

Narratives of Nation, War, and Peace in South Asia: An Interview with Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma from the Chittagong Hill Tracts

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Abstract: *Inhabited by a number of indigenous groups, the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), Bangladesh, is one of the most militarized regions in South Asia and the site of colonial and post-colonial wars, state-making, and displacement as well as development, indigenous movement and “alternative” development. The most recent war in the CHT, waged between the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS) and the Bangladesh security forces, was a low intensity war that endured for more than two decades, ending in 1997 with the CHT Treaty. This paper presents selected narratives of ethnic conflict, war and peacemaking in the CHT, as articulated by Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma, the president of the PCJSS and the key architect of the insurgency war in CHT and the peace-making process. These narratives unfolded during an extensive interview conducted in the Bengali language in three parts that occurred between June 2008 and May 2009 in Dhaka and Rangamati. The paper, prompted by the occasion of twentieth anniversary of the CHT Treaty, has several aims. Specifically it seeks not only to problematize dominant narratives of religious nationalism in South Asia but also to give voices and space to indigenous peoples and their imaginaries of nations, alternative development and politics for achieving dignity and recognition.*

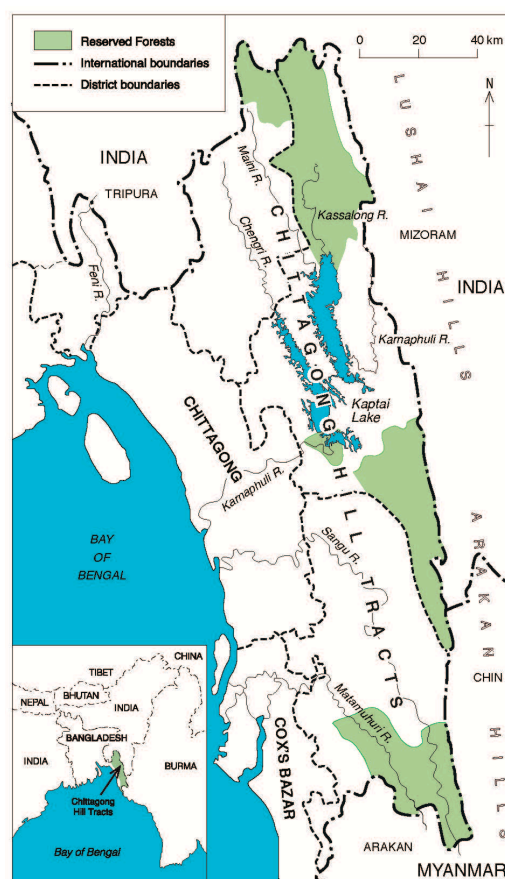
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Introduction: Chittagong Hill Tracts and the Ethnic Conflict

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) is one of the most militarized regions in South Asia (IWGIA 2012). Located in southeastern Bangladesh, this region is inhabited by a number of ethnic groups who are labelled by the State as “tribes”, even though they collectively refer to themselves as *Jumma* or hill peoples. Formerly a colonial district, CHT is currently divided into three districts: Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban (see Map below), which partially overlap with the territories of three traditional chiefs, namely Chakma, Bohmong, and Mong – an invented tradition of British colonial rule (for details see, Chowdhury 2014). Bordered by the Rakhine state of Myanmar to the

South and Indian states of Tripura and Mizoram to the North, the CHT represents a site of pre-colonial ethnicisation and the oldest known ethnic conflict in South Asia (Bertocci 1996). Significantly, the region has been a site for colonial and post-colonial wars, state-making, displacement, and development, along with indigenous movement and “alternative” development (Chowdhury 2014). The most recent war in the CHT was waged between the *Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti* (hereafter, PCJSS), a regional political party, and the Bangladesh security forces. This low intensity war, which lasted for more than two decades between 1976 and 1997, has been described as a “creeping genocide” (Levene 1999) and a “tragedy” rooted in the partition of the subcontinent and consequent displacement that occurred in 1947 (Mukherji 2000).

In 1997, the war ended with the signing of the CHT Treaty (hereafter, CHT Peace Treaty, or Peace Treaty) between the PCJSS and the government. The Peace Treaty recognized CHT as a “tribal area” to be protected for hill peoples and included a number of provisions on land rights as well as measures to address the large scales land dispossession induced by the State, businesses and Bengalis (Halim and Chowdhury 2015). In order to ensure political representation and decentralization of power, the CHT Treaty entailed the reconstitution of three Hill District Local Government Councils as Hill District Councils with hill peoples constituting the majority for local government, and the constitution of a Regional Council, an apex body of the CHT special administration, with hill peoples constituting the majority for coordination between the Hill District Councils and the government. A separate ministry, the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tract Affairs, was established to supervise and oversee coordination between the Hill District Councils and the state. Nevertheless, as of 2017, according to the PCJSS, the major provisions of the CHT Treaty had not been implemented (PCJSS 2017; Mohsin and Hossain 2015). Importantly, continuing from the time of war, the



Map of Chittagong Hill Tracts
Source: Chowdhury (2014)

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ethnic conflict and violence inflicted on hill peoples have remained significant aspects of their everyday experience (Choudhury et al. 2017).

This paper presents local narratives of the ethnic conflict, war, and peace-making in the CHT extracted from extended interviews with Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma (hereafter, J. B. Larma), the president of the PCJSS and key architect of the insurgency war and peace-making process in the CHT. Born on February 14, 1942¹, J. B. Larma graduated with a Master's degree in Bengali literature from the University of Dhaka in 1965. He is one of the founding members of the PCJSS, created on February 15, 1972. He was arrested in 1975 just before the onset of the insurgency and was released from jail without any charge in 1980. Soon after his release, he joined the insurgency and rose to prominence, which resulted in his resumption as the field commander of the "Shanti Bahini" (Peace Armies), the armed wing of the PCJSS, which was responsible for carrying out the insurgency to achieve what the PCJSS calls the "movement for self-determination". In 1983, after a brief internal war with a renegade fraction in the "Shanti Bahini", during which the founding president of the PCJSS, Manobendra Narayan Larma (hereafter, M.N. Larma) along with eight of his close associates were killed, J. B. Larma became the president of the PCJSS. Since then J. B. Larma has remained the president of the PCJSS; he is currently the chairman of the Regional Council.



Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma

Photographed on August 9, 2008 (International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples)

The interview was conducted and recorded over three sessions, totalling six hours and fifty-three minutes during the period June 2008 – May 2009 in Dhaka and Rangamati, and has not been published previously. The interview draws on the relationship that I have built and nurtured with J. B. Larma since 2001 through my research on the PCJSS movement, our shared concerns regarding issues in CHT, our mutual trust and conviction regarding the achievement of social justice and democracy in Bangladesh. The interview was conducted exclusively in the Bengali language with the interviewee's consent, given that both the interviewer and the interviewee were aware that the Chakma are generally very fluent in Bengali and J. B. Larma is a skilled Bengali orator and writer.

Originally, I had intended to save the interview for a book project based on my Master's research with the PCJSS (Chowdhury 2002), which has not

been realized. However, this publication was prompted by the occasion of the event of the twentieth anniversary of the CHT Treaty and several other recent events that have unfolded in South Asia and beyond, namely the seventieth anniversary of the partition of British-India based on religious identities, and the rise of extremist religious nationalism in South Asia in general and of Buddhist religious nationalism in Sri Lanka and Myanmar in particular. The hill peoples of the CHT, particularly the Chakma and the Marma follow Theravada Buddhism, but in my view, their movement and struggle for autonomy of the CHT represent a politics of hope in this “age of extremism”, an anti-thesis to religious nationalism in South Asia (Schendel 2000) and to modernist-state-centric nationalism that has prevailed in Europe since 1789 (Hobsbawm 1990).

In what follows I present selected narratives excerpted from my interview with J. B. Larma, organized thematically into three sections with the following titles: “Imagining Nations: Nationalism without State”, “Sacred Blood: the Arms Struggle and “Alternative Development”; and, “Politics of Hope: Peace Treaty, Indigenous Movement and Environment”. The two transcripts of the interview that I completed in 2009 have been reviewed and reworked for this paper with the help of research assistants, but I am responsible for the English translation. Because the interview was conducted in the Bengali language in the form of conversation entailing a shared understanding of the history and culture of South Asia in general, and of Bangladesh and CHT in particular, I have taken some liberties in editing some of the questions and answers to provide greater clarity (for English readers in other countries), while separating these edits by enclosing them with square brackets. In the interests of clarity, I also added some adverbs and adverbial phrases to improve the understanding of English readers and to contribute to a smoother reading flow by marking the beginning and ending of the conversation. I shared the full Bengali transcript of the interview with J. B. Larma obtaining his permission for writing this paper. The final draft of this paper has also been reviewed by him and his comments have been addressed. It is important to note here that this paper presents the only account of the PCJSS movement, framed in a narrative style, to have been published in an academic venue. This framing is inspired by my anthropological-phenomenological interest in enabling the people themselves to account for the movement. I hope that this paper will clarify the position of the PCJSS movement relating to their rights to self-determination and Bangladesh’s sovereignty as well as their views on the post-colonial state, nations and nationalism in Bangladesh, while providing alternative visions of state, nations, and development in South Asia.

I. Imagining Nations: Nationalism without State

Khairul Chowdhury (KC): Thank you. There are some personal questions that I wish to ask later, but I want to begin with at the

question about the number of groups you have called *Jumma*. In all of your publications, you claim to be 11 groups speaking 10 languages [when others claim the number is between 12 and 14]. [...] Now could you please clarify us why you say this? [And also please] explain your thoughts as to how these groups become a nation and what the basis of their nationhood is?

Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma (JBL): I want to speak first about the peoples who have been living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts from time immemorial. We say 11 groups with 10 languages, but I think we have to correct the number further. [Anyhow] that was our party's decision. If I can name the groups by their relative size based on the number of population, they are: Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Mro², Tanchangya, and then the Chak, Kheyang, Khumi, Bawm, Lushi and Pankho. These are the 11 groups. As a matter of fact, if we look back into the past those who are now known as Chakma and Tanchangya were one group. The Chakma were known as the Anokya, Tanchangya and Diainak. [...] The distinction between the Chakma and the Tanchangya was made during H. M. Ershad's regime (1982-1990) when the government introduced the local government system of Hill Councils which recognized Tanchangya as a separate group within the law. That is one of reasons as to why we now say we are 11 groups with 10 languages.

[...] Functionally there may be many characteristics that define a nation: a nation must have a common language and an economy. And based on its economic and linguistic commonality, each nation has a culture and a life-style: a common mentality, dresses and costumes, cuisine and cooking, and ways of relating with nature – ways of life. [...] But a nation must include a geographical territory, too. And throughout human history we have witnessed this [development of a nation]. Each region has a group of people or a nation. However, because of economic development in terms of forces of production and relations of production, many groups of people were transformed and become one [group]. Therefore, we find big and small nations. If, for example, we take the contemporary Chittagong Hill Tracts, which are a hill region, what we know from the past of this region is that there were the Chakma and the other nations I have mentioned; they may have been big or small in terms of their population size, but this is a relative matter. For example, the Lushi are the smallest group in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, but they are the majority in the neighbouring Indian state of Mizoram; the Mro may be only between 40,000 and 45,000 in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, but they are probably 100,000 in Burma. [...]

The wide regions that stretch from Mizoram to Tripura, and to Chittagong and Chittagong Hill Tracts including Cox's Bazar, like us [in the Chittagong Hill Tracts], there were a number of groups and nations that had lived there with their ways of life as their common characteristic. Yes, they had differences in terms of languages and ways of life, but the economy was more of

the same. [...] What I am trying to say is that in addition to the groups of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, there are a few groups who were brought to the CHT from Assam and Nepal for work during the British rules. [...] Over the years [each of them] has become an ethnic group of their own and we accepted them as our hill groups. Therefore, it must be said that the Chittagong Hill Tracts are inhabited by 14 groups with 13 languages.

[...] Because of the changes in ways of life in the Chittagong Hill Tracts over time and the changes in the lives of the hill people, our leader, M. N. Larma, along with his colleagues and, two other persons, Chitto Koshore Chakma and Snheha Kumar Chakma, thought deeply about the ways in which we could protect the existence of our lives and culture. There were also a few among the old generation who had fought against the British rule and thought about the issue of our existence.

In the Chittagong Hill Tracts, we have nations with several languages, but we have so many things in common in terms of economy, culture, and mentality. We also have our differences in terms of customary rules, but these are not of fundamental importance. The common issues that matter to us equally are the protection of national existence and rights over lands, a system of good governance, and a developing economy to be protected for our people. So why can we not develop as one nation here [in the CHT]? We know that there are many big nations in the world, and they became so through combination and assimilation of many nations. For example if we take the German nation, it has become such a big nation through the assimilation of many nations. All big nations in the world are the result of assimilation of many nations. The main reason for their development as nations is the protection of their existence. Now, if we consider the foundation of the *Jumma* nation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, one aspect of this is that they all live in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. [...] The meaning of *Jhum* is hills. So whoever lives in the hill can be called *Pahari* or *Jumma*. We have known that it is almost impossible for a group from the CHT to fight against the state and ruling class, but if we, the hill peoples, fight collectively against the state and the ruling class we have some possibility of winning the struggle. So our leader M. N. Larma thought there are ways to unite the multilingual hill people's group and it was important. [...]

KC: There is a relation between nationalism and state and some would say that there cannot be a nation without a state. For some this has become commonsense knowledge. But when you started your movement [during Pakistan rule], the Bengalis wanted to establish a new nation, a Bengali nation. So why didn't you go in for the struggle for a state of your own nation?

JBL: Our leader, M. N. Larma, thought about the relations between nation and state, but he was more concerned with nations without a state. We had seen that after World War II, especially after the French Revolution, if a

nationality had to become a nation, then they needed a territory. Many large nationalities successfully emerged as nations and created their states; they fought against colonialism and did what they needed to do to protect their existence. [...] Nevertheless, the states emerging from colonial rule have many nations within them; therefore, the idea of one-nation-one-state apparently was less acceptable and became problematic. As a result, we have seen many national movements in the newly independent states and there are still many on-going national movements. We do not have to look further; we find many examples of national movements in Sri Lanka and India.

Our leader, M. N. Larma, thought that an independent state or an independent territory did not meet all of the needs of the people of that state. He understood that there were many [individuals and nationalities] within the nation who were deprived of fundamental rights though the nation had its state. [...] He analysed the problem [of nation and state] deeply and realized that to become a nation [with a state] or to have a state [for the nation] was not enough to meet the things what human needs. The problems of [any modern] state are not only that there exist many nationalities within a state, or conflicts among the nationalities, but also that the citizens are deprived of their fundamental rights. He realized that having its own state does not guarantee a nation its survival or progress.

For him, the fundamental thing [of human society] is the relationship among humans, the dignity of the human being. It is a long struggle. And it is not only that the people of big nations need basic rights as human beings, such as their food, clothing, residence, education and health; the people of small nations also need them. He understood that even if we had a state and nationhood, the reality of world politics was such that a small state or nation could not ensure the basic needs of the people. [...] There are [also] thousands of things to keep the state surviving. The state needs cooperation with other states. Thus it is not reasonable to form a state in the CHT. If the CHT were to form a state, it would have to depend on other states and the problems [for the people of CHT to have their fundamental right and to meet basics needs] would have taken a difficult turn.

So he [M. N. Larma] maintained that the hill people of the CHT had to fight for what they needed for their existence and to materialize their life from within Bangladesh. He said, “we have to limit our [political] goals to our needs: we do not need an independent state.” This is one aspect of our rationality for the movement. Another aspect of it is Bangladesh. Do you think Bangladesh would give up its sovereignty so easily? Bangladesh would fight with everything to keep its territory. [...] It could not have been possible [for the hill people to have their own state] – it is impossible.

KC: Well, could you tell us then when your leader M. N. Larma developed this sort of thinking, with whom, and what he did to turn these ideas into a political movement?

JBL: By the 1960s we already had a process for forming a political organization. It was not that we who were then part of the political process could not think of these ideas too. [...] The sixties were of critical importance for the CHT: on the one hand, the special status of the CHT was cancelled and on the other hand, there was famine in the CHT. The economy was almost breaking down. At that time, those of us who were [politically] conscious we thought about the idea that “we could not stay with this country [Pakistan] and had to be separated.” And at that point, our leader, M.N. Larma said, “It [separation] won’t be the right choice. We have to live here, but [we will fight for] autonomy [for the CHT].” Therefore, in the 1970s, we demanded autonomy for the CHT, a new. At that time in 1970, starting a political party in CHT was banned, but we participated in the national election in 1970 and had a committee for campaign and a Fifteen Point demands for autonomy.

KC: What would you say to the claim, as Retired Lieutenant General Ibrahim suggests, that the movement of the CHT was in fact a movement led by *Dewans*, the elite landed class of the CHT?

JBL: The movement was started by tenants. [...] And almost all of the participants were from the tenant classes. I even think that the movement in the CHT in the 1940s, just before the partition [of British India], was a movement of coalition between Dewans and tenants. Afterwards, during Pakistani rule, it was all about the tenants. They have led all of the movements in the CHT since then.

KC: The exploitation and oppression of nations, states, and classes by other nations, states, and classes are believed to be one of major causes of nationalist and ethnic movements. What are your views on this? And what was the nature of exploitation and oppression that existed in the CHT?

JBL: In societies, there are [many] differences: national differences, cultural differences, economic inequality, and also racism. Because of these differences, exploitation and oppression exist. You see: on the one hand there is exploitation, oppression of a state by other states and on other hand, there is competition between states. I could answer your question differently: the reality of the world is that it is now shaped by imperialist relations. Weak states are struggling to break away from imperialist relations, but they cannot do it. And this is what we now call the struggle against imperialism. The movement against imperialism and anti-colonialism are the same thing.

Nowadays, the forms of colonial exploitation and oppression, which were [previously] used for direct occupation, have changed. These changes came after World War II and big nations became independent. There were small [elite] groups within the newly independent nations who were subservient to colonial power. What we call imperialism exists through capital and as such, colonial powers still maintain their exploitation and oppression. Therefore, we

have to consider anti-imperialist movements as integral parts of national movements and class-struggles. What is the point of independence or self-determination? National liberation, right! National liberation is not simply independence of the state [from colonial power]. National liberation happens only if the nation is freed from imperialist intervention, if national capital is firmly established, if there is democratic rule, and importantly, if the government is established on behalf of the working class. Moreover, the working class must lead the liberation movement; without working class leadership, national liberation cannot ever be achieved. For example, you know that the nationalist leadership led the 1971 liberation war of Bangladesh. And we have seen that they could not stand up to imperialism; they have become subservient to imperialism. National liberation can be accomplished only if feudalism has been fully abolished. Though the demands of the Six-Point Bangladesh movement included a program of national liberation and though the West Pakistan was overthrown in the 1971 liberation war, national liberation has not been achieved.

KC: As you know, the Chittagong Hill Tracts were a British colonial district, and were also viewed through colonial eyes during Pakistani rule. Do you think the movement was born because Bangladesh too has made the CHT into a colony?

JBL: I have told you before that the movement was started during the British period. The hill people of the CHT also participated in the freedom struggle against British rule. Moreover, they also took part in the movement against Pakistani rule. But at the beginning of Bangladeshi rule, we were pushed to the wall because of the [changing] context of Bangladesh. Therefore, though our movement has taken decisive forms, this does not mean it started during the Bangladeshi [post liberation] period.

KC: As in other countries, exploitation and oppression also exist in Bangladesh. However, all exploitation and oppression do not necessarily lead to national or ethnic struggle. Exploitation and oppression of the hill peoples have existed since the time of British rule, and even before that. So what I want to understand is whether it was exploitation and oppression that inspired your national (ethnic) movement or whether there were other forces at work. To be precise, what was the fundamental underlying cause of the movement? Was it the birth of an educated class in the CHT or the exploitation and oppression of the hill peoples?

JBL: Of course, exploitation and oppression are fundamental; they are the reason, the basis. Because exploitation and oppression exist within society, the hill peoples who are [politically] conscious – you [can] call them educated intellectuals, revolutionaries, militants, or freedom fighters – have struggled against them. But what was the reality of the social system then? The fact of the matter is that national exploitation and oppression, communal exploitation and

oppression, and race, gender, and economic inequalities existed. These were the characteristics of society and were, therefore, the basis or reasons, whatever you [want to] say [for the movement to emerge]. Class differences within society do matter ... [and] not all intellectuals are revolutionary.

KC: How about religion? You know that religion, especially in South Asian countries – be it in India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, or even in the Indian state of Mizoram – is very important in the nationalistic imagination. So how does religion relate to and influence the ways in which you imagine your nation?

JBL: In the Chittagong Hill Tracts those, who are *Jumma* belong to several religions. Here we have animists who worship nature, Buddhists, Christians, and traditionalist also known as Hindus. Here among the hill peoples, what I have seen is that both religious rules and social rules [values, norms and customs] influence their lives. I have seen that notwithstanding religion, social rules dominate the lives of Hindus and Buddhists; they are no less important than the rules of religion. In fact, they work like religion, as they have been passed down from generation to generation. However, among the Christians here, social rules are somewhat suppressed [because] religious rules are more important than that of social rules. [This has happened because] when Christian missionaries arrived they invalidated all social rules [for the hill communities converted to Christianity], but the Christians now admit [that the communities need their traditional social rules].

At one point in history, religion and the state were one and the same. However, at another stage of the development of the history, particularly during [the expansion of] capitalism, the influence of religion on social life gradually diminished. Now turning to our lives and society, I would say yes, religion has had some influence on our life and worldview; religion is intimately enmeshed with our life. I reason this is because our society is a feudalistic one, a decaying feudalism. Therefore, given the material condition of life, it is no surprise that religion dominates social life. Anyhow, if we want to protect our national existence and our feeling of nationality, we have to protect our religion too. Religion has definitely influenced [our imaginary of our movement and identity of nations], but it is not *our* religion per se, but rather Islam. During Pakistani rule and also during the time of Bangladeshi rule, particularly some time after independence, Islam was prompted as the state religion, though this was not done constitutionally all of the time. The influence of Islam on politics in Bangladesh has increased so much that it has affected our nations deeply and in a very harmful way. So the protection of our religion is also part of a national movement because religions exist in our society. To put it differently, in nations and cultures where religions exist, they get enmeshed with cultures. There was a trend of Islamisation of the CHT during the time of Pakistan that continues. Therefore, protecting our own religion is part [of our struggle] and programme.

KC: [...] let's take the example [of the Tibet movement] led by Dalai Lama. There you find that national imagination and religion are so intertwined that nationalist movement and religious movement cannot easily be separated. [...] So how different is your movement from that of Dalai Lama?

JBL: Dalai Lama's struggle is not for [Tibetan] nationalism, but for religion. In our Five-Point demands, there is not a single demand relating to religion [and religious rights]. What we have are: [issues relating to] our national existence, economic rights, and political rights. Dalai Lama is more inspired by anti-communism, and he thinks that communism has no place for religion and [they] have to fight for the religious rights. Which religion? The Buddhist religion. But we are not struggling for religious rights. For us, religion is a private [aspect of life]. A nation may have followers of different religions, [sects or denominations]. However, economic rights or other rights are the same for all, and everyone needs them. For example, [they include] economic or other rights that Bengalis [in Bangladesh] want for themselves. As a Chakma, I also want the same rights; so Bengalis and Chakmas have common interests. However, Bengali nationalism has lost its appeal because of Bengali chauvinism and Islamic fundamentalism. The ruling class use Bengali nationalism for their own interests. Nevertheless, for our movement, we have also taken account of our [religious] differences. We thought that we could not observe our religions if we were unable to protect our economy, politics, and culture.

II. Sacred Blood: The Arms Struggle and "Alternative Development"

KC: Well, now I would like to ask you some questions regarding the armed struggle. When you started the armed struggle or guerrilla war, what was the reason that prompted you to take up arms? You may agree that a movement goes through different phases before becoming an insurgency or war, which can certainly be a qualitative change and a leap. Considering your account of the movement, would you please tell how it has evolved into armed struggle and war through various stages: taking lives and giving lives? Can you explain your thoughts in plain language?

JBL: On the question on our movement, the movement for self-determination, I would like to begin with what I mean by self-determination for us and its context. What we have learned from history or reading books on the history of human civilization, or revolutionary movements of the world, is that the ruling class does not relinquish any rights to people easily, at least there is no proof of that. Rights of [the people] have been achieved through movements.

[...] What we have witnessed in the courses of the development of societies in different countries is that there are two types of movements. One is

the “conventional-legal” political movement, that is, the movement that operates within the limits of the laws of the country. The other is non-conventional, that is, armed struggle. In both cases, whether you opt for a movement with masses or arms, the common denominators are the use of violence and mobilization of the people. Now, as to your question of why we chose an armed struggle over a conventional movement: [I would say] we were forced to do so. We had run out [of option] in the course of conventional-legal movements during Pakistani rule and this situation also continued up to the time immediately after the independence of Bangladesh. To be precise, our movement for autonomy for the CHT and self-determination [of the hill peoples] turned to armed struggle in situations when the military rule was imposed upon the CHT. There was a massive building up of cantonments and oppression over the ordinary people on the pretext of punishing *razakar* [Pakistani collaborators].

KC: [Would you outline the timeline of the events of building up the cantonments and the oppression that you just described?]

JBL: It started in 1972 [when] the government imposed emergency rule in the CHT and in three other districts. Though emergency rule in other district was withdrawn, the CHT remained under the emergency rule throughout the period 1972-1975. Afterwards, in 1976, the military regime of General Ziaur Rahman extended the emergency [in a new way]. In the 1980s, [the then president] Ziaur Rahman wanted to declare the CHT, a “Disturbance Area”, [as the emergency was lifted in the entire country], and introduced a bill in the parliament, but parliament did not pass it for some unknown reasons. Nonetheless, [as the country once again came under the emergency and military rule], in the 1980s, the army began the military operation, “Operational Dabanal,” which continued even after the Peace Treaty [was signed] and up to 2001, [namely,] the end of the rule of Sheikh Hasina when it was renamed “Operation Uttaran.” Now you can understand that we, the hill peoples, have never had an opportunity for building a conventional political movement and have been under military rule since 1972. [...] In 1972 we submitted a four-point demands for the autonomy of the CHT to the constitutional draft committee and that was ignored summarily. Therefore, considering the fact that situation for conventional political activities hardly existed, we had no choice but to initiate armed struggle. To be precise, we took the decision to engage in armed struggle on January 7, 1973. We had prepared for this up to 1975, and we then began the armed struggle in 1976. Meanwhile, we had participated in the 1973 general election and had won both parliamentary seats from the CHT with huge margins. In 1975 when BAKSAL³ was floated [as the only political party of the country], *Bangabandhu* [Sheikh Mujibur Rahman] told our leader that “we had made mistakes and I would take care of the issue [of the CHT].” We then joined the BAKSAL. But you know that *Bangabandhu* was killed in 1975 and things changed.

KC: Here [if you do not mind], I want to be absolutely clear about [your] use of the term “self-determination” because it has several meanings. What does it mean to you? Is it the making of state? ... [If not, then,] what is the political form of it?

JBL: The rights to self-determination are fundamental rights for all nations for their survival and protection. These rights are also meant to have, establish, or achieve, representation in a democratic system of government, economic rights, cultural rights and land rights. It is not the demand for a separate state; rather it is to secure all of these rights within the state. [...] There is a difference between movements for self-determination and secessionist [movements]. Secessionist [movements] seeks a separate state, and the fundamental characteristics of a state are that it should have a territory, a population, a system of government, and its sovereignty. But self-determination does not [always] include sovereignty.

KC: You know very well that you have both friends and critics. Your critics sometimes say that India is to be blamed for the insurgency. I think we need to know if there is some truth behind this accusation.

JBL: No. The accusation that India backed our movement is not true. As a matter of fact, we had some help from the people of India. We met representative of several Indian political parties to explain our situation. They listened and said that they would consider what they could do to help. So the help we had was not from the government of India, but mainly from the people. However, if you consider the situation of 72,000 refugees, the people and the government of Tripura state extended all the help they could to enable them to settle in. What I am trying to say is that the help we have had from the government was a humanitarian response to the refugee crisis. India refused to recognize *Jumma* refugees as refugees despite requests from the UN agencies. So the way this is being portrayed, that is, India conspired to influence our armed struggle is false. The movement escalated into armed struggle over a period of time and underwent several phases. Having said that, one can still ask us, “Where did you get your arms”? I can tell you that we had our arms from several sources. We gathered them from the [supplies of] arms abandoned during and after the 1971 war, the liberation war of Bangladesh. We also knew how to make local guns, and importantly, if you had money, there would not be a problem to obtain the arms that you wanted.

KC: Who were those 72,000 refugees and when did they become refugees to India?

JBL: They were from the war in the 1980s and went to India mainly around the time of 1985-1986. The 1960s refugees went to the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh and could not return. Our original Five-Point demands included the return of the refugees from Arunachal Pradesh, but the

government of Bangladesh did not agree. So we had to give up the demand in our amended Five-Point demands.

KC: As you began the armed struggle, I anticipate that the ways in which you mobilize popular support of the hill peoples for the movement shifted. I was wondering what you did to retain the popular support of the hill peoples in your favour during the armed struggle. To the best of my knowledge, during the insurgency, you enjoyed extensive mass support of the hill peoples from every part of the CHT, be it villages or towns. And you once told me that during the armed struggle, people could sleep at night peacefully without fearing the loss of property to thieves. So, how did this happen? What were your policies, programs, and strategies at that time to maintain the support of the hill peoples for the movement?

JBL: Well, we did not only have political programs but also social and welfare programs. Socially, we had many wings or departments as part of the armed struggle, such as education, health, agriculture, development and so on. Regarding education, for example, we encouraged enrolment of [children] into formal education and told their guardians to enrol their children in schools. We encouraged communities to build primary schools where there were none, asking everyone in the communities to participate, donate, or help in establishing the schools in whatever ways possible. We told communities that if they had money, they should donate some, and if they did not have any, they should help the schools by donating construction materials, or by [volunteering through physical] labour. On [the question of economy] economy, we advised *Jhum*-cultivating communities to help each other through providing labour, to raise orchards, plantations, and horticulture. On health issues, we campaigned for good health [program]. These programs included latrines use, hand washing after using of toilets, using mosquito nets during the nights, and visiting doctors instead performing curative rituals when ill. In fact, we had a group of locally trained doctors, and a complete medical department.

KC: Was there any other department or program?

JBL: We had many other departments too: women's welfare, children's welfare, justice, and land, especially land conflict. In fact, we had all kinds of departments to deal with people's needs.

KC: Have you had these departments since 1973?

JBL: Yes, [they have been there] since the beginning of the armed struggle.

KC: It seems you had all kinds of departments, much like an alternative government, right?

JBL: Yes, like an alternative government we had most departments. In addition to agriculture, health, women, children, and justice as well as labour, we also had departments of foreign relations and a military department. Under the

military department, we had a hand-sewing wing. We took training to learn how to sew and encouraged the community to learn this as a way of becoming economically solvent.

KC: Of the departments you had, the departments of justice and agriculture interest me a lot. I want to know more about the justice system and how you structured it.

JBL: We had Village Councils, *Gram Panchayets*, at the grassroots for achieving justice. Village Councils consisted of a president and [a number of members]. The president was elected democratically through the direct votes of the villagers. Because villages can be small or big, we developed different approaches for the formation of councils. If [villages were] small, then they would be put together under one council. When a village was big and had many families, then the village would have its own council. There were also Extended Village Councils, consisting of several village councils. The formation of Extended Village Councils depended on several factors, primarily the number of cases [disputes]. The Regional Justice Department oversaw the activities of Extended Village Councils. On top of the justice system was the Central Justice Department.

KC: As you described village councils and the justice system and their structures, I was wondering if they were run by personnel from the armed cadres.

JBL: No, no armed cadres were involved in the justice system. This was a civilian affair. The justice system for the armed cadres was different from that for civilian affairs.

KC: How about agriculture? I understand you discouraged *Jhum* cultivation? Why and how?

JBL: [For agriculture, and especially for *Jhum* cultivation, we had a policy based on many considerations]. We understood that we could not secure livelihoods only with *Jhum* cultivation so slowly but surely we wanted to gradually change our *Jhum* cultivation-based livelihood strategies to other alternative livelihoods. We also thought about the protection of forests and wanted to control and regulate *Jhum* land by doing *Jhum* cultivation in a more systematic way without harming the environment. Overall, our vision was for a modern type of agriculture, using modern science and technologies. [Importantly, on the issue of land settlement], we had several programs. We put an end to arbitrary land settlements and instructed headmen⁴ that they should not make land settlements at will. We did this in a way that only those who did not have land got land settlement, not those who already owned land. We encouraged [communities] to take up livestock farming, gardening, private forest plantation, and so on. We also opposed Forest Department's adverse policies and advocated for forest villager resettlement programs.

KC: How about your policy on children? What programs did you take up for the children?

JBL: Our priorities were to ensure that children were raised with care by being sent to school and through maintaining good health care. So, it was mainly the education and health of the children that we cared the most.

KC: Do you have any special programs for girls?

JBL: [No], that is the matter of women's rights. To ensure equal status for women, we had a separate women's organization, *Mohila Shamiti* [Women's Association]. In our organization, we fully recognized women's rights and considered women as humans [the same as men and not inferior]. Thus, [the policy was that] women should establish themselves, having equal status [to men in society]. [In fact,] we had separate Village Women's Councils, *Women Panchayets*, to oversee women's issues or problems. [...] They worked with women only and could even decide on punishments for men if they were found guilty.

KC: It is really an extraordinary thing! Anyhow, I guess my question then is: why did you think of forming an alternative government. Also who did this, and how did she/he come up with this idea? It looks like you were creating a new society, [isn't it?]

JBL: Ideologically speaking, yes, I will admit that. It is part of our struggle for self-determination. It was our leader M. N. Larma who thought about this first. He did so by delving into the ideas of contemporary movements and into the ideologies and reality of our societies [and communities]. As he was killed, becoming a martyr for our cause, I had to take up the [mantle of ideological] leadership. You know that I was the principal architect of our Five-Point demands and I could do this only because I followed our leader, his ideals and his guidance. Though I had the help of my senior colleagues, I had to study in-depth the experiences of self-determination and local autonomy of difference countries. [...] In particular,] I read about the welfare state of European Unions, the UK's forms of government, the revolutionary ideas of China and the Soviet Union, and most obviously India's federal and locally autonomous governmental system.

III. Politics of Hope: Peace Treaty, Indigenous Movement and Environment

KC: I have been meaning to ask you this question for some time. Why did you agree to forge the Peace Treaty?

JBL: That was because of our movement for self-determination. We wanted to develop a strong foundation for the movement and if we had not done that, then the movement would have been lost [forever]. [...] Also, our movement

was not meant to be for the so-called independence of the CHT, and we did not have a program for that.

KC: My next question then is why did you sign it in 1997, and not in [1994]?

JBL: [The dialogue between the government and the PCJSS for peace started even before]. If I recall correctly, the first formal meeting was held in October 1985, but the process had begun before this, during the rule of Ziaur Rahman which could not get off to successful start for the formal meeting. So when the dialogue formally began during the Ershad military regime, we put forward our Five-Point demands, but the government then in power did not have a positive attitude toward our demands or cause. During the period from 1991 to 1994, Khaleda Zia's government held the same negative attitudes.

KC: The Member of Parliament, Rashed Khan Menon, who was a member of the CHT dialogue committee during Khaleda Zia's government (1991-1996), claimed that you were almost at the final point to signing the peace treaty in 1994.

JBL: If I remember correctly, we had had 26 dialogues from 1985 to 1997. During the time of the Ershad government, the dialogue we had on our Five-Point demands was in fact exchange of views in which the army officers represented the government in the dialogue. The dialogue did not advance to a successful conclusion because the government presented us with a Nine-Point proposal in 1989 for our agreement, but we did not accept the proposal ... as it did not recognize any of our Five-Point demands. Afterward, the national election was held, and a new government led by Khaleda Zia came to power [in 1991], and they started the dialogue anew [in 1992], led by a [parliamentary committee] headed by Colonel Oli Ahmed. We had several dialogues with Colonel Oli's committee, but there was no productive discussion on our Five-Point demands. [...] And, so, a new [sub] committee was formed, headed by Rashed Khan Menon and we had probably six meetings with Menon's committee. If Menon claimed what you just said, it is not completely true, but we had some progress on some points and that too was unsuccessful in the last analysis].

KC: So what was the key factor of behind the sudden agreements and conditions of the Peace Treaty with Sheikh Shania's government in 1997?

JBL: It was not sudden or speedy progress. We had been in dialogue with the government since 1985.

KC: I agree, but what I meant to point out was that you and the government had huge differences [on the issues of the CHT]. Gradually these differences have been worked out, reaching a point where you agreed informally. This was followed by a verbal

agreement and then a formal agreement in writing, the Peace Treaty. And that was a very critical decision.

JBL: Let me put this differently. We had dialogues on our Five-Points with three [successive] governments. If I compare and evaluate the achievements during [negotiations with] these governments, I would say that during the period of the Ershad government, we [the government and the party leadership] developed some sort of familiarity with each other's positions and demands. We cannot call this progress. During the period of Khaleda's government (1991-1996), we spent most of our time bargaining hard on each of our Five-Points, discussing almost all of the demands: which were to be given up and which were to be retained. And during [the first] Hasina government (1996-2001), we had a real foundation for reaching a deal. This could only happen because – and I must emphasize this –, the [first] Hasina government had a very positive approach for resolving the problem of [the conflict]. There is also another aspect of this: [let's put it this way] – who were directly involved with the war? [The answer is] the army. Politicians did not do the war [in person]; they were sitting in the capital, becoming ministers and doing their office work. So here [in the CHT] who bore the burden of the war? The pro-people leadership and the *Jumma* peoples on the one side, the army vis-à-vis the government on the other. We understood the generals who led the war told the government, “we are tired, we want political solutions.” I believe this sentiment of the generals played a significant role in backing the political decision of Sheikh Hasina's government to end the war.

KC: What would you say if I argue that these developments took place because Bangladesh has started participating in the UN Peace Core Mission since the war on Iraq in 1991 or in the changing global context?

JBL: No. [I would not say that]; internal dynamics was the main factor. On the international front, the government and the generals who had been trying to label our movement incorrectly as an armed secessionist movement had been unsuccessful for a long time. The world at large had seen that the movement in the [Chittagong] Hill Tracts was a political one, and that is what the government had to recognize in the end. We said that the problem in the CHT was a political one, a national problem that had to be resolved politically, but not by military means. The generals [of the army] recognized this and advised the government accordingly. At the same time, our movement had received international attention and recognition as a movement for self-determination. And, therefore, there was huge pressure on the government internationally [concerning the conflict in the CHT].

So what you are saying about the influence of the Iraq war or the changing global context on [ending the conflict] is only partially true. I believe there was huge pressure on the government internationally and diplomatically to recognize our just movement for self-determination. In the international

context, India was also under tremendous pressure because of the 72,000 refugees from the [hill tracts] who took shelter on their soil. It was a big problem for India; they had to be fed, clothed, and treated well. The international Red Cross wanted to take care of the refugees and wanted India to recognize them as refugees, but India did not agree, saying, “We will do it by ourselves; we will take care of their security, food, health and residence.” We must recognize this aspect [of India’s contribution] as well.

KC: That means one can say that the relationship between the government of India and the democratic government of Sheikh Hasina, and their mutual trust of each other had a very important role to play.

JBL: I cannot ascertain that; I do not know their internal relations, but definitely there was international pressure on the government. Similarly, locally, [...] because the people were with the movement the government could not suppress the movement. Every sector of the government – the administration, the judiciary, law enforcement agencies, or other agencies recognized that the movement had its energy. Moreover, nationally, people – however small be their numbers or groups – demanded a political solution to the problem of the conflict in the CHT. In particular, the democratic and left parties of the country not only demanded this but they also helped the government to seek a political solution.

KC: Let’s switch the topic for a moment. It has been 11 years since you signed the CHT Peace Treaty. So what do you think were the main barriers for the full implementation of the treaty?

JBL: I recently presented a paper in Chiang Mai, Thailand on the issue. I will give you the paper and you can quote me from that. [...] Anyhow, the first barrier to [full] implementation of the treaty was the army’s leadership: their attitude. This is so, because the CHT is ruled and controlled by the military. Considering the context of Bangladesh, the elected government cannot ignore the military’s role. Therefore, if [we] cannot come out of the military’s negative perspective, even the elected government vis-à-vis the prime minister cannot implement the treaty, at least its fundamental aspect. You can read about my views on its other aspects in the paper.

KC: You would agree that you signed the treaty at a specific stage of the movement. Now, considering your movement and its objectives, how would you evaluate the achievements of the CHT Peace Treaty? I mean, what did it achieve or what did it not achieve?

JBL: In fact, the CHT Treaty is the greatest achievement of the hill peoples of the CHT for the protection of their existence. It contains the basic foundation for the fulfilment of self-determination and as such it reflects progress towards the advancement of the movement of self-determination. In other words, unless

there is some foundation for the *Jumma* peoples of different linguistic groups within the region to protect their existence, how could they fight for their movement? It [the treaty] provided a real foundation for the movement for self-determination. This is an important achievement.

KC: Is it a milestone achievement for the movement?

JBL: Yes, you can say that.

KC: Is there any non-written verbal agreement of the CHT Peace Treaty?

JBL: Yes, there is. [...] One of the most important aspects of the unwritten agreement of the CHT Treaty is a respectable solution and resettlement of 500,000 Bengali-speaking Bengalis, the outsiders, who were brought into the CHT during the rules of General Ziaur Rahman and of General H. M. Ershad from different parts of the country. It was a “gentlemen’s agreement”, [which the government has denied flatly and not carried out]. Another one concerned the interim Regional Council to be constituted only with PCJSS leadership. Though it got implemented eventually, there was some hard bargaining and uncertainty about this as the government wanted us to include three members from the ruling party Awami League in the Regional Council; we had to accept this. These were two important unwritten agreements, the others I cannot remember now.

KC: Since 2001 the PCJSS has begun to participate in indigenous movements in the country, becoming part of the Bangladesh Adivasi Forum and other indigenous forums. The claims for the recognition of indigenous identity somehow overshadowed [the demand for the recognition of] *Jumma* identity of the hill peoples. [...] What I am trying to understand is the differences between the hill peoples and the other indigenous communities of Bangladesh.

JBL: Excluding the CHT, *Adivasi* is an [umbrella] term referring to the [ethnic] groups or peoples living in different parts of the country, though small in numbers. [...] In the context of Bangladesh, *Adivasi* is, in fact, a common identity for all [ethnic] groups who are not Bengalis. The government and Bengalis call these groups ‘tribes’ and at times, ‘ethnic’ or ‘small ethnic groups.’ [...] Bengalis too are an ethnic group, *Nrigosti!* Nonetheless, in the CHT, we are indigenous *Jumma* [in the broad sense of the term indigenous], but, in a narrow sense of the term, it is possible to say indigenous Chakma or indigenous Tripura, depending on the context. [...] Based on the United Nations’ definition of indigenous peoples or tribes, we prefer [to call ourselves] indigenous [...] and we can’t accept being labelled as ‘tribal’. This is a term for hatred. Though we sometimes use the term ‘ethnic minority’ in our writing, but nowadays we use ‘*Adivasi*’ or ‘indigenous peoples’ more often. The term tribal has no place among us. Anyhow, we have not abandoned the use of the term *Jumma* and the demands for its recognition.

KC: Given your answer, I am still wondering what the term indigenous peoples means in the context of the CHT or Bangladesh. Does it indigenous rights or recognition?

JBL: It means what it means in the ILO Conventions 107 or the modified ILO Conventions 169. Bangladesh did not ratify Convention 169, but only Convention 107. [So, we take it] in the spirit of Convention 107.

KC: Do not you think that the term indigenous peoples is a new umbrella term, that retains the connotation of the term tribe?

JBL: The point here is not the naming of the people; the important thing is the rights one gets and the extent to which all states follow the United Nations Declaration of Indigenous Rights and concede to them. Locally, we do not want [to be called] tribes; nor should the government continue to use this term.

KC: Are Bengalis indigenous?

JBL: No. Bengalis cannot be considered indigenous peoples. They cannot be [considered indigenous] according to the UN's definitions and/or declaration.

KC: What about me? Should I not be an indigenous Bengalis in Dinajpur? My father and great grandfather were born and died in Dinajpur District, Bangladesh, so why not?

JBL: Since you are a Bengali, you cannot be indigenous. [...] Even though you claim that your forefather was from Dinajpur, there was no Bengali ethnicity or Bengali nation in the [distant] past. The birth of Bengalis is very recent one. [...] Indigenous means the first people, and if you examine maps of Bangladesh, and [in particular] the Chittagong Hill Tracts, [Modhupur Tracts] and Barind Tracts or Varendra region in the north, they were forest lands and were never places where Bengalis had ever lived. The word 'Bengali' comes from the region, Banga: Banga, Bangal, and Bengali. If Bengalis behaved like subordinates or subjects we used to call them Bangal. [...] In our Chakma language when we call a Bengalis 'Bangal', we do not mean a rural person. Perhaps it becomes so because of our pronunciation of Bengalis.

KC: Anyhow, concerning the identification of main problems in the CHT, you often say that land is the main problem in the CHT conflict.

JBL: No. Land is one of the main problems. Our main problems are, [first], the protection of our national existence. The next problem is democracy – the representative system of government for the people in this region. The problem of land rights comes after that. The land problem is part of land rights. Political rights and the rights to self-rule should be the main problems, land isn't. We are losing our national existence because we do not have a democratic system of government [in the CHT].

KC: You know that 24 per cent of the CHT's total land area is reserved forest. So, what is your policy on environment or forest? What is your perspective on forest? Is it a resource? Or is it nature?

JBL: Forest is our life. Nature, Mountains, [and] hills all make up our ways of life. Therefore, you cannot separate forests from the lives of the hill peoples.

KC: Well. What I meant to ask is what is your perspective on what forest management is or should be?

JBL: Our perspective is that forests must or should be protected and developed. We should do whatever we need to do for achieving this. In fact, what we need for this is empowerment of Hill District Councils and that we do not have. If we had power, we would have a plan for forest protection, development, and plantation.

KC: What then would be your main policy or strategy?

JBL: Forests here have grown naturally. Therefore, on the one hand, we need natural forests, and on the other hand, we need planted forests. For plantation, in fact, the responsibility should go to people and that is very important. People have to be included. I certainly do not know the people who are working for the Forest Department, but I think they do have some expertise, knowledge and technologies. I think we should not do the things that Forest Department does, but we should take their technologies and keep the protection of forests in the hand of the people.

KC: Are you advocating for “social forestry”?

JBL: No. “Social” forestry is not what is going in the name of “social forestry” [as done by the Forest Department].

KC: What does social forestry mean to you then?

JBL: I mean our own [traditional] system of forest protection: village common forests, that is, VCFs. Generally, there are debates about *Jhum* cultivation. And given the changing reality of our present conditions, we cannot let *Jhum* cultivation carry on; we must reduce it through scientific management and rehabilitate the *Jhum* cultivators. [...] The government is not really doing these kinds of work in practice; they are doing them on paper. Who are destroying our forests? *Jhum* cultivation does not destroy forests directly, but the government, the individuals who are running the country, does that; the forest department is the main agent behind the destruction of the forests. So, we have to give the responsibility of the protection of forests to the local leadership vis-à-vis the local government representative so that it can be done at the level of the village, union, upzila (sub-district) or in the CHT.

KC: So, your strategy for “participatory forestry” is something along the lines of village common forests (VCFs). Would you then maintain reserved forests [in the CHT]?

JBL: No. We are not in favor of the reserved forests system, they are not necessary. Reserved forests are a foreign [system]; it is meant for [revenue] income in which they create forest resources and in turn earn revenue.

KC: I was wondering if you could say something about the claim that indigenous peoples are environmentalists.

JBL: [If that is the claim,] it has been said in very general terms because indigenous peoples give much importance to their forests, hills and biodiversity. Scientists are saying a country should have 25 per cent of forests for the maintenance of balance in [average yearly] rainfall. Where do indigenous peoples live? [They live] in and around hills and forests. Therefore, naturally, hills and forests are part of their life and their lives get entangled with [the place]. As a result, the knowledge that indigenous peoples have acquired is advanced. For example, a man from a city cannot understand this relation [and their] knowledge because he/she does not have any relationship with forests, hills and bio-diversity. The point is that the claim is correct if one says indigenous peoples are much more caring about the protection of forests or jungle, that is, in comparisons with others. [To put it simply, the claim] that indigenous people *are* environmentalists cannot be true.

KC: All right. [...] What I am trying to understand is the extent to which indigenous peoples and nature are synonymous as there are popular arguments that “if indigenous peoples survive, the forest will too.” Can indigenous peoples save forests [from complete peril and destruction]?

JBL: No. I do not agree with that. There are classes in indigenous societies too, and there are those among indigenous peoples who won't hesitate to destroy forests. There was so much trafficking of timber from our forests, and don't you think some indigenous peoples are involved in this too? [...] The lives of indigenous peoples here are also influenced by class divisions. If someone, whether he/she is indigenous or non-indigenous has progressive ideology, he/she would protect forests for the welfare of humanity and protest against wrongdoing, injustice, and corruption. Is it not [true] that among Bengalis there are those who understand [and care for the environment]? Conversely, there are also indigenous persons who can wipe out forests. [Anyhow], one reason for the popular argument is because indigenous peoples live in forests and even without formal education, they know experientially how to protect forests. For example, even if I was being asked [to manage forests], I could not do that because I have become urban, separated [from rural life]. Even then, I am full of joy when I see hills and/or forests because I am from [the CHT]. Similarly, when a person from the plains sees boundless rice fields, the sky above his head in the horizon and villages surrounding his villages, his mind would also fill with happiness. [...] And these are the facts of life. For example, when I was in jail, I used to dream of the hills never dreamt of a boundless rice field. The physical environment is part of the life of humans, and they are

enmeshed with each other and that can be termed as a “total environment”. Therefore, if you wish to say indigenous peoples are environmentalists, you can say this in the sense that they not only have a deep sentiment for the protection of bio-diversity, but they also have developed a spiritual relationship with the environment that is naturally different from that of the other living groups or people living in different physical environments.

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Notes

- ¹ In the official records of the government and PCJSS, J. B. Larma’s date of birth is shown as February 14, 1944.
- ² In both English and Bengali languages, the Mro is being spelled as Mru and at times, Murang, frequently resulting in confusion between this group and the Osie, a southern Tripura group. In part, this is because the Marma refer to the Mro as Mro and the Tripura group as Murang, whereas the Chakma and Tanchangya refer to the Mro as Murang. The Mro calls themselves the Murucha and refer to the Tripura group as Murun (for details see Chowdhury 2014, Appendix B).
- ³ The Bengali acronym BAKSAL stands for *Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League* (or Bangladesh Peasant-Worker People’s League), a political front comprising the Bangladesh Awami League, the Communist Party of Bangladesh, the National Awami Party (Mozaffar) and the Jatiyo League.
- ⁴ Headmen are the head of *Mouzas*, a collection of villages constituting revenue units at the bottom of civil administration under the traditional chiefs of the CHT. The position of headmen is hereditary in principle, but it is the chiefs who appoint headmen of the *Mouzas* under their jurisdiction, in consultation with the Deputy Commissioner(s) of the CHT (for details on administration of CHT, see Chowdhury 2014).

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