

## Micro-Minority and Negotiated Lives in a Deadly Conflict Society: a case Study Of Sikhs in Pattani<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

The three southernmost provinces of Thailand have been a “deadly conflict society,” extending over 15 years. In this area there are fewer than 40 members in the Sikh micro-minority, who coexist with 1.9 million Malay Muslims – the largest majority in the area. Out of the entire population, 89% are Muslims, 10% are Buddhists, and 1% are “Christians and others”. The Sikhs are counted as “others” among the micro-minorities. The key question is how do Sikhs — as a micro-minority — exist amongst the deadly conflict and tension between the other groups? With their differences in ethnicity and religion, as well as the rumor of Muslims intending to eradicate others from the southernmost provinces, a former Muslim empire. This research aims to study through the lens and daily life of a Sikh woman, examining how Sikh people negotiate for survival in the deadly conflict society between the Muslim majority and Buddhist minority in the southernmost provinces, while nationally the Buddhists are the majority and Muslims the minority. The study employs an integrated qualitative approach combining literature, field research, and in-depth interviews. The research findings suggest that being a micro-minority is not an obstacle to existence for the Sikh population. On the contrary, Sikhs use their status as a micro-minority to build negotiating power in society through social interaction in business, converting private homes into public spaces to generate power to negotiate lives. This also includes using the potential power within for their source of authority as community leaders and peace advocates in Women in Faith for Peace. These are peaceful and powerful ways for the Sikh micro-minority in Pattani to negotiate their lives.

**Keywords:** Ethno-religious identity, power of micro-minority, negotiated life, Sikhs, southernmost provinces

### Introduction

The widely perceived association in Thailand between Muslims and “violence” and their stigmatized generalization as separatists and insurgents (Salamat, 2006) are perhaps similar to views and accusations in India where Sikhs are seen as

religious extremists, fundamentalists, separatists, insurgents, political extremists, and violent (Sripokangul, 2015). However, Sripokangul raises a crucial point by asking us to consider their history through the religious framework they use both in their day to day life and against injustice, to bring us to a greater understanding of the Sikhs

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from a viewpoint of “rationality” as an offender, and of “tragedy” as a victim. Even so, despite the negative views towards the Sikhs, Sripokangul points to many pieces of evidence which reflect various peaceful approaches to resistance and negotiation by the Sikhs. This research presents the negotiation employed by the Sikhs, a micro-minority which lives amidst a deadly conflict and close to the Muslim majority of the southernmost provinces. In fact, there are fewer than 40 members in the Sikh micro-minority, who coexist with 1.9 million Malay Muslims – the majority in the area. Out of the entire population, 89% are Muslims, 10% are Buddhists, and 1% are Christians and others. The Sikhs are counted as others among the 1%. However, even though Sikhs are very few in numbers, one Sikh woman’s role is outstanding especially in negotiating among the Muslim majority and other larger minorities in that area. It is noteworthy that the life negotiation of this Sikh woman is not only for her survival, but also, the author believes, for a desired negotiation platform as an attempt to create peace in her hometown.

### **Deadly Conflict Society in the Deep South**

The deadly conflict in the Deep South of Thailand erupted and lasted for a full 15 years by January 4, 2019, causing countless injuries and deaths. The 15-year statistics from Deep South Watch between 2005-2018 show 20,163 incidents with 6,921 deaths and 13,511 injured victims (TNN, January 11, 2019). It is undeniable that the new uprising in 2004 was a resistance of the largest minority in the country that had previously used peaceful means (Che Man, 2004 translated by Nuanpien, 2008). However, there was no response from the state until the eruption in 2004 which has continued until now. One condition demanded by the Muslim minority of the nation – which is the majority of the Deep South – is to preserve

their ethnic and religious identity, which is deeply connected to this area as a source of pride in their Muslim identity and homeland. This may be similar to the goals of the Sikh resistance, as Sikhs and inhabitants of Pattani, wish to remain in the area they call ‘home’ and to be a part of restoring the peaceful environment as it used to be.

### **Sikh in Pattani Society**

Some have explained the arrival of Sikhs into Thailand through the relationship between trade and the monarchy. Sikh merchants from Punjab, India, came to trade in Bangkok during the reign of King Rama V after his visit to India in 1872. They first settled down with their businesses in the Pahurat area, then later built the Gurdwara Siri Guru Singh Subha Temple (Kamwang, 2013). The Sikh population in Thailand, whilst numbering under 100,000, may be less than 1% of the entire population of the country. Their way of life focuses on trading as a profession, moving throughout different provinces in small groups. According to statistics, there are 40 Sikhs in the Deep South, with one Sikh temple in Yala (There are about 10 Sikh households in Yala) where they gather during special celebrations. However, since the insurgency in 2005, the Sikhs have not been gathering as they used to, though they remain in contact. When mentioning the Sikhs in Pattani, one may look at or speak of an elderly woman with a pronounced nose, a hair-bun, with elegant stature and vitality, who owns an old fabric shop that has always been open for Pattani people for very many years. She usually drives herself around to be with peace activists in the Deep South. Sometimes, she appears with her dark, tall son who looks very similar to her. Recently her daughter can also be seen, having just moved back to help at a new fabric shop near the mosque in downtown Pattani. The Sikh database in Pattani shows only 2 families (The other family has a

curtain business and does not have as much social role in public space.) that still remain in the area. It is interesting that the Sikh woman appears in a public space and plays a significant role in peace advocacy on behalf of Women in Faith for Peace under the Religions for Peace Inter-Religious Council of Thailand.

### **How Sikhs Exist amidst Deep South Insurgency**

After the initial insurgency, the rumor that people who are not Malay-Muslims would be driven out continued to spread, while Muslims also moved downtown to conduct business. Chinese and Buddhists, who used to be the main vendors in the business district, started to disappear, in contrast to the increasing number of Muslim vendors. The decline of Chinese and Buddhists in the area is partly due to the violence, and partly due to moving out of the area (Sakolnakorn et al., 2012). The decline of the non-Muslim population also included the Christians. The dissertation of Narkurairattana (2013) shows evidence and findings from anthropological field research that, prior to 2004, the Catholics in the Deep South were in greater numbers than in 2012. Some remaining Catholics said, "This is home. I don't know where to move to." Some said, "We actually can still live here. If we stay low-key, the Muslim majority should leave us alone. In fact, when we first came here, we were helped by the Muslims." (Interview, Cited in Narkurairattana, 2013, p.202).

However, after 2004, a number of Catholics started to move out of the area or sent their children away for safety concerns. Some said:

"I can't stay, because the Muslims don't eat at non-Muslim shops. In fact, previously they used to be the main customers. Our menu has no pork dishes. Only seafood,

chicken, and things the Muslims can eat. Lately, they don't come at all." (Dee, interview, 5 December 2009).

"Before, the students from Prince of Songkla University would come after class. The shop was packed. I couldn't toast the bread fast enough. Now? They are taught to not buy from non-Muslim shops. I'm doing nothing. I probably need to find a new job, but I don't know what to do. I'm retired and old. But if I don't do anything, what do I eat?" (Kok, interview, 9 December 2009).

These voices from the catholic micro-minority are some examples of the negotiation challenges that micro-minority people face in an area dictated by deadly violence amongst the Muslim majority. This raises the question of other micro-minority groups, such as the Sikhs, who are in even smaller numbers than the Catholics. Both are micro-minorities when compared to the majority of the population in the area – Malay-Muslims and Buddhists, respectively, and all of them are diverse in terms of religion and ethnicity. However, the purpose of this research focuses on the Sikh micro-minority and their way of life, source of power, platforms, and the means they use to negotiate effectively, both in terms of negotiating to live with their identity and dignity, as well as negotiating to participate in peace building for society.

### **Objective**

This research aims to examine the understanding of micro-minority politics and to understand the approaches and practices of authorities towards micro-minority groups with diversity in religion and culture. It also aims to propose a new angle of analysis by using spiritual feminism theory to explain the peaceful life negotiation by Sikh women to exist with their identity and dignity, and to participate in peace building amidst the deadly

conflicted society in the Deep South of Thailand.

### **Research Assumption**

1. Micro-minority people with diversity in religion, ethnicity, and culture create platforms, power, and power operations in negotiating their lives in spite of being a micro-minority. As individuals, they create the power of negotiation from their power within, both pre-existing and newly produced from the source of Sikhism.

2. Micro-minority politics plays a role in convincing the majority that the micro-minority poses no threat that challenges the authority of the majority. Thus, they are not suspected or monitored when they negotiate for acceptance to co-exist with the majority in the area amidst deadly conflict in their daily life.

3. Sikhism is an essential source of power within, which cultivates a Sikh woman to tap into the potential of using her power to negotiate to exist with her identity and dignity through peaceful means, as well as through interactions in her privately-owned shop. Her business, however, is a crucial factor that functions as a platform for public interaction and builds negotiating power through the merchandise sold in her shop. In effect, it invites the Muslim majority along with other minority groups to interact and negotiate with her.

4. The perspective of spiritual feminism on power within and the perspective on micro - minority politics, complement each other in explaining life negotiation amidst a surrounding context that seems hopeless and with no solution. Nonetheless, the power within and being a micro-minority member enables the user of the power within to powerfully create platforms for negotiation without inserting authority or violence.

### **Methodology**

This qualitative research employs mixed methods, combining relevant documentary research and field research with non-participant observation and in-depth interviews with consent from the sources to ensure complete data. Occasionally, participant-observation is also applied in the research.

### **Theories and Framework of Analysis**

This research uses the framework of micro-minority politics (Narkurairattana, 2012, 2013, 2017) that produces the power of life negotiation through peaceful means, to exist in a deadly conflict society amongst the majority with diversity in religion and culture. It also applies the concept that the power operations of micro-minority people can create structural change, as stated by Appadurai (2006) and Goldfarb (2006). Appadurai discloses how power, when used by a small number of people, can control and change the rules of the world – such as an operation that generated intense fear almost to the point of insanity through the hijacking of the planes that crashed into the World Trade Center in the U.S.A. The aftermath was that security regulations changed entirely around the globe. A clear example is that the world held the fear that some micro-minority group would conduct deadly attacks. Therefore, new anti-terrorism measures were enforced on people in their own countries who were not micro-minorities, an example to show the power of the smallest of minorities – a single individual – to make decisions and act with autonomy. However, the example used by Appadurai above points out the power exercised by a minority group through violent means which violates world peace. Such a way of exercising power deserves no legitimation. Nonetheless, Appadurai's extreme example indicates that, in fact, even a very small number of people can also create negotiating power with those in greater numbers. The power exercised by minorities is powerful and more legitimate because of its peaceful

means, as explained by Goldfarb (2006). This shows that great changes in the world can start with a small step, by a small group of people, through their operations in daily life. This may start within private space, which later becomes public space in society. Goldfarb elaborates that the “power of small things” takes place when people are willing to have conversations as equals, revealing their diversity. They must be ready to develop their capability to share activities in a “space” that enables “free and equal interactions”. Then, power is created through the activities that they share, such as, spontaneous conversations in the kitchen of an illegal bookstore, selling banned books where academics or activists of the same cause meet, exchanging books, and discussing politics (cited in Narkurairattana, 2013, p.71).

In their general perception, some groups of people might be familiar with the old understanding that minority people have no negotiating power with the people of the majority, especially through peaceful means. It is, perhaps, because of the ways in the past in which micro-minorities shook and drew attention from the majority through violence, expressing rage by destructive means. The 9/11 incident is a good example of this, when a handful of people crashed airplanes into the World Trade Center in the U.S.A.

In other areas, the resistance of racial and religious minorities against larger groups is usually undertaken through violence to negotiate for something they want. For example, in the South of the Philippines there is the resistance of the Moro-Muslim minority people in religion and politics, or even the uprising against the state in the Deep South of Thailand which, in total, has continued for over half a decade (Strategic Nonviolence Committee, 2018; Satha-anand, 2006). This does not mean that peaceful resistance by micro-minority people is impossible to achieve. The work by Pickering (2003) is a crucial piece of evidence which demonstrates the peaceful resistance of a Christian, negotiating life to

coexist with the majority amidst deadly conflict between religion, and culture. This was the Bosnia-Herzegovina civil war involving 3 states and the religions of the different populations and their struggle for power. The Catholic minority was pulled into the conflict, except one Catholic woman named Vera. Pickering examined the case and found a powerful way of life negotiation that allowed Vera to be recognized and coexist without losing her identity and her Catholic faith. She befriended the Muslim majority around herself (cited in Narkurairattana, 2013, pp.76-78), which is a Catholic teaching how to love your neighbor as yourself. In fact, Vera was well aware that socializing and interacting within the same minority group was not beneficial for coexisting with the majority. Hence, befriending the majority is both a means and end in itself (Pickering, 2003, p.266; 2007, p.111).

However, Vera’s negotiation as a micro-minority person of religion began after the deadly conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina had ended, while this research focuses on the negotiating methods taking place as the deadly conflict in the Deep South still continues. The research emphasizes the methods of life negotiation, not only in the sense of preserving a Sikh identity amongst a differing majority dictated by deadly violence, but also in the sense of how the micro-minority group produces negotiating power in society as part of peace building in the Deep South. Most people are familiar with having power over others that comes with a majority. Very few recognize that great power can operate through a micro-minority which has not even been seen or acknowledged. The dissertation of Narkurairattana (2013) explored a case study of the Catholic micro-minority in the Deep South. However, the Sikh population is even smaller. Therefore, another objective of this research is to test the assumption that an individual is able to create negotiating power with the majority society without using violence, but rather with power within. An American spiritual

feminist and peace advocate, (Starhawk, 1999 cited in Khuankaew, 2008, pp.24, 29-30), has categorized power as being of 3 types – power over, power sharing, and power within. Starhawk points out that power within can be developed and, under fear, injustice, and obstacles, is used as a peaceful means to respond to these situations. Power within is wisdom, determination, courage, love, self-confidence, forgiveness, hope, virtue, etc. These qualities are the essence that the micro-minority – the Sikh population in Pattani – uses to negotiate with the power over from the Muslim and Buddhist groups in the area, respectively. Turning private space into a space for public interaction is to integrate the micro-minority, who are so small in number that they cannot be counted in percentages, into society and offers value to gain negotiating power, as seen in the concept presented by Goldfarb (2006).

## Results

By doing a field survey in the three southernmost provinces, it was found that there are approximately 40 Sikhs living in that area since before 2004. Most of them have their own businesses. After the 2004 violent incident, it is hard to see the Sikhs' role in social space. "Indeed, we need just only to save our lives and continue doing our business for survival" said a Sikh businessman, while another kept quiet when I asked them the same question. There is only one Sikh woman in Pattani who plays a significant role in leading the local market community. Compared to other women from other ethno - religious groups, this lady is totally different, especially in how she negotiates her life as a woman, an Indian-Thai Sikh, and a community leader who wants not only to survive but also be a peacebuilder for her hometown. The research into the negotiating lives of the Sikh micro-minority in Pattani through the example of a 71-year-old Sikh woman finds that:

## 1. Negotiated Lives on Religion

For Sikhs, the faith in their religion can be seen in the holy ceremony called "Amrit Sanskar" or the baptism ceremony where they take a vow of faith to become a good Sikh. The ceremony began systematically during the time of Guru Gobind Singh, the 10th prophet (Sripokangul, 2015). The ceremony might be unfamiliar to Thai society, as the Sikhs are generally a micro-minority in the country and the Sikh ceremonies are almost unknown to Thai society, whose culture, belief, and practice system have platforms mainly in the ceremonies of Theravada Buddhism. Chitragoh shared the precepts that the Sikhs have to strictly uphold. However, in a Muslim-majority society that does not provide a platform for minority groups like Sikhs to practice their religious faith, they do not have the liberty to engage in their religious practices as they should. She said:

"My father didn't take the Amrit to be baptized into the Sikh faith. But he didn't take it only because, among the Muslims, he wouldn't be able to practice what the vow would demand of him. He said that not taking a vow is still better than taking a vow and not committing to it. That would be a greater sin than tuning down the Amrit." (Interview, January 26, 2019).

When the deadly conflict started, negotiating life with religion became more difficult. The gathering at the Sikh temple in Yala became very quiet; even though the recent conflict does not violate the temple grounds, nobody could guarantee safety. Chitragoh shared a memory imprinted in her mind:

"Before the conflict, I would go to the temple in Yala. Since 2005, I rarely go. There was an explosion in the temple a long time

ago, 40-50 years back in my father's time. I had only one child back then. There was a kidnapping. There was PULO. The explosion injured and handicapped the Sikhs. It happened when the service was about to end. (I remember it because one of the injured victim had the same name as my father, Rakbisingh)." (Interview, January 26, 2019).

Negotiating life to maintain the Sikh identity has higher costs due to her moral integrity demanding that she practise according to her religion's teachings. For example, attending the temple and prayer on the birthdays of the 10 prophets. "I'd go to Bangkok, if I have a chance. Mostly I attend the birthdays of the 1st and the 10th prophets. In June, I attend the memorial service of the prophets." (Interview, January 26, 2019).

## **2. Negotiation Micro-Minority Beliefs with the Majority**

As the largest majority in the Deep South, the Muslim influence on culture and society penetrates almost every dimension. The platform of negotiation for micro-minority people, on the surface, may seem hopeless. For Chitragoh, it certainly does not appear so. She sees room for negotiation to coexist in the society, because:

"I can be here simply because the Malays here don't care about other religions, not what others believe in, not what others regard as holy – nothing at all. I've asked them. They said, their religion forbids them to learn about other religions. They don't learn even about their colleagues that have been working in the same shop for years. I myself am quite strict about beef. We don't have any beef in the

shop. It's forbidden for us. A Muslim acquaintance wanted to give some beef to their son who worked in my shop. I had to refuse. They asked, why not? I replied by asking, 'if I pass pork to you to give to someone, would you take it?' This is something they're not interested in learning or caring about with others who are non-Muslim." (Interview, January 26, 2019)

Not everything can be negotiated. There are foods she can eat – fish and chicken. However, she has food concerns as well:

"Strictly speaking, I cannot eat chicken slaughtered by Muslims. The Sikh principles demand the least suffering for the animal, or no meat at all like vegetarians. But I don't have many options here. The Muslims kill the chicken by bleeding it to death, which is a long torture. It's not a clean kill. When they slaughter goats, they just cut them and let the goats die. Can you imagine how long and how much pain they are in until they die?" (Interview, January 26, 2019).

Although she may be strict and leave no room for negotiation, such as "no beef in the shop," at the same time, in order to coexist with the majority in her own shop, she also does not allow anyone, including herself, to bring pork in. Most of her staff are Muslims. She said:

"Very rarely. As far as I remember, I've never hired a non-Muslim. My family wanted to hire Muslims since my father's time. It's been over 30 years and we haven't had pork at home (the shop) . We have separate water glasses for them to use. We also prepare outfits for their Islamic daily prayers. In

Ramadan when they fast, I provide dates for them.” (Interview, January 26, 2019).

### 3. The Power of Language and Negotiated Lives

The local Malay language, spoken by the majority as a common language, is the first great challenge in communication for those “non-Malay others” who live in the Deep South. Although modern education has enabled new generations to speak Thai, most people use Malay in their day-to-day lives. In fact, the Malay language signifies the local identity. Therefore, the ability to communicate in the Malay language bears importance and necessity. However, not every local can speak it. Many years of field research has shown that many non-Muslims in the area cannot speak the local language. They hold a prejudice, considering the language “not Thai.” Chitragoh sees being able to speak the local language as empowering for the micro-minority to negotiate with the majority, especially in her case where she needs to survive with the family business that was passed down to her from her father. Her opinions are:

“If you can speak their language, it’s to your advantage. If you’re fluent, even better. There was a group of Muslim customers coming to my shop. One of them said, let’s not buy from non-Malay shop. But I could understand that. I replied, ‘it’s okay if you don’t buy anything’. Since they had browsed through so many things, they felt embarrassed and left.” (Interview, June 17, 2017).

“I can speak, but not very fluently. Though I understand a lot. I was born here. I’m a local. How can anyone say who this land should really belong to? I was born here and I’m 70. I’m still learning. My father was much better. He learned

to converse with the Malays.” (Interview, March 12, 2018).

### 4. Negotiation for Survival

It is not easy for the Sikh micro-minority in the Muslim-majority society where they struggle for survival, both in business and society, in order to coexist with the Malay-Muslim majority with differences in religion, belief, and ways of life. Since the conflict in 2004, in particular, non-Muslims face many difficulties in their daily lives. One piece of evidence drawn from the research of Sakolnakorn et al. (2012) shows that Chinese and Thai-Buddhist shop owners needed to adjust their business operations by closing earlier, or hiring Muslims to be shop clerks to create trust, as well as safety, with Muslim customers. Eventually, these shops ended up relocating to other provinces (Sakolnakorn et al., 2012 cited in Bundhuwong, 2017, p.41). At the same time, Muslim businesses prospered (Bundhuwong, 2017, p.41). However, there is no research available to explain why more Muslims came to conduct businesses in the city. Indeed, the growth in Muslim businesses affected the businesses of the non-Muslims. As aforementioned, the current trend is to support Muslim shops and walk away from non-Muslim shops. This challenge applies to the Sikh businesses as well. Chitragoh shared the long history of her shop:

“We are a friendly shop. We’ve been here since before World War II, probably over 80 years now. My son’s grandfather lived in Pattani. He had a partnership to establish the first shop at Tedwivat market, then later moved to the intersection and opened a shop at Rudee Road.” (Interview, May 25, 2015).



This fabric shop started in her father's generation and was passed down to her. Now, it is being passed down to the third generation. Similar to other non-Muslim businesses, hiring Muslims shop staff to negotiate with Muslim customers, interestingly, has become in itself a negotiating method with the majority of the society. However, this method is not new, but rather a method used by the Sikhs to survive in business long before the conflict in 2004.

“Our shop wanted to hire Malays because most people are Muslims. As much as I remember in the 70 years, we have always hired Muslims. We are the minority. We rely on the majority. If you don't do business with Muslims, you can't stay here. My father also wanted to hire Muslims, because he could speak Malay. He could talk to customers. To survive here as a minority, we need the majority.”

The explanation of Chitragoh's negotiation corresponds with Vera's explanation that:

“If I, or other minorities, stayed among ourselves, we wouldn't be able to survive. Really, only Muslims can help me survive...” (Pickering, 2003, p.266 cited in Narkurairattana, 2013, p.77)

In 2018, Chitragoh opened another branch on the same side of the mosque at the center of Pattani, opposite the new local fresh market. The shop has a parking lot. She says, her customers like to visit the new shop. The old shop is still open, but it is hard to find a parking space.

## 5. The Power of Micro-Minority for Peacebuilding

The Sikhs perceive their roles not only as negotiators to preserve their identity and berecognized as part of the Muslim-majority society, but also as a part of the peacebuilding process through their operations in public. Despite being a woman and the only Sikh person involved in the process, Chitragoh is confident in her capabilities. She wishes to see peace return to the Deep South that she loves and considers home. Chitragoh says:

“I'm lucky to have been born in a Sikh family. Sikhism values men and women equally. Sikh women are not oppressed. This is the foundation that built my self-esteem.

I daresay with confidence, I'm a competent woman. And I have believed that since I was little. I like to help people and have never stopped to consider whom I should or shouldn't help. I helped when they seemed to need help. Also, my father set a good example. Sikhism has honored women all along. Sikh women can lead the reading of the scriptures in the temple. There's no discrimination that makes women less than men. I've been cultivated both through my family and my religion.” (Interview, January 26, 2019).

For Chitragoh, the foundation laid by her family and religion is her source of power within – a micro-minority resource that makes her confident to carry out her social roles. She further elaborates:

“In fact, the smallest micro-minority has to live unheard and unseen. Nobody cares about us. But we do the best we can. On the other hand, it might be a positive thing.

Nobody suspects us. That makes us feel comfortable.

“I’ve been an activist for a long time because I like it. But my serious peace activism started in 2013 with IRC (Interreligious Council, Interreligious for Peace, Thailand. A project supported by the Institute for Human Rights and Peace Studies in Thailand. The author first collaborated with Chitragoh in late 2014 and has continued since) with professor Parichad, who invited me to be on the committee. It’s because I’m the only Sikh in the three provinces. The Sikh association in Bangkok assigned me to be a representative and an IRC committee member. I’ve been to the Philippines because professor Parichad Suvarnabuppa nominated me. After that, she invited me on many occasions. I got to know Mr. Martin, and so was able to travel to Myanmar to see how women peace activists work over there and tried to apply it back here.

“I did community work in 2011 because I wanted to improve our community and was approached by the Thai Health Promotions Foundation. We started the first campaign on community waste sorting and exchanging waste for eggs. At first, I was on the community committee. Many projects got awards, for example, the Wall Painting Project, Youth Camp, Old House in New Color, etc. Then, I was chosen to be the community chair in 2016. My community was officially approved by the municipality. The term lasted 3 years and the community voted for me for a second term as you see today. I do this because I think it is a part of peacebuilding, when our community becomes strong and

vigilant. I have also done the Safe Market project, which was requested by the PAW women’s network to make the market be a safe space.” (Interview, January 26, 2019).

## Conclusion

The power and negotiation of one Sikh micro-minority person has led to acceptance of her Sikh identity, which can be seen in social phenomena in the Deep South over the past couple of years. Chitragoh was invited to be a part of the discussion to find a solution for the plural society of Deep South. She has become a symbol of possible coexistence between the majority and micro-minority. However, the negotiated lives of the micro-minority did not take place easily. It is crucial to seek a method and find the potential power within. In addition, one must create a platform and opportunities for social operations, particularly to befriend the majority. In Chitragoh’s case, her source of power within is essential and foundational for her negotiating power to preserve the Sikh identity amongst the majority with a different religion, ethnicity, and culture in a deadly conflict society. These differences amongst religion, ethnicity, and culture are one of the main causes for the deadly conflict, as well as the predicament of Malay-Muslims being a local majority but a national minority within the Thai state. At the same time, she has to negotiate to be a part of the Deep South society, which is heading towards peacebuilding and coexistence with dignity and identity. Thus, the methods of negotiation of the Sikh micro-minority presented through Chitragoh in this research show how micro-minorities can create power to negotiate with the majority through dignified and peaceful means.

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