



CHETANA  
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF EDUCATION (CIJE)

Peer Reviewed/Refereed Journal

(ISSN: 2455-8729 (E) / 2231-3613 (P))

Impact Factor  
SJIF 2023 - 7.286



Prof. A.P. Sharma  
Founder Editor, CIJE  
(25.12.1932 - 09.01.2019)

## The Brutal Past of Rwanda

RENU KEER, *PhD*  
*Senior Assistant Professor*  
*Department of Political Science*  
*Atma Ram Sanatan Dharma College*  
*University of Delhi, Dhaula Kaun, New Delhi- 110021*  
*Mobile: 9211292686, 9810872863*

First draft received: 12.06.2023, Reviewed: 18.06.2023, Accepted: 26.06.2023, Final proof received: 30.06.2023

### Abstract

*Rwanda- known as the land of a thousand hills – appears to have witnessed the brutalist experience of genocide in 1994. While this genocide caused the vicious slaughter of up to one million defenceless children, women and men during a period of just three months, it was completely ignored by the extensively active players of international politics- the UN and the US, refusing to call it ‘genocide’. Given that, this paper examines the major causes of ethnic war in Rwanda in 1994- which is believed to be the one of the biggest genocides of the century. Moreover, it also highlights the brutal response of international community to it, ignoring to address the humanitarian crisis.*

**Keywords:** Rwanda, Ethnic Crisis, International Community etc.

### Introduction

Situated in the heart of Africa, Rwanda is a very small country in Central Africa and is located in the middle of the continent. Built in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century into a complex, unique and quasi-mythological land, it is bordered by Uganda to the north, Tanzania to the east, Burundi to the south and the Democratic Republic of Congo to the west<sup>i</sup>. It has five volcanoes, twenty-three lakes and numerous rivers, some forming the source of the River Nile<sup>ii</sup>. Having an area of only 26,338 Square Km, with mild, temperate and rather humid climate<sup>iii</sup>, it is a land favourable for human occupation with an average annual temperature of 18 degree Celsius and 900 mm to 1,600 mm of rainfall per year<sup>iv</sup>

Though it is a tiny country, it is considered to be the most densely populated nation in Africa<sup>v</sup>. As per the August 2012 Census, it has a population of approximately 12 million. Based on culture and language, the population was divided into three groups: the Hutus, the Tutsis and the Twa<sup>vi</sup>.



Source:[http://bachersblog.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/09/rwanda\\_map\\_nations-online-x600.jpg](http://bachersblog.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/09/rwanda_map_nations-online-x600.jpg)

It is a well-known fact that the most ancient inhabitants of the region have been the Twa- a small and marginal group, comprising only one percent of the current population and is primarily engaged in pottery and hunting<sup>vii</sup>. According to the CRS Report for Congress (2011), the Rwandan population is largely comprised of two ethnic groups: the Tutsis (about 14%), who had been the dominant political and economic force until 1961, and the majority Hutus (about 85%), who took power on independence in 1962. The origin of these two communities, and especially the Tutsis, has been disputed. However, there is a general assumption that the Tutsi might have originated from southern Ethiopia<sup>viii</sup>. On contrary, the cattle-rearing Tutsis had arrived in successive waves from the North during the 15th and 16th century, fleeing from there due to famine and drought<sup>ix</sup>. The Hutus who made up the vast majority of the population were peasants and cultivated the soil. Hutus had a habit for farming and the Tutsis were cattle breeders<sup>x</sup>. Nevertheless, the Tutsis were able to pursue both the professions- they were soil cultivators like Hutus and hunters like Twas. The Tutsis were extremely tall and thin having sharp angular facial features with lighter skin<sup>xi</sup>. Hutus were generally short and possessed dark skin<sup>xii</sup>.

It might not be difficult to accept that Rwanda is considered to be one of the poorest nations of sub-Saharan Africa, primarily rely on subsistence agriculture to survive<sup>xiii</sup>. However, the economy is bolstered by exports of tea and coffee<sup>xiv</sup>. Similarly, Rwanda has made progress in developing national and local government institutions, maintaining security, promoting reconciliation, and strengthening the justice system<sup>xv</sup>. Before we touch upon the genesis of the Rwanda crisis, it is quite imperative to have a look at the history of ethnic division in the region.

### **Ethnicity in Rwanda: Origin and Evolution**

As Rwanda has had a long history of ethnic division, racial prejudice was a structural feature of Rwandan society. Due to this, undoubtedly, the Tutsi minority and the Hutu majority have always had disagreements over their ethnic identities and power accumulation<sup>vi</sup>. This has presented many challenges to the notion of the co-existence of ethnic groups in Rwanda<sup>vii</sup>. For decades, Rwanda suffered from periodic ethnic clashes in which hundreds of thousands of Rwandans died<sup>viii</sup>. The ethnic rivalry and contention between Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda reached far back in the history of the country<sup>ix</sup>. The racial and ethnic division between Hutus and Tutsis started from Belgian colonization at the turn of the 20th century<sup>x</sup>. However, prior to this, Rwanda happened to be completely free of foreign intrusion<sup>xi</sup>. It came under Belgian colonialism in 1916<sup>xii</sup>. Beginning in 1885, European colonial powers established control over majority of African nations<sup>xiii</sup>. In 1899, Rwanda became a German colony and, in 1919, after the end of World War First and defeat of Germany, the system of indirect rule continued with Rwanda as a mandate territory of the League of Nations, under Belgium<sup>xiv</sup>.

Various evidences demonstrate that before the arrival of Belgian rule, Rwanda was a monarchy dominated by Tutsi king<sup>xv</sup>. Hence, the minority Tutsis enjoyed a

position of dominance in the pre-colonial society<sup>xvi</sup>. Though, there has been a long history of differences and conflicts between the Hutus and the Tutsis, the ethnic and cultural disputes became more visible in Rwanda after rule by the Belgians<sup>xvii</sup>. The Belgians discovered that two groups of people shared the land<sup>xviii</sup>. So, they tried to divide the Rwanda society on the basis of their ethnic and cultural differences<sup>xxix</sup>. They treated the minority Tutsis far better than the majority Hutus<sup>xxx</sup>. They considered Tutsis superior than Hutus and gave them special privileges. The colonists politicized the racial differences between Hutus and Tutsis, characterizing Tutsis as civilized and Hutus as the inferior race<sup>xxxi</sup>. "To divide and conquer" was a common colonial device that worked in Rwanda in favour of Belgian rule and the Tutsis<sup>xxxii</sup>. Subsequently, it contributed to boost the ethnic enmity between the Hutus and Tutsis. The Tutsis- being the beneficiaries of the Belgian rule- obviously, welcomed this idea. For the next 20 years, Tutsis enjoyed better jobs and educational opportunities in Rwanda than their neighbours Hutus. This, undeniably, contributed to the surge of ethnic contradictions and conflicts in Rwanda.

Nevertheless, with the end of the World War Second, many African nations struggled for their independence from the colonial rule and Rwanda was also one of them. The more educated and prosperous Tutsis who were minority controlled and remained in power for a long time under the Belgian rule, led the Rwandans struggle for independence from Belgian rule<sup>xxxiii</sup>. Subsequently, the Rwanda accomplished independence in 1962 from the Belgian colonialism<sup>xxxiv</sup>. Since the Tutsis took part in this freedom struggle at a large scale, the Belgians became angry with them and started favoring the Hutus<sup>xxxv</sup>. They provided military and political aid to the Hutus, enabling a new elite of Hutu leaders to replace the privileged position of the ruling Tutsis<sup>xxxvi</sup>. Thus, in the aftermath of colonial rule in Rwanda, Hutus became the dominating power of Independent Rwanda<sup>xxxvii</sup>. The First Republic, under President Gregoire Kayibanda and the second, under President Juvenal Habyarimana, institutionalized discrimination against Tutsi and subjected them to periodic massacres<sup>xxxviii</sup>.

### **The Origin of the Crisis**

While the Rwanda genocide began in 1994 in the wake of President Juvenal Habyarimana's death in mysterious plane Crash<sup>xxxix</sup>, the root of this human tragedy can be found in the early twentieth century and Belgian colonial rule<sup>xl</sup>. As previously discussed, Rwanda had been a victim of colonialism and Belgium had been the last colonial power in Rwanda<sup>xli</sup>. After accomplishing its independence in 1962, the Hutus- the least advantaged group and a majority came into the power<sup>xlii</sup>. Consequently, they seized the opportunity to take their revenge from Tutsis by murdering about 15000 Tutsis between 1959 and 1962. From 1959, Tutsi were targeted, causing hundreds of thousands of deaths and sending almost two million of them into exile<sup>xliii</sup>. Over the next decade, a series of violent programs further targeted the Tutsi population of Rwanda<sup>xliv</sup>, forcing almost 100,000 Tutsis to flee to neighboring countries such as Uganda and Burundi

and Zaire<sup>xlv</sup>. Tutsis who did not run away from Rwanda paid a high price for that, losing their wealth and deteriorating to a low social status.

In 1973, Major General Juvenal Habyarimana, a Hutu regime came to power and began a twenty years dictatorship<sup>xlvi</sup>. He discriminated against the Tutsis systematically and led to a degree of stability in Rwanda<sup>xlvii</sup>. In such environment- the expulsion and persecution of country's Tutsis put permanent seeds for the future civil war<sup>xlviii</sup>. Fueled by the continuous oppression in Rwanda and harsh treatment by host countries, Rwandan refugees in exile, specifically the Tutsi, who fled to the neighbouring countries like Uganda formed the Rwandese Alliance for National Unity (RANU) in 1979. Their aim was to mobilize Tutsis against divisive politics of Hutu regime and genocide ideology, repeated massacres, statelessness and the lack of peaceful political exchange in Rwandan society. In 1987, RANU transformed into the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF)<sup>xlix</sup>. The RPF was supported by moderate Hutus, aiming to overthrow the President Juvenal Habyarimana regime and his Hutu political party- the National Revolutionary Movement for Democracy (MNRD)- from the government. In fact, they did everything possible to attain the power, securing Tutsis' right to return to their homeland<sup>l</sup>. Therefore, on October 1, 1990, the RPF, a rebel group composed mostly of Tutsi refugees invaded in northern Rwanda from Uganda in order to defeat the Hutu led government and the civil war escalated<sup>li</sup>. It ultimately ousted the dictatorship in 1994 and ended the genocide of more than one million Tutsi and massacres of moderate Hutus who opposed the genocide<sup>lii</sup>.

### International Community and Rwanda

In the early 1993, the UN Secretary General drew attention to the tragedy befalling Rwanda. In June, the UN Security Council passed resolution 846 authorizing a UN Observer Mission Uganda-Rwanda (UNOMUR)- a classic peacekeeping operation, a confidence building exercise designed to encourage the belligerents to get to serious business of peace which began operations in July with approximately a hundred military and civilian personnel<sup>liii</sup>. Its primary task was to ensure that no military assistance reached the Rwandan rebels- the RPF- across the Uganda border<sup>liv</sup>. In August 1993, with the assistance of the UN, a peace agreement referred as the Arusha Peace Accords was signed between in Arusha, Tanzania, to establish power sharing between the MNRD and the RPF, and 24 countries committed troops to the UN presence in Rwanda<sup>lv</sup>.<sup>1</sup> It was a set of

five accords prepared and signed under negotiation organized by the US, France and the Organization of African Unity (OAU)<sup>lvi</sup>. The agreement had called for the balance of power in Rwanda to be held by new smaller parties that were willing to recognize the RPF's political stakes in Rwanda<sup>lvii</sup>. Moreover, the accords sought to end Hutu political hegemony over the Tutsi, integrate thousands of Tutsi exiles into Rwandan society and democratize the Rwandan government, which had been dominated for over 20 years by an elite group of Hutus<sup>lviii</sup>. This was a time when Rwanda had just finished a civil war and the enemies signed a peace agreement<sup>lix</sup>. Nevertheless, the Hutu extremists opposed the power sharing arrangement with the Tutsis<sup>lx</sup>. Also, they envisioned Rwanda as having a broad-based international government<sup>lxi</sup>. Unfortunately, the UNOMUR mandate to prevent weapons from entering the country did little to abate human suffering. Consequently, in October 1993, the Security Council adopted resolution 872 in authorizing an international peacekeeping force known as the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) of some 2500 military personnel, commanded by a Canadian general- Romeo Dallaire<sup>lxii</sup> to oversee implementation of the Arusha accord<sup>lxiii</sup>.

The MNRD and the Committee for the Defense of the Republic (CDR), an extremist faction, joined together and refused to participate in the negotiated power sharing<sup>lxiv</sup>. They began organizing small militia groups. On the evening of April 6, 1994 unknown assailants shot down President Juvenal Habyarimana's plane while it was preparing to land at the international airport on the outskirts of Kigali as President Habyarimana was returning from peace talk in Arusha, Tanzania<sup>lxv</sup>. He died in the crash with members of his inner circle of advisors and the President of Burundi, Cyprien Ntaryamira<sup>lxvi</sup>. Shortly after the incident, the Rwandan military and Hutu militia known as the Interhamwe began to systematically massacre Tutsis and moderate Hutu opposition members<sup>lxvii</sup>. In 1994, a government-sponsored campaign of genocide targeted Rwanda's Tutsi minority for extermination. Over the course of little more than 100 days, between 507000 and 850000 Tutsi were killed alongside about 30000 members of Rwanda's Hutu majority<sup>lxviii</sup>. The NRMD barricaded Kigali airport so that the UNAMIR observers could not investigate the wreckage. It blamed the RPF for shooting down the plane, and then called for retaliation against all Tutsis<sup>lxix</sup>. Thus, the low intensity civil war between the Hutus and Tutsis was followed by the shooting down of President Habyariman's aircraft and transformed into an atrocious genocide<sup>lxx</sup>. In the course of a year, the country moved from a peace agreement through political stagnation to assassinations, massacre, civil war and ultimately, genocide<sup>lxxi</sup>. Atwood (1994) in his report to US Agency for International Development claims that the international community has never been

<sup>1</sup> In 1993, after several failed efforts, the RPF and the government of Rwanda reached an agreement in Tanzania. It was a comprehensive and wide-ranging peace agreement, which aimed to provide political, military and constitutional Reforms in Rwanda. They were meant to bring a peaceful resolution to the conflict that pitted the Hutu government of President Juvenal Habyarimana against the Tutsi led RPF. This peace agreement was the result of fourteen months of negotiations and mediation by the Tanzanian government, in conjunction with the OAU and the governments of France, Belgium and the US to end the

three year civil war in which approximately 10000 people had been killed. See, Wage and Haigh (2004). The talks began on July 12, 1992, and lasted until June 24, 1993, with a final week-long meeting in Rwanda, July 19 to July 25, 1993 (Uvin 1997).

faced with a refugee crisis of such proportions in such a short period of time<sup>lxxii</sup>.

Habyarimana's death created a power vacuum that was felt instantly and gave the Hutus an opportunity for violence based on calls for revenge<sup>lxxiii</sup>. This led to the brutal slaughter of up to one million defenceless children, women and men during a three months period<sup>lxxiv</sup>. One million killed, mutilated bodies floating in lakes and rivers, but despite all this the aftermath of the genocide has received relatively little attention<sup>lxxv</sup>. Roughly, three- quarter of the Tutsi population in the country died along with thousands of Hutus who opposed the killings, making it the swiftest genocide in history<sup>lxxvi</sup>. As per the USAID Report (1994), of Rwanda's pre- crisis population of 8 million, 500,000 have been massacred and almost were refugee or internally displaced. Almost 800000 people (one-tenth of the population) were slaughtered in a period of a few weeks, while as many as 250000 to 500000 women were raped and half the population forcibly displaced; and in Bosnia-Herzegovina there were some 250000 deaths, between 20000 and 50000 rapes, and 2.7 million people in need of assistance<sup>lxxvii</sup>. People were dying of dehydration, malnutrition, exhaustion and cholera. They lost most basic of life's necessities like food, water, sanitary facilities and shelter<sup>lxxviii</sup>. Moreover, people were drifting through the city in search of food as mortar and heavy machine guns fire rained down on them throughout the day and into the night<sup>lxxix</sup>.

### Conclusion

The Rwanda Genocide was not an accidental phenomenon. Rather, it was a deliberative campaign by Hutus extremists to assassinate the Tutsi minority population (Cohen 2007). Nevertheless, the Hutu controlled media also fuelled the conflict between Tutsis and Hutus and generated incitements to genocide (Lemarchand 1998: 4). Media were used in Rwanda to spread hatred, to dehumanize people, and even to guide the genocidaries towards their victims (Thompson 2006). Moreover, the hate media organ in Rwanda, through their journalists, broadcasters and media executives played an instrumental role in laying the groundwork for genocide, and then actively participated in the extermination campaign (Thompson 2006). The local media, particularly the extremist radio station- Television Libre des Milles Collines (RTL) were literally part of the genocide. The genocidaries used media like weapon (Dallaire 2007: 12 and Mark 1994: 19). Radio Mille Collines, the Hutu extremist radio station, named ethnic Tutsis the target (Power 2013: 330).

In July 1994, the Tutsi led RPF won the civil war and seized power in Rwanda (Reyntjens 2004 and Dallaire 2007: 12). As per the CRS Report for Congress (2011), the RPF took over power in July 1994 and later formed a coalition government. This led to an end to the four year-long civil war in the Rwandan nation. This was seen by many as a victory of good over evil and the succession of a bloody dictatorship by a decent government (Reyntjens 2006). When a new government was put in place on 19 July 1994, the RPF reaffirmed its commitment to the terms and the spirit of the Arusha accord and the logic of power sharing it

contained (Reyntjens 2006 and Uvin 2001). The new government began to broadcast conciliatory messages

---

i (CRS Report for Congress 2011)

ii <sup>ii</sup> Republic of Rwanda Report/  
<http://www.gov.rw/Geography>

iii (Prunier 1995)

iv (Prunier 1995).

v (Spalding 2009, Dallaire 2003 and May 1995)

vi Prunier 1995 and Mirzoeff 2005).

vii (Uvin 1992).

viii (Prunier1995: 16)

ix (Uvin 1997)

x According to White (2009),

xi (Prunier 1995)

xii (Dallaire 2003)

xiii CRS Report for Congress 2011, Goose and Symth 1994, and Spalding 2009)

xiv (Spalding 2009)

xv (US Department of States 2013)

xvi (Wage and Haigh 2004)

xvii (Uvin 1997: 92)

xviii(CRS Report for Congress 2011).

xix (Wage and Haigh (2004)

xx (Barna II 2012: 42)

xxi (Prunier 1995)

xxii (Wage and Haigh 2004)

xxiii (Spalding 2009)

xxiv (Republic of Rwanda Report and Spalding 2009) See,  
<http://www.gov.rw/History>

xxv (Uvin 1997: 92)

xxvi (Calpham 1998)

xxvii (Bharthapudi 2012 and Mirzoeff 2005)

xxviii (Dallaire 2003: 47)

xxix (Mirzoeff 2005: 37)

xxx (Verwimp 2004: 233)

xxxi (Bharthapudi 2012)

xxxii (Wage and Haigh 2004 and Makinda 1996)

xxxiii (Wage and Haigh 2004)

xxxiv (Heusch 1995)

- 
- xxxv (Verwimp 2004: 233)
- xxxvi (Verwimp 2004: 233, Goose and Symth 1994)
- xxxvii (CRS Report for Congress 2011)
- xxxviii (Republic of Rwanda Report and Verwimp 2004) See, <http://www.gov.rw/History>
- xxxix (Zacarias 1996)
- xl (Dallaire 2003)
- xli (Heusch 1995)
- xlii (Heusch 1995)
- xliii See, <http://www.gov.rw/History>
- xliv (Dallaire 2003)
- xlv (Dallaire 2003)
- xlvi (Wage and Haigh 2004, and Dallire 2003)
- xlvii (Wage and Haigh 2004, and Dallire 2003)
- xlviii (Dallaire 2003)
- xlix (Republic of Rwanda Report) See, <http://www.gov.rw/History>
- <sup>1</sup> (Wage and Haigh 2004, and Lyon 2005: 271-272, and Verwimp 2004)
- li (CRS Report for Congress 2011 and Bharthapudi 2012)
- lii Republic of Rwanda Report
- liii (Dallaire 2003)
- liv (Dallaire and Poulin 1995, and Lyon 2005: 271-272)
- lv (Lyon 2005: 271/ 272 and CRS Report for Congress 2011)
- lvi (Wage and High 2004)
- lvii (Bharthapudi 2012)
- lviii (Wage and Haigh 2004)
- lix (Dallaire 2007: 12)
- lx (Thompson 2007)
- lxi (Coicaud 2007)
- lxii Romeo Dallaire is a retired Lieutenant- General. He led the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) to help implement the Arusha accord. As a commander of the UNAMIR, he was able to watch what was exactly happening in Rwanda.
- lxiii (Dallaire and Poulin 1995, Makinda 1996, and Thompson 2007)
- lxiv (Thompson 2007)
- lxv (Holzgreffe 2003: 15 and Power 2013: 328)
- lxvi (Burnet 2012 and Meltz 1997 a)
- lxvii (Power 2013 and Metlz 1997 a)
- lxviii (McDoom 2012)
- lxix (Lyon 2005: 271/ 272)
- lxx (Reyntjens 2004)
- lxxi (Dallaire 2007: 12)
- lxxii (US Agency for International Development 1994)
- lxxiii (Reyntjens 2006: 272)
- lxxiv (Uvin 1997)
- lxxv (Waugh 2004)
- lxxvi (Burnet 2012)
- lxxvii Weiss (2007: 15)
- lxxviii (Atwood statement to USAID 1994)
- lxxix Hubamd (1994: 19)