

## **ABSTRACT**

This research is about the contemporary identity crisis, and developmental politics and policies as they relate to the indigenous peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), Bangladesh. The three-hill districts of Rangamati, Khargachar and Bandarban together make up the CHT of Bangladesh. The CHT indigenous people have a way of life (such as social, cultural and religious beliefs and practices), and a physical appearance, that is different from the rest of the Bengali peoples of the country. The thesis examines the hegemonic articulation of the Bangladeshi state's policies in terms of identity development and the practices of the indigenous peoples in the CHT. The thesis examines the construction of identity of the ethnic minorities in the CHT, explaining the processes of identity formation or reformation by the state and ethnic minorities themselves. The thesis explores the state hegemonic processes and its colonial genealogy in line with its articulation of nation building imaginations about the ethnic minorities in the CHT. It explores state policies and contemporary politics as the source of forced assimilation, marginalization and discrimination directed toward the indigenous peoples in the CHT. The indigenous lands in the CHT have been used as a tool of state domination and development. From British colonial rule to the present ethnic minorities have been displaced from their ancestral lands through state development programs. During British administration, most of the indigenous collective and common lands were turned into reserve forest, thereby excluding the indigenous peoples of the CHT. Moreover, with the construction of the Kaptai Dam, a vast area of land was inundated, internally displacing thousands of people who then became refugees in India and Myanmar. Successive Bangladesh governments have also forcibly assimilated indigenous peoples into mainstream Bengali society, and confiscated indigenous lands for Bengali settlement and military purposes. These policies have created a conflict with the state in the CHT. This research adopts a comprehensive view regarding state policies that has been detaching indigenous peoples from the own way of life. These state policies have led to ethnic conflict, massacres and thousands of internally displaced indigenous peoples'. In 1997, there was a major turning point in state-indigenous relations when the indigenous political party Parbataya Chattagram Jana Songhati Samiti (PCJSS) and the Bangladesh government signed the CHT Accord. The CHT Accord represents a peace process that aims to ensure the identity of the CHT peoples. The thesis examines Bangladeshi state' politics and policies that create the identity crisis of indigenous peoples of the CHT, and the role of the CHT Accord in addressing that crisis.