

**IDENTITY CRISIS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN THE CHITTAGONG HILL
TRACTS (CHT), BANGLADESH**

by

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Thesis

Submitted to Flinders University

for the degree of

Master of Arts (International Development)

College of Humanities, Arts and Social Science

Date: 02 July 2018

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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.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to express my appreciation and gratitude to Associate Professor Michael Barr for his kind supervision of the thesis. It is a great honor to work under his supervision.

I would like to special thanks to Dr. David Jolley for editing the thesis.


I extend to my gratitude to my friends Tomohito Nijori, Md. Raihan Kabir, Soeum Soren, Lily Myat, Bhabhani Dewan and Aziza Rahman for their unconditional support.

I am also very grateful to my wife Tushi Chakma and my daughter Aritri Arani Chakma who both provided great love and support during the thesis writing.

On a personal note, I am grateful to my parents for taking care of me every moment of my life, especially during the ten years spent in a refugee camp in India. In the refugee camp, there were no educational institutions, proper healthcare, sufficient food, or pure drinking water, all essential for fulfillment of a meaningful life. However, both of you provided me with primary education at home and this education helped me to reach this point – the writing of a thesis. My interest in writing this thesis grew from these transformative experiences as a refugee.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed..... 

Date.....

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Asian Development Bank	ADB	
Bangladesh Nationalist Party	BNP	
Bangladesh Rifles	BDR	
Boarder Guard of Bangladesh	BGB	
Chittagong Hill Tracts	CHT	
Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board	CHTDB	
Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Facilities	CHTDF	
Chittagong Hill Tracts Welfare Association	CHTWA	
Deputy Commissioner	DC	
Education for All	EFA	
Education for Indigenous Children	EIC	
European Commission	EC	
European Union	EU	
General Officer Commanding	GOC	
Hill District Council	HDC	
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights	ICCPR	
International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination		ICERD
International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights		ICESCR
International Labour Organization	ILO	
International Year of the World's Indigenous Peoples	IYWIP	
Member of Parliament	MP	
Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs	MoCHTA	
Ministry of Education	MoE	
Ministry of Primary and Mass Education	MoPME	
Manusher Jonno Foundation	MJF	
National Curriculum and Textbook Board	NCTB	
National Human Rights Commission	NHRC	
Parbattaya Chatragam Jana Sanghati Samiti	PCJSS	
Press Information Department	PID	
Regional Council	RC	

Reserve Forest	RF
Reservoir Operation Committee	ROC
Tribal Health, Nutrition, and Population Plan	THNPP
Unclassified State Forest	USF
United Nations	UN
United Nations Development Program	UNDP
United People's Democratic Forum	UPDF
Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization	UNPO
Village Defense Party	VDP
World Commission on Dams	WCD

CHAPTER 1 - SETTING THE SCENE: A DEBATE ON INDIGENOUS IDENTITY

1.1 Introduction: Are There Any Indigenous Peoples In Bangladesh?

Since the 1990s, the ethnic minority peoples in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), Bangladesh have been seeking official recognition as 'indigenous peoples'- particularly since 1993, when the United Nations (UN) declared the International Year of the World Indigenous Peoples (IYWIP) and announced the first International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples (1995-2004).¹ The following year, on 23 December 1994, the United Nations General Assembly declared that the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples would be observed on the 9th August every year.² The indigenous peoples in the CHT have been observing the day ever since the declaration. During that time, the Bangladesh government, led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), has refused to recognize the UN declaration on the indigenous issue, declaring that there are no indigenous peoples in Bangladesh. However, the main opposition party, the Bangladesh Awami League, recognized that there are indigenous peoples in Bangladesh, and its 2008 election Manifesto promised constitutional recognition of indigenous people's identity if they came to power. But the Awami League in government (1996-2001, 2008-2013 and 2014 to present) has continued the policy of refusing to recognize indigenous peoples in Bangladesh.³ Moreover, in 2011, the Awami League - led government, while passing the significant fifteenth amendment of the constitution, still denied constitutional recognition for the indigenous peoples.⁴ Consequently, on 9 August 2014, the government's Press Information Department (PID) issued a press release urging the media, academics, civil society members and experts to avoid using the word 'indigenous' in discussion, talk shows and any public meeting.⁵

Subsequently, fierce public and academic debates have taken place on the issue of indigenous identity in Bangladesh. There are three main perspectives. Firstly, there is the government view that the ethnic people in the CHT are not indigenous peoples because they are not 'pre-settlers' of the

¹ A. Barkat, *Political Economy of Unpeopling of Indigenous Peoples: the Case of Bangladesh*, MuktoBuddhi Prokasans, Dhaka, 2016, p. 69.

² United Nations (UN), 'International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples 9 August', UN's website, New York, 2008, <<http://www.un.org/en/events/indigenousday/background.shtml>>, consulted 12 February 2018.

³ M.A. Uddin, 'Change in Language, Communication and Thought: A Study on Linguistic Discrimination against the Indigenous Peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh', *Studies in Literature and Language*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2010, P. 28.

⁴ Barkat, p. 73.

⁵ I.U.M. Zahid, 'Conflict between Government and the Indigenous Peoples of Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh', *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, vol. 16, no. 5, 2013, p. 98.

region.⁶ Secondly, there is the view of the ethnic minorities of the CHT, who consider themselves as indigenous within the UN framework. According to the UN, indigenous peoples are defined as those who have distinctive cultural, social, political and economic characteristics that are different from the mainstream dominant group. They are a group of people who have been seeking recognition of identity, rights to traditional lands, rights to exercise traditional cultural practices - rights that have been violated by state domination over the ages.⁷ Finally, scholars in the third group have attempted to explain the identity of indigenous peoples in the CHT by illustrating how state policies have alienated ethnic minorities in Bangladesh.⁸

This research attempts to find the root causes of the debate on the ethnic identity of indigenous peoples in the CHT. This study explores and analyses state policies on ethnic identity from the British colonial period to period of Bangladesh independence. During the past two decades researchers have produced an impressive variety of studies on ethnic identity in the CHT, some of which I utilise and critically analyse. To develop the discussion, this thesis starts from the theoretical basis. Then the research analyses the development of state nationalism in Bangladesh and its impact on the CHT. It also explores the political processes and state mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion through processes of group formation.

1.2 Aim (s) and Objective of the Research

The aim of the thesis is to analyze the situation of ethnic minorities of the CHT and the role of the state. To do this, I will focus on the role of the state in building nationalism, and on state policies in various areas including constitutional recognition, Bengali migration in CHT, militarization and cultural domination. To achieve the objective, this research aims to explore the following questions;

- What are the distinctive features of CHT ethnic history and culture?
- Why do the CHT different ethnic groups want to identify themselves as indigenous peoples?
- How do Bangladeshi state policies force assimilation of the CHT ethnic groups into the mainstream Bengali nation?

⁶ H.U. Rashid, 'Debate over 'Indigenous' Issued', *The Daily Star on the Web*, Dhaka, 2011, <<https://www.thedailystar.net/news-detail-198886>>, consulted 6 March 2018.

⁷ Division for Social Policy and Development Indigenous Peoples, 'The Indigenous Peoples at the UN', United Nation's website, New York, 2018, <<https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/about-us.html>>, consulted 2 February 2018.

⁸ N. Uddin, 'Decolonizing Ethnography in the Field: an Anthropological Account', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, vol. 14, no. 16, 2011, p. 456.

1.3 Theoretical Context

1.3.1 Ethnic Identity

There are many and varied approaches to the idea or theory of ethnicity.⁹ Researchers tend to conceptualize ethnic identity in ways that help them answer the question they intend to resolve.¹⁰ For instance, some researchers focus on self-identification relating to communities and social group membership,¹¹ while others highlight values and attitudes.¹² Other researchers concentrate on cultural aspects of ethnic identity, like custom, tradition, language and values.¹³ These underlying theories embraced by researchers in relation to ethnic identity lead to a wide variety of definitions. For example, there is the multidimensional construct of ethnic identity, which contains the awareness of knowledge and cultural beliefs, group behaviors, traditions and custom of ethnic groups.¹⁴ In addition, identity refers to the way that people identify themselves and others in terms of various categories, to distinguish themselves from others. When an identity category is determined by ethnic origin, it is termed, 'ethnic identity'.¹⁵ Ethnic identities are 'imagined communities', constructed, fluid and loaded with political power.¹⁶

In general, studies of ethnic minorities represent ethnicity as a complex set of interconnection through which diverse groups of people recognize themselves and are recognized by others. Nash argues that ethnicity formation is through kinship and blood relationships, religious views, custom and tradition. However, these are not the only elements that identify ethnic communities. He highlights other features of ethnicity, such as housing, dress pattern, communication with other groups, traditional practice, customary laws, medication and cultural practices. These traditional and customary practices of ethnic groups provide them with a sense of recognition, 'rightness', legitimacy and authority.¹⁷ Thus, an ethnic group maintains its identity and differences from other

⁹ R. Brubaker and F. Cooper, 'Beyond "Identity"', *Theory and Society*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2000, p. 2.

¹⁰ J.S. Phinney, 'Ethnic Identity in Adolescent and Adults: Review of Research', *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 108, no. 3, 1990, p. 499.

¹¹ F. Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: the Social Organization of Cultural Difference*, Waveland Press, Illinois, 1969, p. 8; H. Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories: Studies in Social Psychology*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1981, p. 69.

¹² C. Jeff, 'Who is Indigenous? Peoplehood and Ethno Nationalist Approaches to Rearticulating Indigenous Identity', *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2003, p. 83.

¹³ A. Sen, *Identity and Violence: the Illusion of Destiny*, W.W. Norton & Co., New York, 2006, p. 182.

¹⁴ R.M. Lee, 'Resilience Against Discrimination: Ethnic Identity and Other-Group Orientation as Protective Factors for Korean Americans', *Journal of Counselling Psychology*, vol. 52, no. 1, 2005, p. 36.

¹⁵ Turner *et al.*, *Rediscovering the Social Group" a Self-Categorization Theory*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1987, pp. 42-46.

¹⁶ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, London and New York, 1991, p. 7.

¹⁷ M. Nash, 'The Core Elements of Ethnicity' in J. Hutchinson and A.D. Smith (eds.), *Ethnicity*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1996, pp. 25-26.

communities with reference to specific socio-cultural features. According to Seol, people form their group or individual identities in line with history, but they also refer to socio-cultural structures, in order to construct these identities.¹⁸

1.3.2 State Nationalism and Ethnic Identity: David Brown’s Framework

David Brown provides an illuminating framework to understand state politics and policies of building nationalism and national identity. He analyses national and ethnic identity through the prism of civic, ethno-cultural and multicultural politics. In his account, civic nationalism depicts the idea of nation-state governed by ethnically-blind norms which promote differences, and security and development towards a community of equal citizens.¹⁹ Ethnocultural nationalism portrays the modern nation-state based on a homogeneous community around a high-status ethnic elite, promoting a majority groups’ dominant culture, and which offers a promise of security to minority groups, and to assimilate them into the dominant ethnocultural ‘sameness’. Multicultural nationalism is distinctive in that it describes the community through the prism of ethnic communities, in which individual rights and protections are mediated through communal group rights, with an emphasis on the protection of minority rights and the promotion of cultural diversity. All of these visions discuss nation-state control, and mobilize policy and power. In this regard, inequalities in the nation-state can be resolved through national development policy.²⁰

Table 1: David Brown’s Framework on Building Nationalism

	Civic	Ethnocultural	Multicultural
Idea of Nation	Community of equal citizens	Homogenous community around ethnic core, individual sense of community based on their identity	Community of equal ethnic groups, in which minority rights and status are protected
Key features	Inclusive towards all ethnicities	Promote majority culture and assimilation	Promotes cultural diversity and advocates ethnic minority rights
In-group	All citizens	Ethnic or majority core	All ethnic groups, with special emphasis on minority groups.

Source: D. Brown, *Contemporary Nationalism*, 2000, pp. 33-36.

¹⁸ B. Seol, ‘A Critical Review of Approaches to Ethnicity’, *International Review*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2008, pp. 338-340.

¹⁹ D. Brown, ‘Are There Good and Bad Nationalism?’, *Nations and Nationalism*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1999, p. 281.

²⁰ D. Brown, *Contemporary Nationalism: Civic, Ethnocultural and Multicultural Politics*, Routledge, London and New York, 2000, p. 6.

Brown emphasizes that ethnicity and ethnic conflict is related to and bound up with the activities and character of the state. The state engages in society with the view to effect the behavior of its citizens, but the success of the state rests on its approach and abilities. If the state is unable to take proper steps for its citizens, or is weak, then the intervention of the state will not be able to regulate citizen behavior, including behavior regarding ethnic conflicts.²¹ Consequently, Brown argues that the state determines the 'idea' and the features of ethnic identity, (to promote national identity) by defining and reacting to ethnic expressions. Regarding the role of state and elites, Brown highlights that the state and its agents generate the idea and debate about ethnicity. State domination by majority groups through Brown's notion of ethnocultural nationalism is one of the main causes of ethnic upheaval, and state building assimilation policies are primarily a state response to ethnic conflict.²² This thesis examines the emergence of state nationalism in Bangladesh and its impact on ethnic fragmentation and identity.

1.4 Ethnoculturalism and the Source of Jumma (or Indigenous) Identity in the CHT

After British colonialism, the creation of India and Pakistan in 1947 inspired a number of ethnocultural movements in South Asia.²³ The Indian sub-continent had been divided along the lines of religious identities – Islam in Pakistan and Hinduism in India. As a Muslim majority region, Bangladesh was included as part of Pakistan to be known as East Pakistan. The CHT was also included as a part of East Pakistan, even though more than 90% of the population was non-Muslim. Under the British administration the CHT had been an 'Excluded Area' since 1900, which means that there were restrictions on internal migration, including by Muslim Bengalis, in order to preserve, protect and promote the local ethnic identity. The new government of Pakistan abolished the status of 'Excluded Area' and allowed non-indigenous settlement in the CHT and imposed such development programs as the Kaptai Hydro-electric Dam, which inundated a vast area of CHT land, displacing a large number of indigenous peoples, pushing thousands into India and Myanmar as refugees.²⁴

After the creation of Pakistan, the ethnic minorities in the CHT began to mobilise to form a common identity in order to protect and promote their cultural identity against the Pakistan state's policies

²¹ D. Brown, *The State and Ethnic Policies in South east Asia*, Routledge, London, 1994, pp. 4-5.

²² D. Brown, 'The State of Ethnicity and the Ethnicity of the State: Ethnic Politics in Southeast Asia', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol.12, no. 1, 1989, p. 50.

²³ K. Chowdhury, 'Politics of Identity and Resources in Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh: Ethnonationalism and/or Indigenous Identity', *Asian Journal of Social Science*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2008, pp. 63-64.

²⁴ W.V. Schendel, 'The Invitation of the 'Jummas': State Formation and Ethnicity in Southeastern Bangladesh', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 26, no. 1, pp. 110-112. See more details in Chapter 2 below.

of assimilation and domination. In 1956, some ethnic students started a movement against the Pakistan state's discriminatory policies, forming an underground organisation called Pahari Chhatra Samity (Hill's Students Association) and later the Chittagong Hill Tracts Welfare Association (CHTWA) in 1966. Through the decades, student organisations began using the term 'Jumma nationalism' to construct a common identity of ethnic minorities in the CHT. The term Jumma is derived from Jum cultivation, which is slash-and-burn farming or shifting cultivation practised by the all ethnic minorities in the CHT. Henceforth, the CHT ethnic minorities began using the term Jumma to build a common identity and a resistance movement against the common enemy, the Pakistan state.²⁵ After Bangladesh won independence in 1972, the new Bangladesh government continued the policy of forced assimilation and domination of the CHT. The idea of Jumma nationalism movement was revived when the Parbattaya Chattragam Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS), a political organisation in the CHT, was formed and started a resistance movement against the domination of the Bangladesh government.²⁶ Jumma nationalism had its origins in the CHT and was developed by the educated middle class amongst the indigenous peoples.²⁷ The main aspect of Jumma nationalism was the formation and self-assertion of a common identity against Pakistan's and later Bangladesh's exclusionary nationalism. This resistance movement through Jumma nationalism raised the ethnic minorities' voice against the Bangladesh state's elite and Bengali hegemony.²⁸ State assimilation policies have been trying to dominate the Jumma nationalism movement through constitutional change to turn indigenous peoples into Bengali – wiping out indigenous identity through constitutional means. In articulating the Jumma identity, the minorities in the CHT consider themselves as a nation in their own right – their own alternative 'imagined community',²⁹ their own group with its own sense of identity.³⁰

1.5 The Rise of Autonomy in the CHT

In 1971, during the liberation War of Bangladesh, the CHT ethnic minorities, including senior leaders such as M. N. Larma and Mong Prue Chai Chowdhury, fought against Pakistan for Bangladesh with the hope of securing an independent Bangladesh. In 1971, Bangladesh won independence from Pakistan and the CHT was included as a part of Bangladesh. After the victory, representatives of CHT

²⁵ Chowdhury, p. 66.

²⁶ Schendel, pp. 110-112. See more details about the Bangladesh state's domination to the ethnic minorities in the CHT in Chapter 2.

²⁷ Chowdhury, p. 66.

²⁸ Chowdhury, p. 67.

²⁹ Anderson, p. 7.

³⁰ Brown, p. 39.

peoples, led by M. N. Larma, met with first Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and submitted a memorandum demanding constitutional recognition of the indigenous peoples and the right to self-determination for protection of their ethnic identity.³¹

Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman rejected indigenous peoples' recognition and self-determination and advised Larma to assimilate into the majority Bengali nationalism. After rejecting the 1972 constitution, which made no special provision for the CHT, M.N Larma formed Parbattaya Chattragam Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS), and proposed an alternative platform for the ethnic minorities in CHT. Nevertheless, in a pre-election mass gathering in Rangamati, CHT, Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman mentioned that all ethnic minorities are Bengalis and nothing else. According to his political view these distinct identities could not be accepted as Bangladeshi identities. In 1973, M.N Larma ran as an independent candidate in the national election. As a member of parliament, M.N. Larma again demanded special status for the CHT ethnic minorities in the national parliament. In 1975, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was assassinated during a military coup and the country underwent military control. During that time, Ziaur Rahman was appointed as army chief who then became President in 1977. At that time, M.N. Larma crossed the Indian boarder and formed 'Shanti Bahini', an armed wing of PCJSS and started guerrilla action against the Bangladesh government.³² With the help of the Indian government, CHT training camps were established in India. Guerrilla fighters were recruited and within a few years, 'Shanti Bahini' became a political and military threat to the Bangladesh state.³³ The government responded to the rise of the armed identity movement by militarising the CHT. The Ziaur Rahman government handed over unlimited power to CHT military to dominate the PCJSS.³⁴ Thus, the lack of constitutional recognition of ethnic indigenous peoples in the CHT, together with the state's tendency to dominate through force, led to the rise of an armed autonomy/identity movement, which aimed to make a separate identity for the indigenous peoples in the CHT

³¹ M.A. Uddin, 'Displacement and Destruction of Ethnic People in Bangladesh', *Canadian Social Science*, vol. 4, no. 6, 2008, p. 20; A. Ahsan, and B. Chakma, 'Problems of National Integration in Bangladesh: the Chittagong Hill Tracts', *Asian Survey*, vol. 29, no. 10, 1989, p. 967.

³² A. Ahmed, 'Ethnicity and Insurgency in the Chittagong Hill Tracts Region: A Study of the Crisis of Political Integration in Bangladesh', *The Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, vol. 31 no. 3, 1993, p. 45.

³³ Ahmed, p. 47.

³⁴ Ahmed, p. 49.

1.6 Research Methodology

To answer the research questions, the approach here is a qualitative desk study. According to Flick, qualitative research finds relevance in the study of social relations, because this kind of research takes the researcher forward to inductive strategies, for instance, specific problems or case studies and theories.³⁵ It also helps the researcher to identify and collect a wide variety of data based on existing knowledge and related to the research area.³⁶ Qualitative study encourages the researcher to map the context or situation in the area of research and then gather relevant literature. In addition, qualitative study is suitable for gaining an in-depth understanding of the particular motivations and actions of various agents/actors.³⁷ The methodological approach of qualitative research is primarily guided by the materials at hand, and its findings are usually analytical.³⁸ In this research, such qualitative data and research is used to illustrate and analyze the situation of identity crisis related to the indigenous peoples in the CHT.

This research explores the identity issues of indigenous peoples in the CHT and illustrates the arguments from theoretical perspectives and historical evidence. The limitation of the thesis is there is no primary information - no first hand evidence from field work carried out by myself, and no direct communication with people who have experienced first-hand the events described. This thesis relies on data and information interpreted by the scholars, information that can sometimes be inaccurate or biased. Word limits and time constraints present further limitations, with many relevant aspects of the subject matter omitted. These can be addressed in further studies.

1.7 Outline of the Thesis

Chapter 1 begins with a debate about the existence of indigenous peoples in Bangladesh. This chapter presents the background to the debate on indigenous peoples in Bangladesh and the related theoretical context for framing the issue in this research. In order to understand the situation of identity crisis of indigenous peoples in the CHT, the theoretical discussion highlights the construction of ethnic identity, with a special focus on David Brown's framework on constructing nationalism. **Chapter 2** presents the more detailed historical context and background to the identity

³⁵ U. Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, 4th edn., Sage Publications, Los Angeles, 1990, p.76.

³⁶ J.M. Corbin and A.L. Strauss, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Technic and Procedures for Developing Ground Theory*, 4th edn., Sage Publications, Los Angeles, 2015, p. 12.

³⁷ P. Verschuren and H. Doorewaard, *Designing a Research Project*, Eleven International Publishing, The Hague, 2010, p. 17.

³⁸ Flick, p. 227.

crisis of indigenous peoples in the CHT. This chapter highlights state policies regarding indigenous peoples from the British colonial phase to post liberation Bangladesh. It then provides a discussion on the state policies and processes of building Bengali nationalism in the Bangladesh period. It also outlines how indigenous peoples in the CHT were denied identity formation in the nation building process, as well as indigenous peoples' resistance to these policies.

Chapter 3 provides a brief analysis of the Bangladesh's state policies and their impact on the indigenous peoples. State policies such as inter-migration, militarization, Islamisation and counter insurgency. A case study is presented to illustrate the impact of these policies. **Chapter 4** presents the policies and institutional setting of the education system of Bangladesh and the impact this has on the indigenous peoples in the CHT. **Chapter 5** provides a brief discussion on the cultural differences between the mainstream Bengali and the indigenous peoples in the CHT. It describes the different cultural practices including Jum cultivation (traditional mode of production), dress and language pattern. **Chapter 6** looks at the political processes that led to the signing of the CHT Accord signed between the indigenous peoples and the Bangladesh government on 2 December 1997. This Accord could have led to a lasting peace, and an end to the debate on the indigenous issue in the CHT. In this regard, the research analyses how the Accord has dealt with indigenous identity during its implementation phase. The **final Chapter** draws on the research, summarizing the discussion on the identity crisis of indigenous peoples in the CHT, and drawing some conclusions.

CHAPTER 2 - CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

2.1 Introduction

Bangladesh is one of the world's most ethnically and religiously diverse states. The majority of the people are Muslims (90%), and Hindus (9%), and Buddhists (0.70), while the rest are Christians and Animist (0.30%).³⁹ The majority Muslims and Hindus are mainly identified as Bengali, with a very small number of Hindus entitled as 'tribal'⁴⁰ or 'ethnic minorities'.⁴¹ According to the population census of 1991, there are 29 ethnic groups, but the Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples Forum (BIPF), a joint platform of indigenous organisations of Bangladesh, claims that there are 45 ethnic communities in Bangladesh.⁴² Among the 45 indigenous communities, the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) comprises 14 indigenous communities with their own distinctive features. These indigenous communities have distinct culture, language, tradition, custom, and religion, all completely different from the mainstream Bengali community in Bangladesh.⁴³ Every indigenous community speaks their own language. Further, with regard to religion, amongst the fourteen communities, the Chakmas, the Tanchangyas, the Chaks, the Marmas and the Khyings are Buddhist; the Tripura/Riyangs are Hindu; the Bawm, the Lushais, the Bonjogies, the Assamese and the Pangkhuas are Christians; and the rest the Khumis, the Murong/Mrus are animists. However, *none* of the Hill people are Muslims.⁴⁴ The thirteen ethnic communities are collectively known as Jumma or Pahari (Hill people) or indigenous people of the present day. Despite being a part of Bangladesh, the CHT has its own

³⁹ Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), *Statistical Pocket Book Bangladesh 2016*, BBS, Ministry of Planning, Dhaka, 2016, p. 51, <http://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/d6556cd1_dc6f_41f5_a766_042b69cb1687/PocketBook2016.pdf>, consulted 15 May 2018.

⁴⁰ According to the Constitution of Bangladesh the ethnic minorities considered as 'tribal' (Upajati in Bengali). Here, Upa means 'Sub' and Jati means 'Nation' in Bengali 'Sub-nation'. In this regard, the ethnic minorities do not want to identify themselves or be identified as 'Sub-nation'. I will avoid the term 'tribal' and 'Upajati' in this thesis. Preferred comparable terms are 'indigenous', Hill people or Pahari', and 'Jumma'. See details in sub Chapter 1.4.

⁴¹ K. Khaleque, 'Ethnic Communities of Bangladesh' in P. Gain (ed.), *Bangladesh: Land Forest and Forest People*, Society for Environment and Human Development, Dhaka, 1995, p. 9.

⁴² Bangladesh Ethnobotany Online Database, 'Indigenous Communities in Bangladesh', Bangladesh Ethnobotany Online Database's website, Chittagong, Bangladesh, <<http://www.ebbd.info/indigenous-communities.html>>, consulted, 12 February 2018.

⁴³ B. Chakma, 'The Post-Colonial State and Minorities: Ethnocide in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh', *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, vol. 48, no. 3, 2010, p. 283.

⁴⁴ Asian Development Bank (ADB), *Second Chittagong Hill Tracts Rural Development Project: Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors*, Asian Development Bank, Manila, 2011, pp. 1-2, <<https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/project-document/61308/42248-013-ban-rrp.pdf>>, consulted 2 February 2018.

distinctive identity in terms of race, history, culture, politico-administrative system and geography.⁴⁵

As shown on Map 1, the CHT is located in the south-eastern corner of Bangladesh, bordered by the Indian states of Tripura in the north and Mizoram in the east, by Myanmar in the east and south, and by Chittagong district (of Bangladesh) in the west. It is located at the confluence of two regions – South Asia and Southeast Asia.⁴⁶ The region is comprised of three hill districts: Rangamati, Khagrachari, and Bandarban, and the three districts are divided into different sub districts, as shown on Map 2.

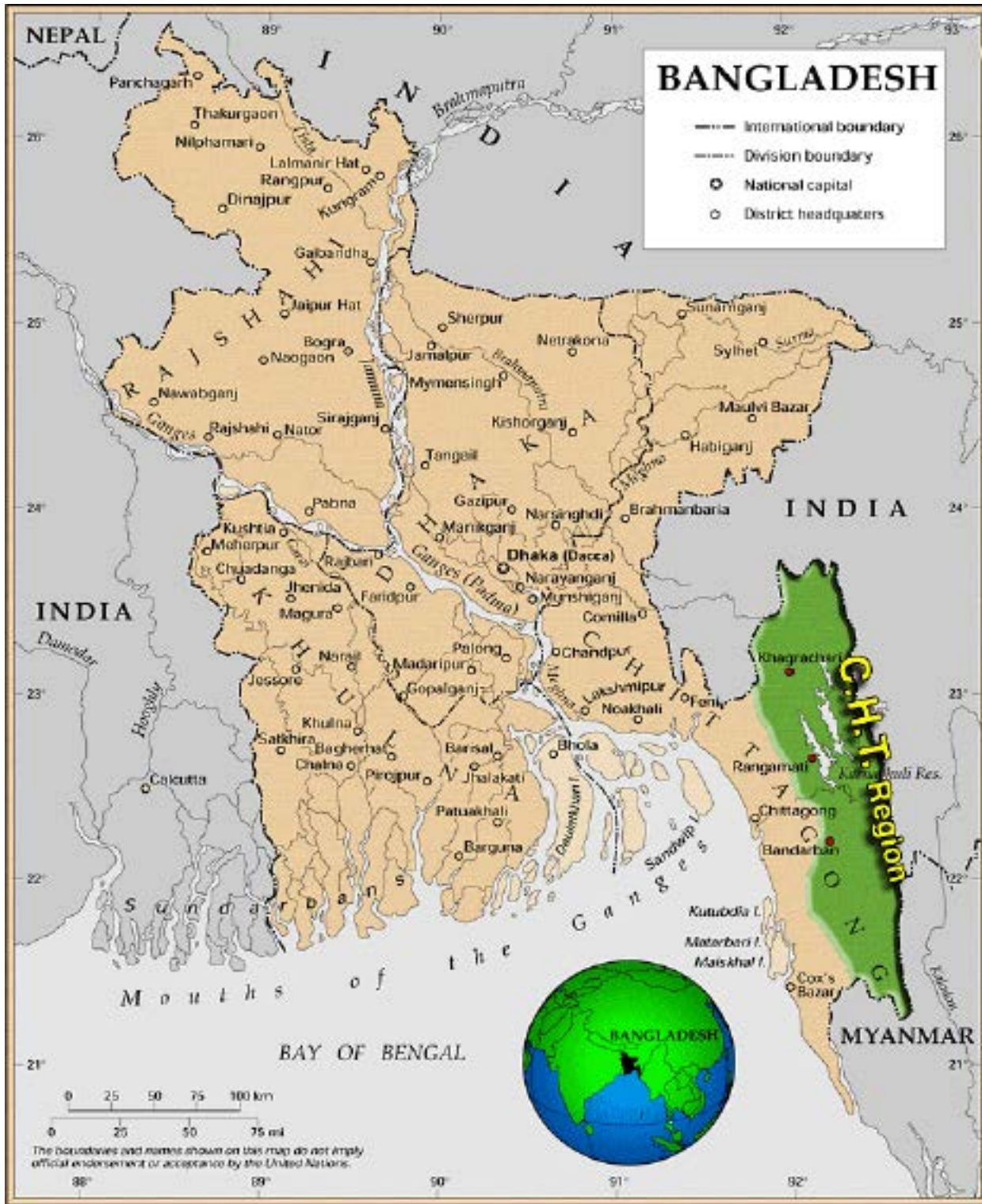
The indigenous peoples of the CHT face a range of crucial political and development issues, regarding ethnicity and identity, lack of constitutional recognition, displacement and dispossession, forced migration, environmental degradation, socio-economic backwardness, insurgency and military counter-insurgency operations. Indigenous peoples in the CHT are some of the most politically marginalized and socioeconomically disadvantaged peoples in Bangladesh. One of the key aspects of this marginalization is the gradual dispossession of their land and lack of constitutional recognition, both of which negatively impact on their livelihood concerns, and their identity crisis.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Chakma, p. 283.

⁴⁶ A. Mohsin, *The Politics of Nationalism: the Case of Chittagong Hill Tracts*, the University Press Limited, Dhaka, 1997, p. 49.

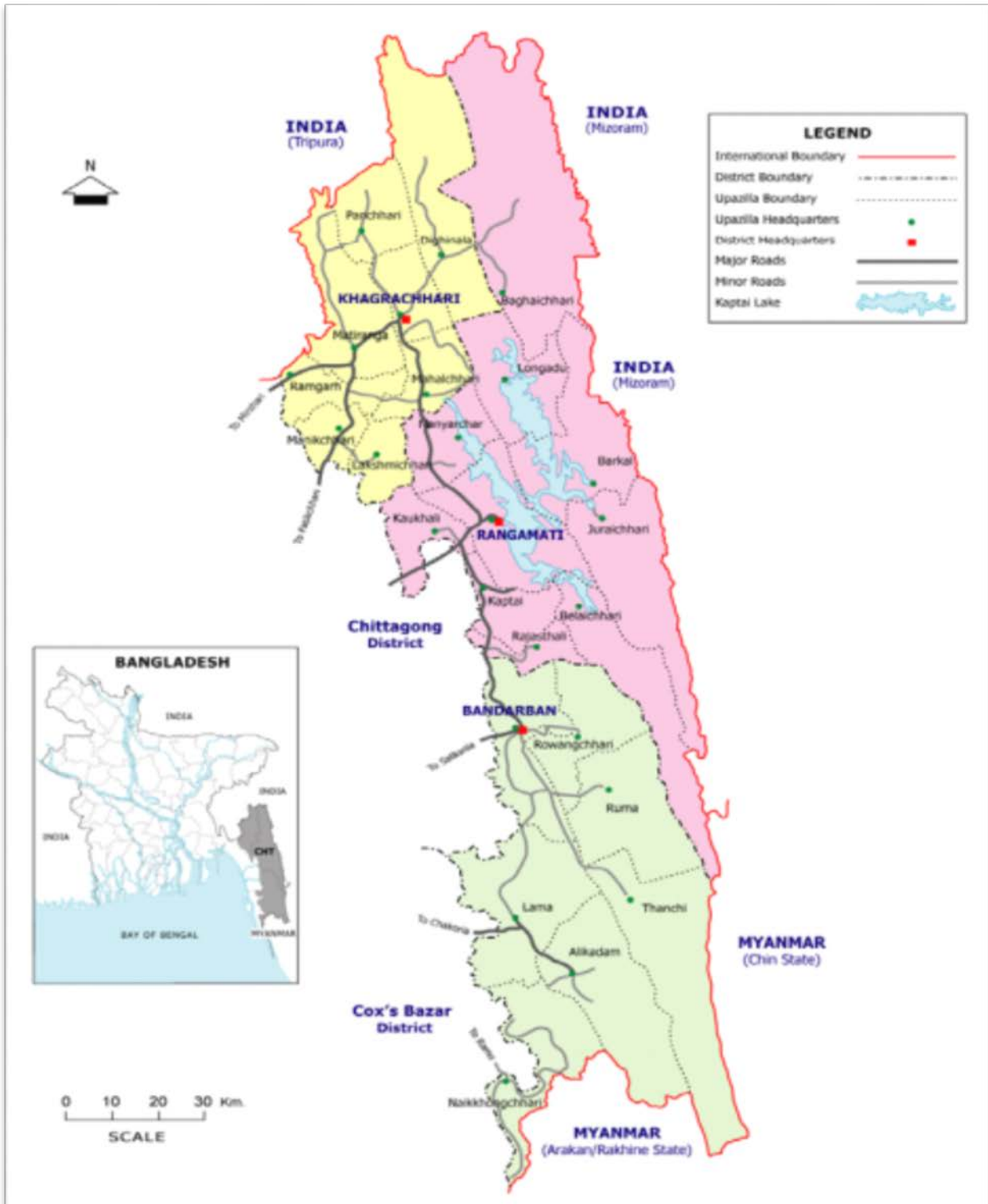
⁴⁷ Barkat, *et al.*, *Socio-economic Baseline Survey of Chittagong Hill Tracts*, Human Development Research Centre, Prepared for United Nations Development Program, Dhaka, 2009, pp. 4-7, <http://www.hdrc-bd.com/admin_panel/images/notice/1387703212.03.%20socio-economic%20baseline%20survey%20of%20chittagong%20hill%20tracts.pdf>, consulted 10 January 2018.

Map 1: Location of CHT



Source: Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs website, Government of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2018, <<http://www.mochta.gov.bd/>>, consulted 09 March 2018.

Map 2: Districts and Sub-district Location of CHT



Source: S. Adnan and R. Dastidar, 2011, p. **Error! Bookmark not defined.xxError! Bookmark not defined.ii.**

2.2 Discourses on Ethnic Minority in Bangladesh

The debate about indigenous peoples in Bangladesh gained attention, when in 1992 the United Nations declared the International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples (1995-2004). The UN

placed the world's ethnic minorities within a frame of 'indigenous people', promoting the idea that ethnic minorities in Bangladesh should refer to themselves as 'indigenous' – 'Adivasi' in Bengali.⁴⁸ There are other words and expressions to identify indigenous including ethnic communities, minorities, tribal, natives and aboriginal.⁴⁹ Subsequently, on 13 September 2007, the UN also declared the 'Rights of Indigenous Peoples'. The Declaration outlined the following indigenous rights.

1. The rights to self-determination;
2. The rights to be recognized as distinct peoples;
3. The rights to free, prior and informed consent and
4. The rights to be free of discrimination.

In 2018, highlighting these issues, the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues of the United Nations published several reports on the issue of indigenous peoples in Bangladesh.⁵⁰

In Bangladesh, a wide variety of terms are used to identify ethnic minorities - such as, 'Upajati', 'small national minorities' 'tribal', 'communities' and 'ethnic groups'.⁵¹ In Bengali the term 'Upajati' ('upa' means 'sub' and 'Jati' means 'nation') means 'sub-nation' in English. Another term Khudro Nritattik Jonogosti (in English expression Small Ethnic Minority Group) has also been used in recent government discourse to identify ethnic minorities. After the 1992 UN Declaration on the Decades of the World's Indigenous Peoples, the Bengali term for indigenous - 'Adivasi' was increasingly used in the media, and in academic and development discourse. Government documents used the term 'indigenous' in different documents and policies such as the Small Ethnic Groups Cultural Institutes Act of 2010, the Finance Act of 2010⁵², the National Educational Policy (2010), the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) of 2010, the Sixth Five Year Plan (2011-16).⁵³ The current government led by the Bangladesh Awami League also used the term 'indigenous' in its 2008 election manifesto.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ R.D. Roy, *The ILO Convention on Indigenous Peoples and Tribal Populations, 1957 (No. 107) and the Laws of Bangladesh: a Comparative Review*, International Labour Organization, Dhaka, 2009, p. 57.

⁴⁹ M. Rashiduzzaman, 'Bangladeshi's Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord: Institutional Features and Strategic Concerns', *Asian Survey*, vol. 37, no. 7, 1998, p. 656.

⁵⁰ United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, *Report on the Seventeenth Session (16-27 April 2018)*, UN's website, New York, 2018, p. 2, <<https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/unpfii-sessions-2/2017-2.html>>, consulted 22 May 2018.

⁵¹ Ahsan and Chakma, p. 953.

⁵² National Board of Revenue, 'Finance Act, 2010', National Board of Revenue's website, Government of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2018, <<http://nbr.gov.bd/regulations/acts/finance-acts/eng>>, consulted 23 February 2018.

⁵³ The Planning Commission of Bangladesh, *Sixth Five Year Plan FY2011-FY2015*, The Government of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2010, pp. 428-429, <http://www.plancomm.gov.bd/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/SFYP_-Final-Part-3.pdf>, consulted 02 March 2018.

⁵⁴ Barkat, *Political Economy of Unpeopling of Indigenous Peoples: the Case of Bangladesh*, p.16.

2.3 Identity Crisis of Indigenous Peoples in the CHT: The Land Rights Issue

In the last two centuries, three main events relating to land rights have badly affected the indigenous peoples of the CHT. Firstly, a scarcity of land developed during the British colonial period.⁵⁵ The British administration declared that almost two thirds of the land was forest and therefore the property of the state. In 1872, the British administration declared that the 5670 square miles of land out of the total of 6682 square miles in the CHT region as reserved forest. The reserved area was then divided into two divisions (1) 'Reserve Forest' (RFs) under the control of Forest Department and (2) 'Unclassified State Forest (USF) or District Forest, under the Deputy Commissioner (DC) management. At that time, the indigenous people were prohibited from using the RFs resources, which accounted for one fourth of the total of CHT lands, though they did have the right to use USF resources with the permission of DC.⁵⁶

Secondly, in the Pakistan period (1947-1970), the Kaptai Dam⁵⁷ was built between 1959 and 1963 in the CHT. During that time, it is estimated that one-third of the indigenous peoples were displaced from their ancestral lands as 54,000 acres of productive land was permanently submerged.⁵⁸ Finally, in the 1980s, the Government of Bangladesh Forest Department targeted a total 218,000 acres of land in the CHT for afforestation.⁵⁹ Further as part of the transmigration program, approximately 350,000 to 450,000 Bengali peoples from other parts of Bangladesh migrated into the CHT.⁶⁰ The first two events mentioned above will be discussed below, while the third event will be discussed in Chapter 4.

2.3.1 Ethnic Identities: Politics and Policies over the Land in British Colonial Phase

Since British regime in the 18th Century, the Chittagong Hill Tracts was a restricted area for the non-CHT resident.⁶¹ During the British period, the CHT enjoyed pro-autonomous ruling system and received state protection in return of a fixed revenue. Then the CHT - from the south of Arakan,

⁵⁵ K. Misbahuzzaman and C. Smith-Hall, 'Role of Forest Income in Rural Household Livelihoods: The Case of Village Common Forest Communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh', *Small-scale Forestry*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2015, p. 317.

⁵⁶ Chowdhury, p. 64.

⁵⁷ See details in sub Chapter 2.3.2 below.

⁵⁸ Chowdhury, p. 64.

⁵⁹ S. Adnan and R. Dastider, *Alienation of the Land of Indigenous Peoples in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*, Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission and International work Group for Indigenous Affairs, Dhaka and Copenhagen, 2011, p. 54.

⁶⁰ Mohsin, pp. 112-113.

⁶¹ R.C. Roy, *Land Rights of the Indigenous Peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh*, International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, Copenhagen, 2000, p. 29.

North of Tripura and northwest of the Bengal – became a battlefield for three powers. From the sixteenth century onwards the CHT was constantly engaged with expansionist newcomers such as Portuguese traders, and Burmese and Mughal state agents. When the Mughal were defeated by the British in 1860, the CHT was formally declared an administrative area by the British rulers.⁶² The British administration formed three Circle Chiefdoms the Chakma, Bomang and Mong Circle Chiefs also known as traditional Raja (King in English expression).⁶³ Under the British colonial rule, the Chakma Raja covered more than half of the CHT territory, while the rest of the territory was shared by the Bomang Raja to the south (bordering Burma) and the Mong Raja in the north-west.⁶⁴ The three Rajas exercised their jurisdiction regarding all CHT matters and paid annual revenue to the British administration.⁶⁵

During the colonial period the British administration formulated a number of administrative regulations with Act 1 of 1900 Regulations one of the most significant.⁶⁶ This regulation gave legitimacy to distinct CHT customary rights,⁶⁷ and CHT people enjoyed a degree of independence and colonial protection from the intrusion of Bengali settlers.⁶⁸ In 1920, the British declared the CHT administration an 'Excluded Area' in order to protect the indigenous people from outsider Bengali people; and to preserve, protect and promote indigenous ethnic identity in the CHT. In this regard, the special status of the Act 1 of 1900 accepted and accelerated the sovereignty of the ethnic minorities and ensured their traditional rights.⁶⁹

As discussed, the CHT came under direct British administrative rule in 1860. At that time, there was no private property land ownership system. All land was held under collective and traditional ownership by the indigenous peoples. In 1872, the British administration declared 5670 square miles land out of the total of 6682 square miles of the CHT region as 'Reserved Forest' (RF) or government-owned forest under the management of Forest Department (FD). The rest of the forest were declared as 'Unclassified State Forest' (USF) under the Deputy Commissioner, a representative of the central government who was given fully authority to take care of the USFs land. As a

⁶² Schendel, p. 97.

⁶³ Roy, *Land Rights of the Indigenous Peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh*, p. 29.

⁶⁴ R.H.S. Hutchinson, *An Account of the Chittagong Hill Tracts*, Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, Calcutta, 1906, p. 24.

⁶⁵ Ahsan and Chakma, P. 962. See more details about 'Mouza' and 'Para' in the following sub Chapter of 2.6.

⁶⁶ Hutchinson, p. 44.

⁶⁷ M.E. Ali and T. Tsuchiya, 'Land Rights of the Indigenous Peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh: A Historical Analysis of Policy Issues', *Fourth World Journal*, vol. 5, 2002, p. 65.

⁶⁸ J. Burger, *Report from the Frontier: The State of the World's Indigenous Peoples*, Zed Books Ltd., Massachusetts, 1987, p. 103.

⁶⁹ Mohsin, p. 24.

consequence, land ownership and use changed in the CHT. While Act 1 of 1900 Regulations provided the legal framework for civil and judicial administration of the indigenous peoples, by declaring RFs and USFs it neglected and overturned their land ownership system and the associated Jum cultivation (traditional mode of production)⁷⁰. In this regard, the British colonial laws and administration undermined traditional indigenous land ownership and use in the CHT.⁷¹ Consequently, even though the areas of USF were inhabited and used by the indigenous peoples, the new ownership system meant the indigenous peoples could be treated as squatters, and allowed the government to alienate or expropriate their land for settlement or lease by others.⁷² Thus colonial state domination threatened the basis of indigenous people's lives and their cultural identity.⁷³

2.3.2 The Pakistan Phase: Displacing Indigenous Peoples from Root

After 1947, the Indian subcontinent was divided into two nation-states on a religious basis – Muslim-majority Pakistan and Hindu-majority India. Most of the Muslim majority areas formed Pakistan while the rest went to India. During the partition, the CHT was included in the Pakistan, even though 97% of the CHT population were not Muslim. The reason for this unusual partition is that Ferozpur of Panjab was to be included as a part of Pakistan, but in the end it went to the India, because majority of the people in this area were Hindu. Consequently, the CHT was awarded to Pakistan as compensation.⁷⁴ Although, the CHT population are not Muslim or Hindu, but they wanted to be a part of India. In addition, some of the CHT leadership, including S.K Chakma, wanted to be included in India and they met with Congress leaders in Delhi, India. The Congress leadership assured the CHT leadership that the CHT would be included in India, and so they hoisted the Indian flag in Rangamati, CHT. Moreover, the three circle Chiefs of the CHT, and others representatives, met with the British administration to express their wish to join India. They demanded the CHT region be an independent area. However, the British government rejected the three Chief's demands.⁷⁵ Although the CHT became a contested area, the 1956 Pakistan Constitution declared the CHT as an 'Excluded Area'.

⁷⁰ See more details in Chapter 4 about the Jum cultivation or shifting cultivation of the traditional mode of production of indigenous peoples in the CHT.

⁷¹ Adnan and Dastidar, p. 37.

⁷² J. Sato, 'People in Between: Conversion and Conservation of Forest Land in Thailand', *Development in Change*, vol. 31, no.1, 2000, p. 158.

⁷³ C. Brauns and L.G. Löffler, *Mru: Hill People on the Border of Bangladesh*, Springer, Basel, 1990, p. 244; Roy, *Land Rights of the Indigenous Peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh*, p. 93.

⁷⁴ W. Mey, *They Are Now Burning Village after Village: Genocide in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh*, IWGIA, Copenhagen, 1984, pp. 146-150.

⁷⁵ Mohsin, p. 56.

Later, in 1964, with the changes of political situation, Pakistani Constitution removed the 'Excluded Area' of the CHT to facilitate non-indigenous peoples' access to the CHT. This decision was the first step in allowing outsiders to enter the CHT.⁷⁶ Consequently, Pakistan government encouraged the low land Muslim Bengali people to migrate in the CHT. As a result, between 1951 and 1961, the population of Muslim Bengali in the CHT increased about five times, from 26,000 to 119,000.⁷⁷

Moreover, between 1959 and 1963, the Pakistani government constructed a hydroelectric dam locally known as Kaptai Dam on Karnafuli River, Rangamati, CHT to produce electricity. The Kaptai Dam occupied some 256 square miles, producing the largest man-made lakes in the world at that time. The Dam submerged 54,000 acres of agricultural land, nearly 40% of the land suitable for plough cultivation in the CHT. The Dam displaced more than 100,000 ethnic minority peoples from their ancestral lands,⁷⁸ more than 40,000 Chakma people took shelter in Arunanchal Pradesh, India,⁷⁹ and another 20,000 Chakma peoples migrated to Burma as stateless refugees.⁸⁰ Although the project provided a number of benefits to the country as a whole, such as electricity, fisheries and employment, the indigenous peoples had access to less than 0.1% of national electricity, and only 1% of the direct and indirect employment provided by the project. According to the World Commission on Dams (WCD), there are some economic, social and environmental criteria for constructing, planning and managing a Dam. These include equity, efficiency, participatory decision making, accountability and sustainability. In the case of the Kaptai Dam, none of these criteria were met throughout planning and construction.

2.3.3 Rehabilitation and Land Allocation for the Displaced Peoples

The government of Pakistan set up a rehabilitation office to help the displaced peoples but the government did very little for the indigenous peoples in the CHT. As discussed 100,000 indigenous peoples were displaced, but a small number did receive land from the government. However, the land provided was not suitable for indigenous agricultural purposes.⁸¹ The following initiatives were taken by the government:⁸²

⁷⁶ Roy, *Land Rights of the Indigenous Peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh*, p. 47.

⁷⁷ G.B. Thapa and G. Rasul, 'Implication of Changing National Policies on Land Use in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh', *Journal of Environmental Management*, vol. 81, no. 4, 2005, p. 448.

⁷⁸ Roy, *Land Rights of the Indigenous Peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh*, p. 95.

⁷⁹ C.B. Majumder, 'Ethnic Politics in Bangladesh: A Search for Tribal Identity' in G. Pakhon (ed.), *Ethnicity and Polity in South Asia*, South Asian Publishers, New Delhi, 2002, p. 88.

⁸⁰ R.D. Roy, 'The Land Question and the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord' in V.T. Corpuz *et al.* (eds.), *The Chittagong Hill Tracts: The Road to a Lasting Peace*, Tebteba Foundation, Baguio City, 2000, pp. 8-22.

⁸¹. See more details in Chapter 3, Table: 1 regarding the categories of land in the CHT.

⁸² Roy, *Land Rights of the Indigenous Peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh*, p. 99.

- A) A total of 54,000 acres of all-purpose agricultural land was submerged, but the government had only 22,000 acres of low level land to allocate to the displaced peoples.
- B) It is estimated that the indigenous farmers lost 34,000 acres of cultivable land.
- C) Only 10,000 families received 20,000 acres of hillside land suitable for irregular annual cultivation, however, this was not ready for immediate use.⁸³
- D) Only \$2.6 million of compensation (from a total of \$59 million provided) was allocated.
- E) The displaced people received only Taka 500-700 compensation (approximately AUS \$10) per hectare (1 hectare = 2.47105 acres).⁸⁴

The Reservoir Operation Committee (ROC) maintains the Dam, and consists of 18 members including the Divisional Commissioner of Chittagong, three District Commissioners of the CHT, the Manager of the Kaptai power station, and other government and military representatives. The indigenous peoples of the CHT are excluded from Dam maintenance as there is no indigenous representative on the ROC.⁸⁵

2.4 The Bangladesh Period: Land Grabbing in the CHT

Since the independence of Bangladesh, different state agencies such as the Forest Department (FD), military forces, civil administration, political leaders, and Bengali Muslim settlers have been involved in land grabbing in the CHT. The traditional land management system in the CHT was collective and community based, whereas, in the rest of Bangladesh, land management system was based on inheritance and private ownership regulated by written law and religious law. The CHT enjoyed a special status regarding land management under the colonial rulers and in the pre-independence Pakistan regime until 1964, at which point the special constitutional status was rescinded. This special designation was partly aimed at regulating Bengali in-migration and protecting the ethnic/indigenous peoples from majority cultural encroachment. Since the British were more interested in revenue generation than protecting the ethnic minorities rights, this designation had the effect of segregating the CHT from the rest of the country.⁸⁶ In this regard, the indigenous peoples have been facing threats on multiple fronts through various anti-indigenous state mechanisms. For instance, the Forest Department was one of the major state agents responsible for grabbing indigenous lands in the CHT. As discussed, Reserved Forest (RS) established by the

⁸³ S. Parveen and I.M., Faisal, 'Peoples versus Power: the Geopolitics of the Kaptai Dam in Bangladesh', *International Journal of Water Resources Development*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2002, p. 202.

⁸⁴ Parveen and Faisal, p. 204.

⁸⁵ Parveen and Faisal, p. 206.

⁸⁶ Adnan and Dastidar, p. 17.

British covered approximately one quarter of the total CHT area. Since the 1980s, FD has been attempting to expand RS forest areas ever further. Now the FD manages 483,000 hectares of forest land in the CHT region.⁸⁷ The land acquired by the FD through RS is normally then used in expanding commercial monoculture cultivation, settler Bengali settlement.⁸⁸ With the support of the World Bank (WB) and Asian Development Bank (ADB),⁸⁹ Muslim Bengali business people from outside the CHT benefit from FD policies, turning formerly indigenous land into timber and rubber plantations. Forest-dwelling indigenous peoples in the CHT have then become involved in these projects as providers of cheap labour. Thus reminiscent of earlier colonial times, the Bangladesh state is involved in the exploitation of indigenous land and labour, leading to the loss of indigenous land rights, which is fundamentally related to the loss of indigenous people's livelihood and cultural identity. Land grabbing by other state agencies, such as the military forces, and other settler Bengali Muslims, and the impact on indigenous rights and identity in the CHT will be discussed in Chapter 4.

2.5 The Bangladesh Period: Bengali – Bangladeshi – Islamic Nationalism

Three forms of nationalism can be found in Bangladesh history – Bengali, Bangladeshi and Islamic nationalism. Bengali nationalism was developed during the regime of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who led the independence movement, and became the first Father of the Nation. Bengali nationalism comprised two features: cultural and territorial. The cultural features are based on secularism and a language movement,⁹⁰ both of which emerged in an attempt to demarcate Bangladesh from West Pakistan, when Islam as state religion and Urdu as state language reflected of nationalism. The territorial feature of Bengali nationalism relates to the boundaries⁹¹ of East Bengal. In this regard, the idea of nationalism was reflected in the first constitution of 1973 in which Article 6 states 'citizen of Bangladesh shall be known as Bengali' and Article 9 states: The unity of Bengali nationalism, which identity form its language and culture, shall be the basis of Bengali nationalism. The non-Bengali-speaking and culturally ethnic diverse populations were subordinated to the national population

⁸⁷ R. Ahmed and N. Stacey, 'Forest and Agrarian Change in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh' in L. Deakin, M. Kshatriya and T. Sunderland, (eds.), *Agrarian Change in Tropical Landscapes*, Center for International Forestry Research, Bogor, 2016, p. 206; A.A. Uddin, 'CHT Forests: Hidden Treasure' *The Daily Star on the web*, Dhaka, 2011, <<https://www.thedailystar.net/news-detail-190473>>, consulted 16 March 2018.

⁸⁸ The monoculture cultivation, which was not familiar in the CHT. The CHT indigenous peoples are used to Jum cultivation (shifting cultivation) since their immemorial time. See more details in the Chapter 5.

⁸⁹ Adnan and Dastidar, p. 48.

⁹⁰ Mohsin, p. 54.

⁹¹ According to the constitution, the ethnic minorities of Bangladesh are the 'Upajati' (sub-nation in English meaning). However, the ethnic minorities in Bangladesh wants to identify themselves using the UN designated term 'indigenous peoples.'

and turned into second class citizens or 'Upajati'.⁹² In 1975, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was assassinated, and army General Ziaur Rahman, as head of the army, came to the power. He formed the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). In 1977, the Ziaur Rahman government changed the constitution and there emerged a shift from Bengali nationalism to Bangladeshi Nationalism. During that time, religious essence took shape, through the amendment Article 8 of the constitution and replaced new provision 'to place full Faith in Almighty Allah' instead of 'secularism'.⁹³ Later, in 1988, another military government led by Hossain Mohammad Ershad adopted Islamic nationalism⁹⁴ by declaring 'Islam as state religion' in the Constitution.⁹⁵ In all forms of nationalism – Bengali, Bangladeshi and Islamic – there was no recognition of minorities or indigenous peoples.⁹⁶

The nature of nationalism in Bangladesh allowed for assimilation and marginalization of the CHT people.⁹⁷ The existence of different ethnic communities within the state was not only denied, but the constitution allowed for their forced assimilation into the Bengali nation. This has created two options for the CHT people - either to assimilate with the Muslim Bengali or face cultural/identity elimination at the hands of the state. As a result, the indigenous peoples have suffered an identity crisis in Bangladesh.⁹⁸ The construction of Bengali nationalism, based on the idea of 'oneness'⁹⁹ - one culture, one language, one religion and one community, denies the existence of other minorities, and fails to recognize and accept difference. Since independence in 1971, state elites have spoken of a dominant Bangladeshi nationalism, an ideology of 'oneness' that excludes ethnic minorities. State elites and Bengali majority groups have dominated in terms of language and religion, creating an identity crisis for the indigenous peoples in CHT.

2.6 Administrative Structure of the CHT

A picture of administrative structures helps to understand identity formation in the CHT. Administratively, there exist a combination of semi-autonomous 'traditional, bureaucratic and

⁹² Jamil I. and Panday, P.K., 'The Elusive Peace Accord in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh and the Plight of the Indigenous Peoples', *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, vol. 46, no. 4, 2008, p. 467.

⁹³ M.I. Islam and K. Marzia, 'Abuse of the Religious Sentiment to Gain Political Purpose in Bangladesh', *Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2013, p. 17.

⁹⁴ Mohsin, p. 52.

⁹⁵ Islam and Marzia, p. 18.

⁹⁶ Mohsin, p. 103.

⁹⁷ Chakma, p. 286.

⁹⁸ Ahsan and Chakma, p. 962.

⁹⁹ Brown, *Contemporary Nationalism*, p. 34.

elective regional authorities with separated and sometimes concurrent responsibilities'.¹⁰⁰ Under the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord 1997¹⁰¹ the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts affairs (MoCHTA) is the highest agency in the CHT. The existence of both formal and traditional systems has made for structural complexities in CHT. The formal administrative system includes the Regional Council (RC) with its three Hill District Councils (HDCs); Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachari. The RC falls under the MoCHTA. Each district has Upazilas (sub-district) and Unions (smallest administrative units), Mouzas (comprising a few villages), and Paras (village). A Deputy Commissioner (DC) is the civil administrator representing the government who administers all important civil and criminal matters. Every HDC is comprised of 15 members, each with a chairperson.

The traditional system in the CHT is divided into three circles: the Chakma, the Bhomang and the Mong Circles. Each Circle has a Circle Chief. The Circle Chief is also known as Raja (King). Each circle divided into different administrative unit under the control of 'Headman' and 'Karbai'. The 'headman' and 'karbari' both are employed by the Rajas. The Rajas are the responsible for the collection of taxes from the 'headman' who are responsible for resource management, land and revenue maintenance from the Mouzas/villages, a lowest administrative unit of revenue collection. Every Mouza is linked to two or more villages and for the resolution of conflict through application of customary laws in tribal court. The Headmen in turn are assisted by the 'karbari' who is the head of the village.¹⁰² Traditionally, the Rajas are the administration chief in the CHT, but now it is replaced and the dominant by DC.¹⁰³

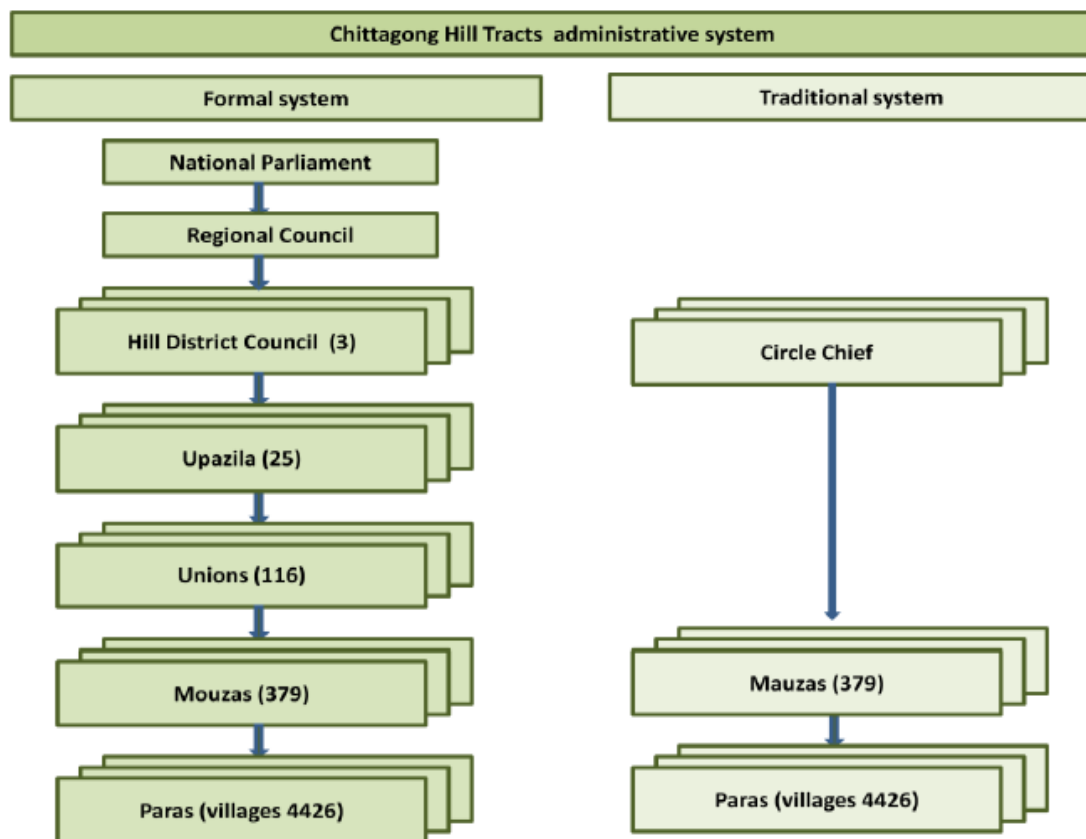
¹⁰⁰ R.D. Roy, 'Challenges for Juridical Pluralism and Customary Laws of Indigenous Peoples: The Case of Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh', *Arizona Journal of International & Comparative Law*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2004, p. 124.

¹⁰¹ For more details about the CHT Accord see Chapter 6

¹⁰² Barkat *et al.*, *Socio-economic Baseline Survey of Chittagong Hill Tracts*, p. 8.

¹⁰³ D. Roy, S. Hossain, and M. Guhathakurta, *Case Study: Access to Justice for Indigenous Peoples in Bangladesh*. UNDP Regional Centre in Bangkok, Bangkok, 2007, p. 19.

Figure 1: The CHT administration system



Source: P. Novakova, 2010, p. 59.

2.7 Conclusion

This discussion highlights the state’s ethnoculturalist approach and its impact on ethnic minorities in CHT. British colonial state policies and practices created a hierarchal administrative structure that dominated the existing traditional system in CHT. The British administration imposed a ‘divide and rule’ policy to oppress and suppress the indigenous peoples as traditional elites were co-opted to collect tax for the formal British structure. In addition, the British administration declared certain indigenous communal lands as Reserve Forest which were then made available for commercial plantation. Further a large number of indigenous peoples of the CHT were displaced from their ancestral lands by the construction of the Kaptai Dam in the Pakistan period. Thus, from the British period to the Pakistan period, state policies led to the expropriation of indigenous land, and the eviction and displacement of ethnic minorities from their ancestral lands, leaving them both socially and economically vulnerable. The subsequent Bangladesh state continued these land policies. The following chapter explains how Bangladesh state policies led to indigenous displacement, marginalization and assimilation in the CHT.

CHAPTER 3 - CULTURAL ASSIMILATION AND INTEGRATION

3.1 Introduction

In Bangladesh, the majority of the population are Muslim and Bengali speakers, also known as Bangla speakers. Beside the Bangla speakers, there are fourteen ethnic minorities in the CHT, collectively known as indigenous peoples, who each have distinct languages, cultures, traditions and mores. Historically dominated by the state, indigenous peoples have formed a joint platform to protect their identity. Although there are some language and religious differences amongst the fourteen communities, there is also common ground regarding cultivation methods, festivals and diet that together have served to construct a common identity. Further, the ethnic minorities in the CHT have been living in a same place since time immemorial, constantly struggling to protect their land and resources against intruders including Muslim Bengalis settlers. In their struggles against domination and exploitation they have formed political parties, common platforms and social ties, thereby unifying the indigenous peoples in the CHT.

The common social practices of the ethnic minorities in the CHT, have helped to construct a common social identity of the indigenous peoples.¹⁰⁴ Collective practices and features such as Jum cultivation (production system), food, language, dress, housing and physical appearances, together distinguish the indigenous peoples from the Muslim Bengali population. For instance, Muslim Bengalis reject the consumption of pork and wine for religious reasons, but the indigenous peoples do not have such restrictions and in some cases wine is an important part of their way of their life. Another distinguishing feature is the different modes of preparing food. For example, the indigenous peoples boil vegetables instead of frying as Muslim Bengalis do. The indigenous peoples use different herbs and spices in cooking, which are unfamiliar to the Bengalis. These different cooking habits contribute to the process of identity construction of indigenous peoples in the CHT. In the following section, aspects of common identity formation amongst the indigenous peoples, and cultural differences between the indigenous peoples and the mainstream Bengali, will be discussed in more detail.

3.2 Making Boundaries and Convergence of Common Identity in the CHT

The Indigenous peoples in the CHT used the demarcation of cultural and territorial boundaries as central features in representing their cultural distinctiveness from the mainstream Bengalis. Other

¹⁰⁴ H.M.A. Ali, 'Place and Contested Identity: Portraying the Role of the Place in Shaping Common Sociopolitical Identity in the Chittagong Hill tracts, Bangladesh', *Diversipede*, vol.1, no, 2, 2012, p. 39.

key aspects of inter-ethnic relations and topographic situation also marked the differences between indigenous peoples and the mainstream Bengalis. The CHT consist of hill areas, and their cultural and economic activities are based on the hill forest and land. The attachment of the indigenous peoples to the land and its natural resources is, reflected in every aspect of their life - economic activities, patterns of living, housing, food habits, and customs tradition and beliefs - all of which are noticeably different from the Bengalis way of life, which evolved on the plains.¹⁰⁵ As a result, the construction of the different social, political and cultural identities within the indigenous communities is directly interconnected to the protection of territory. In this regard, the formation of the indigenous identity is a socio-cultural and political phenomenon in the CHT.¹⁰⁶ A common identity of all distinctive indigenous communities in the CHT has emerged in response to the socio-cultural and political discrimination imposed by the state. From the British colonial period to the present Bangladesh, the state has imposed and implemented such policies.¹⁰⁷ As a result, the indigenous peoples have been facing destruction, partly through the influx of the non-indigenous settlement. The fear of loss of identity in terms of culture, place or land, language, and tradition is the main reason for the construction of a shared identity and the establishment of 'ethnic boundaries for the indigenous peoples in the CHT.¹⁰⁸

There are certain differences amongst the fourteen indigenous communities in terms of socio-cultural issues such as language, kinship and religion. Despite these differences, the CHT ethnic minorities have adopted a common identity as the 'indigenous peoples of CHT'. This convergence of identity as indigenous peoples can be explained by David Brown's idea of 'ethnicity as a defensive ideology'. Brown highlights the establishment of ethnic boundaries as a defense mechanism, an identifiable 'other'. He argues that the creation of an 'other' in terms of an ethnic social and cultural system at the periphery entails the construction of a social and somewhat artificial boundary designed to both exclude 'others' and establish an 'in group'.¹⁰⁹ He interprets ethnicity as an ideology which individuals employ to resolve the insecurities arising from the power structures in society.¹¹⁰ Because state policies, existing social inequalities and imbalanced power relations between the state and the indigenous peoples have increased insecurity in the CHT, indigenous

¹⁰⁵ Ali, p. 37.

¹⁰⁶ F.U. Ahmed, 'Ethnicity and Environment: 'Tribal' Culture and the State in Bangladesh', PhD thesis, University of London, London, UK, 2014, p. 212.

¹⁰⁷ Ali, pp. 37-38.

¹⁰⁸ Ali, p. 38. For more details see Chapters 4 and 5.

¹⁰⁹ Brown, *The State and Ethnic Politics in Southeast Asia*, p. 12.

¹¹⁰ Brown, *The State and Ethnic Politics in Southeast Asia*, p. 6.

peoples have been seeking relief from state domination by constructing a common identity in the CHT.

3.3 Jum Cultivation (Mode of Production) of Indigenous Peoples in the CHT

The economy of ethnic minorities in the CHT is based on land. Traditionally all the ethnic minorities in the CHT were engaged in Jum cultivation also known as Swidden slash and burn, or shifting cultivation.¹¹¹ In 1901, 109,360 people out of 124,762 in the CHT were engaged in this production system.¹¹² In the CHT, Jumming is practiced on the hilly slopes, which is completely different to the plough cultivation practiced on the plain by the Bengali people. The Jum cultivation is a main source of the indigenous people's livelihood in the CHT,¹¹³ and ensures the daily subsistence needs. The government, however, promoted commercial mono-crop agriculture, which is not familiar to the indigenous peoples. The state policy makers in Bangladesh claim that the Jum cultivation is responsible for the loss of forest biodiversity.¹¹⁴ However, evidence shows that shifting cultivation is an integral part of tropical forest landscapes, and is crucial for biodiversity conservation, watershed protection and climate change mitigation.¹¹⁵

Possessing and cultivating land in indigenous society represents a means of identity formation, and is a part of tradition and historical construction that applies across all CHT groups. In this regard, the Jum cultivation system helps to determine the identity of the indigenous peoples in the CHT and demarcates the indigenous peoples from the Muslim Bengali. The origin of the indigenous peoples along with method of Jum cultivation have clearly distinguished them from the Muslim Bengalis. PCJSS, an indigenous political organization in the CHT, first introduced the term Jumma as a symbolic word of unity as it has its origin in 'Jum'. Thus, the term Jum cultivation not only distinguishes the indigenous peoples from the Bengalis culturally, but also symbolizes political unity in the CHT.¹¹⁶ The term Jumma was introduced to identify and unify the ethnic minorities in the CHT against the threat of the majority Muslim Bengali in Bangladesh. Through adopting the term Jumma, the PCJSS have attempted to unify the different ethnic groups under one designation. State land policies such

¹¹¹ Roy, *Land Rights of the Indigenous Peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh*, p. 24.

¹¹² Hutchinson, p. 50.

¹¹³ T.K. Nath, M. Inoue and S. Chakma, 'Shifting Cultivation (jum) in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh: Examining its Sustainability, Rural Livelihood and Policy Implications', *International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2005, p. 130.

¹¹⁴ M., Khaled, 'Traditional Farming in the Mountainous Region of Bangladesh and its Modifications', *Journal of Mountain Science*, vol. 13, no. 8, 2016, p. 1489.

¹¹⁵ Khaled, p. 1490.

¹¹⁶ Chowdhury, p. 67.

as settlement programs and commercial plantations act to replace traditional farming with cash crop agriculture and significantly reduce the amount of land available for Jum cultivation.¹¹⁷ This represents a gradual shift from a traditional pre-capitalist mode of agricultural production to a capitalist mode of production. The disappearance of traditional farming practices in the CHT may be threatening not only local biodiversity, but also cultural identity.¹¹⁸

3.4 Dress Patterns and Cultural Assimilation

Clothing is a matter of tradition, but in the CHT it also relates to other rituals and practices – particularly women’s clothing.¹¹⁹ There are fourteen distinctive ethnic communities in the CHT and every community has its own traditional dress. Among the communities some styles of dress are more or less the same. For instance, the Tanchangya, Chakms and Tripura women all wear similar styles of jewelery, and colorful handloom-woven striped skirts with a blouse. The Marma women also use colorful skirts tied onto the side of the hips. The Murong women traditionally go topless, wearing just a skirt¹²⁰. In contrast, Muslim Bengali women wear Shari and blouse, while men wear Panjabee. Women use clothing cultural differences in both the indigenous and Bengali society.¹²¹ David Brown argues that ‘ethnicity refers to the easily identifiable identity markers, such as clothing’.¹²² Women’s clothing in indigenous society demonstrates the demarcation between indigenous and Muslim Bengali society.¹²³ Thus clothing has two cultural purposes: on one the hand dress patterns demarcate indigenous from others, and, on the other hand, clothing establishes affiliation with one’s own group.¹²⁴ Further, the diversity of the indigenous people’s dress represents the exclusiveness of each group.

¹¹⁷ See more details in Chapter 4.

¹¹⁸ Khaled, p. 1489.

¹¹⁹ L. Dube, ‘Trends in Kinship and Gender Relations in South Asia’ in C. Risseuw and K. Ganesh (eds.), *Negotiation and Social Space: A Gender Analysis of Changing Kin and Security Networks in South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa*, Saga Publication, New Delhi, 1998, p. 106.

¹²⁰ Since 1980s, Bengali influx in the CHT, the dress patterns have changed among the indigenous women including Murong. The Murong women began covering their breast to protect themselves from the eyes of the Bengali.

¹²¹ N., Kabeer, ‘The Quest for National Identity: Women, Islam and the State of Bangladesh’ in D. Kandiyoti (ed.), *Women, Islam and the State*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1991, p. 129.

¹²² Brown, *Contemporary Nationalism*, p. 14.

¹²³ Ali, p. 40.

¹²⁴ E. Tarlo, *Clothing Matters, Dress and Identity in India*, Hurst, London, 1996, p.318.

Photo 1: Indigenous Peoples and some of their traditional dress patterns in CHT



Source: Khagrachari Hill District Council, 'Photo Gallery', Khagrachari Hill District Council's website, Khagrachari, Bangladesh, 2018, <<https://www.khdc.gov.bd/>>, consulted 13 April 2018.

Photo 2: Murong Men and Women their traditional dress patterns in CHT



Source: W.V. Schendel, 2002, p.355.

Photo 3: Murong girls and their traditional dress patterns in CHT



Source: W.V. Schendel, 2002, p. 362.

Today Muslim Bengali cultural influence has transformed habits of dressing in the CHT. Many indigenous women wear Shari and Shalwar Kameez and men wear Panjabee. Particularly the Marma, Chakma, Tanchangys and Tripura, who traditionally wear a short dress compared to the Muslim Bengali women and girl. Since the 1980s, following a Bengali settler influx into the CHT, the dress patterns have changed among the indigenous women including the Murong. The Murong women began covering their breast to protect themselves from the eyes of the Bengali.¹²⁵ Educated indigenous women in particular are now adopting the dress pattern of the Muslim Bengali culture. In public they increasingly wear the Muslim Bengali attire, leaving their traditional 'pinon-hadi' and 'thami' dresses home. Men are also changing their pattern of public dress to mainstream¹²⁶ Muslim Bengali attire.¹²⁷ This Bengalisation or cultural assimilation, occurs in response to a perceived external treat.¹²⁸ In this regard, the changing dress patterns of educated indigenous peoples who have regular contact with Bengali culture, is, in some cases, done in order *not* to attract attention to their culture.¹²⁹ This cultural assimilation is in line with the dominant paradigm of Bengali nationalism.

3.5 Language

In the CHT, the fourteen ethnic groups have their own distinct languages, but some of the communities have no alphabet. The different languages are more or less connected to each other. To illustrate the classification of the languages in the CHT, Table 2 below shows that many of them follow the original Tibeto-Burmese linguistic pattern. The Marma and Murong or Mro, for instance, follow the linguistic form of the Arakanese in Barma in both spoken and written form. The oral language of others group such as the Bawm, Pankhua, Khumi, Kheyang also have similarities to the Kuki-Chin. The root language of the Chakma community in Pali and Sanskrit is in some cases written in Burmese script.¹³⁰

¹²⁵ W.V. Schendel, 'A Politics of Nudity: Photograph of the 'Naked Mru' of Bangladesh', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2002, p. 361.

¹²⁶ The meaning of the term mainstream in the context here is indicated in Chapter 2. Mainstream refers the structures and content of dominant Bengali society.

¹²⁷ Tarlo, p. 42.

¹²⁸ Brown, *Contemporary Nationalism*, p. 57.

¹²⁹ The arguments here relates to the violations against indigenous peoples in the CHT, which are discussed in this thesis. See more details in Chapter 2 and 4.

¹³⁰ Uddin, 'Changes in Language, Communication and Thought', p. 32.

Today almost all the indigenous peoples are bilingual. They understand and speak the Chittagongian, a local dialect of the Bengali language in the CHT. The Chakma language is not frequently used, except for speaking within their community. Now, most young indigenous people are unable to write in their own language. They are giving up their languages due to the everyday need to use the Bengali language Bangla. The Bengali school curriculum,¹³¹ and exposure to common media forms, also influenced the shift to Bangla. The language trend can be seen in wider political context - state promotion of Bangla, and the influence of state sponsored Bengali settlers, in the CHT.¹³² The situation can be explained using Brown's thesis. Ethnic communities face assimilation and marginalization through state policy.¹³³ State sponsorship of the Bengali language, and the gradual erosion of indigenous language and hence identity, can be considered a symbol of the hegemony of the Bangladesh state.¹³⁴

Table 2: Classification of Languages in the CHT

Linguistic family	Sub-Family	Ethnic community
Indo-European	Indo-Aryan	Chakma and Tanchangya
Sino-Tibetan	Tibeto-Burman	
	(1) Burmese Family	Marma and Murong or Mro
	(2) Bodo(Kokbrok)	Tripura
	(3) Kuki-Chin	Bawm, Pangkhao, Lushai, Kheyang and Khumi

Source: M.A Uddin, 2010, p. 32.

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the gradual and systematic cultural assimilation, integration and domination of indigenous peoples in the CHT by the Bangladesh state. The construction of a collective indigenous identity represents a defensive mechanism and a line of demarcation with the Bengali Muslim culture. These dynamics were illustrated through the gradual destruction of the unique indigenous Jum cultivation system through the introduction of the commercial plantations, and the undermining of indigenous dress and language patterns, now being replaced by the mainstream Bengali alternatives. These developments reveal efforts by the Bengali state to

¹³¹ See more details in Chapter 5.

¹³² The argument here is, that due to the state's Bengali population transfer program in the CHT, communication has increased between the indigenous and Bengali people. See more details in Chapter 4.

¹³³ Brown, *Contemporary Nationalism*, p. 11.

¹³⁴ M. Haque, *Ethnic Insurgency and National Integration: A Study of Selected Ethnic Problems in South Asia*, University Press Limited, Dhaka, 1998, p. 132.

establish economic, social and cultural hegemony in the CHT. Indigenous people's defensive action against cultural assimilation can also be seen in relation to the majority Bengali Muslim religion.¹³⁵

¹³⁵ The argument is that religion is a part of the cultural. In regard to the religious differences between the indigenous peoples and the Bengalis, see Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 4 - BANGLADESH STATE POLICIES AND ETHNIC MINORITIES IN THE CHT

4.1 Introduction

Since independence in 1971, Bangladesh government policies have disrupted the social, political, economic and environmental underpinnings of the indigenous peoples in the CHT. Various policies and programs have been implemented in the name of development in the CHT. In particular, the CHT has witnessed a massive state sponsored transmigration of settlers from the other parts of the country, as well as counter insurgency operations and ethnic domination backed by the military forces. These policies represent the most significant intervention of the Bangladesh government to integrate and assimilate the ethnic minorities into majority Bengali Muslim culture.¹³⁶ This chapter explains the ways in which the Bangladesh government systematically alienated the CHT ethnic people from their identity.¹³⁷ The chapter also argues how the ethnic minority groups are being dispossessed of their ancestral land, and exposed to a continuous process of forced assimilation into the Bengali Muslim culture.

4.2 Bengali Nationalism and the Marginalization of Ethnic Minorities in the CHT

The first constitution of Bangladesh states that ‘the people of Bangladesh shall be known as Bengali as a nation and the citizens of Bangladesh shall be known as Bangladeshi’. The constitution does not recognize the existence of indigenous peoples. The constitution adopted Bengali nationalism based on the mainstream Bengali language, culture and the 1971 struggle for independence. Though the indigenous peoples made a significant contribution in the liberation war, the Bengali leaders failed to appreciate the heterogeneity of ethnic minorities in the territory.¹³⁸ The CHT indigenous peoples were advised to assimilate into the Bengali.¹³⁹ Therefore, in Bangladesh, ‘national identity’ and a sense of ‘oneness’ means ‘denying’ ethnic minorities. The idea of nationalist unity is based on a community of cultural sameness.¹⁴⁰ In this regard, the nationalist ideology of the Bangladesh government entails pursuing its policy of Islamisation and Bengaliisation of the CHT through militarization, and reducing the indigenous peoples to a minority in their own land. According to

¹³⁶ Roy, p. 84.

¹³⁷ Chakma, p. 122.

¹³⁸ G. Rasul, *Land Use, Environment and Development Experience from Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*, AH Development Publishing House, Dhaka, 2009, p. 18.

¹³⁹ Mohsin, p. 234.

¹⁴⁰ Brown, *The State and Ethnic Politics in Southeast Asia*, p. 24.

Scott, the states promotion Bengali nationalism have marginalized indigenous/ethnic groups through the process of making majority of the Bengali Muslim population in the CHT, which can be called as 'politics of identity'. Indigenous/ethnic identities are planned within the political position between the indigenous/ethnic groups and Bengali population in competition for power. This process have created a conflict between the 'powerful state back Muslim Bengali settlers' and 'powerless indigenous/ethnic groups'.¹⁴¹

4.3 Population Transfer Program: A Policy of Demographic Engineering in the CHT

Demographic engineering in CHT was one of the most damaging socio-economic policies of the Bangladesh government.¹⁴² In 1979, the Ziaur Rahman government¹⁴³ changed the CHT Manual 1900¹⁴⁴ and removed the restrictions against settlement by outsiders. The government decided to settle about 30,000 Bengalis on 'Khas land'. Officially in Bangladesh 'Khas land' is government owned land¹⁴⁵ and the ethnic minorities in CHT claim that 'Khas land' is their collective land which they have cultivated for centuries.¹⁴⁶ Further phases of Bengali settlement were initiated in 1980 and 1982. By 1984, altogether approximately 350,000 to 450,000 Muslims peoples from other parts of Bangladesh had migrated to the CHT.¹⁴⁷ Even though CHT land was already being used for the construction of Kaptai Dam (see Chapter 2),¹⁴⁸ the government argued that the CHT had vast areas of vacant land compared to other parts of the country. The government promised to provide 5 acres of hilly land, 4 acres of mixed land and 2.5 acres of paddy land to each settler family. It is estimated that approximately 100,000 families were settled in the CHT. On that basis the following areas of land were needed.¹⁴⁹

Hilly land:	100,000 * 5 acres	= 500,000 acres
Mixed land:	100,000 * 4 acres	= 400,000 acres
Paddy land:	100,000 * 2.5 acres	=250,000 acres

¹⁴¹ J.C. Scott, *The Art of not Being Governed: an Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2009, p. 243.

¹⁴² S. Adnan, *Migration, Land Alienation, and Ethnic Conflict: Causes of Poverty in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*, Research and Advisory Service, Dhaka, 2004, p. 47.

¹⁴³ See more details in Chapter 2.

¹⁴⁴ See more details in Chapter 2.

¹⁴⁵ Rashiduzzaman, p. 657.

¹⁴⁶ A. Mohsin, 'Democracy and the Marginalisation of Minorities: the Bangladesh Case', *The Journal of Social Studies*, no. 78, 1997, p. 99.

¹⁴⁷ Mohsin, *The Politics of Nationalism*, pp. 112-113.

¹⁴⁸ D. Roy, 'Land Rights, Land Use and the Indigenous Peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts' in P. Gain (ed.), *Land Forest and Forest People*, Society for Environment and Human Development, Dhaka, 1995, p. 57.

¹⁴⁹ Chakma, p. 192.

Table 3 shows that there was not enough land to settle Muslim people in CHT. In 1966, a soil and land use survey found that about 73% of the land of CHT was suitable only for forest, nearly 15% for horticulture, and only 0.03% for settlement.¹⁵⁰ It shows that the vast areas of land could not be used for cultivation.

Table 3: CHT Soil Type and Land Use

Type of soil and land use	'Class' of lands	Acres	Area %
All purpose agriculture	A	76,466	3.07
Terrace agriculture	B	67,871	2.72
Mostly horticulture and partly forestry	C	366,622	14.71
Only forestry	D	1,816,993	72.91
Horticulture and forestry	CD	32,024	1.28
Settlement		653	0.03
Water bodies		131,637	5.28
Total		2492,266	100

Source: Adnan, 2004, p. 112.

Muslim Bengali settlement in the CHT was carried out without informing the traditional leaders such as the three Circle Chiefs of Chakma, Mong and Bomang Rajas, although according to the CHT Regulation 1900, the traditional ethnic minority leader should have been involved in the decision-making process. This settlement program has largely violated the Regulation as well as other rights of ethnic minorities in the CHT. Many of the Muslim settlers were not allocated any land but simply grabbed the land illegally, and thousands of indigenous peoples were uprooted and pushed into neighboring India.¹⁵¹ There were acts of violence against the indigenous peoples during the settlement/land grabbing process, including rape, forced eviction, forced religious persecution, arrests, torture and kidnapping. Most importantly, together with the *Bangali* settlers, the army was implicated in a number of massacres carried out during the transfer program. Case Study 1 describes in more detail how law enforcement agencies became involved in human rights violations against ethnic minorities in the CHT. Table 4 shows the pattern of the human rights violations and the 11 massacres that occurred in the CHT from 1973 to 1993. The influx of settler Bengali in the CHT has resulted a number of massacres and human rights violation against ethnic/indigenous peoples.

¹⁵⁰ G. Rasul, G.B. Thapa and M.A. Zoebisch, 'Determinants of Land Use Changes in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh', *Applied Geography*, vol. 24, no. 3, 2004, p. 221.

¹⁵¹ Roy, 'Land Rights, Land Use and the Indigenous Peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts', p. 60.

Table 4: Massacres in the CHT (1973-1993)

	Place	Date	Deaths
1	Mubachari	15 October 1979	Number unknown
2	Kauhkali-Kalampati massacre	25 March 1980	200-300
3	Barkal massacre	31 May 1984	110
4	Panchari massacre	1 May 1986	Number unknown
5	Matiranga massacre	May 1986	70
6	Taindong massacre	18-19 May 1986	200
7	Hirachar, Sarbotoli, Khagrachari, Pablakhali massacres	8-10 August 1988	Number unknown (100s)
8	Longadu massacre	4 May 1989	Over 30
9	Malya massacre	2 February 1992	30
10	Logang massacre	10 April 1992	138
11	Naniarchar massacre	17 November 1993	100

Source: B. Chakma, 2010, p. 293.

4.3.1 Demographic Transformation

There is evidence that the migration programs were an effort to establish a demographic shift, an attempt to turn the indigenous majority into a minority in the CHT. During the migration policy, more than 120,000 indigenous peoples were evicted and internally displaced in their own ancestral land. About half of them became refugees in India. Table 5 shows that in 1872, over 98% of the population in CHT was indigenous. In 1974, after the independence of Bangladesh, the indigenous population decreased to 73%, and in, 1991 only 51% were indigenous peoples. This demographic shift has also changed the whole dynamic of politics and power.¹⁵² Further the state's policy of creating a Bengali nation is reflected in the 2011 official census of Bangladesh which does not provide any ethnically segregated data.

The settlement program is a state political migration¹⁵³ that it has made the ethnic minorities feel deprived, disregarded and excluded from Bangladeshi society. The sense that they are 'outsiders' in their own 'country' has provoked the ethnic minorities to begin processes of constructing a 'counter identity' based on cultural and ethno-cultural relations in the CHT.

¹⁵² Roy, *Land Rights of the Indigenous Peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh*, p. 113.

¹⁵³ Mohsin, *The Politics of Nationalism*, p. 112.

Table 5: Changing Trend of Ethnic Composition in CHT (1872-1991)

Year	Indigenous peoples%	Bengali people%
1872	98.27	1.73
1901	92.81	9.19
1959	90.39	9.61
1974	73.71	26.29
1981	59.17	40.83
1991	51.34	48.66

Source: R.C.K. Roy, 2000, pp. 112-113.

In pursuit of a Bengali nation the state and military have changed the names of thousands of indigenous places to Bengali names. Some examples are shown in Table 6. The new Islamized names represent a threat to the history and culture of indigenous peoples, and some of the ethnic groups in the CHT may soon lose not only their places names, language and words, but their culture and identity.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ Uddin, p. 34.

Table 6: List of Name Changes in Various Places of Khagrachari

Previous name (Indigenous)	Present name (Bengali name)
Pankheyepara (Divided into Four parts)	Milonpur, Pankhaiapara Kallanpur Madampur
Khagrapur	Islampur
Khabong Puizza	Khabongparia
KanoongoPara	Mohammad Pur
UttdaChari	RasulPur
Nanyachar	Naniar Char

Source: Z. Nasreen and M. Togawa, 2002, p. 106.

4.4 Militarization of the CHT

After Bangladesh independence in 1971, the CHT ethnic minority political leaders demanded specific recognition and autonomy in the nation's first constitutions. In this regard, ethnic minority leaders led by M.N. Larma met with the first Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and called for CHT autonomy. This was rejected and the Prime Minister advised the CHT ethnic minorities to adopt the new nationalist Bengali identity.¹⁵⁵ Bengali identity is based on the Bangla language and the central idea of Bengali nationalism expressed in the 1972 constitution. Article 9 states:

The unity and solidarity of the Bengali nation, which deriving its identity from its language and culture, attained sovereign and independent Bangladesh through a united and determined struggle in the war of independence, shall be the basis of Bengali nationalism.

In response to the constitution, M.N. Larma expressed his frustration in a speech to the Bangladesh Parliament:

You cannot impose your national identity on others. I am a Chakma not a Bengali. I am a citizen of Bangladesh, Bangladeshi. You are also a Bangladeshi but your national identity is Bengali... . They (ethnic minorities of CHT) can never become Bengali.¹⁵⁶

In 1972, after all initiatives were rejected by the state, Larma established the political party Parbataya Chattagram Jana Songhati Samiti (PCJSS). The Bangladesh state considered the PCJSS as a threat to national security, and tried to control it through military means. The Bangladesh government started the militarization of the CHT in 1971 through the establishment of three army garrisons. In 1975, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was assassinated and a military regime ruled under

¹⁵⁵ Mohsin, 'Language, Identity, and the State in Bangladesh' in M.E. Brown and S. Ganguly (eds.), *Fighting Words: Language Policy and Ethnic Relations in Asia*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2003, p. 22.

¹⁵⁶ Mohsin, 'Language, Identity, and the State in Bangladesh', p. 23.

General Ziaur Rahman who became President (1975-1981). Militarization of the CHT was expanded under the military regime. Following a military coup in 1982 General Hossain Mohammad Ershad further militarized the CHT, with four Bridge Army Head Quarters: Khagrachari, Dighinala, Rangamati and Bandarban and two army garrisons in Alikadam and Ruma. There are a further 500 army camps and training centers making the CHT one of the most militarized areas in the world.¹⁵⁷ Different governments had deployed a total of 115,000 military personal, which constitutes one soldier for every five or six indigenous people in the CHT.¹⁵⁸ The military also undertook counter-insurgency strategies against the armed wings of the PCJSS. A key part of this strategy was the resettlement of hundreds of thousands of Muslim Bengali people from other parts of the country into the CHT. From 1980 to 1985, many Bengali people were settled into 'cluster villages' near army camps and recruited by the military to conduct paramilitary operations against the PCJSS and the ethnic minority people.¹⁵⁹

The state also used the police, the Bangladesh Navy and Air Force, the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) now the Boarder Guard of Bangladesh (BGB), the Village Defense Party (VDP, a government appointed village security force) and the Ansars (Paramilitary Forces) to militarized the CHT.¹⁶⁰ Consequently, though the CHT had a civil administration headed by the Deputy Commissioner (DC), the coercive arms of the Bangladesh state heavily influenced political and socio-economic life.¹⁶¹ For example, the General Commanding Officer (GOC) of the Chittagong division, a high ranked military officer in the CHT, was the chairman of Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board (CHTDB). The CHTDB controlled education, health, agriculture, natural resources, forestry, fisheries, roads and infrastructure. Even political and social life was controlled by the army. The indigenous peoples required permission from the military to congregate in public, and to hold meetings and religious ceremonies.¹⁶² Moreover, the daily newspapers and other publications were controlled by the army.¹⁶³ The army also engaged in 'divide and rule' measures forming ethnic organizations that

¹⁵⁷ International Work Group for International Affairs, Organizing Committee CHT Campaign and Shimin Gaikou Centre, *Militarization in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh: the Slow Demise of the Region's Indigenous Peoples*, IWGIA, Copenhagen, 2012, p. 10,

<https://www.iwgia.org/images/publications/0577_Igia_report_14_optimized.pdf>, consulted 2 April 2018.

¹⁵⁸ M. Levene, 'The Chittagong Hill Tracts: A Case Study in the Political Economy of 'Creeping' Genocide', *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 20, no. 2, 1999, p. 354.

¹⁵⁹ Adnan, p. 29.

¹⁶⁰ Mey, pp. 147-148.

¹⁶¹ M.K. Chakma, 'Counter Insurgency: A Multidimensional Process of Marginalisation of the CHT Jummas' in S. Bhaumik, M. Guhathakurtha and S.B.R. Chaudhury (eds.), *Living on the Edge: Essays on the Chittagong Hill Tracts*, Forum for Human Rights and Calcutta Research Group, Kathmandu, 1997, p. 237.

¹⁶² Mohsin, 'Language, Identity, and the State in Bangladesh', p. 173.

¹⁶³ Mohsin, 'Language, Identity, and the State in Bangladesh', p. 174.

completed with those formed by the CHT ethnic minorities, with aim of destroying intra-ethnic relationships. These organizations included: *Chakma Unnayan Sangsad* (Chakma Development Council), *Marma Unnayan Sangsad* (Marma Development Council) and *Tripura Unnayan Sangsad* (Tripura Development Council). At the same time the paramilitary *Murong Bahini* (Murong Force) was created by the army among the Murong people to provide assistance in fighting the PCJSS.

4.4.1 Case Study: 1

Bengali settlers backed by security forces attack indigenous people in Baghahat, Rangamati and Khagrachari in the CHT

Introduction

On 19-20 and 23-24 February 2010 Muslim Bengali settlers, supported by the Bangladesh army, attacked a total of 13 indigenous Buddhist villages in Baghahat and Khagrachari in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Around 494 indigenous houses including 2 Buddhist Temples, 1 Church, 6 Village Development Committee Offices, 2 schools, 2 UNICEF Village Centers, and 1 Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) hospital were burnt to the ground, 2 indigenous people were killed by the army, 2 remained missing and 25 were injured. This communal attack was conducted in the presence of a huge number of military personnel.¹⁶⁴

Background to the attack

On 19-20 and 23-24 February the attack described above spread to Khagrachari Sadar in Khagrachari District, and Gulakmachhara, Bame Gulakmachhara, Simanachhara, Chhurung Nala and Gulakmacchra villages in Sajek Union, Rangamati District. This area was populated by indigenous peoples. However, the army had been trying to settle the Bengali families in this area, and indigenous peoples had protested against the Bengali settlement. Thus Bengali peoples with the help of law enforcement agencies attacked the indigenous villagers.¹⁶⁵

Summary of the attack:

On 19 February 2010, a group of Muslim settlers arrived in Gangaram Dwar on buses and started to a build house. The local indigenous peoples tried resist them. At 8.30 p.m., a number of Muslim

¹⁶⁴ International Work for Group International Affairs, Organizing Committee CHT Campaign and Shimin Gaikou Centre, p. 28.

¹⁶⁵ Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti, *Report on the Status of Implementation of the CHT Accord*, Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti, Rangamati, 2013, p. 20, <<http://www.chtcommission.org/Report-on-Impln-of-CHT-Accord-January-2013-Final.pdf>>, consulted 22 February 2018.

settlers and army personnel arrived and drove the indigenous peoples away. Indigenous houses were looted, and some were burnt by the settlers. In another attack that evening involving settlers with army support, 35 houses, a school and a church were burnt in Gangaram Dwar. According to the evidence, the army and the police did not take any initiatives to stop the attack. On the contrary, a Chakma youth was arrested and tortured with electric shocks at the army camp.¹⁶⁶

On the following morning, 20 February, the victims and affected indigenous peoples gathered near the burnt houses. Again, a number of Muslim settlers with sharp weapons and army support attacked and killed 2 indigenous people.¹⁶⁷ The dead were Lakshmi Bijoy Chakma of Golokomachora and Buddhapati Chakma of Guchagram village. In 13 villages, a total of 434 indigenous houses, 1 Church, 2 Buddhist temple, 2 UNICEF Para Centers, 2 schools and a MSF hospital were burnt to ashes.¹⁶⁸ At least 1,500 indigenous people were displaced after the attack.

On 23 February 2010, the indigenous peoples in Khagrachari called for a protest demonstration against the massive attack. When the rally reached the Khagrachari town, Muslim settlers backed by the army attacked the protest rally. The following day, the settlers started to attack and set fire to the nearest indigenous villages of Mojajanpara, Modhupur, Milanpur, and Upali para. In this attack, a total of 61 indigenous houses were burnt and looted.¹⁶⁹

State and Civil Society Response

On 21 February, Dipankar Talukdar, a State Minister of CHT Affairs and Jatindralal Tripura, MP and Chairman of the Task Force on Rehabilitation of the Return Refugee and Internally Displaced People, visited the affected area in Baghaihat. They promised relief for the affected people and an investigation into the attack, but no investigation report was ever published.¹⁷⁰ On 23 February, in Khagrachari Sarad, the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) was deployed and a curfew was imposed. The following day, the State Minister of CHT Affairs visited Khagrachari and blamed the Jamaat-e-Islam, the major Islamic political party in Bangladesh, and the BNP, for a conspiracy behind the attack.

¹⁶⁶ International Work Group for International Affairs, Organizing Committee CHT Campaign and Shimin Gaikou Centre, p. 28.

¹⁶⁷ International Work Group for International Affairs, Organizing Committee CHT Campaign and Shimin Gaikou Centre, p. 28

¹⁶⁸ International Work for Group International Affairs, Organizing Committee CHT Campaign and Shimin Gaikou Centre, pp. 28-29.

¹⁶⁹ The Daily Star, 'Hill Remain Tense', The Daily Star's website, Dhaka, 2010, <<http://www.thedailystar.net/news-detail-127367>>, consulted 10 March 2018.

¹⁷⁰ The Daily Star, 'Hill Remain Tense'.

On 24 February, concerned about the attack, 17 members of the Bangladesh Parliament formed a parliamentary caucus on indigenous affairs to protect the rights of indigenous peoples. Different political organizations such as Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, Bangladesh Juba Moitree, civil society members, academics, NGO's, and Human Rights activists all raised their voices.¹⁷¹

4.5 Development Programs Controlled by the Military in the CHT

In 1976, the military government led by General Ziaur Rahman established the Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board (CHTDB) to implement and coordinate development in CHT. The Board was concerned with major infrastructure projects, such as roads, bridges and buildings. The General Officer Commanding (GOC) of the Chittagong cantonment was appointed as the Chairman of the Board, placing the military in a strong economic position. A huge budget was allocated for the CHTDB, but most of it was used for military purposes, including the construction of military camps, roads and bridges, and mosques and cluster villages for Muslim Bengali settlers.¹⁷² The CHTDB also leased a huge amount of land to Muslim Bengalis for commercial rubber production.¹⁷³ Civil and military officials were also beneficiaries of CHTBD budgets.¹⁷⁴

Moreover, during the counter-insurgency in 1986, the government of Bangladesh allocated a huge budget for the military operations to attack the armed PCJSS. At the same time the CHT was declared a special economic area. The main aim of the declaration was to assimilate the ethnic minority and Muslim Bengali through a policy of integration. Providing financial and other logistic support to the ethnic minorities, the state aimed to separate the armed wings of the identity movement of the PCJSS from the masses. In this regard, the strategy of declaring a special economic area was designed to act as a 'divide and rule' policy. Under the program, the government also formed and funded the paramilitary Murong people armed group¹⁷⁵ to fight against the PCJSS.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷¹ The Daily Star, 'Parliamentary Caucus for Ethnic Rights', The Daily Star's website, Dhaka, 2010, <<http://epaper.thedailystar.net/index.php?opt=view&page=16&date=2010-02-25>>, consulted 10 March 2018.

¹⁷² International Work for Group International Affairs, Organizing Committee CHT Campaign and Shimin Gaikou Centre, pp. 16-21.

¹⁷³ Rasul, *Land Use, Environment and Development Experience from Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*, pp. 84-85.

¹⁷⁴ International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, p. 22.

¹⁷⁵ Murong is one of the fourteen ethnic minorities in the CHT.

¹⁷⁶ Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission, *Life is not Ours: Land and Human Rights in the Chittagong Hill Tracts Bangladesh*, International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, Copenhagen, 2000, pp. 38-39.

4.6 Islamisation in the CHT

Before independence, the CHT was a predominantly a non-Muslim area.¹⁷⁷ The state policy of Islamisation in the CHT was conducted through the military, and had a significant impact on the ethnic minorities. Young Muslim women were encouraged by the army to marry ethnic minority youths after converting them to Islam¹⁷⁸ Bengali youths and soldiers were also encouraged to marry indigenous women.¹⁷⁹ As mentioned in Chapter 2, none of the CHT ethnic minorities are Muslim. The ethnic minorities consider themselves culturally different from the Bengali people. In Bangladesh, Islam is the state religion. State education is oriented toward Bengali nationalism and in some cases, it has a strong Islamic influence on the students and teachers. State promotion of Bengali culture and Islam is designed to draw the ethnic minorities into the Islamic culture of Bangladesh.¹⁸⁰ This process began with the Pakistan government (1947-1971), and continued after independence of Bangladesh, with the policies increasing the level Islamisation.¹⁸¹ In 1947, less than 2% of the total population in CHT was Muslim, whereas by 1991 the proportion of Muslim people had increased to nearly 49%.¹⁸²

Islamic NGO's were also encouraged by the army to take the lead in pursuing the goal of Islamisation in the CHT. For instance, since the mid-1980s, Al Rabita, an Islamic missionary organization funded by Saudi Arabia has been working to Islamise the CHT region. In recent years Jamat-I-Islam, the major Islamic political party in Bangladesh has been very active, building mosques and madrassas (Islamic religious schools) in the CHT. Table 7 shows that the number of mosques has increased in the CHT. In 1974, there was a total of 200 mosques and 20 madrassas in the CHT,¹⁸³ whereas by 2012 mosques and madrassas increased 2297 and 1552 respectively. With the militarization of the Islamisation process by the Bangladesh state, religion became more politicized within the armed conflict. For example, in 1986, 54 Buddhist temples and 22 Hindu temples were destroyed within eight months in the CHT.¹⁸⁴ During this time about 30 indigenous women were kidnapped, forcibly

¹⁷⁷ Jamil and Panday, p. 477.

¹⁷⁸ K. Chakma and G. Hill, 'Indigenous Women and Culture in the Colonized Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh' in K. Visweswaran (ed.), *Everyday Occupations: Experiencing Militarism in South Asia and the Middle East*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2013, pp. 141-142.

¹⁷⁹ Chakma, 'Counter Insurgency: A Multidimensional Process of Marginalization of the CHT Jummas', p. 294.

¹⁸⁰ A.B.M.N. Absar, 'Muslim Identity, Bengali Nationalism: an Analysis on Nationalism in Bangladesh', *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2014, pp. 400-444.

¹⁸¹ Jamil and Panday, p. 447.

¹⁸² See details in Table 3.

¹⁸³ Mohsin, 'Language, Identity, and the State in Bangladesh', p. 179.

¹⁸⁴ International Work Group for International Affairs, Organizing Committee CHT Campaign and Shimin Gaikou Centre, p. 18.

converted to Islam and married Muslim men.¹⁸⁵ The Muslim oriented policies in Bangladesh have contributed substantially to the further alienation of indigenous peoples. The coercive Islamisation process has further demarcated society in Bangladesh between the majority Muslims and the non-Muslim indigenous peoples in the CHT.

Table 7: Growth of Mosques and Madrassa (religious Muslim schools) in CHT

Year	Number of mosque	Number of Madrassa
1961	40	2
1974	200	20
1981	592	35
2012	2297	1552

Sources: IWGIA 2012, p. 18.

4.7 State Policies and the Violation of Indigenous Women

Ethnic minority women are one of the most vulnerable, marginalized and disadvantaged groups in Bangladesh. In the CHT, ethnic women have been facing multiple forms of discrimination within the Bangladeshi nationalist framework. Firstly, in a male dominated and patriarchal society, indigenous/ethnic minority women face discrimination within their traditional societies. Secondly, in a Muslim-dominated society they are the religious minority. Further, in a Bengali dominated society, CHT ethnic women are in an ethnic minority.¹⁸⁶ Since independence in 1972, there has been no constitutional provision for, or recognition of indigenous women in Bangladesh. Due to the lack of constitutional safeguard, the indigenous women in the CHT have been facing various types of discrimination, marginalization and assimilation in terms of ethnic identity. These types of discrimination have created significant barriers in terms of access to income, land and resources, decent and quality employment, education, healthcare, and participation in public and political life. Ongoing human rights violations and marginalization from development program has left the indigenous women more vulnerable and subjected to sexual abuse, domestic violence and trafficking. Having no constitutional recognition as ‘indigenous’, ethnic minority women in Bangladesh are often treated as ‘second-class citizens’ in public places. For instance, ethnic minorities including women cannot access some restaurants and job places.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission, p. 108.

¹⁸⁶ S. Ahmed, ‘Women in the CHT: the Violent Hills’, *The Daily Star on the Web*, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 6 March 2011, <<https://www.thedailystar.net/news-detail-176520>>, consulted 17 June 2018.

¹⁸⁷ Mohsin, ‘Language, Identity, and the State in Bangladesh’, p. 47-51.

According to Section 10 of the Constitution of Bangladesh, 'steps shall be taken to ensure participation of women in all spheres of national life'. In this regard, a total of 50 seats out of 350 in the national parliament are reserved for women to promote their representation and participation in public and political life. However, none are reserved for the ethnic/indigenous women and only one - a Tanchangya indigenous women from the CHT elected in the 1980s – has ever sat in parliament.¹⁸⁸

In addition, indigenous women have less access than men or other women to health services in the CHT compared to other parts of the country. According to the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) indigenous women in the CHT are at particular risk at the time of childbirth. In 2004, Tribal Health, Nutrition, and Population Plan (THNPP) was initiated by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare of Bangladesh to improve the health system in the CHT. However, this policy was not sensitive to important cultural, social, economic and linguistic features of ethnic/indigenous identity and life. In this regard, Because Bengali doctors do not have sufficient knowledge and understanding of social, cultural and linguistic aspect of ethnic/indigenous society, they do not understand the unique sufferings of indigenous women. In 2011, the Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), a news agency focusing on humanitarian stories in regions that are often forgotten, under-reported, misunderstood or ignored, reported that mortality rates are 85 deaths per 1,000 in the CHT, compared with a rate of 64 deaths per 1,000 nationally.¹⁸⁹

Violence against ethnic/indigenous women in Bangladesh is one of the more alarming issues. The Bangladesh government has endorsed several international treaties such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) and the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), all of which refer to equal rights for men and women. These treaties commit the government to promote and protect women and prevent discrimination and violence against women, but no proper initiatives were taken by the government to implement these treaties.¹⁹⁰ According to the International Land Coalition (ILC) report in 2015, and reports from 2007 to 2015, a

¹⁸⁸ Barkat *et al.*, *Women in Parliament: Process and Extent of Participation, and Scope for Strengthening their Role*, Prepared for PRODIP The Asia Foundation Bangladesh, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2012, p. 2.

¹⁸⁹ Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), 'Health Indicators Lag in Chittagong Hill Tracts', IRIN's website, Geneva, 2011, <<http://www.irinnews.org/feature/2011/07/14/health-indicators-lag-chittagong-hill-tracts>>, consulted 20 June 2018.

¹⁹⁰ Ahmed, 'Women in the CHT: the Violent Hills'.

total of 434 ethnic women and girls were subjected to sexual and physical violence.¹⁹¹ Moreover, in 2017, the human rights organization Kapaeeng Foundation (KF), reported that a total of 30 ethnic/indigenous women and girls suffered sexual assault in the CHT, including nine who were raped and murdered, and 12 who were raped. There were also nine cases of attempted rape. Most of the offences were committed by Bengali settlers and members of law enforcement agencies.¹⁹² None of the perpetrators were prosecuted within the existing judicial system because the CHT police and civil administration are dominated by the Bengali. In this regard, in most cases, ethnic/indigenous peoples are afraid to speak up against the powerful military backed Bengalis.¹⁹³

4.8 Conclusion

In this Chapter, I have shown that a wide range of policies implemented by various arms of the Bangladesh state contributed towards the political, economic and cultural marginalization of indigenous peoples in the CHT. The Bangladesh state, guided by notions of Bengali nationalism, Bangladeshi nationalism, and Islamization, and assisted by the military, has pursued the following policies in the CHT:

Bengali settlement leading to demographic transformation and a decline in the proportion of indigenous peoples; expropriation/land grabbing of indigenous land; changes to indigenous nomenclature; the militarization of civil administration and development agencies; Islamization through marriage, education (madrasa) and NGO activities; and counter-insurgency campaigns to defeat the ethnic/indigenous based PCJSS; exclusion of indigenous/ethnic minority women from state services and political participation; and ongoing human rights violation against ethnic/indigenous women. Together these policies threaten to undermine the political, socio-economic and cultural bases of indigenous life and identity. The state education system is of particular importance in the state's efforts to integrate and assimilate the indigenous peoples of the CHT.

¹⁹¹ International Land Coalition (ILC), '2015 Situation Report on Indigenous Women in Bangladesh', ILC's website, Rome, 2016, <<http://www.landcoalition.org/en/regions/asia/news/2015-situation-report-indigenous-woman-bangladesh>>, consulted 18 June 2018.

¹⁹² United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, *A joint Submission on Indigenous Rural Women Situation in Bangladesh*, United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, Geneva, 2013, p. 4, <<https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/CEDAW/RuralWomen/KapaeengFoundationBangladesh.pdf>>, consulted 22 June 2018.

¹⁹³ Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), 'Chittagong Hill Tracts: Women and Children Remain Targets of Human Rights Violations', UNPO's website, Brussels, Belgium, 2018, <<http://unpo.org/article/20763>>, consulted 12 June 2018.

CHAPTER 5 - EDUCATION SYSTEM IN BANGLADESH AND THE IMPACT ON THE ETHNIC MINORITIES

5.1 Introduction

The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations UDHR) states every person has the right to education, even in the midst of national crisis. The international community has adopted several education policies to combat the lack of access to education throughout the world. UNESCO's Education for All (EFA) program emphasizes the need to provide quality 'education for all' children.¹⁹⁴ The government of Bangladesh is fully committed to implementing the objectives of EFA. In addition, the constitution of Bangladesh in Article 17 states that there should be free and compulsory education for all.¹⁹⁵

There are two education ministries in Bangladesh - (1) The Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) and (2) the Ministry of Education (MoE). While the MoPME is responsible for primary education, the MoE is divided into divisions: the Secondary and Higher Education Division responsible for tertiary education, and the Technical and Madrasa Education Division responsible for technical and Islamic education.¹⁹⁶ Over 700 NGOs are involved in the provision of formal and non-formal education within the government system. The system of primary education comprises the formal and non-formal schooling system within the Muslim religious stream. With more than 19 million students at the primary level, Bangladesh has one of the largest education systems in any developing country.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 'Education for All', UNESCO's website, Paris, 2008, <<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/education-for-all/>>, consulted 13 May 2018.

¹⁹⁵ World Data on Education, *Bangladesh*, The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO, Paris, 2006, p. 1, <<http://www.ibe.unesco.org/sites/default/files/Bangladesh.pdf>>, consulted 11 March 2018.

¹⁹⁶ Ministry of Education's website, Government of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2018, <<http://www.moedu.gov.bd/>>, consulted 22 April 2018.

¹⁹⁷ Directorate of Primary Education, *Bangladesh Primary Education Annual Sector Performance Report 2017*, Directorate of Primary Education, Government of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2017, pp. 32-38, <[https://dpe.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/dpe.portal.gov.bd/notices/f33bc7ad_c705_42a8_bba9_76b384f3e9cb9/ASPR%202017%20Report-October%202017%20\(M&E\)%20\(4\).pdf](https://dpe.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/dpe.portal.gov.bd/notices/f33bc7ad_c705_42a8_bba9_76b384f3e9cb9/ASPR%202017%20Report-October%202017%20(M&E)%20(4).pdf)>, consulted 22 February 2018.

Table 8: Type of Schools in Bangladesh

Jurisdiction of:	Type of Primary School
Ministry of Primary and Mass Education	Government primary school
	Registered non-government primary school
	Experimental school
	Community school
	Non-registered non-government primary school
	Kindergarten
	NGO school
Ministry of Education	Primary section of secondary school
	Ebtedayae madrassa (Islamic education)
	Primary section of dakhil, alim, fazil and Kamil madrassa (Islamic education)

Source: P. Novakova, 2010, p. 61.

5.2 National Education Policies in Bangladesh

The majority of the Bengali population in Bangladesh speak in the Bangla language. Around 45 indigenous communities speak over 30 languages other than the Bengali language.¹⁹⁸ Since 1971, all language-in-education policies and planning has focused on the Bengali language and culture, ignoring the other ethnic/indigenous languages.¹⁹⁹ Article 3 of the 1972 Constitution declared the Bengali language as the state language and ‘the official language of communication as well as the medium of instruction in all state academic institutions’.²⁰⁰ The constitution does not recognize the indigenous peoples’ languages.²⁰¹ Nor does the constitution or law protect indigenous languages.²⁰²

Since independence, there have been six National Education Commission reports on language-in-education policies (1974, 1987, 1997, 2000, 2002 and 2003).²⁰³ The 1974 report states that ‘Bengali language to be the medium of instruction in all schools’. The Bengali language will be considered as the ‘mother tongue’ of all in Bangladesh.²⁰⁴ The subsequent reports of 1987, 1997, and 2000 also recommended that Bangla should be the sole medium of instruction.²⁰⁵ Thus throughout the years,

¹⁹⁸ I. Islam, *Banglapedia: National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh*, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2013, p. 57.

¹⁹⁹ T. Hossain and J.W. Tollefson, *Language Policy, Culture and Identity in Asian Contexts*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, 2007, pp. 242-247.

²⁰⁰ Mohsin, ‘Language, Identity, and the State in Bangladesh’, p. 98.

²⁰¹ Hossain and Tollefson, p. 255.

²⁰² T. Rahman, ‘A Multilingual Language-in-Education Policy for Indigenous Minorities in Bangladesh: Challenges and Possibilities’, *Current Issues in Language Planning*, vol. 11, no. 4, 2010, p. 346.

²⁰³ Rahman, p. 447.

²⁰⁴ Hossain and Tollefson, p. 249.

²⁰⁵ Hossain and Tollefson, p. 252.

Bangladesh has emphasized a single language policy.²⁰⁶ Neither the National Education Policy nor the six commission reports considered that the education of the ethnic minorities may be conducted in their 'mother tongues'.

Recently, however, the government of Bangladesh approved a Primary Education Situational Analysis, Strategies and Action Plan for mainstreaming Tribal Children (2006) under the Primary Education Development Program II (PEDP II), to ensure primary education for indigenous children in their mother tongues. In 2009, the government declared the formation of National Education Policies based on the Kudr-at-e-Khuda Commission Report of 1974, the Shamsul Haque Commission Report of 1997, and the National Education Policy of 2000 in line with the mother tongue, including in the indigenous communities.²⁰⁷ The National Education Policy of 2009, proposed a first-mother language based education policy for the indigenous students. However, the policy is still not fully implemented.²⁰⁸

5.3 The Impact of National Education Policy in the CHT

The 'no language policies except Bangla' in the national education curriculum has had a great impact in the CHT's indigenous peoples. Bangla has been the only language used in all forms of education, including primary and adult literacy classes. There has been no scope in the education sector for the use of indigenous languages. The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) also does not take any initiatives to prepare textbooks in indigenous language, with only Bengali and English used. To follow the national curriculum, the indigenous children have to learn the Bengali language. The national curriculum is based on Bengali language and culture, and most teachers are Bengali. Indigenous student do not understand the Bengali language, and Bengali teachers do not understand indigenous language and ways of communication (as described in Chapter 2). For example, indigenous student do not understand the meaning of Bangla stories or poems. Thus, they often lose interest and drop out.²⁰⁹

5.3.1 Access to Education in the CHT

The CHT's education system follows national policies. The Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council (CHTRC) and its three Hill District Councils are in charge of a wide range of services, including primary

²⁰⁶ H.R. Thompson, 'Bangladesh' in A. Simpson (ed.), *Language and National Identity in Asia*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007, p. 6.

²⁰⁷ Rahman, p. 347.

²⁰⁸ Rahman, p. 342.

²⁰⁹ Uddin, p. 33.

education. In the CHT, a District and Upazila Officer, who usually do not belong to the CHT, are responsible for the education program and are appointed by the national administration.

The education situation in CHT in terms of both literacy and schooling is much worse than in other parts of the country. The pie chart below illustrates that more than 54% of indigenous peoples are illiterate and have received no education. More than 15% of the CHT indigenous peoples did not complete primary and secondary education. According to a survey conducted by Barkat *et al* only 1.5% of the indigenous peoples have completed above secondary education.²¹⁰ The dropout rate in primary education at the national level is around 30%, whereas the rate is nearly double at 59% in the CHT.²¹¹ More than 33% of the primary school students drop out because of a lack of understanding of the Bengali language.²¹² The survey also shows that 63% of the indigenous students have to take private tutorials to support their reading and writing of Bengali language. Other students receive support from their parents, who learn to speak, read and write Bangla from television. However, only 20% of indigenous students have televisions at home.²¹³ In addition, almost all administrative offices in the CHT are staffed by Bengali officers who are responsible for important issues such as justice, land and law enforcement. In everyday activities, the indigenous people's lack of understanding of the Bengali language makes them feel insecure and excluded.²¹⁴ The root causes of illiteracy among the indigenous peoples includes remoteness of indigenous communities; failure of the national curriculum to recognize ethnic/indigenous social context and culture; the language barrier between indigenous students and Bengali teachers, and less school facilities the indigenous students. Indigenous female students had comparatively less access to education. For instance, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics 2016, the literacy rate in the CHT for female students aged 7 was about 38%, whereas the national literacy rate for female students about 49%. Further, the literacy rate for female students aged 15-24 years in the CHT was 49%, whereas the national average was 72%.²¹⁵ The lack of access to education for

²¹⁰ Barkat *et al.*, *Socio-economic Baseline Survey of Chittagong Hill Tracts*, pp. 6-8.

²¹¹ The Daily Star, 'School Dropout Rate Higher in Three Hill District', The Daily Star's website, Dhaka, 2012, <<https://www.thedailystar.net/news-detail-251421>>, consulted 11 March 2018.

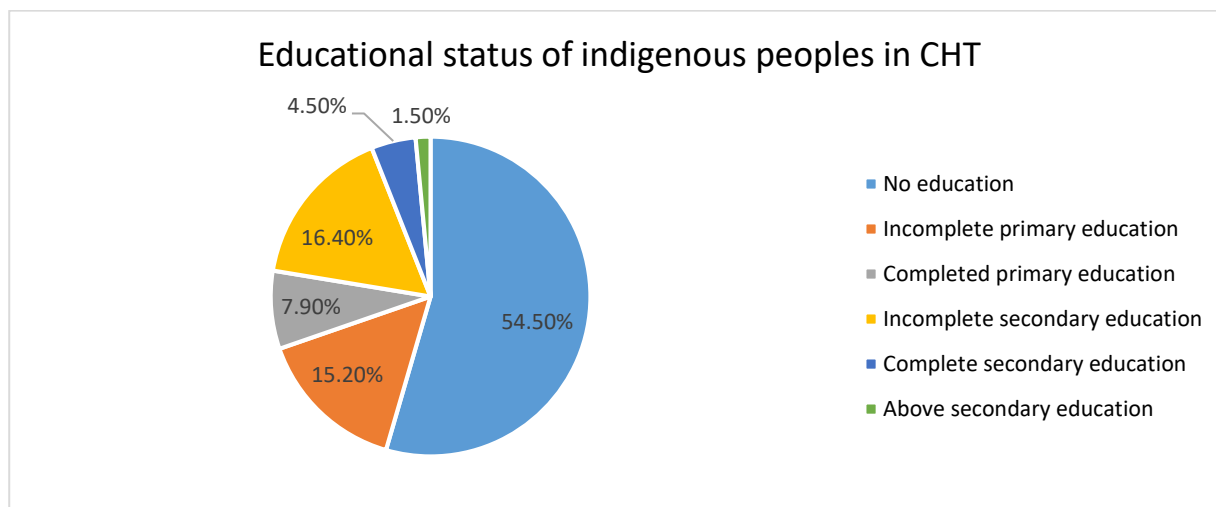
²¹² S. Deabnath, 'No Books in Mother Tongue, Ethnic Kids Dropout of Schools', The Daily Star on the Web, Dhaka, 22 February 2008, <<https://www.thedailystar.net/news-detail-24439>>, consulted 12 February 2018.

²¹³ J. Leer, L. Gertsch, S. Parveen, and M.D. Hossain, *Language Use and Literacy Skills: READ Baseline Assessment and Situation Analysis, Chittagong Hill Tracts Bangladesh*, Save the Children, Dhaka, 2015, p. 10, <http://readbangladesh.org/Content/upload/Bangladesh_CHT_Synthesis_FINAL_20151111.pdf>, consulted 11 March 2018.

²¹⁴ Uddin, p. 34.

²¹⁵ Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), *Statistical Pocket Book Bangladesh 2016*, BBS, Ministry of Planning, Dhaka, 2016, p. 63-66,

ethnic/indigenous peoples in the CHT is one of the key contributing factors in their marginalization, and assimilation into mainstream Bengali society.



Source: Barkat *et al.*, pp. 2-6.

5.3.2 The Lack of Educational Infrastructure in the CHT

The formal system of education in CHT is shaped by a national education policy which is designed mainly for the majority Bengali. Consequently, the CHT students have lower access to education compared to the others. According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) 2009 base line survey in 2009, the CHT has one primary school for every five villages compared to two schools for every three villages in the rest of the country.²¹⁶ In some cases, for instance, in Sajek Union in Rangamati District, there is no school within 30-50 kilometers from where there are nine indigenous villages and more than 300 students.²¹⁷ According to government requirements, a school should be available within two kilometers. The educational institutions are mainly in the densely populated Bengali areas. However, indigenous students live in remote villages, and it is much more difficult for them to reach school due to poor transport.²¹⁸ In this regard, the national education policy is not accessible for the CHT. The shortage of teachers is another major problem. For instance, Rowangchari Government High School in Bandarban District has had only three teachers for over 500 students since 2008.²¹⁹ The indigenous peoples have also been facing obstacles in the job market. Skills in community languages are ignored and the efficiency is measured only by their skills

http://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/d6556cd1_dc6f_41f5_a766_042b69cb1687/PocketBook2016.pdf, consulted 15 May 2018.

²¹⁶ Barkat *et al.*, *Socio-economic Baseline Survey of Chittagong Hill Tracts*, pp. 2-3.

²¹⁷ Kapaeeng Foundation, 'Human Rights Report 2015 on Indigenous Peoples in Bangladesh,' Kapaeeng Foundation's website, Dhaka, 2015, < <https://www.kapaeeng.org/>>, consulted 20 April 2018.

²¹⁸ Mohsin, *The Politics of Nationalism*, 1997, p. 127.

²¹⁹ Kapaeeng Foundation, p. 169.

in the Bengali and English languages. The emphasis on proficiency in the mainstream Bengali language ignores the other distinct languages, and is an indicator of gradual indirect assimilation.²²⁰

5.4 Reducing Gaps

The above discussion emphasizes that indigenous access to education the CHT is inadequate. However, a number of NGOs have been working in the CHT to promote primary education. The NGO BRAC (Building Resources Across Communities, formerly, the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee) is one actor playing an important role. Since 1985, BRAC, has run a Non-Formal Primary Education project for those being excluded by the existing national education policy.²²¹ In 2001, BRAC launched Education for Ethnic Children (EEC) to help indigenous children who do not cope with mainstream Bengali education. This program developed teaching methods and materials to help indigenous children adjust to the Bengali national curriculum, with the help of an indigenous speaking teacher. In 2008, BRAC produced pre-primary school materials in indigenous Chakma script under a pilot project. The materials were produced in a way that reflected indigenous culture, tradition and their way of life.²²² This program highlights particularly ‘the needs of indigenous children, and also raises awareness amongst the mainstream dominant Bengali.’²²³

In addition, UNICEF started a Community Development Project in the CHT. Its two main components are: (1) Early learning opportunities for children, and (2) Hygiene and nutrition education for mother and child. The project aims to introduce local culture as well as the Bangla alphabet and language to indigenous children.²²⁴ Moreover, in 2009, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) launched a project on ‘Strengthening Basic Education in the Chittagong Hill Tracts’ under the Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Facilities (CHTDF), with contributions from the European Union (EU). The UNDP project aims to make a bridge between the government system and CHT Hill District Council (HDCs);²²⁵ to strengthen community based schooling under the national financing scheme;

²²⁰ Uddin, p. 35.

²²¹ M.B. Anderson, *Education For all: What Are We Waiting For?*, UNICEF, New York, 1992. p. 23.

²²² BRAC, Education for Ethnic Children, BRAC’s website, Dhaka, 2016, <<http://www.brac.net/education-programme/item/775-education-for-ethnic-children-eec>>, consulted 12 March 2018.

²²³ T. Sagar and N. Poulson, *Education for Indigenous Children: The BRAC Model*, Paper Presented at the Conference on Language Development, Language Revitalization, and Multilingual Education in Minority Communities in Asia, Bangkok, Thailand, 6-8 November 2003, p. 1, <<http://www.silbangladesh.org/resources/archives/65425>>, consulted 16 March 2018.

²²⁴ United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), ‘2011 Bangladesh: Evaluation of the Integrated Community Development Project’, UNICEF’s website, New York, 2011, <https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index_66822.html>, consulted 15 February 2018.

²²⁵ See details about HDCs in Chapter 6.

and to increase community involvement in school management.²²⁶ Local NGOs such as Zabarang Kalyan Samity, in partnership with donors like Save the Children and the Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF), have also been working on improving primary education in the CHT. Though the national and international agencies and NGOs are working for the betterment of primary education in the CHT, they recruit a huge number of Bengali people who have no idea about indigenous culture and way of life, and in some cases these programs do not follow up, or take further steps after completing the initial project.²²⁷

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed various national education policies of the Bangladesh state, and how they ignore indigenous peoples. All government approaches and policies on formal education are based on the dominant Bengali language and culture and consequently exclude indigenous language and culture. As a result, a huge number of students drop out from the formal education system. Although, national and international NGOs have been working to reduce the gaps by focusing on local language and culture, their efforts are constrained by the recruitment of Bengali staff. Overall, the state dominated education policy can be considered as a tool to assimilate the indigenous peoples into Bengali society. As a consequence, there is a loss of linguistic and cultural diversity, as well as indigenous identity in the CHT.

²²⁶ United Nations Development Programme – Bangladesh, and Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Facilities, *Strengthening Basic Education in the Chittagong Hill Tracts - Phase II, 2014*, Prepared for the European Union, Dhaka, 2014, p. 6, <https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/BGD/Donor%20Progress%20Report%202013_Strengthening%20Basic%20Education%20in%20the%20CHT%20Phase%20II.pdf>, consulted 9 February 2018.

²²⁷ Uddin, p. 35.

CHAPTER 6 - THE CHT ACCORD OF 1997 AND DEVELOPMENT ISSUES IN THE CHT

6.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the CHT Accord (also known as The CHT Peace Accord) signed by the Bangladesh government and the PCJSS in 1997. In the 1980s, the world came to know about the CHT, when international newspaper headlines highlighted state sponsored military massacres of indigenous peoples, human rights violations, forced evictions, the burning of indigenous villages, rape, disappearance and torture, and indigenous refugees fleeing into India. In 1977, a Tribal Convention was formed to stop the conflict between the Bangladesh government and the PCJSS. There was also pressure from international donor countries to reach a political solution to the conflict. During that time the CHT Commission²²⁸ and Amnesty International published regular reports about the CHT situation, and also provided news on the CHT for the different donor countries of Bangladesh such as, the United Kingdom, Germany, Switzerland, Japan, Sweden, Denmark, France, the European Commission (EC) and the United States of America.²²⁹

From 1979 to 1997, a negotiation process began between the PCJSS, different government representatives including the BNP, and the Bangladesh Awami League. On 2 December 1997, after 24 years of negotiations the CHT Accord was signed, ending armed conflict in the CHT. On the 26 September 1999, Sheikh Hasina the Prime Minister of Bangladesh was honored with UNESCO's Felix Houphouet-Boigny Peace Award. The Accord contains the following major provisions:²³⁰

6.2 Main Features of the CHT Accord

- a) Recognition of CHT as a tribal inhabited area.
- b) The formation of the CHT Regional Council, a new unit of regional authority considered an instrument of self-government²³¹ in the CHT; and reformation of the remaining three Hill District Council²³². On both of the councils, the chairman and two thirds of the membership

²²⁸ CHT Commission works for the indigenous peoples in the CHT to promote human rights and examine the implementation of the CHT Accord of 1997.

²²⁹ Mohsin, 'Language, Identity, and the State in Bangladesh', p. 14.

²³⁰ Mohsin, *The Politics of Nationalism*, p. 78.

²³¹ Jamil and Panday, p. 471.

²³² The Three Hill District Councils including Rangamati District Council, Khagrachari District Council and Bandarban District Council, were established in 1989 through an act of parliament under the Ershad government.

are to be reserved for the indigenous peoples. The local police forces can be recruited by the HDC.

- c) Indigenous supervision and coordination of the three HDCs, administration of law and order, the CHT Development Board (CHTDB), development programs including NGO activities, social and traditional justice, disaster management and relief operations.²³³
- d) The establishment of a Ministry for Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs (MoCHTRA).
- e) Demilitarization of the CHT through withdrawal of the military and its 500 camps,²³⁴ except for the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), now Border Guard of Bangladesh (BGB), and three cantonments.
- f) The formation of a CHT Land Dispute Resolution Commission headed by a retired judge and comprising the following representatives: the three Circle Chief (*raja*) of three Hill District, a representative of the RC Chairman, of the District Council concerned, and the Divisional Commissioner.
- g) Rehabilitation of indigenous returnee refugees from India, as well as internally displaced and landless indigenous peoples.

6.3 The Implementation Status of the CHT Accord

According to the PCJSS the government has implemented few provisions of the Accord over the last 20 years. The government passed the CHT Regional Council Act of 1998, the three Hill District Council (amendment) Act of 1998, the Land Dispute Resolution Commission Act of 2001 and 2016, and the CHT Regulation Act of 2003. A total of 70 military camps out of more than 500 were closed.²³⁵ However, the main issue of the Accord, ensuring protection of indigenous identity by taking measures to return of Muslim Bengali Settlers, has not been addressed.²³⁶ Further, although parliamentary acts regarding the CHTRC and HDC were passed in 1998, they have not been implemented or acted upon. The military, under the insurgency program of 'Operation Uttoron' still

²³³ Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti, *A Brief Report on Implementation on the CHT Accord 2017*, Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti, Rangamati, 2017, pp. 21-13, <<http://www.pcjss-cht.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/PCJSS-Report-on-Impln-of-CHT-Accord-2-December-2017-Eng.pdf>>, consulted 16 February 2018.

²³⁴ More details are outlined in Chapter 4.

²³⁵ Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti, p. 30.

²³⁶ Kapaeeng Foundation, p. 28.

intervenes in everyday civil matters as it did before the CHT Accord, maintaining its rural dominance.²³⁷

In 2001, the Land Dispute Resolution Commission Act was passed and a Land Commission was formed to resolve the land problems in the CHT. Since 2001, the Land Commission has not started any activities in this regard. The Commission has not been able to address even a single land problem within a decade. Specially, the Commission has failed to reverse the following aspects of ethnic/indigenous land and resource alienation, some dating back over a century:

- a) British colonial state appropriation of the ethnic/indigenous people's collective lands, and the concomitant introduction of private ownership to facilitate commercial agriculture.
- b) Dislocation of 100,000 ethnic/indigenous peoples during the Pakistan period due to the submersion of lands caused by a state's development project, particularly, the Kaptai Dam on the Karnafuli river;
- c) Government sponsored settlement of Bengali in the CHT, supported by militarization of the CHT and
- d) Despite the signing of the CHT Accord, ongoing land grabbing and acquisition for commercial purposes, and militarization.²³⁸

Further, while the government promised to rehabilitate internally displaced indigenous peoples²³⁹ and ex-combatants of the PCJSS,²⁴⁰ and return indigenous refugees, no action have been taken to implement these components of the Accord.²⁴¹ With regard to the question of constructing indigenous identity in the CHT, the Accord implementation and outcomes are frustrating and disappointing.²⁴² For instance, Ushatan Talukdar, vice-president of PCJSS and Member of Parliament (MP), expressed his frustration over the implementation status of the CHT Accord as particular the

²³⁷ UNDESA Division for Inclusive Social Development Indigenous Peoples, *UNPFII Report on Eleventh Session*, United Nations, website, New York, 2012, <<https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/unpfii-sessions-2/unpfii-eleventh-session.html>>, consulted 12 March 2018.

²³⁸ Mohsin, *The Politics of Nationalism*, p. 24-30.

²³⁹ Due to state policies, a number of indigenous peoples were displaced internally. See Chapter 4.

²⁴⁰ After signing the CHT Accord in 1997 more than 1900 combatants surrendered their guns to the Bangladesh government.

²⁴¹ Internally Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), *Bangladesh: Indigenous People and Religious Minorities Still affected by Displacement*, IDMC, Geneva, 2009, pp. 16-18, <<http://www.internaldisplacement.org/assets/library/Asia/Bangladesh/pdf/Bangladesh-Overview-Jul09.pdf>>, consulted 16 February 2018.

²⁴² M. Wilkinson, 'Negotiating with the Other: Center-Periphery Perceptions, Peacemaking Policies and Pervasive Conflict in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh', *International Review of Social Research*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2015, p. 185.

failure to implement land issue.²⁴³ Control over the land and its natural resources is considered a key element in the construction and maintenance of indigenous/ethnic minority in the CHT.²⁴⁴ According to the PCJSS, during Accord negotiations the government verbally agreed to resettle the Muslim Bengali, and return land ownership to the indigenous owners. The Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission states that a number of Muslim Bengali settlers have openly expressed a desire to settle outside of the CHT if the government ensures their livelihood. In this regard, the European Union proposed to provide financial assistance to rehabilitate the Bengali settlers. The Bangladesh government then refused to accept the EU offer.²⁴⁵ It indicates a lack of political willingness from the government to resettle the Bengalis outside of the CHT, because Bengali settlers are powerful, and the rehabilitation would undermine the Bengali nationalism project. Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma, President of the PCJSS who signed the Accord on behalf of the ethnic minority in the CHT, has accused the government of failing to implement key components of the Accord in order to maintain Bengali dominance. This has implications for the indigenous peoples and their identity.²⁴⁶

In addition, during the BNP-led coalition government (2001 to 2006) implementation of the CHT Accord was put on hold. When in opposition the BNP opposed the CHT Accord, calling it a 'sell-out' of Bangladesh sovereignty. Khaleda Zia, the Chairperson of the BNP demanded the rehabilitation of all slum dwellers from the capital city of Dhaka to the CHT. A number of indigenous peoples who wanted full autonomy of the CHT also rejected the Accord. In 1998, these indigenous opponents formed United People's Democratic Forum (UPDF) and they have been involved in clashes with the PCJSS supporters.²⁴⁷ A political organization called Sama Adikhar Andolon (Equal Rights Movement), opposing the Accord, and backed by the military, has also been formed by the Muslim Bengali settlers.²⁴⁸ Given these divisions over the Accord, 'the CHT today is divided in every sense of the word'.²⁴⁹ The state's failure to implement the CHT Accord has led to growing tensions between

²⁴³ Daily Sun, 'Call to Implement CHT Accord', Dhaka, 2017, Daily Sun's website, <<http://www.daily-sun.com/arcprint/details/272805/Call-to-implement-CHT-accord/2017-12-04>>, consulted 26 January 2018.

²⁴⁴ Mohsin, 'Language, Identity, and the State in Bangladesh' p. 44.

²⁴⁵ Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission, p. 20.

²⁴⁶ S. Liton, 'CHT Peace Accord – Achievement Sinks in Negligence', The Daily Star on the Web, Dhaka, 2 December 2016, <<https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/human-rights/cht-peace-accord-achievement-sinks-negligence-1323739>>, consulted 21 April 2018.

²⁴⁷ Internally Displacement Monitoring Centre, p. 12.

²⁴⁸ The Daily Star, 'CHT Peace Accord: Disconnect Still Brews on Slake Implementation', The Daily Star's website, Dhaka, 2004, <<http://archive.thedailystar.net/2004/12/01/d4120101022.htm>>, consulted 11 March 2018.

²⁴⁹ Mohsin, *The Politics of Nationalism*, 1997, p. 107.

ethnic minorities and the military backed Bengalis in the CHT. There are human rights violations, and increasing violence against the indigenous peoples in this region.²⁵⁰

6.4 Conclusion

The Bangladesh government promised to ensure indigenous identity and rights through the signing of the CHT Accord. The signing of the Accord and the end of armed conflict between the PCJSS and the Bangladesh government was hailed by the international community. However, implementation has been disappointing. Although some provisions have been enacted, particularly regarding the CHT RC, the three HDC Act, MoCHTA and the closing of some army camps, other components regarding land reform, the military's ongoing role in civil administration and development, and indigenous refugees, have not been implemented. In this regard, the indigenous peoples continue to feel excluded from political and economic power and the construction of their identity. The CHT Accord could have been a platform for recovering and safeguarding indigenous identity in the CHT. Instead, the state's failure to implement key components has created more fear and tension. In many ways, key features of the Bengali nationalist project remain intact.

²⁵⁰ See the Case Study in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 7 – CONCLUSION

The central question addressed in this thesis is - how do Bangladeshi state policies force assimilation of the CHT ethnic groups into the mainstream Bengali nation? This thesis has attempted to identify how state policies dominate and forcibly assimilate ethnic minorities of the CHT into the mainstream Bengali of Bangladesh society.

The central question has been analyzed by providing historical information regarding state policies, and assessing their impact on the identity of indigenous peoples in the CHT. The thesis has attempted to explore the state's role in forced assimilation, marginalization and exclusion of indigenous peoples as part of the state's national development process. In this regard, the thesis has shown that policies such as building Bengali nationalism, constitutional recognition (and exclusion), and the national education policy have together undermined indigenous identity in the CHT. Policies of indigenous exclusion have been pursued by both colonial and post-colonial governments, and reflect the determination of the current Bangladesh state to gain and maintain hegemony through Bengali nationalism, assimilation and Islamisation.

In the first Chapter, I analyzed current debate on the existence of indigenous peoples in Bangladesh to develop the research questions, and then attempted to find an appropriate theoretical approach. In Chapter 2, the research was presented, showing how the British and Pakistan policies alienated the indigenous peoples in the CHT from their communal land rights. Both colonial administrative systems implemented state policy without consulting the ethnic minority in the CHT. Colonial 'divide and rule' tactics were used to dominant them, with some indigenous elites coopted. The British policy of land expropriation was particularly harmful because it isolated the indigenous peoples from their ancestral lands and culture. While the indigenous peoples lost their lands the CHT region was still at this point protected from non-indigenous settlement through the Regulation of 1900, in which the British government declared the CHT an 'Excluded Area'. After British colonialism, the CHT was awarded to Pakistan in 1947. Pakistan changed the status of the 'Excluded Area' to 'tribal area', allowing people from other parts of the country to settle in the CHT region. Another major event in the Pakistan period was the construction of the Kaptai Dam in the CHT. This led to the loss of indigenous lands, internal displaced and indigenous refugee fleeing to Burma and India.

Both the Bangladesh and Pakistan states considered the CHT as a 'tribal' and 'backward' area. As such the indigenous peoples in the CHT have been deprived of their land rights. After independence,

the first Bangladesh constitution denied recognition for the indigenous peoples in the CHT. State elites 'invited' the indigenous peoples to assimilate into the mainstream Muslim Bengali society and nation. However, both Bengali nationalism and Islamisation have alienated the indigenous peoples in the course of the construction of the new independent state. In the nation-building process, the state attempted to exclude indigenous peoples through assimilation policies.

Chapter 3 highlighted cultural differences between the indigenous peoples and the Bengali Muslims in the CHT. Though the indigenous peoples have their distinctive dress patterns, these are changing due to Bengali influence, particularly as professional/educated indigenous women adopt Muslim Bengali attire in public. Chapter 4 has shown that state policies and its mechanisms marginalized the indigenous peoples in terms of their political, social and cultural identity. The Bangladesh government followed colonial attitudes and practices towards the indigenous peoples, creating commercial agricultural development programs based on expropriated indigenous lands. State resettlement programs led to rapid demographic and religious change in the CHT with the Muslim population raising rapidly. The Bangladesh state also continued the militarization of the CHT, with the military becoming involved in political administrative, and the Bengalisation and Islamisation of the region, undermining indigenous identity.

Chapter 5 demonstrated how the indigenous peoples have been disadvantaged in terms of education. The unequal education system in Bangladesh discriminates against the indigenous peoples. The national and official language is Bangla, the national curriculum is designed and based on Bengali nationalism, and is delivered by Bengali staff. Although in the CHT every ethnic community speaks its own language, the government has no separate language policy for the indigenous peoples. Due to the language and cultural differences between the indigenous students and Bengali teachers, the student dropout rate is high compared to other parts of the country. The CHT Accord recognized the 'CHT region as a region inhabited by tribal people and also recognizes the need of preserving the characteristics of the region and development thereof'.²⁵¹ However, the reality indigenous languages and culture are being threatened by assimilation.

The final Chapter presented a brief outline of the CHT Accord and its current implementation status. In this regard, there is no effective implementation of key aspects of the Accord. The government of Bangladesh promised to ensure the identity of the indigenous/ethnic peoples through full

²⁵¹ Uddin, p. 35.

implementation of the CHT Accord. However, the failure to implement key aspects that form the foundations of indigenous identity bring into question the state's commitment in this regard. Important provisions, especially in relation to land, culture, local government and the role of the military, have not been addressed. Nor are there any initiatives to return the Bengalis settlers.

In summary, this thesis has demonstrated that the identity of the indigenous peoples of the CHT, based on autonomy, and communal lands, and unique dress and language, has been under constant threat. Today, Bangladesh state policies continue to undermine indigenous identity through land grabbing and commercial agriculture, education policies, Islamisation and Bengali nationalism. These state policies, represent efforts to secure and maintain Bengali state hegemony. They also represent an ongoing threat to indigenous identity in the CHT.

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