chittagong.

13th Century A.D.

The victory of Muhammad Ghori against the Rajputs led by Prithviraj Chauhan in the second battle of Tarain (1192) paved the way of Muslim rule in the Gangetic plains of India. The establishment of Muslim rule in India resulted in the destruction of Buddhism in India which then shifted to hills in Chittagong (southern Bengal), Assam and Arakan.

14th Century A.D.

Tsakma/Sawngma (Chakma Raja) Marekyaja emigrated from Arakan to Bengal bordering Arakan area and Chittagong and established his kingdom there. The last remnants of Indian Buddhist culture were safely preserved among the inhabitants of this territory and the main source of the present day Buddhist culture in Bengal can be traced to that period.

Important Titles on Tribal India

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