ETHNICITY AND ENVIRONMENT: 'TRIBAL' CULTURE AND THE STATE IN BANGLADESH

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Abstract

Ethnicity and Environment: ‘Tribal’ Culture and the State in Bangladesh

This thesis investigates the current predicament of the people of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in Bangladesh, a population with significant cultural differentiation from the mainstream Bengali population. Dealing with the issues of their survival in the forest and their quest for identity, the research explores how their ethnicity and environment are intertwined. This is examined in the context of state policies towards non-Bengali ethnic minorities in the CHT. The study identifies sources of diversity at the micro level and the forces that create conditions for ‘unity in diversity’ at the macro level. One is the assertion of ‘self-image’ on the basis of cultural polarity within the confines of a multi-ethnic locality. The other is the assertion of ‘collective image’ as unifying forces stemming from the notion of shared deprivation and marginalisation generated by conditions of the State and State institutions. This ethnographic study is based on two years fieldwork between January 1999 and December 2000 among three ethnic groups, Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga in Banderban district of southern CHT.

The thesis is divided into three main parts. Part one deals with research context, the historical development in CHT and the main theoretical issues concerning the relationships between ethnicity, social movement and indigenous land rights. The second part looks at local perceptions of settlement, locality and village organisation and at the dimensions of linguistic identity at both group and collective levels. The third part examines broader issues, events and processes concerning ethnic mobilisation around the traditional land use system, jhum, and the politics of khas land, based on case materials of how jhum lands are leased out to Bengalis. This is followed by analysis of local electoral processes and a concluding discussion of ‘ethnic mobilisation’, ‘multi-ethnicity’, and ‘social movements’.

The study promotes a deeper understanding of the multi-ethnic nature of the Bangladeshi State and provides a more balanced assessment of the relationship between ethnicity, environment, development and the state. It also contributes to the wider anthropology of forest-dwelling peoples of South Asia. It challenges the political use of environmentalism and anthropological knowledge in national and regional disputes over the control and use of natural resources.
Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ...................................................................................9

Introduction ............................................................................................12
  The General Background of the CHT ......................................................16
  Outline of the Study ................................................................................23
    Part One: Research Context, Theory and Methods ..............................24
    Part Two: Self-image-Dynamics of Ethnic Group Identity .....................25
    Part Three: Collective-image – Dynamics of Shared Identity .................27

Chapter One ............................................................................................32

Theoretical Considerations on Ethnicity and Environment .................32
  Introduction .............................................................................................32
  Ethnicity: Theoretical Perspectives .......................................................33
  The ‘Tribes’ of Bangladesh in National Cultural Context .......................40
  Limitations of Ethnicity Theories .............................................................43
  Alternative Theories of New Social Movement and Collective Identity ....45
  Environment as Social Context .................................................................54
  Review and Critique of Existing Ethnographic Literature on CHT ..........63
  A Brief Review of the Literature .................................................................64
    Colonial Understanding of CHT ............................................................64
    Post-colonial Understanding ................................................................65
    More Recent Studies .............................................................................67
  The CHT in Ethnographic Details .............................................................69
    Names and Numbers .............................................................................69
    Language and Ethnicity .........................................................................69
    Social Organisation ...............................................................................71
    Social and Political Context of Land Tenure and Use .........................72
      Jhum ................................................................................................72
      Ownership and Rights .....................................................................74

Chapter Two ...........................................................................................77

Methodological Procedures and the Research Setting .......................77
  Introduction .............................................................................................77
  Methodological Issues of Fieldwork .......................................................78
    Doing Research at Home .....................................................................79
    Positioning Self and the Wider Consideration of the Research in the CHT 80
    Penetrating the micro-level: acceptance and trust ...............................81
    Language Learning ...............................................................................83
Initial fieldwork activities ................................................................. 85
Journey to the Roangchari ................................................................. 86
Participant Observation ................................................................. 88
Observing local political process and degree of participation .......... 89
Local understandings of agricultural system, land tenure and rights .. 91
Case Study Material ................................................................. 93
Archival work and Census material .............................................. 95
The Research Setting ................................................................. 96
Location for the Research ............................................................. 97
Roangchari as multi-ethnic setting ............................................... 98
Rockoywa Roa (Marma village) .................................................. 100
Bottoli Pada (Tanchanga village) ................................................. 101
Soanoloo Para (Bawm village) .................................................. 102

Chapter Three .............................................................................. 105

Settlement, Social Organisation and Ethnic Identity ................... 106
Settlement and Identity ................................................................. 106
Marma .......................................................................................... 107
Bawm ......................................................................................... 109
Tanchanga .................................................................................... 110
Notion of Attachment ................................................................ 111
Social Organisation ..................................................................... 112
Clan Organisation ....................................................................... 112
Marma Clan Organisation .......................................................... 112
Bawm Clan Organisation ........................................................... 114
Tanchanga Clan Organisation .................................................... 117
Descent, Family and Household Organisation ............................. 118
Marma Descent Organisation ...................................................... 119
Family or Household ................................................................ 120
Oeingsa: family or household or, a conceptual ambiguity .......... 121
Bawm Descent Organisation ...................................................... 123
Tanchanga Descent Organisation .............................................. 124
Inheritance Practices ................................................................. 125
Marma Inheritance Practices ...................................................... 126
Changes of Somohada and legal system of inheritance ............. 129
Bawm Inheritance Practices ...................................................... 130
Tanchanga Inheritance Practices .............................................. 131
Marriage Organisation ............................................................... 132
Marma Marriage Organisation .................................................. 133
Bawm Marriage Organisation .................................................. 138
Tanchanga Marriage Organisation ........................................... 141
Conclusion .................................................................................. 144
Chapter Four ................................................................. 147

Culture Becomes Politics, Politics Becomes Culture .............. 147

Language and Identity in CHT ............................................. 147

Introduction .............................................................................. 147

Ethno-linguistic map of CHT ................................................... 150

Status of Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga Languages/dialect ..... 150
Language of Temple, Language of Identity .............................. 154

Ethno-names and Group Identity ........................................... 158

The Development of an Alphabet as the Politics of Cultural Identity... 166

The Marma Society ................................................................. 167
The Bawm Socio-cultural Organisation .................................... 169
Tripura Shongshod ................................................................. 170
Tanchanga Language Convention and Having an Alphabet of One's Own ... 171
Discussion .............................................................................. 174

Upazati Shanskritik Institutes .................................................. 178

TCI Policy and Activities of Indigenous Culture ...................... 182
The Mother Language Day ...................................................... 184
Indigenous People's Day ........................................................ 187
Baishabi as Collective Festival ................................................ 189
Concluding Remarks: A Garden with Many Flowers .............. 193

Chapter Five .......................................................................... 195

Jhum as Shared Identity .......................................................... 195

Introduction .............................................................................. 195

Defining Jhum ......................................................................... 198

Competing Conceptions of Land Use and Tenure: Jhum as Contested Domain ........................................................................... 206

Private rights and Usufruct rights ........................................... 207
Jhum Collective Rights and Ownership ..................................... 212
Traditional Indigenous Institution of Roaza-Piancy as Present Headman-Karbari ................................................................. 219

Local Conceptions of Land Use and Tenure - The Customary Practices of Toykhong ................................................................. 220

Gogha Customary Rights (Household Rights) in Toykhong ........ 222
Dhango-Common Rights to Toykhong ..................................... 224
Dynamics of jhum and jhumia .................................................. 227

Measuring jhum .................................................................... 228
Conclusion: *Jhum* as shared identity ................................................................. 231

Chapter Six ........................................................................................................... 233

**The politics of *khas* land** ........................................................................... 233

- Introduction ....................................................................................................... 233
- Definition and Conceptualization of *Khas* Land ......................................... 234
- The 1900 Regulations and *Khas* Land ......................................................... 235
  - The Main Features of the 1900 Regulations in Relation to Land and Administration .................................................................................................. 236
  - *Pahari* Perceptions of the CHT Manual ................................................... 240
- Bangladesh Legal-official Perceptions of the CHT Manual .......................... 241
- Amendments of the CHT Manual ................................................................ 243
- New Entitlements and *Khas* Land Lease ..................................................... 250
- Official Mechanisms and Bureaucratic Procedures of *Khas Bondobasti* 251
  - The eligibility of *khas bondobasti* ............................................................ 252
  - Preparing *khas bondobasti* ...................................................................... 254
  - Unallocated *khas lands* .......................................................................... 255
  - Drafting an application ............................................................................. 256
  - Submitting a *khas bondobasti* application ............................................ 258
  - Granting *khas bondobasti* ..................................................................... 260
- *Khas Bondobasti* and Prospective Beneficiaries ......................................... 262
- A Case of *Pahari* Resistance and *Khas* Land Lease .................................. 266
- Conclusion ....................................................................................................... 272

Chapter Seven .................................................................................................... 273

Negotiating Collective Identity: Election as *Pahari* Mobilisation .... 273

- Introduction ..................................................................................................... 273
- Who are the *Pahari*? .................................................................................... 275

*Pahari* in the wider socio-political context .................................................... 278

  - The notion of *Jhumma* identity ............................................................... 281
  - *Upazati* - A Statist discourse .................................................................. 282
  - *Pahari* Identity and Banderban *Puroshava* Election ............................. 286
- The Nature of Election Culture: National vs. Local .................................... 288
- Banderban *Puroshava* Election as Politics of Ethnicity ............................. 290
  - Choosing Candidate as *Pahari Sa* .......................................................... 291
  - *Pahari Okka Parishad*: a Multi-ethnic Organisation .................................. 293
  - The Other Side of the Story ....................................................................... 296
Lists of Maps, Tables, Diagrams and Figures

Lists of Map

Map 1 - Bangladesh ................................................................. 30
Map 2 Chittagong Hill Tracts ...................................................... 31
Map 3 Roangchari sketch map by a local Bawm student ................ 99

Lists of Tables

Table 1 - A summary of the splinter phuns........................................... 115
Table 2 - Comparative Framework of Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga Social
         Organisation ..................................................................... 143
Table 3 - Marma Naming Days ...................................................... 159
Table 4: Population Composition in Banderban ................................. 311
Table 5: Break down of the result .................................................. 313

Lists of Diagrams

Diagram 1 - Marma Marriage Custom ............................................. 135
Diagram 2 - Bawm Marriage Custom ............................................. 139
Diagram 3 - A Tanchanga Marriage .............................................. 142

Lists of Figures

Figure 1 Rockoywa roa ............................................................ 101
Figure 2 Bottoli pada .............................................................. 102
Figure 3 Soanloo para ............................................................. 104
Figure 4 A Tanchanga sanga mela (wedding ceremony) .................. 142
Figure 5 TCI Water Festival 2000 (Banderban) ............................. 190
Figure 6 A Marma woman weeding in the jhum field in Roangchari ... 200
Figure 7 A Marma jhumia family in Roangchari in their moinghor ....... 203
Figure 8 Gogha possession in jhum toykhong ............................... 223
Figure 9 The leaders of the Vomi Odikar Rally in 30 June, 2000 ......... 270
Figure 10 Pahari women participation in Vomi Odhikar Rally .......... 271
Figure 11 jhum harvesting dance by Tanchanga girls at TCI cultural festival .... 276
Figure 12 Pahari Okka Parishod procession during puroshova election .... 294
Figure 13 Ayub Chowdhury’s election meeting with a minister’s visit ...... 298
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Introduction

This research concerns the people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts\(^1\) (CHT) of Bangladesh, a population with significant cultural differentiation from the mainstream Bengali population. The research explores how the ethnic identity of the people of CHT and their environment are intertwined. Dealing with the issues of their survival in the forest and their quest for identity, this thesis investigates the current predicament of the hill people of CHT.\(^2\) This is examined in the context of state policies towards non-Bengali minorities in Bangladesh and the control of natural resources.

In Bangladesh the relationship between ethnicity and environment is conceived in terms of that between ‘tribal’ culture and the State. I thus set this research context within the theoretical considerations underpinning the discourses of ethnicity and environment. However, because these are very big issues with a huge amount of literature surrounding each of them, I focus on land tenure, land use and jhum agricultural systems.\(^3\) I am aware of the political sensitivity of these issues in contemporary Bangladesh. Nonetheless land is a crucially important way of researching the relationship between ethnicity and environment. I am also aware of potential theoretical links between land, identity and other issues: specifically micro-politics. As a multidimensional subject, land, thus, becomes the main focus of my research.

Land is the platform on which environment and ethnicity have a regular discursive interaction. Claims of ethnicity and claims to land are intertwined, suggesting the need for a comprehensive understanding of land tenure and land use patterns in the CHT. I discuss the issues that emerge concerning the relationship between resource use and tenure, political conflict and ‘tribal’ identity in this thesis. In doing so, I

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\(^1\)Henceforth CHT in this thesis.

\(^2\)The eleven ethnic groups who are the original inhabitants of the CHT call themselves collectively as *Pahari* (hill people), there are other terms, such as 'tribal', *Upazati*, *Jhumma* and *Adivashi* which are also interchangeably used to refer to these people, but the connotations and meanings are varied. I will discuss this issue of categorisation in details in the proceeding chapters.

\(^3\)The characteristic form of swidden agriculture in the CHT (see detail discussion on swidden agriculture in Chapter Five).
highlight the social and political implications of resource use and tenure for the construction of collective identity in the CHT. I suggest an analytical approach that adequately deals with this relationship in the context of CHT, relating historical construction of the environment to political and social movements in this region of Bangladesh. Many of the issues related to the emergence of these movements revolve around the control and use of land.

The management of land and forest resources, particularly the khas land,\textsuperscript{5} is a key concern in this thesis. I am particularly interested in changing conceptions of ecological issues, including the possible use of environmentalism as a political instrument. Politicians, environmentalists and policy makers in Bangladesh have long associated the cultural and economic practice of the ethnic minorities of CHT with deforestation. Deforestation has, for many political reasons, been erroneously attributed to the practice of jhum cultivation alone. Unfortunately public perception has now come closer to this official position. In fact, with the diminution of the forest and commercialisation of land in the hill regions, the sustainability of jhum cultivation is becoming untenable. Hence the hallmark of their identity has been under continuing external and internal pressure for change.

State policies undertaken in the name of development have also marginalised the hill people of CHT from their land, with the result they are becoming increasingly landless. This has instilled in them an acute feeling of alienation from successive Bengali regimes. The entire CHT region has experienced significant changes in the socio-economic and political arena particularly during post-colonial period. The eleven ethnic groups who were the sole inhabitants of this region and who once enjoyed a greater degree of autonomy now face profound challenges to their distinct ways of life.

The above situation gives rise to several possibilities: should the CHT be protected from further encroachment by the mainstream Bengali population? As their situation

\textsuperscript{4}Schendel's (1996) recent comprehensive discussion on this issue opened up new questions challenging the contemporary nationality debate in Bangladesh.

\textsuperscript{5}From the perspective of the state khas land is state owned land but this is problematic for local conceptions of land rights and ownership. I will discuss the issue of khas land in more detail in Chapter Six.
changes, will the people of CHT be able to claim stewardship of their land, or will their dispossession be sanctioned by their depiction as environmentally destructive land-users? How are these changes instigated and articulated, and what are their cultural repercussions? What are the strains and tensions within the ethnic groups? Does adaptation to the new realities of the CHT bring about a fusion of collective ethnic mobilisation?

In its extension, the main research questions addressed in this thesis are: why has jhum land become politically and symbolically important for the hill people in their construction of a new collective identity? Is the notion of Jhumma ethnicity shared by everyone? How do they relate jhum to their everyday life? How does the necessity of taking collective action contribute to forging of an overarching Jhumma ethnicity, and how does this impact on the cultural orientations of each group of the collective? As ethnicity is the politics of difference, in what situations is the particular identity operational in the CHT? How do people represent their cultural reality to themselves, and to one another, and to the outside world? I return repeatedly to these questions and try to answer them in this study.

At the linguistic-political level, it appears that language barriers create the strongest basis for cultural difference between hill people and Bengalis and between hill groups themselves, which have been concretised by colonial and subsequent state policies (Islam 1984; Tripura 1992; Ahamed 1999). In this study, I explore the nuances of this very political everyday relationship between language and culture. How have the languages been negotiated in complicated political and social inter-relationships between the groups themselves? How are these language differences signified in the lives of the people of CHT?

In this research I look at the CHT culture and society changing through time. The research treats ‘culture’ as fluid and politically contested, in contrast to the previous studies of the CHT which have been mainly folkloric in character (such as Selina 1995; Sattar 1975). Unlike these conventional studies, the present ethnographic research is thus conceived from a processual point of view with the emphasis upon dynamic forces that operate as a mechanism for both distinct cultural boundary maintenance as well as collective identity formation. In other words, the study
identifies sources of diversity at the micro level and the forces that create conditions for 'unity in diversity' at the macro level. One is the assertion of 'self-image' on the basis of cultural polarity within the confines of a multi-ethnic locality. The other is the assertion of 'collective image' as a unifying force stemming from the notion of shared deprivation and marginalisation generated by conditions of the State and State institutions.

A clearer understanding of this relationship and its local manifestations is formed through the use of traditional anthropological fieldwork techniques. Living in a multi-ethnic locality, such as Roangchari of Banderban district, I examine how Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga ethnic groups are constituted and what are the constituting elements of their ethnic identity. The notion of diversity is explored through investigating socio-organisational and linguistic aspects of these groups (see Part two of the thesis).

The notion of unity is also explored through the study of multi-ethnic relationship and the processes of collective identity construction. Against the backdrop of exogenous forces and in the face of adverse socio-economic and political realities in everyday life how do these diverse ethnic groups emphasise shared identity at broader level? It emphasises that construction of Pahari, Jhumma, and Adivhasi is the expression of collective ethnic mobilisation on the basis of cultural politics, land and resource contestation in the CHT (in Part three). I discuss these dynamic process of identity construction and ethnic mobilisation throughout the thesis.

The conflict in the CHT assumes the appearance of a struggle between natives and the State for self-determination and control over resources. The thesis addresses the relationship between resource use and land tenure, political conflict and ethnic identity. It argues that hill people respond to increased marginalisation by forming ethnic social movements. The ongoing organised activities of different indigenous organisations, such as Vomi Odikhar Committee, Pahari Okka Parishod, are central examples of these processes.
The study will promote a deeper understanding of the multi-ethnic nature of the Bangladeshi State and provide a more balanced assessment of the relationship between ethnicity, environment, development and the State. This thesis, of course, covers only very limited parts of the present-day situation of Pahari in the CHT. Despite these limitations, the study makes a unique contribution to the knowledge of ethnic peoples in the CHT, and, more generally, hopes to induce a different kind of thinking about the non-Bengali peoples of Bangladesh. I start this with general background of CHT.

The General Background of the CHT

The Chittagong Hill Tracts are located in the southeastern part of Bangladesh, bordering with India on the north and east, Burma to the south and Chittagong district to the west. Geographically, as part of the Himalayan range, the region comprises numerous hills, forests and river valleys in complete contrast to the rest of the low lying alluvial plains of Bangladesh. It occupies a physical area of 5,093 square miles, constituting ten percent of the total land area of Bangladesh. According to the Population Census of 2001, the total population of CHT is 1,325,041 combining both hill people and the Bengali (BBS 2001).

At present the CHT includes three hill districts: Rangamati, Banderban and Khagrachari. This hilly area is inhabited by around a dozen ethnic groups or communities, though there is controversy over the number of ethnic groups in the existing literature. Chakma, Marma, and Tripura numerically are the dominant groups, living mainly in valley areas and practicing both plough and swidden agriculture. The smaller groups, such as the Bawm, Khumi, Lusai, Chak, Mru occupy the mountain areas and are practicing swidden agriculture - locally known as jhum cultivation - alone.

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6 See the map of CHT and Bangladesh in Map 1 and 2.
7 By 'ethnic communities' or 'ethnic groups', a reference has been made here to those people whose linguistic and cultural background is different from the mainstream Bangladesh. (This will be elaborated upon later).
8 The number of ethnic communities of CHT has been variously mentioned in the literature, for example, 8 (Lewin 1869; Hutchinson 1909), 10 (Bessaignet 1958; Bernot 1959; Roy 1997), 12 (Schendel 1992; Dewan 1990; Loﬄer 1990), 13 (Mohsin 1997; Mey 1981), 16 (Selina 1995).
However, traditionally *jhum* is the predominant form of subsistence agriculture for all the inhabitants of the CHT. The CHT topography and climate makes it imperative that the people fall back upon *jhum* agriculture for their livelihood. Their agriculture is mainly oriented towards subsistence, with limited production of cash crops. The principal crop is rice with other vegetables, corn, lentils, chillis, and garlic grown on a smaller scale.

It is important to note that although all these groups share a common mode of subsistence, that is *jhum*, they nonetheless differ from each other in terms of religion, language, and social organisation to some extent. All the major religions - Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity - are represented among the people of CHT. The Chakma, Marma and Tanchanga are Buddhists; Tripura are Hindus. There are smaller groups, such as Mru, Khumi, and Khang, who still have still their own animist religion, but some of these animist groups, for example the Lushai, Bawm, and Pankhuiz, are increasingly being converted to Christianity by missionaries working in the CHT.

Linguistic diversity among the groups is also significant as there are ten different languages spoken by eleven ethnic groups along with Bengali and Chittagonian. Under racial classifications, the ethnic hill people are generally described as belonging to the Mongolian group and closely resemble the people of North-East India and Myanmar rather than the Bengali population in Bangladesh.

A conflicting analysis prevails in existing literature in identifying these people in terms of their origin and background. Anthropologists (Schendel 1992; Dewan 1990; Tripura 1993) claim that the CHT is the traditional homeland of “indigenous” populations now living there. However, early colonial reports suggest that most of the groups inhabiting the CHT migrated to the area during the last four hundred years, either from the Arkan (Burma) or the North-east Indian states of Tripura or Assam (Lewin 1869; Mackenzie 1884; Hutchinson 1906). Though conflicting theories exist, there is no hard evidence in the present body of literature of the pre-existing population of the CHT. Moreover, it is argued by many recent writers that

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According to official statistics the number of ethnic communities is 13 (BBS 2001).
the CHT people do not have any documented records of their own (Mohsin 1997). Therefore, the ethnographic map of the people of CHT remains confused until today.

**Contemporary political and historical development in the CHT**

The historical development of the CHT has marked it as a unique place within South Asia. The area has been the site of much contestation between its inhabitants and the state since the colonial period, continuing after the creation of Pakistan and the independence of Bangladesh. The CHT has a political history unique within Bengal as this region maintained an autonomous status even under pre-colonial Mughal Rule. It was first brought under the direct administration of British colonial power in 1860, when the colonial government made Chittagong Hill Tracts region into a separate district and placed it under the administration of a deputy commissioner (DC). During this time, the CHT underwent a fundamental change in terms of its indigenous autonomous status and resource use. In 1900, the colonial government promulgated the CHT Manual outlining detailed rules and regulations for the administration of the CHT. The entire CHT was divided into three spheres of influence, each of which was placed under an indigenous chief who regulated customary matters as well as collected taxes for the colonial state (see the detailed discussion of colonial political history and economy on the section two of chapter one). However, the hill people remained largely unaffected by these developments, since their local status was not altered.

The CHT initially remained immune from the turmoil of the anti-British nationalist movement on the Indian subcontinent. As soon as the anti-colonial movement acquired communal dimensions with the growing divide between the Muslim League (Muslim interest in Pakistan) and the Indian National Congress (viewed by Muslims as representing Hindu interests despite its secular posture), the hill people - 95% non-Muslim - unable to identify with the position of the Muslim League sought assistance from the secular Congress. Chakma elites approached congressional leaders for the merger of CHT with the Indian union and the Marma, by contrast, sought a union with Burma (Ahmed 1993; Schendel; Dewan 1991). Ultimately the Bengal boundary commission headed by Cyril Radcliffe awarded the
CHT to Pakistan suggesting that as "the economic life of the people of CHT depends upon East Bengal ...it would be disastrous for the people themselves to be cut off from the East Bengal (Quoting Radcliffe from Mohsin 1997). However, many believe that the motivation behind Radcliffe's award was to compensate Pakistan for its losses in the partitioning of Punjab (Ahmed 1993; Barua 2001). As a mark of their disagreement with the award made by the Boundary commission's annexation of CHT into Pakistan, the Indian flag was hoisted in Rangamati and the Burmese flag in Banderban. On August 21, a week after the partition of sub-continent, the Pakistani military took down the flags (Schendel 1996).

The raising of the Indian flag in Rangamati in 1947 marked the hill people as forever disloyal to Pakistan. This triggered a series of policies by the Pakistani state designed to victimise the people of this area. Therefore, with the constitutional developments of Pakistan in 1956, the government dropped the previous designation of CHT as a special tribal area, disregarding the hill peoples' special rights in the CHT. It was in the Pakistani period that the Kaptai hydro-electric project (1957-62) was built that created a huge lake in the centre of the CHT inundating about 40% of the arable valley lands of the district and uprooting one hundred thousand people, half of whom migrated to India as refugees. The hill people still regard Kaptai dam as their "teardrop" (Mohsin 1997) and view the economic and development policies of the Pakistani state in the CHT as having led to widespread displacement and disruption of their lives (Soper, 1962; Shendel, 1996).

Politically and economically marginalised within the state of Pakistan, the predicaments of the hill people continued even after the independence of Bangladesh in 1971. Firstly, the Bangladesh liberation struggle was an intensely nationalistic movement and had its genesis in the culture and language of Bengali within the state of Pakistan. The CHT, though constituting part of the East Pakistan at that time, was never part of this language movement. The Awami League, the main champion and mouth-piece of the independence movement, failed to appreciate that the political, cultural and linguistic distinctiveness of the CHT groups might make it difficult for them to identify with a specifically 'Bengali' nationalistic movement. The birth of the Bangladesh nation-state too thus marked a significant political and cultural transformation in the CHT.
Following independence, as the new state proceeded with its first constitution in 1972 the hill people led by Manobendra Larma, the lone parliament member from the CHT, sought constitutional safeguard for their protection and recognition as a separate community by demanding the autonomy of the CHT with its own legislature. However, the post-independence Awami League government rejected this demand as anti-state and instead invited the hill people to become a part of a new nationalist Bengali identity. The 1972 constitution declared Bangladesh to be a unitary state and its citizens would be known as Bengali including the country’s non-Bengali population. Alarmed at these developments, Manobendra Larma formed a political body called Parbattya Chattagram Jana Samhiti Samiti (PCJSS, The United People’s Party of CHT) in order to mobilise support for a movement to gain autonomy.

At this political and historical juncture, however, following the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the first president of independent Bangladesh, in 1975 the country as whole was taken under military and quasi-military rule (military generals turned civilians) and this phase lasted until 1990. During this period, fundamental changes were made in relation to constitutional and political measures taken in the name of Bangladeshi nationalism. These not only violated hill people’s traditional rights and alienated them from their resources but also eroded the civil rights of the country. In the CHT, since 1977 the conflict between the people and the State has worsened steadily, due to planned migration of Bengali settlers who forcibly settled in CHT, military occupation of the CHT and environmental pressures such as deforestation, commercialisation of forestry and the development policies of the state which are particularly worse in CHT.

This discontent was first reflected in the outbreak of active resistance against the State, framing a demand for the recognition of "cultural plurality" and "full autonomy of CHT" by the PCJSS (Schendel 1996; Ali 1993). The military governments saw these movements as ‘insurgencies’ and a threat to ‘national integration and state sovereignty’ (Ali 1993). Thus, the militarisation of the CHT

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9 See detailed discussion of Bengali and Bangladeshi nationalism in chapter Seven.
was a bid to control the ‘insurgency’; obviously resource control was another latent agenda (Bertocci 1989; Anti Slavery Society 1984). In the early 1980’s the government initiated a settlement programme for Bengali people in the CHT. The settlement policy was justified on the ground that CHT constitutes about 10% of the land surface of the country and has hardly 1% of the population of the country (Huq 2000; Chauduri 1991). Between 1979 to 1983 settlement policy brought about 400,000 Bengali settlers, mostly landless labourers from plain lands (Roy 1997).

Many commentators believe that the real motive of the government was to “colonise” the CHT by bringing about a demographic shift in the region (Dewan 1990; Mohsin 1997; Anti-Slavery Society 1984). State policies undertaken in the name of development are said to have marginalised the people of CHT from their land, turned them into refugees and instilled in them an acute feeling of alienation from successive Bengali regimes (Mohsin 1997 Mey 1984). The benefits of resource allocation were thus distributed directly to the Bengali in-migrants.

Another dimension of ‘modern’ resource utilisation involved the renewed declaration of the Reserve Forests by the previous military rulers. This paved the way for the government to legitimise the acquisition of land under jhum cultivation. Jhum was completely banned as cultivation practice in the government ‘protected forest’ areas. Deforestation has, for political reasons, been erroneously attributed to the practice of jhum cultivation alone. Though the policy clearly revealed the motive of land encroachment it is ironical that the government blamed jhum cultivation solely for soil degradation and deforestation (Ahamed 2002) given, that with the diminution of the forest, the sustainability of jhum cultivation was becoming untenable. The CHT Commission Report of 1991 suggest that the exploitative nature of the Kaptai Dam and the transmigration of the Bengali settlers has caused a massive shortage of land in the CHT which was a direct consequence of state policies rather than failure of jhum cultivation (see the detailed discussion on jhum and land rights in Chapter Six and Seven).

Since 1990, the policy followed by the successive governments has been to gradually relieve the indigenous people’s control over their resources so as to benefit the Bengali. Land rights have also similarly been usurped; the local people have been turned into environmental refugees due to the reality of military oppression.
During this time, in other parts of Bangladesh, a global policy on environment had begun to influence national policies through the work of international and national development organisations and NGOs but in the CHT since the outbreak of the active resistance against military oppression, this region was turned into an area of restricted movement for so-called reasons of national security. Non-nationals were excluded from working, residing and even visiting the CHT until the 1997 peace treaty was signed between the Bangladesh government and the PCJSS.

By marginalising the CHT from both mainstream politics and the international community, the military governments have dealt with the CHT problem strategically. During the army rule in CHT (1975-1990) government initiated many development programmes for the hill people as a measure to counter the so-called ‘insurgencies’ in an alternative way. Along with a quota policy for the hill people, the government also established some local institutions, such as the Tribal Cultural Institutions (TCI) in order to enhance the so-called ‘tribal’ development. Although official policy and objectives for establishing TCIs was said to be to preserve the upzati (sub-nation) culture and promote the zati (national) level, many local critiques argue that the establishment of TCI was part of the government’s wider goals (legitimation and justification of military rule and its policies). Since the fall of military rule in 1990, however, TCI itself has had to transform in many ways its policies and programmes on the issues of indigenous cultural politics in the CHT (see detailed discussion of TCI in Chapter Four).

So as with the policies of reserved quota for the ‘tribal’ people introduced in the 1980s by the military governments with manifold objectives, many commentators argued that the primary objectives of the quota policy were to ensure sympathy of the ethnic peoples in the CHT against the backdrop of military assault. Secondly, the quota system was used as a political tool by military regimes in order to convince foreign donor countries by showing responsible efforts for the disadvantaged ‘tribal’ in the CHT (Anti-Slavery Society 1984; Mey 1984). However, apart from these political objectives the quota system was far more deep-rooted and linked to the inherent state policy of divide and rule in the CHT. Even after the fall of the military regime in 1990, the quota system remained a vital political instrument of government policy in order to manipulate the relationships among ethnic groups.
From the statist point of view any collective ethnic mobilisation in the CHT is perceived as a threat to Bangladesh State sovereignty and territorial integrity. Therefore, the introduction of the quota system was in practice part of the state policy of ethnic division and manipulation. The way in which the quota system is currently operated has been, by and large, a system of playing off conflicting ethnic interests against each other leading to an antagonistic relationship between the groups. Thus, for example, today’s ethno-naming discourse can also be seen as the result of government’s divisive policy on reserved quota system in CHT (See Chapter Four).

The post-military civil governments in Bangladesh are no exception to the previous rule; in fact it has added certain elements of its own. At the present time the CHT remains at the heart of debates about Bangladeshi State sovereignty and identity. The relationship between the hill people and plains people has always been variable, and their relationship to the CHT within the overarching context of the state more so. Today it has become a question of day-to-day survival of the people of CHT, both in social, economic and cultural terms. The very hallmark of their hill identity has been under continuing external and internal pressure for change. This has led to the rise of resistance and the strength of the link between ecology and collective identity which has become even more evident in the present politicised scenario. Above all else, the shared experiences of deprivation and exploitation and the recent struggle against a Bengali-led government have created political awareness among the hill people.

This ethnographic study is based on a two years fieldwork between January 1999 and December 2000 among three ethnic groups, Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga in Banderban district of southern CHT.

**Outline of the Study**

The thesis is formed into three main parts. Part one deals with the research context, the historical development in the CHT and the main theoretical and methodological issues concerning the relationships between ethnicity and environment. The second part looks at local perceptions of settlement, locality and village organisation and at the dimensions of linguistic identity at both group and collective levels. The third
part examines broader issues, events and processes concerning ethnic mobilisation around the traditional land use system, *jhum*, and the politics of *khas* land, based on case materials of how *jhum* lands are leased out to Bengalis. This is followed by analysis of local electoral processes and a concluding discussion of 'ethnic mobilisation', 'multi-ethnicity', and 'social movement'.

**Part One: Research Context, Theory and Methods**

Followed by a brief introductory discussion of research context and the general background of the CHT, **Chapter One** reviews the literature on ethnicity, social movement and indigenous land rights. The chapter is a selective outline of some of the theories dealing with these issues, and also brings in ethnographic cases from different parts of the world. I also look at historical and contemporary sources on CHT in order to highlight the socio-political history of the region and motives of colonial and post-colonial regimes in treating CHT as the 'economic hinterland' for the state. More specifically, the chapter outlines how various measures, economic and political policies have been conceived in terms of macro indicators of development by the state to benefit the mainstream Bengali without taking into account the indigenous character of the CHT. In doing so, I will highlight the social and political implications of the resource use and tenure for the construction of collective identity in the CHT.

**Chapter Two** deals with methodological issues and research techniques of this ethnographic study. A clear understanding of the relationships between ethnicity, environment, 'tribal' culture and the state, and its local manifestations is formed through the use of traditional anthropological techniques. Two years of fieldwork among three ethnic groups, Marma Bawm and Tanchanga in Banderban district of southern CHT entailing mundane micro-social interaction elicit the social, cultural and political realities of this relationship in the lives of the people. Besides participant observation, use of other methods such as key-informants, case studies of land disputes, and analysis of local political process have been discussed separately with a brief physical, and ecological description of the research setting at the end.
Part Two: Self-image-Dynamics of Ethnic Group Identity

The second part of the thesis is primarily concerned with the cultural diversity aspects of ethnic communities. The main purpose of this part two is to identify the sources of internal dynamics in relation to group organisation. Analysis of group organisation aims at an understanding of how different ethnic groups are constituted at the local level, particularly in a multi-ethnic locality. Understanding of social and cultural variations between the groups explains the cultural/ethnic identity of groups. In this part, I have thus mainly focused on linguistic and socio-organisational aspects of three ethnic groups.

Chapter Three analyses the local perceptions of settlement, locality and village organisation among the Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga groups in Roangchari. Drawing from the ethnographic materials on settlement pattern, clanship, descent, marriage organisation and inheritance practices, I discuss how these socio-organisational features become constituting elements of group organisation and a mechanism for ethnic boundary maintenance bringing group members together and culturally differentiating them from others. I have also explained how these differential modes of social organisation are produced, practiced, and to some extent manipulated in order to reproduce ethnic identity in a multi-ethnic society like Roangchari.

This chapter provides an internal dynamics of group organisation. One of the key issues that it addresses is how local perception of settlement shapes the localised group identity, and what does 'the locality' mean socially, culturally, symbolically to ethnic groups in the CHT? The other issues I discuss in this chapter are defining characteristics of group organisation. In analysing clan, lineage, descent and family the chapter explores the relationship between village level organisation and other social structural principles. A comparative analysis of marriage organisation reveals the question of ethnic endogamy practices which can be viewed as the salient feature of boundary maintenance among the groups. Also analysis of customary inheritance

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10 In this thesis, I interpret 'mode of social organisation' to mean both ideological rules and principles and their implication and practices.
is crucial to an understanding of the changing nature of farming practices among the groups.

The chapter indicates how differential forms of cultural polarity and diversity maintenance are the basic dynamics of multi-ethnic society in the CHT. It compares how groups place the importance of ethnic endogamy, bride price, clanship practices as elements of distinct group markers in greater ethnic boundary maintenance in relation to others.

Chapter Four discusses the dimensions of linguistic identity at both group and collective levels. In CHT, among other thing, language can be seen as the idiom of cultural politics within groups themselves and with the wider Bengali and Bangladesh State. In this chapter, I first discuss ethno-linguistic identity in terms of temple language, ethno-naming and development of written scripts. It seems that articulation of ethno-linguistic identity through native scripts is influenced by various organisational activities in the CHT. This chapter examines how various organisational activities are related to ethnic mobilisation in terms of language and culture. Particular emphasis is given on why different organisations are engaged in these language projects of identity making and how these influence ordinary people.

The chapter also discusses another level of mobilisation. At the broader institutional and political level, the diverse linguistic aspects are interpreted as representation of 'indigenous' culture in the CHT. The representation of 'indigenous' culture has largely been orchestrated in the form of unity within the diversity at institutional discourses. In other words, invoking a common 'indigenous' culture challenges the Bengali culture and regime. In this context, I discuss TCI (Tribal Cultural Institute) policies and programs in order to compare the organised institutional activities with those of ordinary discourses in the realm of 'indigenous' culture.

I conclude the chapter by returning to the issues of language and its relationship to the assertion of distinct cultural identity at both group and collective level. The underlying theme of the chapter relates to the broader level of ethnic mobilisation. It emphasises that in CHT social movements largely revolve around the issue of socio-
economic marginalisation based on the struggle for land and livelihood but language projects supplement this in asserting collective indigenous politics.

**Part Three: Collective-image – Dynamics of Shared Identity**

The third part examines broader issues, events and processes concerning ethnic mobilisation. The contemporary process of collective identity formation is the main theme in this section with various forms and expressions. As I mentioned in part 2, ethnic groups exhibit markedly distinct cultural identities in the localised form, but at the broader level they collectively face a common problem of survival in mundane day to day affairs vis-a-vis the dominant Bengali population and the State. The deprivation, exploitation and discrimination made by government functionaries, the legal and judicial procedure and land administration system, have created a syndrome of collectivism among the ethnic peoples of CHT in opposition to their politically dominant Bengali counterpart.

The section looks at the dynamics of collective processes from political, ecological and institutional perspectives. It primarily focuses on the socio-economic and political implications of the government’s developmental interventions on the ways of life of hill people, especially in relation to land and livelihood in the CHT. The section identifies the circumstances and conditions under which the diverse ethnic groups unite, minimising their differences and the way in which search for a common ground on the basis of ‘shared realities of collective problems’.

In this section as a way of exploring connections between Pahari ethnicity and the state, and of unpacking the political framework around which environmental and ‘indigenous’ discourse in the CHT is organised, I focus mainly on two examples. The first is the practices of *jhum* (a practice that relates to traditional land use throughout the CHT) as an indigenous system of natural resource management. The second is the opposition to a controversial *khas* land lease granted by the Bangladesh government to Bengalis. These two related issues are examples of ways in which Pahari identity are represented in the regional political context.
Chapter Five explores the local understanding and perceptions of traditional land use system, jhum. It discusses how traditional jhum land use system is intimately related to village organisation in the CHT, historically representing a distinct character of ‘community value’ combining different groups into a single network of social relationship, which I describe as a form of ‘shared environmental identity’. The chapter explores this dynamic relationships by addressing the debate on the anthropology of common property and state regime. It seems that understanding of local land holding is also the key to understanding the wider relationship between the people of CHT and the Bangladesh State.

Chapter Six deals with the politics of khas land, based on case materials of how jhum lands are leased out to Bengalis. It outlines various political, legal, and administrative measures relating to khas land lease policies of the government. The chapter examines how institutional discriminations led to a situation where common Pahari deprivations can be seen as collective realities manifested in the form of ethnic mobilisation. An analysis of protest movements by Vomi Odikhar committee against the government land policy translates the processes of mobilisation. This chapter will thus indicate a brief note on how control and use of land in the CHT form a basis of territoriality that in turn is the basis for collective identity.

Chapter Seven looks at the issue of local political process in the form of election, and discusses the general questions of ethnic mobilisation. It presents the Bandebaran puroshava (municipality) election as a case study, and analyses this as a local political arena in which various forms and faces of ethnic mobilisation are expressed in an explicit manner. I suggest that local elections can be seen as a process of collective identity making. The case of the Bandebaran puroshava election represents a theatrical view of CHT where all the issues, including the most salient feature of the land issue, become the issues of Pahari mobilisation. The chapter seeks to assess the hill people’s experiences of electoral politics in light of the issues of democracy, party ideology and hill politics in the CHT.

The final chapter is the follow up of main arguments and ideas with a concluding discussion of ‘ethnic mobilisation’, ‘multi-ethnicity’, and ‘social movement’. This analysis contributes to the wider anthropology of forest-dwelling peoples of South
Asia and debates surrounding the political use of environmentalism and anthropological knowledge in national and regional disputes over the control and use of natural resources.
Map 2 Chittagong Hill Tracts
Chapter One
Theoretical Considerations on Ethnicity and Environment

Introduction

I consider the main theoretical issues for this study to be those concerning the relationship between ethnicity and environment. In Bangladesh, the relationship between ethnicity and environment is conceived in terms of that between 'tribal' culture and the State. I thus start with a brief literature review of the theoretical considerations underpinning the discourses of ethnicity and environment. I suggest an analytical approach that adequately deals with this relationship in the context of CHT, relating historical construction of the environment to political and social movements in this region of Bangladesh.

Many of the issues relating to the emergence of these movements revolve around the control and use of land. Land is the platform on which environment and ethnicity have a regular discursive interaction. Claims of collective identity/ethnicity and claims to land are intertwined. I discuss the issues that emerged concerning the relationship between resource use and tenure, political conflict and 'tribal' identity. In doing so, I highlight the social and political implications of resource use and tenure for the construction of collective identity in the CHT.

The construction and manipulation of ethnic identity is one of the obvious themes that will arise from this research. However, ethnicity is a slippery subject to deal with as it involves notions and claims which are often highly contested. It involves both public discourses and representations which are constantly being re-negotiated, and intuitive and unarticulated experiences of the self and others as situated within a particular 'ethnic' discourse or context. There are innumerable theories of ethnicity and ethnic identification addressed in the anthropological literature which are discussed later on from a wider perspective, as a basis for establishing this fact in my research.

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In the context of CHT, ethnicity appears to be an idiom in which political and environmental relationships are contested. The conflict in the CHT has assumed the appearance of a struggle between ethnic peoples and the dominant Bengali speaking state for self-determination and control over resources. One problem with the theoretical literature on ethnicity is that it does not deal adequately with the issues of resource use and particularly with the symbolic use of agricultural systems as collective ethnic identifiers. Confronted with the pragmatic realities, the dangers and the complexities of life in the CHT, academic debates about the nature of ethnicity seem rather abstract. Nevertheless the perspectives on ethnicity which have been described as primordialist, instrumentalist, constructivist and Marxist illuminate contrasting aspects of ethnicity in the CHT.

I will briefly review these and then also consider the conceptualisation of ethnicity within Bangladesh political discourse concerning the CHT. Considering the limited helpfulness of theoretical academic discourse about ethnicity and the direct political impact of local official perceptions of ‘tribal’ identity, I will then examine a different approach, based around social movements in third world contexts which has more specific relevance to the CHT.

**Ethnicity: Theoretical Perspectives**

In recent times the term ethnicity has emerged as a key concept in the writings of numerous social scientists including anthropologists. A host of social phenomena, for example “tribes”, “races”, “castes”, “ethnic group”, “nation”, are now used to represent ethnicity at different levels (Horowitz 1985: 53; Jenkins 1996: 21-24; Devalle 1992:4). Indeed as the notion of ‘ethnicity’ expands in the public and academic discourse, it has become “a way to signal any category of group identity even gender” (Tilley 1997: 498), what Bayart calls the “theatre of ethnicity” (quoting from Burnham 1996: 38).

Therefore, ethnicity becomes a keenly contested term generating many debates amongst social scientists. Perhaps the most contentious debate has been between

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12 I am, however, aware of Leach’s exceptional analysis of Kachin political system of Highland Burma (1954).
primordialists and instrumentalists about whether ethnicity or ethnic identity is fundamentally a primordial aspect of human existence, almost pre-conscious and involuntary, or is orchestrated and manipulated, and susceptible to change at both individual and collective levels.\textsuperscript{13}

It was Geertz who defined ethnicity as “primordial attachment” stemming “from being born into a particular religious community, speaking a particular language and following particular social practices” (1963: 259). Conceptualisation of ethnicity as being the expression of “primordial ties” has become increasingly outmoded, and is less prevalent in anthropological writings. Geertz’s model of ethnicity can be seen as a symbolic system that provides meaning for those who identify with a particular group. My analytical approach to ethnicity in this thesis has nothing in common with the primordialist position. Following Burnham’s analysis in this context, I do agree that “whilst ethnically defined behaviour is a function of basic, essentially universal, human interactional competencies, the cultural differences and interpretations of difference on which ethnic demarcations are based are clearly subject to historical change and transformation” (1996: 6).

It is thus important to give careful attention to the socio-political processes which underlie the development of a society, such as the multi-ethnic CHT, processes which are embedded in the locally specific and always changing cultural realities which the concept of ethnicity seeks to capture. In the case of CHT, inter-ethnic relations can be seen as a dynamic process of negotiation between ‘diversity and unity’. At one moment inter-ethnic relationships are manifested in the form of collective articulation, while at another level inter-ethnic relations are fundamentally affected by variations in the logics of the cultural beliefs and practices of the ethnic groups concerned, and by their varying patterns of articulation with structural practices.

I emphasise this last point, following Barth’s (1969) influential and almost exclusive emphasis on the mechanism of ethnic boundary maintenance. Barth challenges the primacy given to culture, seeing culture as an implication or result of long term

social processes rather than as a “primordial” feature of groups. For him, ethnicity is the “social organisation of cultural difference”, furthermore “ethnic groups are categories of identification and ascription used by the actors themselves” (Barth 1969:10). Barth’s key insight into the understanding of ethnic identities is that they are not fixed but flexible and fluid depending upon an individual’s behaviour and decision making process. A similar theme was developed earlier by Leach (1954) in his study of political systems of highland Burma: the “situational variability of ethnic identity” (regional appropriateness).

The above arguments lead us to two important conclusions. Firstly, ethnicity cannot be attributed to a particular content. “Ethnic categories provide an organisational vessel that may be given varying amounts of form and process in different socio-cultural systems” (Barth 1969: 15). Secondly, analytic focus must be shifted away from the cultural content to the boundaries, which define the group from the outside world. Therefore, the practical assumption that derives from the Barthian model is that rather than looking at the existence of ethnic groups one must explore how such groups maintain their distinctiveness.

Barth’s analysis of cultural knowledge and practice of the constituent units of ethnically plural societies, such as the CHT, is central. However, Barth’s understanding of ethnicity is too single-mindedly focused on the questions of boundaries. The character of the multi-ethnic society in CHT is more than simply locally observable culturally discrete co-residential groups. Indeed identity construction in the CHT is a process of social negotiation in continuously changing relationships between different groups under distinctive social situations. This is a result of the fact that the processes of mutual accommodation between the groups tend to generate a shared cultural expression. This shared notion evolves under the influence of larger scale social formations operating at regional and national levels.

Barth’s model, by and large, fails to relate ethnic groups with other ethnic groups. He simply tells us that ethnic groups exist. As Marcus Banks says “Barth’s analytical indifference to the state, and to centralised relations of power, produces a

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14 This is an issue in relation to later points (the citizenship of Bengali).
liberal model of ethnic pluralism that has difficulty in dealing with inequalities of power and resources" (Banks 1996: 76). Despite such criticism, by breaking with an essentially colonial paradigm of “tribe” he paved the way for anthropologists to approach ethnic identities in a new light.\(^{15}\)

Instrumental perspectives view ethnicity as a purely “political phenomenon”, defined by the use made of certain markers for the purposes of political mobilisation (Jenkins 1997; Banks 1996; Devalle 1992). A more extreme instrumentalist is Abner Cohen. For Cohen ethnicity is functional. The reasons for a group asserting and maintaining an ethnic identity are common economic interests and keeping ‘symbolic capital’ within the boundary it invokes. Cohen dismisses culture even more completely than Barth does, arguing that ethnic organisation must serve both political ends and satisfy psychological needs for belonging and meaning (Cohen 1974). In this context, identity formation is analysed in terms of strategic use of ethnic attributes or behaviours, with no meaning beyond the pursuit of material or political interests. In these analyses ethnic identity is reduced to consumer choice. However, this approach fails to explain ethnicity in a way that does justice to its enduring strength.

In recent years there have been considerable advances in the study of the identity aspect of ethnicity focusing on how ethnic identity may assume fundamental importance for the individuals and how attachment and loyalty to ethnic categories or groups are maintained (Doja 2000; Cohen 2000; Chan 1998). Notions of shared origins are usually crucial for ethnic identity, and interpretations of history are therefore important to ideologies seeking to justify and maintain particular ethnic identities. This particularly concerns the relationship of ethnicity and state formation.

Phil Burnham argues that “although ethnic identity construction may be analysed primarily as a reflex of dyadic inter-personal interactions, such interactions are typically situated within the broader frameworks of collective discourse, including appeals to shared historical knowledge, cultural traditions, legal, political and other

\(^{15}\) However, in some current anthropological circles, even to mention words "ethnic groups" is to stand accused of siding with the colonialist anthropology (Burnham 1996: 3).
rights, and so on. These collective discourses, in turn, serve to articulate ethnic categorisations with larger scale processes of political competition, domination and resistance which, in the present day, are often played out with reference to the more globalising discourses of the modern state system” (1996: 5).

Burnham’s argument in this context suggests that ethnic identity and difference become a part and parcel of nationalism. Looking at the literature on ethnicity and nationalism, there are varying degrees of emphasis placed on the significance of ethnicity and culture in the growth of nationalism. Anthony D. Smith (1986) argues that pre-existing ethnic sentiment symbols, values, myth, and memories - is the basis on which the modern nations are constructed. By contrast, Gellner (1983) treats nations as modern inventions without such a prior ethnic base - what Benedict Anderson (1983) terms an “imagined community”.

Anderson examined the phenomena of nation and nationalism, describing nations as “imagined communities...that, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in [them] ...are always conceived of as a deep horizontal comradeship” (1983: 15-16). In such ‘imagined’ states, ideology depicts the nation state as an all-embracing inter-group collectivity, a “super-community” with no internal contradictions (Devalle 1992: 19). However, Anderson’s proposal is not adequate to understand those aspects of collective identities that are not instrumentally inflated or revived but have been built up in the course of time. Anderson basically highlights the nationalism of the dominant community, and gives little attention to the subject of ethnicity itself. Jonathan Spencer argues that “the study of nationalism poses particular problems for anthropology, not at least because nationalism and anthropology share certain concepts and certain assumptions; both anthropologists and nationalists have tended to depict a world made up of bounded, homogeneous cultures” (1990: 283).

Glazer and Moynihan, though both instrumentalists, saw ethnicity from a different viewpoint. According to them, ethnicity is a relatively new phenomenon and a product of modernity (Glazer & Moynihan 1975). They argued that nation building and modernisation processes have a detrimental effect on ethnic groups and create a discourse of ethnicity in its own image. However, they did not mention how the
notion of ethnic identity in a variety of forms challenges nationalist ideologies in many contexts.

This is what Williams (1989) emphasises: ethnicity can only be understood in relation to the state and to the question of nationhood. Williams described ethnicity as a kind of “lightning rod” which attracts all those who have vested interest in promoting and defining the interests of one group as against others. William notes that ethnic groups in a society do not exist in isolation, instead, they are overlapping groupings whose relationships are defined, not by their relative power or status in comparison to one another, but by their position within the state (1989: 407-8).

Based on the study of language politics in North India, Brass argues that “ethnic groups in India gain by asserting their corporate identity on the basis of commonality of language, religion and region in order to win concessions from the state” (Brass in Pieterse 1996: 25-29). Brass’s analysis of ethnicity emphasised the purpose rather than content which positions him as an instrumentalist. This perspective is perhaps particularly relevant to the new ethnicities which are being forged in the CHT.

Thus we find that, in much of the literature that deals with ethnic groups, minorities and subordinate groups within larger scale formations, there is a preoccupation with pluralism which does not take account of the exploitative and hegemonic nature of relationships that exist between ethnic groups and the state, the Bengali State vs the hill people of CHT (Mohsin 1997; Dewan 1990).

There is, however, a burgeoning literature that attempts to conceptualise ethnicity as a product of colonialism. Whilst reading recent post-colonial literature on the CHT it appears that colonialism is now represented as a big political change which contributed to the redefinition of ethnicities in the CHT (Schenlde1 1992; Tripura 1992, 1993; Mohsin 1997; Dewan 1990). I argue that the impact of colonialism is a very significant episode not only for the CHT but equally for Bangladesh itself. Therefore ethnic identities have not been created solely by colonialism because ethnic discourses are to be formulated with regard to the ‘others’. Both colonial and
post-colonial realities are a catalyst for the significant ‘other’ in present day identity construction in the CHT.

And yet there is another area of anthropological research that has yielded numerous analytical insights in the study of ethnicity. In traditional Marxist analysis ethnicity and nationality are seen as “masks” that conceal the “identities of social classes” (Banks 1996). Critics argue that this approach is only concerned about class struggle and is inadequate to deal with the question of national minority oppression, for example the case of CHT. However, Marxists like Mamdani (1976) and Hechter (1975) consider ethnicity as a form of ideology. They argue that ethnicity does not necessarily arise due to socio-cultural differences, rather it is in part a consequence of state economic development policy and legal frameworks. It polarises the social relationships into a “core and periphery” which is explained in terms of the “social base” in the African context (Mamdani 1976: 16) Hechter (1975) uses “internal colonialism” to explain regionalism in the Celtic fringe, while Devalle (1992) has used the same terminology in the examination of socio-economic development in the Jharkhand movement in India.

Overall, it seems that the predominant perspectives upon ‘ethnicity’ and ‘ethnic identity’ at individual and group level can be applied to certain circumstances, but there are too many incongruities for one single theoretical model to be formed. There has never been no single discourse of ethnicity, rather, there are plurality of discourses. Accordingly, in this study, ethnicity will not be translated into a single discourse because collective identities do not exist in a pure form but are forged with many interwoven elements, some of which I will examine. Moreover, there is no neutral ground from which an ethnic identity can be seen as uncontested. The complexity of a situation like that in the CHT yields to no single theoretical perspective. As Tilley has suggested, “to debate the meaning of ethnicity is one thing; to elucidate the motivations that lie behind ethno-politics is another” (1997: 512).

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16 I consider Mamdani’s concept of a social base to be ‘ethnic or ‘tribal’. 
Cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious factors have often served as markers for the construction of ethnic discourse (Levine 1997) or as a source of solidarity or a basis for mobilisation at particular historical conjunctures. In this context, ethnicity serves as a dependent variable in the process of social formation, not as a product of vaguely defined "primordial sentiments" (Geertz 1973). The different faces of ethnicity have to be distinguished. In the CHT claims are being made by the hill peoples, the settlers, government officials and academics. New ethnicities are being asserted and challenged. Some questions that this research hopes to address are as follows: what are the connections between the diverse peoples of the CHT? How might they be harnessed into new politically effective forms of identity, and how might these claims be challenged from within and without?

The ‘Tribes’ of Bangladesh in National Cultural Context

In anthropological literature since the 1970s there has been a noticeable shift in terminology from “race” and “tribe” to “ethnicity” and, this is said to have entailed a deep transformation in analytical approaches (Eriksen 1993; Banks 1996; Jenkins 1996). In particular it is related to the growing concern with the nation as a unit of analysis and with the incorporation of ethnic groups and categories into states (Hettne 1996). Whilst anthropologists had studied ethnicity as a kind of corporate social phenomena, which emphasised cultural distinctiveness on the basis of "kinship" and "clanship" (Jenkins 1997), there is a shift in reassessing and attempting to deconstruct the notion of ethnicity away from fixed categories towards process and meaning. Nevertheless, the term “ethnic group” is still regarded with some suspicion, particularly in the South Asian context by writers such as Devalle (1992) who still believe that social scientists, especially anthropologists have helped to prolong a colonial discourse about ‘tribal’ identity, based on kinship and clanship, which now serves the interests of the state.¹⁷

In fact, there is a disjunction between the theoretical concerns of social scientists and the kind of discourse that actually exists on the ground in Bangladesh. Theoreticians are working with the issues of definition of ethnicity and its fluidity, but

¹⁷ See also ethnicity in Mamdani’s early works as the "social base".
Unfortunately the Bangladeshi state constructs Bengali society and ‘tribal’ people as having distinctive, oppositional identities.

Under the colonial period the ‘tribal’ people were constructed as ‘primitive’. This has continued in post-independence Bangladesh and India. The post independent Bangladesh State categorisation of *upazati* (sub-nation) has become acceptable substitution for ‘tribes’ in official discourse and in reality, this is used in the same way as old category of “tribe” (Subba 1992; Tripura 1992; Schendel 1992). There is no clear definition of these terms. It is up to the government or state to decide which communities are to be called *upazati*. Generally “backwardness”, “relative isolation” and cultural distinctiveness, language (‘tribal’ dialects), religion (animism), traditional dress and the practice of *jhum* (primitive agriculture) are considered when specifying a community as *upazati* (Karlsson 1997: 47; Tripura 1992: 323; Devalle 1992: 32). I discuss this in Chapter seven.

There is also a continuation of the colonial policy of declaring certain areas as “special” and setting up a special type of administration there, for example CHT in the case of Bangladesh and Jharkhand in the case of India. Guha (1989) describes this view more elaborately by showing how the British formulated the policy of special administration for tribal areas in order to prevent “subaltern resistance” and to extract resources. By stressing the ‘primitiveness’ ‘isolation’ and ‘backwardness’ of the people identified as ‘tribal’, the state narratives denies them both voice and agency. I discuss this in relation to legal frameworks and their implementation ‘on the ground’ in Chapter five and six.

In British India the original category of “primitive tribes” or “hill tribes” referred to the people traditionally living in the forest or hill regions (Tripura 1993; Guha 1989). Lewin, one of the first colonial ethnographers of the CHT, writes, “among a simple people like our hill men there is no... desire (for excessive wealth); their nomadic life precludes any greater accumulation of wealth, and they enjoy a perfect social equality” (1869: 116). Clearly we can see that the category ‘hill men’ was constructed not only to place the people so designated, but also to have them serve as objects in a colonial discourse. The Colonial view of ‘hill men’ was also influenced by nineteenth century evolutionist’s thinking, as can be seen, for
example, by Lewin’s reference to Maine’s Ancient Law (ibid: 27-28). Accordingly, the category ‘hill men’ was also seen to be at lower stage of cultural evolution compared to the people of the plain such as Hindus, Muslims and Bengalis etc. Thus the term denotes “cultural inferiority” or “primitive people” in modern anthropological sensibilities (Bertocci 1989: 140).

The real legacy of colonialism is that colonialist classificatory schemes continue to be meaningful to date throughout the sub-continent. In Bangladesh it is largely accepted that the colonial categories of ethnic differentiation that the upazati or ‘tribal’ people cannot be identified with the Bengalis today or vice-versa. This is usually attributed to the British “divide and rule policy” (Tripura 1992). Thus the notion ‘tribe’ only exists in relation to the mainstream. Unfortunately, social scientists, including anthropologists, have partly contributed to this stereotyping discourse. In South Asia the category ‘tribe’ has not developed as a conceptual category, independent from administrative practice. Defining the ‘tribes’ is the task of government officials according to the criteria mentioned above.

It is important to show an example of these ‘tribalist’ ideas voiced by Bangladeshi authors. Sattar, for example, an influential writer on tribal affairs in Bangladesh, asserts that “tribals are as simple, credulous, and jovial folk ... As long as they have enough to eat they are not much bothered by worries” (1975: 7). Many recent writers, however, treat this as part of a general pattern of ethnocentric ideology that legitimizes the penetration and subjugation of indigenous people’s homeland in quest of their resources (Schendel, 1992, 2001; Tripura 1992, 1993; Dewan 1991a, 1991b).

Such attitudes towards ethnic minorities are not, of course, unique to Bangladesh. Indian anthropologists have remained faithful to the old category of the tribe, as Dube’s “tribal ethnicity” and Sinha’s “tribes as ethnic groups” are applied in an ambiguous way with reference to the term ethnicity (cited from Devalle 1992: 34). The implication is that however problematic the categories ‘tribal’ or ‘hill men’ may be from an anthropological perspective, it is obvious that they are no longer simply a

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18 This discourse may be referred to as 'tribalist' because of its similarities to the Orientalists representation of the 'Orient' (see Edward Said Orientalism 1979).
matter of colonial imagination. In Bangladesh, the official culture is actually adhering to very old notions of 'tribal' people. Bangladeshi law, including the newly adopted Hill District Council Bills of 1997 about Chittagong Hill Tracts has actually not made that move from tribal to ethnic group. They basically still see them as 'tribal' or upazati (see Article 1 of the Hill Tracts District Council Act 1997), a term which underlines the subordinate structural position of 'tribal' within the larger society.

There is a lack of consonance between the way the social scientists/anthropologists think about these issues and the way policy makers, politicians and lawyers are still thinking and formulating policy at least institutionally. The spirit of the 1972 constitution which states "all citizens of Bangladesh are Bengali", but the non-Bengali speaking inhabitants are seen as 'different', and that difference is a distinction between a mainstream population (Bengali) and upazati. The intention is not the recognition of ethnic plurality and equivalence between groups such as Bengali, Chakma and Marma etc. There is very little sophistication in the categorisation of these notions of identity. Social science may have finely honed theories about ethnicity and ethnic identity, but the Bengali legal framework, official culture and the political system and everything else is still working with the old distinctions; 'tribal' versus everything else, 'outsiders' versus 'insiders'.\(^\text{19}\)

**Limitations of Ethnicity Theories**

Given that the notion of ethnicity provokes such strong reactions and is central to the thesis, it is important for me to explain at this point what I mean and what I do not mean by this concept. I argue that in the CHT far from being a single 'tribal' identity, ethnic peoples moved in and out of multiple identities, defining themselves at one moment as part of ethnic group and yet another moment as part of broader collectivities. The process of broader identity construction appears to receive a boost when linked with or in opposition to, strongly institutionalised structures of centralised power, such as the state.

\(^{19}\) Many writers like Ahmed, A. (1993), also support this idea.
Recent anthropological literature suggest that in the present day it is true that the process of ethnic identity formation as well as resistance movements take place with reference to state structure (Burnham 1996; Hodgson 2002; Gray 1997). Therefore, ethnicity is inseparable from the political process structuring the state.

In the above discussion on ethnicity and identity in both abstract analytical and local Bangladeshi contexts, one theme that arises is that all identities, both personal and collective, are constructed in and through relations of dominance and resistance. I want to examine the nuances of this. A major weakness of established views in the ethnicity literature, due to its macro-level preoccupations, is the failure to trace serious accounts of how identity is asserted in local cultural and environmental contexts.

A lot of theories of ethnicity have not really engaged with the way the people use and construe resources, nor have they engaged with the legal and institutional framework of state-ethnic group or state-tribal relations. Moreover, very few of those previous theories of ethnicity have dealt with, or explored, the problem of identity formation in relation to natural resources. The purpose of this study is to examine the process of ethnic mobilisation based on resource use and resource tenure and the way in which it relates to wider communities and implicated in the CHT.

Nevertheless, I have reviewed the related anthropological literature and also considered them in the conceptualisation of ethnicity from analytical standpoints. In explaining the issues of diversity & multi-ethnicity at the local level, I find the analytical model of Barth, Burnham, Brass and others helpful in the understanding of group dynamics. While for dealing with more critical and broader issues involving the process of collective identity, ethnic mobilisation, resistance movements, hegemonism, the new social movements theories developed by Martinez -Alier, Escobar and subaltern historians, such as Guha, are considered more relevant in view of my proposed research goals for part three.
Alternative Theories of New Social Movement and Collective Identity


Their discussions have arisen out of studies of social and political movements offering a range of relevant questions about the politics of representations, recognition, resources, and rights as these movements engage shifting political and economic landscape; national discourses, alliances, and organisations; articulations, and the complicated cultural politics of inclusion and exclusion invoked by the term indigenous. Studies also explore the pragmatic and political uses by activists and communities of the concept of ‘indigenous’, and how the concept has been imagined, understood, used and shaped by people in their everyday practices, discourses and struggles.

Therefore, in this thesis I am dealing with the literature on social movements concerned with indigenous identities and rights. These rights include protection of and control over property and possessions (such as territories, resources, and land), practices (cultural performances and literatures) and knowledge (cultural, linguistic, environmental and agricultural). Although as Edelman (2001) has recently noted sociologists and political scientists have long dominated the study of social movements, anthropologists, I would argue, have been central to the study of indigenous social movements.20

The concept of new social movement has a “qualitative difference” with that of earlier movements such as labour movements (Wignaraja 1993: 18-19). These contemporary people’s struggles, both cultural and social, are being seen as

20 Important studies on indigenous movements include Gray 1997; Maybury-Lewis 1997; Brosius 1999a, 1999c, 1999d; Li 2000, 2001.
apparently “grassroots”, often in Third World context (Gledhill 1994: 179). The new literature on social movements is concerned with the way in which social groups are formed as a political process, rather than the behaviour of static bounded social groups. This would obviously apply to the context of CHT.

Some theoretical works built around the study of social movements make a valuable contribution to the understanding of this political process. Escobar, for example, points out that “the new social movement theory provides an interesting rethinking of collective agency formation” (1992: 412). Since cultural politics becomes the politics of social movements, Escobar suggests “culture becomes political when it becomes implicated in implicit and explicit struggles for power” (ibid.). Using diverse Latin American experiences he argues that certain cultural practices of marginal people, such as traditional economic activities, concepts of territory, and knowledge of resources are expressed in social movements as alternative “cultural identities” in relation to a dominant culture (1997: 203).

Therefore a focus on the politics of culture as a process by which groups construct and reconstruct identities for themselves in their struggles and negotiations with dominant groups and the state leads us to explore other issues related to it. In most of the frontier regions (such as CHT), and in rain forests areas, there has been a politics of resources, the environment and representation (Baviskar 2003). A number of anthropologists have explored this complex politics of cultural identity, images and representation involved when indigenous groups nationally and internationally manipulate, project, and homogenise their public images and identities in order to seek recognition and demand rights (Conklin 2002; Winzeler 1997).

There is also, of course, a much broader literature on cultural politics (Alvarez et al 1998; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Hale 1997; Subba 1999) that informs these studies of indigenous social movements. Some anthropologists have also linked work on the cultural politics of representation with what has been called the “politics of recognition” (Li 2001; Frost 2001). As Li elaborates, recognition is an “act of acknowledgement” (2001: 652) by examining the struggles of indigenous activists and organisations in order to gain political recognition from the respective nation-states as “indigenous peoples” in the Indonesian context.
Moreover, the politics of recognition is closely tied to the politics of political representation. Of course, the paradox is that indigenous groups must demand recognition from the very nation-states that have historically treated them as second class citizens by ignoring their rights, exploiting their resources, and disparaging their cultures and identities* such as *upazati* of CHT in Bangladesh. Others have examined the politically strategic, but complex and often contradictory, overlap in indigenous rights and environmental agendas (Brosius 1999a; Guha and Martinez-Alier 1997).

In the often-overheated contexts of environmental politics, resource development and human rights debate, indigeneity is more than a cultural identity. It represents a dynamic social process and a contested domain wherein indigeneity can circumscribe a political argument, a resource related practice, a shared historical experience, and a defining moment in nation-citizen relationships (Von Benda-Beckman 1993: 20).

It is also evident from the literature that a key impetus for the emergence of indigenous activism on its current scale has been the sustained threats to indigenous land, territories, and resources by colonial and post-colonial state interventions. An increasing number of anthropologists are exploring indigenous demands for rights that extend beyond their territorial resources. These demands hinge on the right to self-determination and include the right to determine their own development and to control and protect their cultural knowledge and performances, languages, and indigenous knowledge (Hodgson 2002; Frost 2001; Nicholas 2000; Escobar 1997).

By linking together issues of representation, recognition, resources, and rights through ethnographic case studies, these studies offer a critical, comparative perspective on the issues of culture, identity, power, representation and alliances. The studies, despite the widely differing dynamics of each area, make evident the intersecting politics of representation, recognition, resources, and rights in the various regions. This comparative perspective of social movement is crucial in forming an understanding of the CHT because indigenous peoples of this region are facing a similar situation with the nation state Bangladesh.
One of the salient aspects of this cultural politics is the organised response emerging from it in the form of social movements (Escobar 1996, 1992), though I will try to show a more nuanced organisation than Escobar's grand theory. The literature focuses on new social movements not only as "political struggles in pursuit of socio-economic goals, but also as cultural struggles" (Escobar 1992: 397). For Escobar, the notion of cultural struggle is a process in which social actors, who are theorised as marginal, oppositional, and minority etc., and who are subjected to national economic and cultural policies for a long time, are shaped by different meaning and practices that come into conflict with the dominant cultural order. In this context, Escobar's analysis of the social movement as "cultural struggle" draws many interwoven elements besides economic goals.

The above perspectives are in many respects relevant to the present ethnic mobilisation processes in the CHT where land and language issues are intertwined. Similarly, Karlsson (1997) in his recent study of Rabhas, an indigenous people in Sub-Himalayan Bengal, reveals that Rabha people assert their cultural identity in opposition to the dominant Bengali community, and this assertion of identity takes forms directly related to their survival and struggle for land, forest or other basic resources such as language.

In the Latin American context, some analysts also argue that "Indianness" has become more profound in diverse indigenous movements (Gledhill 1994), as peasants are continuously engaged in struggles over "indigenous land rights" (Wignaraja 1993), and "in the process of challenging the conventional development model and the state which has proved unable and/or uninterested in improving their lives" (Peet & Watts 1996: 96). In terms of indigenous politics, Beth Conklin (2002) explores how Brazilian Indians have shifted their claims to distinct status, and therefore rights, from indigenous practice to indigenous knowledge, in part through promoting particular representations of Native Amazonian shamans.

Therefore, ideas on social movements as being collectivities organised around common concerns and experiences of oppression, as well as being practical struggles over livelihood and survival, are what Martinez-Alier (1991) describes as
the "ecology of the poor". The specificity of ecological struggles is, however, marked by considerations of both political and moral economy, and an ecological perspective involves a worldview about the nature and positioning of community in relation to it (Peet & Watts 1996). Most of this recent social movement literature suggests that the relationship between territory, identity and culture is of paramount importance in the discourse of such movements. As it is historically in the making of nations, territory is deemed as space for hope and continuation of existence, and in an economic sense it is linked with natural resources. The loss of territory is the loss of life (Sethi 1993).

Hence social movements can be seen as a process of mobilisation, a strategy of constructing diverse identities based on cultural and social, economic and territorial rights, a mechanism of the defense of traditional methods of resource exploitation in the face of challenges from external forces. They also emphasise preservation of local control over the allocation of natural resources and the environment. Yet the expression these movements take is moulded not only by specific grievances but also by the historical and social context. In some cases, aggrieved groups resort to outright collective action, often invoking the language of ethnic and other identities which may become reinvigorated in the context of struggles over resources. However, a strategy of identity construction may take on different meanings in different socio/cultural contexts. Contemporary cultural, and ethnic and collective identities are central to this thesis.

In the case of CHT, the story of identity politics seems to be connected to the colonial and post-colonial categorisation of their inhabitants as 'tribal' or upazati and is incorporated into their struggle for self-identification. This category is being reified into a cultural identity for the assertion of political claims. Under successive colonial and national regimes, the people of CHT have been subjected to different classificatory grids (for example 'tribe', upazati) in order to map them out as colonial/post-colonial subjects, and to depict CHT as a free resource to exploit. Today it seems that their assertion of Pahari identity is related to their survival or struggle for land and forest on the one hand, and to an organised protest against the dominant Bengali community and state for long term deprivations on the other.
There is a general consensus among the writers on social movements that they take place largely among poor, oppressed, marginalised and subordinate people who, at some level, share a common culture (Nicholas 1973). Indeed, protest by marginalised groups has been analysed conventionally in terms of discrepancies rooted in social class or other criteria such as property ownership. A few recent studies, however, suggest that it may be useful to conceptualise such activity as involving conflicts over access to natural resources and the patterns of natural resource exploitation. These studies emphasise the origins, articulations, ideologies and form of resolution (legal, political and cultural) of these kinds of socio-economic conflicts.

Agarwal (1998, 1988) highlights gender and domestic politics and struggles around the environment, focusing on the way in which poor women experience ecological crisis in quite gender-specific ways, and how they have become significant actors in ecologically-based movements of resistance. Martinez-Alier (1991) examines the implications of local control of resources, and explains how socio-ecological movements in the Latin American region are survival imperatives for the poor, whose existence is not being assured by the market economy or by the state. His research is especially concerned with the social perceptions of, and reactions to, episodes of depletion of resources.

Subaltern historians have brought into focus the theme of peasant resistance (Guha 1983, Ram Guha 1989; Gadgil and Guha 1992, 1995). Subaltern studies have as their aim the breaking of existing notions of the Indian peasant, and other “fixed” subaltern identities like the colonial categories of “untouchable” and ‘tribal’, as passive. By focusing on peasant struggles, they attempt to establish an independent “subaltern” consciousness experience and practice; recognising the subordinate people as a subject in their own right: according to Guha (1983) it is “insurgent consciousness”. This suggests that notions of peasant community and subaltern consciousness are rather different from conventional anthropological descriptions of distinct peoples with distinct culture, which gives space for both continuation and change. Moreover, these studies have also tried to bring an ecological dimension to the study of agrarian history and peasant resistance focusing on colonialism and
commercial forestry (Guha 1989; Gadgil and Guha 1992, 1995). This particular point is relevant to the understanding of the people of the CHT today.

Focussing on property rights and the micro-politics of access to, and control over, resources within the domestic sphere, much of this social movement literature tends to be local in its purview. All of these studies try to link political action (whether peasant resistance, social movements or organised domestic politics) with power relations in relation to the question of resource access, control and identity formation.

Nevertheless, Melucci points out that “when studying social movements one should not consider them as empirically given, as a unified and consistent object” (1988: 245-246). Indeed, collective identity is a process of negotiating the continuously changing relationships between different social groups under distinctive social circumstances (Schiller 1997; Paul 1995; Levine 1997). To address this problem in the context of CHT it is pragmatically important to consider Melucci’s distinction between ‘latent’ and ‘manifest’ levels of social movements.21

In the CHT, the ongoing autonomy movement based on the notion of territoriality22 is clearly a visible instance of ethno-politics. On a broader scale, the conflict between the people of CHT and the majority Bengali people may be described as challenging state rights to land and forest, but at the local level people have different notions of this organised collective mobilisation. They have their own conception of territory and resource use, a process that involves the invisible networks of everyday life; what Melucci terms the “latent” level of any social movement.

Some of the more interesting ideas in this vein derive from the work of Scott (1985) on “everyday forms of resistance”. The notion of everyday forms of resistance is quite opposite to violent uprisings, often being based on individual mundane interests in a non-organised way. Scott’s concept is central, in the context of CHT, to uncovering the fabric of social action at the local level, most specifically in the

21 Although, the concept "latent" and "manifest" were originally coined by Sociologist Robert K. Merton (1957).
22 The concept "territoriality" is referred here to mention the CHT as the land of hill people.
villages, where kinship, neighborhood, faction, network and ritual links offer multiple avenues and arenas for the assertion and manipulation of identities.

Very recently emphasis has also been given not only to political forms of social groupings but also to the way in which claims are made, negotiated and contested. For example, Peluso's (1993) study shows how state power and forest management institutions are contested by Indonesian peasants, raising the larger issues of the colonial legacy and the coercive pattern of conservation. However, there are lots of ways of forming social groupings.

In micro-political anthropological analysis, group formations are defined in terms of social actions in which social conflicts are seen as the competitive pursuit of collective interest. But it is also the reconstitution of social, cultural or political identities (Peet and Watts 1996; Nicholas 1973). Nicholas points out that factions largely emerge out of social conflicts. However, a similarity exists between factions and movements in a sense that both are formed around the tissue of personal ties, common interests and moral ideology.

In the context of identity projects this also implies that the politics lie in the effort to create a center and thus fix a particular configuration of identity. In the context of CHT the term ‘identity politics’ might be appropriate because the regional identity is clearly manifested in the emergence of new vocabulary, Pahari or Jhumma people, to refer to all inhabitants of the CHT hills, excluding the Bengali. It highlights the Pahari cultural separateness from Bengalis, their shared possession of a Jhumma homeland, the CHT, a shared history of oppression and marginalisation, and the need to develop an “indigenous cultural model”.23

Therefore the concepts Pahari and Jhumma are being used as unifiers to form new social groups to demand self-rule and engage in the struggle to establish a place of their own. However, from methodological and empirical point of view, some intriguing questions can be raised: how and why is one particular configuration or representation selected rather than another? Identities emerge through the struggles

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23 For details see Van Schendel, "The invention of Jhumma" (1992).
that constitute social "fields" or political "arenas", which may intertwine with
domestic, local, national, regional or even global realities. How should micro-
politics and its links to bigger systems be understood?

Bailey's micro-political approach is useful in studying the local politics of social
groupings in the CHT. Bailey's (1960, 1969) study of a village of highland Orissa
(India) illuminates the relations between everyday life and politics at the village
level, specifically factional politics. Using the metaphor of the "competitive game"
he argues that an environment may contain rival political structures which compete
and make up the "political field", and there are also "arenas" where teams build
support and subvert their opponents. Competition may move from one arena to
another, or groups in one arena unite temporarily against a common threat or goal.

Bailey's concept of the "game of politics" is central in understanding the dynamics
of political competition among the groups of CHT inhabitants themselves and with
the wider Bengali society as a whole. Conflicts between local political figures, such
as headmen, chiefs and national figures and administrators, could be interpreted as
representing conflicts of power at larger levels between the central government and
the local authorities over the control of resources. But it is equally important to
understand the local manifestation of the larger organisations, such as party
organisations and local elections.

The crucial point is how such structured interventions from outside are received
locally, how they play in the local political "game". For example, at the local level,
recent new alignments are thrown up in the protest against the khas land lease and
disputes over infra-structural development, cantonment expansion. In this process,
local leaders often play a crucial role in mobilising local followers. Thus Bailey's
micro-political approach is useful because it addresses certain key issues of conflicts
and interests of different parties at the local level. Another aspect, for example, is an
analysis of land disputes of khas land and puroshava election is also a study of local
level politics (see Chapter Six and Seven).

I am positioning my research with the work of this alternative stream of Third World
and non-metropolitan scholars such as Escobar, Guha and others, working on the
real issues in the real world as opposed to trying to theorise ethnicity. My intention is to study the political process in the CHT: the new laws, new alliances and identities, the politics of environment and culture, the effects of government land policy, military occupation and the movements of the population. The research thus examines, through the micro-level politics of land tenure and resource use, the underlying basis of the social movements in the CHT. The issues and realities brought by the social movement studies, such as representation, rights, resource, land and shared marginalisation and state intervention are all crystallised in the form of Pahari movement in CHT. Therefore, the alternative analytical framework I consider in this thesis is mainly derived from the literature on indigenous social movements.

Environment as Social Context

For the purposes of this study I take issues about ‘the environment’ to refer primarily to resource use. As there is an enormous body of literature on the subject of environment, I am going to concentrate on the way the environment is conceived, defined and constructed from a given historical perspective. Recently, a growing number of studies have emphasised that the conceptualisation of the environment is a theoretical construct, and one that is determined by the historical context (Guha 1989; Guha & Gadgil 1992, 1995; Guha & Martinez-Alier 1997; Brosius 1999d, 1999a; Mohsin & Ahmed 1996; Baviskar 1997, 2003; Escobar 1996; Frost 2001; Peet & Watt 1996; Karlsson 1997).

Guha and Gadgil (1992) place the environment in a historical perspective, describing forestry policy in colonial India and how it led to peasant initiatives like the Chipko Movement in the 1960s. “These movements have helped Uttarakhand emerge from a position of relative obscurity to one which accurately reflects its ecological and cultural importance to the life of the subcontinent.” (Guha 1989: xi). It is relevant to look in a similar fashion at the way the environment of the Chittagong Hill Tracts has been constructed through its particular economic, social and political history.

Historically, the people of CHT have been subjected to colonial, Pakistani and Bangladeshi systems of governance. However, whichever rule the people of the
CHT have been subjected to, the way in which they have been politically defined has been related directly to the oppressors' conception of them. Typically, the CHT has been seen in accordance with the political and economic interest of the ruling regime as a free resource, inhabited by natives. There has been a changing relationship between the hill people and the plains people and both of their relationship to the environment and to the overarching context of the state (Mohsin & Ahmed 1996).

The issues I expect to address and explore are prevalent in situations where socio-political change is directly linked to changes in the environment. In this study the environment is seen as both a natural resource as well as a social context. In CHT, there are two conflicting interests in resource use: one is a system of subsistence agriculture, *jhum*, practised by the hill people (*Pahari*); the other is the commercial exploitation of the environment (forestry, *khas* lands etc) by the State and the dominant Bengali.

Karlsson (1997) has studied a similar situation. His study of the Rabha community highlights the construction of identity as a form of subaltern resistance in Sub-Himalayan Bengal, perceived as a struggle against the predominant Bengali people. This identity also stems from the construction of their environment in terms of a traditional land use practice of *jhum* cultivation; constructed in the face of pressure from colonial, national and current international policy towards their forest surroundings. The connection between ecology and identity has also been established in recent theoretical discussions of resource use and tenure where ecology appears as a strategy for the reorganisation of self and group identity, as described by Martinez-Alier (1991) and Escobar (1992a, 1992b) for social movements in Latin America and other parts of the World.

In the context of CHT, land and its possession have been a source of identity construction. The right to use and appropriate CHT land and territory relates to diverse collectives in the past, present and future. Historically, Chittagong had been an area of contestation between the rulers of Bengal, Arakan and Tripura because of its access to the sea and for natural resources (Ishaq 1971: 26). There is very little information about the pre-colonial CHT. Historians report that in pre-colonial Moghal period (before 1760) the CHT areas were under autonomous self-rule,
resulting in the maintenance of their indigenous socio-political system (Sirajuddin 1971; Schendel, 1992).

Although the Moghals left the political structure of the hills undisturbed, changes occurred in very subtle ways. For the first time the people of the CHT paid a tax in the form of a tribute to an outside power. As the tax was paid in cotton tributes, the area was designated as “Kapas Mahal” (land of cotton) (Ishaq 1971; Sirajuddin 1971). Many believe that the introduction of cotton tributes by Moghal in the CHT marked the beginning of the loss of indigenous power (Mohsin 1997, Dewan 1990, 1991; Roy 2001).

In the perspective of the Moghal environmental construct, the CHT was seen as mainly a resource to be exploited in the form of the cotton taxes levied. This area was ceded to the East India Company in 1760. The Company continued the policy of collecting cotton tribute, with the addition of Bengali middlemen appointed as “the agents to collect tributes” (Ishaq 1971: 31). This system exposed the people of CHT to exploitation by middlemen who usually collected more cotton than the amount they paid to the company (Sirajuddin 1971). But, there was a difference in the taxes levied; the form of tribute was changed from kind to cash; from cotton to money according to the treaty signed in 1789 (Hutchinson 1906; Mackenzie 1884).

Many authors espouse the view that monetarisation went against the interests of the people of the CHT (Mey 1981; Dewan 1990; Mohsin 1997; Schendel 1992). In order to raise the necessary cash, they became dependent upon Bengali traders to whom they sold their products at nominal prices as the traders controlled and manipulated the market. This in fact seems to be the beginning of the settlement of ‘outsider’ Bengali people from the plains into the Hill Tracts. The environment of exploitation was thus established in the CHT.

In 1860 British Colonial policies in the region underwent a fundamental change when for the first time in history, direct rule was imposed on the region. The hill and forest tracts to the east of Chittagong district were separated to form an administrative district in its own right, and officially named as the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) (Lewin 1869; Hutchinson 1906; Ishaq 1971; Schendel 1992). The separation of the district was essential for the colonial government to consolidate its
power and authority against potential rebellions in frontier regions, as reported by earlier colonial administrators (Lewin 1869; Mackenzie 1884, Hutchinson 1906).

Another aim of the British was to increase its revenue from land and local forest produce; protecting its politico-economic interests (Gain 1998; Roy 1992, 2001; Dewan 1990). The CHT was divided into three main revenue circles headed by three chiefs responsible for tax collection. Taxes were demanded on a territorial basis rather than personal followings, as before (Schendel 1992; Mohsin 1997; Tripura 1992).

Many post-colonial writers claim that the colonial administration sought to impose their own notions of “progress” and agricultural “development” upon the jhumia (swidden cultivators) (Mohsin 1997: 149). The colonial perception of jhum, the characteristic form of agriculture in the CHT, was a primitive method of agriculture. As it entails fallow periods, it was considered to be a waste of resources. On the other hand, Jhumma perceived jhum as a way of life, based on the conception of communal ownership, exchange and sharing and had been in harmony with their ecology (Dewan 1990; Roy 1996, Mohsin 1997; Schendel 1992; Tripura 1992). Therefore, colonial construction of methods of land use in CHT, or elsewhere in India, had a different mission in contrast to traditional local method of jhum. Between 1868-71, repeated efforts were made to replace jhum cultivation with plough cultivation because this was expected to yield higher revenues and to be less ‘wasteful’ of timber resources and land. David Gilmartin (2003) in his recent article explores differing uses of the term ‘waste’ in late 19th and 20th century British irrigation administration in India. He argues that “differing concepts of ‘waste’ point towards deep-seated conflicts in British thinking about the relationship between the state, nature and the social body of Indus basin society” (2003: 5057).

In the CHT, the colonial state also claimed ownership of all lands in the hills in 1868, introducing two types of land tenure system: “proprietary right” granted to the sedentary plough cultivators together with individual ownership rights, while the jhum cultivators were given the right to use the land over which the state retained proprietary rights (Roy 1992; Mohsin 1997; Gain 1998, 2001). Recent studies have shown that this kind of land entitlement created a contradictory land tenure system, undermining the traditional customary right, that is an ‘individualistic system’ as
opposed to a ‘community system’, and beginning the policy of land alienation (Roy 1996, 1998; Kalindi 2000). Burman (1993) and Furer-Haimendorf (1982) have shown how this similar process has affected the Northeast tribal people of India under the same conditions.

The other significant change in relation to land and resource exploitation in CHT was the development of scientific forestry. In order to begin ‘commercial’ or ‘scientific’ forestry, the Indian Forest Reserve Act was passed in 1865. By 1871, vast tracts of cultivated jhum land and virgin forests within the CHT were taken over by the colonial government and declared as “reserve”, like many other ‘tribal’ regions in India (Roy 1992, 1997; Mohsin 1997; Ghua 1989; Guha and Gadgil 1992; Karlsson 1997). The local people were barred from entering and using the resources of these forests in an attempt to protect them. The forest as communal space thus became a “commercial venture for the colonial state” (Guha 1989: 56).

Moreover, large tea plantations were established in the hill regions in order to generate revenues and meet the tea demand in England (Karlsson 1997; Guha and Gadgil 1992). Little consideration was given to the social and cultural values of the hill people who were thus marginalised through their exclusion from the forests. I will address this issue of jhum and jhum land rights in Chapter five from a contemporary local perspective.

Furthermore, for the purpose of administrative structuring, the CHT was declared an excluded area in 1900, which was formalised in the CHT regulation of 1900 known as the CHT Manual Amended Act 1860 (Ishaq 1971: 253; Shelly 1992; Roy 2001). This laid down detailed rules and regulations for the administration of the CHT, which were different from the rest of Bengal. The regulation maintained the “traditional” institution of chiefs but gave all executive, judiciary and financial powers to the District Commissioner (colonial administrator). The manual did not have any provision whereby the local people or their representatives could formulate rules for themselves.

However, the regulations restricted settlement and ownership of land by non-indigenous people (Dewan 1990; Kalindi 2000; Roy 1998). Critics of the regulations often demonstrate that colonial administration stemmed the tide of Bengalisation but
isolated the hill people from the rest of Bengal (Ahmed 1993; Ali 1993). Their exclusion kept the CHT away from the rest of India, particularly in a period of intense nationalist movements (Schendel 1992; Schendel & Dewan 2001; Hassanuzzaman 1991; Mohsin 1997). However, my ethnographic experience in CHT suggests a complete opposite picture. Ethnic activists even blame the government for not fully implementing the CHT Regulations which for them now become the safeguard of hill identity (see the discussion of contemporary debate on the CHT Manual in Chapter six).

The colonial construction of the CHT environment, thus, implied a saga of exploitation. Policies regarding modernising agriculture and scientific forestry were formed and implemented with great care to maximise the revenue gains and reduce indigenous peoples’ access to resources. The entire power structure was changed, making the State owner of almost all land and leading to land alienation. Control of resources had passed from the people to the government or a larger state institution.

After 1947 the CHT, under the direct control of Pakistan, faced the devaluation of its high taxation generation potential, but gained instead an alternative importance from the intrinsic value of its land (Schendel 1992, 2001; Gain 1998; Mohsin 1997, 2001; Kalindi 2000). Land was required to establish the Kaptai Project on the Kornafhully River. The industrialisation of the economy was also begun with the establishment of the Kornafhully Paper Mill. The Hill Tracts were supposed to supply the pulpwod for making paper reflecting the State’s usage of the forest resources by recreating reserve forests. Consequently, the policies adopted by the Pakistani regime in the name of ‘national development’ and ‘national integration’ ultimately served the interests of Bengalis in East Pakistan (Barua 2001, Dewan 1991; Schendel 1992, 2001; Tripura 2001; Mohsin 1997; Bertocci 1989).

This developmental activity had dire consequences for the people of CHT, as more than 40% of their best cultivable land was submerged under the reservoir of the Kaptai Dam along with the displacement of about 100,000 people, who became environmental refugees migrating to India (Sopher 1963). Jhum cultivators were the worst affected as they were not compensated by the government since they had no direct ownership to the land. The paper industry (started in 1953 at Chandraguna in CHT) demanded huge amounts of pulpwod to sustain itself, causing intensive
deforestation of the region (Sopher 1963, 1964). Coincidentally at this time jhum cultivation had already been “designated as an unsustainable form of agriculture by the State” (Bertocci 1989: 154).

Though the resources of the hills are used in industry, it employed less than 1% of the total hill population compared to its earlier commitment that 50% will be employed from local hill people (Mohsin and Ahmed 1996). Consequently they remained peripheral and marginalised, which sowed the seeds of unrest and politicisation of the Hill people. Student protests groups such as Pahari Chatra Shamity (Hill Students Association) started the agitation against the Kaptai hydroelectric project in 1957 (Chaudhuri 1991). Commentators mentioned that the rise of these political platforms meant “a growing consciousness of identity among the hill people on one level, and their alienation from Pakistani regimes and Bengalis on the other” (Schendel 1992: 158).

The birth of the Bangladesh nation-state marked significant political and cultural changes and transformations in the CHT landscape. The Bangladesh State was formed in 1971 on the twin bases of culture and territory, emphasising linguistic identity (Anisuzzaman 2000). The inhabitants of the CHT were completely excluded from this cohesion due to their different cultural and territorial circumstances (Hassanuzzaman 1991; Barua 2001; Schendel 1996, 2000; Mohsin 1997). This discontent was reflected in the outbreak of active resistance against the State, framing a demand for the recognition of “cultural plurality” and autonomy (Schendel 1996; Ali 1993; Dewan 1991; Chaudhuri 1991). The government saw these movements as ‘insurgencies’ and a threat to ‘national integration and state sovereignty’ (Ali 1993; Burua 2001). Moreover, this was the time when the Bangladesh Government was headed by military dictators. The militarisation of the CHT was a bid to control the ‘insurgency’; obviously the resource control was another latent agenda (Bertocci 1989; Anti Slavery Society 1984).

Thereafter the government advocated the promotion of Bengali migration to the CHT (mostly landless labourers from the plains) as an instrument in changing the demographic profile of the area. The settlement policy of 1980s was justified by the government on the ground that the CHT constitutes about 10% of the land surface of the country, and has hardly 1% of the population of the country (Roy1997; Huq
The benefits of resource allocation were thus distributed amongst both the hill people and the Bengali immigrants. Now, in considering the CHT, both of these had become interest groups with a major distinction, one of them had the cohesion of the cultural and linguistic factors linking it with the rest of Bangladesh and the other was culturally and socially differentiated, triggering what some writers called an “ethnocide” (Mey 1984; Muhammad 1997; Bodley 1990).

Another dimension of ‘modern’ resource utilisation involved the renewed declaration of the Reserve Forests by the previous military rulers. This paved the way for the government to legitimise the acquisition of land under jhum cultivation. Furthermore, jhum was completely banned as cultivation practice in the Government ‘protected forest’ areas. Though the policy clearly revealed the motive of land encroachment, the project also has detrimental effects on the environment (Roy 1996, Gain 1995, Tripura 2001). But, it is ironical that the government blames the jhum cultivation for soil degradation and deforestation (Ahamed 2001, 2002).

The policy followed by the successive governments has been to gradually relieve the indigenous people of control over their resources so as to benefit the State, even at the expense of the original area. Thus people of CHT have been marginalised causing poverty and environmental degradation. The present Bangladeshi State is no exception to the rule; in fact it has added certain elements of its own. “The exploitative nature of the Kaptai Dam hydro-electric project and the transmigration of the Bengali settlers has caused a massive shortage of land in the CHT which is attributable to government policies rather than failure of jhum cultivation as a method” (Report of the CHT Commission 1991). Land rights have also similarly been usurped; the local people have been turned into environmental refugees leading to a situation of military oppression.

During this time, elsewhere in Bangladesh global policy on environment and land rights has begun to influence national policy through the work of international and national development organisations and NGOs. In the CHT this is not the case. Since the outbreak of the active resistance against the state military oppression in 1977 this region has become an area of restricted movement for so-called reasons of national security. Non-nationals are excluded from working, residing and even visiting the CHT.
Marginalised from both the mainstream and the international community, today it has become a question of day-to-day survival of the people of CHT, both in social, economic and cultural terms. This has led to the rise of resistance and the strength of the link between ecology and collective identity has become even more evident in the present politicised scenario. Above all else, the shared experiences of deprivation and exploitation and the recent struggle against a Bengali-led government have created political awareness among the hill people.

"The role of unequal power relations in constituting a politicised environment...and the ways in which conflict over access to environmental resources is linked to systems of economic and political control first elaborated during the colonial era...resulting in increasing marginality and vulnerability of the poor as an outcome of such conflict" (Bryant 1997: 87), is not an unique feature of the CHT. It has been seen in parts of Brazil, Latin American, and as well as in India, as is evident from the works of Escobar (1992, 1996, 1997), Martinez-Alier (1991), Hecht and Cockburn (1989), Gray (1997), Winzeler, (1997), Guha (1983), Ram Guha (1989) Guha and Gadgil (1992, 1995) and Baviskar (1997, 2003). Collectively they provide rich empirical evidence from various regions to show how political struggles, economic interests and ecological change come together in the patterns of human/environment interaction.

Thus the human construction of the environment of CHT over time has a monotonous regularity in terms of exploitation for political ends, the story being repeated with every successive regime. The emergence of a collective identity among the people of CHT, based on local environmental constructs, is now being directed towards the achievement of their own political goals, but the question remains to what extent is this collective identity representative of the practices, views and interests of all groups in the CHT?

I have thus far discussed the two main theoretical and analytical issues central to my thesis: the first is ethnicity and its relationship to the real political process as found in social movements’ theory. I have explained why social movements, in this sense, are relevant as a better way of looking at ethnicity, ‘tribes’ and their relations to the
state, rather than mainstream theories on ethnicity and ethnic groups.\(^\text{24}\) I have also clarified why it is fair to say that such ideas about ethnicity lead me into this alternative social movements line of thought. The second main theoretical issue that I have discussed is the environment as social and historical construction and the necessity to outline the way this has changed over time. I have shown how the environment has been differentially constructed in different social, cultural and historical contexts.

In this study, I have, thus, concentrated on the two related strands of contemporary discourse with particular resonance in CHT: ethnicity and the environment. I suggest that a new anthropological approach can provide the detailed ethnographic analysis which need to situate in the complexity of social life with an analytical framework which encompasses national and international debate. Before I discuss the methodological procedures I now briefly review the ethnographic literature on CHT in order to situate this research.

**Review and Critique of Existing Ethnographic Literature on CHT**

As I have already mentioned, there is a disjuncture between the theoretical concerns of social scientists including anthropologists and the kind of discourse that actually exists on the ground in Bangladesh to which anthropologists have partly contributed in discussing ethnicity. It is, thus, necessary to review the literature of Lewin, Loffler, Selina, Mohsin, Sattar \textit{et al}, as most of these scholars have been working with the 'tribe' model to describe the people of CHT. The Bangladesh State at the outset assumes that the Chakma, Marma, Tripura and others are the people of 'tribal' cultures. The Bangladesh legal and social policy-makers consequently present a picture of Bengali and the rest, the non-Bengali 'tribals'.

Social scientists including anthropologists, even in recent works, for example, by Selina (1995), have contributed to this stereotypical discourse. I am going to review this literature because it is clear that some of the social structure and cultural issues discussed are going to be relevant to my research. At the same time I am

\(^{24}\) See also Burnham's (1996) study of northern Cameroonian ethnic group's relationship with the state.
nevertheless aware of the potential danger of becoming trapped by adopting a similar view of the people of CHT as ‘tribes’. Therefore, I am going to critique these literature in terms of the fact that it has itself contributed to the construction and use of the term ‘tribe’.

It is important to point out here that the state/tribal distinction has also been central to theoretical interpretations in African studies. Recently, however, this stereotyping distinction has been questioned by anthropologists. Sharpe (1986) has shown how previous ethnographic and historical studies have reinforced the state/tribal distinction in northern Nigeria leading to the construction of “mental maps” which have greatly influenced local policy and administration.

Nevertheless, the ethnographic literature on CHT that I will review is pragmatically useful in understanding various complex issues and giving a handle on issues such as clan structure, the alliance system, and the way power is constituted. By looking at these areas the nature of the relationship between group dynamics, social organisation and land use system is more easily revealed and explored.

A Brief Review of the Literature

Colonial Understanding of CHT

There have been very few serious ethnographic studies on the people of CHT. Until the late nineteenth century, travellers’ accounts and ethnographic reports by colonial administrators and explorers were the sources of British understanding of the inhabitants of the CHT. British administrators of the region provided detailed accounts of these people, based primarily on government reports, gazetteers, census information and personal memory.

Much of the literature of that period contains too few ethnographic descriptions to be of use for this discussion. However, I have included the works of some colonial administrators such as Lewin and Hutchinson as examples of colonial perspectives.

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25 These works include; Lewin (1869,1870), Hunter (1876), Mackenzie (1884), and Hutchinson (D06).
of South Asian ‘tribal’ people which are also central to later debates in the literature. Notably after the establishment of direct control over the CHT in 1860, the colonial government needed to collect detailed information about the ‘tribal’ people and their socio-cultural system because they were looking for the best possible ways to deal with them, primarily for administrative purposes.26

These colonial ethnographies, which often focused on the most spectacular ‘savage customs’ such as head hunting or human sacrifice, also served to legitimise the colonial civilising mission. The most influential of these early ethnographies was that of Lewin in 1869. Most of the ethnographic accounts that followed, even up to today, draw heavily on his work, either as a base for their own interpretations or as a source for criticism.

**Post-colonial Understanding**

From the nineteen-fifties onwards some European anthropologists, particularly French and German (Levi-Strauss 1952; Bessaignet 1958; Bernot 1959; Kauffman 1962) made some studies on the people of the CHT, specifically the Chakma and Marma groups.27 These scholars dealt with diverse features ranging from kinship systems, the jhum economy, and oral traditions of the various ‘tribal’ minorities, and ethnographic descriptions and identification of ‘tribes’ in terms of their locations, numbers, language, etc. The main objectives of these scholars were indeed centred on testing a wide body of hypotheses that hold true for many communities in other regions.

Bessaignet’s (1958) work entitled *Tribesmen of Chittagong Hill Tracts* is an ethnographic description of the Chakma and Marma people, presenting the way of life of these people in the 1950s with no theoretical or analytical frame of reference. Bernot (1959), a linguist, published an article that particularly dealt with the various facts and aspects of different ‘tribal’ groups, such as language, religion, economy, with reference to similarities between peoples living in neighbouring areas. His focus, however, was mainly on the linguistic features of the ‘tribal’ population.

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26 Another source of information comes from the colonial spying system officers serving in the tribal territories reporting back to the Governor (Hunt and Harrison 1980).
Kauffmann (1962) observed the agriculture of the ‘hill tribes’ particularly jhum cultivation, describing the general features such as the type of crops grown, the kind of tools used, method of farming etc. Levi-Strauss (1952), on the other hand, examined the comparative pattern of marriage systems among the three groups, the Chakma, Marma and Kuki. Following a very brief visit to the CHT, he attempted to relate these ethnographic facts to his theories on marriage exchange and social structure.

All these writers, however, have examined the CHT ‘tribal’ groups as independent and isolated units, without ever exploring the process of interaction between them and the Bengali plains people that surround them. This aspect of their ethnicity has been wholly ignored. Not one study has focused on the impact of colonial and post-colonial situations in the CHT, and most of these works were done before the emergence of Bangladesh. It is obvious that there has not been much economic or political analysis of historical change and social transformation in the lives of these people, nor much study of their relevance for the contemporary ‘re-ethnicisation of social movements’.

In the 1960s, an American geographer, Sopher (1963, 1964) began a study of ethnic interaction and the environment, interpreting the relationship between hill and plains people of Bangladesh as symbiotic. The societies of the plains were said to have supplied political and technical culture in order to overcome insecurity caused by the raiding ‘hill tribes’. The ‘tribal’ groups in turn exchange their surplus on the market of the plains, and this exchange process was deemed symbiotic too. These interpretations of hills and plains societies as symbiotic and harmonious clearly show both evolutionist and functionalist perspectives.

The socio-political history of the CHT demystifies this theoretical approach concerning the relationships between the hill and the plains people. Historically, these two populations have been linked by complex networks of exchange and barter, which rest on their different lifestyles and modes of exploitation of the

27 Most of these researches, however, have not been translated into English or Bengali.
environment. Since the colonial period various policies such as the introduction of
cash crop cultivation, together with the monetarised economy, radically changed
these links and affected the socio-economic structures of the hill people, as they
came to be more dependent on the plains people. Over the years, their
interrelationship has posed problems of interpretation for many observers, as the
nature of this relationship has become unequal and even exploitative. These studies
saw political centralisation or integration as the only normal course of development
in this region of 'tribal' belt.

More Recent Studies

Even many recent sources (Sattar 1975; Ahmed 1993; Selina 1995) reinforce the
stereotype of the 'tribal' societies as wild appendices of the hierarchical societies of
the plains. This is precisely the point where a theory perceiving cultural dichotomies
(plains vs jungle; civilised vs dark) is supportive of a national State policy that
favours the majority and marginalises the minority on grounds of inferiority. A
recent study of the Marma people by Selina, a researcher for the Bangladesh
Agriculture Research Council, presents a typical example of this 'ethnocentric'
approach. She advocates that the national development strategies should be
integrated with the strategy for the development of 'tribal' communities because, as
she believes, "they still live in forests with age old primitive tradition, culture and
beliefs" (1995: 13).

The characterisation of 'innocent tribal' for the purposes of development attention of
the state has had the effect of isolating people of CHT from its wider cultural and
political context, and of masking the considerable diversity within the region. I
argue that contrary to the image propagated by prevailing insular, arch-structuralist
accounts, the ethnic people in CHT is and has always been, actively engaged with
national and international debates.²⁸

Recently, some local and foreign anthropologists and social scientists have been
critical of the government's oppressive policies towards the CHT (Dewan 1990;

²⁸ See detailed discussion on this issue in (Tripura 1992; Schendel 1992, 2001, Mohsin 1997;
Ahamed 2001).

Dewan (1990) studied the CHT from a historical Marxist perspective showing how the government policies have periodically marginalised the hill people. His work is primarily based on secondary sources, although he spent six months in the field. Very recently, another study based on secondary sources (Mohsin 1997) traces the development of the Jhuma political movement, again focusing on the marginalisation by the Bangladeshi State.

However, Mey and Mey (1978, 1980, 1981, 1984), in particular, have made a significant anthropological contribution to exposing the recent situation in which government policy towards ‘tribal’ people is seen as continually eliminating them from their land. The government settlement programme of Bengali landless families fails to recognise the CHT’s indigenous system of land right and ownership. Thus, the government’s position in legal matters regarding land supports the “intruders” against the local population. I argue that the concepts of ‘stability’, ‘equilibrium’ and ‘symbiosis’ are poorly suited to the conceptualisation of the political situation in the CHT.
The CHT in Ethnographic Details

To locate the hill people geographically is no problem; to locate them ethnically is more difficult. In Bangladesh, at official level presently two terms upazati (sub-nation) and ‘tribal’ are used interchangeably to refer collectively to the various non-Bengali ethnic groups of the Hill Tracts. However, ethnic groups collectively call themselves as Pahari besides their own ethnic group’s name. There is also a third label. The term Jhumma people is preferred by the PCJSS. For the terms Pahari and Jhumma have different connotations. A survey of the literature on the aspects of ethnographic details provides us with confusing insights into the internal dynamics of ethnic groups.

Names and Numbers

As I have mentioned in the introduction, the actual number of ethnic communities in CHT is not easily agreed upon in the existing literature. The information suggests that listings with different names, divisions or branches of the same group and subgroup as separate ethnic groups have contributed to a lot of confusion about the number of ethnic groups in CHT. Lewin (1869) classified Doignak, Tangchangya, and Sak as sub groups of Chakma. Bernot (1959), however, claimed that they are not sub-groups as their lineages and clans do not exhibit any feeling of identity with Chakma. Levi-Strauss (1952) classified the Bangozi and Pankhu as moieties of the “Kuki” group, but recently Loffler (1990) noted that there is no such name as a Bangozi group in the CHT. I found the people call themselves as Bawm and deny having any genealogical links with “Kukis”.

Language and Ethnicity

Ethnographic knowledge of these peoples' language groupings is also extremely limited. The most recent account available is by Bernot (1959) who classified the languages of the hill people as of Tibeto-Burman origin. He also points out that in CHT groups have inter-mingled in many cases, so that they can be classified as

29 I will discuss these in more detail in Chapter seven, see also the discussion on the subject in (Schendel 1992; Tripura 1993).

30 It seems that colonial administrator (perhaps for administrative purposes) attempted to deal with these people by distinguishing smaller groups as subgroups of dominant group.
“ethno-linguistic groups” as they share the same culture and tradition. Khaleque (1998), however, differs from the above views regarding the categorisation of the language family or branches. Unfortunately, Khaleque’s is not an in-depth ethnographic study and provides only limited data. Though overlapping views exist, scholars suggest that an analysis of present day distribution of language and dialect would reveal the course of historical migration of the hill people from which they were supposed to be descended.

In colonial ethnography, race and racial classifications became the dominant mode of ordering the ‘tribal’ people where race and language were seen as synonymous. For example, Lewin’s (1870) book the Wild Races describes how the ‘hill tribes’ of CHT Tibeto-Burman - speaking Mongoloid immigrants have managed to live in relative isolation from the societies on the plains. Ethnographers have often assumed that groups who speak the same language form a single unit and the unit of language can be used as a bond of political and national solidarity (Karlsson 1997). In the CHT, this model appears to be paradoxical, as linguistic diversity between ethnic groups is widely varied, and the collective ethnic boundary may not be maintained at least at a linguistic level.

Thus, many ethnographic questions may be raised in this respect. The term ‘tribe’ as it appears in the literature has become an unsatisfactory word to describe the people of CHT. Are linguistic groups really the best way to define them? How are their different languages being negotiated in complex socio-political inter-relationships between the groups, at least in the context of new identity formation? How do language differences signify in the lives of the present day hill people of the CHT? I am going to answer these questions in Chapter four.

The multi-plurality of religious doctrines of the hill people has often been attractive to researchers. Besides the major religions predominant among the larger groups, there are smaller groups known as animists who have been increasingly converted to Christianity due to missionary activities, as reported by many (Dewan 1990; Mey and Mey 1978). However, it may be far too simple to describe minor groups’ adoption of Christianity as merely due to missionary activities, since it is the people themselves who choose to convert.
Yet these studies do not tell us why the minor groups choose to become Christians and why they do so at this particular juncture in their history. Although this issue does not come within the purview of my main ethnographic inquiry, I have addressed as a secondary issue of investigation whether Bawm's (one of my study groups) conversion to Christianity is a part of struggle to establish or construct a salient new identity. An understanding of the possible connections between conversion and changing forest landscape in the CHT lead to other insights into how changes of religion can affect everyday life.

Social Organisation

The quality of literature is not particularly good on the issues of social organisation. The way these groups are treated in the literature produces some uncertainties regarding the nature of political process in terms of labeling ethnic identity. Another area that is deficient in the literature is local social organisation of “marriage systems”, “lineage”, “clans” and “inheritence”. In this study, it is relevant to the understanding of the relationship between social organisation and group dynamics in the context of local politics and identity construction (see Chapter Three). In order to examine this I have also focused on the interactions taking place vis-a-vis resource related issues, such as property rights and land use.

It appears that in the CHT ethnic groups are culturally diverse in terms of religion, language and social organisation. The existing literature has focused on the larger groups, neglecting many aspects of smaller groups. These ethnographic descriptions, however, suggest that multi-ethnic nature of interrelationships that exist among the groups is not analogous to the situation found elsewhere in South Asia. Loffler rightly pointed out that “within one and the same mouza in the CHT, one may find four groups speaking completely different languages, building different types of houses, wearing different clothes, believing in different customs and religions”(1990: 36). This suggests that ethnographic research undertaken in the CHT needs to focus on a micro-social setting.
Social and Political Context of Land Tenure and Use

Little field research has been undertaken on real resource use and resource tenure. However, some general themes have emerged from the work of geographers, linguists and anthropologists are central to the local level research, like this study. I summarise these briefly below.

**Jhum**

It appears from many recent studies that *jhum* practice is declining. Loffler (1990) claims that among the Mru land scarcity is a major problem for *jhum* cultivation. As a result, fallow periods have shortened with subsequently poor yields, and this has led to harder livelihoods. Mey (1978, 1981), on the basis of a comparative socio-economic study of eight ethnic groups, argued that there are decisive differences between the valley and mountain groups regarding their agricultural practices. Mey observes that as the *jhum* fields are becoming smaller and do not produce sufficient food for subsistence, there has been a progressive uptake of plough agriculture in valleys. Mey further observes that land is scarce in the valley areas too, as most of the Bengali settlers are now settled there and practice plough cultivation. As a result the economic situation is bad in general among the hill people.

This suggests that *jhum* may not be sustainable if the process continues. Though two types of farming are visible in the CHT the methods are completely different. Plough cultivation is usually associated with cash crops whereas *jhum* agriculture is normally subsistence farming. This literature suggests that *jhum* cultivation could never sustain the high density of population which plough agriculture can sustain. Good yields are only possible if there is large amount of uncultivated land.

It is often shown that if the population increases, degraded *jhum* fields appear. This is because a continuous increase in population involves an intensification of *jhum* cultivation by shortening the fallow, which reduces soil fertility. The shorter fallow periods and poorer soils mean lower yields for the same piece of land. Alternatively, in order to maintain the level of production, the cultivated area needs to expand. However, larger fields also mean more work; sooner or later the household will not
have enough manpower to keep up with the weeding *Imperata* grass being the main problem. Consequently, the degraded swidden field is often colonised by *Imperata* grass, which imposes certain kinds of labour constraints. This automatically increases female labour because women are typically the people who do the weeding (Ruthenberg 1971).

The above analyses erroneously assume that *jhum* is subject to the same constraints as paddy cultivation. In most cases of *jhum* cultivation there is no need for weeding of *Imperata* grass. Provided the burning is timed correctly when the vegetation is dry enough to burn well there is very little weeding to be done. Another situation when *Imperata* grass may become a problem when *jhum* is practiced more than once a season. This may happen if there is not enough labour to open up a new *jhum* field or in case of land pressure. Over-cultivation of the land does not allow regeneration of other vegetation, which is, when burnt, essential to produce enough ashes to fertilize the soil.

The undermining of *jhum* by single cash cropping such as in paddy fields has deleterious effects on the cultivator’s nutritional status and livelihood as the intercropping in *jhum* traditionally yields a wide range of crops which produce a nutritionally balanced diet. One can say that a paddy field is almost an ecological desert in some respect. Only in wet rice cultivation there is no intercropping or very little intercropping, whereas in *jhum* system there is the possibility of modifying cropping in all sorts of way. For example, one can plant different types of vegetables together, beans with dry-rice. So contrary to Mey’s argument, the shift to paddy field cultivation does not necessarily result in a much better livelihood or nutrition (see Chapter Five for detailed analysis).

Despite the fact that *jhum* is declining due to various socio-political reasons, the tradition of *jhum* cultivation is nevertheless still perceived as the basis of hill people’s cultural identity. In the CHT, there are efforts to uphold a common cultural identity. The current political movement of hill people in CHT attempts to forge a unified collective identity on the basis of *jhum* cultivation.
Although previous research into the CHT has highlighted *jhum* as a significant issue in the formation of cultural identity, little field work has been done on this issue over an extended period of time. There is a need to study the hill people in relationship to the nation state and the wider political system, but in a way which avoids centre-periphery paradigms which render the hill people passive recipients of state policy. Neither are there any substantial studies on land tenure and land use. Yet, land is not only the resource most critical to hill peoples’ work, livelihood and identity, but is also a much competed for scarce resource within Bangladesh.

**Ownership and Rights**

A contradictory form of ownership rights exists in relation to land tenural system in the CHT. There has been a contrast between *jhum* cultivation and plough agriculture, which also entails different concepts of ownership and rights to land. In the valleys plough land is leased by the administration and rent is paid according to the size of the land (Roy 1992; Mey 1981). The long lease ensures continuity of individual ownership and land may be inherited. Land for the *jhum* cultivators is not private property, but is treated by them as "*de facto*" property of the village communities (Loffler 1990: 45). Land is communally owned; every household has equal access to the land, there is no idea of buying and selling land.

Many commentators believed that the major difference between plough agriculture and *jhum* is the land tenure system in the CHT (Mohsin 1997). Official attitudes towards plough and *jhum* cultivators seem to show a wider gap as far as land tenure system is concerned. Plough cultivators in the valley areas enjoy relatively individual ownership (being ‘modern’ in the state/legal sense) whereas *jhum* cultivators have no formal legal rights under their traditional system.

In the official context, land tenure is commonly seen as a set of jural concepts or legal rules externally formulated or enforced by political bodies. But it is not as simple as it seems; for example, in the CHT households have rights to resources in many ways. Such rights may be embodied in deeds, tax valuations and wills under the legal jurisdiction of the state, but they also depend on customs relating to acquisitions, use and social transmission within the local community as per as *jhum*
tenural system is concerned. So, land tenure is a complex and crucial cultural phenomenon. There is a variation among the ethnic communities of the CHT in terms of land use, holding, transfer and administration at the community level as balanced with, and opposed to, the official regulation of the state. In many cases these represent a careful adjustment of social rules and practices to ecological factors.

It has been suggested that *jhum* agriculture correlates with conceptions of collective ownership of land. For example a report by the Land and Human Rights Commission (1991) states that hill people could only subsist from their fields as part of a community, bound in ties of mutual reciprocity. For the *jhum* cultivators of the CHT, land is common property, belonging to the community, kinship groups and even members of the spirit world, with individual families exercising the right to use the land.

For the state, *jhum* lands are the government lands. This concept has been subject to rationalisation under the colonial and subsequent government's rule mediated through the legal system. Therefore, the balance of legal notions of ownership and property with 'community' ownership needs to be addressed here. This research therefore will look at what both 'private' and 'collective' ownership might mean socially, culturally, legally and politically in the CHT (see Chapter Five).

In the CHT, people have conceptions about land rights as both usufruct and private ownership, which are now practised simultaneously. So, how do these two systems, the state land ownership and traditional land ownership system, operate? How do these system co-exist at the village level. What does land itself mean to the people at the local level? Since *jhum* cultivation has been a symbol of different ethnicity, how does the shift to plough cultivation impact upon ethnic status and the territorial claims associated with it.

It is important to try and understand the relationship between the macro level problems of the CHT and the local level management of competing claims to resources. The farming systems in the CHT need to be understood in the context of changes, which articulate with local level resource management and state relations.
The State tends to undermine *jhum* cultivation because of its mobile nature and custodianship. I suggest that *jhum* representation as ‘indigenous’ and as a system for resource management serves a number of different political ends, not all of them ecological.

The study examines how people at the local level, by a variety of methods involving tenure status, have rights to the land and rights to the harvest and compete for scarce resources. The more specific questions are: who owns the land? How is it owned? How is land used? To be able to understand the struggle for land, one must grasp the sources of livelihood, the people’s strategies, conceptions and practices regarding land tenure and land use.

With the increasing scarcity of land in the CHT, a change has taken place in the ownership pattern of land. In the past, people were mostly *jhum* cultivators and everyone had access to the land. Today a lot more people are said to be landless and sharecroppers. Therefore examining the process of losing and gaining land is important to an understanding of the land transfer mechanism. In the immediate historical context of the Hill Tracts, how has the conflict itself affected patterns of ownership and use of land? Land tenure and land uses are issues of central importance to any understanding of the Hill Tracts.

The CHT provides an excellent setting to study the relationship between ethnicity and environment, and the formation of collective identity on the basis of local culture and the economic & political struggle for survival. Ethnicity also manifests itself through new social movements which challenge the state primarily over issues of land-use and land tenure.
Chapter Two
Methodological Procedures and the Research Setting

Introduction

My aim is to provide an ethnographic account of how resource use in the CHT is related to the construction of their identity in the Bangladeshi State political context set within the dynamics of local socio-political and economic relations, as discussed in the previous chapter. This has entailed identifying and focusing on the two primary issues raised by the discussion - that is, ethnicity and environment. I have dealt with both of these issues in the preceding chapter, with a centring of the research focus on land tenure, land use and issues of social movement.

The aim of this study is clearly broad. Given the variety and complexity of the changes that have taken place in the CHT, I have, however, decided not to narrow the focus of the study to a particular problem and/or theoretical orientation so as not to delimit the scope of the inquiry or pre-judge the importance of the various factors. I consider this especially important in light of the fact that very little anthropological research has been conducted in the region.

However, in order to have an organisational framework for approaching this subject I have made a fundamental decision concerning the structure of the project. This decision both limits the scope of the inquiry to a manageable level, and at the same time situates the investigation in what I believe is a key concern to which all the issues described in the previous chapter are in some way related, that is, to land use, tenure and policy of the state. A narrowed focus on the issues of land use, tenure, rights and agricultural systems, etc, as a point of entry, has enabled me to address wider issues of ethnicity, environment and politics and explore their interaction.

Pragmatically, I have tried specifically to understand how these issues work at the local level, as I am going to use it as a means to understand the wider political and economic context. Accordingly, the methodology has been planned so as to provide me with a wide range of information on everyday life and different situations in the
CHT. From theoretical and methodological points of view, in my opinion, most of the social science studies on CHT suffer from an exogenous notion as to what constitutes the important categories. My aim, therefore, has been to focus on an approach that is as close to the social reality of CHT as possible.

My glimpse of social reality is naturally limited, and is to a large degree determined by the field situation. I found myself in, the contact I made with individuals and the specific events I experienced. I think it is reflected in the way I carried out this research and presented the results. I am thoroughly aware that much relevant information, which might have provided insights in the issues/questions I studied has not been “discovered” and collected. Such information when “found” should be incorporated in the analysis. Therefore, throughout the study I have sought to formulate my “finding” in such a way that they can be tested and falsified by further empirical investigation. I hope that this study might, however, in a small way contribute towards greater understanding of the CHT.

However, there are methodological issues which have been at the heart of recent debate in anthropological research that need to be addressed here because these issues are to a large extent central to my research on CHT.

**Methodological Issues of Fieldwork**

In recent times, much have been written about the need for new and innovative fieldwork methods in anthropology since the reflexive turn of the discipline in the 1980s. As research interests of anthropologists have changed, so have the types of fieldwork that are being undertaken. New contexts for fieldwork and the re-evaluation of old theoretical assumptions have widened the anthropological gaze. The ideal of long-term fieldwork in a rural location among ‘non-Western’ peoples still exerts a powerful influence on the discipline as the implicit norm for ethnographic fieldwork.

However, while fieldwork remains the most significant rite de passage for anthropologists and one of the key identifiers of the discipline, there has been little discussion of how one goes about doing fieldwork in different kinds of fields and
what epistemological implications for the discipline different kinds of fieldwork have. While traditional methods such as long-term site work and participant observation are still valid, they must now complement other innovative methods that respond to contemporary epistemological challenges. The very notion of “the field” itself may need critical questioning.

The fieldworkers may find themselves being objectified by their informants and may find their identity as a researcher challenged. In this context, researchers are facing new challenges that need to be addressed. The most common themes and issues include: multi-sited fieldwork, fieldwork at home, issues of the fieldworker’s position vis-à-vis informants and fieldwork focusing on social and political movements.

Doing Research at Home

Doing research in one’s own country or society has been a long-debated issue (Jackson 1987; Ellen 1984). Some of the questions raised in this debate apply to anthropological research: whether doing research at home automatically allows a deeper understanding of the meaning people give to their environments, or whether the researcher is instead restricted by a failure to grasp the significance of what may appear obvious. Lengthy discussions of these issues with colleagues at UCL prior to fieldwork left me reasonably confident that feasible answers could be found.

A most intriguing and contentious issue has been that of my ‘neutrality’ as researcher, at least during fieldwork and while writing up the material. Of course, this is a general problem, and there are certainly more complex situations. It is equally obvious that remaining relatively neutral is not necessarily in contrast with being a participant observer and adapting to the cultural model of behaviour specific to the people we study through various forms of interaction. However, striking the right balance between interaction and detachment can significantly influence our acceptance in the field and the level of trust our informants will have with us. Acceptance, particularly in my case being a member of the dominant Bengali population, constitutes the major single issue to be dealt with. Indeed, it soon
became clear to me that a series of tests and *rites de passage* were the price to pay for a reasonable form of acceptance.

**Positioning Self and the Wider Consideration of the Research in the CHT**

Since my childhood, I have witnessed many ups and downs in the situation among the Buddhist people around my village in Teknaf, the extreme southeastern part of Bangladesh bordering with Burma. This is an area where a tiny Buddhist community lives on their ever-ongoing migration to Burma. The social relationship between the Bengali and Buddhist people in Teknaf has always contained a sense of insecurity, intimidation and fear.

When I joined Chittagong University anthropology department as a lecturer, I met many students from the CHT. I have listened to many similar stories about their relationships with the Bengali in the CHT. In contrast to the Buddhist community in Teknaf, I have also come to know about their on-going movement against the Bengali. Subsequently, I made a few visits to CHT particularly in Banderban area, and established some initial contacts that naturally guided my anthropological venture.31

Thus, I started to formulate my research project on CHT focusing on minority and indigenous people’s issues. As land issues, particularly the *jhum*, have been the issue of everyday talk in CHT and ‘public outcry’ in the media, my attention was drawn towards the issue in terms of ecology and ethnicity, particularly the ethnic mobilisation/social movement among indigenous communities in the CHT. A friend of mine at Chittagong University (CU), though, advised me not to get involved with such a sensitive subject and I was advised by several colleagues at the university to study something on the ‘mainland’.

Being a long-term resident of Chittagong district and a founder member of Anthropology Department at University of Chittagong, the PhD research is, nevertheless, envisaged as being the start of a prolonged engagement with the

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31 It was also the time when I was preparing for my postgraduate study in UK.
minority cultures of the Hill Tracts. Qualitative knowledge of these ‘tribal’ cultures is imperative if we are to change the hitherto disastrous relationship between the ‘tribal’ peoples and the Bengali State. It is equally central to a fruitful debate on environmental sustainability both in Bangladesh and elsewhere.

However, doing fieldwork in the CHT has always been a sensitive area, particularly on ‘indigenous’ issues, due to political tensions. Until 1998 the CHT was a “Restricted Area” and no foreigners were allowed to visit without special permission from the Military. The situation started to cool down after the signing of the CHT peace treaty between the PCJSS\(^{32}\) and the Bangladesh government in December 1997 ending two decades of bloody conflict. But the years of turmoil and killings were still present in people’s minds and relation between the dominant Bengali and Pahari remained tense: which I clearly experienced during my fieldwork period.

A year later when I started fieldwork in Banderban in 1999 I was still carrying a letter from my supervisor authenticating me as a PhD research student of UCL, and also a letter from my university in Bangladesh certifying that I am a staff member of the anthropology department in case of any military intervention into my fieldwork. During my stay in Banderban, I was often questioned by many government officials about my purpose in being there. My answer has been that I want to write a book on CHT. My impression is that officials care little about what academics write.

**Penetrating the micro-level: acceptance and trust**

In spite of the initial enthusiasm of some of my friends in Banderban towards my research it was hard to get people to co-operate, and even harder to establish good personal relations of trust. Not surprisingly, many local people in Banderban initially assumed that I must have been working for the government or other official agencies. This is mainly because the vast majority of research on CHT, in recent years, is either commissioned by the government or funded by non-governmental organisation (NGOs) and development agencies for specific purposes. Many educated local elites clearly aware of projects motivated by specific political and

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\(^{32}\) The name PCJSS abbreviates "Peoples Solidarity Organisation", previously a guerilla organisation of the hill people, now emerged as the regional political party of the CHT.
military interests were disappointed by studies carried out by some of the Bengali authors who, they said, had misunderstood CHT life and culture: occasionally referring to books by Satter and Selina.33

In particular, problems soon arose with the PCJSS: behind an appearance of good will and acceptance, I could sense suspicion, especially from some leaders, who nevertheless later co-operated in my research. Justified as they felt by suspicion about my purpose and identity, PCJSS did not seem bothered by the fact that their hostility blatantly conflicted with the image of the Bengali, as ‘oppressor’ that PCJSS wanted to project. As I shall argue later at length, looking at the broader picture of CHT, I have become convinced that such suspicious attitudes and values that PCJSS express towards the Bengali are in the nature of the political ideology and organisations for many reasons. I have explained in detail the political manifestation of PCJSS value in election process (see Chapter Seven).

My relationships with the PCJSS and other organisations, such as Vomi Odhikar Committee and Pahari Okka Porishad improved considerably when it became accepted that the fieldwork I was doing was truly part of my own independent research-project, which I was carrying out in a British University, and that in no way was I involved in ‘Bengali politics’ in the CHT, nor was I working on commission for foreign agencies. More importantly, my professional identity with the Chittagong University was instrumental in my acceptance as researcher of academic interests, as some friends and students from the region already knew me in that capacity.

The impression gradually improved significantly over the months when I stayed longer, started learning the local languages and became familiar with many aspects of ordinary every day life activities in Banderban. I was often invited to political activities around organisational programmes. It was also the time when Banderban Puroshava (municipality) election was gearing up. One Okka Parishod (Pahari political alliance) leader told me that “I could be trusted and should feel free to attend their meetings for the selection of candidate” (see Chapter Seven). This change of attitude was an important step towards acceptance.

33 See Chapter one, for the discussion of this literature.
A few important steps were significant in this respect. Registering with the Marma language course at TCI (Tribal Cultural Institute), staying with a Marma family who was an old friend at CU at Uzani para, and recruiting a Marma research assistant—all these activities ultimately helped me to earn a good reputation and trust as the 'neutral' researcher, and to a large extent, facilitated my acceptance and the cooperation of the community.

**Language Learning**

Language learning was a key activity during the first six months of fieldwork. Although I was able to use Bangla to communicate in the CHT, and was conversant with some dialects spoken there, I wanted to acquire fluency in Marma language via participation. From my earlier days of fieldwork I had realised that speaking Bangla or Chittagonian would not take me far. Most people understand Bangla but women especially have difficulties in expressing themselves in it. The Bangla they know is a local variant spoken mainly by Chittagonians.

I, therefore, realised that to get a clear view of the very nature of the research issues I was dealing with, I must take language training as the first priority. A comprehensive grasp of the Marma language in its regional form was thus essential to the successful outcome of this study. I decided to learn Marma because this is the dominant language, in terms of the numbers of people who spoke it, in Banderban, and as I did not have any problem with speaking Tanchanga as it largely similar to Chittagonian. However, throughout the fieldwork period I was limited in that I only managed to learn a little Bawm (one of the other study groups) for everyday communication. Nevertheless, whenever I had difficulties in communicating Bawm they easily switched over to either Bangla or Chittagonian.

They also realised that I knew the Chittagonian dialect which most of the ethnic groups were, more or less, able to speak as well as Bangla. However, I felt that

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34 The local dialect of Chittagong district, which I speak as my home district dialect.
knowledge of the local dialects would give me a better understanding of the ethnic cultures in depth as well facilitating my interaction with ordinary people.

In fact, while my behaviour and way of interacting with people gave me away as an outsider, knowledge of the dialects allowed me to understand their observations, feelings and jokes about the Bengali. As ordinary people became accustomed to me, jhumia, shopkeeper, women, elderly persons and students willingly engaged their views with me as they usually do with fellow locals. The nearest village shop in Roangchari, for example, where I lived was an interesting place for occasional encounters and exchange of gossip and other activities with the ordinary people who, while discussing politics of CHT freely expressed their opinions on Bengali and the government.

I think that one of the cornerstones in anthropological fieldwork is fluency in the native language. People create their world in their own language and if one is interested to know these ‘other worlds’ one must take trouble to learn their language. Nigel Barley put this nicely in his enjoyable book, *The Innocent Anthropologist*, “The first priority is to find an assistant and to settle down to learning the language. The anthropologist’s assistant as a figure seems suspiciously absent from the ethnographic account (1986: 44)”.

Keeping this in mind, in the very initial stage of the fieldwork a field assistant was employed to work with me directly to enable me to establish myself in the ‘field’. My assistant, Masing Newar was not only fluent in Bangla but also enthusiastic about the research project. I had not yet managed to learn the Marma language sufficiently well, as she had not been my co-worker during my initial periods of fieldwork. She helped me a lot in improving Marma as well as other activities, such as tape-recording of the informants’ discussion, taking picture, organising informal discussion with the informants surrounding activities of elections, rallies and indigenous festivals and finally, introducing me to the locals. She was very sociable person and her involvement in diversified activities, such as religious, cultural and political, helped me gain access to different social circles in Banderban.
Learning Marma language, staying in U Saw Nue’s household (my Marma host in Banderban), and employing a local field assistant helped to build up the relationships in the locality in the initial phase of the fieldwork. Without these, it would have been impossible for me to switch easily between different arenas, and to observe without imposing on the locals.

**Initial fieldwork activities**

As well as doing language training during this period, I carried out some preliminary research at TCI library and public record section of the District Council, relating to historical and contextual data to up-date and expand my material. These activities were highly informative and productive in terms of personal relations and ‘acceptance’. For example, I had the full co-operation of the TCI Director and Assistant Director, who helped me to settle in Banderban during this preliminary period of fieldwork. These persons made me particularly aware of the importance of being considered an ‘insider’.

During this time, I also made some preliminary trips to many areas in Banderban district in order to locate the final field site. This ethnographic study envisaged two years fieldwork between January 1999 and December 2000 among three ethnic groups in Banderban district. The advantage of an extended period of fieldwork is the possibility of continuously reviewing the findings, developing new questions, and finding new traits to follow up. As I am interested in the process of ethnic mobilisation, I have had the chance to observe these processes at different levels in different situations. These have, for example, been the case in indigenous language movement, *khas* land lease protest and the political processes of election (See Chapters, four, seven and eight).

By living in the multi-ethnic locality of Roangchari, I have examined how the Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga ethnic groups are organised at both local and broader levels. It entails mundane micro-social interactions with participant observation, key-informants and case studies of land use, tenure and rights. This also involves interactions in election processes, protest rallies and court cases at Banderban.
Journey to the Roangchari

After six months of language training at TCI and making preliminary trips to many upzilla\textsuperscript{35} in Banderban district, I selected the place for my final field location called Roangchari inhabited by mainly Marma, Tanchanga and Bawm ethnic peoples of the CHT.\textsuperscript{36} During fieldwork months I stayed in Roangchari (from October 1999 to September 2000). However, during my stay in Roangchari, I also visited Banderban to follow up many related events and participating in its activities. The body of my data, thus, corresponds to both Roangchari and Banderban but bulk of the ethnographic material on three groups was generated from the Roangchari study. Therefore, this should be taken as the principle reference of the thesis.

I took up residence in Roangchari in October 1999. I mainly lived with three households but regularly visited others households of the locality on an informal basis. In other words, I had three different bases in three villages in Roangchari, but Mong Kay Marma’s household was the main base at Rockoywa para. He is the relative of U Saw Nue (my host family in Banderban). I met him in U Saw Nue’s household when I was doing language training during the early phase of fieldwork. For the first time, I visited Roangchari accompanying Mong Kay Marma and made other contacts there. He offered the accommodation and food at Roangchari but I agreed with paying some monthly payments. Mong Kay Marma’s house is located at the heart of Rockoywa para close to Roangchari bazar (market place) and upzilla office, where most of the social activities are taken place.

Although Mong Kay Marma’s household was my main base in Roangchari, I had two other occasional arrangements: one in the Bawm village of Soanloo para and the other one in the Tanchanga village of Bottoli para. In Bottoli para, I mostly stayed with Baikash Tanchanga’s household, a primary school teacher of Roangchari. I also met him during my language training at TCI. When I finally moved to Roangchari, I explained him my intention to know about Tanchanga people of Bottoli para. He gladly offered me all kinds of assistance. Whenever I stayed in Bottoli para, I stayed with Baikash Tanchanga’s household, sometimes for

\textsuperscript{35} The sub-administrative district unit of Banderban (see Map 2).
\textsuperscript{36} See the detail discussion of the selection field site in the next section.
a week in a row, sometimes a couple of days. The other arrangement I had in Roangchari was in Soanloo para. I frequently stayed in Buting Bawm’s household, an ordinary jhum cultivator.

All these arrangements were, however, within close proximity of Rockoywa para, I could have stayed all through there. The reasons, I rotated my residence in Roangchari was because I did not want to be branded as giving only focus to Marma or living with the Marma. Occasional changes of residence between the groups and villages provided me an intimate opportunity to building up ‘trusted’ relationship with all groups in Roangchari. Later, in the course of time I realised that whenever a marriage ceremony or other social occasions in the villages (communities) held I was invited to attend.

I think that in order to carry out fieldwork in a multi-ethnic locality one must aware of the delicate balance of relationships that persists among the groups, and this requires positioning oneself into that direction. Living in Roangchari for a fairly long period, I realised that the complex nature of inter-ethnic relationships in CHT is only achieved through maintaining a right balance of interactions between the researcher and groups. Otherwise, I would have had very different experiences, effectively obscuring the multi-ethnic reality. I was intimately attached to three different sets of households, Bawm, Marma, and Tanchanga.

In other words, experience of living in three different groups constantly reminded me how to maintain correct relationships according to prevailing situation in the locality.

While living in multi-ethnic locality, the households I stayed with were rather different in the sense that each of the households presented me with interesting aspects and transformations of the groups’ worldview. This obviously gave me an opportunity to compare the aspects of group organisation. Comparison among them brings out the specificity of social organisation and group dynamics in Roangchari (see Chapter three).
In the initial period of fieldwork in Roangchari, however, I was only collecting basic ethnographic data on the village setting, distribution and boundaries of households and other residential units, mapping out of the locality to give a spatial representation of people, where they live and work. This has informed later decisions about what questions to ask, how and to whom. Most of my extended period of fieldwork has been carried out in Roangchari mainly in the middle part. In the beginning and last part, I have also resided in Banderban. While residing in both places during the entire period of fieldwork, it was possible to have frequent and regular contact with people and events in both Roangchari and Banderban.

A variety of techniques has been used to obtain information for this study, the most important being the traditional anthropological technique of fieldwork living among the people studied. These techniques include participant observation, key-informants, case studies, informal interviews, etc. These techniques have been employed in two key phases. Firstly, to gather general background data through various activities, and then secondly to formulate detailed accounts of events in the lives of various individuals and groups. In the first phase, the use of these techniques have been divided into three groups of activities: (a) collection of basic ethnographic data, (b) access to material on local understanding of land use and tenure, (c) access to data on routine everyday activities. In the second phase, these same techniques have been used to put together in-depth case material on events and situations of local political processes and review the legal process within and outside Roangchari.

**Participant Observation**

Without living in the midst of a locality/community for a fairly long period, it would have been impossible for me to gain a clear understanding of many factors/relationships that shape and influence people’s everyday life in the CHT. As I have suggested earlier, proximity to and involvement in mundane micro-social interaction is indispensable to communicating with local people about their social, cultural and political realities. Katy Gardner put this point more impressively in her ethnography on Sylheti people in Bangladesh “I cannot think of better way of learning about a community and the people than living within it and sharing their lives (1995: 18)".

88
A major advantage of the approach of participant observation as a way of obtaining information is that one is able to transcend one’s own understanding of the categories by which a society is ordered. Participant observation and the collection of case material on significant individual and situations, thus, have been the methodological corollaries to the theoretical approach described above.

**Observing local political process and degree of participation**

Although many aspects of ethnicity (group organisation) I have recorded from the Roangchari deal with local level inter-ethnic relationships, there are also important factors operating beyond Roangchari, beyond the village boundary, for which observation is an effective option in obtaining information: such as *khas* land lease cases, organised script movements, and political activities (protest rallies and election).

The impact of such factors can be observed with participation in order to depict how they shape and influence ordinary life in the CHT. Description and analysis of these factors are important and relevant for an understanding of the dynamics of what goes on inside and outside the locality or groups. I have demonstrated in chapters six and seven how the development of such external factors has enormous impact on local life and livelihood of the ordinary people of CHT.

However, penetrating the ‘behind-the-scenes’ processes was essential, though, of course, there were limits to the extent to which I could ‘participate’. It was important to learn quickly what was appropriate to say and what it was wise to ‘ignore’. I gradually realised that many of the ‘behind-the-scenes’ events could not become the objects of analysis, for there was strong risk of betraying the trust and confidentiality I was granted. Yet, participation was immensely important in gaining a general understanding of local processes, which would have been otherwise obscure.

It was thus useful to observe and participate in the public performances of the different groups’ and organisation’s activities, such as the indigenous language movement and TCI activities (Chapter Four), protests by *Vomi Odikhar Committee* (Chapter Six) and the preparation and performance of the electoral campaign
(Chapter Seven). Especially in the case of Banderban puroshava election, apart from various forms of personal relationships, the political alliances between different ethnic groups became obvious during the campaign. More generally, the life of the Banderban municipal area was imbued with the local election. Ordinary ethnic people’s degree of confidence in their political representative (candidate) was expressed in every occasion of the Okka Parishod activities. Bengali leadership, too, commented on various electoral rhetorics with their candidate in public places. All these have an obvious political significance in revealing the ethnic politics in the CHT.

During the campaign, I was allowed to participate in the Okka Parishod meetings of planning and strategy, and also to accompany their candidate during house campaigns. Of course, accompanying the individual candidate in their campaign gave me the possibility to observe how they interacted with their potential electors. At personal level, moving with Okka Parishod candidate Kessy at election campaign I had plenty of time to discuss various issues, after every election meeting he kept asking for comments on his speech. The situation became in a sense more intimate as the conversation moved from the subject of election to the politics of Pahari-Bengali relations.

Fortunately, I had also opportunity to exchange views, news and gossip with the Bengali candidate, as he personally knew me since the start of fieldwork in Banderban. Interaction with the ‘Bengali camp’ helped me to understand the dynamics of agreement and disagreement between the parties around the ‘Bengali’ candidate, and various possible deals about the future shape of ruling the Banderban puroshava. My personal engagement with Mogib contractor and others in the Barishal para as well as U Saw Nue’s father-in-law in Uzani para was a dynamic process informing my discussion of whether ‘local election is a process of identity making in CHT’ (see Chapter Seven).

Engaging with organisational activities in other arenas, such as the indigenous language movement, the Vomi Odikhar rally provided much interesting information about broader levels of ethnic mobilisation as it became obvious that an outcome of that was going to be central in establishing new political alliances of Pahari.
Local understandings of agricultural system, land tenure and rights

During fieldwork in Roangchari, I collected routine material on agricultural production (*jhum*), farming techniques, division of labour and household relationships. The actual process of gathering this type of data is to generalise a picture of ways in which *jhum* agriculture is used in a day-to-day way. Exploring social life by means of the household relationships enabled me to examine the type of farming system in CHT, *jhum*, as it exists and its meaning in day to day activities. One of the key considerations was to define and conceptualise the *jhum* from a local perspective. Using *jhum* as a basic reference point appears to be tactically the most efficient means of investigating such a wide range of issues (economic and socio-political).

During this time, I have also sought access to material on land issues in order to try to discover the local understanding of the ‘indigenous’ framework of land use, tenure and rights. This involves key-informants, who are knowledgeable of the local system. In my ethnographic base in Roangchari, I got to know a group of people in all three communities, headman, ordinary elderly persons of Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga, whom I visited from time to time. At a later stage, they all become my key-informants. They are source of my data on social life in Roangchari. I learnt a good deal from them about clan organisation, marriage rules, rituals and village *jhum* organisation. They all provided me with a great deal of detail of different aspects of social organisation. Chapter three is based on their account and my observation in analysing a comparative framework of group organisation.

These key-informants helped me to discover patterns of land ownership and traditional rights at the local level. Key-informants’ accounts thus help to illuminate how intergenerational relationships are bound up with rights to resources, particularly to *jhum* land in the CHT. Following key-informants’ accounts and analysis of case material, I have described the ‘normative rules’ and ‘rights’ and note how these are validated by everyday behaviour in Roangchari: how, at the micro-level, the ownership of *jhum* land is actually regulated. The study of
indigenous tenurial relations involves investigating settlement pattern, forms of authority, distribution of land and the territorial control.

Furthermore, for an understanding of disputes over local patterns of ownership, 'common property', and 'usufruct rights', I needed to find out how the jhum cultivators in CHT use their natural resources, and how they react to others using their resources (see Chapter Five). The recent khas land disputes in CHT provide insights because they involve local level politics and reveal how people think about ownership and rights. The nature of khas land lease procedures has been carefully observed at each level of interactions. Additional information was also obtained from the knowledgeable informants, such as local headmen, karbari, and lease applicants. Some of the local employees of the district administration assisted me in getting useful but confidential information on khas land distribution and inside stories of the lease procedures.

In order to understand the dynamics of the issue, informants' versions have been verified through direct observation of the events in their dealing with the officials. Informal discussions with Bengali agents, who are contacted for preparation of the lease documents, are also conducted. During fieldwork in Banderban, I developed a friendly relationship with some of the officials at district and Upzilla levels, who happened to be previously senior friends at Chittagong University, and who frankly verified the accounts obtained from different quarters. 37

As well as following khas land lease disputes at the village and official levels, I documented how land ownership in the CHT is regulated through the state legal system. By attending the local land court in Banderban I have been able to examine how land disputes are solved and who are involved. Analysis of legal disputes via attendance at local courts and following up cases involving hill people's land ownership reveals who uses the legal system to their advantage and who disputes with whom. This method yields valuable data on how 'cultural practices' translate under judicial scrutiny (see Chapter Six).

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37 For the sake of confidentiality I am not mentioning any concerned names here. The fact that as the present research is an academic pursuit they felt that it is necessity to share their views.
Besides most of this qualitative information I received from individuals belonging to
different groups, social categories, and organisations. Some of the information from
the key-informants is also presented in different case studies.

Case Study Material

Once I gained sufficient insights and identified specific issues, I selected a certain
number of individuals and organisations at both Roangchari and Banderban in terms
of various considerations established during the course of initial phase of fieldwork.
Case study and in-depth interview methods have been employed to collect more
detailed information. This involves a broad range of issues related to both intra- and
extra-group dynamics and to the wider community in the CHT. Collection of data
from a wide range of case studies focuses on situations in which a 'shared collective
identity' is asserted as a basis for control of resources.

It should be noted here, however, that the initial phase of fieldwork has strongly
indicated land as a primary source of strain and contention among the ethnic
communities, which affects the social relations with the Bengali to an obvious
degree. The case study methods have been geared to uncover more detail about the
issue. The detailed analysis of case materials on individuals, situations, and events
have broadly given me an understanding of the way peoples' own community
history is conceived, experienced and how their sense of 'shared attachment' to the
land is manifested.

Case studies on local level institutions, for example, TCI, puroshava election and
other socio-cultural organisations of the indigenous language movement have been
useful to understanding everyday micro-politics and other aspects of ethnic
mobilisation in the CHT. By attending meetings and following different organised
activities involving political activists and social agents, I collected data on how
different groups are formed through micro-politics. The detailed case study of the
organised activities records the ways in which ethnic groups are mobilised at both
local and broader level (see Chapter Five and Seven).
In particular, I have made case studies of the personal accounts of my informants and their relations within and outside their groups. Most importantly, case studies were conducted in such a way as to encourage inner motivations to emerge. The case study method, thus, helped me to collect in-depth information not only on informants’ perception of the political arena and their motivations in becoming involved in the CHT politics but also on the underlying ideology of their collective political actions. I have concentrated on their significant involvement and participation in the process of ethnic mobilisation, and on the way in which such mobilisation have occurred.

As particular events shaped the unfolding of the dynamics of broader identity politics, such as *khas* land lease, I decided to make some case studies on key figures of the ethnic movements/events in order to give the wider picture of the political process in the CHT. These case studies were based on several informal discussions and were extremely time-consuming, and every single one of these discussions was taped and transcribed. Their co-operation at all stages gave me a measure of the degree of acceptance I then enjoyed.

Otherwise, it would have been unthinkable to apply the systematic strategies of research aimed at acquiring in-depth information. It was obvious that only after having established good interactions with groups could I hope to penetrate the inner motivations and gain information on the way in which political aspects influenced the actors in the process of ethnic mobilisation in CHT. Through the case studies I intended to grasp the meanings as well as processes of the changes that are taking place among the ethnic groups in CHT.

Of course, this kind of approach to the ‘field’ requires a strong personal commitment also on the researcher’s side. As I entered my informant’s private and public lives, I had to give way to their curiosity about mine. Kessy’s reply is revealing when I asked if I might make a case study of his political activity. He would co-operate, he said, because he had observed my behaviour on various occasions. Other informants too, though in a more indirect way, also expressed similar attitudes by spontaneously discussing with me their family lives, their relationship with children, their
relationship with other groups within the CHT, and their anxieties about the political relationship between Bengali and Pahari.

In order to make informants feel more at ease I used the scheme of the case-study technique as a guideline. I did not want my informants to feel that our meetings were interviews; this would run contrary to our relationships of intimacy and confidentiality established. However, selecting the informants most relevant for my research was not an easy task. On the one hand, my study is the politics of ethnicity, but on the other hand, it is also of a new form of ethnic mobilisation and collective political action. Should I focus on the institutional position of my informants? Should I go for the ‘reputational approach’ in selecting key informants?38

Indeed, all these aspects were important but as I was interested, above all, in studying approaches of ‘new social movement’ and ethnic mobilisation, I decided to focus on those individuals who were directly or indirectly involved and expressed their attachment to the CHT politics regardless of whether they were members of particular ethnic group, political party or organisation.

In additions, I have also carried out some tape recorded informal discussions with ordinary key-informants, in the form of case studies, for certain issues relating to land, language and political issues, as well as official versions.39 These individuals though not being formally involved in politics nonetheless expressed their opposition to government policy in an organised way (see the discussion of Vomi Odhikar protest rally in chapter Six). Information from the government officials comes from personal interviews. My frequent interactions were with the district administration of Banderban and Upzilla office of Roangchari.

Archival work and Census material

At the end of micro-level study in Roangchari, I did some archival work specifically relevant to the CHT and to the wider political context in Bangladesh. I reviewed

38 See detailed analysis of case study procedures (Ellen 1984).
39 Masing Newar and I have regularly transcribed and translated the tapes, in most cases the same evening or in next morning to have the context fresh in our minds.
secondary literature produced by all kinds of projects working in the CHT, for example, NGO reports and National Development and Forestry Reports, etc. These works have been useful to cross-check much of this information with respect to historical details in the CHT. I took one census at the end of my fieldwork in Roangchari.

**The Research Setting**

I have, thus far, discussed the methods and specific research techniques that I employed in this study. It is now worth discussing briefly the reasons for my choice of field site as research setting.

**Location for the Research**

As mentioned in the previous section, one of the important decisions I made regarding the structure of this study was not to limit the scope of investigation to the level of a single village. That is, I planned to locate my work around activities carried out in a multi-ethnic locality in Banderban district, an important part of the CHT. It is, however, necessary to briefly discuss about the term ‘multi-ethnic setting’. In this thesis, I use the term ‘setting’ as a unit from a wider consideration of my study, not in the sense of a traditional single village study, in order to get a comprehensive understanding of inter-ethnic relationship from both local and broader perspectives.

So when I use the term ‘setting’ it denotes the composite inhabitants of different communities living in separate settlements within a relatively larger size of area beyond the village boundary. In practice, however, I also focused on the villages as a component part of the ‘setting’ in a process of comparative analysis. Therefore, in this context villages are intertwined within the broader area of ‘multi-ethnic’ locality of Roangchari ‘setting’.

This is not to say, however, that I have created an artificial boundary on social life which stops short at the end of the village, but rather that the village as it exists alone and as it relates to the wider region form the central focus of my investigations.
during the course of fieldwork. The characteristics of a particular site, in a multi-
ethnic study such as this, inevitably influence the type of information obtained. This
is unavoidable, and even the use of a multi-sited study cannot totally overcome this
problem.

It is widely argued in many ethnographic research guides that specific location
should be chosen on the basis of representativeness (Ellen 1984). The notion that
one can find a “representative” village in the CHT, as anywhere else, is false. As I
have mentioned earlier there are multiple variations among the groups in the CHT,
in terms of their religion, language and social organisation. However, the area I have
selected as a ‘research setting’ has experienced each of the major events (dam,
construction, abolition of jhum, Bengali migration, military occupation, arm
conflict between Bangladesh army and PCJSS) affecting the region for the last few
decades.

Another reason for choosing a field site in the Banderban district of CHT is because
it is within the same area as the only ethnographic study, of any kind, to have been
done on Mru - that of Loffler (1990). Loffler’s ethnography of Mru provides
excellent base-line information because his fieldwork was finished before the
Bangladesh liberation war in 1971 and the conflict between the ‘tribal’ people the
state (although his book was published in 1990 with certain updated information).

Loffler’s study is primarily concerned with the relationship between subsistence
jhum cultivation of Mru on the hill top region and the principle of household
organisation. As such it gives a detailed set of descriptions of how Mru villages
conducted their activities around production and the distribution of resources at a
time when traditional social forms were still dominant. Using Loffler’s analysis, I
have been able to see how local patterns of resource-use have changed over time in
response to new situations. In the face of many contemporary changes, it is now
interesting to see how new processes of group formation are taking place in the
CHT.

Most of the previous studies on CHT have drawn their conclusions from one village
of one ethnic group without looking at the multi-ethnic nature of relationship. In my
study I focused on one larger locality (setting) within which there are three villages representing a wide variety of groups. This allowed me to examine in detail the nature of cohesion and conflict between the groups and with outsiders. It has also created an opportunity for me to investigate the dynamic process of ‘collective identity’ among the ethnic groups. In choosing a multi-ethnic site, I have chosen the Roangchari as my fieldwork ‘setting’.

**Roangchari as multi-ethnic setting**

One of the main research objectives of the study was to be based in a multi-ethnic setting of CHT for a comprehensive understanding of interethnic relationships. Unlike other areas in the CHT, Roangchari is multi-ethnic in many different ways. Roangchari is about 13 miles east of Banderban district headquarter (see Map 3). It is inhabited by three main ethnic groups, Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga, each representing a single village within the ‘setting’. Geographically Roangchari has special ecological characteristics of hills, valleys, rivers, and tributaries. The aspect of ecological diversity is one of the important components of this study in the sense of how ‘hill people’ conceptualise their land, habitat, and resources in everyday life, and how they experience the present realities of state regimes in the CHT.

Roangchari is a sub-district administrative headquarters locally known as *Upzilla*, an ideal representation of both ‘official culture’ and hill society. This location is relatively close to the city of Banderban, and as such an area where most of the hill ‘political’ activities are more visible, particularly in the context of ethnic politics in the CHT. It is the area from which I have collected the bulk of my data. At the end of my fieldwork, I conducted a census which shows that the total population of Roangchari is 2439 (including *Upzilla* government officials).

Among the three ethnic communities, Marma is demographically the dominant group followed by Tanchanga and Bawm. The Marma constitutes about 66% of Roangchari’s population in comparison to 26% Tanchanga and 7% Bawm respectively. The Marma, the second largest ethnic community throughout the CHT, are also overwhelmingly concentrated in the southern part of CHT in Banderban district, of which Roangchari is a sub administrative area.
Map 3 Roangchari sketch map by a local Bawm student
Regardless of ethnic boundary, the *jhum* is the main subsistence occupation of the majority of people in Roangchari. However, there are a number of Marma and Tanchanga households engaged in paddy along with the main *jhum* cultivation. Marma and Tanchanga villages are at the valley areas whereas Bawm village is in the hill top region. The three villages of Roangchari setting are located over a large area separated by Rockoywa roa on the north between Marma and Tanchanga, and by the high hills on the south between Marma and Bawm.

Doing fieldwork among them consequently involved a lot of travelling. I spent endless hours going from one village to another. The Marma village of Rockoywa roa and Tanchanga village of Bottoli *pada* are close to the main Roangchari-Banderban road, but the Bawm village of Soanloo para is three miles away from Roangchari *Bazar* to the hill top region. It is much more difficult to reach particularly during rainy seasons when tracks and forest paths become slippery.

**Rockoywa Roa (Marma village)**

Rockoywa roa is a Marma village. In Marma language, the term *roa* means village or cluster of houses. The Roangchari Rockoywa roa is believed to be two hundred years old. The Marma are the oldest inhabitants of the area. Rockoywa roa is one of the villages under study in the Roangchari multi-ethnic setting.

In Rockoywa roa, the total population is 1570 comprising of 310 households. Like any other Marma *roa* in the CHT, Rockoywa roa has also a *kayang* (temple) with a monastery. Apart from being central to religious practices it is the centre where all the social activities of Rockoywa roa inhabitants take place. In the *kayang*, there is a tree, called *Roasama*, which is believed to be associated with *nats* (spirits). There are many stories attached to this tree among the Marma in Rockoywa roa. The common one is that the evil spirit might cause danger to the entire village if villagers do not worship the tree. A ‘community house’ locally called a *sarangghor* is also the essential part of life in Rockoywa roa situated within the *Kayang* premises. It is used as a daytime meeting place of the villagers; sometimes the headman also uses it as the place of dispute settlement.
The Marma of *Rockoywa roa* maintain territorial boundaries on ethnic lines with other ethnic groups around them. They emphasise residential segregation from other groups in Roangchari. I have not encountered any sort of cohabitation with the members of other ethnic communities in the Marma settlement of Rockoywa roa. All the groups in Roangchari setting maintain separate ethnic boundaries on the basis of settlement and group identity. Therefore, there are separate villages of Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga.

*Bottoli Pada (Tanchanga village)*

In the Roangchari setting, the Tanchanga village is called Bottoli *pada*. In Tanchanga language, *pada* is village. According to elderly Tanchanga, the *Bottoli pada* was a deep jungle without any human habitation until mid 1960s. The Tanchanga settlement first began in 1963 with a limited number of households headed by Shorot Chandra Tanchanga. These first settler Tanchanga people were the victims of the *Kaptai* Dam project. The dam was constructed in 1963 on the upper stream of *Karnafully* river in Rangamati district of CHT displacing ten thousands of Chakma, Marma and Tanchanga families as mentioned in Chapter one.
Today the total Tanchanga population in *Bottoli pada* is 625 comprising household numbers of 150. The Tanchanga people in *Bottoli pada* are dispersed throughout the settlement; homesteads are separated from one another by paddy land. Today, the larger concentration of Tanchanga populations is found in different parts of CHT away from Roangchari namely *Ali Kadam, Ruma* and *Naikhongchari upazilla* (sub-district unit) totaling about 17,000 alone in Banderban district. A large number of Tanchanga people also live in Rangamati district of CHT and Cox’s Bazar, the extreme Southeastern district of Bangladesh. In Roangchari setting, the Tanchanga settlement of *Bottoli pada* is also a residentially and ethnically segregated village with the other two groups around them.

**Soanloo Para (Bawm village)**

Taking the time chronology of the settlement history of Roangchari, the Marma are the oldest inhabitants of the area followed by Tanchanga in 1960s. The Bawm settlement of *Soanloo Para* in Roangchari is recent compared to Marma and Tanchanga. The Bawm is one of the smallest ethnic groups in the CHT. The total Bawm population is about 7000 throughout the CHT.

The Bawm used to live in the interior region of the CHT in remote clusters of hills far off from the Roangchari. The *Bengchari, Pankyong, Lunglei, Munlai* villages of
interior areas of Banderban district are the original Bawm settlements. In the last decades, the out migration of Bawm people from their old settlements was not a voluntary choice, but rather an outcome of the insurgencies and counter insurgencies of PCJSS and the Bangladesh army.

In the early 1980s, the Bawm settlements were the main scene of military operation. The Bangladesh military, in response to the PCJSS, forced the Bawm people to evacuate their early settlements on the grounds that members of the PCJSS were able to conduct guerilla operation from their villages. Under such pressure, the Bawm had to move out from their original settlements in different directions of the Banderban district.

There are now ten Bawm settlements in Banderban districts. The present Bawm dwellers of Soanloo para in Roangchari setting represent one of the Bawm settlements of immigrated Bawm. Originally there were only seven Bawm families in Soanloo para helped by a NGO, called CCDV (Christian Community Development Volunteers). The new Bawm settlement was named after Soanloo para (village). Soanloo is the name of fruit tree grown in that area (amoloki in Bengali). At present, the total Bawm population in Soanloo para is 168 in 35 households. Most of the Bawm inhabitants in Soanloo para have regrouped according to their previous ethnic Bawm connections.

The Soanloo para Bawm settlement seemed to be guided by both Bawm community and Christianity. They have their own Christian Sunday school, a village regulatory body to oversee the everyday affairs of the settlement, a Bawm hostel for the students studying at the Roangchari high school level. However, inter-ethnic residence pattern is not accepted among the Bawm of Soanloo para. Ethnic group-wise residential segregation is strictly followed among the Bawm as found in nearby Marma and Tanchanga villages respectively.
In summary, all these groups in the Roangchari setting are maintaining separate resident settlements according to ethnic identity. For these groups, ethnicity is the basis of group organisation in various forms and degrees. I will discuss in detail the nature of social organisational features of these groups in the next chapter.
Chapter Three
Settlement, Social Organisation and Ethnic Identity

Introduction

This chapter describes the socio-organisational features of the Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga people in the Roangchari setting. Drawing from ethnographic material on settlement patterns and social organisation, such as clan organisation, descent, marriage and inheritance practices, the main purpose of the chapter is to identify the internal dynamics of group organisation. Examining group organisation is to understand how different ethnic groups are constituted at the local level, particularly in a multi-ethnic locality. Understanding of social and cultural variations is fundamental to understanding ethnic identity of the groups in CHT.

Analysis of settlement patterns and socio-organisational features reveal how ethnic boundaries are maintained between these groups. I argue that the mode of settlement pattern, clan organisation, marriage systems and inheritance practices are the constituting elements of group organisation and also act as a mechanism for ethnic boundary maintenance. The differential rules and practices display distinct ethnic markers of Marma, Bawm, and Tanchanga. However, all these aspects of social organisation are discussed not as a static system but as a dynamic process in order to prepare the ground for understanding interethnic relations among the groups in the present day.

The ethnographic literature on CHT is not useful in understanding various complex issues of local social organisation of marriage systems, lineage, and clans and the way groups are constituted (see Chapter One). The literature produces some uncertainties regarding the nature of political process in terms of labelling 'ethnic identity'. The term 'tribe' as it appears in the literature has become an unsatisfactory word to describe the people of CHT. A common tendency in this literature has been to maintain that a single type of homogenous social structure prevails throughout the CHT. Therefore, I investigate the nature of local organisations, and the ways in which the literature presumes these groups are organised in terms of marriage systems, endogamy and exogamy.
By looking at these areas, the nature of the relationship between group identity and social organisation is more easily revealed as is the way in which groups are mobilised for local politics. The chapter particularly examines the practices of social organisation by which ethnic identity is constantly produced and reproduced in a multi-ethnic society.

Analysing a comparative framework of Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga, the chapter addresses a number of ethnographic questions: what is the relationship between local level organisation and other social structural principles? What are the most important factors which govern local social organisation: clanship, marriage alliances or village locality? What are the defining characteristics of village organisation? I suggest that internal dynamics of the group organisation vary with changes in everyday mundane relations. People talk about kinship, lineage, and clan in terms of marriage alliances and inheritance but all these cultural practices are becoming elements of distinct group markers in relation to others. All the three ethnic groups in Roangchari place importance on greater ethnic boundary maintenance.

The main purpose of this chapter is thus to identify how these people are maintaining their ethnic identity living in a multi-ethnic setting. More specifically how these diverse ethnic groups in Roangchari articulate their ethnic identity in their everyday life. The chapter begins with an analysis of settlement pattern and identity.

**Settlement and Identity**

The section describes the local perceptions of settlement, locality and village organisation among the Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga groups in Roangchari. One of the key questions arising here is of how local perceptions and attachment to the settlement is shaped by group identity. The section examines the relationship between place names and ethnic groups. What does place culturally and socially mean to the groups?
It is evident from the findings of the naming of Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga settlements in Roangchari that place names are symbolised in localised identities. The social and cultural perceptions of the locality are greatly varied among these groups in Roangchari. The cultural interpretations of settlement pattern give a different perspective to the local understanding of village and group organisation.

Marma

The name of the Marma settlement is generally derived from geographical phenomena emphasising characteristic features of the habitat. In CHT, Marma prefer to live along banks of the river and streams: as such they are generally identified by a local Marma nomenclature *Khyong Sa* (‘the son’ of the river valleys). In the generic sense, the term *Khyong Sa* is not an ethnic or clan name but the general designation of the particular location of a Marma settlement. The underlying emphasis in this classification involves where they live, not how are they related by blood ties in the settlement.

In the CHT, all the Marma settlements on respective river valleys are known by the corresponding name of the rivers. This habitual orientation of Marma has been vividly reflected in their daily life. Rivers and streams are of ritual significance in many domestic rites. This ‘localised identity’ of the Marma can be seen in relation to the settlement pattern of ‘others’.

In Marma nomenclature, there is another term call *Taung Sa* (‘son’ of mountain) used to designate peoples who live in the hilltop regions. The Marma notion *Taung Sa* especially classifies the settlements of Mru, Pankhu, Khyang and Bawm, which are predominantly located in the mountain region in the CHT. The way in which classifications of the settlements are used in Marma appellations reflects a localised identity of Marma and others. The geographical distinction between *Taung Sa* (hilltop) and *Khyong Sa* (streamside) settlements is a cultural construction of localised identity. American geographer Sopher (1964) mentions the “regional identity” of the ethnic groups in the CHT, perhaps following the Marma geographical distinction in terms of settlement pattern.
Marma classify themselves into many regional groups distinguished from each other by the name of the locality, names derived from the rivers around which they established their settlements. In the entire CHT region, there are twelve 'localised regional groups' based on different Marma settlements. These are: Ragre Sa, Plaung Sa, Mrofa Sa, Sabkot Sa, Kodoya Sa, Kyowk-pia-Sa, Longada Sa, Kwen-chary-Sa, Kog dat-Sa, Palaing Sa, Kolat Sa, Rockoywa Sa. The following main rivers and canals are the main source of settlement organisation: Shangu Khyong, Plaung Khyong, Ragre Khyong, Rokang, Mata Mohuri Khyong.

Thus, Marma settlements that grew on respective river valleys are known as: Ragre Sa, Mrofa Sa, Plaung Sa and Rockoywa Sa. The corresponding meanings for such settlements can be described as the lower portion of the Shangu is known to the Marma as Ragre Khyong, and residents of both sides of the river are called Ragre Sa. Similarly, Mrofa Sa or Mohari Khyong Sa refer to the son of Mata Mohuri Khyong- the inhabitants of the south Banderban area. Another Marma localised regional group is Plaung Sa related to Plaung Khyong, a mountain stream of the northern CHT.

In Roangchari, the Marma people identify themselves as Rockoywa Sa. The name Rockoywa is derived from the near by river Rockoy. The Marma nomenclature Rockoywa Sa means the son of the Rockoy river. In the broader sense, the identification of Rockoywa Sa in Roangchari is the Marma residents of Rockoywa roa irrespective of lineage or clan relationship. As Rockoywa Sa the Marma people in Roangchari, thus, can be defined as 'localised regional group' named after geographical location of the river.

This suggests that Marma settlements cannot be described as simply “clan centred”, as previously mentioned in the CHT literature (Selina 1995). The Rockoywa Sa is a place identity which refers to the regionality of the Marma people of Roangchari. This will be further examined in terms of Marma clan organisation. In sum, it can be said that settlement pattern and regional identity are interwoven in the context of Marma group organisation in the CHT.
Bawm

The Bawm settlement of Soanloo para in Roangchari is located in the hilltop region in contrast to valley settlements of Marma and Tanchanga. The identification of settlement among the Bawm has traditionally been depicted by the names of ranges and clans. In the case of Soanloo para, settlement identification corresponds to the characteristics of the habitat rather than clan name considerations. Soanloo is the name of a fruit tree (amoloki in Bengali) implying the characteristics of the surrounding forests.

Elderly Bawm in Soanloo para claim that Bawm settlements are organised along phun (clan) and the name of the settlement becomes the name of particular phun ancestor. Loffler, a German ethnographer, has found similar kind of settlement perceptions among the Mru, who also live in the hill top region of Banderban district. Loffler points out that “Mru live in hamlets, a small settlement comprising of five to twenty households…and regard hamlets as belonging to kin” (1990: 139).

However, the present Bawm settlement of Soanloo para is comprised of different phuns in contrast to a more traditional notion of village organisation. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the Soanloo para Bawm settlement organisation is a result of regrouped settlement in 1980s when the government forced the different Bawm villages to move out from their original far interior region of CHT. Thus, in the case of present Bawm settlement the characteristics of the habitat become the principle basis for the name of the settlement.

In recent times, however, a new phenomenon is also observed among the Bawm in terms of identification of settlement name. In Ruma, a southern sub-district of Banderban, I have encountered settlements named after the holy Christian shrines such as, Bethlehem para (residents of Bethlehem), Hebron para (residents of Hebron). In this context, the names of the Bawm settlements are taking new shape symbolising Bawm Christian identity instead of phun (clan) identity with naming of ancestry or geographical phenomena. Therefore, there has been a shift in the perception of naming of the settlement among the Bawm. The changes can be interpreted as the impact of the Christianity on Bawm traditional culture.
Nevertheless, habitual orientation and the identification of Bawm settlement and place has always been the mountain region. The Bawm settlement of *Soanloo para* gives altogether a different view than that of Marma and Tanchanga. Each Bawm household follows similar pattern of dwelling house and surroundings according to their cultural planning. Bawm houses are by-and-large *machan* types\(^{40}\), which is a common pattern across the ethnic communities in the CHT. In Bawm language, *machan* means high platform. Although Bawm follow the same principle of constructing *machan* houses like other communities, the distinct feature is that *machan* are built side by side in order to maintain a face-to-face view leaving a uniform courtyard in between. The placing and planning of the dwelling houses in the Bawm village seem very different compared to other communities. Their attitudes, house construction and settlement pattern on hill top region, express a particular set of cultural construction of Bawm identity.

**Tanchanga**

In Roangchari, the Tanchanga settlement of *Bottoli pada* was established in valley areas near *Rockoywa roa* when they first moved into this area. In Tanchanga language, *pada* means village. One distinguishing feature about the naming of the Tanchanga settlement is that in contrast to Marma, *Rockoywa Sa* (sons of Rockoy river), a location based naming, the Tanchanga highlight their clan ancestry in identifying their settlement pattern. The naming of *Bottoli* (the surroundings of Banian tree) signifies a particular history of the founding ancestor of the village, who planted the tree when they first settled in the area. Now, the name *Bottoli* is synonymous to the settlement of Tanchanga people in Roangchari.

\(^{40}\) In CHT this type of house construction display a commonality of Pahari culture across the ethnic boundary. The dwelling houses are fundamentally conditioned with CHT hill ecology and economic activities of the people. All the ethnic communities build their houses on a high platform locally call as *machan*. The houses are rectangular in shape with oval roofing. The bamboo matting platform is raised six to eight feet above the ground, and is supported by timber or bamboo posts; the walls are made of bamboo slate and the roof is covered with thatched grass. Since the house is built on high platform the vacant portion below is used for keeping agricultural tools and appliances, such as looms and husking implements. The main entrance of the house is approached by a ladder placed between the platform and the ground. Ladders are removed at night so that wild animals, in this hilly region, cannot enter the house. The size of the room varies according to the requirement and economic status of the family.
It is also found that some the Tanchanga settlements in the greater Banderban region are named after the place of origin prior to their migration. The Tanchanga settlement known as Kafasa indicates the place of early residence in Burma’s Kapru area long before they migrated to CHT. Thus, the names of the Tanchanga settlement express a sense of attachment to the people of their origins.

**Notion of Attachment**

In each case, a settlement’s name denotes group organisation in Roangchari. Geographical distinction in terms of settlement pattern is reflected in cultural identity and sense of home among the groups. Marma and Tanchanga settlement is largely associated with the valleys. On the other hand, identification of the hamlet among the Bawm is by the name of ranges. The cultural perception of settlement, thus, explicitly expresses a sense of attachment to people of their own group and to the land they inhabit. As a notion, ‘attachment’ to settlement is an important aspect in constructing ‘localised’ cultural identity.

Marma prefer to live along banks of the river and stream. As such their perception of settlement is attached to river valleys and they inventory or cognitively differentiate categories of the hill land habitat: for example, koyongs refers to plains land as opposed to taung thaihnang (hill slopes) and taung fa (up hills) as opposed to taung jhui (high land).

In contrast to Bawm, today the Marma and Tanchanga are engaged in paddy cultivation along with traditional jhum. However, some of the activities relating to paddy cultivation lack indigenous terms in the Marma and Tanchanga languages. For example, plough cultivation involves use of specific inputs, such as lingual (plough), irrigation known as shech, seedling as gala, insecticides and chemical fertiliser as kimashak and sar. In Marma, irrigation is known as lema ri tang re which literally means ‘to bring water and pouring into ground’. This does not sound like a vocabulary rather a description of an activity in the field.

As a whole, perception and classification of land in terms of utility and economic value among all ethnic groups is different from the Bengali (I elaborate in Chapter
Five). However, I suggest that local perceptions of settlement and locality are also specific to each group forming different village and group organisation. This also challenges the common theory that village organisation in CHT is neither stable nor permanent because of *jhum* ‘nomadic life’. Western and local ethnographers paint this picture without looking at the local dynamics of how it is actually organised. I argue that fluid nature of village organisation is a myth in the CHT.

Amongst all the groups, the notion ‘village’ is always stable but sometimes readjusted to the changing realities of *jhum* practice in the distant area. The practice of deserting the village is rare in the CHT. The present Marma Rockoywa roa (village) in Roangchari is believed to be two hundred years old. In fact, portraying CHT ‘tribal’ people as ‘nomadic’ with unstable village organisation has profound implications to their access to rights over the land (see Chapter Five).

**Social Organisation**

The section deals with social organisational features, such as clanship, kinship, descent, household, inheritance practices and marriage organisation of Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga in Roangchari. As mentioned earlier, sociological and anthropological literature in Bangladesh produced a great deal of confusion in describing social organisation of ethnic groups in CHT without any clear definition what exactly this means. My ethnographic data on social organisational features gives a different perspective suggesting an understanding from the local cultural context. The section looks at the dynamics of social organisation and ethnic boundary maintenance in the multi-ethnic locality of Roangchari.

**Clan Organisation**

*Marma Clan Organisation*

Social scientists, anthropologists and geographers invariably identified many clans among the Marma, presumably following the habitual notion of Marma settlement organisation (Bessaignet 1958; Sopher 1964; Selina 1995; Khan 1999). Using different analytical tools, the literature maintains that Marma are divided into several
clans and each clan lives in a particular locality with its members possessing the village land (Bessaignet 1958, Bernot 1959). This suggests that Marma villages are clan based, and that the clan controls village lands. Recently, Selina (1995) has listed about fifteen Marma clans which are said to be independent of each other.41

The way in which Marma clan organisations are interpreted in this literature confuses classificatory categories with the local dynamics of how the group is organised in an area or locality. My findings do not support the straight application of a broad classification of Marma localised groups into clan identification. The analysis of Marma settlements suggest that different localised groups have been formed after the names of a particular river valley instead of an unknown common ancestor or totemic unity (an important criteria for the definition of clan).

In fact, in anthropological literature there are many definitions of clan but a common ancestral link is generally considered to be the organising principle of clanship. Without having traceable genealogical links a group cannot be identified as clan (Loffler 1990; Holy 1996). This dimension of clan organisation has not strictly been followed among the Marma in relation to settlement pattern and group organisation. As I mentioned in previous section, in the entire CHT region there are twelve settlement groups. These are not clan based groups rather localised regional groups.

For example, in Roangchari, at Rockoywa roa level, the localised group Rockoywa Sa is split into many lineage segments mainly based on kinship relationship. Talking to many elderly Marma of Rockoywa roa, I have encountered two main descent groups, namely pube and puri. Tracing back their settlement history and ancestry, it is revealed that the two groups are originated from Marma persons puri and pube (legendary figures). The pube group was the first settlers of the Rockoywa roa, and expanded gradually splitting into different lineage segments. Long after the settlement of pube group, puri settled in the Rockoywa roa.

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41 These are; Regretsa, Palaingtsa, Marotasa, Kogdasa, Kolatasa, Palowsa, Kwen-charysa etc. (Selina 1995: 53). In fact, as I mentioned earlier, these are Marma 'regional groups' derived their names of the nearby river.
Today these lineage segments are not directly related to each other, as most of them do not remember any genealogical link after two or three generations. Many of them even do not recognise their ancestral history of puri or pube. They do not have a clear-cut idea of clan; they only tell about the patrilineal kin groups of two to three generations’ depth. However, many of these lineage groups living in Rockoywa roa are not maintaining any territorial segregation within themselves, but reckon their descent through separate relatives.

In Rockoywa roa, two groups, puri and pube, are residing together as a single entity sharing common village territory. The members of the pube and puri are now collectively engaged in socio-economic, religious and political activities in everyday life as Rockoywa Sa in Roangchari. Coexistence of several lineage groups in one village has become a common feature in almost every Marma settlement.

Thus, at the local level, these localised Marma groups are organised in a particular settlement on the basis of different lineage segments rather than having a traceable common clan ancestry. Therefore, the role of one such ‘clan’ over one village in possessing village land has in fact become non-existent today. In dealing with the other groups in Roangchari, particularly with the Bawm and Tanchanga, all the lineage segments constituting the Rockoywa Sa together assert their primary identity as being Marma, disregarding their other differences.

This is also reflected in their personal naming. Today both at personal and group levels, taking an ethno-name has become a new dimension to group affiliation and assertion of ethnic identity. This has been an expression of a distinct ethnic boundary maintenance in relation to others. In the case of Marma, they do not bear any clan identity as part of personal names as practiced among the Bawm (see below). The element of ethno-naming can be seen as process of both socio-political and cultural identity making (I explain this perspective in detail in Chapter Four).

**Bawm Clan Organisation**

Of the three communities under study, the operation of clan organisation is most pervasively prevalent among the Bawm. Among the Bawm of Banderban, on the
whole, there are two principle phuns (clans) namely Sunthela and the Panghawi. Each of the two major phuns, however, split into several smaller phun segments.

Table 1-A summary of the splinter phuns

| Sunthela | Zahau, Zattang, Chin Zah, Lawn Chew, Cheurek, Rung Be, Siarlawn Sando, Tenu, Bawiting, Thilum, Vandir, Lawnsins, Laitall, Cheulai Dawitling, Haubeng, Tongir, Lalnam, Thlua thang, Milai, Maram Thangta, Ruallens, Khenglant, Lihang, Aineh, Laikens |
| Panghawi | Sailuk, Palang, Rakha, Satek, Rapichai, Sakhawng, Tipiling, Samthang, Thamgming, Sangla, Komlau, Shahu, Pawngking, Lingtawang, Nakaw Amlai, Tangthing, Buiting, Demrong, Talaksa, Mihi, Charang Khualring, Sangthing, Rempeehe, Mitau, Ichia, Kongtwa |

This table is based on consultations of Bawm clan genealogy as well as information from aged Bawm informants in Soanloo para and Banderban.

Each of the splinter phun is formed by tracing ancestry to a common founder and is named after the ancestor. Among the Bawm, the phun ancestors are mythically considered as persons who showed the potentials of leadership in crisis or in big game hunting. This implies that, once upon a time, clan leaders would have ruled over members of the clan. In the present day, however, clan leaders no longer lead the clans, as headman/karbari have taken over many political functions of the clan. Yet clan membership is still more important for the Bawm as everyone takes a clan name and someone with the same clan name is considered to be a close relative. The Bawm regard someone with the name of the same phun (clan) as belonging to the same taksa (flesh) or thlah (descendent) or rualsia (relatives).

In Roangchari the Bawm settlement of Soanloo para is not residentially segregated strictly on phun or clan basis. The entire Bawm para comprises of different phuns. Among the Bawm inhabitants in Soanloo para, I have encountered fourteen of the splinter phun segments of the two principle phuns. These are: Thamgming, Lawnsins, Bawiting, Charang, Maram, Buiting, Shahu, Milai, Palang, Haubeng, Lawn Chew, Nakaw, Amlai, Komlau. These phun names are derived from the common ancestor of the past, though they are now reunited in Soanloo para from divergent directions of CHT.
The Bawm residents of Soanloo para differ from the Marma and Tanchanga in terms of maintaining clan identification and distinct ancestral roots. Among the Bawm, the emphasis on phun centred identity allows identification of each Bawm individual in terms of phun as well as the greater Bawm ethnic identity. For example, one of my informants is Zir Khung Shahu Bawm, which is a combination of the three identities. The Zir Khung is the first name; the second part Shahu denotes his phun name; and the last part is a Bawm ethno-name. Emphasis on self-image is centred around taking phun name which serves the mechanism of tracing ancestry of each Bawm individual.

However, in practice phun identification carries no differentiation in Bawm everyday life at broader ethnic level. Cohabitation of members of divergent phun, such as, Shahu, Amlai, at Soanloo para settlement does not disrupt the Bawm ethnic unity at the broader level. In many ways members of the Bawm community in Soanloo para display a greater solidarity highlighting the common Bawm ethnic identity.

As a smaller ethnic group Bawm is a very closed society and people increasingly tend to live together. In recent years, economic hardship and land scarcity even forced them to get much closer. In case of any crisis or in need of help there is a feeling that someone else of their own is around them. They are more accommodating to other Bawm migrants in relation to settlement in Soanloo para. The general perception is that if any Bawm wishes to settle in Soanloo para, they will be generally welcomed, even though they belonging to a different phun (clan). They have their own Christian Sunday school, a village regulatory body to oversee the everyday domestic affairs of the settlement, and a Bawm student hostel. Collective wellbeing of the community is the main value of the settlement.

In the present political context of CHT, the identification of Bawm as an ethnic group is crucial. It can be manipulated as a vehicle to assert political identity as a group. It maintains their status as Bawm ethnic entity within the broader context of ‘state-tribal’ relations on the one hand, and also justifies their cultural distinctiveness in relation to others on the other hand.
**Tanchanga Clan Organisation**

There are many contested theories in the literature as to whether Chakma and Tanchanga are two separate ethnic entities or a single ethnic group (Lewin 1869; Bernot 1959, Bessaignet 1958). Linguist Bernot and other earlier ethnographers seeing some linguistic resemblance conclude that Tanchanga is actually an offshoot of Chakma. These studies, however, do not tell us of any genealogical relationship between these two groups. Without substantive historical research, it is difficult to judge whether these two groups had any clear link in the past.

In Roangchari, Tanchanga inhabitants of Bottoli pada regard themselves as an ethnic group. They do not exhibit any feelings of relatedness with the Chakma but rather assert their own ethnicity as Tanchanga. They claim that their lineages and clans are distinct from the Chakma. Anil and Proashoannan Kumar Tanchanga, officials of the Tanchanga Welfare Association, told me that “in the past Chakma did not want Tanchanga to be treated as a separate ethnic group as they would have lost their dominant position in terms of numbers in the CHT. It is not an issue now; we are accepted as separate ethnic group-as Tanchanga- both in official and public domains”.

According to elderly Tanchanga informants in Bottoli pada, the Tanchanga people are organized along gosa lines. Tanchanga clans are indigenously referred to as gosa. There are said to be twelve gosas among the Tanchanga, but at present they can only identify six gosas residing in the CHT, and others are claimed to be living in Burma. The gosas living in CHT are: Mo gosa, Karba gosa, Donna gosa, Mongla gosa, Malong gosa and Lang gosa.

In Roangchari area, I have found most of the Tanchanga residents at Bottoli pada predominantly belong to Mo gosa, with only a few families claiming to be members of Malong gosa. The present Tanchanga populations of Bottoli pada are not all descended from early settlers in 1960s. Some of the Tanchanga families migrated to this settlement from different parts of the CHT in later times. Elderly Tanchanga in Bottoli pada told me that in the past intermixture of gosa within the same village
was rare. Today I have observed that this pattern of Tanchanga settlements has been changed in many ways. For example, a newly established small Tanchanga settlement of bhaga mura para near Banderban town consists of only twenty families with several gosa identifications.

The general pattern of gosa organisation among the Tanchanga people suggests that these are formed on the basis of kin ties, marriage organisation, and distinctive dress pattern. This gosa identity is only maintained at the local individual level in relation to other gosa. For example, gosa commonality is expressed in the use of female dress with a distinct head cover and colour of the lower part, locally called a pinon. In case of the members of Mo gosa, females invariably wear a head cover named khobong showing a distinct style and colour.

Although the majority of the Bottoli pada inhabitants belong to Mo gosa they collectively emphasise a greater Tanchanga identity distinctive from the other two ethnic groups in Roangchari. In other words, though Tanchanga people are organised along gosa lines at the personal level, but at the broader level of group organisation Tanchanga people do not use their gosa name as part of their proper name unlike Bawm. Every Tanchanga individual, as a whole, is using the greater Tanchanga ethnic name as part of their personal name to signify a separate ethnic group. This again can be seen as part of 'naming politics' in the context of identity formation in the CHT.

Descent, Family and Household Organisation

All the groups in CHT show a well-developed patrilineal descent ideology coupled with principles of internal genealogical ranking expressed in inheritance and succession. My kinship data shows the underlying rules of patrilineal descent among the Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga are reflected in terminological systems. But whilst patrilineality as a shared rule is prevalent among these groups, there are notable differences and variations in many aspects of social organisation such as: degree of male and female status and authority, rights and privileges among the heirs.

42 I have done an comprehensive analysis of Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga kinship terminologies but space does not permit me to present them here in detail.
relating to inheritance practices, rules and practices of marital alliances, post-marital residence and practices of dowry/bride price.

In this section, I examine each of these aspects of social organisation from a comparative perspective in order to understand the dynamics of group organisation. The section begins with the descent and household organisation.

**M arma Descent Organisation**

All three ethnic communities are basically patrilineal. However, there are some exceptions observed among the Marma compared to the other two communities as far as their kinship terms are concerned. Among the Marma, whilst descent is reckoned through the male line, one of the most recurrent issues that consistently appear in the literature is whether Marma follow the character of matriliney. Selina (1995), a sociologist, has noticed the influence of matriarchal character among the Marma. Most of the questions relating to this, by and large, seem to be raised in terms of inheritance and post-marital residence practices. My ethnographic data does not validate this hypothesis.

One of the problems with these interpretations is the lack of in-depth analysis of other aspects of social organisational feature, producing a kind of 'floating ethnography'. It is, indeed, true that among the Marma, women’s role in the domestic domain is very significant. Although descent is explicitly expressed through the male line, Marma woman enjoy a substantial degree of authority in terms of privileges of inheritance of property and decision-making at the household.

At the Marma household level, I have noticed all the domestic activities are done on the basis of mutual discussion and joint efforts between husband and wife. For

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43 There are three well-defined categories of terms for identifying the members of the patrilineal descent from ego-centered perspective involving siblings, parallel cousins and cross cousins of ego’s generation as well as the parental and succeeding generation. This implies that among the Marma the emphasis on lineage at both ego’s and father’s level express patrilineal line. According to the Marma kinship data, it can be said that Marma descent system is a variant type of unilineal descent system. This is further clear from the discussion of marriage organisation.
example, in the case of husband's death, the sole responsibility rests on the wife in maintaining all domestic affairs such as management of land and other properties. Marma women, as mother and wife, have a greater degree of freedom, privileges and rights compared to Bawm and Tanchanga women.

The most important element among these is the matrilocal residence without any social stigma attached to it. Unlike other patrilineal groups within and outside CHT, such as Bawm, Tanchanga and Bengali, Marma are exceptional in accepting a daughter's husband as a member of the household. Among the Bengali, this practice is predominantly seen as lowering the social status for the husband. In the case of the Marma, the post-marital residence rule has been relaxed keeping the descent rule unchanged in the vital area of marital alliances.

In actuality, what I have observed among the Marma is that if a couple are endowed with only one daughter, the patrilineal descent rule of Marma is subordinated to a form of 'matrilocaity' where the daughter's husband moves to the residence of his in-laws. This Marma practice differs from both Bawm and Tanchanga. Perhaps, researchers have confused residence with the matrilineal. In fact, both patrilocal and matrilocal residence patterns are prevalent among the Marma.

**Family or Household**

The concept of family and household is one of the salient characteristics that is embedded in social life of all ethnic communities in CHT. Exploring social life by means of the ‘household’ enables us to examine the types of farming system and social organisation in the CHT as they exist in meaningful day-to-day activities. One of the key considerations is to define and conceptualise the ‘household’ from local perspectives.

In CHT, as far as traditional *jhum* practices are concerned, one must understand the dynamics of household organisation. There is a strong correlation between the household organisation, marriage and access to *jhum* land. For example, traditionally one of the criteria considered for access to *jhum* common land is to establish an

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44 I have discussed this point elaborately in the inheritance section.
independent household. Until marriageable age children live with the parents, and contribute to the father's *jhum* as part of the common workforce. The independent household is established only after marriage. Household organisation is, therefore, a dynamic process of social organisation in relation to access to *jhum* land in the CHT. (I discuss this point in the discussion of customary *donga* system in Chapter Five).

As household organisation is an important institution in every day life of ethnic communities, particularly in the context of farming systems, *jhum*, I argue that continuity of household organisation is related to the practices of land use and livelihood of the groups and group organisation in the CHT. However, from the Western point of view it is rather ambiguous to conceptualise and define family and household in the local context of social organisation.

**Oeingsa: family or household or, a conceptual ambiguity**

The most important unit of Marma social organisation is the *oeingsa*. However, the way Marma define their *oeingsa* organisation is quite different from Western conception of family. Neither family nor the Bengali notion of *paribar*, which usually refers to father-mother-children unit, fully conveys the connotations of the Marma term *oeingsa*. When I asked about the Bengali word *paribar*, some Marma people count their sons and daughters living in other villages as part of the *oeingsa*, and others only count those that live with them.

Therefore, the way *oeingsa* is defined among the Marma has various crosscutting aspects between kin and non-kin, between sharing or not sharing food. Marma often say even distant members of the lineage can be included as members of *oeingsa* as long as they eat from the same cooking pot and share economic activities. However, sons residing even in part of the same house but cooking separately are not considered to be member of *oeingsa*. In this sense, the notion *oeingsa* does not fit into the Bengali conception of *paribar* (family). Thus, among the Marma, *oeingsa* is not only a unit of biological reproduction, but also a unit of economic co-operation and assistance.
In fact, the Marma word *oeingsa* is more closely rendered by household than family. The term *oeingsa* can be used as a rough translation of the notion “household” because *oeingsa* is as socio-economic unit of household organisation (Netting 1993). *Oeingsa* has also a special significance in relation to subsistence activities at the roa level as mentioned before. In CHT, as the *oeingsa*, not the individuals, is the recognised member unit of roa organisation. In other words, individuals are socially accepted as members of an *oeingsa* in the roa. For example, in Roangchari, Marma are referred by their status to the *oeingsa*, i.e., the father of such and such *oeingsa*.

The chief characteristic of *oeingsa* is of its continuity over time, as each *oeingsa* is, by and large, linked to others in a considerable amount of institutional and social interaction within the domain of roa organisation in Roangchari. It is, perhaps, for that reason why one is invariably given the number of *oeingsa* in the roa rather than individuals when one inquires about the actual population of the village.

The household census data suggests Marma *oeingsa* characteristics in Rockoywa roa are of two types. According to size, the most common form of *oeingsa* is a household with one married couple and their children at an average size of four members. It is the smallest size of *oeingsa* and all members reside in the same residence. There are also large *oeingsa*, like an extended household, comprising of a married couple, their children and an elderly parent, also some distant relatives ranging between eight to ten members.

However, it is noticeable that such large *oeingsa* are relatively unstable due to scarcity of land and the difficult livelihood situation of recent times. In Rockoywa roa, large *oeingsa* nowadays are frequently changing shape, as the head of the *oeingsa* is unable to provide secure subsistence and livelihood for all members. This leads to the development of smaller *oeingsa* as the dominant type. The smaller *oeingsa* are generally created from the main *oeingsa* after the marriage of sons.

Among the Marma, these households are viewed as the ‘branch households’ of the main *oeingsa*. Often, these houses are established within the vicinity of the main household, sometimes even a part of main house. The way in which the main *oeingsa* is linked to the branch *oeingsa* demonstrates a feature of an extended
oeingsa group co-operation’ in the Rockoywa roa. The relationship between main and branch oeingsa ties is viewed as common membership to the main oeingsa.

This relationship is conceived as the relationship between the parent and child. Members of the extended oeingsa group help each other and co-operate during critical situations. At times of sickness, bad harvest, and labour shortage, members of the extended oeingsa group turn out to be a group with effective economic cooperation. For example, when a new branch oeingsa is not immediately given the allotment of common jhum land for subsistence it has to rely on the main oeingsa for a share of jhum land for cultivation.

As every day ritual, I have seen, members of branch oeingsa do not touch or eat their morning meal before they first send a portion of it to the parents at the main oeingsa. It is also a mandatory ritual that first fruits or crops must be offered to head of the main oeingsa. Among the Marma, oeingsa organisation is thus a distinctive feature of group organisation linked by economic, social and ritual co-operation.

Bawm Descent Organisation

As has been reflected in their kinship terminological system, Bawm also observe patrilineality like other two groups. Their genealogy is traced along the male line. In Soanloo para my Bawm informants told me that the sons belonging to the father’s phun and daughters after marriage are conceived of members of husband’s phun instead of father’s phun. This perception is, in fact, well reflected in their customary system of inheritance practices where daughters are not entitled to inherit any parental ‘property’ (I will discuss this point in the next section). Nevertheless, Bawm women retain their phun names as a symbol of original phun identity after marriage.

Patrilocality is also the dominant cultural practices with respect to post-marital residence pattern among the Bawm. Girls after marriage leave their parental household to live with husband’s household. As a whole, in Bawm community females are less advantaged than male in terms of access to parental possessions, as far as their cultural rules are concerned, a rule in opposition to Marma.
However, recently, the common trend observed among the Bawm is towards individualistic values in terms of adopting a nuclear family structured compare to other communities. This transition can be seen as the influence of Christianity.

**Tanchanga Descent Organisation**

Similar to Marma and Bawm, Tanchanga also trace their descent strictly through patrilineal line. However, the Tanchanga people, as whole, can be seen as one of the most rigid patriarchal group in the CHT. In contrast to what has been observed in Marma, the Tanchanga male members enjoy and exercise the absolute authority in every sphere of life. In Tanchanga community, the social position of female is perceived not as equal as male. This is clearly manifested in their inheritance practices and pattern of *guti* (lineage) attachment after marriage.

Firstly, there is a common perception that through life cycle process when girl get married finishes her natal relations with parent’s *guti*. In other words, daughters remain with father’s *guti* until their marriage but lose the privilege of father’s *guti* membership after marriage, and are identified with their husband’s *guti*. Therefore, they must reside with husband’s *guti*, which is, in turn, their own family and *guti*.

Secondly, the post-marital residence practice is solely patrilocal among the Tanchanga. Matrilocality that practiced among the Marma is socially disapproved and looked down upon among the Tanchanga. Similar to Bengali conception of *ghor zamati* the Tanchanga view of matrilocal residence pattern is disgraceful for a husband because he will be treated as having inferior status compared to the husbands who reside in their natal house. So, post-marital residence is an important aspect of expressing male authority among the Tanchanga. Tanchanga women told me that they do not want their husband to live in their parent’s residence.

Evidently there is variation in the conception of family types, male and female authority, and post-marital residentiality among the Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga. Although these variations can be seen as ethnic “stereotypes” but in reality it reflects
distinct markers of boundary maintenance in multi-ethnic locality. In the next section, I discuss the differential inheritance practices.

Inheritance Practices

Analysis of inheritance practices among Marmas, Bawm and Tanchanga is crucial to understanding social and cultural values which, in turn, form the foundation of ethnicity. Ideally, all the ethnic groups in Roangchari are patrilineal but inheritance practices are not the same as far as their local practices are concerned. In the CHT, however, these variations must be understood in both the historical and local cultural contexts.

As mentioned above, traditionally all the ethnic groups in CHT were solely dependent on jhum cultivation, as such the notion of private ownership and inheritance of land was unknown and inconceivable. The concept of private ownership of land among the ethnic communities in CHT apparently appeared only after the introduction of plough cultivation in the valley areas during the colonial period. Therefore, the process of inheritance in landed property in CHT is relatively a recent phenomenon. I discuss this issue more elaborately in Chapter Five.

However, the pace of this development did not take place uniformly among ethnic groups in CHT. Even today ethnic groups, such as Mru, Khumi, Pankhu and Bawm of Banderban district still do not have possession of ‘private land’ nor have any elaborate system of inheritance rules. The elaborate system of inheritance with regard to landed property is only visible among the Chakma, Marmas, Tanchanga and Tripura, who have adopted plough cultivation in the valleys along with traditional jhum cultivation.

With regard to jhum common land, there are still no individual heirs whatsoever. The headman or karbari decides the allotment of jhum plots in usual customary manner; households have no permanent ownership of these plots. Therefore, one needs to be mindful here that the present system of property ownership and

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45 In Bengali culture ghor zamai is thought of not as a ‘husband’ rather a ‘house husband’. 

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inheritance rights in CHT is both historical and local cultural construct. Yet every ethnic group, in one way or another, follows some customs for handing movable and unmovable properties such as, livestock, house, ornaments, dress, and household elements, from generation to generation. There is a wide degree of cultural variations in these practices across ethnic lines.

Marma Inheritance Practices

The present Marma inheritance practices have a distinct historical background. In Rockoywa roa, elderly Marma told me that customarily Marma have specific rules of inheritance for movable and unmovable properties except land. They also claim that Marma rules of inheritance in relation to land and other properties is by and large adopted from the Burmese family and inheritance law locally known as Somohada.

Today, in practice, Somohada understanding is mainly attached to cultural and religious identity of Marma ethnicity. As Somohada contains the descriptions of family values, marriage customs and system of property distribution among the heirs according to Buddhist faith and culture, for Marma, this has become an imbued regulatory principle of Marma social life. My personal engagement and participation in Somohada practices at Rockoywa roa enable me to draw a local level reality of how Somohada has been institutionalised among the Marma. In other words, how Somohada has become part of Marma ‘cultural assets’ in relation to group identity.

The Roangchari headman, Mong La Sin Marma is the one who often uses the Somohada in dealing with inheritance matters and other social affairs. In an informal conversation, I asked him why Somohada is such an important thing to Marma.

Meng La Sin Marma explains,

Somohada is an integral part of Marma people in CHT. Many cultural and religious elements of Marma, such as family values, marriage custom, and rules of property distribution among the heirs are all guided by the Somohada.

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46 See for further information, the detail analysis of Mru inheritance, Loffler (1990).
However, in practice, it is really the *kayang*, the Marma temple, which gives institutional shape of *Somohada* practices in Marma community. In day-to-day activities, the Marma community, as whole, revolves around the *kayang* culture, which guides Marma social and religious life in many ways. As most of the *vantes* (priest of *kayang*) are trained in Buddhism in the Arakan district of Burma, when they come back they apply the same cultural principles that they have observed in Burma. Moreover, they are the people who deliver Buddhist teaching in Burmese language in the *kayang*. So, their knowledge of *Somohada* has become the ‘cultural asset’ in guiding Marma people with certain family values, inheritance practices and religious code.  

My Marma host in *Rockoywa* village, Mong Kay Marma, a peon (office assistant) of Roangchari, describes his understanding of *Somohada*,

*Amgra manu kesho boge na somohada. Jaiga jamir baheapre headman ja bolia ta sonie ar kyang vante jane* (We don’t know about *Somohada*. If we have any problem regarding land and others we go to headman and the *vante*) (field notes dairy 17 January 2000, own translation from Chittagong dialect).

This ordinary view suggests that *Somohada* has been a ‘social and cultural property’ of few such as the headman, *vante*, and elderly Marma. In reality, the headman, *vante* and elderly Marma all appeared to be the key players in regulating *Somohada* cultural practice among the Marma. In fact, whatever reasons, the *Somohada* has become the symbol of Marma social, cultural and religious life.

In the following, I discuss present Marma practice of *Somohada*. This analysis also reveals how Marma customary system of inheritance is undergoing changes through Bangladesh legal and judicial process. Talking to many Marma informants, men and women, and subsequently verifying with elderly people an elaborate description of Marma inheritance practices was collected from different sources in Roangchari and Banderban.

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47 I have discussed dimensions of Marma linguistic and religious identity in Chapter Four.
It reveals that rules of inheritance practices are the most important aspect of Marma social life as it occupies the distinctive socio-organisational feature compared to other communities in CHT. Although Marma basically follow patrilineality, inheritance practices are not restricted to males only. Both males and females are entitled to inherit property. In Marma language, 'property' is termed as *ingthong*. *Ingthong* is considered as hereditary properties of the household and classified into two main types: movable and immovable. Immovable *ingthong* are land, houses and trees whereas movable *ingthong* includes agricultural implements, domestic animals, weaving appliances, ornaments and clothing etc. According to *Somohada*, Marma follow a principle of succession that emphasises the distribution of both movable and unmovable properties in the following manner:

After the death of a parent, children are entitled to inherit all the hereditary properties including both movable and non-movable but there is a variation between their father’s and mother’s belongings. A sharp distinction is observed between *iokia wain* (male goods) and *min ma wain* (female goods). According to customary inheritance practices, house, cattle and agricultural implements, are considered as *iokia wain* (the property of the male household head) that can only be inherited by sons. On the other hand, female dresses, ornaments, pigs, spinning and weaving equipment, belong to the domain of female property as *min ma wain*, thus heritable by the daughters only.

According to *Somohada* practices paddy land is distributed equally between sons and daughters but among the sons’ portion, properties are not equally distributed if there are more than one. Usually the first-born son is the main heir. There is a ratio of succession of sons’ property: 50% of the inherited landed property goes to the elder son and other sons share the remaining 50%. However, the daughter’s share of the property are equally distributed among them. Besides an equal share of parental landed property women have also a greater role in managing their husband’s property.

In the case of a husband’s death, landed property remains with the custody of the deceased man’s wife for her entire lifetime. She is socially the legal caretaker of the landed property meeting all the domestic needs of the household. Such landed
property is only passed down to heirs after her death. This is one of the most distinctive characteristics of Marma society in relation to female property rights.

Changes of Somohada and legal system of inheritance

In recent years, there have been significant changes in relation to traditional Marma inheritance practices in legal setting. The changes were brought in accordance with the existing Bengali Muslim inheritance law, which outlines the succession procedures as 2:1 among the sons and daughters, i.e., one-third of landed property is given to the daughters as opposed to brother. It is complete contrast to Marma Somohada inheritance practices.

Therefore, the changes in the customary inheritance practices to landed property, as an integrational policy of the state, favours the male authority denying the local customary practices. There has been profound impact on social relationships in Marma everyday life. In the Marma community women are considered as equal as men in relation to inheritance practices and marital status. This Marma cultural aspect has been ignored in the government legal inheritance system. There are now many disputes arising due to conflicting interpretation of Somohada relating to inheritance matters in the legal setting.

In Roangchari, I have attended one of these inheritance dispute settlement cases. The following case reveals the local level reality of the Somohada practices and the impact of new legal provisions in relation to inheritance disputes. The case was an inheritance dispute over a piece of paddy land in Rockoywa roa between the heirs of late Lafusu Marma. The dispute began, when Lafusu Marma’s only son occupied two acres of paddy land after his death. Later, two married daughters of Lafusu Marma claimed their share of paddy lands that were now in possession of their brother. This brother only agreed to give one-fourth of the lands to his sisters as per legal provisions. On the other hand, his sisters claim that according to traditional Somohada practice daughters are entitled to an equal share of their father’s landed property. Consequently the sisters brought the issue to the Roangchari headman.
The dispute settlement meeting was arranged at the headman’s house. There were only six people present, including myself, the headman, the local karbari, two elderly Marma and the vante other than the two conflicting parties. The vante had brought the Somohada book with him. Initially there was a long conversation between the vante and the headman about the different rules of Somohada in relation to proportionate property distribution among the heirs. We were simply silent observers. Then after long discussion with conflicting parties, the final verdict came out in favour of the sister’s being entitled to half of the lands. The way the whole process of dispute settlement was done simply by describing the Somohada rules for the proportionate shares between brothers and sisters. The brother looked unhappy over the verdict.

After the meeting when I asked headman whether either party could go to the court if they are not satisfied with his verdict. He replied “anyone could go to the court but there is no family or inheritance law for the Buddhist people in Bangladesh. Somohada is not recognised in the court setting. They generally follow the legal rules of inheritance practice of the Bengali Muslim”. During my fieldwork, however, I did not have any opportunity to observe this matter in the court setting. Although talking to bureaucrats at the district administration I have come to know that there were few instances of ‘tribal’ appeal cases that were done in accordance with the existing law.

Nowadays the Marma, on the whole, are confronting with various political, social and legal conflicting interpretations of Somohada inheritance practices. Most of the Marma residents in Roangchari, however, prefer their traditional system of Somohada inheritance. Somohada, for them, is a symbol of Marma ethnic identity.

Bawm Inheritance Practices

The inheritance practices among the Bawm need to be understood in the context of their long enduring jhum subsistence activities. As I mentioned earlier, Bawm people are, by and large, jhum cultivators - in the sole means of livelihood unlike the other two ethnic groups in Roangchari. The question of inheritance in land is not conceivable as far as their customary practices are concerned. However, the Bawm
customary practices provide succession rules on parental properties in the form of movable and unmovable items like Marma. Among the Bawm, household assets are movable and the dwelling house is unmovable.

Therefore, inheritance law is very simple in nature among the Bawm compare to Marma and Tanchanga. According to inheritance practices, the female descendents (daughters) are not entitled to inherit any paternal property. The youngest son succeeds the parental house. The other elder sons have only share of the parental assets, such as livestock, gun and other household's items. On the other hand, the daughters only receive mother's personal possession such as ornaments, dresses etc, as practiced among the Marma.

Among the Bawm, this system of inheritance practices makes sense when it is judged from the post marital residence pattern. Each son from the highest successively establishes own household immediately after marriage, and the youngest son remains in the parental house unit he gets married. It is the youngest son who takes care of aged parents in the absence of other family members. Under such circumstances the Bawm succession law favours the youngest son to be the inheritor of the parental house ultimogeniture. This is distinctively a different feature of inheritance practices compare to the other two groups, Marma and Tanchanga.

Tanchanga Inheritance Practices

As I have mentioned in earlier section, all ethnic communities in CHT are traditionally jhum cultivators. There was as such no idea of private ownership to the land. The notion of inheritance to the landed property has thus largely been in practice since the introduction of plough cultivation. In Roangchari, the Tanchanga along with Marma, now practice both jhum and plough cultivation. They now have an elaborate system of inheritance to the landed and other properties.

According to Tanchanga inheritance practices, only sons are customarily entitled to inherit paternal properties that include bhoy (land), livestock and household assets. Unlike Marma, however, Tanchanga succession only goes to sons in equal proportion. On the other hand, daughters are completely deprived of any such rights.
Among the Tanchanga, women have no rights either over husband or father’s property. However, if a father wishes to give some property to daughters, a verbal declaration has to be made before the elderly people.

The verbal declaration about property distribution is another aspect of customary practices of inheritance among the Tanchanga. It is a very well honoured custom that the male household head makes a verbal statement before village elders about the proportion of the property to be handed over to daughters, who are not legal successors. Such verbal desires concerning the distribution of properties are viewed as socially binding. Among Tanchanga, the violation of such a statement is believed to be an act of sin, which will bring disaster and curse for the violator.

Other distinctive inheritance practices among the Tanchanga are as follows: In case of the death of a married son without any children prior to his father’s death, his share of heritable property will be passed on to his other surviving brothers instead of his wife. If a woman gets divorce during pregnancy, and subsequently the newborn child is a son, he would eventually be the heir of his parental property. This suggests that Tanchanga inheritance practices are, by and large, gender biased in favour of the male sex compare to Marma and Bawm.

**Marriage Organisation**

Marriage organisation, in general, is seen as one of the important element of social organisation among all ethnic groups in CHT in terms of maintaining group identity and livelihood situation. As mentioned above, a person whether Marma, Bawm or Tanchanga, could only attain the right to cultivation *jhum* common lands once he gets married and establishes a separate household. It has long been a customary practice that before marriage one has to work with the parents on the plots allotted to the father’s household. So, in this context, marriage organisation is considered one of the important criteria in relation to access to *jhum* lands and livelihood in CHT. There are various social and cultural values attached to marriage organisation among ethnic communities.

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48 Of course, there are instances of temporary arrangements: parents might allow the son to cultivate some plots of the households until he gets a similar allotment from the *karbari*.
Ethnic endogamy is the common form of marriage practices among all ethnic communities in Roangchari. This can be viewed as the salient feature of ethnic boundary maintenance in the CHT. I suggest that marriage as a social institution is of central importance to ethnic communities. It plays a significant role in establishing and maintaining ethnic boundaries on the one hand, and facilitating the fusion process that leads to greater intra-group cohesion on the other. This is especially true for the complex set of customs relating to the marriage practices. Data collected on the marriage customs of three ethnic groups demonstrates that proper marital practice is an integral part of maintaining and perpetuating a ‘pure’ ethnic identity.

In this section, I discuss differential practices attached to each group, such as Marma *lasonbuiya*, Bawm *thaihu*, and Tanchanga *sanga mela*, in order to see the internal dynamics of group formation.

**Marma Marriage Organisation**

The Marma word for marriage is *lasonbuiye*. There are various considerations attached to *lasonbuiye* among the Marma. *Lasonbuiye* is seen as the social recognition of a man and women having legitimate sexual relations and is considered as a process to become a full member of the community. The other important consideration is *lasonbuiye* would bring descendents who can look after parents, when they become old, as well as household property.

In CHT, monogamy is the most common practice among all ethnic groups including Marma. There are two different forms of marriage (*lasonbuiye*) commonly practiced in Marma. These are *Niongkia* (marriage by negotiations) and *Kheerohejecho* (love marriage or marriage by elopement). Rituals and other ceremonies associated with them are similar in both cases. *Niongkia* is a form of marriage, which is normally held through a series of negotiations at the parental level, a kind of arranged marriage. When boy and girl attain marriageable age their parents spread such information through verbal communication within and outside the Marma settlement.
A matchmaker, locally call *mitachera*, brings back and forth the information between the parents of a probable couple. Sometimes relatives are also involved in this process. There are many rituals involved in *Niongkia* marriage arrangement in terms of sending and accepting proposal between two families. Once this process is over, the *Niongkia* marriage is organised with a feast called *lasong*. *Lasong* is the main ritual feast associated with *lasonbuiye* and has a very special significance.

The other type of marriage is *kheerohnejecho* what Bengali refers to as ‘love marriage’. *Kheerohnejecho* is a recognised form of marriage among the Marma. As I have mentioned in earlier section, Marma women enjoy a degree of freedom compared to others in many spheres of social life, such as inheritance, post-marital residential preference and choice of husband. Many young girls that I talked to both in Banderban and Roangchari had chosen their own bridegroom. Their parents are aware about it and this is socially accepted. In Banderban and Roangchari, I have seen that it is almost an everyday ritual after finishing a day’s work for young people, girls and boys, to get dressed up and go out in the evening. This sort of free mixing is unusual among other communities in the CHT. For the Bengali, it is simply a ‘social crime’.

In Marma community, *kheerohnejecho* is a socially recognised form of marriage. There are many instances when young people often elope to get married due to a lack of the parent’s consent but eventually have been accepted by offering symbolic ritual feast *lasong*. However, the practice of dowry that is strictly followed by Bengalis is totally absent among the Marma. The symbolic ceremonial feast *lasong* is central to Marma marriage organisation.

The offering of ceremonial feast *lasong* is in many ways an indispensable part of asserting Marma-ness. *Lasong* ensures social recognition and approval of the newly married couple within the Marma community. It is also socially and culturally accepted that without offering this ritual feast by Marma groom, a bride would not enjoy the status of wife in the community. Moreover, in Marma community a marriage without offering *lasong* makes their children’s marriage also questionable. Thus, *lasong* is a vital cornerstone of marriage organisation among the Marma.
However, there are specific cultural rules with regard to Marma marriage organisation. In general, these can be summed up as follows: Marma strictly prohibit marriage within the members of a patrilineage. In other words, a male Marma cannot marry his parallel and cross cousins on the paternal side. Since members of the patrilineage regard themselves as a source of common blood, so marriage with them is equated to marriage with one’s own family members. Thus it is restricted by the descent exogamy, i.e., the husband and wife come from different descent groups.

Matrilateral cross cousin marriage is widely practiced and preferred among the Marma. The preference for cross-cousin marriage may be an easy way to maintain solidarity among the descent groups. However, marriage with maternal parallel cousin i.e. mother’s sister daughter (akugri) is forbidden. The male members can only marry cross cousins on the maternal side.

Although Marma are basically patrilineal, some of the characteristics related to inheritance and marriage rules are complex and ambiguous. As we have seen, with the fate of father’s property and mother’s property in inheritance practices, Marma also consider daughters as source of mother and sons are father’s blood. Thus in the context of marriage rules, female Marma can only marry her male cross cousin on the fathers side as opposed to parallel or cross-cousins of mother’s side. Diagram 1 illustrates this principle:

**Diagram 1 - Marma Marriage Custom**

![Diagram 1 - Marma Marriage Custom](image-url)
For A (male ego), marriages with parallel and cross cousins on the paternal side is prohibited but preferred to marriages with cross-cousins of the maternal side, i.e., mother’s brother daughter (yofa). For B (female ego), maternal cross cousin i.e., mother brother’s son (meri) is prohibited but father sister’s son (kooh) is prescribed.

In practice, Marma marriage rules emphasise descent exogamy for marital alliances between two groups, but only the cross cousins, not the parallel cousins. Marriages with parallel cousins are viewed as the extension of the siblings having same blood ties while cross cousins are not related by blood, because they belong to different descent groups. In fact, ethnic endogamy and descent exogamy co-exist and go hand in hand in the Marma society.

However, in practice, rules of descent exogamy marriage seem flexible, not as rigid as in theory, particularly in case of kheerohnejecho (love marriage). Among the Marma, this is, to some extent, tolerated within the descent group. This indicates flexibility in marriage rules that may allow Marma to maintain renewed alliances within the group. This could also be interpreted as a political mechanism to control members of the descent groups. This irregular marriage practice may give an opportunity for the groups to establish their old relations on the one hand, and also to uphold broader group cohesion within context of Marma ethnicity on the other. In other words, marriage is commonly enforced within the Marma ethnic group-ethnic endogamy at the cost of abandoning the full rigour of descent exogamy.

In fact, the politics of 'community culture' is clearly expressed in the case of inter-ethnic marriage. In everyday practice, Marma, as an ethnic group, are less tolerant towards the element of inter-ethnic marriage. In other words, inter-ethnic marriage is seen as a threat to Marma ethnic identity. Among Marma, in the case of inter-ethnic marriage involves punitive actions such as denial of property inheritance rights as well as social ostracism if it happens to be with the Bengali in particular. During my fieldwork in Roangchari, I have not come across a single instance of inter-ethnic marriage either within the ethnic communities themselves or with the Bengalis.

49 For example, Friedman (1975) analyses similar point in context of Kachin exchange system and the
However, in Banderban town I knew of a couple of instances of inter-ethnic marriage. The story of Monir and Me Ma Nue (pseudonyms), a Bengali-Marma couple tells us the reality of inter-ethnic marriage in the CHT. I met Me Ma Nue in Banderban TCI (Tribal Cultural Institute) when I was taking Marma language course at initial stage of my fieldwork. Me Ma Nue is a part time language instructor at TCI and mother of two children. Her husband, Monir, is a reporter on a local Bengali newspaper.

During my fieldwork period I developed a good friendly relationship with this family. They explained to me their marriage experiences of how they had escaped from Banderban fleeing to Chittagong town in a frightening, tense and insecure situation. Me Ma Nue explains:

Because of marrying a Bengali man, I had to suffer a lot. Immediately after the marriage my everyday life was miserable; anywhere I went I experienced verbal abuse in the street, work place, everywhere. Socially, I was rejected by my family and relatives. Whenever I went to Uzani para, my father’s village, everybody I knew would just turn around.

The couple now live in a rented house at Magistrate Colony, away from the overwhelming Marma village Uzani para, after returning to Banderban about five years living in Monir’s parental village of Comilla district. Since the birth of their first son three years ago Me Ma Nue for the first time visited her parental home at Uzani para. The relation with her parent’s family is now becoming easier as two of their children frequently stay with the grand father. However, Me Ma Nue still feels that because of this marriage her father has lost social reputation and prestige in the community where their marriage is looked down upon.

The social life of Monir and Me Ma Nue’s family seemed to be confined within a closed friendship circle. I think, by and large, inter-ethnic marriage is still considered as disrespectful to the community as well as endangering ethnic solidarity, not only among the Marma but all ethnic groups in the CHT. In many cases, inter-ethnic marriage is conceived as one of the important factors in the
constitution of multi-ethnic society, for example in Cameroon (Burnham 1997). However, this is not the case in CHT.

**Bawm Marriage Organisation**

The Bawm of *Soanloo para* in Roangchari also adhere to the exclusive practice of ethnic endogamy. Marriages with members of other ethnic groups are culturally taboo. The underlying emphasis is the maintenance of the enduring character of ethnic distinctiveness. However, within the group they strictly follow *phun* (clan) exogamy. Each *phun* is an exogamous unit. So, in theory, a Bawm man cannot marry a woman of the same *phun*. Bawm believe that *phun* members are related by blood signified by *phun* name. For example, with a *phun* name of *shahu* a man can not marry a *shahu* woman, he must find a woman from other *phun*, such as *sailuk*, *amlai* etc.

In *Soanloo para*, one of my Bawm informants, Zirkhung Shahu Bawm, told me that in the past Bawm marriages between the *phuns* were affected by notion of *misia* (unclean). In Bawm language the term *misia* is used for people with whom you never eat or sleep, a kind of lower status *phun*. This indicates that in the past Bawm were divided into high and low ranking clans, with further differentiation by marriage restrictions and ceremonial differences. Loffler (1990) with reference to Mru social organisation has indicated such hierarchical social relations of high and low ranking clans.

However, Loffler's interpretations on these issues are not clear whether “high-ranking” and “low-ranking” clan refers to clans or castes or a local combination of both at village level. It is also not clear whether a ‘caste-model’ is being placed on top of the lineage/descent organisation. At present, this is not the case in Bawm community. In the face of new social situations, such as Christianity, resettlement, hardship and continuous loss of *jhum* lands, the Bawm community, as a whole, has undergone a change. Conceptions of high-ranking clan and low-ranking clan no longer exist among the Bawm.
Zirkhung Shahu Bawm admits that after conversion to Christianity the *misia* custom no longer exists among the Bawm. This suggests that *phun* relationships have been revised in Bawm society. This, perhaps, helps to reduce the tension among the marriageable men and women by the restricted marriage rules in Bawm community. *Phun* exogamy is now a common form of marriage practice among the Bawm.

Among the Bawm, there are specific cultural rules existing in relation to organising competing groups for the exchange of women based primarily on the distinction of descent. The specific marital rules prescribed as customs among the Bawm are as follows:

Parallel cousin marriage, irrespective of lineage differences, consanguineal or affinal, is totally forbidden. This implies that a Bawm man (male ego) cannot marry his father’s brother’s daughter (FBD) for lineage unity, and mother’s sister’s daughter (MZD) for non-lineage parallel cousin. Similarly, a Bawm woman (female ego) can neither marry her mother’s sister’s son (MZS), nor her father’s sister son (FZS), similar to Marma rules. Therefore, there is only provision of ‘preferential cross-cousin marriage’, but with restriction of following descent rules, i.e., male ego can marry cross-cousin only on his non-lineage side, mother’s brother’s daughter (MBD) but not the cross-cousin of father’s side, father’s sister’s daughter (FZD). Diagram 2 illustrates the Bawm marriage custom.

**Diagram 2 – Bawm Marriage Custom**

The Bawm marriage rules suggest prohibition within the lineage line is socially enforced but lineage exogamy is generally prescribed. This also means that cross-cousins are ideally the marriageable partner while parallel-cousin marriage is prohibited. The Bawm regards cross cousin as the preferential mate indigenously
call *thaihu*, the mother's brother daughter (*pupa's mack*). The *thaihu* marriage is commonly prevalent among the Bawm and has a significant ritual value in the marriage relationship.

For example, in case of *thaihu* marriage a special feast is arranged in honour of the bridegroom's kin. While the married cross cousins are restricted from participation, only the bachelor cross cousins have the privilege to be special guests. This ritual feast is considered towards the purpose of selecting 'would-be' partners. In this respect, Bawm places very distinct cultural value on ritual associated with *thaihu* marriage. This can also be seen as a mechanism of perpetuating traditional cultural rules as well as maintaining group solidarity. In Bawm society, the underlying significance of *thaihu* marriage has a social meaning.

Among the Bawm, marriage is predominantly patrilocal and bride price must be paid. Bride price has different social implications in many societies. It is the most distinctive feature of Bawm marriage custom, locally call as *mun*. This is, in many respects, represents cultural identity of the Bawm. Since marriages are arranged by the parents in Bawm community, custom emphasises on a prefixing brideprice to be offered to the bride's family. The amount of brideprice varies with the economic conditions of the bridegroom. The bride price, *mun*, is justified by the fact that the rearing of the daughter in the parent family incurred maternal strenuous investment conceived as 'milk price'. But, *mun* goes to both parents of the daughter.

However, recently, the nature of customary *mun* (bride price) has been changed in order to cope with the economic reality of the Bawm in CHT. Many local residents of *Soanloo para* told me that there were instances of discontent about the increasingly high demands of *mun*. In view of these growing discontents, the Bawm social council enacted a law named *Bawm Phung Dan* (*The Bawm customary law of mun*) in order to keep the bride price within limits. Now, the bride price is fixed at three thousand *taka*.

According to *Bawm Phung Dan*, if marriage breaks up because of the husband, his family cannot claim the *mun* back. On the other hand the wife's parents are customarily bound to return the *mun* if she is found guilty. Thus, Bawm cultural
practice of mun in relation to marriage organisation express a distinctive feature of Bawm ethnicity, in contrast to Marma and Tanchanga.

**Tanchanga Marriage Organisation**

With regard to marriage organisation, the custom that is socially and culturally valued among Tanchanga is the marriage arranged by parents accompanied with a ritual feast. The Tanchanga locally call such marriage custom *sanga mela*. Likewise Marma and Bawm, the Tanchanga also maintain *sanga mela* within the broader Tanchanga ethnic group, i.e., ethnic endogamy. However, within the group, Tanchanga emphasise different cultural rules in relation to marriage organisation.

Among Tanchanga, paternal parallel cousins, such as father’s brother daughter (FBD) are strictly prohibited to marry because this is considered to be the lineage of father. On the other hand, parallel cousins on the mother side i.e. mother sister’s daughter (MZD), is allowed. Tanchanga view that mother’s sister daughter (MZD) belongs to different *guti* from which male ego’s *guti* (lineage) is not traced. This is also true for the cross-cousin marriage. A Tanchanga man can marry cross-cousins on both sides i.e. father’s sister’s daughter (FZD), mother’s brother’s daughter (MBD) on the similar ground of *guti* affiliation.

Thus approval of maternal parallel cousin marriage is exceptional in Tanchanga community, not observed either in Marma or Bawm. A sharp difference in marriage customs is found among Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga. Marma and Bawm offer a more rigid and restricted type of marriage rules. Parallel-cousin marriage is strictly prohibited at both lineal and non-lineal sides while cross-cousin marriage occurs outside one’s own lineage.

Tanchanga marriage rules, on the other hand, are more flexible. Tanchanga man is only restricted to marry a parallel cousin of his own *guti* i.e. father’s brother’s daughter (FBD). On the other hand, he can marry corresponding parallel cousin of mother’s side, i.e., mother’s sister’s daughter (MZD). Thus, marriage rules allow either side of the cross-cousins, mother’s brother’s daughter (MBD) and father’s sister’s daughter (FZD). The Diagram 3 illustrates the Tanchanga marriage custom.
Tanchanga Marriage practices are allowed parallel and cross cousin marriage of both lineage and non-lineage group. These marriage rules can also be seen as the distinctive feature of Tanchanga ethnic unity maintenance.

Figure 4 A Tanchanga sanga mela (wedding ceremony)

Among the Tanchanga, marriage is, according to custom, held by dowry practice that involves money, ornaments and clothes etc. In the case of divorce the husband is supposed to return the dowry received at the time of marriage. In practice, however, like the other two groups, divorce is rare among the Tanchanga. I did not see any divorce cases during my fieldwork period in Roangchari. There is also a striking similarity between Marma and Tanchanga with regard to arrangement of a ceremonial feast during marriage. Tanchanga call this ritual feast mella which is of
significant social value in Tanchanga community. It is a common practice that nonconformity of this ritual feast would lead to social boycotting in death ritual associated with cremation. This indicates that the marriage feast offered by the bride’s side is an indispensable part of Tanchanga culture.

In sum, it appears that in the CHT ethnic groups are culturally diverse in terms of social organisation. Marma Bawm and Tanchanga display marked differences in clan organisation, descent and household organisation, inheritance, and marriage custom. A comparative table can be shown here on the basis of diversity of the social organisational feature of three ethnic groups in Roangchari.

Table 2-Comparative Framework of Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga Social Organisation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameters</th>
<th>Marma</th>
<th>Bawm</th>
<th>Tanchanga</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History of settlement</td>
<td>Early settlers (oldest)</td>
<td>Last settlers (1985)</td>
<td>Late settlers (1962)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of settlement</td>
<td>Settlement in plain</td>
<td>Settlement on hill top</td>
<td>Settlement in plain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clanship</td>
<td>No clanship</td>
<td>Clan centred</td>
<td>Clanship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descent rule</td>
<td>Patrilineal</td>
<td>Patrilineal</td>
<td>Patrilineal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Structure</td>
<td>Semi-extended</td>
<td>Nuclear</td>
<td>Extended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of male and female authority and position</td>
<td>Higher status for women</td>
<td>Lower status for women Male centred relation</td>
<td>Absolute male dominated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage rule</td>
<td>Restricted cross cousin marriage, No parallel cousin marriage</td>
<td>Restrictive cross cousin marriage, No parallel cousin marriage</td>
<td>Flexible cross cousin marriage, Parallel cousin marriage is prescribed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-marital residence</td>
<td>Both patrilocal and matrilocal (bilocal)</td>
<td>Neo local</td>
<td>Only patrilocal (unilocal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules of inheritance</td>
<td>Elder son’s share is high, Female inheritance is recognised on equal basis</td>
<td>Young son inherits parental house, No female inheritance</td>
<td>All sons inherit equally, No female inheritance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dowry/Bride price</td>
<td>No dowry and Brideprice, Social feast lasong is recommended</td>
<td>Practices of bride price, No dowry</td>
<td>Dowry Practices, No brideprice, mela (feast) is recommended</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

To understanding the social organisation of the three ethnic groups from a comparative perspective is to form an understanding of inter-ethnic relationships in the CHT. I argue that differential forms of cultural polarity and diversity maintenance provide the basic dynamics of very nature of the multi-ethnic society in CHT. As mentioned above, all the three ethnic groups under study trace descent patrilineally, but they have varied types of clan organisations, kinship relations, inheritance and marriage organisation - the distinct markers of each community. These distinctive organisational features maintain as group boundary between each of them in their locality.

I argue that the way in which the social organisational features are maintained in every day life of Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga people in Roangchari is an expression of ethnic cultural identity. Of course, identities are constructed – they are not pre-given absolutes. It is important to deconstruct identity in the context of CHT because these groups are not neatly bounded ‘tribes’ but actually part of the much bigger political field.

Today, for example, clanship is of less significance among the groups. In recent times, membership of an ethno-linguistic group has been seen as a basic element in the group identity project in CHT. I suggest that taking ethno-name as a membership of an ethno-linguistic group is a key factor to ethnic identity construction. In the CHT, the first question to be addressed to a stranger is which ethnic groups do you belong to, rather than which clan do you belong to? This point has, I think, been made clear in my account of clan and identity.

In a multi-ethnic area like CHT where different ethnic groups have a competing relationship with each other on the one hand, but on the other hand they have a collective identity in relation to their antagonistic relationship with the dominant Bengali. Clanship, marriage organisation, and other social organisational aspects, in this context, have limited significance beyond the local ethnic domain. As Marma, Bawm, Tanchanga and other communities in CHT are increasingly incorporated into the broader framework of the region, nation and state, social organisational features
in many ways have been defined and redefined in the discourse of ethnic and collective identity.

In other words, traditional forms of social organisation have not been abandoned by the groups themselves, but many of these have instead been modified in the context of rapid socio-cultural changes in the CHT. In fact over the years, each and every ethnic group has undergone an internal and external process of change. The degree of changes, however, varied across the groups and each community has experienced it in a dissimilar way to others.

For example, Christianity has had a profound impact on Bawm. Among the Bawm, previous clan relationships as high and low rankings are no longer in existence. The mode of behaviour has changed significantly. Once a rice beer producing group, it has been completely transformed into a non-drinking community, abandoning the drinking habit as socially and religiously immoral. Life styles, such as clothing (the adoption of trousers, skirts), and music (for example, the guitar), have been the new outlook of Bawm identity compared to other common ethnic dress in CHT. The customary bride price has also changed into a new form.

Marma have already adapted to Burmese Somohada inheritance practices, and there are also changes in customary practices of inheritance under Bengali legal and judicial procedures. In case of livelihood situations, there are also changes in social organisation as the Bawm community is relying on day labourers due to scarcity of jhum lands. Marma and Tanchanga have adapted to the paddy land cultivation along with jhum. In view of these contemporary changes, it would be misleading to describe ethnic groups as being fixed bounded categories, as is often characterised in the literature on CHT (Loffler 1990; Selina 1995).

I argue that as organising principles, clanship, kinship and marriage organisation are symbolically important to group formation at the level of local politics. These aspects are still fundamental to the cultural boundary maintenance as ethnic groups, such as Marma Tanchanga and Bawm in the CHT. At the broader level, however, these internal aspects of socio-organisational features of group identity are
politically unimportant in relation to collective mobilisation. In this process, political and economic marginalisation is seen as the 'shared deprivation' of collective identity.

At present, in the CHT, smaller groups join with larger groups to form a bigger category of hill people because of the political and material advantages involved. This could be explained as the fluidity of group identity in the CHT. The notion of 'shared deprivation' potentially provides the vehicle through which a broader level ethnic collective mobilisation is achieved. This mobilisation is reflected in the range of vocabulary regarding broader ethnic identification such as *Pahari, Jhumma, Adivashi* and so on. The construction of these categories is influenced by the wider political context. I discuss this dimension of collective identity construction with different layers and meaning in the third part of the thesis.
Chapter Four
Culture Becomes Politics, Politics Becomes Culture
Language and Identity in CHT

Introduction

The main theme I wish to elaborate in this chapter is the linguistic dimension of ethnicity. In the CHT, language forms a dynamic element in the discourse of boundary-making and ethnic construction. There is a constant interplay in the construction of linguistic identity both at micro and macro level. Therefore, among other things, language can be seen as the idiom of cultural politics within multi-ethnic milieu in the CHT as well as with wider Bengali and the Bangladesh State. In this chapter I will discuss different dimensions of linguistic identity construction at individual, group and collective level mainly focusing on the Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga in Banderban.

In the previous chapter I have discussed how settlement, clan, and marriage organisations are the elements of ethnic boundary maintenance bringing group members together and culturally differentiating others. I have explained how differential modes of social organisation are produced, practised, and to some extent manipulated in order to reproduce ethnic identity in a multi-ethnic locality like Roangchari. Although I suggest that marriage and clan organisation are very important elements in terms of group membership, they have very limited significance beyond local levels. I argue that ethnic groups in the CHT are increasingly engaged in wider forms of relationships among themselves and with the State. Language and linguistic elements are becoming the basis for group identification within multi-ethnic relationships.

Indeed, membership of an ethno-linguistic group is the key to identification of ethnicity in the CHT. This can be seen in the forms of temple language, ethno-naming, and development of written scripts. The way in which linguistic identity is articulated among the groups demonstrates a form of ethno-cultural mobilisation in the CHT. The development of written scripts in particular becomes the source and

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50 An ethno-name is used here to denote the widespread habit of people taking the name of their ethnic
central focus of this linguistic identity. I argue that the articulation of linguistic identity through native scripts is reinforced and influenced by various organisational activities. These organisational activities in terms of language and cultural development can be seen as a process of ‘ethno-linguistic mobilisation’.

However, there are different levels of mobilisations in the CHT. At the micro level, construction or invention of native scripts by different ethnic groups is not only the development of language but it is also the assertion of one’s cultural identity in order to maintain diversity within multi-ethnic politics. At a broader macro level, the diverse linguistic and cultural elements are interpreted as a unifying whole in a quest for the indigenous representation, such as in TCI (Tribal Cultural Institute) activities. In other words, linguistic mobilisation takes another form when reified into institutional representation at the macro level in order to symbolise the discourse of ‘indigenous culture’. In this context, culture and politics are intertwined.

Therefore, one must be aware of the shifting and fluid nature of contested identity construction in the CHT. I argue that there is no common single language that can unify diverse ethnic groups into a single unit or assert collective identity. However, it is also a matter of interpretation because the notion of cultural representation is always manifested in articulation. In the CHT, among other things, a group’s linguistic identity project can be used as a template for mobilising political discourse of indigenous culture.

The TCI representation of indigenous culture has largely been symbolised and orchestrated in the discourse of ‘unity within diversity’. In this metaphor, the diverse ethnic language projects can be seen as a source of unity in order to produce broader cultural politics in the CHT. In other words, construction of a common indigenous culture is in fact a challenge to the present Bengali regime and culture. To explain
this dynamic process I use Escobar's (1992) phrase “politics becomes culture, culture becomes politics”.

In this chapter, I will first map out the ethno-linguistic background of ethnic communities, particularly Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga to illustrate the underlying basis of multi-ethnic and multi-lingual society in the CHT. Within this perspective, I will show how ordinary people articulate ethno-linguistic identity in their everyday life. I then turn to the organisational discourses of linguistic identity construction. The socio-cultural organisations, such as the Tanchanga Kyllan Shaongshod, Bawm Socio-cultural Organisation, Marma Society all strive to mobilise their respective ethnic communities by developing language and culture. I will examine these organisational activities how they are related to ethnic mobilisation. One particular importance of this inquiry is to locate how these language projects influence ordinary people.

Finally I will discuss TCI policies in order to compare organised discourses generated by institutional activities with ordinary people's reactions particularly in the realm of indigenous culture. I end the section with a note on the terrain of subaltern mobilisation in the CHT, and discuss the relation between language/culture-based ethnic mobilisation and resource-based movements of collective identity. Although the two largely overlap there is a clear shift towards the latter. In the context of CHT, the social movement largely revolves around the issue of socio-economic marginalisation based on the struggle for land and livelihood, which I will discuss in succeeding chapters. However, I suggest that the linguistic/cultural project supplement this as a vehicle for broader level indigenous collective mobilisation.

I conclude the chapter with a discussion of linguistic identity within the context of multi-ethnic relationships. The underlying theme of the chapter, however, relates to the broader level ethnic mobilisation. First, I begin the discussion with a background analysis of linguistic map in the CHT.
Ethno-linguistic map of CHT

Anthropologists and linguists consider language as the mirror of a society because it represents all objective realities and cognitive categories of a given culture (Cheater & Hopa 1997; Kuipers 1998; Rahman 1999). This perspective suggests that understanding of language and linguistic elements are also understandings of the cultural identity of an ethno-linguistic group. In the context of CHT, however, I find that ethno-linguistic knowledge of the groups is extremely limited as far as ethnographic literature is concerned. A research gap is particularly wide in the context of the historical relationships between various languages.

However, an inquiry into this line is not within the purview of this present study since it requires a purely different kind of investigation. Yet it is deemed useful to provide a brief diachronic account of the languages of Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga in relation to different proto-languages or ancestral languages (with the broader level) with which they are related (see the Appendix 1). An analysis of present day distribution of languages and dialects in the CHT reveals an inherent linguistic diversity that prevails among the ethnic groups who co-habit in the region, as well their historical relationships in terms of constituting multi-ethnic society.

Status of Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga Languages/dialect

Of the three groups under study, the Marma and Bawm have writing alphabets while the dialect of Tanchanga has operated until now only at the oral level (as a spoken language). The name of the Marma is suggestive of their connection to Burma. The origin of the word ‘Marma’ is by no means certain but it is generally held that the word owes its origin to Myanmar, a term which designates Burma. U Tun Pru Marma (1994) notes that Burmese natives identify themselves as Mirma.

According to local legends the forefathers of the present Bhomang king of Banderban ruled over the Pegu region of Burma in 16th century and family members of the Bhomong king are the descended from ruling dynasty of Pegu (see also U Tun Pru 1994). The Marma people in Banderban are in favour of regarding themselves as major component of the Burmese population and claim that in the past their
ancestors migrated from Burma and later settled in the CHT. They show religious and cultural affinity with the Burmese, and believe that the term Marma is derived from word *myanmar* implying historical root of Burma. It suggests that similarities between languages of Marma and Burmese are attribution of past historical unity. Thus the present Marma language is written with a Burmese alphabetic system, which is locally called Marma *jha*.

As far as the Bawm are concerned, there are various legends in support of the origin of the term Bawm. According to one version, the word Bawm literally means *coop* or basket or container. The term Bawm is attributed to them because of their habit of carrying basket. The manners and customs of the Bawm people support this version of claim. A number of Bawm writer also note that 'man of the basket' is the same group of people living in upper Burma called Chin by the Burmese. ‘Chin’ means ‘basket’ in Burmese (Vumsom 1974; Shahu & Pardo 1998).

However, the term ‘Bawm’ has been variously rendered by colonial administrators in the CHT and reproduced confusingly in later ethnographic and historical literature. Lewin (1869) and Hutchinson (1909) described the Bawm as Banjogi. According to Hutchinson the name Banjogi is derived from *ban* “a forest” and *jagi* “wanderer” (notably both *ban* and *jagi* are Bengali word). Pierre Bessaignet (1958) described Bangugis are almost same with the Pankhoos in customs, habits and religion. The only two main differences are that the men folk bind their hair in the front and do not shape their forehead. Lucian Bemot (1959) accounted that the meaning of the name Banjogi was unknown to his informants and the Marma called them *langge* and the Bengali *kuki*. This was the way to know the Bawm as ‘wanderer tribe’ by the outsiders.

The Bawm people, however, call themselves as Bawm. For better understanding, both the terms, *Langge* and *Kuki*, are vague in designation. Traditionally the Bengali people generally call to the Bawm, Pankhua, and Lushai in the CHT ‘Kuki’, who have more affinities with the Chin-Kuki-Mizo people, commonly known as Zo people in the hilly region of North-east India and Burma (Vumson 1988). Recently Shahu & Pardo (1998) in their booklet pointed out that Bawm maintain a common legend that they originated from a cave called *chinlung*, believed to be located in the
Chin Hills. They claim that Bawm is one of the small groups like Zahau, Sunhala Lakhers and Haka in the Falan region of the Chin Hills but all of them belong to the Chin group.

Consulting Bawm missionary chronicles they mentioned that the Bawm, in a larger group moved from the Chin Hill of Haka and Falan area towards the Sangu of CHT around 1810. Subsequently they spread out over different parts of the CHT such as Sangu, Painda, Tarasa, Rokhong Hills and the hill regions of Saichal, Sajek and Barkal. This source of information about the Bawm is valuable because they are the first Bawm to document historical roots and migration of the Bawm people in the CHT. Their accounts are valuable not only for detail and careful treatment of information by combining their own observations with considerable number of elderly Bawm but also for the reconstruction of history in terms of social and cultural relationship between Bawm and other neighbouring groups.

Their analysis suggest that there is a historical relationship between Bawm and other Chin groups in terms of linguistic similarity, and later particularly adoption of Roman scripts for a common *lingua franca*. In the first quarter of the 20th century when Roman writing system was introduced among converted Chin groups by the missionaries they prepared a dictionary called *A Grammar and Dictionary of the Duhlien Dialect* (Shahu & Pardo 1998). The Duhlien dialect of Lusai, Pawi, Lai, Bawm and Lakher groups are almost similar to one another because of their origin to Tibeto-Burman sub-family of *Kuki-Chin group*. The *Duhlien dialect* is considered to be the *lingua franca* of the Zo people. It is now a written language in Mizoram and among the Bawm in the CHT.

Since 1930 the Bawm have had a writing system mainly for missionary purposes. The Bawm alphabet system has been designed after the Roman one. At present about 80% Bawm can read and write in their language. Children are taught Bawm language in the Sunday school. Since 1977 they have had the Bible and Bawm Dan Bu (Bawm Customary Law) printed in Bawm. An anglicised writing system and values have had a profound impact on the Bawm traditional life style. This has been revealing the way elderly Bawm still count five days of the week-*thai* (tomorrow), *kip* (the day after tomorrow), *thiam* (the day after that), *kam* (the day after that) and
lawi (the day after that). They have twelve months and each named after nature, festivities, and jhum.

In contrast to Marma and Bawm, the Tanchanga dialect bears a close resemblance with the Chakma dialect and Chittagonian dialect (regional variety of Bengali language). In view of linguistic similarity between Tanchanga and Chittagonian dialects it would be incorrect to assume that Tanchanga have migrated from the westwards plain lands of Bengal. In fact, Tanchanga people are said to have settled in the CHT migrating from eastwards neighbouring Arakan region of Burma. According to accounts of Lewin (1869) and Bernot (1959), Tanchanga is the sub-tribe of Chakma.

However, Tanchanga people in Banderban deny this fact and identify themselves as Tanchanga and Dainyak. They claim that some segments of their population are still found in different pockets of Arakan, who call themselves as Dainyak. Today Tanchanga relate their ancestry with Dainyak to assert their separateness from the Chakma. The legendary and mythical beliefs of Tanchanga only support a view that Dainyak formed the military force of Chakma king in the past (Bir Kumer Tanchanga 1998). From such evidence one can draw a tentative conclusion that Tanchanga were aboriginal of Arakan and CHT area.

Linguistically Tanchanga dialect is linked to the Indo-Aryan language group of broader Indo-European language family. Of the three communities under study, until today Tanchanga have no written alphabets for their language. It operates as oral dialect. A section of Tanchanga, nonetheless, emphasise that they have a restricted literary tradition of written script, called tallek, used by shamans and boddyas (local medicine man or healers). They claim that the tallek scripts contain secret magic formulas for curing people from physical ailments having spirit possession.

Ordinary Tanchanga, however, have no knowledge or understanding about this tallek. In a recent article, Bir Kumer Tanchanga (1998) suggests that talleks are the traditional scripts of Tanchanga. Such claims, however, could not be validated with empirical proof. However, a written scripture named gojen lamma contains various ballads (gits) or proverbs are also said to be source of Tanchanga alphabets. At
present, a strong sentiment prevails among the Tanchanga to devise an alphabet system for their language. The TCI is providing the necessary stimulus towards this end.

Outlining this short description of ethno-linguistic background of these groups, I address some of the intriguing ethnographic questions in relation to language and identity of present day CHT: what do language differences signify in the everyday lives of ordinary people? How are their different languages being negotiated in complex multi-ethnic relationships, particularly in the context of new identity formation?

In order to answer these questions, I begin with a discussion of how ethno-linguistic boundary maintenance plays a crucial role in everyday life among ethnic groups in CHT. I explain the question of ethno-linguistic identity based on two related as well as complementary ethnographic examples. First, I describe how language use in the temple reinforces the ethno-linguistic identity among ethnic groups in the CHT. Secondly, how usage of an ethno-name as part of a personal name is becoming a public discourse in the form of linguistic identity construction.

Language of Temple, Language of Identity

As I mentioned earlier, language is perceived as an essential trait of ethno-linguistic affiliation among ethnic groups in the CHT. The importance of language in defining Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga as an ethnic group is relevant, not simply in order to establish a criterion of definition but as a resource to organise, create and maintain a myth of common cultural origin. Speaking the same language represents the similarity in customs, particularly linguistic similarities, which reinforces the dimension of ethnicity and very sense of unity of the group. In the CHT speaking the same language is also a process of ethnicisation and reproduction of ethno-linguistic identity.

Social relationship of the groups is manifested in linguistic terms the way in which they interact with each other in day-to-day life. There are various ways in which linguistic attachment crosscuts other dimensions of ethnicity. Both Marma and
Tanchanga are Buddhist by religion and ritual beliefs\(^5^2\) but Buddhist Marma and Buddhist Tanchanga are practically organised in ethno-linguistic terms. The ethnic terms Marma and Tanchanga exclusively refer to ethno-linguistic groups linked to the name of the languages. They identify their cultural differences based on languages rather than religious similarities. Marma and Tanchanga have separate kayangs (temples) of their own. This is not due to the fact that they have differences in the observance of religious and ritual rites, nor that there are other practical reasons to have separate village kayang for infra-structural factors, such as long distances or bad communication. In fact, Roangchari temples are situated within the close proximity to both Marma and Tanchanga villages but known to locals as Marma and Tanchanga kayang. In Banderban, there are even Tanchanga families living next door to the Uzani para Marma kayang.

Yet these Buddhist kayangs, in religious term, are symbolically places of worship for any Buddhist. But in reality these places are culturally conditioned with ethno-linguistic criteria of the group. Only Marma people go to Marma kayang and Tanchanga people go to Tanchanga kayang. However, one should not become confused by the idea that Marma and Tanchanga are religiously segregated community in terms of observing public rituals in Buddhism. They do share, perform and participate in many common activities like viccu (priest) cremation ceremony, zadi (pagoda) erection worship\(^5^3\) and so on. In everyday mundane life, however, Tanchanga and Marma have their own way of practising and justifying Buddhism more in a cultural way. It is rather linguistic practice which dictates the religious unity of the group.

During my fieldwork in Roangchari, Bottoli para Tanchanga kayang had no viccu for three months. An assistant viccu of Noapotong Tanchanga kayang (neighbouring kayang of some eight to ten miles away from Roangchari) was discharging religious

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\(^5^2\) Buddhism is the major religion in the CHT. Numerically dominant groups like the Chakma, Marma and Tanchanga are all Buddhist.

\(^5^3\) A zadi occupies an important place in the religious life of the Buddhist followers in the CHT. Zadi symbolises the corporal relics of Buddha and his disciples. Zadi is like a dome based on a circular base but pyramidal end because of a gradually tapering outline resulting from gradually receding disc of umbrella at the top. At the time of its construction a big worship is held in which large number of Buddhists irrespective of ethnic groups participate. On the occasion of its erection worship is signified to paying homage to lord Buddha.
functions on an irregular basis as requested by the kayang committee until a new viccu was found to take over the charge. However, many ordinary Tanchanga, who are regular kayang visitors, were agonisingly disappointed about the departure of the old viccu and the problem of practising day-to-day religious activities. I was told that the old viccu left for another kayang in Rangamati because of his uneasiness with local kayang committee. Many of these angry elderly told me that old viccu’s departure was an outcome of his awareness that there was not sufficient financial support to refurbish the old kayang, which has a thatched roof and is in very fragile condition. They felt uncertain about the whole situation and were agonisingly fed up with the committee. Among them I spoke to, told me that it was shame for the Tanchanga people in Roangchari to live with a broken kayang and without a viccu.

Despite persistent difficulties in day-to-day rituals and religions, however, I hardly noticed any Tanchanga elderly visiting to nearby Rockoywa para Marma kayang, which is believed to be the oldest kayang in the entire Banderban region. I was curious about what really deterred them from going to Marma kayang. I wondered whether there were any strange personal or community feelings or other socio-cultural factors that influenced both these Buddhist communities, in religious terms, to set them apart.

As elderly people have difficulties in routine religious practices, I asked Sharod Chandra Tanchanga (aged 70) why he would not go to Marma kayang, which is only half a mile away from Bottoli para. He replied in a rather collective fashion, placing linguistic elements of the community over religious attachment:

Our religion is not different from the Marma but there is only one difference. It is pratonna (prayers) and it is conducted in Tanchanga language. We feel different during viccu’s sermon in Tanchanga language, which unite us to think it is for the Tanchanga. [...] We do not understand what Marma viccu says to the devotees when giving panch shil and in other ritual cases. Only

54 Day to day rituals involves many things, for example, food purification through serving viccu, panchshil observance and others.
55 This happened to be an ambiguous element out of my own experience and engagement with the Bengali notion of religiosity. Both Hindu and Muslim communities, in spite of their caste and sects boundary, still go along with performing many rituals and religious activities in common place as common worship entity. In the case of Marma and Tanchanga this seemed to be different.
56 The literary meaning of Panchachil is the five commands of self-restriction and it is believed to be one of the main principles in Buddhism which has to be done through the viccu to rectify self.
Marma can understand this. Marma *viccu* even does not talk in Bangla. So if you don’t understand *pratana* why should you go there?

Thus, what elderly Sharad Tanchanga tells us here is that it is not the *kayang* or Buddhism itself as an ideology making everyday community, it is rather linguistic practice in the temple which creates a sense of ethno-linguistic belonging/identity among the Tanchanga. Shorad Tanchanga’s account can be illustrated as the construction of ethno-linguistic identity. This also suggests that practicality of the language use in the *kayang* is a bonding factor rather than religious segregation. Therefore I argue that the language of the temple is not simply the language of religion it is also the language of identity.

The same dimension can also be seen among other groups in the CHT. The way Marma people articulate the practice of Buddhism, in many ways, is an expression of Marma-ness embedded in Marma language and Burmese culture. It is conceivable that Marma as the second largest ethnic group have established religious institutions and symbols, such as the *kayang, pali tool* (religious school) and *zadi,* to signify their Buddhist identity in the CHT. These religious establishments, however, represent for the Marma the opportunity to articulate their linguistic and cultural Marma-ness as Buddhist. For other Buddhist groups, in order to participate or perform Buddhist rituals in this institutional setting of Banderban one has to follow the medium of Marma language as the language of religion. During my stay in Banderban I observed many public Buddhists rituals which profoundly demonstrated Marma-ness more in a linguistic way.

I argue that for the Marma and Tanchanga people in the CHT Buddhism, as an ideological practice of religiosity, does not create a sense of shared ‘religious community’; it is rather articulated in an ethno-linguistic way. So as with other communities in the CHT, among the Bawm, for example, Christianity has shaped their lifestyle in many ways but they still express their common identification with the Bawn language. The Bawn language has been the iconic feature of Bawn identity, including the practices of Christianity.
Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga ethno-names are much more embedded in self-
identity as ethno-linguistic group based on language rather than religious or other
affiliations. But the articulation of ethno-linguistic boundary is also assertion of
political identity of the group in the context of multi-ethnic relationship in CHT. The
following example clearly reveals taking up an ethno-name as part of personal name
is another way of asserting ethno-linguistic identity in the CHT. Through the
following ethnographic example I will show how the articulation of a group name as
part of a personal name not only justifies attachment to an ethno-linguistic group but
also serves as an emblem of political identity in everyday relationships between the
groups.

**Ethno-names and Group Identity**

Names and naming are central to the modern projects of identity construction among
ethnic groups in the CHT similar to many South and Southeast Asian so-called
"tribal" peoples. These identity projects vary in nature and situation relating to
both local level ethnic mobilisation and broader level collective identification
against the state and others form of external forces. In the CHT, the
institutionalisation and personification of ethno-names are of great importance in
ethnic and political contexts. Personal naming is one of the dimensions in which an
ethno-linguistic identity is articulated not only as the index of group affiliation but
also the criteria of determining politics of multi-ethnic relationships.

Ethnicising personal names is a fairly new phenomenon among the ethnic groups in
the CHT. In Roangchari I encountered many ordinary Marma, Bawm and
Tanchanga elderly people who quite recently did not have any ethno-names as part
of their proper name but are using them now. However, members of Marma and Chakma royal family still do not take ethno-names and use the
colonial title of *talukder, dewan, khisha, chowdhury, larma* and so on. These titles are the attributions of royalty and directly related to the notion of traditional local powers connected with the landed
aristocracy in the CHT. In the past they also thought of the agents of higher authority. For examples, the titles: *talukdar and dewan* among the Chakma were given by the Mughal as to the revenue collectors of the empire in Bengal.
among the Marma, for instance, in private lifecycle rituals such as in naming
ceremony babies are ceremoniously given the traditional Marma cognomens rather
than ethno-names. As a general practice, a child's name is to be chosen in
accordance with the phones of the day on which he or she is born. As Marma phones
are assigned for a particular day of the week it is within this limit any name is
chosen. For example, Chotoy Pru Marma was born on Tuesday and cha is taken as
the first letter of his birthday. The following table indicates how the Marma names
are selected.

Table 3-Marma Naming Days

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Days</th>
<th>Phones</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>ka, kha, ga, gha, and na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Cha, chha, ja, jha, and na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>ta, tha, da, dha, and na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>pa, pha, ba, bha, and ma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>la, wa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>ya, tha, and ha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Show Yeo, Chatoy Pru, Mung kuyo Sin of Roangchari and Banderban.

A is only assigned to Sunday. It is combination with other vowels changes to the
sound of the word.

Among the Marma cognomens denotes position of the person within the siblings. A
boy is addressed *maung* which literally means brother; nowadays it becomes part of
a personal name (e.g. Maung Thin Han). Elder son or daughter use ‘AU’ before and
after their personal name, for example, Aung Thazan Marma, Aung Pru Maram,

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\[59\] However, it is difficult to check whether people are differently named on the birth certificate. The
majority of Bangladeshi do have a birth certificates. There is of course an official policy of providing
birth certificates if a baby is born in hospital or in the private clinics. But only educated urban people
bother about this. Rural Bangladesh is mostly outside of this discourse. As a result the exact age of an
individual is not an easy matter unless one keeps a record of one's own.
Why does it matter for them to take ethno-names as part of their personal names in public life? There are number of reasons which underscores the necessity of having one's ethno-name.

I observed when children start school they are registered with their ethno-names. Possibly their parents' envisaged future entitlements to higher education and other sectors of reserve seats on the basis of ethno-names. Registration of an ethno-name in school is important because officially it ensures the child's group/ethnic identification in all public examination certificates starting from the age of fourteen. For ethnic groups in the CHT, documentation is crucial not only as a record to be a member of particular ethnic group but also to be used for the validation of one's social entitlements.

One of my informants Mong Kayo Chin Marma, an assistant of Roangchari Upzilla office, told me that his son could not take the opportunity to study in medical college because of his mistake. When his son was registered in school he did not use Marma ethno-name as part of his personal name. As a result his son was recorded Okayo Chin in all public examination certificates. Mong Kayo Chin ensured authentication of his group status as Marma from the local headman in order to support his son's case. However, the Health Ministry, which deals with the medical education in Bangladesh, refused to accept his application on the ground that his son's title did not correspond neither with Marma nor with any other groups. Mong Kayo Chin and his son now use the Marma ethno-names as part of their personal name so as to avoid further discrimination.

This is one of the reasons, among many other, why ordinary people like Mong Kayo Chin Marma publicly take or use ethno-names in day-to-day activities. Usage of an ethno-name has now become routine in order for individuals to assert their group identity in official and everyday life. But the ethno-naming discourse can also be seen as the result of government's divisive policy on CHT. The reserved quota system for 'tribal' people of CHT is a glaring example of this.

60 In the present government policy there are upazati quotas in educational institutions and in certain jobs for the people of CHT. However, one must produce his/her tribal identification to qualify for this.
Reservations of places in educational institutions and reserved quota for jobs were initially introduced in the 1980s by the military governments in Bangladesh with manifold objectives. Many commentators argued that primary objectives of the quota policy were to ensure sympathy from the ordinary ethnic peoples in the CHT against the backdrop of military assault in the 1980s. Secondly, the quota system was used as a political tool by military regimes in order to convince foreign donor countries by showing responsible efforts for the disadvantaged ‘tribal’ in the CHT (For further discussion of the quota system, see Anti-Slavery Society 1984; Mey, 1984).

However, apart from this general political objectives the ideological motive behind this quota system was far more deep rooted and linked to the inherent state policy of divide and rule in the CHT. Even after the fall of the military regime in Bangladesh in 1990, the quota system remained a vital political instrument of government policy in order to manipulate relationships between ethnic groups. From the statist point of view any collective ethnic mobilisation in the CHT is perceived as a threat to Bangladesh State sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Therefore, the introduction of the quota system was, in practice, part of the state policy of ethnic division and manipulation. The way in which the quota system is currently operated has been, by and large, a system of conflicting ethnic interests leading to an antagonistic relationship between the groups. The common official category of upazati (tribal) quota though, in principle, adopted to accommodate all ethnic groups in the CHT it is in fact practically monopolised by relatively advantaged groups. Smaller groups find themselves disadvantaged and under represented in the present quota system.

Some Tanchanga and Bawm students of Chittagong University, who are far less in numbers in higher education, have shown resentment about present quota policy in public Universities. At present, there are ten to fifteen reserved seats for the upazati students in each University but these are not proportionately classified for the

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61 They do not want me to mention their names in this thesis for fear that it may create uneasy
specific group. As a result, numerically dominant groups like Marma and Chakma, who are relatively advanced in education and well connected compared to other smaller groups, take full advantages of these facilities. The Bawm and Tanchanga students complain that the quota system in educational institutions has not properly addressed the issue of proportional composition of ethnic groups in the CHT. Consequently minor groups have an unequal position to access to higher education. These resentments can clearly be read as reflections of group interests and the very nature of multi-ethnic relationships in the CHT.

Hence the government policy of reserved quotas in educational institutions and jobs though in theory designed for the protection of marginalised and disadvantaged ‘tribal’ people of CHT, in practice the policy lead to an uneasy relation between the groups. The official quota system is inextricably linked to instigating group politics in such a decisive way that ethno-naming becomes central to conflicting interests of the group. Taking an ethno-name, in this context, is not only an overt expression of one’s ethnic political identity, also an assertion of legitimacy for the appropriation of a group’s rights and opportunities. The implications of this quota policy have largely been a policy of systematisation of ethnic rifts among the groups in the CHT.

Many local people feel that number of reserved places in educational institutions is exceedingly low given the number of students that apply for the university admission each year.62 There are even complaints that many Pahari students who are eligible on merit basis are forcibly admitted under the quota system. Similarly, the number of jobs under the reserved quota is very low and there are even difficulties in access to proper information regarding these quota jobs for Pahar.63

Despite these critiques on quota policy, the ethno-name is largely seen as a symbol of group representation in the CHT, particularly in official dealings. In many instances I saw people could not obtain Esthai Shonad Potra (permanent residency

relations with Marma and Chakma students in the University.
62 Referring from Devasish Roy’s speech on International Mother Language Day in Banderban TCI.
63 Referring from the leaflets of Pahari Chtra Porishod—hill student’s body of CHT.
certificate) because of not having ethno-names as part of their personal names. The *Esthai Shonad Potra* is issued by the Deputy Commissioner as an authenticated proof of one's 'tribal' group identity as well permanent residency in the CHT. Officially the *Esthai Shonad Potra* is the most important document for ethnic groups because it provides not only vital information of one's primary group identification, can also be used for many other purposes such as proof of eligibility for land lease, contesting election and obtaining quota opportunities. Therefore, in order to claim permanent inhabitants of the CHT one must procure the *Esthai Shonad Potra* from the DC. For the ethnic groups ethno-name criteria is considered as standard official practice to issue an *Esthai Shonad Potra*. In many respects, this certification, however, becomes a tool of government political and legal manoeuvring on the issues of land lease in the CHT.64

In Banderban a group of Marma people told me that they were advised by the district revenue officer to use their ethnic names as part of their names to avoid any misunderstandings. They were annoyed by this, saying that they ought to have the right to choose whatever names they preferred. They argued that Marma people are distinguished and known by their traditional cognomens. There is no need to be identified according to new official political groupings; it is rather a cultural matter. Opposing views, however, exist among the few urban educated Marma and they are closely related to Marma royal family.

In fact, most of the ordinary Marma I talked to preferred to take Marma ethnic name as an essential marker of their identity. They are generally conscious of keeping the Marma ethno-name as part of their personal name. I asked the present Roangchari union *Parisad*5 chairman, why he would prefer to take Marma ethnic name as others feel uncomfortable using this. He replied to me that “it is important for the Marma to be identified as separate ethnic group with the ethno-name, particularly in relation to other groups in the CHT. In an ethnically plural situation like in the CHT each group maintains its own marker. An ethno-name is one of these”. Therefore for any ordinary Marma like him, the ethno-name is a distinct cultural as well as political identity signifying a greater bond of Marmaness as opposed to others.

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64 I will discuss this point in relation to *khas* land lease in Chapter Six.
65 A smaller administrative unit within the sub-district *Upzilla*.
As I mentioned earlier, ethno-naming is also a new dimension to Bawm and Tanchanga ethnicity. Traditionally, personal proper naming of Bawm only contains phun (clan) identity which allows Bawm individuals to identify his phun affiliation and distinguish them with others phun. Today everyone uses Bawm ethno-name as for Bawm identification along with phun identity (see Chapter three). One of my Bawm informant Zir Khung Shahu Bawm told me that when he was a child he did not have a Bawm ethno-name as part of his personal name, only the phun name. He started using the Bawm ethno-name as title much later. He thinks that “this gives a sense of belonging to the Bawm community and a feeling of making a Bawm cultural identity, and also useful to identify the Bawm from others communities in the CHT”.

Among the Bawm ethno-name, in this sense, has been a vehicle to assert political identity in the CHT. For them, this ensures and justifies their cultural and ethnic distinctiveness as a Bawm entity in relation to others groups on one hand and the broader context of ‘state-tribal’ relations on the other. This motivation among the groups in general has been inflicted through the very nature of multi-ethnic relations and the state politics in the CHT. I will return this point in the later section of this chapter.

In the case of Tanchanga, despite their gosa (clan) segmentation, they collectively emphasise their greater Tanchanga identity. They do not take any gosa name as part of their proper name unlike the Bawm. Today every Tanchanga takes a greater Tanchanga ethnic name as part of their personal name to signify a separate ethnic group as a whole. Thus the politics of ethnic naming can be seen as part of a broader identity formation in the CHT.

It appears from the above discussion that the discourse of ethno-naming is more than identifying one’s ethnic affiliation, it is also a politics of representation and group interests. I argue that there are many reasons for usage of ethno-names in the CHT. Using an ethno-name is linked to and influenced by many socio-economic and cultural factors. Firstly, taking ethno-name as part of personal name is one way of expressing ethno-linguistic identity because in the present political context of multi-
ethnic relationship in the CHT each ethnic group tends to maintain its own cultural identity. Taking up an ethno-name in this sense is an overt expression of *zati porichai* (national identity) in cultural terms. From the political point of view, the ethno-name also serves the purpose of individual’s rights and entitlements as the member of a particular ethnic group.

Individuals and ethnic groups, as a whole, employ ethno-names in order to assert group cultural identity as well succeeding material interests available for the groups. In every day life, usage of an ethno-name as part of personal name, particularly in the official matters, is influenced by the Bengali administrative discourse of ‘naming politics’. Every single government policy in the CHT, from the distribution of development relief to certification of local residency, is by and large directed towards the divisive group identification. For that reason alone, affiliation to a particular ethnic group is crucial to identity politics in the CHT. I, therefore, suggest that ethno-naming can be seen as a process of socio-political as well as cultural identity making.

I argue that taking up an ethno-name is apparently a matter of ‘public discourse’. I am calling this public discourse because it involves individuals acting as an ethno-linguistic group competing with others in the everyday public arena, such as for jobs, quotas, and in the political representation of local bodies in a manner of contested plural ethnic politics in the CHT. However, I also suggest that individual perceptions of ethno-linguistic identity have largely been influenced by organised community mobilisation. Individuals are motivated by socio-cultural organisational activities within the arena of linguistic revivalism. The development of written scripts and language appeared to be the symbolic capital to these organised discourses. The work led by TCI and different socio-cultural organisations aim to adopt new alphabets, develop old language scripts, and develop projects of ‘standardised modern languages’ is central to this discourse.
The Development of an Alphabet as the Politics of Cultural Identity

Besides ethno-naming, the development of an alphabet and standardisation of written language is another crucial aspect in the discourse of cultural identity construction in the CHT. Among other thing, the socio-cultural organisations of different ethnic groups come to play a key role in this discourse of linguistic identity project. Each and every ethnic community has organised themselves into socio-cultural associations emphasising strong community bonds and welfare issues. One common denominator which is at work in these organised discourses is that languages and dialects must be developed in written form as with other ‘modern languages’ in the CHT and in relation to Bengali.

*The Marma Society*, the Tanchanga *Kayllan Shongshod* (the Tanchanga Welfare Organisation), *The Bawm Socio-cultural Association* and *the Tripura Shongshod* are the key organisations actively engaged in the language projects at community level. At the institutional level, the TCI has also elaborate programmes of language development and are closely working with these organisations. Almost every ethnic community now has a project of either written language development or alphabet invention. I would rather like to describe this situation a sort of ‘scripts movement’ in the CHT.

In order to unfold the dynamics of ‘script movement’ I begin the discussion with the important ethnographic question: why do they emphasise so much on written form of language in relation to identity? I grapple with the question in the remaining section of this chapter. First, by analysing the organised discourses of scripts and standardised language movements within the wider political landscape in the CHT. In this section, I explain some of the actions and programmes of these organised movements through activists’ perspectives in order to reveal why alphabet and written form of language are so imperative for the ethnic groups in the CHT. However, within the purview of this study, I limit my discussion on three ethnic communities, Marma, Bawm and Tripura. I elaborate upon a Tanchanga language convention organised by the Tanchanga *Kayllan Shongshod* as a case of point.
In the following paragraphs, I present these organised discourses of scripts and language movements through the discussions and interviews I had with some key activists and leaders of different socio-cultural organisations in Banderban who are actively engaged in the development of new alphabets and standardisation of languages. Here, I present a carefully edited version of the translated transcripts. They all used the Bengali language while talking to me about their language development.

**The Marma Society**

The Marma Society is a socio-cultural organisation of Marma people based in Banderban. The Society is perceived as the community organisation and speaks for the Marma people in a manner of structuring social and cultural life, and is represented by respected Marma elders. The aims and functions of this organisation are diverse from the celebration of traditional festivals to welfare activities but the main concern of this organisation is about the education, language and cultural development of Marma. Khuka Master, a part-time Marma language instructor at TCI and a key player of Marma language development programme in Banderban, describes Marma language crucial to Marma Identity.

We are Marma by name. We cannot read and write our own language. How can we claim to be Marma *zati* (nation) without knowing our history, culture and language? How can one be a Marma without recognising Marma *ja* (alphabets)? Marma language is very rich. To be a proper Marma one must be able to read and write Marma language.

He further adds about the necessity of Marma language development.

Marma have long tradition of running *pali* school (religious school) at *kyang* (temple) but they only teach how to read *tripitak* (religious books) in order to understand and perform Buddhism. Burmese type religious teaching in *kyang* is not suitable for the Marma children because they are unable to learn 'standard' Marma reading and writing, Marma history and culture. Children are not able to learn Marma either in the school because the medium of instruction is Bengali. In the present school curriculum there is nothing about the CHT or the Marma history and culture. Due to this our children struggle linguistically, culturally and academically from very beginning.

[...] It is our moral duty to do something for future generation otherwise Marma language and culture will not survive. For the sake of Marma *zati* (nation) we must develop Marma as modern language. Our children must
learn their history and culture through their own language. We have been working for the development of Marma language and culture with the help of Marma society and the TCI. We have recently published a book entitled “Marma shikad” (Marma learning) and are preparing Marma language books with the topics of Marma history and culture in the CHT. We demand that the medium of instruction at least at the primary level should be Marma so that our children can grasp two languages, Marma and Bengali, quickly.

[...] Introduction of Marma language courses by TCI for the young and older people has been significant for Marma zati unnati (nation-building). The TCI initially started these courses in Banderban municipality area but afterwards there have been positive responses from the Marma people across the Banderban. Parents are now very keen for their children to learn ‘standard’ Marma realising that without knowing their own language and culture they are nothing! At the moment, there are two more such courses for the children outside Banderban, one in Roangchari and the other one in Roma. Even the TCI’s afternoon adult class is attracting different categories of people: housewives, service holders, and ordinary Marma. Everyone is happy to write and read their language, history and discover their roots. They can also read their religious book properly.

Chotoy Marma, a committee member of Marma society and local musician famous for his Marma shangri song (New Year’s song), also puts similar views:

We know that Rakhain of Arkanese-Barmese speak a language almost similar to the Marma but the way we speak is different from them. There are differences in punctuation and meanings between this two. We have to try to develop Marma language based on what people speak in daily life in the CHT. Although even everybody speaks Marma but mostly elderly people know how to read and write Marma particularly those who received education in Burma. Even the TCI officials could not read and write Marma until recently. We Marma in Banderban want to make a new ‘standard language’ which people can read and write easily. After all it is the main thing for Marma to be Marma.

From both Khuka master and Chotoy Marma’s account it is evident that there is a strong sense of need to learn the standard Marma. Development of the modern Marma language, in this context, is turned into a sense of belonging for the Marma community.
The Bawm Socio-cultural Organisation

Like the Marma society, the Bawm socio-cultural organisation is also an organisation that is engaged in Bawm social welfare activities, and is also represented by elderly Bawm. But the way the Bawm socio-cultural organisation operates and acts express a collective voice of the entire Bawm community in the CHT. Since the adoption of Christianity in the 1930s, among other things, the Bawm socio-cultural organisation has been active in the development of Bawm customary law and writing system. The Bawm socio-cultural organisation had already accepted Roman scripts as the medium of Bawm writing and subsequently Bawm religious and language books were written with this. As mentioned earlier, the Roman script was introduced largely through the work of Christian missionaries and is already taking shape in their literature and other written communication.

Since the entire Bawm ethnic group in the CHT had already been converted to Christianity there was reportedly no opposition to the adoption of Roman script. The decision was turned out to be spontaneous. I was told that the whole Bawm community came out in support of the Roman script since they did not have any sort of written medium of communication. More importantly Bawm language was used as vehicle to spreading the Christianity, which has had a profound impact on Bawm social life in terms of marriage customs, mode of behaviour and so on, as I mentioned in chapter three. However, one cannot deny the importance of the adoption of Roman script in their assertion to Bawm distinct cultural identity.

Chaplong Bawm, a member of Bawm socio-cultural organisation and a resident of Soanloo para, asserted that,

Bawm language is our mother language; we all speak Bawm. The Bawm did not have written scripts but the Bawm socio-cultural association with the help of missionaries adopted the Roman alphabet for the Bawm language. Now with the help of TCI we are running Bawm language courses for children in different Bawm villages. It is important for the Bawm to learn their language, history and culture. Without the written language and history nobody will recognise who we are (Amder porichai zanbe na)?

Again from the Bawm perspective, the Bengali word prochai (identity) here implies the identity based on the language rather than anything else.
**Tripura Shongshod**

Tripura is one of the ethnic groups in the CHT but was not in the focus of my study. However, I briefly include it here in relation to the discussion of linguistic identity. Like Tanchanga, Tripura is another group which currently does not have an alphabet for written language. However, it is not clear which form of script they are going to accept. Among the Tripura, a tense debate is going on at present whether to accept Bengali or Roman scripts. In Banderban area where the majority of Christian Tripura are concentrated the Roman alphabet as the medium of written language is the most popular, whereas Hindu Tripura in the Northern CHT are bargaining for the Bengali alphabet. There has so far still been no consensus among the Tripura community in the CHT.

Dan Dhua Tripura, Secretary of Tripura Shonshod told me that this script debate is part of wider debate, which is going on for sometimes now among the Christian Tripura and Hindu Tripura in the Indian State of Tripura. Frustratingly he admitted that this put Tripura community far behind compared to other groups in the CHT in terms of social and cultural development. As an activist of Tripura language development Dan Dhua Tripura notes that,

> The debate should be stopped for the sake of Tripura language development. We have heard that in India, Tripura have lot of problems with the Bengali. In the CHT we are facing similar situations. We have to preserve and develop our language and culture from the Bengali.

Similar feelings were also echoed in a newspaper article written by Prashanta Tripura, a local anthropologist, “the debate over Bengali or Roman scripts would not bring any fruitful results to Tripura community. The more the debate is prolonged the more the Tripura will suffer. It is time for the Tripura to quickly solve this problem whatever form we accept for the long-term Tripura desire to be fulfilled” (Protom Alo, 3 November 1999). Tripura perspectives also offer here a discourse in which development of alphabet is linked to the development of Tripura community.
Tanchanga Language Convention and Having an Alphabet of One’s Own

In 2000, the Tanchanga Kayllan Shonshod, the socio-cultural organisation of Tanchanga, organised a language convention in Banderban, with an explicit aim to establish Tanchanga alphabet and written form of language. The mission was described as more urgent in the wake of ‘indigenous’ language movements (mother tongue) in the CHT.

I was one of the participants in this convention. I travelled to Banderban from Roangchari in a hired mini-bus along with twenty-five Tanchanga delegates. Roangchari delegation comprises of students, elderly and some activists but most of these voices are considered to be ‘politically conscious’ section of Tanchanga society. Tanchanga delegations from other parts of the CHT had already arrived by the time we reached the convention venue at Banderban Town Hall. Perhaps three hundred peoples were filling the Banderban Town Hall.

Outside the Town Hall tea was being served for the initial refreshment and the launch has been prepared in nearby Tanchanga household by a group of Tanchanga volunteers. With meeting and greeting each other, the convention was finally started one hour late from the initial time at 10 a.m. in the morning. The speakers were well-known Tanchanga leaders and some cultural personalities, who sat on the stage with the convener Proshonna Tanchanga. I recorded the entire meeting but I am presenting here the edited and translated versions.

Shaktipad Tanchanga, the secretary of the Tanchanga Kayllan Shonshod, opened the convention and welcomed all the representatives after a Tanchanga patriotic song sung by children urging the Tanchanga to unite and be alert and awake within the heart (hidyai) and mind (mon). The floor was then given to the Ashaprodip Tanchanga, a primary school teacher from Lama, who was presented as one of the oldest educated Tanchanga, and who spoke in Tanchanga mixed with Bengali.

Where other communities are becoming more developed (unatir dike jachhae), we are moving in the opposite direction. In order to change this

A sub-district unit -south of Banderban.
situation Tanchanga have to get organised as one people. We know nothing about our origin. When I present myself to an outsider as Tanchanga, people always ask Tanchanga ki? Tanchaga kun zati? (What is Tanchanga, what is Tanchanga nation?). Sometimes people think we are Chakma. We must support the development of Tanchanga language. A Tanchanga alphabet is necessary for writing books on Tanchanga history and culture. When people hear about our history and language, they will understand how rich is Tanchanga kriti o sanskriti (culture).67

After him an elderly Tanchanga karbari from Roangchari was given the floor.

Here I give a direct translated transcript of the beginning of his speech:

When we got this invitation, we have to come because this is so important to us. It is for the Tanchanga language. We are born of Tanchanga blood (Mogo sharie Tanchanga rokto). Our grand fathers, fathers, and uncles are all Tanchanga. We are born of Tanchanga but we do not have any plan to develop our language and culture (vasha-kristi-achar). We are now aware of the rights we have in our life. I hope that Tanchanga Kayllan Shongshod can be a way forward for our Tanchanga Somaj (society). We have to think about our young Tanchanga generation. We suffered a lot due to our ignorance about education and overall situation in the CHT. To be able to advance Tanchanga zati we have to develop Tanchanga language and culture and educate our people.

The secretary then gave the microphone to Bir Kumar Tanchanga, a promoter and expert of Tanchanga language writing a lesson book using the Tanchanga alphabet. He opened his discussion with a joke in Bengali “I will speak neither Bengali nor Chittagonian”. Here I focus on the Bir Kumar’s own speech in Tanchanga.

We do not have Tanchanga scripts at the moment. Bikas Tanchanga wrote a Tanchanga primary lesson book with Bengali alphabet but we do not agree with this. This is similar to the Chakma. People always try to mix up Tanchanga with the Chakma. Recently Shopraya Chakma has written a book called Chakma jati hitihas (History of Chakma nation) and he mentioned that Tanchanga is one of the clan of Chakma, but this is wrong. There are lots of differences between the Chakma and Tanchanga languages. Although it sounds similar, there are distinct differences in pronunciation and articulation of the word. Differences in language, dress and other spheres of life events indicate that we Tanchanga are different from the Chakma living side by side.

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67 In Bengali sanskriti, is used for culture but kriesti is often used in relation to folk culture. Sanskriti is more commonly used to refer to high learned culture.
Tanchanga Kayllan Shongshad is working on a project to write a Tanchanga book based on the Tanchanga traditional alphabet. Tanchanga alphabet is the bond of Tanchanga people. Tanchanga Kayllan Songshod is trying to collect cultural and linguistic terms in order to form a common written standard for Tanchanga language.

Bir Kumar Tanchanga demonstrated how important it is for the Tanchanga to have a written language for the sake of their history and identity. Speaking in Tanchanga he directly pinpointed the need of standardised Tanchanga language, describing it as the sanio-kosh (nerve centre) of the community.

I will come back to this discussion a little later but first I present the presidential speech by Proshonan Kumar Tanchanga, which was more than one hour long and indeed the centrepiece of the convention capturing the full attention of the audience. Proshonan started by expressing his gratitude for giving the honour to organise the historic language convention for the Tanchanga zati (cultural sense) and gratefulness to the participants for showing a keen interest in working for the language and culture of 'new blooming' Tanchanga. I will give a longer excerpt from my transcripts of his speech.

We are all Tanchanga here and many of us here could read, write and speak Bengali but we do not know how to read and write our own Tanchanga language. We are expert on other languages but not in our own language. Some people even introduce themselves saying that they have lost their language. We all feel very ashamed of to say our problem is language and we do not have any bornammala (alphabet).

We have our own history and tradition (krishti) but now every thing belonging to us has been sold to others [not mentioning the Chakma] due to lack of education and written language. We have to face this type of problem since we have forgotten and continue forgetting our own history, our vasha (language) and culture. Still there is no clear decision how to write our vasha. TCI has been trying for a long time to get a bornommala (alphabet) book but we could not do it because of our differences whether we accept the Chakma, Bengali or we should have our own bronamala."

Never say we have no language. It is language that is the best of every civilisation. Language is the basic property of the Tanchanga. We have our spoken language; we have our story; we must be proud of it and preserve it. We start collecting this information from the elders. It is very urgent because the old men and women who know much about our history, tradition and language will die soon then we will know nothing. They know our git (song), and puti (ballad). Our old people particularly women know skills how to
weave the Tanchanga traditional cloths with the right colour and the handicraft skills. These are very important for the development of Tanchanga language, which tells our *shanskritik poricho* (cultural identity).

[...] The importance of having written Tanchanga language is crucial to the Tanchanga identity. The right way is to develop our Tanchanga *Bornammala* first so that we can defend our traditional culture in a distinctive way. It is now of great demand for the Tanchanga people to learn how to write and read the Tanchanga language. If the government introduce indigenous language in school level, we must have our language books that will bring the opportunity for the educated Tanchanga to be employed in the school. From Tanchanga *shonshod* it is possible to demand Tanchanga language teachers in Tanchanga dominated primary schools. We have an unemployment problem among our educated boys and girls. We have to be Tanchanga to shoulder the responsibility for our future *somaj* (society). The Bawm, Marma and other communities are rising steadily because they work for their language and culture through community organisations.

Turning to the specific reason for setting up a committee for writing a Tanchanga *Bronnamala* book he emphasised that final decision has to be reached after reviewing the book by Tanchanga *Shonshod* for adoption. He concluded the speech by expressing thanks to those who are working for writing the Tanchanga *Bornammal* book and who are willing to collect the vocabulary, and personally hope that Tanchanga will be gaining self-respected *jati morzada* through the development of written language.

**Discussion**

Let me just round off my presentation of the convention speeches with some brief comments on the speakers before analysing the discussion of the whole section. Both the *karbari* and the teacher quoted above, who are known to be promoter of the Tanchanga *kristi*, point out that language is central to the Tanchanga identity. Bir Kumer Tanchanga, the local expert of Tanchanga, even refers to language as the "nerve centre" of Tanchanga people. But the key figure of the convention, Proshonan Tanchanga goes further by saying that Tanchanga educated people living without a written language of their own makes little difference even if they are expert in other languages, such as Bengali, English, Chakma, Marma and so on. Besides language, he also mentions things like their common origin, history, dress, and the art of weaving, as signifiers to distinct Tanchanga cultural identity. More
importantly he brings the dimension of political economy in the discourse of language development. The economic benefits to the development of written Tanchanga language can be seen, in this context, as opportunity to Tanchanga mobilisation.

What this convention reveals is that every speaker’s message strongly conveys the importance of a written language which is not only be the indicator of Tanchanga cultural identity but also socially and politically places them in an advantaged position in relation to others groups in the CHT. What we see here is similarity between Tanchanga leaders and other key players of various ethnic organisations in the same discourse of language development in terms of identity construction.

Let us return to the discussions of socio-organisational activities. In these discussions there were many related topics that came up but central to these were language, culture and identity. Raising demand for the use of their own language, instead of Bengali or others at school level, is explicitly an assertion of ethno-linguistic identity. All the organisations mentioned above function basically in the field of socio-cultural arena-to provide the cultural content, the ethos of identity of the group. These organisations have introduced a new type of nationalist discourse. As it is very much clear from the leaders’ speeches, conversations and in interviews that above all a nation needs a language of its own with advanced form. Without a printed language you are nothing, it is the main message that all the key players in this discourse want to convey what Benedict Anderson (1983) might call “imagined community”, i.e. print nationalism. For Anderson, in modern times, print technology can be a powerful tool for languages, creating a possibility of a new form of imagined community. However, from the statist perspective Spencer notes that the forces of the state have a great responsibility for the reproduction and control of ‘national culture’ “in replacing local vernaculars with homogenous print language and thus creating new experiences of time and community” (1990: 287).

In the context of CHT, however, one may question whether all the voices heard in this discussion present an elitist discourse. Of course it is true that all the informants are educated and represent the ‘conscious voices’ of the respective ethnic group in some respect. Not only do they speak different languages, economically and socially
they also inhabit relatively different worlds from most of their “co-ethnics”. The whole issue of language and status may seem to be largely irrelevant to those who live in the remote hilly areas.

But this is not the case in the CHT. The elite construction of linguistic and cultural politics are interwoven with everyday interests of the group and in many ways internalised by the ordinary discourse. A common perception among ordinary people is that these socio-cultural organisations are the property of the community. Ordinary people speak of these organisations in the idiom of property possession, it is ‘ours’; ‘our’ interests are looked after through this organisation.

Because these organised discourses are not plainly cultural and linguistic alone, it also represents the politics of group identity, multi-ethnicity and broader collective representation. During my discussions with many of these activists it was pointed out that “we all are Pahari and we all are Marma, Chakma, Tanchanga and Bawm”. This perspective leads us to another discourse of how this negotiating identity overlaps in every day reality in CHT. I will deal with this issue in the next section. In this section I address the issue of why there is an urgent need of asserting ethnic cultural identity in linguistic terms, particularly in the form of written language.

The urgency of such linguistic identity projects must be understood in relation to present political and economic realities in the CHT. As I mentioned earlier, the development of an alphabet or of a standardised language is not only symbolic of allegiance to the cultural identity of the group, but also the politics of recognition and representation within the context of multi-ethnic relationships in the CHT.

Since the signing of the peace treaty between the PCJSS and Bangladesh government in 1997, there have been a rallying cry among local activists, community leaders as well as national and international NGOs to introduce ‘indigenous language’ as a medium of instruction in the primary schools levels in the CHT (at least). However, introduction of the mother language as medium of instruction is not an easy task in the CHT because of plurality of languages. The

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68 In fact, this demand was adopted as one of the objective of the peace accord implementation (see the 1997 Peace Accord).
situation looks even more complicated with regard to written forms of languages. As we have already seen whilst some dialects exist only in spoken form, others have proper written alphabets.

A common indigenous language is essential as a means of communication. At the moment there are no written forms of languages other than Marma and Bawm, which could be used as a medium of instruction. Therefore, if the government decides to introduce the mother tongue as the medium of instruction then it has to be either Marma or Bawm. As the second largest spoken language, Marma would be the likely case. And if it happens to be so, it would be difficult for other groups to refuse the Marma language instead of Bengali. That means they will again fall back to the same dilemma.

For those who do not have written forms of languages such as Chakma, Tripura, Tanchanga and Mru, they demonstrate a strong sense of insecurity and reservation, and fear of losing their distinctive cultural identity if the indigenous language scheme is introduced at the school level in the form of another’s language. Among these groups, there have been growing concerns that their language will never be recognised as a ‘modern language’ under official categorisation. For them, the development of an alphabet is not only an articulation of their distinct identity but also the politics of equality and representation within the context of multi-ethnic relationship in the CHT.

Envisaging group interests and recognition in the broader spectrum of indigenous language project, ethnic communities feel the urgency to develop an alphabet in order to introduce a written form of language. There are also economic dimensions relating to these language politics. As is revealed from Proshonan Tanchanga’s speech, the introduction of the mother language in schools means more teachers’ posts, which would be a window of opportunity for the unemployed educated youths of the community. Failure to develop an alphabet for the written language will miss out on their economic opportunity. The ordinary people thus spontaneously receive the economic impetus of the discourse advocated by activists. This awareness can be translated as the ‘politics of cultural revivalism’ with the core project development of an alphabet among other things.
However, there is no singular form of ideas and practices in relation to a cultural revivalism project among the ethnic groups in the CHT. Although language appears to be one of the salient features of ethnicity there are many interwoven elements relating to ‘cultural revivalism’. All this takes another shape when language and cultural identity packages are redefined and interpreted in institutional discourse in the context of broader ‘indigenous’ culture and Pahari identity.

The development of scripts is also the politics of asserting distinct cultural and political identity in relation to Bengali and the state. Understanding of this scripts movement is linked to understanding the other related issues such as land, resource and Pahari identity. This broader perspective can be seen through the prism of TCI activities and programmes. In the following section, I discuss the way Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga produce language as a form of cultural representation, but at the same time TCI present these diverse languages as an ‘indigenous culture’ in different ways. I argue that this institutional discourse is an attempt to gain control over the lives and livelihood of Pahari, as marginalised people in the CHT. In this project language and culture becomes a way of life.

Upazati Shanskritik Institutes

*Upazati Shanskritik Institutes* (Tribal Cultural Institutes-TCI) are locally based government funded organisations established during army rule in Bangladesh (between the period of 1975-1990) in order to enhance ‘tribal’ cultural development in the CHT. As far as TCI policy document (official memorandum) is concerned the main objective is to establish these *Shanskritik* Institutes in order to preserve and promote the *upazati shanskriti* (tribal culture) in CHT up to the ‘national level’ (see TCI memorandum), accepting the notion that *upazati shanskrit* is inferior to Bengali culture. At present, there are three such institutes in the greater CHT region, Rangamati, Banderban and Khagrachari districts respectively. In this section, however, my discussion is limited to the Banderban *Upazati Shanskritik Institute* only. During my fieldwork I was initially affiliated with the Banderban TCI mainly for language training but over the period I spent a substantial amount of time
engaging in its various activities related to various language and cultural programs. TCI activities and programs are significantly important because they provide an alternative institutional discourse as opposed to ‘tribal’ culture shaping a new meaning and politics of indigenousness, commonality, and identity making.

The official line is that these institutes function as autonomous bodies run by the local people themselves and are able to work out their own plans and programs for the social and cultural development of ethnic groups in the CHT. The structure of the institute itself is very significant in its intention to develop a new ‘cultural regime’. There is at least one cultural officer from each group dealing with specific activities of that group. In this way it represents all ethnic groups in the CHT. However, as a state funded organisation like any other government department, TCI is placed under the cultural ministry, and has to follow the government’s guidelines as well. As a result, there is always a tension between the official and local approaches to the social and cultural development and representation of so-called ‘tribal’ culture in the CHT. The way in which ‘tribal’ culture is defined and interpreted in this institutional setting offers a contested discourse which is largely expressed in TCI activities and programs.

There are two trends of meaning construction and symbolism with regard to the notion of ‘tribal’ culture. The first trend, the official cultural policy project is that the CHT ‘tribal’ culture is a sort of aesthetic thing which needs to be preserved for its own sake (see TCI memorandum). The development and promotion of ‘tribal’ culture in this context is linked to the idea of commodification and objectification. This has been manifested in different forms of government-sponsored programs such as presentation of ‘tribal’ cultural parties for the VIPs while visiting the CHT. The naming of the TCI itself is a reflection of this perspective.

Many local activists I talked to, both professional and ordinary people, generally welcomed the establishment of cultural institutes in the CHT as what they call “a move in the right direction to enhance the development of indigenous people’s language and culture” (Mamano Marma, a local NGO worker). But, many of them

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69 It is important to note here that it is same time when the quota policy was also introduced.
70 In Bangladesh, VIPs (very important personalities) are the people who are either government Ministers, MPs and high-level civil and military officials.
were not happy to have their cultural institute called *upazati* or ‘tribal’ institute. District Council Chairman Kay Shala Marma even jokingly told me “if we are called *upazati* then the people who came to live here from the plain land should be called *apozati*” (The literal meaning of *apozati* in Bengali is ‘corrupt nation’). The term *upazati* is not only derogatory to the local activists’, TCI officials also express their dissatisfaction about using this. They told me that they are unable to do anything with the change of naming, as it is entirely up to the government decision. These are a few examples of how they react to the *upazati* notion in the CHT.

Why bother about the term? It is important here to consider the meaning and applications of the word. In Bangladesh, the notion ‘tribe’ is very problematic not only for the lack of a good definition, but perhaps more importantly because of its negative connotations. Ellen Bal writes, “to most people in Bangladesh, it refers to totally different people who are more or less isolated from mainstream society. Moreover, they are considered more primitive, less developed, childlike, naive, and close to the nature” (1999: 4). This perspective suggests how the ‘tribal’ or *upazati* are generally perceived in Bangladesh. I argue that terms and their connotations not only refer to ways of thinking but also to ways of acting, such as naming of the TCI. This can be seen as the statist view of ‘tribal' culture. For the TCI officials and other local activists the word is too ‘racist’, disparaging and paternalistic. Today their dissatisfaction and anger are expressed in an alternative trend of meaning construction.

The alternative trend, which is supported by local activists and TCI, is inclined to see cultural and linguistic diversity of CHT as historically specific and unique displaying a common ‘indigenous culture’, a discourse that resists the dominant Bengali culture. They generally refer themselves collectively as *Pahari*, or *Adivashi* (indigenous peoples) or *Jhumma* (swidden cultivators) as terms of self-reference, rather than ‘tribal’ and *upazati*. They eschew terms which suggest primitive or uncivilized.

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71 See the discussion of *upazati* in Chapter Seven.
This new trend advocates cultural revivalism through the invention of alphabets, celebrating common festivals, and the common struggle for life and livelihood of the Pahari people in the CHT land. This translates CHT culture as ‘indigenous Pahari culture’, a sort of way of life that challenges the dominant official discourse in political terms. So, on the one side, there is an idea that ‘tribal’ culture is something different from politics, it only carries aesthetic value. On the other hand it is directly linked to politics. It is thus interesting to see how the TCI as a cultural institution engages in local and official discourse representing the so-called ‘tribal’ culture. I examine Banderban TCI activities, particularly its language and cultural programs as a case in point.

As far as TCI language and cultural projects are concerned they pursue the local perspective of indigenous Pahari culture negotiating official discourse in subtle way. First, from the TCI point of view, it is the question of the survival of the institution. After all, as they see it, it is the institution of the local people, and a centre of creating awareness about their culture and identity, and a platform of building up wider opinion about the common problems in the CHT. But as a state funded organisation they are also obliged to follow the government guidelines and regulations with regard to policy framework.

So, whilst on paper, TCI policy does to some extent accommodate the official projection of ‘tribal culture as aesthetic expression, this is manifested through some of its activities and it is mostly designed to secure resource flow. For example, the objectification of ‘tribal’ culture was expressed in one of its’ project proposals prepared for the Cultural Ministry for the construction of eleven model ethnic houses. I was partly involved in helping drawing up the project proposal with them. The Ministry eventually accepted the project; construction of the model houses was finished by December 2000 and they are now on display.

I argue that representation of ‘tribal’ people by TCI has partly been shaped by the dominant criteria for an acceptable project proposal as well as by tourism. In practice, however, TCI presentation of this project takes different perspectives to show local diversity as a distinctive feature of life in the CHT. From both TCI and official points of view, the house construction project can be defined as hegemonic
forms in order to achieve more control over the interpretation of 'tribal' culture. It is in that sense that a tension explicitly and implicitly exists between meaning and action between culture and politics.

There is a constant movement between the modalities of cultural representation. At the individual and group level, linguistic and cultural objectification aims at gaining representation within the context of multi-ethnicity. But, at the broader macro level, collective representation such as in the institutional discourse of TCI, cultural and linguistic diversity embodies a lived way of life: the shared experiences of being a disadvantaged and marginalised people of CHT. At the same time elements from regional, national, transnational organisations and mass media are fed into each others’ discourses in a common struggle to gain control over CHT resources. The TCI approach to the cultural representation of CHT is to foreground indigenous Pahari subjectivity in Bangladesh.

**TCI Policy and Activities of Indigenous Culture**

The way that the language, culture and history of different ethnic groups are defined, interpreted, and are to some extent being revived by the TCI is instrumental in the construction of a common 'indigenous culture'. The representation of 'indigenous culture' by TCI has largely been symbolised and orchestrated in the discourse of 'unity within diversity'. In the following discussion, the celebration of Mother Language Day, International Indigenous Day, the *Baishabi* festival, and Mother Tongue Language courses all can be seen as part of this broader cultural project being played out in a quest for indigenous representation.

At the institutional level, the linguistic plurality of different ethnic groups is being interpreted not as a fragmented entity but rather seen as source of larger unity as 'indigenous' culture in the CHT. The policy of the development of a variety of native scripts suggests that these are unique and indigenous to CHT and different from the Bengali. The TCI discourse of 'indigenous' culture is not simply articulated in cultural terms, it also includes other aspects of hill life and livelihood in the CHT. The political and other activists take this notion further in relation to the broader level of collective mobilisation and identity construction.
With regard to TCI policy and programmes, it is important to note here that in the last decade especially during the autonomy movement, the TCI had undergone a more radical organisation with its various social and political agenda (see for example, publications like *jhum prada*). During this time some of the TCI research officers also attended workshops on the indigenous rights movement organised by international and local NGOs. Picking up information on other indigenous movements in South Asia and others part of the world, they learnt how to organise their own workshops and projects on CHT issues.

Most of the TCI activities now focus on community projects related to language and culture. Besides routine celebration of common festivals, such as *Baishabi*, and publications of the local journal *jhum parda*, they are organising some small meetings and discussions related to CHT issues: from language and history to customary land rights etc. These ventures are supported by local ethnic political activists, local NGOs, such as Hondong, Green hill, Taomour and the youth generation. This provides an opportunity for TCI to form a group consisting of different ethnic communities echoing a singular voice of common CHT culture.

One of the features that struck me in spending time with the TCI was the hard work involved in making a broader ‘indigenous, identity. This work involved organising language courses and cultural events and mobilising local leaders and NGO circuit people. The research and cultural officers of TCI, for example, spent a lot of time visiting academics, cultural activists, and knocking on doors of the various agencies, such as the socio-cultural organisations of different ethnic groups, and local NGOs in Banderban to make their programs successful.

All these activities are dedicated to form a unity of experience out of different ethnic and cultural diversity in which symbolic and material aspects are impossible to separate. All of them are cultural by definition; all of them are necessarily political in the sense that they are part of a way of life lived in the shadow of discrimination, exploitation and marginalisation. The TCI activities thus are based on unity.

72 Some of these local NGOs, such as *Hondong, Toyomor*, are using local indigenous names.
experiences embody a collective whole to produce indigenous representations in relation to the State. In the following paragraphs I cite two examples of this sort of cultural unity experience of indigenous representation undertaken by the TCI in which I participated. Apart from local traditional festivals, TCI celebrates two international events with great festivity, the Mother Language Day and the World Indigenous Day.

**The Mother Language Day**

In Bangladesh, the newly named Mother Language Day by UNESCO is historically known as the *Ekoshe*. The *Ekoshe* is the language movement of 21st February in 1952 led by Bengali students for the recognition of Bengali as the state language of Pakistan. Six students were killed in the protest movement against the declaration of Urdu as the official state language of Pakistan. Since 1952 the *Ekoshe* has been a secular ritual and considered the most important national day in Bangladesh as well as Bengali speaking people across the world. *Ekoshe* is also thought as the root of Bengali nationalism and the birth of the nation-state of Bangladesh.

In 1999, UNESCO symbolically declared the *Ekoshe* as the day of "World Mother Language day" in order to recognise the importance of the mother tongue as well as to respect the diversity of languages throughout the world. The UNESCO declaration has certainly brought a new meaning and dimension to the discourse of indigenous language programs in the CHT. Since 1999, TCI has been celebrating the World Mother Language Day as part of its yearly activities. The TCI celebration of old *Ekoshe* with renewed emphasis on Mother Language Day has potential political and cultural implications in the construction of 'indigenous' identity through language and culture.

For TCI, Mother Language Day is the global recognition of local rights to indigenous language and culture. It is not only the symbolic recognition of all mother tongues in the world by an international body like UNESCO but also the right to learn and pursue the knowledge through their language. TCI interpretation of

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73 For the language movement, see Anisuzzaman (2000).
74 Even in the West Bengal *Ekoshe* is celebrated symbolically as the day of struggle to establish Bengali language.
Mother Language Day thus synchronises with the global recognition into a local context giving new meaning to indigenous language activities in the CHT. TCI celebration of Mother Language Day is particularly focused on addressing indigenous education and languages of Pahari. As part of the Mother Language Day celebration, TCI organises a panel discussion, a poster exhibition of different alphabets, and publishes a special leaflet covering language issues in the CHT. Two of the discussion meetings I attended in 1999 and 2000, had the title: “Mother Language Day: the Importance of Indigenous Languages in the CHT” (my translation from Bengali titles).

In both the occasions, TCI draws the speakers from almost every ethnic community representing elderly leaders, politicians, students, cultural personalities, and NGO people. TCI Mother Language Day discussion can be seen as the creation of an alternative ‘indigenous’ discourse with an active engagement and participation of plural ethnic representation on the common issues such as language development.

Some of the speakers had never had this kind of experience before but others are already aware and engaged in different forms of hill politics. I know some of them are representatives of socio-cultural organisations, mentioned earlier. All the speakers talked about their past and present in the CHT: some talked about their jhum life and others talked about their common festivals like Baishabi and Rajpunah arguing a common ‘indigenous’ culture. However, the main discussion point was how their language is suffering from the dominant Bengali culture.

Both TCI officials and local speakers voiced the common reasons for the educational backwardness in the CHT. There are mainly three factors which, as they see, are problematic to the development and progress of the Pahari people. These are curriculum and contents of the education, medium of instruction and staffing in the school. A speaker commented on the present curriculum that it has no relation with their life and community environment in the CHT and thus does hardly enthuse Pahari children. He goes further saying, “most Bengali boys and girls have never seen a hill or a mountain whereas for a Pahari boy and girl jhum is a life”. They argue that CHT life is not reflected in the curriculum and thus has social and psychological impacts on the development of the Pahari children in the CHT.
Others argued that notwithstanding the present curriculum being difficult to internalise by the Pahari, if the medium of instruction was their mother tongue the situation could most probably be improved. They relate the poor enrolments, poor attendance and massive drop out rates in the CHT,\(^7\) to the consequences of the medium of instruction and poverty. The young learners do not comprehend the texts and instructions in the classroom mostly given by Bengali teachers. Therefore, they suggest that the Bengali medium of instruction in the CHT rather blocks their movement to later stages. Among the speakers, there is a general consensus that they all share a similar experience of disadvantaged positions in government offices, educational institutes and in court settings where ordinary Pahari rely on Bengali interpreters. I will describe this situation in detail relating to khas land lease in Chapter Six.

In Bangladesh, it is evidently common that the way public institutions function through Bengali linguistic terms evoke an antagonistic feeling of cultural difference among ethnic minorities in the CHT. In 1999, in a parliamentary debate when an MP from the CHT asked the Education Minister whether “there is any government programme for the introduction of mother tongues as medium of instruction in the CHT”. The Education Minister replied “the CHT is an integral part of the country and its connection with other parts of the country must necessarily be intimate and it is possible only through Bengali language” (The Daily Star, 25th August 1999). Thus, from the statist perspective, the medium of instruction in indigenous language is a question of political sovereignty of the country.

The state’s attitudes are obviously bound to create a sense of being in a disadvantaged position and a feeling of isolation among the ethnic groups. In this process, indigenous marginal identity is articulated as opposed to broader Bengali. As is revealed in the Mother Language discussions and TCI publications, the main message is the recognition of CHT languages as ‘indigenous, language, and the introduction of them as a medium of instruction in the school level. This mobilisation has been influenced by the UNESCO declaration of Ekoshe as the

\(^7\) It is fact that Banderban has the highest dropout and lowest literacy rates in the country (BBS2001).
Mother Language Day. In this context, TCI sponsored indigenous language programs can be seen as a strategy to put pressure on state policy towards accepting linguistic diversity according to the UNESCO principle of mother language education.

The TCI celebration of Mother Language Day thus serves twin purposes. Firstly to make a sense of commonality across the ethnic community on the basis of an idea that every language in the CHT needs to be developed as part of a 'indigenous' language regime. Secondly, these diverse linguistic and cultural elements can also be turned into a broader social movement on the basis of 'indigenous' culture.

From this ‘indigenous’ construction what TCI is trying to argue is that CHT peoples are the people who have their own distinctive languages, history and culture, and therefore they have the right to their homeland. They are different from Bengali; they are other Bangladeshi. In other words, you can speak Marma, Bawm or Tanchanga and you can be Christian and Buddhist but you are still Pahari. Thus, for TCI development of indigenous culture is also a process of collective mobilisation.

Indigenous People’s Day

Since the UN declaration of the “World Indigenous People’s Day”, there has been a renewed growing sense of belonging among different ethnic minorities in Bangladesh. The TCI also celebrate this World Indigenous Day with great festivity every year on the 9th of August. For the celebration of World Indigenous Day in 2000, TCI organised a discussion meeting like the Mother Language Day. TCI invited local speakers comprising of teachers, public representatives, political activists, NGO personalities, and students, who are mainly pro-active in hill politics. I was also a participant in the meeting.

In the discussion, all the speakers echoed the CHT as a place of ‘indigenous’ peoples with unique culture diversity in relation to the dominant Bengali. The TCI director in his opening speech even mentioned “we all belong to different religions, speak different languages but we all share the same culture of CHT; we share the same situation in the CHT as indigenous people. If someone asks me I say I am Marma
and I am Pahari”. A Bawm even speaker puts this: *Amra Akk Baganer Dosh Fol* (we are ten flowers in one garden - my translation). These views of ‘commonality and diversity’ can obviously be seen in the context of ‘unity within diversity’ in the CHT.

Without going into details of the Indigenous Day programs and activities, I argue that the way in which TCI structure their discourse and represent ‘indigenous culture’ is basically the construction of broader community with distinct history, language and culture, and a homeland of *Pahari* in the CHT. From one point of view, celebration of Mother Language Day and Indigenous People’s Day are purely symbolic. Yet, from another point of view, they provide a common platform for *Pahari* to actively engage and work together on one project ‘multi-ethnicity as unity in the CHT’. This affects inter-ethnic relationships in different ways. One of these effects is that ethnic groups locate themselves in relation to each other and to the CHT as whole. They share similar values and inhabit common territory. This is in fact central to common indigenous identity creating a sense of shared engagement.

In this construction they also focus on general social problems such as poverty, marginalisation, and land dispossession that affected their lives as indigenous *Pahari* as a whole in the CHT. ‘Indigenous culture, in this context, is not simply an aesthetic expression and style, as perceived by the government, but also an experience of discrimination. For TCI a common indigenous culture is paramount in the CHT. It is evidently clear from many of its activities, such as promotion and campaign for indigenous languages and their introduction in the CHT.

The TCI celebration of Mother Language Day and Indigenous People’s Day also provides the link with many other organisations working on similar agendas. Parallel to the TCI, in recent times there are a number of organisations that are already in this arena of ‘indigenous’ politics who assert a common voice through collectivisation of the CHT issues. For example, the forum for the CHT students studying in different colleges and universities is named after as *Pahari Chatra Parishod* (Hill Student Union). Membership to this organisation is open to all hill students of different ethnic groups in the CHT, except the Bengali (see more discussion on this issue in Chapter seven). Within and outside CHT, they are actively engaged in organising
rallies, seminars on CHT issues such as discriminatory state policy, military oppression and so on. Another organisation called Adivashi Vomi Odhikar Shongrokkon Committee (Indigenous Land Rights Committee) has also been formed with multi-ethnic representation in order to mobilise Pahari against government land lease and jhum indigenous land rights in the CHT.

Therefore, I argue that the ethnicisation of CHT politics in indigenous terms gives a new dimension to the 'state -tribal' relationship in Bangladesh. The notion ‘tribal’ is reified into a new meaning of Pahari with renewed emphasis on regionality and territoriality based on cultural and ecological distinctiveness of CHT. In this context, the term ‘indigenous’ people displays the notion of united hill people as Pahari - the original inhabitants and guardian of CHT lands. This can also be seen as a representation of ‘indigenous culture’ as a particular cultural attachment to the CHT. I take here another example of how TCI organise a common cultural festival in order to form a collective ‘indigenous culture’.

*Baishabi as Collective Festival*

The term *Baishabi* is a newly constructed term by TCI for the New Year festival in the CHT. *Baishabi* is a abbreviated term (in short) from the names of different ethnic groups’ New Year festivals: ‘BA’ from Baisu of Tripura, ‘SA’ from Sangrai of Marma and ‘BI’ from Bijhu of Chakma. The TCI redefinition of the New Year festival as *Baishabi* in a new manner has had a monumental impact in the construction of the collective festival in the CHT.

Traditionally, the New Year celebration is considered one of the main festivals, both in a cultural and religious sense, among all ethnic communities in the CHT. However, every community has their own way of New Year celebration involving religious, rituals and cultural festivities. In some communities, the celebration lasts for one or two days while in others it continues for a few days. For example, the Marma people call it as *Sangrai pwe* and regard this as the most important annual event of Marma social life. They believe that prayers to Buddha on this occasion will be blessed with good fortune throughout the year. A major part of Marma celebration involves religious rituals. The *Sangrai* lasts for three days. The first day
of the celebration is termed as *Sangari akaneh*. The highlights of *Sangari akaneh* are cleaning the *kayang* and yearly ritual bath of Buddha idols in the nearby river with large procession of *viccus* (monks) and ordinary Marma.

Men and women are expected to participate in this ritual as obligatory community work. They decorate *kayang* and offer donations to the monks. On this day coloured pieces of clothes are also offered to wrap up Buddha idols as part of *Sangrai* celebration. The second day is termed as *Sangrai alenoh*. On the day there are special prayers held. They take oaths of *panchachil* and light the candles in the *kayang*. Men and women wear traditional Marma costumes\(^\text{76}\) and attend the *kayang* service. Every Marma household prepares special food called *suaing* and this is also distributed to *viccu* in the *kayang*. Besides religious and ritual activities, there are also cultural parts of this celebration among the Marma. The most communal and cultural part of this event is held on the last day of the *Sangrai*. It is called *Relengpo* (water festival) and is mainly participated by youths. One of the *Relengpo* that I observed in Banderban seemed to me like a game. In an open field a big *pandal* (stage) is made and two large wooden boats full of water are placed on it. A group of boys and girls stand face-to-face holding each of the boats. Boys and girls then start throwing water at each other until the water is finished. The boats are again filled with water and another group of boys and girls play in the same way.

![Figure 5 TCI Water Festival 2000 (Banderban)](image)

\(^{76}\) Marma ritual dresses are generally beautiful in terms of colour and design. Men wear *longy* made of cotton or silk. The *longy* reaches from the waist to below the knees. Marma men also wear close-fitting coats called *parakha engyi* over the shirt, buttoned at the throat. Marma women wear silk *thami* below the waist with a blouse called an *engyi* at the top.
Among the Marma, traditionally the water festival is significant event for the youths because the event is specifically organised in order to choose the prospective partner within the community. Although nowadays it is very rare to happen in this way but symbolically it carries a social meaning to the Marma as part of Sangrai festival. Marma believe that Relengpo wash away their agonies, sorrows, misfortunes, and unhappiness of the previous year and brings hope of starting a fresh life in the New Year.

There are also similar kinds of rituals attached to the Tanchanga, Tripura and Chakma. However, the Bawm as a Christian community now celebrate 1st January as their New Year festival but participate in Baishsbi with other communities in the CHT. In recent years, the TCI has been celebrating this New Year festival as collective Baishabi. The TCI role of making this festival a collective festival is significant. The TCI activities of Baishabi celebration involve a Baishabi cultural show participated by different ethnic groups, writing Baishabi songs, and Baishabi publications. These are all making this occasion to be a common festival of Pahari in the CHT. TCI activities can be seen as another way of constructing collective identity through collective festival.

Here, for example, I discuss a cultural evening of Baishabi 2000 organised by the TCI. With participation of many cultural and musical artists from different ethnic communities, it was a gathering of Pahari. The event drew mostly a local crowd of youths. It was an important statement of identity. The Marma puangera, Bawm bamboo dances and Tanchanga gyngoli all blended through evocation and enactment in the realm of the TCI construction of indigenous culture. It was in fact a creation of a public place for Pahari identity.

Like the Mother Language Day and Indigenous Day meetings, the Baishabi event brought ethnic groups together-located them in relation to each other in the CHT and engaged them in a common festival through the very actively blending embodied mode of music and dancing. Many of these dances and songs are particularly related to hill life and jhum cultivation. I argue that the Baishabi cultural evening is an expressive statement of collective form. The split between culture and politics does not work when the event is seen as part of a lived ‘indigenous culture’. The new
emphasis on the traditional New Year celebration as *Baishabi* by the TCI reinforced a collective ‘indigenous culture’.

As collective festival, it is attractive and revealing to the *Pahari* people. As Aung Chaloo Marma, a local resident of Banderban, puts it: “one can see with all linguistic diversity coming together embodied in one people singing, dancing and expressing their shared joy and feeling”. For the TCI, music and dances of Marma, Tanchanga and Bawm in *Baishabi* cultural event is related to the world of CHT. Therefore, representational meaning of these music and dances are inseparable and linked to the common indigenous culture of CHT embodied in people’s life and experiences. In this discourse, it is not ethnic communities singing different songs in different languages, wearing different traditional dresses with specific ethnic styles, it is rather a *Pahari* person telling ‘others’ to respect them as they share a common indigenous culture.

So as TCI *Baishabi* edition of *jhum parada* (in Bengali), published in 2000 which covered the topics: “Rights of the *Pahari* in CHT”, “Our History and Traditions”, “*Pahari* Shaiskrit”. The outline of the publication articulates everything is connected with each other with a continuous historical tread of the CHT suggest a telescopic version of *Pahari* history. *Pahari* identity is being built here on a perceived continuity of shared history living in the CHT. But, this also can be seen as *Pahari* cultural resistance, as land rights and mother language issue. It is important to note here that anything and everything is not relevant to this construction of identity but only something which appeals to the commonality as relevant to their local and collective situations and experiences, and their practical engagement with the Bengali and Bangladesh State. In the case of TCI, the relationship between indigenous culture and *Pahari* identity in CHT is both the representation and the lived experiences. The TCI is clearly constructing a cultural identity as lived reality, a way of being in and experiencing the CHT in a disadvantaged way.

Promoting the idea of common ‘indigenous’ culture, TCI policies and activities, in fact, speak for a broader level of collective mobilisation, similar to the political mobilisation of *Pahari* which challenges the dominant Bengali culture. Economic
deprivation, marginalisation and land dispossession are important issues in this broader level of mobilisation but the issues of cultural identity have been brought to the political agenda in a new way. The TCI articulation of 'indigenous culture' does not simply speak the linguistic aspects of ethnic groups, it also includes other aspects of the people's life and livelihood in the CHT. Cultural and ecological distinctiveness from mainstream Bengali becomes the essence of *indigenousness* or *Pahariness*. Expressions of this broader collective identity process can also be seen in other areas such as land, election and local politics. I will discuss these in the succeeding chapters.

**Concluding Remarks: A Garden with Many Flowers**

In the beginning sections of this chapter, I discussed the process of linguistic identity construction of Marma, Tanchanga, Bawm on the basis of written language. The logic behind this is very straightforward. Language is the base of culture and the culture is the base of peoplehood. Or to put it the other way around, without a language of one's own there is no culture, and hence there can be no people/nation. Developing modern languages is therefore the highest priority for the promoters of new "script movement". It appears that with the work of TCI and other cultural organisations, a new type of movement is taking shape among the ethnic communities in the CHT.

The people of CHT have never been so aware of their collective identity as they are today. Today they call themselves *Pahari*. They are proud of being *Pahari* rather than 'tribal' or *upazati*. They have undergone many changes in recent years and now realise that differences within are part and parcel of their common reality. That reality brings them into another stage of broader co-operation as the original inhabitants share a historical past in the CHT. This signifies and justifies the idea that the notion of diversity and unity can go hand in hand. As a Bawm speaker in the Indigenous Day discussion puts it “isn’t a garden is much more beautiful when you grow more than one types of flower?”

I argue that ethno-linguistic groups such as Marma, Bawm Tanchanga have several options open to them: they may join with other ethnic groups to define themselves as
Pahari or indigenous people, in broader collective terms, in order to mobilise jointly and to seek stronger alliances against the Bengali and the state. Or, they may also identify themselves in order to organise collective mobilisation based on the notion of jhum cultivation as disadvantaged groups in the CHT. I will discuss this in the next chapter.
Chapter Five
*Jhum* as Shared Identity

Introduction

Land tenure and land uses are issues of central importance to any understanding of CHT. In recent times, all the issues related to conflict between the local inhabitants of the CHT and the state revolved around the control of land and use of land. The competing claims of rights and ownership over CHT land has largely been expressed in ‘shared identity and autonomy’ of the hill people vis-à-vis the ‘sovereignty and legality’ of the state. *Jhum*, the traditional subsistence activities in the CHT, has become the main focus of this conflict (see Chapter One). An understanding of *jhum* land holding and land use is, therefore, the key to understanding wider relationships between the people of CHT and the state in the contemporary debate on indigenous land rights and collective identity.77

In analysing the competing claims of rights and ownership over CHT land and resource this chapter explores local understandings and perceptions of ‘traditional’ land use, particularly the *jhum*, within the framework of traditional-jural versus politico-legal relations. Engaging with the debate on the anthropology of “common property”, “legal pluralism”, and “state regime” (Guha & Martinez Alier 1997; Burnham 2000; Von Benda-Beckmann 1993; Sharpe 1998; Abramson and Theodossopoulos 2000), it mainly addresses the question of ‘indigenous shared identity’ in terms of land rights and land use practice among the hill people in CHT.

In the anthropological literature the notion of “shared identity” is generally conceptualised in terms of common language, religion, history and kinship (Hollup 2000; Levine 1997). However, recently anthropologists have increasingly written about the concept “shared identity” in terms of indigenous land rights and land use (Hodgson 2002; Escobar and Alverez 1998; Baviskar 1997, 2003; Mrinal Miri 1993). Among the diverse forest dwelling peoples in the regions of South Asia,

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Africa and Latin America, the notion "shared identity" has been an expression of ethnic mobilisation in their struggle against the state.78

Among the hill people in the CHT, contemporary political processes demonstrate that claims of shared identity and claims to traditional land rights are intertwined. I argue that the assertion of jhum as a shared collective identity is about the control and use of CHT land, which in turn is the basis for territoriality at a broader level of Pahari construction.79 Construction of Pahari identity through the collective ethnic marker jhum has a special meaning, significance and social value. The very notion of jhum provides a perspective that indigenous land rights and collective ownership is actually an identification of Pahari. In other words, rights to CHT land are all encompassing. That is, they are expressed in a value of shared experience with ethnic groups standing as 'co-owners'.

One fundamental issue that arises here is that in the CHT, the question of jhum land rights as historical continuity is central to understanding of present Pahari shared identity. Jhum land use is a unique social relationship among the peoples of CHT. For them, jhum is an expression of cultural unity and autonomy: what Myers call a "shared relatedness" (Myers 1989:15). In this context, jhum land rights enter into a system of indigenous collective rights negotiating their ethnic relationship into a shared possession of CHT land.

In recent years, among academics and activists, concepts of territory, traditional practice of jhum, forest resources, the meaning of development and the question of identity are the most concurrent issues of political development in the CHT (Mohsin 1997, 2000; Roy 1997, 1998, 2000; Schendel 1992, 1996, 2000, 2001; Ahamed 2002, 2001, 2000, 1998; Tripura 1993, 2000; Gain 1998, 2000; Dewan 1990, 1991). The choice of these “cultural differences”, to use Burnham’s term (1997), has been articulated as issues of Pahari politics in relation to the dominant Bengali group and the Bangladesh state, and is influenced by various social, historical and political factors, as discussed in Chapter One.

78 See the discussion of social movement in Chapter One.
79 The literal meaning of Pahari may vary. The connotation of Pahari reads here as the collectivities of diverse indigenous inhabitants of CHT. The notion Pahari identity is discussed elaborately in the form of political process in Chapter Seven.
In this construction, the relationship between territory and culture is of paramount importance for the Pahari in the CHT. The articulation of territory as place for the Pahari and the right to continuation of CHT culture has been orchestrated in many organisational activities such as Vomi Odikhar Committee (Indigenous Land Rights) and Pahari Okka Parishod (Hill people’s United Forum). In this organisational discourse, the loss of territory is linked to loss of identity. The notion of territoriality here represents a political dimension but it is also an economic concept to the extent that it is linked to the forest resources of CHT. Activists, thus, assert identity to be based on a set of cultural practices, believed to be characteristics of Pahari culture: practice of jhum, local knowledge of forest and land use.

Like many other ‘tribal’ or peasant movements in South Asia (Guha 1989), the notion of territoriality is, therefore, a new dimension for the Pahari, particularly in their political struggle over CHT land. I argue that the right to a territory - as an ecological, productive and cultural space - is now a political demand in CHT. This demand is fostered by collective mobilisation, what Escobar (1996) terms “potential reterritorialisation”. In this context, the notion territory is also a question of identity in the form of ‘indigenous land rights’, particularly jhum rights in the CHT. It is, thus, necessary to understand the relationship between the macro level problems of the Hill Tracts and the local level management of competing claims to land resources. The jhum farming systems in CHT need to be understood in the context of changes which articulate competing claims of local indigenous land rights and state relations.

In this chapter, I examine the dynamics of land use and land tenure at the micro level, in particular how hill people characterise their jhum land tenure and use. To understand the complexity of jhum land tenure, knowledge of the land use patterns is also important. There have always been functional links between land tenure and land use. It has been suggested that a particular land-use pattern requires particular

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80 Organisational activities are discussed as ethnographic examples in the next chapters.
81 There are some interesting studies on similar issues, see for indigenous peoples and land struggles in Malaysia (Winzeler 1997), for tribal land struggle in India (Purer-Haimendorf 1982).
tenurial rights (Netting 1993); therefore land use, by and large, determines land tenure.

I suggest that there is a complex interplay between jhum tenurial rights, shared values and village organisation. The use of traditional jhum land in CHT historically represents a unique character of 'communal value' bounding the entire village community socially, culturally and economically into a single network of relationships which can be interpreted as a form of shared identity. In understanding the dynamics of jhum land use and shared identity, in this chapter, I focus on the local conceptions of land use, tenure and rights, and how local people value the jhum lands in terms of utility and survival. I would like to begin the discussion by defining the jhum from a local perspective, and explore the way in which shared social relationships is expressed in jhum organisation.

Defining Jhum

As mentioned in the main introduction, the economy of CHT is mainly land based. Traditionally its inhabitants were predominantly engaged in subsistence agriculture locally known as jhum, a characteristic form of agriculture in the CHT, which is referred to as “swidden”, “slash and burn” or “shifting cultivation” in the literature (Peters & Neuenschwander 1988). In the CHT, the term jhum has popularly been used by all ethnic communities as the general name for swidden agriculture. Yet each ethnic group in CHT has its own corresponding terms in their language for this subsistence agriculture: ya among the Marma, lao among the Bawm and jhum among the Tanchanga and Chakma. In this thesis, I use the emic term jhum for subsistence swidden agriculture as a way of life and livelihood of diverse ethnic peoples in the CHT, what Spencer calls “collective agriculture” (1990: 286).

Jhum is a system of agriculture whereby the jhumia (as community) cultivate a number of fields in rotation. In CHT jhum is carried out predominantly on the hill

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82 The term 'village community' here primarily refers to members of a village, who shares village common lands as the domain of subsistence activities. In this sense, the term has also a territorial significance in relation to access to village land.

83 The term jhumia here I mean only to refer to exclusively jhum cultivators in the CHT. However, there is another term Jhumma has been used mainly by activists in the context of identity politics (see the discussion of this term in Chapter Seven).
slopes. According to this method, *jhum* cultivators select a slope of hill land preferably covered with bamboo in the month of January and February. The *jhumia* then cut all the vegetation and trees (only the lower branches of large trees). The *jhum* plot is left for the cut vegetation to dry up in the sun. After a few weeks, depending on the weather, *jhumia* decide to set fire to the thoroughly dried vegetation before the first monsoon which normally begins in April-May. The burning reduces the cut shrubs to ashes. *Jhum* cultivators then spread the ash as fertiliser on the *jhum* plot keeping humus on the land. No manure or pesticides are used apart from ash.

The *jhumia* then wait for the rains. With the onset of the first rains sowing begins on the softened *jhum* lands. The mixed seeds of rice and various species of fruit and vegetables, melon, millet, pumpkin, yam, maize, oil seeds, ginger, sesame, and cotton, are ‘dibbled’ into the ground at fairly even intervals. The time of the harvest varies from crop to crop. The different crops ripen at different times: the maize ripens at the middle of July; melons, vegetables and rice are harvested in September and October, and cotton and sesame in November and December. Bananas, if planted, are left for harvesting in the second year.

The ways in which processes of *jhum* cultivation are organised also exhibit a ‘shared community’ relationship. The selection of land for *jhum* cultivation is reached communally by the households in the village. All processes of clearing and burning are done communally. A whole household’s labour and sometimes an entire village are engaged in the cultivation process. Field preparation is normally done by household labour but occasionally with the help of a “mutual aid group”, a group of five or six households working together during planting, who are not necessarily related by kinship. However, weeding under *jhum*, which is the most tedious task, is not done through the mutual aid group. It is normally done by individual

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84 This is done in order to enable fields to regain their fertility during a fallow period that varies from about ten to fifteen years, depending on the land-man-ratio. The ideal fallow period is considered minimum ten years or longer (Ruthenburg 1971). In the CHT, however, the fallow period has recently been reduced to as short as three to five years due to various factors reported in many studies (Huq 2000:14; Roy 1997; Mey 1978b).

85 In the CHT, *jhum* cultivators dibble their lands but never hoe it so that the soil in sloping tropical lands does not run off during heavy monsoon downpours.
households. The young plants have to be weeded constantly as they come to maturity, and again have to be guarded against the depredations of wild pigs, parrots, deer, monkeys, parrots and rats. It is usually men who cut the *jhum* for the whole village. The women and children are responsible for weeding, tending and harvesting along with men.

Figure 6 A Marma woman weeding in the *jhum* field in Roangchari

In fact, such agricultural activities are not exclusively unique to CHT, it is one of the farming systems practised in many parts of the world, particularly among the small-scale societies of South and Southeast Asian regions. However, various researchers’ uncritical use of various terms and concepts relating to this agricultural practice, especially the notion shifting cultivation, apparently create some ambiguity and misconceptions, at least in the Bangladeshi context. Leading writers on the subject point out that shifting cultivation is a widespread form of land use in the hilly region of so-called tribal belt.\(^{86}\) I think this kind of proposition has profound political and cultural implications on the lives of the peoples concerned.

One of the direct implications of uncritical adoption of the terms, without looking at specific local reality, is linking it to the statist notion that the method is an ‘evil cultural practice’, as backward and nomadic. In many cases, these terms and notions

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are used as justification for the state political regime bringing in a “desired legal charm” (Von Benda-Beckman 1993:116), to deny the traditional rights of the locals. Therefore, terminological sensitivity is crucial particularly where subsistence agricultural practice is linked to cultural identity and indigenous land rights vis-à-vis the state.

For example, as far as Bangladesh state policy is concerned, *jhum* agricultural practice is seen as an unscientific method and mobile livelihood. The Bangladesh state authorities describe ‘tribals’ of CHT as the nomadic people who are constantly on the move to find new lands to burn for cultivation.87 The basis for this myth can be ascribed in some measure to *jhum* cultivation, as *jhumia* households rotate the *jhum* according to the methods of land use and soil conservation (I discuss this point later in this chapter). In statist interpretation, the concept ‘nomadism’ is directly linked to undermine the collective land rights of the *jhumia* in the CHT by adopting the ‘shifting’ perspective of *jhum*.

The British, while making the move from *jhum* to plough, had widely used the notions of ‘primitivism’ and ‘backwardness’ of the hill people in South Asia who needed to be ‘settled’ (Guha 1989; Guha and Gadgil 1992, 1995; Karlson 1997; Mohsin 1997). This was in fact an imposition of a colonial notion of “progress” and agricultural “development” upon the *jhumia*. The colonial authority asserted that *jhum* is a primitive method of agriculture because it entails long fallow periods which were considered to be wasteful of resources. An interesting discussion by Guha illustrates how the issues of *jhum* were dealt in the colonial state with the process of forest reservation. Quoting Baden-Powell, one of the chief architects of the British forest laws in India, he shows that “shifting cultivators could claim no property rights or legal rights to the forest” (Guha and Gadgil 1995: 56).

In post-colonial state regimes, particularly in present day Bangladesh, the state reproduces the same notions associated with *jhum* cultivation and nomadism in order to deny the customary land rights of tribal people by implicating their lack of land titles or permanent settlement. In primary school text books in Bangladesh, the

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87 See Bangladesh Government land use policy and forest plan in relation to development
culture of upazati (tribal) has been depicted as zazabor ziban (nomad people), who are dependent on jhum cultivation. In Bengali, the notion zazabor means lack of permanent settlement - a shifting mobile life. It implies that since they are not permanent settlers, they have no right to claim ownership of the land.

The existing CHT literature also suggests a persistent ambiguity in relation to village organisation. Historians have often pointed out that village organisation in the CHT is neither stable nor permanent; rather it is only in existence for a span of fifteen to twenty years (Sirajuddin 1971; Khan 1999). Their argument is put forward on the ground that, as tribal people engaged in jhum cultivation for which one constantly requires new lands to open, once an old field is exhausted from excessive cultivation. As a result, the whole village or settlement moves in search of new cultivated lands. This analysis projects the mobile nature of jhumia life which is, in turn, one of the main reason for the fall and rise of village organisation in the CHT.

This is completely a mistaken idea and indeed a misrepresentation of jhum and jhumia in the context of CHT. In fact, this perception of jhumia people has profound political implications in their access to and rights over CHT lands. The present official discourse of land use and land management policy in CHT has largely been influenced by this model.

However, portraying jhumia as nomadic people because of their jhum cultivation is misleading. Jhum cultivation is of course a rotational agriculture method but, contrary to widely held views, homes and settlements are stationary. Although the search for a suitable piece of jhum land might take them to a very considerable distance from the original village, jhumia always maintain a permanent-home base in the natal village. As early as during colonial times, R. H. Hutchinson describes:

>The very great majority of villages are permanent and have occupied their present site for a very large number of years. Take Banderban for instance, this is the largest of the hill villages and its population is entirely jhumia, but it has occupied its present site for more than 80 years and will continue to do so. The same may be said for all the principal villages (1906: 51-54).


88 The socio-political implications of the term upazati is discussed in detail in Chapter Seven.
Exactly eighty-four years later, the German anthropologist Loffler expresses a similar view on the issue of stable village organisation in CHT. He describes, “in general hamlets remain in the place for decades, although inhabitants may well change” (1990:61). As I observed during my fieldwork, on the jhum plot a jhumia household often builds a temporary bamboo hut, locally called moinghor (jhum house) by the Marma. However, the correlation between moinghor and permanent settlement depends on the distance between the field and the village.

Among the Marma settlements in Roangchari, I have seen some part of households (only jhum workforce) move into the moinghor during the cultivation period due to the long distance between jhum field and permanent village. Households with a shorter distance travel each day from their village to the jhum fields. Sometimes two or three households join together in a form of ‘mutual aid group’ in order to help each other on co-operative basis in field activities, which allow them to organise their relatively longer distant jhum fields from the village. Only at the peak time, during sowing and harvesting, do they erect a moinghor and stay for the time being. The moinghor is abandoned together with the jhum after the principal crop rice has been taken and jhumia return to their villages. What is significant here is that invariably the moinghor do not have the plan of permanent houses.

Figure 7 A Marma jhumia family in Roangchari in their moinghor
So, in practice, the question of deserting the village does not arise. Whenever official statements all too easily characterise the hill dwellers of CHT as nomads, they paint a false picture. The interlocked hypothesis of jhum cultivation and nomadic nature of jhumia life simply does not apply, at least in the present context of CHT. This theory should be discarded altogether.

The notion of nomadism does not fit into the dynamics of jhum organisation in the CHT. State authorities adopt this notion in view of characterising jhum with other non-settled traditional economic activities, such as hunting and gathering, which can be attributed to so-called nomadism. This, in fact, has no relevance to jhum cultivation in CHT. In the case of CHT, the state policy simply accepts these notions for their own justification to linking the component of nomadism and non-settled traditional activities to deny the land rights of jhumia. This has become, perhaps, the common way of handling the jhum cultivators.

I argue that the non-settled traditional subsistence activities in no way diminishes the rights of the indigenous peoples to their traditional lands, and all these traditional economic activities are in strict conformity with the indigenous custom and usages. In particular, jhum activities in CHT are always practised with recognised territorial boundaries, such as mouza (an area of several village localities) (Ahamed 2002; Kalindi 2000; Roy 1998, 1997). In all cases where I made enquiries during my fieldwork in Roangchari regarding jhum, land rights appeared to be inalienable with customary territorial boundarirs. For example, if villagers of one mouza permanently move to another mouza under a different headman, they forfeit their land rights in the previous toykhong (jhum area) - the domain of mouza headmen, according to dhango customary system. I will discuss details of customary jhum land rights in later sections.

Mainstream social scientists and government officials often put forward a theory that jhumia move their sites simply because of having exhausted the fertility of the slope of a hill and they go on to destroy another forest (Mustafa 2002; Haque 2002).

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89 I will discuss this aspect of customary rights in the following sections. See also the discussion of customary rights and traditions, and subsistence activities in Fernandes (1993), Mahapatra (1993), Faroogue (1998).
Reading this literature one indeed comes across underlying assumptions that state control is motivated by the need for protecting the forest against uncontrolled destruction by the local jhumia. In view of the state regime, jhum cultivation is regarded as a ‘social evil’ that devastates the forest causing deforestation, soil erosion, and so on. This is clearly a dubious attitude towards the traditional practice of jhum if the local level reality is considered.

There is a common failure among sceptics in realising that the technology of jhum cultivation requires a long fallow period and that fallowing in such circumstances amounts to letting the jungle grow up again on once-cleared land. In many cases, the distinction between jhum lands and the forest commons in the CHT are merely a transitory phase. On the one hand, these forest lands are rotationally cropped for jhum. On the other, these jhum lands themselves in the course of time are left for fallow for several years after each jhum crop, whereby they naturally regenerate themselves into a forest again within a number of years. Thus, in the CHT the same lands are both forest and jhum lands depending upon the use of the land at any given time. It is generally assumed that when land is fallowed in this way it is abandoned, i.e. that land rights are given up. This also suggests that lands of a village common jhum site are simply the lands under cultivation at any one time.

At present, however, the practical reality in CHT is that in many cases, village jhum sites are now being abandoned due to the government’s policy of leasing to private individuals and the government’s department. As in the case of Roangchari, some of the Soanloo para (village) jhum site had to be abandoned due to the establishment of a military firing training centre. Given the present situation, some villages have their jhum sites for a fairly long period of time, maintaining cyclical jhum cultivation within the site whilst others have to find new sites for the cultivation as previous lands are taken away by the government. Therefore, today actual jhum sites of the village are not necessarily fixed but the houses of the village location are fixed. The most common practice for the villagers is to move their jhum to another site of the mouza boundary but still reside in the same village.

\footnote{The issue is more elaborately discussed in the use of toykhong lands in the following section.}
Thus, in the case of CHT, the above analysis suggests that jhumia live in permanent settlements and rotate the use of a fixed number of fields. Of course, there are some regions where the entire village moves to a new locality once the fields in one locality are exhausted. Authors refer to the former process as “rotational agriculture” and the later as “shifting cultivation” (Peters & Neuenschwander 1988). Anthropologists, who have studied this subsistence cultivation from an ethnographic perspective, prefer to use the more neutral term “swidden farming” (Dove 1988; Burnham 2000; Sharpe 1998). I argue that although swidden agricultural practice may exhibit unifying themes spanning cultural, temporal and geographical boundaries, it may differ greatly in terms of land use practice and local level political realities (situation) from place to place and people to people.

In the case of CHT, despite land scarcity and many other constraints, the traditional jhum cultivation is still an integral part of the way of life and is considered as the “cornerstone of indigenous culture” (Kalindi 2000: 7). It is, however, very complicated when someone asks where this agricultural practice is actually carried out, as there are so many competing claims of ownership and rights by different state departments. In recent years, the questions of jhum land use and tenurial rights has become the crux of all the troubles between the Pahari and Bengali because land is not only the resource most critical to hill peoples’ work, livelihood and identity, but also a much competed scarce resource within Bangladesh. Pahari claim that their most important possession is their common jhum lands which is communally owned and managed. On the other hand, for the state it is considered to be the ‘state property’.

**Competing Conceptions of Land Use and Tenure: Jhum as Contested Domain**

Before going into detail about the local level understanding and perceptions of land use and land tenure, it is important to discuss the contemporary context of land holdings and land rights in CHT. This enables us to understand how in everyday life people by a variety of methods involving tenure rights to the land and rights to the jhum compete with the statist perspective. At present there is a dualistic framework of land rights and ownership in CHT: customary and state. First, an analysis of land
use and tenurial arrangement within the framework state-legal system is outlined below with references to the 1900 Regulation.91

Private rights and Usufruct rights

Under the present state system land holding and land tenure operate on two lines as far as official land policies are concerned in Bangladesh. The first type is the private right in land, particularly in the valley areas where lands are normally used for plough cultivation and other activities. The second is the usufruct right - a right to use the land over which the state retains proprietary rights (exclusive rights). These are mostly hilly lands - lands not demarcated as Reserve Forest, lands that are not settled or leased out in the name of any private individual or corporate body - regarded as khas lands. That is, state lands, managed under district administration and which the Forest Department categorises as “unclassed forest lands” for purposes of forest extraction and export.92

In actual practice, however, these are the common jhum lands of jhumia. Local jhumia claim that these are the lands where they have been doing traditional jhum activities for centuries, and thus have collective rights to these lands and its resources by virtue of their common ownership of the areas based upon customs and usage. I will discuss the local understanding of collective ownership and customary land rights as opposed to the statist perspective a little later.

To return to the discussion of state categorisation of land titles, the government does not formally recognise the rights of the jhumia on the common lands as a collective

91 The 1900 Regulations, popularly known as the Chittagong Hill Tracts Manual, were promulgated by the British authorities in January 1900 and came into effect later in the same year (Act 1 of 1990). The CHT Manual laid down details rules and regulations, general, judicial, land and revenue, for the administration of the CHT. Some of the key features of the Manual: (1) The CHT became an excluded or non-regulatory area compared to the plain districts. (2) Rule 34 of the regulation restricted possession of any land by outsiders (non-indigenous) in CHT. (3) Under the regulation 1900, the CHT was divided into three revenue circles - the Chakma, the Mong and the Bhomong. Many commentators claim that the CHT regulation functions in a manner of constitutional legal instrument for the CHT. They argue that it provided limited self-government to the hill people and recognised as the homeland for the indigenous people (Roy 2000; Gain 2000; Kalindi 2000). (See the detailed discussion of the 1900 regulations and its legal and political implications relating to khas land in Chapter Six).

right. Under state categories, these common lands are state lands. Land in the first category bears deeds and titles, and is known as registered land which is transferable and inheritable since the introduction of 1900 Regulations. The Rule 34(11) of the Regulation stated that “a tenant directly under government shall have permanent and heritable rights in the land for which he pays rent” (Page 17).

These rights were given to farmers who undertook plough cultivation with a clearly demarcated piece of land. In the case of such privately held lands there is no distinction between the CHT and the plain districts in Bangladesh. To obtain proprietary rights for plough lands in CHT, however, one has to formally register it with the Deputy Commissioner’s (DC’s) office in contrast to the Land Department as in other parts of Bangladesh.93

All these flat lands suitable for plough cultivation are under permanent ownership. However, given the natural condition and steep slopes of the CHT, the amount of this type of land is negligible. There have been no land surveys whatsoever in CHT after independence. According to the most widely cited forestal land survey report in 1966, conducted by a Canadian company, only 3.1% of the CHT lands (about 5,200 sq. miles of total area) are suitable for plough agriculture (Forestal Forestry and Engineering International Limited, “Chittagong Hill Tracts: Soil and Land Use Survey” (1964-1966), quoting from Gain 1998; Roy 1998). These lands are officially classified into three categories depending on the soil fertility and productivity. The classification of lands into first class, second class and third class relates to the number of crops per annum. Lands that can be used for two crops grown annually are categorised as first class and those lands that yield only one crop a year are called second class land. Low-lying marshlands fall into the third class category.94

For all other hilly lands, there are two broad categories in CHT: Reserve Forest (RF) under the management of the Forest Department and Unclassed State Forests (USF)

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93 See for further information, an interesting discussion of land administration in CHT by Roy (2000).

94 Based on personal interviews with landowners and perusal of official communications on the subject.
administered by District administration. According to the Forestal Land Survey Report in 1964, “In addition to the RF, the CHT amounting to 3,850 sq. miles of Unclassed forests” (quoting from Gain 2000; Roy 1994, 2000). Historically, *jhum* is the dominant farming practice in many parts of the USF lands and is still practised under the traditional *mouza* boundary of headman, although officially there is no classification for *jhum* lands. The government policy on this land is that ownership is retained by the state and *jhum* cultivators are only given the rights to cultivate as “usufruct”.  

However, as I mentioned earlier, USF are in practice regarded as the commons of the *jhumia* that includes village *jhum* common and settlement areas. Initially, during the British period, the USF were divided into *mouzas* under the headmen who were formally vested with the responsibility of managing and protecting these forests. More recently, however, since 1989 the government has redefined USF as *khas* lands (lands that no individual has any claims). Under the new categorisation of *khas*, these lands are now increasingly leased out to private persons in the name of *baggan* (horticulture) development.

This system requires an individual to secure necessary entitlement for specified period under a lease directly from the government. This new system now falls within the judicial regime of private property rights. With the present changing policies, in reality it is now easily understandable that the area of the USF is far less than the amount mentioned by the Forestal Survey in 1966.

In CHT, from the statist perspective, we have thus seen that there is a contrast between *jhum* cultivation and plough agriculture, which also entails a different conception of ownership and rights to land. Farmers cultivating the lands at the river valleys and on the lower terraces are provided with land titles. Holders of land titles have the full right to legally transfer lands to anyone which ensures the continuity of individuals’ ownership to land and is inheritable. In contrast, land for the *jhum*  

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95 Analysis of the state ownership has also been documented in number of studies: Huq (2000), Roy (2000), Shelly (1992), Mohsin (1997).

96 I will discuss the operation of *khas* land regime as an ethnographic case study in the next chapter.
cultivators is not private or common property; it is seen as the property of the state. *Jhum* cultivators are only allowed to practice their traditional farming by paying *jhum* tax through the headmen.

Even the nature and concept applied to the revenue collection of these lands suggest different types of ownership rights. The amount of taxes varies according to types of the lands being realised in differential taxing concepts and institutions. For the plough lands, rent is paid according to the size of the land. The rent for plough lands per acre is payable directly to governmental administration and is given with proper revenue receipt. The rate is still fixed low compared to *jhum* lands, Taka 3, 2, and 1 for first, second and third class of land per acre respectively. On the other hand, *jhum* tax is collected on the basis of households, not for a particular plot or size of plot. In 2000, a rate of Tk.8 per household was fixed for the *jhum* cultivators.97

Variations in tax terminology relating to plough lands and *jhum* lands are thus significantly meaningful in terms of ownership of the land. The term rent is referred to the plough land whereas *jhum* tax is referred to as a capitation tax. Capitation tax also sometimes referred to as *dao* tax (*dao* or bill-hook is the main tool in *jhum* cultivation). This is, perhaps, the continuation of colonial taxation policy in which rent for the plough lands was kept low to attract *jhunia* to plough cultivation while *jhum* cultivation was discouraged by taxing more.98 At the present time, however, this differential taxing policy has been interpreted in relation to land title-holders and non title-holders, particularly in the context of *jhum* tax. This differential system implies that *jhunia* have no ownership rights on the land as they only pay a capitation tax for *jhum* to the state through the headmen, not for the land.

97 Conversation with ADC (Revenue) of Banderban, also verifying with the locals. There was even discussion about further raising of *jhum* tax from Tk.8 to 12 during rajpunnah festival (Tax collection ceremony) in 2000 suggested by a Deputy Commissioner of Banderban.

98 *Jhum* taxing was a very elaborate business for colonial authority in realising maximum revenues. Rule 41(3) says "every *jhunia* family lives in one mouza and *jhum* in another mouza shall pay an additional tax to the headman of the mouza in which it jhum, who locally calls as *parkulis* (outsider)". Thus colonial *jhum* taxing was not only design to extract more revenues also directed towards sedentarise *jhunia* into the village and *mouza* level. See for the details of colonial *jhum* taxing in other region of India (Karlsson 1997).
It appears that contradictory official perspectives seem to be posing many problems relative to land tenure for the jhum cultivators. Although the official attitude equally applies to the hill peoples of CHT in general, there has been a wider gap between the plough and jhum cultivators as far as state tenurial system is concerned. Plough cultivators enjoy individual ownership in the state/legal sense whereas jhum cultivators have no formal legal rights, considered ‘nomadic’ with traditional land use practice. Under the present government policy in Bangladesh, in many respects, there is no sure legal basis for the ownership of jhum lands by the traditional jhumia community despite the current popularity of the notion of “community management” with the rhetoric of development programmes (Tripura 2000; Gain 2000; Ahamed 2001, 2000). There are no corresponding notions of ‘communal’ or ‘indigenous lands’ in contemporary land management systems in the CHT.

Therefore, anyone, as did I, could assume that in the CHT, people have conceptions about land rights as both usufruct and private ownership, which are now practised simultaneously. Many studies (Mohsin 1997; Mey & Mey 1980, 1981) even suggest that these concepts have been subject to rationalisation under the colonial and subsequent government’s rule mediated through the headman system, as there are many households in the CHT now practising both jhum and plough cultivation, and which therefore balance legal notions of ownership and property with community ownership.

During my fieldwork, however, I tried to investigate these intriguing issues from the local perspective: what these statist and collective ownership mean socially, culturally, and legally to the Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga people in Roangchari, and what does the CHT land itself mean to the hill people in general? In the following section I explain the local understanding and perception of collective land rights at the micro level dealing with present indigenous forms of jhum land use and tenure rights under headman-karbari system as well as outlining the traditional normative customary model.
Jhum Collective Rights and Ownership

There is a wide variation between the statist conception of usufruct and the local perspective of collective rights in terms of jhum use, land holding and administration at the village community level as opposed to the official regulations. From the statist perspective, jhum usufruct rights are commonly seen as a set of jural concepts or legal rules formulated by political bodies of the state. Such rights are only embodied in jhum tax valuations under the legal jurisdiction of the state. From the local perspective in CHT, however, jhum land tenure is a complex socio-economic and cultural phenomenon.

In contrast to state categorisation of jhum as usufruct rights, local conceptions of jhum rights and holdings are not held in the same sense. Local jhumia, across ethnic groups in Roangchari, assert that they have their own traditional way of defining customary rights to jhum which for them are the ‘de facto property’ of the village. They claim that jhum land is common property, belonging to the village community and even members of the spirit world, with individual households exercising only the right to use the land. The concept of property as understood by the statist perspective today, focusing on the individuals who have formal written document of the ownership of land and pay tax on it, is not of property in that sense. For the jhumia, whose life is centred primarily on land and forest resources, it is a community resource; this is common property of the village; individuals have rights of use over it. In other words, every villager has a collective right to cultivate a plot through being a member of the village.

Mahapatra, an anthropologist examining different land rights from an Indian perspective describes, “collective rights usually refers to the rights which is exercised by a group. ...Such rights are commonly referred to as communal rights. ...Communal rights may be exclusive rights of ownership or right to control and manage resources apart from the right to use or usufruct” (1993: 53). From this perspective, for the jhumia in the CHT, the common lands are those which belong to a village with shared rights of access by the villagers. Forest and jhum lands are included within this category of village and mouza commons, and are the common property of jhumia with equal rights of access, use and extraction.
This suggests that *jhum* agriculture correlates with conceptions of collective ownership of land, and local *jhumiya* could only subsist from their fields as part of a village community, bound in ties of mutual reciprocity. The concept of collective ownership for the *jhumiya* is thus inextricably linked to traditional *jhum* occupation, with the land and its resources providing the enabling environment for subsistence activities. Amongst almost all the ethnic groups in CHT, prior to opening *jhum* fields and before harvesting, some form of ritual or ceremony is performed to appease the spirits and to ask for the good luck for the crops in *jhum*. They believe that the land belongs to the village community, is theirs to use for the duration of their lives, and must be preserved for future generations. In this sense, ownership and possession are cumulative rights, and those lands that are identified as common lands are accessible to the entire village. Therefore the western concept like usufruct does not have the same connotations in indigenous conceptions of customary rights in the CHT.

Households have the rights to land use depending on customs and rituals relating to acquisitions, use and social transmission within the village community. Loffler, studied the Mru for almost ten years, another group outside my study area, and states that “a kind of unwritten law of land ownership exists among the Mru. Land is communally owned; every household has equal access to the land, there is no idea of buying and selling land” (1990: 45). Loffler’s ethnography, however, does not elaborate what is actually meant by community ownership. As I mentioned before, collective ownership in CHT must be understood within the framework of *jhum* and village organisation. It is based on custom and usages, is held in village or *mouza* common, and is regulated by the indigenous institution as collective rights.

In the CHT today the traditional collective rights and indigenous institution are conceived of by most inhabitants in Roangchari as inseparable and refer to the customary procedures of *jhum* land use and tenurial practice under native authority of headman-*karbari* system. Among the elderly Marma whom I talked with believe that the British colonial system, in many ways, codified the local customs through

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99 The traditional Tanchanga method is to sacrifice a chicken before *jhum* cut. Marma sacrifice a pig
the headman system and adopted in the CHT Manual. The CHT Manual is still held in fond regard by the local hill people, who resent the national legal code, which is based on the statist legal conceptions.

According to the present indigenous system, which has been operational since the colonial times, ideally common collective rights can be categorised at three levels: village level, mouza level, and the CHT level. Firstly, at the village level, the village community as a whole is jointly responsible for the use, management and control of the lands surrounding their village, which is a village common. As head of the village, the karbari has responsibility to allocate jhum lands for the villagers in consultation with the headman, who is the mouza head. Access to village common lands, however, is not limited to descent or lineage groups. For example, in Rockoywa para in Roangchari, ethnic groups can be differentiated by different lineages and clans, but there is no "principle lineage" which provides the karbari/headmen to be the legitimate authority of the village, as observed by Leach in the context of Kachin society in Burma (1954: 116). In Roangchari, every household of the village, irrespective of ethnic background, as a whole has cultivation rights, rights of jhum, that are clearly defined in terms of landmarks, such as streams, mountain tops, prominent trees and so on. In this conception, the village common has a territorial significance.

Secondly, at the mouza level (above the village), a number of villages are grouped together on the basis of territorial boundary under the authority of headman. There are 365 such mouzas at present in the CHT. Within the mouza territory each village has wider access to the mouza common lands beyond the village common as resident of the mouza. The headman is responsible for distributing the mouza common lands to different villagers through village karbari and for collecting jhum tax. Today in practice, in one way or another, village commons and mouza commons are overlapping and intertwined in the fact that village commons are the smaller units of bigger mouza commons.

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before harvesting the jhum.
In many cases, village commons are not always close to the village settlement due to the non-availability of jhum lands resulting from multiple causes. As I mentioned earlier, these mouza commons are increasingly made RF by the Forest Department, and leased to the individuals as khas lands. Thus, households practically find jhum allotments far away from the village within the larger mouza boundary. In the CHT, therefore, village common can also be seen as the mouza common. Today, in present day reality, this common jhum lands is managed by the indigenous authority of headmen-karbari at both village and mouza level.

Thirdly, at the circle levels (above the mouza), chiefs are responsible for their territories including revenue collection and land claims matters, such as the boundary disputes between the mouza commons and other social matters. In case any dispute arises, at first the matter is placed before the karbari/headman, sometimes also involving an informal council of elders at village or mouza level. The dispute matters only go to circle chiefs if conflict between the two headmen or mouzas is locked with serious local repercussions. Dispute resolution within the mandate of the indigenous administration is adopted in the 1900 regulations. Since colonial times, the indigenous modalities for land allocation have been governed by customary practices and usage, the village community, as whole, decide upon the modalities for land use and conservation (fallow) in consultation with karbari and headmen. This includes the identification of certain areas as common lands, e.g. forests surrounding areas of the village accessible to villagers for jhum.

I suggest, therefore, that even within the framework of present indigenous institutions, the jhumia have their shared rights individually and collectively to use the jhum common lands. The concept of 'shared use' is significant in this context. Although individual households have exclusive rights to specific areas of the immediate surrounding of village common, the village community as a whole shares the rights of access and to use these lands as the collective property of the entire village or mouza. Individual land rights include the rights to a particular jhum, rights to land for a home, rights to extract resources including forest produce on the common lands.
However, one has to be mindful that once a specific allocation is no longer in use or occupation by an individual household, i.e. an old jhum, the land reverts to the village community. Therefore, although individual land rights in the form of household rights do exist in the CHT, in the ultimate analysis it is the jhumia (as community) who have the inherent collective rights in common lands according to the custom and usage. It is the village community who collectively owns the lands, with individuals having specific rights of use and possession.

Moreover, within these indigenous modalities, jhumia are also paying jhum tax since the adoption of 1900 Regulations [Rule 42(4)]. An annual tax is paid for the right to jhum, collected by the headman, who enters the details in a register called jhum tazi. The particulars included in the tazi are the name of the household head, names of households' members, whether they are doing jhum that year or not, and the details of the jhum. Every year the jhum tazi (list of jhumias) has to be submitted by each headman to the chief. The chief, after verification of the lists, forwards a copy to the Deputy Commissioner certifying the persons who are exempted from the payment of the jhum tax, widows, bachelors, shamans, etc. On the basis of this list the headman collects jhum tax.\textsuperscript{100} There is also the practice of parkulya (outsider) whereby a jhumia household paid the tax in full to the mouza where they actually cultivated a jhum, usually the neighbouring one known as mouza parkulya.\textsuperscript{101}

Thus, I suggest that within the present indigenous modalities the customary right to jhum is formally recognised in the CHT Manual, and taxes are paid for the exercise of such rights. There is no formal lease required for jhum, although all the relevant information is duly recorded in the tazi which is sent to the chief every year, and is updated on a regular basis. This means that in the CHT the rights to use the jhum common lands over which jhumia have customary rights under the head authority at the village, mouza and circle level. Hence for the jhumia, it is the indigenous institution of headmen-karbari through which one can get access to village or mouza common lands. In other words, customarily within the indigenous institution the

\textsuperscript{100} According to the Manual, the jhum tax was Rs. 6.00 per jhumia, and apportioned using by following formula: chief Rs. 2.50; headman Rs. 2.25; and Rs. 1.25 to government. Today this remains applicable theory and the government still share same portion of jhum tax with higher rate.

\textsuperscript{101} This practice is also recognised in the CHT Manual see the Rule 42 (3).
jhunia's right to jhum has been ensured on mouza or village common lands, which for them is collectively owned by the village community.

The argument put forward by the state administration, following the discourse of usufruct rights, that jhum taxation system is based on the person not on the land is mainly argued with reference to the capitation tax that is levied on the jhumia through the traditional authority of mouza headmen. The state authority stresses that the indigenous institution is limited to the people only and does not extend to the lands. This theory, however, totally ignores the indigenous conceptions of land rights in the CHT. The principle of jhum land tenure is almost wholly misunderstood by the government officials, and most of their statements are quite misleading too.

The articulation of the official culture has always been that the jhumia lacks fixed rights to land due to their mobile traditional life. As already mentioned, Bangladesh land administration continues to follow British colonial conceptions in which all lands are considered as state lands. Burnham calls this situation "vacant and without master", and therefore that land falls within the "domain of the state" (2000: 37). As Burnham has argued in his recent article which reviews the implications of the concept of state land in the colonial and postcolonial laws of Cameroon, such legal theories have the pragmatic aim of facilitating acquisition of local communities' land through nullification of traditional conceptions of the land tenure. Burnham's point is important in understanding the present debate between the State vs. indigenous land rights in the CHT.

In Bangladesh, proponents of indigenous lands rights composed of radical social scientists, law practitioners, political activists, from the pluralist and common property approach to tenure in CHT, describe the statist argument as "legal gymnastics" (Mohsin 1997; Gain 1998; Muhammad 1997; Jahangir 1979; Roy 1998, 2000; Schendel 1996, 2000; Tripura 1993). According to this school of thought, the Bengali elite, civil and military bureaucracy continue to use the concept of the state as guardian of all lands for their own interests and their clients, combined with the idea that private ownership should be the basic concept for allocating the lands in the CHT. They suggest that it will only be in instituting an
effective “legal pluralism” especially in recognising the local customary rights in their jhum lands for equitable management in the CHT. Roy, an indigenous legal expert from the CHT, particularly highlighted that “although the British claimed total sovereignty over the lands through the CHT Manual the chiefs and headmen are ensured with the territorial boundaries, recognising the customary practice of land use and rights” (Roy 1998: 13).

Following the above arguments, it is therefore a common failure to realise from the statist perspective that the collection of jhum tax, among other things, is restricted to the territorial limits of the mouza/circle boundary. I argue that in fact, jhumia are liable for the jhum tax to the indigenous authority wherein is located the jhum plot, indicating the territorial dimension of the tax. In addition, customarily there is still general exemption of priests, shamans, widows and the sick people under the premise that it is difficult for them to use, manage and cultivate sufficient lands for jhum. In this context, jhum tax is tied up to the exercise of their rights to jhum, including the rights of being exempted from this. Therefore, the source of the jhum tax indicates that the very payment of taxes in the CHT originally occurred from a right in land per se and the indigenous system itself based on the territorial jurisdiction. From this point of view one can conclude that the conceptual framework of land rights of the jhumia is inextricably linked to the land itself.

The normative model of customary land use practice also confirms that territoriality is an inherent part of the indigenous system. The elderly Marma people in Roangchari assert that the present indigenous system is the outcome of historical continuity under the British. I have recorded details of traditional Marma customary land management system, jhum land uses and tenure rights, and village authority, which in many ways has now been shaped by the present headman-karbari system. During my fieldwork in Roangchari engaging physically in jhum activities and talking to the local jhumia I observed that there is still a close functional link between the village organisation and jhum land management within the framework of headman-karbari system practised among all the ethnic communities. In the

102 Benda-Beckman (1993) and Burnham (2000) used the term "legal pluralism" in reference to traditional customs and laws under the statist legal system. Nicola Frost also describes the term "adat" (local customary law) in the context of Maluku, Indonesia (2001: 2).
following section, I discuss in detail the traditional notions of village community, common lands and indigenous institutions from the local level perception and understanding.

**Traditional Indigenous Institution of Roaza-Piancy as Present Headman-Karbari**

Elderly Marma narratives state that the Marma word *roa* means big village (a domain of several villages) which also strictly denotes the houses of the village and the land (*lay*) which it controls within the surrounding area. A traditional leader called *roaza* was the head of *roa*. The traditional hierarchical leadership under the authority of *roaza* was also a small group of village leaders representing the smaller villages within the *roa* known as *piancy*. The villagers in the *roa* on consideration of maturity and strong qualities of leadership selected both the functionaries of *roaza* and *piancy*.

The present *mouza* structure is somewhat similar to that of previous *roa*. Until the early days of colonial time this traditional *roaza-piancy* system was said to be the basic structure of *roa* authority. Many elderly Marma, who are the oldest inhabitants of Roangchari, assert that there has been continuity between the titleholders of *roaza-piancy* and the *headman-karbari* in terms of village authority and *toykhong* organisation (*jhum* area). They still see the headman as their *roaza* and the *mouza* commons as their *toykhong*. Their perceptions of *jhum* land use are closely bound with this indigenous authority.

Eighty years old, Mong La Sing Marma, the present headman of Roangchari, whose father was also a headman, has long experience of the British, Pakistani and Bangladesh periods. In his view traditional land use pattern under *roaza-piancy* in the past is not different from the present *headmen-karbari* system. He told me that traditional *roaza-piancy* system of *roa* organisation was replaced by the present *headman-karbari* system corresponding with the *mouza* boundary, and formalised through 1900 regulations with changes in two respects. Firstly, the British introduced *headmen-karbari* as hereditary titles whereas *roaza-piancy* leadership

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103 This aspect has formally adopted in the 1900 regulation (Rule 34).
was vested in personal attributes recognised by the members of the village community. Secondly, the major change was brought in the functions of headmen who were empowered with jhum tax collection from the mouza.¹⁰⁴

Despite structural changes in the leaderships of roaza-piancy to headman-karbari in colonial times, Mong La Sing Marma claim that jhum land use under indigenous institution, to a large extent, remained the same. The way in which members of the roa customarily exercised their right in the use of toykhong (jhum area), in similar manner today mouza residents under the headman-karbari use the mouza commons. Other elderly Marma informants also corroborate how this traditional toykhong practice is still operational relating to jhum land use in CHT.

Local Conceptions of Land Use and Tenure - The Customary Practices of Toykhong

The literary meaning of the Marma word toykhong is jhum area but in a structural sense it has a political character. It is perceived by the Marma as the domain of roa under the rouza, where jhum activities are organised by the members of roa community. In this sense toykhong has a territorial significance in relation to jhum rights - customary jhum common lands of the roa.

According to the traditional practices, jhum hills of the region are grouped under different roazas known as toykhong (jhum area). Villagers and roazas collectively decide boundaries between the toykhongs, not by any written deeds. Customarily toykhong boundaries between the roazas are demarcated after known geographic features, such as a stream, river or tree. Therefore, one toykhong can be separated from the other by a visibly recognisable geographical feature. Every hill within a toykhong bears a name commonly known to the village community such as phakhu tong, pakhu hill, mora ziri, mon ziri, and shokna ziri, currently practised in present day Roangchari mouza. Such names are derived from local conceptions of toykhong boundaries following geographical peculiarities, for example, a spring coming down through a hill, a dried up stream, a running stream and a narrow stream etc. These

¹⁰⁴ Many academics, however, suggest that "indirect rule" in CHT was governed by the colonial economic interests (Mohsin 1997: 89).
local perceptions can be seen as cognitive boundary maintenance of the toykhong territory of the roa.

Today the concept toykhong is not exactly maintained in the same traditional sense due to number of reasons, as I mentioned earlier. At the present day CHT, jhum common lands are not exclusively confined to a one single area or village. For example, most of the hilly lands in close proximity to Rockoywa or Soanloo para in Roangchari are either leased out to individuals or turned into a reservation for the Forest Department. They can also be in the process of acquisition by other government establishments. Jhumia are not finding jhum fields in the same area. Instead they have to choose their jhum fields far away from the village. In this new situation, as jhumia are moving towards different directions within the broader mouza territory, the traditional roa toykhong system is not exactly maintained in that sense. It is now, more or less, becoming tied up with mouza boundary under the headman. Roa toykhong, in that respect, has gradually been ceded to the greater mouza system.

The headmen and karbari, however, are still distributing the jhum lands to mouza or village households according to traditional practice of the toykhong system. Today among the jhumia in Roangchari, toykhong boundary maintenance is followed in relation to mouza jhum commons between the headmen. Although mouza common lands are now officially categorised as USF or khas lands, the local perceptions attached to roa toykhong is still vital to their traditional use and rights of these lands as jhum commons. The customary traditional practices emphasise that within the toykhong households are free to choose jhum site with a collective consensus of their respective roaza. It is the same way mouza commons are now used by the villagers under the headmen.

Investigation into households’ rights over toykhong reveals an intricate operation of customary practices in the CHT, relating to jhum land use by the members of village community. The gogha and dhango customary practices demonstrate how household’s rights and community rights are intertwined in the use of toykhong.
Gogha Customary Rights (Household Rights) in Toykhong

In the past, customarily, management of toykhong was vested upon roaza. It was the responsibilities of the roaza who looked after the toykhong and allocated the jhum plots to every household in the roa. Although roaza, as the roa head, had a traditional authority over the domain of toykhong land, in fact, the allocation of jhum land was decided at a meeting of all household heads in the roa. The roaza was responsible for the arrangement of such meeting but the decision of toykhong jhum land distribution was required to come from a consensus of all households. In case of any disputes, the roaza, also involving a council of elders, resolved internal matters. Dispute resolutions were mostly settled in consensus among the village community. So, in this sense, customarily toykhong jhum distribution processes are communal in nature as it is done through the consultation of all villagers. Today, under the headman-karbari, mouza commons are used in a similar way by the local jhumia of Roangchari.

When a household selects a hill slope, as a mark of possession an upper portion of tree is cut and lower is kept on the ground of the jhum plot, which symbolises the newly selected jhum, locally known as gogha by the Marma. No other households of the village attempt to occupy this piece of jhum site already cultivated or selected by a villager. Boundaries of these jhum plots are marked with forked sticks, and other villagers respect them as per normative customary rules. Traditionally there are no formal deeds or legal titles required for the possession of gogha. The headman, also involving the karbari and other elderly members of the village community, generally solves the disputes over gogha boundaries, and if required further, matters are taken to the chief at the circle level.

The general principal of toykhong jhum field allotment among the households is flexible. The distribution of jhum field size is considered on the basis of a household’s size. In other words, the size of the jhum field is proportionately higher for the bigger household so that food supplies from the bigger jhum ensures secure livelihood for the households. Furthermore, the criteria of measuring size of the jhum field is not the size of the land, it is rather quantity of rice seed. The size of the jhum field is measured for each household on the basis of quantity of seeds planted.
(for example one *ari* (twelve kg) of rice produces a hundred *aris* of rice approximately). Therefore, per annum consumption of rice by a household is taken consideration for what amount of seeds is required to be sown.105 This suggests that right to *jhum* is related to basic needs of household’s subsistence in terms of *toykhong* land use management.

This rationale of customary *jhum* field distribution is, thus, not only adjusted with equity and livelihood measure but also ensures a better way of land use, depending on the size of household’s labour force in order to operate the *jhum*. Households, which do not have enough work forces, are helped by others to prepare already selected *jhum* fields. In case the household’s size increases overtime, the headman/karbari readjusts the previously allotted *gogha jhum* sites through an additional allotments in accordance with its need. In such a situation, the household’s head fixes a marker using an “x” sign on the head of a bamboo pool on the new *jhum* site chosen within the *toykhong*. Other villagers customarily accept this as special re-adjustment of *toykhong* supporting households in need.

![Figure 8 Gogha possession in jhum toykhong](image)

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105 It is important to note here that in the CHT rice is the main staple food.
In this process, *gogha* rights over *toykhong* are not only a right but also a way of life and livelihood. The relationship between possession, use and occupation of *toykhong* land by the households is expressed in *gogha* rights. The *gogha* right is the right to utilise the *toykhong* lands which one is not the owner. In fact, there is a complex interplay between the *gogha* and *dhango* rights in terms of *toykhong* land ownership.

**Dhango-Common Rights to Toykhong**

Since *toykhong* land is maintained by joint ownership of the village community, it does not actually allow or pass by inheritance between the generations. However, *gogha* right, as part of collective rights, is being ensured as the member of village community. In other words, every household in the village has a legal right, in customary sense, to cultivate a share of *toykhong* land, which is allotted to them. No household, however, is allowed to own the plots individually because customarily ownership of *toykhong* land belongs to the village or *mouza*.

In each year every household of the village has an equal right to have access to a certain area of *jhum* field within the *toykhong*. Usually, in practice, each household possesses minimally eight to ten different *jhum* fields for their subsistence over a period of time. In this way, each household keeps the *jhum* fields under *gogha* possession simultaneously for some time until one abandons his claims. This system of *gogha* possession over various *jhum* field sites by the household is known indigenously as *dhango*.

In the CHT, however, *dhango* practice over *toykhong* lands must be understood within the dynamics of *jhum* rotational agriculture. In fact, a *mouza* common lands or *toykhong* is much bigger than the lands actually being cultivated in each year. Villagers normally rotate their *jhum* fields within the *toykhong* boundary. The whole area of *toykhong* is divided into several small sections; some of them are cultivated in a particular year while others are kept for future use depending on the requirements of the total households in the village. Each year every household is allocated a piece of *jhum* land from the selected area of *toykhong* - decided for the cultivation in that particular year. In fact, many households maintain some *gogha*
possessions in previous *jhum* sites with some crops still standing or fallowed for regeneration. In this process of allocation and rotation, over a period of time households have a number of *gogha* possessions in different *jhum* field sites within the *toykhong* boundary, which is collectively known as *dhango* for a household.

In this context, at any given point in time, the *toykhong* is always under possession of household’s *dhango* sites. For example, if a *toykhong* contains thirty households altogether, it implies that there will be thirty *dhangos*, i.e. the numbers of *dhango* is equal to the total numbers of households in the village. So, in this process household’s right over *toykhong* lands appears to be inalienable. Customarily, even in the death of a household’s head, other members of the household have rights over that *dhango*. Members of the deceased household exercise the *dhango* rights already established before the death of the household head. Therefore, the *dhango* remains effective, valid, and inalienable.

Ownership is more intrinsic here. *Dhango* rights and possession are embedded in a different doctrine as opposed to usufruct. I argue that *dhango* use and occupation are articulated in a highly distinctive body of “social habit”(William 1986: 105). Although permanent ownership of a particular plot in *toykhong* *jhum* land is not possible by the household due to yearly field rotation. However, there is a common tendency that households always try to maintain the same allotment of plots that they have already previously cultivated. The reason households prefer to return to the same section of cultivated area after the year’s cycle is because the plots are familiar to the households. More importantly, during the first cultivation households might have planted some trees over which they claim a kind of household’s rights.

However, in practice, this could not always be achieved since adjustments and readjustments have to be made on consideration of demographic changes, such as increases or decreases of household membership, formation of new households, or households’ migration to other villages, and so forth. Thus, the customary practices of *toykhong* land use and rights entail two vital aspects: first, the *toykhong* typically belongs to the village, i.e. property of the village. Only members of the village community have exclusive access to *toykhong* lands. Secondly, a household’s *gogha* and *dhango* possession are inherently intertwined with the common customary rights.
in the use of toykhong. The normative practices of gogha and dhango rights over toykhong lands provide a perspective on customary collective rights and ownership in the CHT.

Moreover, the ways in which toykhong lands are used also provide a territorial conception of mouza commons in the CHT. The question of ‘nomadism’ and abandoning jhum is a myth in this respect. There is always an argument put forward by the state regime that the way jhum agriculture is fallowed diminishes the question of permanent land rights. It is generally assumed that land rights are given up. The customary toykhong land use practices shows that this is not the case. According to dhango customary practice, all the marked jhum field sites under gogha possession are not in use at the same time but there are rotations annually between chosen fields within toykhong boundary. In other words, for example, each household minimally keeps several jhum fields having gogha possession simultaneously but only one field is used in a year and the rest remains unused for regeneration until the rotation is completed. As a result, each household could follow the longer period of rotation between the chosen jhum fields. In the past, this rotational system provided a longer falling period extending to a minimum ten years interval of each site. This ensured maximum output of yields and adequate supply of subsistence for the whole year.

In a year’s cycle, as normal practice, households move from one jhum site to another in order to allow regeneration and this can not be seen as abandoning the land. Jhum land is generally cultivated for two successive years; the plot is then allowed to remain fallow for seven to eight years before the same plot is cultivated again. The local practices of jhum in this way suggest that rationality of land use exists in terms of resource conservation. The jhumia, as community, demonstrate the responsibility of toykhong management. For example, when mouza or toykhong common lands show sign of soil exhaustion and deterioration indicating the need for regeneration period, the jhumia collectively take the decision to leave the area untouched for a determinate period. In this way, fallow jhum accommodate a period of regeneration of essential soil materials and vegetation. This represents a careful adjustment of social rules and practices to ecological factors.
Therefore, it is clear that the ways in which jhum are categorised in official-legal discourse contradict local jhumia perspectives in terms of their livelihood and as ways of life. The indigenous jhumia notions of land and its classification also reveal an alternative discourse to the statist interpretation of jhum. This addresses the general principles of jhum cultivation in the CHT and the dynamics of jhum and jhumia.

**Dynamics of jhum and jhumia**

Local jhumia of Roangchari, across ethnic groups, place a practical value on hill lands in terms of utility, crop yield and sustainability of jhum subsistence activities. Such views primarily derive from their long-term attachment and engagement with the jhum as a way of life and livelihood. Among the jhumia, Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga in Roangchari have local knowledge of hill soil texture in terms of suitability for jhum cultivation. They can differentiate hill slopes in terms of productivity and non-productivity. All the hills varying in sizes and altitudes are not equally productive for the jhum. Judged from the criteria of higher productivity local jhumia are able to select appropriate jhum sites.

In terms of suitability, jhumia distinguishes two types of hills. Hills with very high and sharp steep slopes, locally called kyiot-t (pyramidal shape) in Marma, are considered unsuitable for the better jhum yields because ash is washed down quickly after the rainfall and there is very little water retention in the soil. The types of hill which are preferred for ideal jhum are called pa boya. Pa boya hills are curved in shape and with gentle slopes which allows burnt ash to stay after the rainfall, and its soil texture normally retains a higher water content. Therefore, jhum on pa boya hills is considered much more productive.

Furthermore, in their conceptions, jhumia also distinguish hill lands into two contrasting categories: yea and lay (in Marma). Yea lands are those hill slopes that are covered by natural vegetation particularly with bamboo brakes of certain species. Lay lands are the hill slopes with little vegetation. Yea is mostly preferred for the jhum because after the clearance (slash and burning the vegetation) it is enriched with organic ashes that permit high productivity for multi-cropping. On the other
hand, lay lands are avoided because they are covered with only sungrass (*Imperata arundinacea*) which after burning is likely to have little humus for the *jhum*. Hills with very large trees are avoided because they usually involve hard labour to fell.

These local perceptions of suitable *jhum* illustrate traditional indigenous land use practices and attachments to particular social and cultural values. Such knowledge seems to be tenable and empirically meaningful when their land use practices are taken into consideration with their everyday livelihood situation. *Jhumia* identify each segments of season in terms of changes of *jhum* activities round the year. They recognise four types of seasons corresponding with particular activities involved in the *jhum*. For example, in Bawm terms, *four* implies the period for preparation of *jhum*, which takes place before the rainy season. *Thal* follows after the *four* when actual *jhum* is cultivated during the rainy season. The *mango* relates to collection of *jhum* products from the field, while *bosic* corresponds to clearing of forest and burning, which takes place in the winter. This suggests that for *jhumia* land and living are inseparable in the CHT.

**Measuring *jhum***

Among the *jhumia* in three groups, there is a common cultural conception about measuring the *jhum* field in the CHT. The amount of seedlings annually used for cultivation is primarily considered as a unit in measuring the size of *jhum* fields. Roy has pointed out that “the average size of *jhum* plot is about one hectare” (1997: 23). *Jhumia* in Roangchari, however, do not use these units of hectar or acres in measuring the *jhum* fields. *Jhumia* often say that ‘this year they are going to cultivate certain amount of *ari of jhum*’, which means the size of land is measured by the amount of rice seedling. The central concern here is the amount of seed being planted, rather than the size of area that is cultivated. It indicates that for the *jhumia*, the term *jhum* not only mean land, as generally perceived by the outsiders, but also means a variety of crops crucially important for their livelihood. Thus, undermining of *jhum* not only denies their rights to use the lands, but also has deleterious effects on their livelihood, as intercropping in *jhum* traditionally yields a wide range of crops that provides a balanced food supply.
In this sense, the indigenous notion of *jhum* measurement is quite opposite to plough agriculture in which the size of land is the unit for measuring paddy cultivation each year. In other words, how many acres of land a farmer normally cultivates. These different notions of land measurement certainly bring up the issues of different cultural and social perceptions of agricultural practices. The local perception of *jhum* and *jami* (meaning “paddy land” in Bengali) further exemplify this. The following paragraphs illustrate how the local inhabitants historically valued *jhum* and *jami* in terms of their livelihood situation.

Among the present inhabitants of Roangchari with whom I talked, there is a common understanding that until recently *jhum* is the most valued resource for the hill people in terms of providing an adequate food supply in the CHT. A senior elderly Marma gives the following account of how a *jhumi* family had gained sufficient subsistence from the *jhum*:

In earlier days, during British time we had no problem for *jhum*. There were many *jhum* common lands around our village. A medium size *jhum* normally produced sufficient supply for a big household. In an average *jhum*, particularly with bamboo vegetation, if we would sow one *ari* of rice seeds (a unit of 12 kg quantity normally made of cane or wood), we could harvest about 150 to 200 *ari* (1800 kg to 2400 kg) of rice (discussion with Solha Pru Marma, 19th July 2000).

Similarly, another elderly Tanchanga of Botolli para describes:

In the past, we did not undertake any strenuous labour for ploughing wet lands only to get a half of the yields compared to the *jhum*. We get everything from the *jhum*: rice, cotton, vegetable etc. When plain lands were at our disposal around Rockoywa para, we were less inclined to use them for many disadvantages. Plough cultivation requires various use materials such as plough, cattle, water, and fertiliser, which are not required for the *jhum*. *Jhum* is simply *da* land (discussion with Haradon Tanchanga, 15th July 2000).

The Mamma and Tanchanga perspectives here tell us that historically *jhum* is the most valuable resource and way of livelihood for the *jhumia* in the CHT. These narratives also reveal that in earlier times, given the abundance of *jhum* fields, there was no need for *jhumia* to search *jhum* fields outside their *toykhong*. Such necessity only arose when land scarcity became acute as a result of deliberate state policies on
Jhum lands in the CHT. Mong La Sing Marma, the headman of Roangchari, states that,

The competition for jhum land was virtually non-existent. Jhumia had enjoyed the full autonomy of choosing any appropriate jhum within the toykhong. Jhum was the only means of livelihood. Now sowing one ari of jhum, jhumia only can expect 50 to 70 ari. Jhum alone does not provide basic necessities for survival. Now many jhumia in Roangchari search for valley lands for plough cultivation to supplement their yearly deficits of food supply.

Thus, these views evidently suggest that only in recent years have there been serious shortage of jhum fields in the CHT. As a result, the rotational cycle of jhum fallowing has sharply reduced. Many recent studies highlight that jhum fields are becoming smaller and are unable to produce sufficient food for subsistence. Mey & Mey (1978, 1980, 1981), on the basis of a comparative socio-economic study of eight ethnic groups in CHT observed that land scarcity is very acute not only for the jhum in the hilly region but in the valley areas too, where most of the Bengali settlers are now settled. As a result, the economic situation is generally bad among the hill people.

However, in statist perspective unsustainability of jhum is always interpreted as the result of land shortage and increases of jhumia population in the CHT. In reality, this is not the case, as the CHT Commission report states, "the transmigration of the Bengali settlers has caused a massive shortage of land in the CHT which is attributed by government policies rather than failure of jhum cultivation as a method" (The CHT Commission Report 1991). Consequently, with increasing land scarcity, a change is taking place not only in livelihood situation but also in jhum land ownership. Today, the process of landlessness and dispossession are shaping a new meaning for the jhumia in their construction of broader hill people's cultural identity. In the next chapter, I discuss the politics of khas land lease and its local responses in the form of ethnic mobilisation.
Conclusion: Jhum as shared identity

The findings of traditional customary practices of jhum provide a perspective of shared perception of resource use and collective tenure in the CHT. The dynamics of jhum organisation demonstrate a shared value embedded in the life of ethnic communities in the CHT. A basic element of this shared value is the notion of cooperation in the jhum. For example, distribution of jhum plots on the basis of household size and including new households as equal sharer to the common toykhong can be seen as co-ownership displaying a sense of shared value and ethos. Co-operation between households, in the form of a mutual aid groups, during harvesting and showing time is about continual negotiation of their shared relationships in traditional land use practices, connecting every households to maintain common jhum toykhong.

From the local jhumia perspective, I argue that rights to jhum is not simply linked to a size of lands. Rather it is also a livelihood, a way of life. The jhum land they use is part of village and mouza commons and is measured by a household’s need as a member of the village community. In this context, there is a functional link between jhum land tenure, use and livelihood. In the CHT, the notions of collective and individual rights must be understood from local conceptions of tenurial rights. Amena Mohsin, in her recent book on CHT, explains that “communal ownership of land and resources in CHT constitute the cores of their economics as well as cultural values in terms of sharing and exchange” (1997: 78).

I argue that such an ethos and values are embedded in jhum land use practice. They provide a negotiating element in the production of a common Pahari identity in the form of present indigenous land rights movement in the CHT. The relationships among the ethnic groups, in this context, are not defined in terms of given rules of kinship or clan. Instead this relationship must be understood in terms of a variety of social processes, such as land use and rights and indigenous institutions - what Abramson calls the “environmental context of shared identity” (2000: 9).

106 A detailed account of hill economy has also been documented in earlier studies Mackenzie (1884), Hutchinson (1906). For more recent account see Bassaignet (1958).
In the CHT, the cultural relationship between jhum and jhumia can appropriately be conceived of with the local perceptions of collective land rights and ownership - a conception that is better translated as one of the enduring identification of Pahari relationships to CHT land. In the political discourse of Pahari mobilisation, jhum thus becomes an idiom of collective identity as it provides the basis to constitute a larger unity defined by a common value of shared cultural relatedness. In fact this cultural values are ultimately convertible to political support of collective ethnic mobilisation, in political terms, as Pahari or indigenous peoples of CHT.

The symbolic use of jhum as collective ethnic marker by Vomi Odikhar Committee and other organisations in the CHT is therefore a useful mechanism because as a common mode of agriculture jhum represents a notion of shared identity among the diverse ethnic peoples in the CHT. It also represents a common sense of belonging with shared history of deprivation and marginalisation by the state, which forms a common ground of unity (Frost 2001; Gray 1997; Hodgson 2002). The current ethnic mobilisation of hill people as Pahari is an attempt to forge a unified collective identity on the basis of jhum. Their current predicaments of land dispossession by various state interventions, such as reserve forests, Bengali settlements, established of military base, and khas land lease-all produce a renewed sense of shared collective deprivation among ethnic communities in the CHT. In the next chapter, I will discuss khas land lease procedures as an ethnographic case in order to show how these measures have been an enormous impact on local customary rights of the jhumia.
Chapter Six
The politics of khas land

Introduction

This chapter discusses various contemporary political and legal processes in relation to khas land operation in the CHT. In the previous chapter I discussed the complexity of competing claims of jhum rights and ownership between the indigenous people of CHT and the state. I also outlined the nature of present khas land regime in the CHT. This chapter demonstrates how the government’s khas land policy, through the commercialisation and privatisation of jhum common lands, effects the traditional land rights and livelihood of the jhumia. Based on ethnographic case studies, it particularly examines the processes through which khas land is leased to individuals by various institutional measures, such as the 1900 Regulations, and how this process has been a significant influence on interpretation and reinterpretation of the multi-ethnic relationships among the diverse ethnic groups in the CHT. I suggest that the political, social and economic implications of khas land lease policy not only created a new social configuration resulting in landlessness and land dispossession but also lead to a politics of ethnic mobilisation based on shared deprivation among the various ethnic groups in the CHT.

The notion of shared deprivations can be interpreted here as a sense of collective realities faced by all ethnic groups in the CHT. These collective realities are manifested in various forms through new identity formation and protest movements. The range of vocabularies, such as ‘indigenous people’, Jhumma, Pahari can be seen as part of the broader identity construction against State policy. The construction of Pahari identity on the basis of indigenous land rights has been the idiom of political struggle, a vehicle of resistance to government khas land policy, and a means to make political demands for special rights to the CHT lands.

Social movement theorists have emphasised that the construction of collective identities is an essential feature of contemporary struggles over land and resources by many marginalised peoples.107 In the context of CHT, I argue that the khas land

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issue emerges as the most salient feature of collective identity construction among the diverse ethnic groups in the region. In recent times, all the issues relating to conflict between local inhabitants of the CHT and the State revolve around the control and use of land. The notion of 'common land' formulates the elements of social, cultural and political realities of CHT into a negotiating identity. For example, the protest movement by Vomi Odikhar Shongrokkon Committee (Committee for the Protection of Forest and Land Rights in the CHT) against the government khas land lease, can be seen as resistance to State land policy in CHT. The defence of jhum as cultural practice is thus a question of indigenous land rights, and the politics of Pahari mobilisation.

Having engaged in the discourse of khas land regime in the CHT for a fairly long time, it is becoming clear from my findings that the process of khas bondobasti (lease settlement) is intricately interrelated with the privatisation of jhum (common lands) through plural legal complexities in the CHT. Thus, it calls for a comprehensive understanding of the khas bondobasti in order to unveil the underlying dynamics of how this marginalizes and deprives the ordinary Pahari. Before I go in detail into the discussion of different mechanisms and procedures of khas land lease, it is necessary to describe the definition of khas land in the CHT.

**Definition and Conceptualization of Khas Land**

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, according to official-legal definition all lands that are not owned by deeds or titles, such as plough lands are classified as khas lands or 'state owned lands'. In other words, lands not demarcated as reserve, protected forests or those that are not settled or leased out in the name of any private individuals or corporate body are regarded as khas lands by the Administration. In practice, these are the jhum lands used by the jhumia on the basis of traditional 'customary rights' (see Chapter Five). From the statist perspective, all the hill lands in CHT belong to the State; 'tribal' people are only given usufruct rights. In this context, lands traditionally used by the jhumia's come under the khas land system because, for the state, jhumia do not possess any 'legal' entitlement to the lands. Therefore, what the government defines as khas land, in practice is regarded by jhumia as their traditional jhum lands.
For the *jhumia*, this is a common property based on the notion of customary collective rights, and it belongs to the village community. I suggest that the roots of these contested discourses are linked to the claims of ownership, rights and practices of the CHT lands. The statist conception of *khas* land contradicts local *jhum* notions of land ownership and rights. The present Bangladesh government’s legal framework ignores the indigenous notion of *jhum* customary rights. The official-legal justification of redefining *jhum* lands under *khas* land category can be interpreted from the following considerations:

Firstly, *jhum* destroys the forest in CHT. Secondly, as *jhumia* are nomads they have no personal attachment to the land, and because of at the absence of permanent rights they take little care of the land. Therefore, if the *jhumia* are given permanent lease through a *kabiliat* (a lease deed), they might be interested in proper land use for horticulture, homestead gardening, and other plantation economies instead of the *jhum*. The *khas* land lease policy is therefore beneficial to the local *jhumia* as well as forest development in the CHT through private initiatives.

The aims of government *khas* land lease policy are thus towards privatisation of the *jhum* lands in the name of *baggan* (forest) development, which creates a potential for distribution of CHT lands to the Bengali. To achieve these key objectives the present *khas* land regime in the CHT outlines the legal procedures required in order to establish government’s absolute control over the *jhum* lands. The legal procedures, particularly the 1900 Regulations are an important issue from both the statist and local perspectives in relation to *khas* land lease in the CHT. The following section discusses the 1900 Regulations and *khas* land.

**The 1900 Regulations and Khas Land**

The 1900 Regulations, popularly known as the Chittagong Hill Tracts Manual, have been instrumental in many contemporary debates on the issue of indigenous land rights, cultural identity, autonomy and the constitutional legality between the *Pahari* and the state of Bangladesh. The significance of the 1900 regulations for the current study is related to land issues, particularly *khas* land in recent times.
From the *Pahari* point of view, the CHT Manual is thought to be the main legal instrument for the administration of the CHT. The CHT Manual provides the legal, political and cultural safeguard in recognising the *Pahari* as indigenous people and restricting outsiders from the plains to the CHT. For them, it represents hill people's rights over CHT land, particularly their customary land rights. Thus, the CHT Manual becomes a political and symbolic instrument for the *Pahari* social activists in their indigenous social movements. Contrary to this local perception, the statist views suggest that the CHT Manual is only operational under the provisions of the national constitution. In recent years, therefore, in order to maintain 'operationality' the successive governments made several amendments to the 1900 Regulations for various political reasons. The present *khas* land lease policy is one of the amendments towards this operational end.

It is thus important to outline the basic features of the 1900 Regulations and the manner in which they are being reified into a new political meaning in the representation of indigenous land rights and *Pahari* identity on the one hand, and the government's politics of *khas* land lease on the other. Recent literature on CHT carefully ignores the contemporary local understanding and perception of the 1900 Regulations in the context of crucial issues such as *khas* land, and suggests that the CHT manual is simply a historical colonial document (Ahmed 1993; Shelly 1992). The following section highlights some of the current debates on the applicability of the 1900 Regulations within the context of changing political realities in the CHT: (a) what are relationships between the 1900 Regulations and *khas* land lease? (b) what are the socio-economic and cultural implications of the amendments to the 1900 Regulations? I begin with a brief discussion of the main features of the 1900 regulations.

**The Main Features of the 1900 Regulations in Relation to Land and Administration**

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the British Colonial government enacted various rules and regulations for the administration of the CHT since its incorporation into the colonial state in 1860. The 1900 regulations, comprising a
package of rules including judicial, legal and administrative measures, came into effect as the principle "regulatory instrument"\textsuperscript{108} of the CHT in May 1900 (The CHT Manual; Roy 1998).

Under the Regulations a policy of ‘indirect rule’ was pursued through the restructuring of indigenous institutions. Article 40 of the Regulations outlined the administrative structure of the CHT. The main feature of this administrative policy was to demarcate the territorial boundaries of the chiefdoms. The British divided the CHT into three circles: the Mong circle in the north under the Mong Chief, the Chakma circle in the centre under the Chakma Chief and the Bhomong circle in the south under the Bhomong Chief. Each Chief was made responsible for the collection of revenues and vested with the power of looking after internal affairs such as land disputes and other social matters of the circles.

These circles were further divided into \textit{mouzas}, a cluster of villages with a territorial boundary under a headman, and each village within the \textit{mouza} was represented by a \textit{karbari} (the village head). They were awarded the responsibility of settling petty criminal and civil cases in addition to their main function of revenue collection from the traditional \textit{jhum}. The CHT Manual maintained the traditional institutions of \textit{roaza-piancy} village authority into the headman-\textit{karbari} system in terms of \textit{jhum} common land distribution to villagers (see Chapter Five).

However, one major change brought in through the regulations was the introduction of district administration with significant state power parallel to traditional institutions. In other words, the 1900 Regulations maintained a modified form of ‘indirect rule’ in the CHT. On the one hand, the indigenous institutions were allowed to regulate traditional affairs, such as common \textit{jhum} land management and dispute settlement through the ‘tribal’ court. On the other, indigenous institutions were liable to pay annual taxes to the district administration for their traditional \textit{jhum} agricultural practices.

\textsuperscript{108} Devashish Roy (1998) explained the 1900 regulations as "regulatory law" because it sought to regulate already existing rights and privileges of the hill people in relation to traditional institutions and customary land rights. In this respect, the aim of this regulation is to protect the rights and interests of the hill people, their custom and practices, and thus preserving their cultural identities.
Critiques of the regulations argued that although the regulations maintained the traditional institutions all executive powers, judiciary and financial, were vested upon the Deputy Commissioner (DC) (Shelly 1992; Mohsin 1997). Amena Mohsin explained that “the Manual apparently adopted as administrative principles for the CHT based on the local system of indigenous institutions but under the new system real authority lay with the DC and the local chiefs and headmen were virtually turned into merely the tax collectors of the state” (sic) (1997: 34-35).

I argue that there are many implications of the 1900 Regulations in terms of linking indigenous institutions with the district administration but the regulations also enshrined the new order of multi-ethnic relationships in the CHT. Firstly, the integration of diverse ethnic groups into a single hierarchical system of chief-headman-karbari in order to ensure jhum revenue collection and traditional land management practices had, in fact, developed a common perception of indigenous local system. Secondly, its continuation for the last hundred years in the face of many changing realities, amongst all ethnic groups in the CHT, has gradually instilled in them a sense of shared traditional institutions of Pahari compared to the mainstream Bengali society and culture.

However, the implications of the CHT Manual must be understood within the present political context: the way in which the 1900 Regulations are interpreted and reinterpreted in the discourse of Pahari identity construction and state relationship. The significance and priority of 1900 Regulations must be understood in political terms, particularly in the context of indigenous land rights and Pahari mobilisation in the CHT. For the Pahari, the CHT Manual provides the basic framework of the indigenous system in the CHT. It is generally seen as a legal protection and safeguard of their distinct culture and land rights.

The most important element of the Regulations, which has been the source of cultural, legal and political, battles between the Pahari and the official regime in Bangladesh is the definition of indigenous status and special rights to CHT lands. Rule 52 of the 1900 Regulations specifically states:
No person other than Chakma, Mogh or a member of any hill tribe indigenous to the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the Lushai hills, the Arakan hill tracts or the state of Tripura shall enter or reside within the Chittagong Hill Tracts unless he is in possession of a permit granted by the Deputy Commissioner.

The terminological references of “indigenous” hill man and “indigenous” tribe man are interchangeably used in different sections of the regulations, recognising the indigenous status of the hill people in the CHT. Rule 4 of the Regulations reiterates that “a Chakma, Mog (Marma) or member of any tribe is indigenous to the CHT”. Rule 52 further recognises the special status of the region by underlining that “henceforth the Hill Tracts shall be declared an excluded area”.

The above provisions of the 1900 Regulations, particularly relating to indigenous status and land rights, are considered important sources of cultural and political autonomy of Pahari in the CHT. For them, the Regulations restricted possession of CHT lands by outsiders and laid down stringent conditions for the Bengalis to occupy lands in the CHT. Proponents of the indigenous land rights movement mentioned that “the 1900 regulation is a charter of autonomy as it provided adequate protection to the rights of the hill people in the CHT” (Kalindi 2000: 4). Thus, for the Pahari, the provisions of the CHT Manual provide special claims regarding the issues of land rights, territoriality, and indigenous identity.

From the statist perspective, however, these provisions are contradictory to the constitution of Bangladesh as it restricts “citizen rights”, and is a “denial of state sovereignty” over the CHT land (sic.) (Shelly 1992). From this statist viewpoint, the Regulations merely served as an instrument for colonial administration to isolate ‘tribal’ people from the Bengali. In this current debate concerning the issues of indigenous land rights vis-à-vis constitutional legality, the CHT Manual has emerged as the main source of legal, political and cultural battle between the Pahari and the State. In the following paragraphs I discuss contemporary local Pahari and official perceptions of the CHT Manual, i.e. the way in which the 1900 Regulations are interpreted in the present political discourse.
Pahari Perceptions of the CHT Manual

The general Pahari perception of the CHT Manual is concerned with the safeguarding of their special rights, privileges and indigenous identity. There is a common impression among the ordinary Pahari, whom I spoke to both in Roangchari and Banderban, that the CHT Manual ensured traditional land rights of the jhumia. They had no problems of jhum under the indigenous authority, and no instances of widespread dispossession of jhum lands to outsiders. There was also a firm statement that migration from the plain districts was checked through the 1900 Regulations. Their life and livelihood in relation to access to jhum lands were not as difficult as they face today.109

Similarly, proponents of common property regime and activists of the indigenous land rights movement also claimed that the CHT Manual maintained “indigenous institutions” of the hill people. The hill people enjoyed a wide degree of independence and protection from the intrusion of Bengali settlers under the 1900 Regulations (Kalindi 2000; Roy 2000). Roy, a prominent local writer on the land issues, argued that “Rule 34 of the Regulations ensured the special rights and status of hill people by declaring the CHT as an indigenous area (2000: 15). Thus, it is generally perceived among political activists that the 1900 Regulations provided a kind of autonomy for the hill people. The British policy of 1900 Regulations was to protect the CHT as an “indigenous area” and to prevent outsiders from settling and owning lands, particularly restricting the dominant Bengali. The ordinary Pahari also widely hold a view that the 1900 Regulations are a symbol as well as a safeguard of their political, economic and cultural autonomy in the CHT.

Today the firm Pahari adherence to the CHT Manual is mainly reflected in its recognition of the hill tracts as homeland for the indigenous peoples. The concept “indigenous” stated in the CHT Manual has become the concept of “self-identification” as an essential element of identity construction in the current hill politics. Following the guidelines of international organisations, such as the

109 These are the summarised discussions extracted from the conversations I had with some local Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga inhabitants in Roangchari and Banderban about the 1900 regulations.
The International Labour Organisation (ILO)⁸⁰ states that the construction of Pahari identity as indigenous people of the CHT is about social and political movements against the present state policy on CHT jhum common lands. For the Pahari, the 1900 Regulations serve not only as source of rights, a special safeguard to CHT lands, it also challenges the legality of the present Bengali settlers in the CHT.

In the present context of Pahari political mobilisation, the CHT Manual can no longer be seen as a ‘colonial document’ it has become a political and legal manifesto of indigenous land rights and identity in the CHT. Recently political activists and organisations such as PCJSS, Vomi Odikhar Committee and Pahari Okka Parishod have invoked this historic document as part of their campaign for indigenous rights in the CHT (see also Chapter Seven). Among other things, one of the main demands in the recently signed peace treaty⁸¹ between the PCJSS and Bangladesh Government is the implementation and retention of the original 1900 Regulations. The other demands are autonomy for the CHT, continuation of indigenous institutions, and the constitutional provisions against the amendments of the regulations.⁸² The question of retaining the 1900 Regulations and protecting them from future changes is crucial for the Pahari. It not only forms the basis of Pahari mobilisation in terms of indigenous land rights but also challenges the presence of Bengali settlers and non-resident khas lease holders in the CHT.

The ongoing political development suggests that the 1900 Regulations have gained new impetus into the current social and political climate, particularly in the discourse of land rights, indigenous identity and the autonomy of the CHT.

**Bangladesh Legal-official Perceptions of the CHT Manual**

The Bangladesh official-legal position with regard to the CHT Manual has been rather ambiguous. In recent years, there has been a dubious role in complying with the CHT Manual as far as government legal-policy framework is concerned. From

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⁸⁰ ILO Conventions (169) state that “self-identification as indigenous or tribal shall be regarded as fundamental criteria for determining the groups to which the provisions of convention apply (Article 1(2), (cited from Kalindi 2000).

⁸¹ After twenty years of armed conflict between shanti bhahini (the paramilitary wing of PCJSS) and the Bangladesh military, a peace treaty was signed in 1997.

the statist perspective, government officials accept that some of the provisions of the 1900 Regulations are contradictory to the National Constitution and only operational with the necessary amendments. Along with this official line, many commentators and 'experts' on CHT also put forward the idea that the 1900 Regulations deny the citizen rights. A singular argument is made in relation to the CHT Manual that "it is the constitutional right for any citizen of Bangladesh to live anywhere in the country" (Shelly 1992; Ahmed 1993). Section 36 of the Constitution is always the point of reference,

Subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the public interest, every citizen shall have the right to move freely throughout Bangladesh, to reside and settle in any place therein and to leave and re-enter Bangladesh (Quoting from Shelly, 1992: 36).

Citing these constitutional provisions, Shelly, an ex-bureaucrat turned consultant, in his recent book, The Untold Story of the CHT, suggests that "restrictions on the settlement of non-residents are legally impossible under the constitutional provision, ...and thus the 1900 Regulations are no longer in force in that context " (1992: 72). Aftab Ahmed, a political scientist, even expresses frustration at the continued reliance on the "colonial document" which, for him, was "strategic to British goals, not benevolent to Bangladesh state" (1993: 41). There is a common understanding among the bureaucrats, rightwing politicians and some academics in Bangladesh that the 1900 Regulation served the purpose of colonial authority in politically dividing the 'tribal' people from the Bengali. This perspective suggests that the 1900 Regulations should not be maintained as law in the CHT affairs.

Amena Mohsin, a professor and expert on the CHT issue, though she does not hold such an extreme view, however, in her recent book The Politics of Nationalism, writes that "the continuation of 1900 Regulations in administering the CHT is bound to segregate the hill people economically and politically from rest of the country"(1997: 93). I disagree with Mohsin's view in the sense that her political analysis on this "historical document" is only reflected in examining the discourses of broader Bengali nationalist movement against the Pakistani regime in 1971. Mohsin totally ignores the present dynamics of hill politics, particularly the way in

113 Talking to the DC, Banderban and UNO, Sadar Upzilla.
which hill people now redefine the 1900 Regulations in their recent movement around indigenous land rights and identity in relation to Bengali and the State.

From the statist perspective, in fact, a common logic is put forward that the 1900 Regulations can only be applied with subsequent amendments enacted them to it. However, looking at the amendments that so far have been enacted since Pakistani times, one certainly gets an impression of the motives and intentions of State regimes and why they are so inclined towards these amendment provisions. The amendments to the 1900 Regulations especially the recent ones are directly linked to the dispossession of jhum land of the Pahari, and set as the regulatory mechanism of the state to implement khas land lease policy in the CHT. For the Pahari, thus, the amendments to the CHT Manual are about shifting their rights over CHT lands to the Bengali, affecting social, economic and cultural life, and putting them in a marginalised position. The retention and implementation of the original 1900 Regulations has now become a political demand and the symbol of legal instrument in their indigenous movement. A discussion of the amendments’ provisions to the CHT Manual is thus crucial in unfolding the ‘legal gymnastics’ in relation to present khas land policy in the CHT.

**Amendments of the CHT Manual**

The first major changes to the CHT Manual were made under Pakistani rule in 1964. The constitutional development in Pakistan took away the special status of the CHT as an “excluded area” and redefined it as a “tribal area” within the purview of the legislature of the country (Mohsin 1997:46). The political and legal ramifications of this shift were considerable. The CHT was no longer to be officially designated as a separate homeland for the ‘indigenous people’ as it was under its previous designation as an “excluded area”. Although the recognition of its distinctiveness as ‘tribal’ region was given under the new designation most of the provisions and privileges which guaranteed the special status of the local people under “excluded area” were modified in various measures. The first major amendment to the CHT Manual is widely believed to have been facilitating the Bengali access to the CHT.
Commentators emphasise that the constitutional changes were brought about against the backdrop of the Kaptai Dam, which caused severe dislocation and distress among the hill people and resulted in stiff local resistance against the state. In the wake of local resistance, the Pakistani state authority made amendments to the CHT Manual in order to facilitate Bengali migration in CHT by abolishing the “excluded area” status (Barua 2001; Kalindi 2000). Until 1964, there were restrictions on settling by non-hill men in the “excluded region”. Therefore, the changes to the CHT Manual, in practical terms, enabled the Bengalis to enter and acquire land in the hill tracts.

After the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, two more important amendments to the 1900 Regulations were brought in. The amendments of 1979 and 1989 are too lengthy to discuss fully but it is appropriate to highlight some of the main features as they are directly related to present khas land settlement in the CHT. The amendments of 1979 brought about significant changes in matters of land settlement in the CHT. Under the amendments to Rule 34 of the 1900 Regulations, the DC is empowered to settle up to one hundred acres of hilly lands (Unclassed State Forests or khas lands) with the family of hill or ‘non-hill men’ residents. The amendment (b-I) reads:

Land for plantation and other purposes may be settled with a person of hill or non-hill men residents by the DC from 25 acres to 100 acres. Settlement of lands to the deserving cases exceeding 100 acres shall be made with consultation of the higher authorities of the Ministry.

A definition of “non-hill man resident” was also incorporated in the amendment to Rule 34. “Non-hill men resident” means a person who has a house in the CHT for at least fifteen years or a house with agricultural lands settled by the DC (The CHT Regulations, amendment March 1979). The notion “non-hill men resident” is a new conception in relation to land settlement in the CHT. The amendments of 1979 and thereafter are directly linked to the interests of “non-hill men residents”, i.e. Bengali

114 The original Rule 34 stated "all lands held for cultivation on lease from the government are subjected to condition that every person residing and cultivating within a circle to the jurisdiction of its chief, and the lands cannot be sublet or transferred without the consent of the Commissioner" (Regulation I of 1900).

115 See the amendments to Rule 34 of 1900 regulations in March 1979, District Gazetteer, Government of Bangladesh.
to take advantage of the CHT land settlements. More significantly the amendments of 1979 can be seen as the reinforcement of state power in the form of an official-legal regime to control the CHT lands undermining privileges of the hill people granted by the original 1900 Regulations.

The 1979 amendments also awarded the DC, the central government representative of the district, a power to regulate, restrict, transfer and acquire the “government land” (khas lands) that he no longer requires any prior sanction for settling hill lands of certain quantity for plantation and other purposes for the ‘deserving cases in the name of proper land use. This has obviously provided a leverage to state authority to curtail whatever rights are left to the hill people, in the interests of the “non-hill men”. It remains unexplained, however, what are the criteria for the selection of ‘deserving cases’. It seems that the ‘deserving case’ formula simply serves as a mechanism to legalise the official policy on granting leases to the influential Bengalis. I will discuss the politics of ‘deserving cases’ in the khas lands beneficiaries section. The 1979 amendments firmly laid the basis for abuse of jhum lands in the hands of outsiders who could trade with the military and local administration in the CHT.

Another important aspect of the 1979 amendments is that all land settlements must be concluded in the form of a lease deed prescribed by the government authority. Amendment (I) to Rule 34 reads “A lease holder shall have permanent rights in the lands for which he pays rent”. The amendments necessarily facilitated the process of bringing jhum common lands (unclassed state forest lands) under the private regime of khas land lease. According to present official policy, khas land lease is open for both hill and non-hill men but in reality it is a complex process for the ordinary Pahari. I will discuss the complexity of khas land lease procedures in the later section. However, it raises a question that why jhum cultivators suddenly needed lease deeds (official tenancy rights) for their common lands.

The answer is self-explanatory in the very mechanism of khas land lease. It seems that amendments and the so-called government khas land policy are directly linked.
The *khas* land lease policy has had serious economic, social and cultural implications on the part of hill people's traditional *jhum* common rights.\(^{116}\)

The amendment of 1989 to the CHT Manual is another politically important event in the context of land settlement in CHT. In 1989, the government enacted a Local Council Bill for three hill districts in the CHT in order to establish local councils, a representative body, comprising different ethnic group to maintain and supervise local affairs, of which the most significant are land matters.\(^{117}\) Three district councils are still in operation today, but whether council has any authority on the land issue remains questionable.\(^ {118}\) The crucial feature of 1989 local government bill is the redefinition of the relationship between the hill people and the state in terms of land settlement and local authority. During the enactment of 1989 legislation for the local District Councils, there was also legislation to amend the 1900 Regulations. In 1989 District Council legislation, there were provisions for the new district councils to exercise authority on the issues of land settlement. According to the District Council Act (section 64):

> No land within the boundaries of hill districts shall be given in settlement without the prior approval of the Council. Provided that this provision shall not be applicable to lands within the Protected and Reserve forest, lands transferred or settled in for government and public interests (*sic*).

Despite this legislative provision, in practice, the power and authority of the local councils on land matters is limited. To highlight this, the following facts are worth considering. Given the above provision, if one takes into account the amount of land already covered by the Protected and Reserve forests, and that transferred, settled or acquired by the government and public interest, out of a total area of 5,089 sq. miles, there is not much that remains. And from this amount if one excludes the private

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\(^{116}\) I will discuss the *khas* land regime and local reality as an ethnographic in the following section.


\(^{118}\) It is widely believed that the creation of district councils in 1989 with selective representation of different ethnic groups in dealing local matters was a design plan of the then military government in Bangladesh. It was also a significant time when the peace process between the PCJSS and the Bangladesh government was started. There were also widespread speculations that the then army government wanted to settle longstanding conflict between the government and hill people through establishment of local councils. Some critiques pointed out that "local government should be perceived as attempt to legitimise the government control over indigenous affairs under the guise of "local government" (Kalindi 2000; Roy 2000; Rovillos 2000).
holdings of plough lands, there is not much land actually to be settled through the approval of the local councils. Even if there were some remaining, it is the jhum common lands which now government categorised as khas lands (state land).

The question of khas land settlements is, therefore, partly resolved through the 1979 amendments. The 1989 amendments to the 1900 Regulations, particularly Rule 34, ends the systematic process of gradually removing the restrictions on settlement and ownership of CHT lands by non-indigenous persons. The 1989 amendments to Rule 34 of the Regulations state: “lands for plantation purposes may be settled with deserving residents on long term basis by the Deputy commissioner”. With this amendment there are no longer any restrictions on residency for land settlement by non-indigenous peoples or non-residents outside the CHT.

Under the new amendments, the simplification of the definition “resident” without referring to previous criteria, such as time of residency, hill or non-hill men category, clearly calls for attention. The new definition is very much tied-up with District Administration’s authority to issue a CHT residency certificate to deserving persons. The CHT residency certificate is one of the prescribed criteria to be considered for the khas land lease. With such provisions, non-resident influential Bengali can now easily apply for khas land lease directly to the DC.

In this context, the District Council’s authority in relation to khas land lease regulation is certainly limited under the new legal framework. In practice, the real authority lies with the district administration. In an informal discussion with the Banderban District Council Chairman I questioned the practical authority of District Council particularly in dealing with present khas land issue. The chairman explained to me that:

According to District Council Act 1989, there is an authority over land settlement issues in the CHT, but considering the government's practical policy on the ground District Council's power is simply limited to administrative and personal matters. It is up to the civil administration, mainly the DC, who takes all the decisions in relation to regulating,
restricting and granting the land leases. The present *khas* land lease is entirely done by the district administration.

When I questioned him further as to whether he received any approval request from the district administration with regard to lease settlement as per the District Council Act, he frankly admitted to me that "no request of approval whatsoever has been sought from the District Council in relation to *khas* land lease". The chairman's account tells us not only the weakness of the District Council legislation on the ground in relation to land settlement but also reveals the power and authority of the *khas* land regime in the CHT.

My discussion with Banderban Sadar *Upzilla* UNO (*Upzilla Executive Officer*) regarding the applicability of the 1900 Regulations within the present official-legal framework presents another dimension to the power of *khas* land regime at the local level. The UNO states that:

The 1900 Regulations remains the administrative and legal source of authority for the District administration in the CHT. The Deputy Commissioner is still a District Magistrate with jurisdiction of civil and criminal matters as well as chief executive representing the central government according to the 1900 Regulations.

From this official account, one may get an impression that the 1900 Regulations are strictly followed in legal and administrative practices in the CHT. Of course, it is true that the 1900 Regulations have never been entirely repealed but they have been dysfunctional through gradual amendments in order to accommodate the government's various political goals and policies. Thus, the legal status of the 1900 Regulations remains unclear. For example, in the context of *khas* land lease, the administrative and judicial role of the DC is contradictory as he maintains, on the one hand, the procedural responsibility over lease settlements, on the other hand, he exercises the judicial authority over dispute settlement. Devashis Roy rightly points out that "Bangladesh state authority is reluctant to implement the original 1900 Regulations but manipulates them whenever it suits the interests of the regime" (1998: 37).

It is quite ironic that amongst the government officials I talked to in Banderban about the *khas* land issues they always take to the 1900 Regulations as their
reference point. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the official perspective always maintained that the CHT hill lands are state lands, according to 1900 Regulations. Therefore, khas lands are government’s “unclassed state forest lands”. Officials referring to the 1900 Regulations is in practice an articulation to legitimate government claims on khas lands as ‘state lands’, so that they have the right, as government representatives, to handle these lands according to government policy. What it demonstrates is that the Government’s recent policy on khas land lease to the non-resident Bengali is justified in accordance with the present legal status of the 1900 Regulations.

Government land officials in the CHT suggest a view that jhum cultivators do not have any ownership or rights to the lands because they do not have titles for the fixed lands. The statist perspective claims that land used for jhum cultivation is ‘unoccupied’ government land unless a document of title or lease has been issued or produced. It is not clear, however, from the official-legal point of view whether the traditional rights of hill people to jhum land is legally ended through the amendments of the Regulations. The new dimensions of individual lease procurement under the khas land policy clearly suggest a process of privatisation of the jhum common lands.

As I mentioned earlier, local Pahari in Roangchari, in contrast, assert that the rights to jhum are embedded in shared collective rights and jhum common land belongs to the village community. For the Pahari the rights to jhum land and resources is by virtue of their ‘common ownership’ within the framework of ‘traditional institutions’. The 1900 regulation acknowledged these collective rights of the hill people.

My discussion with Devashis Roy about the customary rights and the 1900 Regulations is important to mention here. Devashish Roy mentions that “the 1900 Regulations contain the provisions in relation to control and regulate the already existing rights and remain the principle regulatory instrument in identifying, defining, and declaring various customary rights and privileges of Pahari to lands in the CHT. The Government does not formally recognise the rights of the indigenous people to the common land as collective right. It regards these lands are the state
owned *khas* lands. Now for all practical purposes these fall within the judicial regime of private property rights under the *khas* land regime”.

From the above analysis it is clear that in recent years the most important development concerning land settlement policy in the CHT is the amendments to the 1900 Regulations. The amendments of 1979 and 1989 can be seen as an attempt at rationalisation of the CHT land, particularly the *jhumi* lands. Through the enactment of new amendments to the 1900 Regulations, the government tends to create a framework of how to control the *jhumi* lands in the name of proper ‘rational’ utilization. The amendments to the 1900 Regulations thus created the legal provision for the state administration to lease the CHT hill lands (unclassed state forest in government terms) to the non-hill residents under newly defined category of *khas* land lease.

The changes in the 1900 Regulations are perceived by the government as a means to ratify the anomalies in accordance with the basic principle of the national constitution of ‘citizen’s rights’. The amendments to the 1900 Regulations thus reinforced the statist conception of CHT land, with the government as the ultimate owner of the *khas* lands (*jhumi* lands). Under the present politico-legal framework, the government possesses the right to allocate any part of *khas* land to individuals and to institutions (government, non-government, forest and military purposes) on the basis of need assessments.

**New Entitlements and *Khas* Land Lease**

Since the early 1980s, under the new legal provisions the government continues to pursue a policy of *khas* land settlement. Individuals, hill or non-hill resident, are asked to apply for the hill land lease in order to have legal entitlement to the lands. According to *khas* land policy, the government also fixed a ceiling of 5 acres of hilly lands for ordinary local lease applicants. A household is only entitled to apply for 5 acres of *khas bondobasti* (lease). The district administration, particularly the DC is given the authority to regulate these so-called *khas* land *bondobasti*. The DC is empowered to grant a ceiling of a minimum one to five acres of *khas* lands to ordinary local lease applicants, but as many as twenty five to one hundred acres to
“deserving persons”. Leases, for example, more than the DC’s ceiling of 100 acres, require the approval of the Land Ministry.

In CHT, this \textit{khas} land lease is undertaken in the name of \textit{bagan unnaya} (forest development). This new policy is thus bringing major changes in traditional \textit{jhum} land use under the management of the headman-\textit{karbari} system, which has until now operated as \textit{mouza} commons. The government’s new \textit{khas} land lease policy is directed towards changing the common tenurial practices of \textit{jhum}. The introduction of 5 acres of \textit{khas} land lease for CHT “residents” can be seen as the government’s strategy to establish private rights over the CHT lands. The 5 acres of \textit{jhum} land lease to individuals means they acquire definite rights over a piece of land, thus not only encouraging the individualisation of \textit{jhum} land but also taking away the very essence of traditional ‘common rights’ and the notion of ‘collective ownership’.

Leasing five acres of \textit{khas} land to every household has other implications. In many cases, Bengali settlers mostly based in urban centres in the CHT seek \textit{khas bondobasti} under different names for the same household using different means. As a result a single household can lease lands over and above the prescribed ceiling. On the other hand, for the ordinary \textit{Pahari} this rule stands as for “one household one lease”. I have observed that even when ordinary \textit{Pahari} attempt to imitate the example of their Bengali counterpart, they fail to get the same response because of the indifferent attitudes of land officials at the district administration. There is no provision in the policy framework to deal with this issue. Officials are aware of this matter but simply ignore it for other reasons. As a result, a greater portion of these \textit{khas} land lease are going disproportionately to the Bengali under this ‘ceiling’ policy. I have collected the names of the leaseholder households in Roangchari, which show that only a very small number of \textit{Pahari} have more than 10 acres of \textit{khas bondobasti} (lease). In the following section I discuss detailed official procedures of \textit{khas bondobasti}.

\textbf{Official Mechanisms and Bureaucratic Procedures of \textit{Khas Bondobasti}}

The section discusses the operational procedures of the \textit{khas} land regime in the CHT based on ethnographic experience of the steps and mechanisms involved in
procurement of a khas land bondobasti (lease) in the official setting. During fieldwork I observed, documented and followed up each level of the khas land lease procedures in lease cases of ordinary Pahari and outsider Bengali. In addition, to supplement data on the entire khas land lease procedure, additional information was obtained from informants who are directly involved in the lease procedures as well as local level functionaries of the DC office who prepare the lease documents.

The processes of khas bondobasti in the CHT involves many steps. The allocation procedure ranges from the lower level district administration to higher ministerial level depending on the size of lease cases. The official-bureaucratic procedures in this process are quite elaborate and complex but apply differently depending on whose cases are dealt with. The first step to khas bondobasti process is eligibility.

The eligibility of khas bondobasti

Theoretically under the present khas land lease policy, all the inhabitants of the CHT, Pahari or Bengali, are eligible to apply for a long-term lease of hilly lands (state lands) for baggan (forest) development provided that certain criteria are met. Within the present official-legal framework, there are four general conditions to be fulfilled in order to apply for a khas land lease in the CHT. The lease applicant must be (a) a Bangladeshi national, (b) a CHT resident, (c) a projojhata jachai (need assessment) of the lease must be made, and (d) the recommendation of the headman must be given.

However, all these official conditions for khas land lease application require a little interpretation because they underline the political objectives and purposes of the entire khas land regime in the CHT. Firstly, to qualify for the criteria of Bangladeshi national the applicant must produce a nationality certificate which can be obtained from either the local Union Parishod\textsuperscript{121} chairman or Municipality ward commissioner depending on the applicant's place of birth. From the official point of view, the first condition implies the constitutional obligation to the citizen's rights of Bangladesh in access to any resource within the state boundary.\textsuperscript{122} However, from

\textsuperscript{121} Union Parishod is the lower level administrative unit in rural areas of Bangladesh.
\textsuperscript{122} This point I explained in the previous section as to why 1900 regulations were amended in accordance with this policy.
the *Pahari* point of view, this condition is set only to benefit the dominant Bengali in the name of ‘citizen rights’. For them, it gives the legal entitlement to any non-indigenous person to occupy the CHT lands. The citizen rights formula, in practice, only applies to the Bengali interests. There is no room for customary rights of the *Pahari* in consideration of the very concept of citizen rights.

The most important criteria for *khas* land lease is the second condition, the CHT residency certificate. The official definition of residency in CHT is determined on the basis of a written certificate from the DC. The DC is the only authority who is able to issue the residency certificate. According to *khas* land lease policy, a resident of CHT is qualified on the ground that he/she possesses some lands or homestead in the CHT either by gift or purchase following the 1989 amendments to the 1900 Regulations. In this official qualification, one need not necessarily have to be born in the CHT or a long time resident such as fifteen years. The implication of defining the CHT residency in this way leaves scope for manipulation because any person can now easily obtain a residency certificate through influence or any other means. The government residency certification in relation to *khas bondobasti* thus favours the non-resident Bengali outside CHT. In many recent cases into which I personally enquired, most of the non-resident *khas* lease holders, in one way or another, managed to secure this so-called residency certificate from the district administration. Such measures have proven detrimental to the interests of the ordinary *Pahari*, as the outsiders are continuously dispossessing them of their common *jhum* lands.

The third and fourth conditions to the *khas bondobasti* can also be seen as politically motivated. According to present *khas* land policy, the condition of the headman’s recommendation only applies to the *mouza* residents, particularly for the *jhum* cultivators if they apply for a lease of five to ten acres of their ‘common lands’ as per lease ceiling. The headman’s recommendation is not a required condition for the big leases even though these are mostly granted within the *mouza* common lands. In fact, the headman’s recommendation for the *mouza jhum* lands is to make an official justification of the *khas* land lease for the *Pahari*.
The criterion of *projojhata jachai* (need assessment) has always been on the basis of *baggan* development (forest development) in the CHT for almost every lease applicant. The big lease applicants submit a well-prepared project proposal for the *baggan development* in the CHT. For the ordinary *Pahari* the notion *projojhata jachai* is a question of livelihood. According to *khas* land lease policy guidelines, the notion of *projojhata jachai* is perceived as being based on private initiatives of forest development of ‘state lands’. In this context, the criteria of “need assessment” can be seen as an official justification of government privatisation policy of the *khas* lands/*jhum* lands.

As per the official policy, once all the above conditionalities have been met the applicants, whether *Pahari* or other “CHT resident”, are supposedly legally eligible to apply for a long-term lease of hilly *khas* lands (state lands). In practice, this is not so straightforward for ordinary *Pahari*. The different procedural steps involved in obtaining even five acres of *khas bondobasti* is an awesome task due to what I term a process of ‘procedural obstruction’. The entire *khas* land regime has been established for a politically motivated purpose. The legal-bureaucratic procedures involved in *khas bondobasti* processes can be interpreted as overt manifestations of political manoeuvring on the one hand and making difficulties for the ordinary *Pahari* on the other. There are several ‘important steps’ to be followed before one finally applies for *khas bondobasti* to the DC.

**Preparing *khas bondobasti***

At the second step to *khas bondobasti*, the applicants go through a crucial stage of preparing relevant papers, including drafting a petition addressed to the DC. At this point, firstly the lease applicant has to find ‘unallocated *khas* land’. Officially finding ‘unallocated *khas* land’ involves merely choosing a piece of vacant ‘state land’ waiting to be leased out. For the ordinary *Pahari*, however, the notion of ‘unallocated *khas* land’ is altogether a more complicated matter. For them, what is ‘unallocated *khas* lands’ is their *jhum* common lands. In practice, the officially ‘unallocated *khas* land’ is still under possession and operated by the local *Pahari* as their *mouza* commons. Where to find ‘unallocated *khas* lands’ then?
Unallocated khas lands

In essence, ‘unallocated khas lands’ is a statist myth. The way in which the whole story of ‘unallocated khas land’ is dealt with in the process of khas bondobasti clearly reflects a state of paradox. In actuality, the only straight way to find this so-called ‘unallocated khas land’ is from the DC Office. The revenue section of the District administration, particularly the kanango (official land surveyor) maintains a book called balam khatian no-1, which contains the names of leaseholders, individuals and institutions, in different mouzas of the district with an attested trace map of the eye-estimated geographical boundary of the leased lands. From the Balam khatain no1, one may get an idea of ‘allocated khas lands’ but there is no record for undistributed or ‘unallocated khas land’ in the CHT. By default, all land if not officially allocated becomes “unallocated”. But access to the register is subject to manipulation.

Alternatively, there is another way of getting this ‘secret information’ from the jhum tazi (register list) supplied by the headmen of each mouza to the DC for jhum land distribution and the collection of jhum tax each year. The jhum tazi roughly demarcates the area where jhumia farm, without any legal entitlement or lease. The tazi also contains information of jhum plots with an eye-estimated geographical boundary on a household basis. This certainly gives some clues to the big lease seekers, of course with the help of district administration, as to where an area of ‘unallocated khas lands’ lies!

It is not difficult for the influential lease seekers to obtain this information as money and power play a vital role in the process. The authority of finding an ‘unallocated khas land’ for lease seekers has made the DC office a centre for manipulation. The lease applicants are required to offer cash, locally known as nojor salami, to get this magic information regarding ‘unallocated khas land’. In most lease cases, the officials of the revenue department, the Kanongo in particular, play an important role in the entire process of khas bondobasti.
Drafting an application

The next stage of *khas bondobasti* preparation is drafting a lease application that the applicant has an ‘unallocated *khas* land’ to apply for. For the majority of ordinary *Pahari*, however, the whole process of *khas bondobasti* (lease) preparation is a daunting experience. Firstly, with few exceptions, the majority of the ordinary *Pahari* are illiterate and have little knowledge of the technicalities of administrative procedures such as legal titles, deeds and court proceedings. Moreover, the linguistic barrier is one of the key factors putting them in a disadvantaged position in official dealings. Given the fact that by and large ordinary *Pahari* are ignorant about petition writing, under the present *khas* land regime they are now increasingly being caught up in a vicious circle, particularly with regard to dependence on Bengali middlemen. In present day CHT, the middlemen and the lower level officials at the district administration have locally formed a vested interest group to exploit the situation of ordinary *Pahari*.

There is a visibly growing number of Bengali professional petition writers in the market places and near the premises of DC and UNO (*Upzilla* executive officer) offices in Banderban and Roangchari. These petition writers offer their services at different levels including writing *khas bondobasti* application as well as a negotiation of the lease cases with the lower level officials of the DC office. They act like the agent or brokers of the *khas* land enterprise. I have seen a handful of such Bengali middlemen (brokers) earn their daily necessities by negotiating between *khas bondobasti* seekers and the officials at *Upzilla* and DC office. Every day, they wait in the office corridor of DC and UNO for the *moakkel* (party); when they see ordinary *Pahari* coming to the office for some purpose they immediately catch them up for their service.

In general, writing a single *khas bondobasti* petition costs around two hundred to three hundred taka but with negotiation fees included it amounts to between one to two thousand taka.\textsuperscript{23} In many cases, I observed they even charge more simply showing how busy they were with workload at the desk. These middlemen always look busy at the service of ‘big party’ (locally used phrase), preparing the
applications, collecting certificates, and mobilising an interest group at the DC office. For an outside lease seeker, financial strength almost ensures the khas bondobasti preparation. However, for helpless ordinary Pahari the situation is different. They succumb to the middlemen’s demands in consideration of urgency and professional expertise of khas bondobasti application writings. The cost involved in khas bondobasti petition writing and ‘negotiation service’ fees sometimes requires an ordinary Pahari to spend an entire month’s earnings.124

In the following paragraphs, I give an example of the harsh reality faced by an ordinary Pahari woman in khas bondobasti preparation which I encountered in December 1999 at Roangchari Bazar (market). Soci Rani Tanchanga aged around 60, was an old inhabitant of Bogachare para (village) of Roangchari. The village is only four miles away from the Roangchari Bazar but coming from the Bagachara one has to walk hours on a rugged, uneven narrow hilly path. Soci Rani Tanchanga came along with her nephew to find a professional petition writer to draft an application on her behalf for a khas bondobasti of her homestead. She was virtually forced to put an application to the UNO as one of her relatives found that her homestead area, including three surrounding hills has already been under process of khas bondobasti by a Bengali businessman in Bandarban. She was told by her relative to prepare an application quickly to the UNO because the Bengali businessman had already filed petition to the ADC (revenue) with a ‘trace map’ from the Kanongo. With that urgency the old Tanchanga woman literally cried and confessed to me that she had to sell all her chicken to bear the cost of petition writings and other official formalities. The Soci Rani Tanchanga had literally compelled me to get involved with her application writing. Later I heard that she managed to save her homestead area but the surrounding three hills were leased out to the promising Bengali leaseholder.

Soci Rani’s case is perhaps a clear manifestation of the situation faced by ordinary Pahari under the present khas land regime. The Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga of

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123 £1 = 60 Taka conversion during my fieldwork time in 1999-2000.
124 The monthly earnings are calculated on the basis of a modest yearly earning of 18000.00 Tk per household in the CHT. That means per month income of a household is around 1500.00 TK.
Roangchari and Banderban are no exception to this exploitative system of government’s *khas* land lease preparation.

**Submitting a *khas bondobasti* application**

At the final stage of *khas bondobasti*, the recommended applications usually only come to the DC office for approval or sanction. Firstly, the prepared lease application is lodged with the respective UNO at the *Upzilla* level where the actual lease is sought. The UNO initiates the first action on lease cases after reviewing all the relevant documents such as a residency certificate, nationality certificate, the headman’s recommendation, *projojhata jachai* (the need assessment) of the applicant and so forth. The UNO then forward the case to the ADC (revenue) at the district level, if the application is found genuine. However, none of the cases would be found genuine without cash. The file is forwarded by the UNO and only moves upward to the ADC (revenue) after fulfilment of the demands. If the demand at the *Upzilla* level is not met “properly”, the application file would be held up and remain ineffective for months.

Once the forwarded file reaches to the ADC office, the ADC (revenue) after verifying the genuineness of the case, forwards it to the DC. The DC then recommends to the *Kanongo* for field survey and report to the ADC (revenue) with a trace map of the lease lands in question. According to *khas bondobasti* policy, it is almost mandatory for the *Kanongo* (surveyor) to physically visit the lease site and prepare a field survey report on whether the ‘would be leased land’ is under dispute. In practice, this hardly ever occurs because this is the same office which prepares the groundwork for the *khas bondobasti* case by providing the vital information of ‘unallocated *khas* lands’.

The *Kanongo* prepares a trace map of this so-called ‘unallocated *khas* land’ for the lease applicants in exchange for handsome returns. Nowadays, *Kanongo* make a straightforward demand of the *nojor salami* for making a trace map with an imaginary report delineating the demarcation of proposed *khas bondobasti* (lease). A trace map is drawn by the *Kanongo*, for example, locating a geographical boundary
such as to the south *Boro Bod Gas* (big banian tree), to the north *Mora Khal* (dead canal) in favour of lease application.125

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, there is no cadastral survey and land map with plot numbers for leased lands in the CHT. The approval of *khas* land lease is therefore, arbitrarily demarcated with a trace map based on an eye-estimated geographical boundary. However, there are some recurrent problems with this trace map of *khas bondobasti*. Most often, *Kanongo* produce as imaginary trace map without having a clear knowledge of boundary demarcation of the so-called 'unallocated' *khas* lands. Often this leads to conflict between the *Pahari* and the Bengali lease-holders. The trace map prepared by the *Kanongo* based on his own estimation sometimes includes the homestead of the *Pahari*, as we have seen in the case of Soci Rani Tanchanga. In other cases, problems with this imaginary trace map arise between leaseholders claiming the rights on the same demarcated lands.

However, despite these limitations, the positive field report of the *Kanongo* on *khas bondobasti* depends to a large extent on attractive cash payments ranging between three thousand to ten thousand *taka* depending on the size of lease cases. This has now become almost an unwritten official practice in the CHT. All the higher level officials in the district administration including the DC and ADC (revenue) share the amount charged by the *Kanongo* for the purpose.

I asked one of my informants in Roangchari, Anil Tanchanga who was about to get ten acres of *khas bondobasti* in 2000 why he had to pay so much money to a simple *Kanongo* as he had already paid a substantial amount to the UNO of Roangchari. He told me that "*Kanongo* is not a simple man; he is very powerful because he is the one who makes the lease application strong". Anil Tanchanga further jokingly commented, *Tia chara file 'kanongo office a gomai thikibo* (the file will remain asleep at *Kanongo*’s table without money).

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125 I take this example of a trace map from my informant Anil Tanchanga’s *khas bondobasti* application.
Granting *khas bondobasti*

The final step towards *khas bondobasti* involves the official sanction by the DC after the field report from *Kanongo* has been forwarded by the ADC (revenue). According to *khas* land lease policy, the call for a hearing is to investigate whether there is any dispute or claim by any person over the proposed *bondobasti*. However, the hearing procedure itself is of a dubious nature. In fact the entire hearing procedure is only organised to legally justify the *khas* land lease to the 'prospective' bondobasti seekers. Even if there are disputes over the proposed *bondobasti* the complainants never receive any notice to appear before the hearings. Although it is often shown in the letter delivery book that notices are served to the complainants on time. The ADC (revenue) office set the hearing date in accordance with prospective beneficiaries’ interests.

I had the opportunity to attend two such hearings at the ADC (revenue) office at Banderban. On one occasion in June 2000, I observed a Bengali ‘prospective’ *bondobasti* seeker accompanied by two local lawyers waiting at the ADC (revenue) office for a hearing.¹²⁶ There were no other persons present at the office. The hearing was about a hundred acres of hilly *khas bondobasti* in *Aloykhong mouza* under Banderban sadar *Upzilla* by a Bengali lease seeker from Satkania *Upzilla* of Chittagong district. The proposed leased lands were actually under occupation of *Dulu para* (village) *jhum* cultivators. Interestingly there were several complaints from *Dulu para* villagers against the proposed *khas bondobasti*.

After about an hour when the ADC (revenue) finally started the hearing procedures, he first told his *Ardali* (assistant) to call the complainant before the hearing. The *Ardali* immediately went out of the office and started calling one after another by name of each complainants but none of them responded and appeared at the hearing. The ADC (revenue) then asked his *Ardali*, “why did the complainants did not appear to the hearing”. The *Ardali* showing a letter registry book replied, “sir, we have issued the notices to both parties much earlier to appear on the hearing day”. Then

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¹²⁶ I happened to be in the DC office on the day of the hearing. When I knew from one my informants at the DC office that there would be a hearing in the afternoon I immediately seized the opportunity and approached to the ADC (revenue) to have permission to observe the hearing procedures.
one of the lawyers of bondobasti seeker stood up and defending the Ardali told the ADC “sir, as per law we have appeared before the hearing but our makkal (client) can not wait for years for the complainants to come”. After some minutes of silence the ADC (revenue) concluded the hearing, “As no complainants appeared before the hearing all the complaints against this khas bondobasti case are dismissed and the bondobasti application is declared valid and should be forwarded for approval”.127 The whole hearing procedure seemed to me arranged by the ADC (revenue) office on behalf of the Bengali lease seeker. The conversations in the hearing also looked very precise for the justification of the lease case. Thus the hearing procedures of khas bondobasti only represent the interests of the khas land regime in pursuing lease policy for the ‘prospective’ beneficiaries.

Finally, with post-hearing recommendation by the ADC (revenue), the proposed lease case is again placed before the DC for sanction. The successful outcome of the khas bondobasti ends up with an issuance of a kabiliat (a lease document), of course with a final round of financial inducement. Thus for a wealthy and influential lease seeker the entire process of khas bondobasti requires minimal time as money and power play a crucial role at each stage of decision-making and the whole procedure is done at the higher level. Whereas for the ordinary Pahari the process of khas bondobasti, even for five to ten acres, represents procedural bureaucratic obstruction, longer waiting times and endless loitering in the corridors of the DC and UNO office. In most cases the ordinary Pahari give up the desire to obtain khas bondobasti in the middle of the process due to the financial burden and discriminatory, indifferent attitudes of the khas land regime at the district administration.

Nowadays, different sections such as influential local leaders, Bengali businessmen, government officials and military personnel are all engaged in occupying hill lands in the name of khas bondobasti. The entire cadre of functionaries of the DC and UNO office have now become active partners in making the khas land regime an economic enterprise. Apart from individuals khas bondobasti there are also instances of manipulations and fraudulent practices at institutional bondobasti cases.

127 The conversations of the hearing are translated from my Bengali transcript. The whole hearing
As and when the DC office learned in advance about government schemes of land acquisition for a particular department or institution in the CHT, the officials of the District Administration initiate a process to mobilise an interest group of middlemen. These middlemen, mainly from the settler Bengali, are mischievously engaged with the DC office in making some forged documents relating to proposed *khas bondobasti* with a view of getting compensation. The district administration help them to prepare back-dated *khas bondobasti* papers in order to settle compensation cases before government acquisition is made the proposed scheme. When the particular government institution finally proposes for the lease or acquisition of lands in question, the middlemen in collaboration with the district administration launch a compensation case against the proposed lease with fake documents made earlier. As and when the compensation money is released from the government exchequer all parties involved i.e. middlemen and officials of the district administration become equal beneficiaries of the misappropriated money.

It seems that government *khas* land lease policy is designed to pave the way for Bengali establishment in the CHT. A Bengali commercial interest group has emerged out of this policy whereas the majority of ordinary Pahari are in the process of losing their traditional rights and becoming landless and marginalised. Under the new official-legal policy, any resident of the CHT, irrespective of ethnicity is entitled to *khas* land lease from any part of the CHT but, in practice, this is not the case. Some recent examples of *khas* land lease owners in Roangchari and Banderban area reveal the underlying motives of government *khas* land policy.

*Khas Bondobasti and Prospective Beneficiaries*\(^{28}\)

Mr Nur Alam,\(^{29}\) a former minister and influential political figure at present in the BNP government, is one of the ‘deserving persons’ in the lists of present *khas* land settlements. Mr Alam was granted a sum of five hundred acres of *khas* land for

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\(^{28}\) The names of the beneficiaries and size of the leased lands are collected from my personal engagement with the local level employees of the DC office, and personally visiting the lease sites.

\(^{29}\) In this section I am not using the real names of the beneficiaries rather using pseudonymous names.
baggan development in the Chemi mouza of Banderban sadar Upazilla (central sub-district) under his wife’s name. Mr Alam’s younger brother Mr. Younus is another ‘deserving person’, perhaps as the brother of the former minister, who was also granted 100 acres of khas lands in the same mouza. These so-called khas lands of Chemi mouza were under the possession of three villages: namely Bag Guna, Hati Bhaga and Zadi Mura para, as jhum common lands until leases are granted to Alam’s family members. The Chemi mouza headman told me that he maintained the jhum tazi for jhumia of these three villages in terms of collecting jhum tax and distributing mouza common lands. The headman also showed me the complaint applications lodged by the villagers to the DC against this khas land lease but ended up with no results after three official-legal hearings. \(^{130}\) When I visited the lease site I found many of the jhum cultivators in these villages became sub-lease holders of Alam’s family providing they carry out jhum cultivation in certain areas and plant trees in other areas every year.

Another prospective beneficiary of the khas land lease is Mr. Ali, the BNP MP of Khagrachri District from northern CHT, who is also the present chairman of CHT Development Board with the rank of a deputy minister. Mr Ali has an allotment of 500 acres of khas land under Koykong mouza of Roangchari in the name of baggan development. This khas land lease to Mr. Ali forced the Tanchanga jhumia of Kutubchari para to leave their traditional village jhum common lands. Local Tanchanga people of Kutubchari para told me that there were instances of police harassment due to local resistance against the lease.

Apart from these big leaseholders, there are also local Bengali businessmen and politicians, high-level government officials and army personnel based in Dhaka who altogether accounted for 90% of the total khas land leases granted in the year between 1999 and 2000. The size of the leases ranged from fifty to two hundred acres in different mouzas of Banderban and Roangchari Upazila. \(^{131}\) Besides these

\(^{130}\) As I have mentioned in the previous section, one such official-legal hearing procedures I attended in Banderban ADC (revenue) office was incredibly dubious in a manner that it was all just arranged for the purpose of verifying the leases.

\(^{131}\) I have here consulted the khas lands leases only in two Upazillas. I have had opportunity to access to some of the official lists of lease documents through my local informants, who are district administration employees involved in khas land lease process. On the ground of maintaining privacy, I will not put in their names in this text due to sensitivity of the information.
political personalities, during my fieldwork in 1999-2000, I also came across some senior government officials in the District administration of Banderban, who, by dint of their superior bureaucratic status, appropriated a share of khas land leases. In the years between 1999-2000 alone, the DC, ADC (revenue) of Banderban, and the UNO of Banderban and Roangchari all secured khas lands of different sizes ranging from fifty to a hundred acres under the names of their kin and family members. Officially, as government officers, they are barred from registering any khas lands with their own names. There are also a few local Pahari on the list of khas land lease settlements such as the present local Awami League MP of Banderban, two of the King's brothers, and some government employees in Banderban district.

Besides individual leases, there are also substantial amounts of institutional leases for the Forest Department and Military establishments in Banderban. I do not have actual data for these institutional leases but the daily newspapers reports and some NGO publications suggest that "around 3000 acres of khas lands are granted to the Forest Department for the development of reserve forest, and around 1500 acres to Roangchari cantonment for the establishment of a firing training centre" (Protom Alo, 17 June 2000; Raviloo 2000).

These are the few examples of direct beneficiaries by the government's new khas land lease policy in the CHT. It is quite ironic that the so-called khas land lease policy is envisaged with a view to rational baggan unnayan (forest development), as jhum practice by the Pahari is seen as contrary to forest development in the CHT. The concept of 'rational' land use by leasing khas land to individuals appears to be closely associated with government's favoured policy of privatisation. Within the framework of the government's current khas land policy there is a greater need for modes of revenue generation in the CHT. The concept of khas land management in this new policy can be seen as the privatisation of jhum common lands to individual entrepreneurs and government establishments. The khas land policy is directed to promote the aims of powerful interests in the commercial usage of jhum common lands.

As a result, in recent years thousands of acres of so-called khas bondobasti are now in the possession of only a handful of the urban elite. In fact, under the khas land
policy in cases of such lease (*bondobasti*) to affluent and influential persons for *bagan* development, no attention is given to local traditional rights of the *Pahari*. In almost all the cases I investigated leases were given on *jhum* common lands, which are traditionally under the possession of the village community.

Moreover, the leaseholders carried out minimal plantation just to protect their rights on the leased-lands. In many cases, there are instances of subleasing to original *Pahari* users. A large number of outside *khas* land leaseholders have subleased out their lands to the local *jhum* cultivators. The contract of these sub leases maintains that the local *jhumia* could use the lands either by payment of fixed amount of money annually to the leaseholders or plantation of tress for *baggan* development on one side of the leased-lands each year. Once the lands are filled with plantations the contract of sub-lease is over.\(^{132}\) The leaseholders then make a big profit it by selling trees with high market values in cooperation with the forest department.\(^{133}\)

One of my informants, Sodaram Tanchanga of *Bagua mouza* in Roangchari, told me that he is now contractually using a leased plot of a Bengali businessman of Banderban town named Sanjib Das on agreement of *baggan* development. This means that the *Pahari* have become day labourers and sharecroppers on their own lands. The fact is that in the long run under the *khas* land regime the entire *jhum* common lands in the CHT would come under different entitlements of individual ownership and commercial interests. The big leases to the influential Bengali perhaps become part of this envisaged goal.

However, there are also many instances of legal battles between leaseholders and original local users, such as the case between local *jhum* land users of *Chemi mouza* and Ali’s family.\(^{134}\) Most of the legal battles, however, ended up with the outcome that ordinary *Pahari* were unable to pursue the lengthy procedure of litigation

\(^{132}\) I have learned this process talking to some of the sub-lease holders in Roangchari and Banderban.  
\(^{133}\) In the CHT, it is quite difficult for the ordinary *Pahari* to sell their own grown trees without the forest department permit whereas for the big lease holders permit is not an issue.  
\(^{134}\) I have documented a few cases between individual leaseholders and local inhabitants, and between the Forest Department and locals. However, I only mention the cases here because it is too elaborate to discuss in this text.
against the powerful elements, which requires money and power. Giving up the legal battle left the *Pahari* with few options. Firstly, they could move into the deep interior region of the CHT hills in search of *jhum* lands that are yet to be leased out. This option is obviously strenuous because of the remoteness of the sites from the place of residence and there is no certainty for not being leased out again. Secondly, they take a sub-lease on an annual basis from the ‘legal’ leaseholders. The final option is the organised resistance movement against government policy.

The increasing trend of land dispossession and consequent economic alienation has forced upon all the ethnic groups a sense of unity for collective survival articulating a common shared deprivation and common resistance against the state land policy. Today the political mobilisation of all ethnic groups as *Pahari* is taking a new shape in the form of indigenous land rights movements against *khas* land lease in the CHT.

**A Case of *Pahari* Resistance and *Khas* Land Lease**

It was the first week of June 2000. I had just returned from a short break in Dhaka with my family and immediately noticed how everywhere in the Banderban town area was covered with a poster of an upcoming protest rally organised by *Vomi O Vomi Odikhar Shangrogkon Committee* (Land and Land Rights Protection Committee), a newly formed organisation against the government *khas* land lease policy. The main issue of the protest rally was the government’s recent acquisition of 2000 acres of *khas* land for a sub-military base in Roangchari evicting *Soanloo para* Bwam inhabitants from their *jhum* common lands. While initially talking to some of the key figures of *Vomi Odikhar Committee* and some of my local informants about the whole episode of the organised rally in Banderban, I came to know that there had been stiff local resistance against the government’s *khas* land acquisition in Roangchari. The proposed project was the establishment of a firing training centre in the hills near *Soanloo para*. I was told that the way in which the military personnel took control of the project area by arresting, beating and abusing local Bawm people of *Soanloo para* had created serious repercussions among all the *Pahari* people in the CHT including the regional political party PCJSS. The formation of *Vomi Odikhar Committee* and the up-coming protest rally on 30th June
2000 was thus part of wider social movement against the government’s *khas* land lease policy in the CHT.

In the following days, I wanted to focus on the events around the up-coming protest rally and local responses to military acquisition of *khas* lands at *Soanloo para*, spending substantial time observing organised activities both at Roangchari and Banderban. Firstly, in order to collect first hand information about local responses to *khas* land lease, I began talking to the victims and protest organisers in the *Soanloo para*. Mr. Dan Doha Bawm is one of the victim of *Soanloo para* and a member of newly formed *Vomi Odikhar Committee* against the establishment of a firing centre on *jhum* common lands, gave me a vivid account of the background of the *khas* land lease by the military. He explained to me how local Bawm people of *Soanloo para* were evicted by the military personnel from their traditional *jhum* lands. He explained:

> The disputed leased land is only one mile from the *Soanloo para*. We have been using these lands as village common since we settled in this area. When we first knew about the acquirement of these common lands by Roangchari military camp we went to the UNO along with local headman to request him not to issue the proposed *khas* lease for military firing centre. We explained to him that *khas* land lease to firing centre would cause the livelihood situation of entire Bawm people at *Soanloo para*. The UNO pretended that he did not know anything about it but promised that he would look into this matter. But in the last month, suddenly military people came in and built their security post over the lands and restricted the Bawm people not to move into the area. The news immediately sparked the whole *Soanloo Para*. People were waiting for the rain to begin the *jhum* after cutting, clearing and burning the jungle. In the next morning all the villagers at *Soanloo para* decided to go to the lands but many of them were beaten and physically mishandled including myself and the *Soanloo para karbari* by the military personnel. We again met the UNO and briefed him on the whole matter but he only advised us not take law on our hands. He betrayed us. The whole process of *khas* land acquirement was done secretly among the top officials of the administration. There were even no hearings for the lease. People are now very desperate about their lands and livelihood. It is now illegal for us to go to the lands. The *Soanloo para* Bawm will now be facing a great hardship in their everyday life. As *Pahari* we have now only option left to make a bigger *andolon* (movement) against the government *khas* land lease (my translation from the Bengali transcriptions).
Besides talking to Dan Doha Bawm, I also talked to the local Marma headman Mong La Sing about the issue of khas land lease to the Roangchari military sub-base and the local responses. He explains to me that:

I went to the UNO many times to explain him about the Soanloo para mouza common lands but the government has taken such harsh decision even without consulting the local headman and karbari. The headman and karbari are traditionally distributing these jhum common lands to the villagers. We are now helpless. The government’s khas land lease policy does not recognise headmen’s authority. Government is now allocating these lands to anybody without considering Pahari people’s odikhar (rights). The implications of khas land lease have been a profound impact on the life of Pahari people in the CHT. Now you can see every where in the CHT the land rights protest movements against the government khas land lease.

Both Dan Doha Bawm’s and the headman’s account indicate a new dimension to the khas land lease policy in the CHT - organised collective movement as the only alternative. The ordinary people in Roangchari including the Bawm of Soanloo para that I talked to are visibly being motivated and mobilised in that direction. The event of khas land lease to the Military base in Roangchari and subsequent military assault on the local Bawm have had a serious repercussion among all ethnic groups in the CHT. The event has also sensitised the PCJSS, the only regional political party in the CHT questioning the government’s sincerity to the peace treaty.

Responding to the popular demand against the government khas land policy, in 2000 a committee was formed in the name of Vomi O Vomi Adikar Shangrogkon Committee (Land and land Rights Protection Committee) mainly with PCJSS initiatives. The committee is comprised of elderly personalities from different ethnic groups, headmen and karbari with Z. R. Larma, the PCJSS Chief, as its head. From the inception Vomi Odikhar Committee launched its organisational activities focusing on the land problems of the Pahari. At the local level, it organises small consultation meetings involving local headmen, karbari, and ordinary Pahari. In such consultation meetings, I participated in Roangchari and Banderban, I observed a dynamic process of interaction taking place between the leaderships of the land rights movement and the ordinary Pahari.
Listening to the local *jhumia* about their day-to-day land related problems, taking new information and engaging with them actively in the political process of resistance against the state policies the *Vomi Odikhar Committee* emerged as a *Pahari* ‘justice’ organisation. Building on shared experiences of *Pahari* land dispossession the movement brought together people from various ethnic backgrounds. The main aim of the resistance movement is to protect *jhum* lands from leasing in the name of *khas* lands. The question of restoring traditional land rights became the core issue of the movement demanding the cancellation of all leases. The activities of *Vomi Odikhar Committee* thus involve not only the mobilisation of *Pahari* on the basis of common land dispossession appealing to local sentiments but also challenging the statist ideology of land policy in the CHT. The formation of the multi-ethnic *Vomi Odikhar Committee* has generated a new spirit of cooperation among all ethnic groups in the CHT.

On 30 June 2000, the *Vomi Odikar Committee* with quick mobilisation organised a grand rally in Banderban *Rajbari Moidan* presided over by a Roangchari Bawm leader Mr. Amlay Bawm. Mr. Z. R. Larma was present as the chief guest. It was the largest rally of this kind I have ever seen during my two years stay in Banderban. On 30th June the whole Banderban town area was transformed into a city of protest. From early morning, *Pahari* people of all categories, men, women, youth and elderly, started coming towards the main venue for the protest rally, *Rajbari Moidan* (King’s field), where a big stage was erected for the speakers and hundreds of volunteers bearing arm band of *Vomi Odikar Committee* stood by to help the participants in the rally. *Pahari* people coming from different *Upzilla* moved towards *Rajbari Moidan* with small groups chanting slogans, showing banners with sheer discontent against the government *khas* land policy. The *Rajbari Moidan* was full of people by noon. People were even standing on the rickshaws, climbing up the trees and waiting on the house balconies around *Rajbari Moidan* to listen to the speakers. At around 1.00 PM the meeting finally started with the local speakers and the chief guest at the end. The substance of all the speeches in reality carried an identical message:

*Amara shobai pahari zati. Ai zaiga Amader. Ai Matir shate amadder sodo poroshor jiban jarit. Amader shkale milit vhabe Ai zaiga, Ameder shanskrti abanig aitizza rokka kaorte hobe.(we are all Pahari. This land belongs to us.*
Our ancestors are linked to this land. We have to be united to protect our land, culture and tradition.

The chief speaker, Mr. Z. R. Lamia, in his concluding speech remarked upon even withdrawing from the peace deal if further leases were made at any levels. He demanded immediate cancellation of khas land lease to the army base in Roangchari. In an emotionally charged speech he urged all Pahari to get ready to sacrifice blood for the CHT lands. He comments: Amra astra joma diachi kinto training joma di nai (we surrendered arms but not the training).

The Vomi Odikar Committee by organising this grand rally had orchestrated a sense of shared deprivation and common jhum land dispossession of the Pahari, on the one hand, and a protest against the government land lease policy in the CHT, on the other. The other aspect that Vomi Odikar Committee had brought a radical change in is involving men and women in the protest movement. The overwhelming participation of women in the protest rallies of this kind is not generally seen elsewhere in Bangladesh, particularly outside the capital city.

Figure 9 The leaders of the Vomi Odikar Rally in 30 June, 2000

It is important to note here that in the CHT women along with men are directly involved in both types of farming, jhum and paddy, a complete contrast to the Bengali culture in the plains where women are restricted to work in farming because
of the value of seclusion due to the concept of *purdha* (shame). In Bangladesh, the general anthropological debate on the distinction between “public” and “private” sphere as gendered space is culturally meaningful given the centrality of patriarchal ideology that assigns women to a domestic role. However, in the context of CHT this generalisation is irrelevant from cross-cultural point of view. Although, the patriarchal family structure is common in the CHT, the particular construction of women’s role in the domestic sphere associated with the *jhum* has special significance. Many authors interpret the women’s role in the domestic sphere as providing them with some power to influence the men in public life because of equal engagement in the farming such as *jhum*.

![Figure 10 Pahari women participation in Vomi Odhikar Rally](image)

Thus, in the *Vomi Odikhar* movement women are drawn into public meetings and protest rallies aimed at defending the rights of the *jhum* lands, forcing the state to prevent the *khas* land lease to the Bengali. This political development generated by *Vomi Odikhar Committee* activities is surely towards redefinition of the stereotyped image of women’s domestic role in the CHT. I suggest that the *Vomi Odikhar Committee* by involving women in land rights movements is not only denouncing the state policy of *khas* land lease which affecting the life and livelihood of the

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135 See the detailed discussion on the subject in Gardner (1995).

136 See the discussion on failure of many NGO programmes in the CHT adopting similar strategy as
Pahari, but is also articulating a distinct cultural value in which both men and women are an integral part of jhum practice. A value of co-operation embedded in jhum farming can be seen as a distinct ethos of Pahari social life in CHT. The land rights movement is thus not only the voice of restoration of that shared social ethos but is as well a challenge to the threat against it.

Conclusion

The land rights resistance movement in fact underpinned the emergence of alternative models of development for the Pahari. This new organisation has also promoted the idea of collective Pahari identity in the form of protest rallies against the state policy of khas land lease. The Vomi Odikhar Committee is, in fact, an example of how different ethnic groups can forge their common political interests for alternative modernities. This Vomi Odikhar movement necessarily stresses the unity of the indigenous population as Pahari over their specific ethnic identities, such as Chakma, Marma and so on. The general argument here is that indigenousness is becoming central to this movement as indigenous land rights politics is becoming increasingly diffused through “cultural globalization”.

The leadership of the Vomi Odhikar movement are now emphasising that the question of land for Pahari cannot be reduced to a question of economic resource, since they have a distinct, cultural, social and cosmological relationship to the landscape in which they live. For Vomi Odikhar Committee, once land is lost, Pahari survival is no longer an individual matter since the CHT jhum lands are shared lands in physical terms. Regaining jhum lands thus requires collective endeavours and protests. The Vomi Odikhar movement illustrate the way in which protest are expressed against the government khas land policy is, in other word, a process of collective mobilisation of Pahari in the CHT. In the next chapter I discuss the dimensions of Pahari mobilisation through the local political process.

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practice in the plains (Ahamed 2000).

137 See detailed discussions of recent trends in indigenous rights movements in Hodgson (2002), Brosius (1999), and also Kailash Aggarwal (1999) for the North-East Indian context.
Chapter Seven  
Negotiating Collective Identity: Election as Pahari Mobilisation

Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed the issues of khas land, the ways in which local peoples are marginalised by Bengali and state institutions, and how they respond to this process. This chapter mainly deals with the formation of collective identities through ethnic mobilisation among different groups in the CHT. The aim of this chapter is to primarily reveal the political dynamics of identity formation within the present context of the 'state-tribal' or Bengali-Pahari relationships in Bangladesh. In contemporary ethno-political discourse, the relationship between the ethnic peoples of CHT and the state of Bangladesh has largely been orchestrated as an opposition of Pahari vs. Bengali respectively. The notion of a Pahari identity is central to the construction of collective identity among diverse ethnic groups of CHT.

Within this political discourse, there are some other parallel categories, such as Jhumma, Adivashi which are also used in different contexts (see Chapters Four and Five). However, these terms are contested from the statist perspective as they challenge the Bengali hegemony and emphasise the CHT’s claim to special rights. The official designation of these people (collectively) is upazati ('sub-nation' in the Bengali literary sense), a term which undermines their claims to equal social and cultural status in relation to the dominant Bengali.

This chapter examines the way in which these categories are constructed by the people themselves and also by dominant ‘others’ - i.e. the ways in which the people of CHT represent themselves and are represented by others. To unfold the discussion, I begin with some specific questions related to the ongoing process of ethnic mobilisation and collective identity formation. Why do people choose these new constructions and reject the stereotyped official categorisation? Where is collective or shared identity expressed? In order to answer these questions, I have examined different meanings, forms and expression of collective idioms used in the political discourse of identity formation and ethnic mobilisation in the CHT. I have examined this process through the analysis of Banderban puroshava (municipality)
election as an extended case study, in which dimensions of collective mobilisation among diverse ethnic communities are explicitly revealed.

In the CHT, however, there are various forms, mechanisms, and organisations of collective expression. It emerged from my fieldwork that land issues and local politics are inseparable in many contexts. Land issues are a dominant arena in which many of these collective expressions come to play an anchor role and become solidified in the process of active ethnic mobilisation. I have discussed land and other aspects of shared identity in Chapters Four, Five, and Six, by examining the relationships between local-level institutions and state regime.

In this chapter, the case of the Banderban puroshava election can be seen as a process of identity formation in the local political context, a case where an expression of collective assertion is overtly played out. I suggest that recent articulations of Pahari, Adivashi and Jhumma are, in fact, part of a process of broader ethnic mobilisation. These common collective terms are used at different levels and in different contexts in order to draw out cultural and social distinctiveness between the people of CHT and the dominant Bengali, what Philip Burnham (1996) calls the “politics of cultural difference”.

I argue that the politics of Pahari identity can be seen at different levels of everyday interactions between the Bengali and diverse ethnic groups in general, but, more importantly that it exists situational contexts, in relation to Bengali and the Bangladesh state. It only comes into ‘being’ through practice. The chapter analyses the development of these processes by taking a broader perspective as well as following on ethnographic case study of the Banderban puroshava election. Thus, the chapter is divided into two parts. The first discusses processes of collective identity and the second is based on the analysis of the Banderban puroshava election and Pahari mobilisation. I begin with a discussion of the wider meaning of Pahariness.
Who are the Pahari?

If an outsider, for example, goes to CHT and asks anyone, irrespective of social background, 'who is Pahari'? There will perhaps be no single answer or even couple of answers. The answers could be either: 'I am Marma, Chakma, Tripura' and so on, or 'I am Pahari', or 'I am Marma and Pahari'. One might also ask 'what language do you speak'? or 'what religion do you practice'? Obviously, there will be possible straight answers; 'I speak Marma, and I am Buddhist', and so on. Then, if one asks 'what language do Pahari speak'? The conversation might end up in a big confusion or perhaps a puzzling answer: 'the language of politics'! I wish to leave this puzzle of overlapping identities for the moment, though I will return to it later on.

What, then, does this Pahari category stand for? What is the basis for Pahari-ness? I faced a similar puzzle when I first arrived in CHT. I was initially struck by the way in which local people used the term strategically. My confusion also arose from the reading literature about the CHT written mainly by social scientists and development experts giving the impression that the category Pahari has been used by the hill people in their everyday life for a long time. I decided, therefore, to try and understand this from below. What does the term Pahari mean to ordinary people? Is Pahari a categorisation used only by politicians? How is Pahari-ness expressed in everyday situations among diverse ethnic groups?

Two personal encounters can be used to show that Pahari-ness can mean different things in different contexts. This will eventually lead us to a discussion of the wider meanings and practices of Pahari-ness. The first event was, in fact, a turning point allowing me to reach a deeper understanding of the issue, and of the way in which I have experienced Pahari culture within an institutional setting. During the initial stages of my fieldwork, I attended a cultural competition between 'tribal' children organised by the TCI. Children representing different 'tribal' groups performed their traditional dances, songs and music, and were judged by a panel of local artists. This was followed by a prize distribution ceremony. Cha Tuai Pru, cultural officer of TCI, sat next to me, explaining how the Mru shing niritta (horn dance), the Bawm bash niritta (bamboo dance), and Marma thala niritta (plate dance) have...
significantly different meanings within each culture for life cycle events such as mortuaries ceremony and marriage customs.

Figure 11 jhum harvesting dance by Tanchanga girls at TCI cultural festival

I instantly asked him ‘is there anything called Pahari niritta (Pahari dance)? His initial reaction suggested that this was a stupid question. However, a follow-up conversation with Cha Tuai Pru (CTP) gives a good example of the institutional perspective on Pahari culture.\textsuperscript{138}

CTP: (hurriedly replied to me): agoli tu pahari niritta (these are Pahari dances).
FUA: As you said these are Marma, Bawm and Mru?
CTP: It is also Pahari.
FUA: Could you explain this bit?
CTP: When we perform these for broader audience we present this as part of Pahari culture. (Translated from the Bengali text)

At that point, at least one of my questions was answered: the Pahari speak Bengali or Chittagonian. CTP’s interpretation of what constitutes Pahari culture can be seen as partly true as it is visibly reflected in TCI institutional policies within the framework of ‘state-tribal’ interactions (discussed in Chapter Four). I will return to this point later on. Conversations with CTP, however, tell us about the cultural politics of Pahari-ness. CTP’s interpretation of Pahari culture is about ‘unity within

\textsuperscript{138} Although a detailed discussion of this subject in relation to language is offered in Chapter Four.
diversity’. One can point out enormous cultural similarities to show collectiveness in relation to ‘others’. How the way people explain culture depends upon the context. In fact, in the CHT, significant cultural practices are shared among the different ethnic groups, as for instance of nappi (pest dry fish -a common ingredient used by all ethnic communities in CHT), on the prevalence of masang gor (house type), jhum cultivation and so on. All these are important ingredients for cultural and political activists in the construction of broader Pahari ethnicity.

This cultural interpretation of Pahari-ness is also visible in everyday life situations when it is reified into political meaning. This point was more clearly drawn out from my second encounter with the issue, during a land protest in Roangchari. I have discussed the protest movement of local jhum cultivators against the army land acquisition scheme in Chapter Six. Anil Tanchanga, an activist of the protest movement, along with fellow Bawm protesters, was arrested allegedly for assaulting a Bengali police officer in Roangchari, and was later released on bail. I asked him why he had joined the protest movement. Anil Tanchanga told me,

\[ Aajke bawm re utisa, kalke ameder utibe, amre tu a shobi phare akshete jhum kori, Amra shobi Jhumma \] (Today the Bawm are evicted, tomorrow Tanchanga and the next day other groups will be evicted. We are Jhumma, we together do jhum in the hills).

Anil Tanchanga’s perspective offers us another dimension of Pahari-ness. His construction of Pahari-ness relates to everyday survival in the CHT land. In this context, common jhum culture becomes an element of making solidarity. His construction of Jhumma is intertwined with that of Pahari-ness which includes the shared experiences of deprivation, land dispossession and marginalisation by the Bengali and state institutions. CTP’s construction of Pahari-ness is much more visible in Anil Tanchanga’s participation in protest movement. Thus both the cultural competition and protest movement certainly come to life when “culture becomes politics and politics become culture” (Escobar 1992). This suggests that the construction of Pahari-ness must be understood within a wider perspective.

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139 See the discussion of dynamics of identity and inter group relations in North-East India, Kailash Aggarwal (1999).
Pahari in the wider socio-political context

Pahari is the symbolic representational term used collectively by the diverse ethnic peoples of the CHT mainly in the political arena. The term Pahari, as a noun, is derived from the Bengali word pahar (hill). In the lexicographical sense the English translation of Pahari is ‘the inhabitants of hills’ or ‘the hill people’. The concept Pahari thus encompasses the ecological, territorial and geographic dimensions of place and identity. However, from within a wider context, the categorisation of Pahari as simply ‘the inhabitants of the hills’ is rather problematic. In Bangladesh, social, political, and cultural relevance of the category Pahari is territorial and regional in nature. In order to understand the fluidity and context-related process of Pahari categorisation, one needs to be aware of its manifold, politically contested, and culturally meaningful connotations.

Firstly, not everyone living in the hilly areas of Bangladesh is a Pahari. For example, there are at present a large number of Bengali populations, including recent immigrants, who live in the CHT but are excluded from the broader Pahari categorisation because of their cultural difference. Indeed, the term Bengali is used to refer to people of the plains culture in Bangladesh. So, in this sense, the term Pahari denotes a people with a distinctive cultural background in the hills.

However, it is not the only cultural criteria to be considered a Pahari. For example, there are also ethnic minorities such as the Garu, Manipuri, and Santal living in the hilly northern districts of Bangladesh. Their physical appearance is close to the Mongolian type and the traditional cultural practice of jhum, though no longer practiced now, is identical to that of the CHT peoples. Moreover, to a large extent, they also face the same social and cultural predicaments as of the Pahari in CHT in their relation to Bengali and the Bangladesh State. Despite social and cultural similarity these ethnic peoples are also excluded from the broader categorisation of Pahari in the CHT. In this exclusionary process of broader categorisation, regionality and territoriality become fundamental elements in the construction of Pahari-ness in the CHT.
The way in which the term Pahari is constructed socially, culturally, regionally and politically, is related to its local meaning, interpretations and implications. The usage of the term Pahari bears its own inclusive mechanism of cultural and geographic boundary maintenance specific to CHT. I suggest that Pahari identity only makes sense in its political ecological dimensions. The process of inclusion and exclusion to Pahari categorisation is shaped by the political ecology of the CHT. Ethnicity and territoriality are intertwined in the conceptualisation of Pahari-ness. Within this construction, the two cultural logics - one exclusivist, the other inclusivist - are inextricably interwoven but limited to the CHT only. The coexistence of these two cultural tendencies, i.e., 'us' and 'them', is expressed through the social process of marginalisation by the state. Pahari-ness as a category, thus, continues to generate a tendency of broader supra identity in relation to the state.

The construction of the term Pahari also has another meaning linked to its political connotations. It replaces and challenges various statist-stereotyped categories, such as 'tribal' and upazati (sub-nation), which are now unacceptable in ethnic political discourse. The recent debate on the issue of upazati in Bangladesh requires a discussion because it is directly related to the present construction of Pahari-ness in the CHT. I will return to this discussion later on in this chapter. At this point, it is also important to highlight some of the debates about the colonial origin of Pahari ethnicity.

It is argued that the establishment of a colonial administration in CHT had profound implications in the construction of Pahari ethnicity in the area. Prashanta Tripura (1993), a local anthropologist, argues, from a historical perspective, that the foundation of Pahari ethnicity was primarily laid down by the British colonialists. He points out that the colonial categorisations of “hill men”, “hill tribe” and “tribal people” as a single category to designate the diverse ethnic peoples of CHT attributed a dichotomised ethnic relations of boundary maintenance between “hills vs. Plains”, “Tribal vs. non-tribal” and “Bengali vs. Pahari”.

These terms were originally used by Philip Burnham (1996).
Pranshanta Tripura suggests that the broader hill ethnic category has been solidified in the course of colonial administration in the CHT, and that the present construction of *Pahari*-ness is largely the result of that historical process. Before the colonial period, as Tripura argues, the heterogeneity of ethnic groups as well as their social and cultural isolation left little scope for traditional social groups’ identities to take on meaning in social interactions between different groups.

I do not entirely agree with Tripura’s colonial model of *Pahari* ethnicity. Colonialism naturally had a profound impact on the people of many hill regions. This was not unique to CHT alone; it has been a common feature throughout the frontier regions of South and Southeast Asia. It is true that colonial administration, for the first time, categorised these diverse peoples collectively as ‘hill men or hill tribes’ (Lewin 1869, 1870). However, it should bear in mind that the category of ‘tribal’ or ‘hill people’ was, to a large extent, guided by colonial administrative policy on how to administer the CHT as an area separate from the plains.

Part of the problem with Tripura’s argument seems to be his sources; too much information has been drawn from colonial ethnography. Lewin, who was commissioned by the colonial administration for specific purposes and objectives was Tripura’s main reference. Tripura’s analysis also contains no ethnographic account whatsoever of how *Pahari* ethnicity is expressed in ordinary discourses in present day situations in the CHT. Secondly, there is also no evidence of collective ethnic mobilisation of any sort during colonial times in the CHT as far as the historical literature is concerned.

I suggest that *Pahari* mobilisation is a fairly new trend in political discourses within the CHT. The phenomena of *Pahari*-ness as political identity has come to life in the process of ethnic mobilisation in recent years. The construction of the Kaptai dam and its subsequent impact on the life of the hill people has been regarded as the root of *Pahari* mobilisation in the CHT (Mohsin 1997; Schendel 1992). In recent times, land dispossession, marginalisation, military oppression by the state and the response to these realities transformed small resistance into a broad ethnic movement with the formation of multi-ethnic representation. The notion of *Pahari*-ness is also used as an umbrella symbol for a multi-ethnic political movement.
Therefore, departing from Tripura’s colonial model, I argue that the colonial categorisations of ‘hill men’ and ‘hill tribe’ were largely used by colonial administrators for the purpose of ‘territorializing’ diverse groups in order to maintain smooth revenue collection in the CHT. The creation of colonial local administration functions such as the circle chief, mouza level headman, and the village level karbari are all part of this process of categorisation, which aimed to bring diverse groups into a single set-up.

However, along with its integration into the post-colonial state, the colonial categorisation has now been reified into a new meaning. Ethnic peoples now employ the colonial categorisation to designate themselves collectively as distinct Pahari people, as opposed to the Bengali. The development of a Pahari collective formation is, by and large, a post-colonial situation linked to the everyday experience of antagonistic relationships with the dominant Bengali, and the way in which ethnic groups seek to establish control over the land and resources in the CHT. The notion of Jhumma is another construction to represent these collective experiences, especially in relation to land, land rights and regional autonomy.

The notion of Jhumma identity

The political construction of Jhumma has a special relation to jhum agriculture and land rights in the CHT. The term Jhumma literally translates as ‘territory of the Jhumma’. It emphasises that CHT land is Jhumma land, and excludes non-Jhumma people in the area. The term has largely been popularised by the local regional party (PCJSS) in order to achieve a greater regional autonomy in the CHT on the basis of what Van Schendel calls “Jhumma nationalism”(1992: 1). In the present political discourse, jhum is an institution through which a common CHT identity can be expressed. The symbolic use of traditional agricultural practices (jhum) as collective ethnic marker is a process of displaying a shared history of common past and present, in which all ethnic groups are intimately related and attached to CHT land.

The use of Jhumma is, in fact, an effort to uphold a common cultural identity. The current political and land rights movement in CHT, led by the PCJSS attempts to
forge a unified collective identity on the basis of *jhum* cultivation. In the construction of *Jhumma* identity, the historical past is shaped by present political realities in the CHT. Therefore, in practical terms, *Pahari* and *Jhumma* supplement each other in the form of collective mobilisation in the CHT. Both *Pahari* and *Jhumma* are used in the process of ethnic mobilisation as an alternative to the statist discourse concerning *upazati*. Aware of the political charge which the terms carry, the state has chosen to deny these categorisations and created its own category.

**Upazati - A Statist discourse**

In Bangladesh, the terms, ‘tribal’ and *upazati*, in one way or another, seem to be ever present in the statist discourse, and aim to distinguish the people of CHT from majority Bengali populations. In the official classification there are elements denoting unequal relationships, dependence, and domination between the Bengali and non-Bengali hill populations. In many ways, this can be seen as a systematisation of hierarchical relationships actuated by linguistic, social and cultural differences.

Moreover, this is in many ways a systematic hierarchical relationship. Andrew Turton’s recent work on *Civility and Savagery* in Thai political context gives a new dimension to the analysis of hierarchical classification of what he calls the “pair” model of relationships (2000: 1). A similar classificatory scheme is also seen in the statist discourse in Bangladesh. These classifications are the ‘pairs’ of Bengali: *upazati* and Bengali: tribal, where *upazati* stands for non-Bengali CHT populations, a generic social status of inferior people not up to the standard of the nation; and the ‘tribal’ is the forest dwelling ‘primitive’ people. The relationships between the two are often of a binary kind. This forms the basis of hierarchies in terms of political domination. The interlocked destinies of Bengali and *upazati* are inscribed in texts and in the history of Bangladesh. In the following paragraphs, I offer an analysis of the term with its wider meaning and implications.

In Bangladesh, the term *upazati* is an officially designated category to refer to collectively diverse ethnic peoples in the CHT. In recent times, since the birth of the Bangladesh nation state in 1971, the notion of *upazati* has been at the centre of the debate among the hill people of the CHT and the state in the context of ‘state-tribal’
or ‘Bengali-tribal’ relationships. The contemporary process of Pahari mobilisation in CHT has added a new dimension to this debate. In order to understand the dynamics of official discourse and the nature of the collective identity making process in the CHT, the term upazati requires a discussion from both an ideological and empirical point of view highlighting the ways in which it operates in both mental and in real situations on the ground.

The literary English translation of upazati is ‘sub-nation’. The term upazati is primarily derived from the Bengali word zati (nation), with the added prefix upa (sub). In Bengali, upa is only used as a prefix to designate something ‘subordinate’, ‘under’, and so on. From the semantic point of view, it thus appears that the term denotes a hierarchical relationship when applied to the ideological level, for example, ‘high: low culture’, ‘nation: sub-nation’, etc, as far as official categorisations are concerned. Among mainstream Bengali culture and at the official level the word ‘tribal’ has been used as the English translation of upazati. The Bangla Academy’s most popular Bengali-English dictionary translates upazati as ‘tribal’, a division of a nation, a set of people of common descent, a sub-caste”.

Therefore, in the statist discourse, the replacement of ‘tribal’ by a category like the upazati is rather a social construction similar to other construction in South Asia. As discussed in Chapter One, the official categorisation of upazati has been heavily influenced by the literature produced by earlier ethnographers as well as contemporary historians and social scientists. F. G. Bailey’s (1960) book, entitled Tribe, Caste and Nation, is one of the examples of this genre which clearly sets out the agenda of classification. South Asian anthropology in particular has long been blamed for working on nation-tribe-caste models eventually reinforcing the statist advantage in manipulating the issue in later form state-tribal/upazati discourses (Spencer 1997). The post-colonial Bangladesh state is very much identical to the colonial construction, as it now even influences the public perception about ethnic minorities of CHT. There are not so many changes in perception and attitudes of dominant Bengali view towards upazati or ‘tribal’. Barrie Sharpe has critically explained the same reality in the Nigerian context, suggesting that “the state-tribal dichotomy is a historical construction, and as part of colonial mental map” (1986: 58) examining both history and contemporary ethnography.
Recently, however, a number of local writers in Bangladesh have also started questioning the statist discourse about the Bengali-upazati relationship (Mahammad 1997; Ball 1999; Mohsin 1997; Schendel 2000, 1996; Ahamed 1993, 2001). Drawing from cultural pluralist perspectives, they argue that upazati is an unsophisticated term to refer to the ethnic minority peoples of CHT. They argue that the way in which the term upazati is adopted in the constitution and in the official designation is, in fact, an extension of the colonial category of ‘tribal’, a simple replacement of the term. In the official classification the upazati are the “tribal people”; they are not up to the equivalence of nation like the Bengali. They suggest that the term upazati should be debunked from all legal, constitutional and official documents. This perspective emphasises that cultural pluralism should be the guiding principle of the Bangladesh state in order to accommodate other minority nationals with equal status in relation to the Bengali.

I do not intend to discuss the full details of this perspective within the purview of this study. However, I argue that it certainly opens up the debate around “citizenship” and “nationality” issues in Bangladesh, because the contradiction of the zati - upazati dichotomy partly lies in the very creation of the nation state of Bangladesh. In mainstream political history, the Bangladesh state and the Bengali nation are seen as intertwined, leaving no space for other minority nationals. For example, the 1972 constitution, the first constitution of Bangladesh, states that “all citizens of Bangladesh are Bengali” (1972:2). Non-Bengali inhabitants are not recognised in their own cultural right in this context, and are seen as ‘different’. This difference is a distinction between a mainstream Bengali population and the ‘tribal’ or upazati population. There is no recognition of ethnic plurality and equivalence between groups such as Bengali, Chakma and Marma etc. There is very little sophistication in the statist categorisation of upazati in relation to national identity (see Chapter One).

I agree with the cultural pluralist’s view in the sense that citizenship and nationality are two separate entities and should not be seen as equivalent to each other in the present political context. In Bangladesh, by definition, every person irrespective of language, religion and culture has an equal right to claim Bangladeshi citizenship by
virtue of birth. Whereas a nation can be formed having common language, culture, religion, and so on, or there can be many nations within the same territory (Ahamed 1993).

From this perspective, it can be argued that ethnic groups in the CHT should have similar rights to be considered as minority nationals like Bengali, whatever their size or culture may be. It is argued by many critics that the present nationalist view of the state has enormous implications for the socio-cultural relationship between different nationalities, leading to an antagonistic relation of dominant majority vs. minority (Mohsin 1997; Ball 1999; Mahammad 1997). The recent political history of Bangladesh suggests that present Bengali and Bangladeshi nationalism, by and large, has been the statist ideology in dealing with ethnic peoples in the CHT. Thus, in recent political discourses, the term *upazati* has been a sensitive issue among the ethnic communities in the CHT. They reject the statist categorisation for its derogatory connotations. The other factors that have become crucial to understanding this discourse are the internationalisation of minority issues and the widespread activities of numerous national and international NGOs, which significantly shaped the cultural identity politics among marginalised people in peripheral regions like the CHT (see Hodgson 2002; Nicholas 2000; Kailash 1999; Winzeler 1997; Gray 1997). Awareness of ‘cultural identity’ has reinforced ethnic mobilisation and given it new meaning in terms of regionality, territoriality and cultural survival. Indigenousness, native lands rights, and autonomy all have emerged as the new idioms of identity politics.

In the CHT, ethnic political activists are now redefining their official designation of *upazati* from cultural pluralism that every ethnic group belongs to *zati* (nation), like the Bengali and have similar cultural background, a language, religion, history etc. There are now concerted campaigns across ethnic boundaries against the

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141 At present there are two trends in the nationalist ideology prevalent in mainstream politics of Bangladesh. The first, Bengali nationalism emphasises Bengali language and culture as identity markers, and is mainly supported by liberal and left wing parties. On the other hand, Bangladeshi nationalism is based on territoriality, and is supported by right wing political parties.

142 In Bangladesh, the Bengali have always been characterised as nation rather than a cultural group, in contrast to the Bengalis in West Bengal, where Bengali are treated as a cultural group in the Indian context. The portrayal of Bengalis as nation is vivid in Bengali literature and history. For example the popular quotation that is often used by politicians, and academics alike: *bangali zatir hitihash hazar bosorere itihash* (The History of the Bengali nation is a thousand years old) justifying nationalist
Upazati categorisation. For the activists, it is not only a derogatory term, it also undermines their social and cultural status vis-à-vis the Bengalis. In Chapter Four I have discussed how TCI explicitly and implicitly challenges the statist categorisation through various programmes and activities. I argue that TCI response to statist discourse is an indirect resistance in the form of indigenous Pahari mobilisation.

Apart from institutional activities, there is also a growing sense of awareness about this discourse, particularly among the younger generations. The recently launched Pahari student forum for the hill students is a testimony to this. The students’ assertion of Pahari identity and their rejection of the upazati categorisation can largely be seen as a process of ethnic mobilisation.

The trend of Pahari politics gives a new dimension to state-upazati relationship. As I mentioned earlier on, the notion of Pahari-ness is an embodiment of regionality, territoriality, and cultural separateness which as distinguishes people of the CHT. The assertion of Pahari identity displays a notion of a ‘united hill people’ as the sole guardian of the CHT lands. Pahari-ness has become the core of collective identity projects. The expression of Pahari-ness can be seen in a number of domains such as land and local politics. The Banderban puroshava election, which I will now proceed to analyse, is a political arena in which Pahari identity is explicitly revealed.

**Pahari Identity and Banderban Puroshava Election**

In the first part of this chapter, I have discussed various notions and processes for collective identity formation. I argue that processes of collective mobilisation in the CHT are only expressed in particular situations and events. The case of the Banderban puroshava election can be seen as an ‘event’ in which Pahari collective expression is played out in a vivid way. I will describe Banderban puroshava ideology. Jonathan Spencer explains this discourse as "nationalist cultural production" in the Sinhalese political context. For Spencer, "nationalism is a style of political imagination". He argues that "a force in the politics of the past two centuries, nationalism has been a style of cultural production: there are nationalist writers, nationalist artists, nationalist composers, all of whom are concerned to uncover, create, protect, or restore the true culture of the nation" (Spencer 1990: 283). I discussed this issue in detail in Chapter Four.
election as an ethnographic example of this local level reality in which I personally engaged in. I argue that Pahari mobilisation is transformed into the politics of collective identity through events like election. The analysis of the Banderban puroshava election as a case of Pahari representation is thus significant for a number of reasons.

Firstly, for the first time in the CHT, the puroshava election is held in a manner of peace situation without any military interference or any kind of fear of being labelled as a collaborator by the PCJSS (Parbyta Chattagram Jono Shonghati Samity, People’s United Society of CHT), for supporting the government. In the past, the PCJSS, since their armed conflict began against the Bangladesh army in 1995, opposed participation of any military - backed elections.144 Recently the PCJSS has also openly emerged as the hill regional party in the electoral arena, with the specific agenda of autonomy. In this mere favourable political situation, it was possible to observe how the election process becomes the vehicle for broader-level Pahari mobilisation.

Secondly, in Bangladesh, it is widely viewed by many academics and media that lack of awareness about democratic political organisation among the ‘tribal’ people is one of the main reasons for their reluctant participation in the electoral process (Ahmed 1993; Mullick 2001). As a point of reference, they always justify their views on the basis of electoral turn-out in the CHT, which has always been recorded as the lowest in all previous national elections compared to the rest of Bangladesh. However, this perspective completely fails to address the most intriguing question of all: “why ‘tribal’ people feel discouraged in participating in mainstream political processes, such as elections?”

I argue that the degree of participation and willingness to engage in the electoral process depends on how the hill people view participation in terms of their own interests. Since the fall of the military regime in 1990, the restoration of democracy is considered to be successful as there have been three subsequent elections held

144 After the peace treaty signed in 1997 between the government of Bangladesh and the PCJSS. It is indeed visible that a relatively peaceful situations prevails in the CHT.
under neutral caretaker governments in Bangladesh. During the military rule in the CHT, there was no true representation in the local institutions. Representation had never been decided through elections. The choice of representation had always been the central government’s affairs either through nomination, or selection. The local people were only expected to endorse the government’s proposal. They had never been consulted in a manner of open participation. The ways in which Pahari people engage in the electoral process is therefore of special interest considering the recent changes in local-national politics.

Considering these factors, the Banderban puroshava election turned out to be an “arena” or “political field” (Bailey 1960: 243). There has been a common realisation among the locals that if they act together as single Pahari collective, they would be a formidable political force against the Bengali. In other words, if they were able to win the puroshava election, they would not only control political power, but also be able to play a crucial role in benefiting Pahari at the local level. In this context, the election seen as a political arena, offers an opportunity for diverse ethnic groups to assert collective strength as Pahari. The Banderban puroshava (municipality) election, as I have witnessed it, became a process in which Pahari representation was seen as instrumental in the context of collective mobilisation against the Bengali candidate. Pahari-ness as political force, thus, can be seen as a manifestation of the politics of collective identity.

Before I present the Banderban puroshava election as an extensive ethnographic case study I wish to begin with a very brief discussion of the election culture in Bangladesh. This political outline, in a way, sets the background for the case study in the context of local-national level election and party politics.

The Nature of Election Culture: National vs. Local

The election culture on Bangladesh has always displayed elements of festivity, engagement and counter-engagement (boycott). Mukulika Banerjee (2003), in her recent study on democracy and electoral politics in India, observed a similar form of election culture in the villages of West Bengal. Indeed, festivity, mood and engagement in local level elections are somewhat different from those in national
elections in Bangladesh. In theory, at least, there are structural differences between the local and national level elections.

In Bangladesh, the national election is held under the party system, similar to that of Western democratic systems, whereas the local election is considered to be a non-party election. In local elections, candidates officially contest as individuals (independent). They are sometimes supported by non-political socio-cultural organisations as far as election posters and other election related documents are concerned. The election symbols of different parties are not used in local elections, and this is meant to contribute to their non-partisan character. There are no official clarifications whatsoever why local elections should be treated as non-partisan in Bangladesh.

In reality, however, the local elections have never been held in a non-partisan manner. Candidates label themselves as party men in order to ensure their organisational support of the respective parties, and the local party leadership selects the candidature to contest the local level poll on behalf of the party organisation. Central and district level leaders actively participate in the campaigning process for the party candidates to win the elections. It is partly because central party leaders, such as MPs (members of parliament) of the respective constituencies rely heavily on their local support base, therefore supporting party candidates at the local level ultimately strengthens their own political stronghold in the area.

So, in theory, though local elections are characterised as non-party elections in practice, this is evidently not the case in Bangladesh. For example, even the national dailies publish full details of the election results, highlighting the strength of each particular party in a particular district on the basis of electoral performances (see Protom Alo September 23, 1999). One can thus obviously say that non-partisan local election is a myth.

The Banderban puroshava election is not exceptional in that sense, but it has another dimension that seems typical to the CHT only. Party politics do matter here, but only at the surface level. Local politics in Banderban are divided on ethnic lines at the deeper level. Political activists very subtly balance the relationship and draw a line
between party politics and ethnic politics. All the major political parties in Bangladesh, such as the Awami league (AL), Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Jamaite Islami (JI) and the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), have their own organisational structures in Banderban, and their party politics are organised in accordance with their own respective ideological stances on local and national issues.

However, party ideology, democracy and issues of politics are become different matters altogether when it comes to selecting the leadership to represent the party. The hardcore element of ‘ethnic politics’ is central at the leadership level representing party organisation in Banderban. The top leaderships posts, especially the post of President and Secretary, are chosen from a negotiated framework of Bengali-Pahari combination. For example, if the President is selected from among the Bengali, the obvious choice for the Secretary would be from the Pahari, irrespective of whether they are efficient for the post. The present Banderban puroshava chairman Ayub Chowdury is also the Secretary General of the puroshava unit of the ruling party (AL), is a Bengali, while the President, Prashanna Tanchanga, is a Pahari. These ethnic politics are expressed explicitly the political processes that take place in Banderban. The party politics and democratic representation all turned out to be the ‘politics of ethnicity’. The Banderban puroshava election exemplifies this picture.

**Banderban Puroshava Election as Politics of Ethnicity**

In early September 1999, as soon as the election commission in Dhaka announced the date of the local puroshava election throughout the country, local politics in Banderban accelerated in a significant manner. The news quickly engrossed every aspects of public life. In every public place, such as local tea stalls, the incoming puroshava poll emerged as the main subject of daily talk among people from all walks of life; ‘who is contesting for the post of chairman?’ ‘Who is supporting whom?’ The mood of everyday life in the Banderban puroshava area and to some extent even beyond, for example, nearby Upzilla Roangchari, was transformed like changes of the seasons, from winter to summer, from cold to hot.
Almost immediately after the date announcement, local inhabitants of Madyam and Uzani para (villages) in Banderban, the two largest concentration of ethnic peoples, started to say that, this time they would not support a non-pahari candidate. Indeed some of them told me that “they would select a Pahari Sa (‘regional son’) to contest for the puroshava chairmanship. The phrase Pahari Sa is used in reference to a member of any ethnic community in the CHT other than the Bengali. The articulation of Pahari Sa (Sa means in Marma, son) mainly by political activists initially got a huge support across ethnic communities during the election.

Choosing Candidate as Pahari Sa

The PCJSS was initially reported as the driving force behind this campaign but later, other ethnic community leaders, such as Raiaglai Mru of the Mru community, Dr. William Lusia of the Lusia community and Anil Tanchanga of the Vomi Odikar Committee joined in this movement. It was agreed amongst them that the candidate would be selected under the banner of Pahari Okka Parishad (The hill people unity forum). The carefully coined organisation name Pahari Okka Parishad was perhaps chosen to accommodate other political players such as Prashanna Tanchanga, (AL president), on the one hand, and more importantly to successfully unite all ethnic peoples in one platform.

The candidate selected for the puroshava election was a young timber merchant named Kessy Marma, a PCJSS supporter. Kessy’s popular support among the youths gave him an extra asset as the potential candidate over other older generation candidates. Kessy, in his 30s, is not completely new to the political scene in the CHT. During his student life, he was an active member of Pahari Chatra Parishod and is still proactive against the government policy and military oppression in the CHT. Kessy identifies himself as one of the distant grandsons of the Bhomang King Aungshey Pru Choudhury. However, some elderly Marma in Uzani para think that there is no direct kin relation between Kessy and the King’s family. Kessy’s business fortune, which allowed him to become an established timber merchant within a short period of time, is related to the influence of his ‘political uncle’ Zeri, the eldest son of the King.
Kessy’s selection as *Pahari Okka Parishod* candidate, however, surprised some of the Marma elderly. For example, U Saw Nue’s father, ex-accountant of late Bhomang chief, and his father in law, a retired officer of Karnafhully paper mill, both of whom said: “Kessy is too young for the post” and speculate that “he could not even able to handle the tricky election politics of Ayub Chowdhury whose family they knew for long time being hostile to the *Pahari*” (my own translation from Chittagonian dialect).

In contrast, however, this view was sharply rejected by the younger generations. The selection of Kessy as the chairman candidate for the *puroshava* election was enthusiastically received by the youths. Many youths like Mong Saw Nue, the younger brother of my host U Saw Nue, held a firm view that “Kessy maintains a good relation with local *Pahari* people and is supportive to youths’ welfare activities which earned him a very respectable image among the younger generation”. Kessy’s political distance from mainstream politics such as AL/BNP was also considered another positive criteria that enabled him to become the champion of *Pahari* people.

Other youths also said that, in the past, they had never seen a situation where both young and elderly people of all ethnic groups unitedly supported a single *Pahari* candidate: “this time Tanchanga youth under Nilla Don Tanchanga, Bawm youth under Dr. William are all campaigning for Kessy and everybody’s feeling like *Pahari*”. Rather, they wanted to project the popular support of Kessy as a common ethno-nationalistic feeling of *Pahari*-ness across the ethnic boundary. Dr. William Lusia, a local physician and one of the key members of the *Pahari Okka Parishad*, justified the participation in a *Puroshava* election of a *Pahari* candidate as part of the need “to demonstrate the capacity of indigenous collectivities as a practical alternative to ethnic development”. In this context, *Pahari* representation can be seen as an opportunity to consolidate local power in the process of collective mobilisation.

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145 I knew him quite well, partly because during my stay in Banderban I lived with these families for a significant amount of time.
**Pahari Okka Parishad: a Multi-ethnic Organisation**

As part of the election strategy, in order to have a common platform, a new organisation called *Pahari Okka Parishad* (Hill People Unity Forum) was launched with a multi-ethnic steering committee having representatives of different ethnic groups, such as Tanchanga, Bawm and Mru. Marma lead the committee. The name of the organisation itself is an inclusionary formula cutting across the ethnic barriers of different groups. The strategy of uniting different ethnic groups under one banner has been an overt expression of collective mobilisation against the Bengali. Thus, the formation of the *Pahari Okka Parishad* with a multi-ethnic steering committee can be seen as an example of the public display of collective identity.

**Election Agenda:** Throughout the election campaign, *Pahari Okka Porishad* chose to pursue a pro-*Pahari* line. In some of the public rallies *Okka Parishad* leaders were highly critical of the government's policy, particularly the *khas* land lease. Kessy himself took up the issues that related to local people's concerns, such as the recognition of the *Pahari* as deprived peoples in order to receive free services from *puroshava*. He also raised some domestic issues such as the importance of constant electric and water supply, and the development of a sewerage system in Madyam and Uzani para. The most attractive package he offered was to a minimum holding tax for the *Pahari* on the basis of earnings, which pleased most of the ethnic communities but irritated local administration and the Bengali. The election agenda in fact set the basis for broader *Pahari* mobilisation.

**Election Slogan:** The *Okka Porishad* has also been very selective in the use of language for election campaigns. Most noticeably, they selected catchy slogans in order to make common interests among the ethnic communities in CHT more apparent. For example, one of these self-asserting slogans was *Amara shobi pahari, pahar moder gor bari* (we are all hill people and the hills are our home and homeland). Put in this context, *pahar* symbolises the special distinction of territorial and cultural boundary between *Pahari* and Bengali people, and highlights the only authentic home and place for the *Pahari*. In this process, “we” implies the political unity of heterogeneous ethnicities, and the CHT appear to be the territory of *Pahari*, seen as cultural area and destiny. Their unique lifestyle in CHT has become part of
their pride and sense of belonging, which as understood by them, necessarily refutes cultural diversity among them. “We” also relates politics of CHT land, signifying their rights and access to it.

This gives a sense of their collective distinctiveness in relation to the non-Pahari, who are Bengali (for obvious reasons), and their collective bond can be seen as being attached to the CHT hills. Attachment to CHT land has been symbolised as the most important aspect of their collective cultural identity. Others are important too, but only meaningful within the context of inner level interactions of particular groups. Of course, the Okka Parishad may have politically chosen this kind of rhetorical strategy to win the hearts and minds of ethnic voters but it has, nonetheless, had profound impact on creating a common identity against Bengali, which is vividly expressed in the election results.

Figure 12 Pahari Okka Parishod procession during purosrova election

Campaigning Process: Throughout the campaign, Kessy was projected as Pahari candidate (Pahari Sa) by Okka Parishad, rather than as a Marma. It was rather easier for them to label Kessy as a Marma candidate, because in the Banderban
puroshava area Marma population itself form about 80-85% out of total ethnic population. But labelling Kessy as a Marma candidate could lead to a situation in which other 10% ethnic voters might feel that they have been left out and ignored. Despite small numbers, it was still crucially important for Okka Parishad to ensure full support from other ethnic communities. Pahari Okka Parishad emphasise that although, numerically the Marma are the dominant group among ethnic communities, they could not achieve anything without united efforts.

The other reason to establish the Okka Parishad was that if Kessy was portrayed as the Marma candidate, there would have been a possibility for the AL candidate to manipulate others as non-Marma voters. Okka Parishad envisaged that Pahari politics should emphasise multi-ethnic factor because of the population composition. Only with multi-ethnic support could a local Pahari candidate have a chance to win. So, strategically, choosing the phrase Pahari Sa would not only satisfy all ethnic groups as ‘common people with common aspirations’, it would also cut-cross the internal ethnic boundary by emphasising ‘shared socio-cultural feelings’.

The point whether Pahari mobilisation is an elite construction remains to be discussed. I would argue that the articulation of Pahari Sa by Okka Parishad is in fact a political construction. It emerged as a form of ‘umbrella politics’ between ethnic groups in the CHT but, in many ways, it is inspired by ordinary local voices. There are significant ordinary responses to this construction, and I will discuss this further on. I suggest that the construction of Pahari Sa can be seen as a ‘negotiational identity’ transcending all kinds of local voices. As an example, local AL president Prashanna Tanchanga’s reservation toward Ayub Chowdhury (chairman candidate), and the PCJSS frustration with the AL policy all became motives for unification. The selection of Kessy as Pahari sa not only satisfied political activists but also inspired ordinary people, by heightening their everyday frustrations towards Bengalis and state policies.

Collective local responses to this Pahari mobilisation thus come from the fact that, if Pahari did not unite it would have been difficult for them to retain their rights in the face of Bengali domination. They feared losing their land rights as well as their cultural identity. Thus ‘fear’ and an ‘aspiration to the future’ were intertwined in
choosing a *Pahari Sa* in order to create a stronger unity. As for the *Pahari Okka Parishad*, it was an effective mechanism to unite all ethnic communities. The construction of *Pahari Sa* is, in fact, the symbolic expression of this process. The selection of a ‘regional son’ as the candidate in Banderban *puroshava* election provides a new alternative path to assert indigenous representation in the process of ethnic mobilisation.

**The Other Side of the Story**

Ayub Chowdhury had been in the post of Banderban *puroshava* chairman for the last five years. He had previously been elected as an opposition candidate under the BNP government in 1994.\(^{146}\) Local people told me that Ayub Chowdhury’s winning asset in the previous election against the ruling party candidate was the full support from local *Pahari* people.\(^{147}\) In the previous election, Ayub Chowdury’s candidature as an AL man was thought to be what won the party the election. Indeed it is partly true that, among the mainstream political parties in Bangladesh, the AL’s image has to a large extent been seen as sympathetic to the *Pahari* people’s cause. Since the 1991 general election, the AL has been committed to having a political solution of the CHT conflict.\(^{148}\) This is perhaps one of the main reasons why the then underground PCJSS and ordinary *Pahari* people overwhelmingly supported the AL in all previous elections.

However, departing from the party image, Ayub Chowdury has largely seen as a controversial for his dubious role in dealing with the *Pahari* in Banderban. The local Marmas of Madyam and Uzani para offered some reasons as to why they rejected him; they called him “a man of nepotism” and showed a lack of interests on the welfare of the *Pahari* (my own translation). They also blamed him for harbouring Bengali communal feelings towards the *Pahari*. Many believe that in the 1995 riot,

\(^{146}\) The BNP have now back to power again in the 2001 general election, after being the main force of opposition since 1996.
\(^{147}\) I am using the word *Pahari* here to refer to all ethnic communities residing in the Banderban *puroshava* area.
\(^{148}\) See the 1991 AL election manifesto; It is also worth to mentioning here that, in 1997, during AL’s tenure a historic peace treaty was signed between the government of Bangladesh and the PCJSS, ending two decades of bloody conflict in the CHT.
when many Pahari houses were burnt down in the Uzani and Madyam para, as a chairman he in fact did very little, but instead favoured fellow Bengali activist.

There was much mistrust regarding Ayub Chowdhury’s leadership on the part of the Pahari people in Banderban. Local Pahari AL supporters were not happy either because they thought that he treated the local puroshava office as if his personal firm, and accused him of abusing the power given to him for his own interests. Seeing the selection process, even within the party circles, there was growing resentment about the fact that he would be renewing his candidacy for another term. A large number of local AL leaders, including AL president Prashannna Tanchanga, begun to oppose his selection further. Many new faces, mainly Bengali businessmen, were openly showing their interest to contest in the election.

Nevertheless, local level AL leadership, in spite of hostile criticism from inside party circles finally decided to propose the incumbent chairman Ayub Chowdhury as their candidate again, invoking what they called ‘for strategic reasons’. There was, however, another rebel candidate from the AL who eventually submitted the nomination paper after failing to get the party ticket, but was finally disqualified because his nomination paper was rejected as a “defaulter” case. Hardcore supporters of Ayub Chowdhury, however, argue that the reason Chowdhury was chosen for another term was because he had the potential and strength to mobilise all Bengali voters across party lines. It is not difficult to understand what so-called ‘strategic selection’ measure: it was to target the ‘Bengali vote bank through politicisation of Bengali ethnicity’.

It is noteworthy to mention here that all major political parties boycotted the 1999 local elections countrywide, though some of their members contesting as independent candidates. In Banderban there were no such candidates against Ayub Chowdhury. Surprisingly, all political parties, such as the BNP, CPB, and the Islamic fundamentalist Jamate Islami, were unofficially united to support Ayub Chowdhury as the Bengali candidate.

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149 According to election regulations, one must submit a bank certificate of non-loan defaulter along with the nomination paper. However, this, sometimes, has been used as political tool to disqualify candidates.
Set against the broader backdrop ‘Bengali politics’, the enthusiasm supporting the candidature of AL candidate Ayub Chowdhury was phenomenal. Almost everyday there were rallies; there were slogans and house campaigns as the polling date approached. Some central ministers, the Chittagong City Corporation Mayor and prominent AL leaders visited Banderban at different times during election. During the election campaign, people were saying that “Banderban became the mini capital”. According to the election commission code of conduct government, VIP (very important person) officials are barred from participating in any sort of election campaigns. However, ministerial visits were made in the name of CHT official tours, and several public rallies were organised in order to seek support from the Pahari. There were many election projection meetings held in Uzani para and Madyam para. Along with Ayub Choudhury, the CHT minister, who, incidentally, is a Chakma recently selected by the AL, promised to increases the CHT hill’s allowances for government employees, and to effect substantial improvements in access to safe drinking water and sewerage system in the area after the election.

Figure 13 Ayub Chowdhury’s election meeting with a minister’s visit

During the minister’s visits, government officials and especially the DC (deputy commissioner) office organised different consultation meetings with the residents in different wards of Banderban purossava, in the name of local problems. However,
local Marma people in Uzani para, whom I talked to, claimed that this was all part of the campaign for Ayub Chowdhury. In the Bazar area, particularly at night, I saw movies and various entertainments provided to different youth clubs as part of the campaign. A number of youth clubs mushroomed overnight in order to take advantage of the election season in Banderban. Another feature was the distribution of all types of gifts, for example cash money and saris for the female voters. There were also promises to build roads and other forms of infrastructure in the area.

There is no doubt that the politics of development played an important factor that helped the AL candidate perform well among the Bengali community. During the election campaign issues linked to the 'politics of development' were included quite successfully by the AL candidate as part of their central election message. Under the pretext of development, large amounts of state funds were commissioned for development projects or disbursed before and during the election in order to ensure support from voters, largely Bengali voters. This form of 'money politics' or 'politics of patronage' was widely used in the Banderban puroshava election in order to ensure full support for the ruling party candidate.

The entire campaigning process behind the puroshava election thus appeared to be about Bengali vs. Pahari rather than the AL winning over an independent candidate, which was mostly a common feature throughout the country during the 1999 local election. The Okka Parishad candidate, Kessy, appeared to be the candidate for the Pahari people, while the AL candidate represented the Bengalis. The Puroshava election had become a stage for each group to demonstrate its ethnic identity.

The Banderban puroshava election therefore became a part of broader process of identity-making, which can be characterised as a process of ethnic mobilisation. The election process was largely been informed by ethnicity. The ethnic card of the Pahari and Bengali played the anchor role throughout the Banderban puroshava election. A collective Pahari ethnicity was explicitly expressed among ethnic groups in Banderban. On the other hand, Bengali hegemonic counter-identity was also seen at work in the response to Pahari constructions.
Identity Making, Voices of Cultural Difference: Some Inside Stories

In order to give ordinary voices, both Pahari and Bengali, a fair hearing, and to get a rounded picture of the Banderban puroshava election, I conducted some informal interviews aside from my routine observation of the event. During the election period, I spent much time in the Madyam and Uzani para, the two areas most with the highest concentration of Pahari, talking to local peoples and participating in many election related activities. I also frequently visited the Barishal para, one of the Bengali settlements in Banderban.

One of the things which motivated me to get some inside views about the puroshava election, was that, although I could see lot of election related events in public places such as tea stalls and Bazar areas, I felt that most of these activities only involved political activists. Ordinary voices were not heard in this public arena, and women in particular were invisible. Therefore, my intention was to assess how ordinary people, in general, reacted to this election process as whole.

Talking to a cross section of peoples in Madyam para, Uzani para and Barishal para, I came across a revealing manifestation of ‘political ethnicity’ based on the cultural differences between Pahari and Bengali. My impression was that both ordinary Pahari and Bengali chose their candidates not by virtue of political consciousness, rather under the influences of relatives, local political leaders and also with respect of cultural affinity. The narrative accounts of Usi Mong Marma, Hara Don Tanchanga, Lila Mru, Thing Ley Bawm, Mariam Bibi and Mugib Contractor may tell us more appropriately about this phenomenon.

Madyam Para and Uzani Para

Despite popular support from all ethnic communities in Madyam para and Uzani para, there were individuals who had some reservations or even opposition to Kessy’s candidature. As I mentioned earlier, U Saw Nue’s father-in-law refused to join Kessy’s campaign, but also did not support the AL candidate. However, opposition from anyone within the ethnic community had been severely dealt with. They had been labelled as betrayers and anti-Pahari elements, and blamed for taking
bribes from the other side. During election time, U Saw Nue’s father-in-law had had to face social harassment: stones were thrown on his tin roof at night, and members of his family were verbally abused and physically threatened. However, many people in Madyam and Uzani para thought that U Saw Nue’s father-in-law deserved harassment and considered it legitimate because he had received cash money from Ayub Chowdhury for anti-Pahari activities. In Madyam and Uzani para, the election process became the element of Pahari identity making, whereas anything said against Kessy or the Pahari Sa was considered anti-Pahari.

I also encountered another dimension to Pahari participation in the Madyam and Uzani para. There were some local Marmas, who worked for the government and the municipality office, who were seen to be working for Ayub Chowdhury. I talked with Usi Mong Marma, a junior level officer at the DC office, who was given the responsibility to distribute polling cards in Uzani and Maydam para for Ayub Chowdhury. I asked him why he was working for Ayub Chowdhury instead of a Pahari candidate. He replied,

"Whether I support Ayub Chowdhury or not our activities as Pahari would be scrutinised after the election if the AL candidate failed to win. There would be lots of issues raised against the Pahari employees and our jobs might be hampered in several ways. (inserted from interview transcripts: Usi Mong Marma).

What Usi Mong Marma tells us here is that whatever they perform publicly for the sake of mundane needs, at heart they are all Pahari. In his approach, the notion 'ours' translates as Pahari solidarity rather than his personal interests. Throughout the election campaign, many known faces like Usi Mong Marma were reluctant to participate in Okka Parishad activities openly because they feared negative consequences after the election for example losing jobs, government contracts etc. Although I found that strategically, they had all decided not to show up publicly, in practice, they extended their support to Kessy undercover. On the election day, I discovered that Usi Mong Marma was very active in Madyam para’s polling centre, helping Pahari women voters by showing them where to stamp on Kessy’s election symbol on the ballot paper.
Apart from government employees, I also tried to investigate what *Pahari-*ness meant to the ordinary people. Was *Pahari* mobilisation only a political construction for election by politicians? How was *Pahari-*ness expressed in everyday situations? The following are some selected interviews with reasonably edited versions.

Niru Chakma (an NGO health worker): *Ami Kessy ke Poshada Kori na baikti gotebhabe, kintu ami okka parishod ar dharona poshnda kori, tara pahari shomaoyshaer kata bayshe ai zonna take vote debo* (I don’t like Kessy personally, but I like Okka Parishod’s idea; they are speaking for *Pahari* problem; that is why I vote for him.)

Mayma Sing Marma (woman shopkeeper): *Amra Anek harisi, Amra Mano shobi akk hoe, Amara pahare shobi pahari, abar Pahari Sa hobo*, (We lost everything; we are all united now; we are *Pahari* in the hills; this time our *Pahari* Sa will win.)

Haradon Tanchanga (A day labourer): *Ami tu shob shomai Auami legue ke vote disi, kinto tara shob shomai bangali ke dheke, kessy tu hegar heleo pahari bhai, bi pode pahse darabe.* (I always voted for AL but they always favour Bengali; after all Kessy *Pahari* brother, he will stand by us in a crisis)

Tinkh La Bawm (farmer): *Ami rajniti boji na; Okka parishod amogo mono koise ak hote, ek hole amago ziga onnara nite parbe na; Kessy hole ameder shommoshar somada hobe, he is pahai sa; amago pahar military dokhle gabe na* (I don’t understand politics; *Okka parishod* said to us, we have to be united, if we are united nobody can take our land, the military can not acquire our hills; Kessy will see our problem; he is a *Pahari* sa.)

Lila Mru (a school teacher): *Pahari der para keno shodo shommysha; cele der prikkar shomaio light pahi na, cerag galate hai, Kessy tu amader pahari shomadan zane* (Why are all problems in the *Pahari* area; we don’t get electricity during children’s exam time, we support Kessy, he understands *Pahari* problems.)

For them, the meaning of *Pahari-*ness may be different from how it is defined by the TCI cultural officer, political activist K S Mong, or *Okka Parishod* member Dr. William Lusia, but they also voice *Pahari-*ness in a different way. Their expression of *Pahari-*ness rather comes from everyday problems. They also share the same feelings of deprivation and marginalisation by the Bengali. In the Madyam and Uzani para, these ordinary voices translate into a spontaneous feeling of *Pahari-*ness against the Bengali. Thus, *Pahari* ethnicity only makes sense in a particular situation, if there is a comparison made with the Bengali. *Pahari* ethnicity gains substance through ethnic mobilisation in the election. The expression of this process can only be seen in the context of a relative to the Bengali ‘other’.
Barishal Para

Barishal para is one of the Bengali migrants’ settlements in the Banderban puroshava area. The Barishal para is named after the Barishal district from which many of the present inhabitants have migrated. By naming the Barishal para, people of this village keep their district identity as a way to remember their ancestral home district. However, for the Pahari people in Banderban, the Barishal para symbolises the ‘government Bengali settlement program’ in the heart of CHT land. The Brishal para is located at the south side of Banderban puroshava area, close to the bus station at Banderban’s entry point.

Mariam Bibi’s family is one of the oldest families of settlers in the Barishal para. Mariam Bibi came to Banderban along with some other twenty families from the same area in 1980 under General Zia’s bhomiheen (landless people) settlement programme in the CHT (See Roy 1997, for Bengali settlement programme). Mariam Bibi (50), a widow of two sons, live with her eldest son, who is a rickshaw puller. Mariam Bibi’s main job is to look after two grandchildren, but she also does some handicraft work when she has a free time. Her husband died two years later when they moved to Banderban from the Brishal district.

I wanted to know whether Mariam Bibi was aware of the upcoming Banderban puroshava election. I asked her whether she would be going to the polling centre. She replied quite firmly, “I will definitely vote; if I don’t vote, the Pahari will win”. I was initially surprised about her sharp reaction. Mariam Bibi had a clear understanding of why she wanted to vote. However, it seemed to me that this was not entirely a firm belief that she should exercise her voting rights, but rather an ethnic sentiment deeply rooted in the social condition of the Bengali settlers in the CHT. I was further surprised when Mariam Bibi explained to me “I support dhanershiss (a paddy - the election symbol of BNP) but this time, I would vote for nouka (a boat - the AL’s election symbol)”.

150 “Paddy” and “Boat” are the arch-rival election symbols of two main political parties, the BNP and the AL. These two political parties by and large control mainstream ‘Bangladeshi’ or ‘Bengali’ politics. Ideologically, they also represent two polarised views: central liberalism and the right wing. Though both claim to be nationalist, one emphasises “Bengali nationalism” based on language and
It was sensible for Mariam Bibi to say that the ‘settlers Bengali’ were supporters of dhanershiss because the BNP had brought them to the CHT, and awarded them so-called khas lands to settle in. I already knew that, by that time, the Barishal para was the BNP stronghold in Banderban. However, she really surprised me by saying that she would be supporting nouka, which she did not like in the first place. Interestingly, she was not even aware of the Ayub Chowdhury’s election symbol in the puroshava poll\textsuperscript{151} but she knew Ayub Chowdhury as an AL man, so that election symbol would obviously be nouka. When I asked Mariam Bibi why she wanted to vote for nooaka, she explained:

\textit{jodi pahari zite tobe amogo shobere khedia dibo. eta amago kortobo bangalire bhot dya} (If Pahari wins they will kick us from here, it is now our duty to vote for Bengali).

Mariam Bibi’s account suggests that support for Ayub Chowdhury was not entirely motivated by democratic obligations, but that her participation in the puroshava election is rather a result of Bengali settlers politics against the Pahari. Mariam Bibi is clearly demarcating an ethnic line and creating boundary between the Bengali and Pahari. For Mariam Bibi, the puroshava election is more than a way of expressing Bengali identity. Mariam Bibi’s expression of Bengali-ness is not simply limited to election politics, it is deeply rooted in the recurrent politics of CHT land and Bengali settlement/migration. My personal engagement with Mogib Contractor further exemplifies how the Bengali construction of politicised identity challenges the Pahari construction.

Mogib Contractor, the secretary of the BNP - backed pribhan sromick union (transport labour union), is a key figure in the Barishal para. He virtually controls every aspect of political and social affairs in the village. Mogib Contractor is known to be the wealthiest and most politically influential person in the village. A big brick house with a tin roof and a huge compound symbolises Mogib Contractor’s culture, the other asserts "Bangladeshi nationalism" based on territoriality and a majority religion, Islam. In rural Bangladesh, their politics are valued on the basis of traditional election symbol more than ideology, individual leadership and so on. People are familiar with these party politics through election symbols. During election time, there are different parody/slogan coined in the name of election symbols. These two parties are largely signified with their election symbols.\textsuperscript{151} Which is an umbrella by the way.
prominence in the village. Outside the Barishal para, however, people have different stories about Mogib Contractor’s wealth and power. A popular one is that Mogib Contractor symbolically uses the name “Contractor” (meaning bus ticket-checker in Bengali literary sense) as if was his personal name, but that in reality, he uses it intentionally to rouse the sympathy of transport workers. In the voter list, Mogib Contractor is officially registered as Mogibur Rahman, and he has never worked in transport sector. Since his childhood, Mogib Contractor has been involved in BNP-backed workers politics in the bus station area, and eventually became a controller of the area, locally called *chandabaz* (toll collectors in Bengali).

Mogib Contractor has no visible source of income, but most of his income is believed to be come from transport donations (tolls). These ‘donations’, however, are made in the name of the workers union. However, these ‘donations’ are not voluntarily given. Mogib Contractor maintains a strong network of cadres who are responsible for collecting an already fixed amount of ‘donations’ from all kinds of transports. Bus and truck owners associations are increasingly furious about this but seem to be incapacitated in the hands of *chandabaz*. The owner of the *porobi* bus service, Shanti Dey, the only local bus owner in Banderban, said, with utter dissatisfaction “these are not donations, these are tolls”. I have learnt that trucks with heavy logs are the main targets of Mogib Contractor’s ‘donations service’ amounting about Tk. 200–300 per truck, followed by daily passenger buses and mini buses at Tk. 50 and 25 per trip respectively.

Mogib Contractor spends a substantial amount of these donations for his cadres and followers in order to keep his supreme authority over the ‘donation business’ by controlling the important bus station area. The local police department is another potential partner of Mogib Contractor’s ‘donation business’ as they regularly receive monthly fixed payments for their honest and sincere co-operation for non-action against illegal toll collection. Mogib Contractor’s wealth and influence have allowed him to become an influential political figure in Banderban.

In recent times, especially following the peace treaty, Mogib Contractor has emerged as a very popular politician among the ‘settler’s Bengali’ in Banderban and elsewhere in the CHT for his anti-peace treaty campaign. During my fieldwork in
1999-2000, I have seen Mogib Contractor organise a number of anti-peace demonstrations mainly mobilising 'settlers Bengali' under the banner of Bengali Shongram Parishad (Bengali United Movement) to challenge the Pahari. Mogib Contractor's active involvement with the Bengali Shongram Parishad allowed him to become a key player in the politics of Bangali-Adi-Bangali.

It is noteworthy to mention that although, in the broader sense, the category Bengali represents the opposite pole to the Pahari in everyday life, in the CHT, after the peace treaty, there has been a new development in Pahari politics in terms of defining Bengaliness. The PCJSS leadership now put forward a different definition of Bengaliness on the basis of settlement history. Adi Bangali (original Bengali), who migrated to the CHT before 1947 (before partition) are considered acceptable to the Pahari, because as they claim, there were no major conflicts between Bengali and Pahari. On the other hand, settler Bangali who came to the CHT under military sponsored population transfer programmes, especially after 1971, are not considered to be accommodated in the CHT. This has already proven to be the worst episode in an ever-deteriorating Pahari-Bengali relationship in the CHT.\footnote{This information is collected from talking to many local PCJSS leaders such as K. S. Mong.}

In recent times, this debate has generated a widespread tension among the 'Bengali settlers'. After the peace treaty there has been a growing sense that the 'Bengali settlers' would be rehabilitated outside the CHT. In August 1999, a news item was published in a daily newspaper reporting that "donor countries are willing to help Bangladesh to rehabilitate Bengali settlers elsewhere outside the CHT" (Daily Protom Alo, 16 August 2000).

In Banderban, Mogib Contractor immediately seized upon the news item as the issue of 'settlers' mobilisation to denounce the proposed rehabilitation plan. In a hurried organised protest rally at the front gate of the DC office, activists of Bengali Shongram Parishad chanted slogans such as settlers bangali mani na, bangalider bebhed nhai (we don't agree with Bengali settlers, there is no difference among the Bengalis). Mogib Contractor's protest rally was largely orchestrated to mobilise greater Bengali unity against the Pahari. During the Banderban puroshava election,
‘settler’s issue was repeatedly intertwined in the construction of Bengali-ness against the Pahari.

I met Mogib Contractor personally on a few occasions but never had any opportunity to talk to him privately as he was always surrounded by his followers. During the election period, I decided to talk to Mogib Contractor to have a fuller picture of how Bengali settlers’ leader like him viewed the puroshava election. I chose to interview Mogib Contractor at his home rather than in a public place. It was midday, the ideal time to catch someone when they come home for lunch. Indeed, when I reached Mogib Contractor’s house at Barishal para he was having lunch. I was cordially welcomed to have lunch with the phrase *apne to amader atiti* (you are our guest in Banderban).

Initially, when I started to talk about the general political situation in Banderban, Mogib Contractor was a little formal because his understanding of my presence in Banderban was rather limited to being in the university. When I explained to him the purpose of my research in anthropology and reason to stay in Banderban, he seemed to portray himself as an ‘objective politician’. I asked him why he, as a BNP leader, had joined the AL candidate in Banderban, while other political parities and the BNP were boycotting the local puroshava election everywhere else in Bangladesh.

Mogib Contractor cleverly replied,

> Politically I support BNP’s stand not to join in any election under the AL government. But I think it is dangerous in CHT. Politics is different here. Besides party politics, there is another politics here Pahari vs Bengali. If BNP strongly resist Banderban puroshava poll, the Pahari candidate will win. We don’t want to make this happen. So, politically we are not contesting but encouraging people to cast their votes. (My translation from Bengali transcripts).

What Mogib Contractor tells us here is that party politics is one thing but that, in the CHT everything else revolves around the politics of Pahari vs. Bengali. On the election day, I noticed Mogib Contractor standing right outside the Bazar polling centre with Ayub Chowdhury’s election symbol umbrella stuck on his shirt asking election workers to bring women voters in the centre. In fact, Mogib Contractor was
Ayub Chowdhury's official election agent in the Barishal para: he was responsible for distributing the *burkha* (Muslim women’s black veil covering the body and face), and arranging rickshaws to bring them to the polling centre. Some local people told me that Mogib Contractor was given handsome money to mobilise Bengali voters in Barishal para.

Nonetheless, Mogib Contractor’s account tells us that his expression of Bengali-ness and support of Ayub Chowdhury was more than just electoral support (for money), that it was directly related to Bengali settler issues. Thus, Mariam Bibi’s enthusiasm for *nouka*, is not different from Mogib Contractor’s support to Ayub Chowdhury. For both Mariam Bibi and Mogib Contractor, Bengali Ayub Chowdhury’s political power at the local level was more important than the party identity. Because they needed Ayub Chowdhury’s support with regard to settlers issues. Other things had become less important for them, at least in this time of election.

I also talked to some other ordinary Bengali, such as shop owners, rickshaw pullers etc. Some of them did not even like AL but would vote for Ayub Chowdhury.

Anisur Rahman (a rickshaw puller) said to me that “why do we vote for Mog (a derogatory term spoken by local Bengali for Marma. Ayub Chowdhury gave my son a job as a cleaner in municipality office”.

Primal Datta, (a shop-keeper) “I would vote for Chowdhury because my business would be saved under his chairmanship; I don’t have to fear closing my shop here”.

All these voices, whether that of the Bengali ‘settlers’ such as Mariam Bibi, of politician Mogib Contractor, or of the ordinary rickshaw puller express different reasons to support Ayub Chowdhury, but all express one common interest. Kessy is Mog, and Pahari, while Ayub Chowdhury is Bengali. The Banderban *puroshava* election is a clear manifestation of ‘ethnic politics’ rather than an ‘electoral politics’ in which a collective Pahari identity emerged to challenge the dominant Bengali. At the same time, in response, the Bengali, through electoral alliance, counter-challenged the Pahari discourse. The voting results were the direct reflection of this politics of ethnic mobilisation.
Analysing Results, Analysing Ethnicity

In a recent article, Mukulika Banerjee (2003) described how, in West Bengal villages, people would hate politicians and the way in which recent political trend has engulfed every aspect of village life, but would still overwhelmingly participate in the election process with a strong sense of moral obligation. This kind of political reality is almost identical elsewhere in Bangladesh but in the CHT, people, both Pahari and Bengali, have a clear rationale to explain why should they be voting. It is, by and large, not the democratic value of moral obligation that impels their enthusiasm and generates overwhelming participation. It is, rather, a 'politicised ethnicity' which provides, and to some extent even dictates, a sense of obligation to act as Pahari or Bengali for greater political gain. Both Bengali and Pahari ethnicity, as a politico-ideological tools, provided the basis for high voter turnout in the Banderban puroshava election.

As I mentioned earlier, in the case of the Pahari, the level of participation in the electoral process largely depends on how much voters engage in it with their own interests. My experience of the Banderban puroshava election, and also of the results data demonstrate a reverse rationale to Pahari participation, a rationale which is generally thought to be “negative” to the mainstream political process.

Large-scale voters’ turnout marks the polling process as significant as any other elections in Bangladesh. My understanding is that the way in which local ethnic people in the Maydam and Uzani para have voted in such numbers for the Okka Parishad candidate, exhibited a united voice of ‘cultural otherness’. High turn out and participation in the puroshava election can thus be seen as a collective mobilisation of Pahari-ness. For them, despite all its shortcomings, the election is an effective alternative arena through which their political opinion can be expressed as a collective voice. The overwhelming support for Kessy was largely been orchestrated in the process of Pahari mobilisation.

In a changed political situation, and with the emergence of the regional political party PCJSS, the importance of Pahari representation in electoral politics has significantly shaped local politics. K S Mong Marmar, a PCJSS leader, holds that
In the past, people never felt wholeheartedly to cast their votes; sometimes they were pressured by government and military personals. An abnormal percentage of polling results were shown in the media, which is mainly the handiwork of the army and civil servants.

However, in the Banderban puroshava election, high voter turnout (around 87%) compared to previous general elections clearly revealed a great interest, commitment and enthusiasm among the Pahari in particularly. Understanding the main motivation for high voter turnout particularly at Uzani para and Modyam para centres (around 88%) is evidently important for some crucial reasons. Firstly, high voter turnout must be understood within the context of the antagonistic relationship between Pahari and Bengali. Secondly, high electoral turnout and overwhelming participation can also be seen as a process of collective mobilisation based on anger and mistrust against the Bengali, which, in turn, transformed into renewed hope through Okka Parishad’s construction of Pahari Sa. Analyses of the Banderban Puroshava election results highlight this trend.

Analysis of Voting Behaviour and Trends

As I mentioned in the introduction, the population figure of the CHT has always been a sensitive issue in Bangladesh. It has been a “term of reference” in CHT politics as far as issues of Bengali migration and ‘tribal’ populations are concerned (Ahamed 2001). The exact population figure of CHT is always somewhat misleading. Census reports in Bangladesh do not provide district-wise breakdown by ‘tribal’ and Bengali population in the CHT.

According to the recently published 2001 census report, the total population of the Banderban puroshava is 31,806. However, unofficial sources suggest that the total population of Banderban puroshava is in fact 33,401 of which ethnic populations altogether form about 47%, while the Bengali makes up about 53% (Rovillos 2000). It appears that the population composition of Banderban puroshava area is very finely balanced. On the basis of population concentration, the entire Banderban puroshava area can be divided into two zones: Pahari and Bengali core zones. The purpose of this categorisation is to reveal whether electoral behaviour is determined
by ethnicity or party politics. What are the guiding principles? This may certainly helps us understand the role of ethnicity as well as the nature of electoral politics in the CHT.

There are three wards in the Banderban puroshava area. Ward One is constituted of the Uzani and Madyam para with substantial ethnic populations, among which the Marma predominate about 80%, while other ethnic groups, such as the Tanchanga, Bawm, Chakma and a few Mru families altogether form 10%, and the rest are Bengali around 10%. Ward One could be referred to as the core of the Pahari area. Ward Two consists of the Bazar area, bus station area and court building area. The Ward Two is the Bengali majority area, constituting 85% of the Bengali population, and the rest is the composition of different ethnic groups. Ward Two can be referred to as the core Bengali area. Ward Three is relatively smaller in size. It consists of the hospital area and of Kayang (temple) area. In Ward Three, Bengalis constitute about 73% of the populations and the rest is composed of different ethnic groups. Table 1 shows ward basis population composition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ward</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bengali</td>
<td>Pahari (all groups)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ward 1</td>
<td>1353</td>
<td>12174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ward 2</td>
<td>13272</td>
<td>2342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ward 3</td>
<td>3158</td>
<td>1102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>17783</td>
<td>15618</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on fieldwork materials and consulting local NGO sources

**Analysis of Voting Pattern**

The election results of the Banderban puroshava revealed a clearly uneven voting behaviour pattern, particularly on the part of Pahari voters. Since the introduction of the Banderban puroshava in 1984, AL candidates have remained powerful and have won all previous elections. Banderban district, as a whole, is considered one of the strongholds of the ruling party the AL. In the 1991 and 1996 general elections, AL
won all three seats in CHT, but in the October 2001 general election AL lost two of these to the BNP-led alliance: the seat of northern Khagrachari district was lost to a Bengali candidate, and, in the centre, to a PCJSS backed Chakma candidate at Rangamati. However, AL kept the Banderban seat. There are many post election interpretations about the AL debacle.\textsuperscript{153}

However, as far as the previous general elections results are concerned, AL was still the politically dominant force in Banderban. In the \textit{puroshava} election, the AL candidate Ayub Chowdhury faced a stiff challenge from the \textit{Pahari Okka Parishad} candidate Kessy. Kessy, though, securing almost 90\% of \textit{Pahari} core zone votes, lost the election because he did not get enough votes from the Bengali core zone.

According to the official government voter list, the total numbers of voters in the Banderban \textit{puroshava} area is 13,676, out of total population of 31,806.\textsuperscript{154} Among the six polling centres in the \textit{puroshova} area, there are two polling centres in Ward Two, Unazi and Madyam para. Kessy received overwhelming majority votes in these two centres. Out of the total number of voters (5060) registered on election day, Kessy got 4554 votes (90\%) whereas Ayub Chowdhury received only 506 votes (10\%). On the other hand, in Ward One combining all three polling centres, Court building polling centre, Bazar centre and Goner para polling centre, Ayub Chowdhury received 5156 (about 88\%) votes out of total registered votes 5841 on the election day. In contrast, Kessy got only 685 votes (12\%). In Ward Three, there

\footnotesize{
\textsuperscript{153} There were different versions and interpretations of AL election debacles put forward by the PCJSS leaders, local \textit{Pahari}, Bengali settlers and in the media after the election. Most of these views were published in the daily newspapers and in other media. Although the 2001 general election was held after my fieldwork, I have reviewed the post-election situation by reading newspapers in Internet and also maintaining my contacts in CHT. It has been argued by many local commentators and PCJSS leadership that "AL dual policy and insincerity to implement peace accord pledges frustrated many \textit{Pahari} people who ultimately sought alternative solution" (Zonokhontaa 3 Oct. 2001). Buddah Zuti Chakma, the local correspondent of the national daily Protom Alo, well known for his vocal journalism on hill issues, opined that sudden fundamentalist political upheaval in the CHT was a result of the AL’s narrow party interests towards over all CHT policy. He believes that the AL, in the last five years of their tenure, adopted a policy of slow implementation of peace accord conditions, and ignored the settler’s problem, non-functioning of land commission, politicisation of hill district’s councils by appointing the party men (Protom Alo 29 Sept. 2001). Like Buddah Zuti, many others also think that all these processes together frustrated pro-peace people in the CHT. Many political commentators even argued that the change of political landscape in the 2001 general election made little inroad for the BNP and its right wing allies into the AL support base in the CHT (The Daily Star, 5 Oct. 2001).

\textsuperscript{154} According to election regulations, only people aged 18 and above are eligible to vote.
}
was only one polling centre, the Kayang para centre, where Ayub Chowdhury secured almost twice as much as Kessy, 1053 (64%) votes out of total registered votes 1593 on the election day, emerged as victorious by a total margin of 901 votes. Table 2 shows the votes received by the candidates for each polling centre.

Table 5: Break down of the result

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Court/Bazar/Gonar Para centres (Ward 1)</th>
<th>Maydam/Uzani Para centres (Ward 2)</th>
<th>Kayang Para centre (ward 3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total voters 6714</td>
<td>Total registered on the day 5841</td>
<td>Total voters 1832</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total registered on the day 5060</td>
<td>Total registered on the day 1593</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayub Chowdhury</td>
<td>5156</td>
<td>506</td>
<td>1035 (total received 6697)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kessy</td>
<td>685</td>
<td>4554</td>
<td>557 (total received=5796)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Result</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>901 (margin)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: On the basis of official results on election day

The figures of the total votes received by each candidate in a specific ward visibly demonstrates the importance of an ethnic politics. A Pahari voting pattern emerges in the Pahari core area, on the other hand, a Bengali voting pattern also appears on the same principle. The pattern of voting results demonstrate a particular loyalty to ethnic line: Bengali vs Pahari. Ethnicity has thus played a key role in the Banderban puroshava election.

One important development in CHT recent politics is that ethnic voters have shifted their allegiance from the AL to Pahari candidates for many reasons. The result of the Banderban puroshava election was clearly a reflection of a broad level collective mobilisation of the Pahari against the Bengali. In fact, many interesting observations can be made about the puroshava election. Firstly, in all previous local puroshava elections, the AL dominated the poll with the support of locals. In this puroshava election the same people went against the AL candidate (secured only 10%). I suggest that Pahari voters are, by and large, influenced by the Okka
Parishad's mobilisation on the basis of ethnic solidarity rather than on the nature of party politics.

The Banderban puroshava election results can be interpreted as clear manifestation of politicised ethnicity: Pahari vs. Bengali. In the case of Pahari, regional issues and interests, shared deprivations and exploitation by Bengali have all been identified as reasons for Pahari mobilisation, and played a determining role in the election.

Conclusion

Many reasons have been put forward by critics for the failure of Okka Porishad candidate Kessy. For example, it has been argued that an ultra-ethnic propaganda, including slogans such as “if Pahari win settler Bengali would be in danger to leave the CHT” by Ayub Chowdhury camp has largely been successful against Kessy. This campaign is believed to have significantly influenced the majority Bengali voters in Banderban.

However, there are other crucial aspects which also played a significant role in defeating the Okka Parishad candidate. Firstly, despite the boycott of the election by the major opposition political parities elsewhere in Bangladesh, Ayub Chowdhury still enjoyed the support of all as Bengali candidate in the Banderban puroshava election. Secondly, non-partisan local election turned out to be a party election involving the government machinery, such as government ministers, MPs and senior civil servants, who appeared a key factors in Kessy’s election debacle. Many local Marmas, like Hla Pru master, said that government party interests had crippled the Banderban puroshava election. They thought that the overwhelming electoral support to Pahari Okka candidate Kessy had been undermined by cash money, contracts, and promise of public positions. Some Bengali Hindu minority voters, who were initially sympathetic to Kessy, were warned by threats in order to ensure the victory of the government party candidate.

Another point must be made here: in the previous elections, the ruling party AL had always tried to win the support of Pahari voters, especially at times when Pahari
voters were considered very crucial. During the puroshava election the government went out of its way to win over the Pahari candidate because Kessy was a local Okka Parishad nominee and was also involved in many activities related to CHT causes, such as the recently launched “movement for the land rights of indigenous people”. Moreover, all ethnic groups supported him because of his vocal attitude against government policy, and also for his role in upholding hill tradition and culture, which enabled him to become a very popular figure among the youth. Thus, as I realised, the election process itself, and not the result had been the vivid outcome of the opening chapter of Pahari expression, an attempt to mobilise collective identity against the Bengali.

Multi-ethnic mobilisation as Pahari is a vehicle to challenge the Bengali hegemony. The forces related to their shared beliefs and values become part of their common political and economic interests. The politics of collective identity, in the form of Pahari-ness represent an alternative aspiration to politically challenge Bengali domination. In south Asia or in other so-called ‘tribal’ areas, bullets have become the weapons of ethnic politics. There are armed struggles still being waged by indigenous peoples to liberate themselves and to create their own separate states or to establish autonomous regions as a part of the existing one (Kailash 1999). There are also extra-legal forms of resistance, planned or spontaneous, to fight against the political and economic measures taken by the government that affects the livelihood of the indigenous people and their cultural identity (Mullick 2001).

At the same time, indigenous peoples have the experience of political process that involve election and ethnic mobilisation. The Banderban puroshava election has certainly become an arena in which Pahari collective mobilisation is vividly expressed against the Bengali and Bangladesh State hegemony.
Conclusion

In this final chapter my aim is to follow up the main arguments and ideas that I have presented so far. Instead of summarising the findings of each chapter, I will develop these into a condensed concluding discussion. The processes I have referred to as ‘ethnic mobilisation’ makes a good point of departure.

Ethnic mobilisation is commonly understood as “the process by which an ethnic community becomes politicised” (Esman 1994: 28). It is a matter of an existing collectivity, or people bound together by cultural and experiential core, whom, according to Esman, are turned into political competitor (ibid.: 16, 27). Such reasoning remains within an essentialist understanding of ethnicity and identity formation. The argument I have developed in this thesis is largely in opposition to such a position. One of the basic points I have dwelt on is that the very making of an ethnic community/people is itself produced in the process of ethnic mobilisation.

In other words, the ethnic community cannot be taken as given or existing prior to the mobilisation (just waiting to be politicised). There are shared historical experiences, cultural forms, collective attachments and community solidarities on which ethnic communities are built; the point is that there is no built-in teleology in such attachments, and they can constitute different projects of ethnic mobilisation. Ethnic mobilisation, I would say, refers to the process in which a particular project of ethnic identity is constituted (discarding, or at the expense of, other possible cultural identities such as in the case of CHT).

Cultural identity, and its variants ethnic and collective identities, is central in this thesis. I regard these as modern reflexive projects aimed at demarcating distinct collective selves, an identity that separate ‘us from them’, ‘those who belong’ from ‘those who do not belong’. In the CHT, the processes of identity construction are intimately connected to the historical experiences of the statists categorisation and classificatory grid of colonial and post-colonial subjects. In contemporary times, the newly constructed Pahari ethnicity/identity occupies an interesting structural position within the larger context of Bangladesh society.
The category *Pahari* is an exonym, from a Bengali word *pahar* (hill), once used by the colonial administrators to refer to diverse ethnic groups of CHT into a single term ‘hill tribes’. In the colonial discourse, the word ‘hill tribe’ had negative connotations being portrayed as primitive and backward people. In the post-colonial Bangladesh state the newly constructed category *upazati* bears the similar meaning. The notion *upazati* is usually translated as sub-nation, and can also mean stereotyped isolated tribal people of Bangladesh in official discourse. Among the mainstream Bengali, the category *upazati* denotes undeveloped people, socially looked down upon because of their mode of customary lifestyles, such as *jhum, nappai*, (dry fish powder - a common ingredient used by all ethnic communities in the CHT) and *masang gor* (house types). Thus, the statist category *upazati* is perceived to be used for undeveloped primitive people, who are in need of state intervention to allow them to develop as ‘proper’ Bangladeshi citizens.

In contrast to this perception, at the present day, discourses of ethnic politics in the CHT, the state’s negative connotations regarding this categorisation become the positive meaning in the processes of collective ethnic mobilisation. The common use of the term *Pahari* and the rejection of stereotyped notions, *upazati*tribal, has gained a new dimension in recreating a broader community and collective identity. The notion *Pahari* is turned into a form of political identification opening up a space for diverse ethnic groups in the CHT. In this process construction of *Pahari* identity can be seen as ‘othering’. I qualify this argument by emphasising the fluid and therefore changing processes of ethnic identity formation in the CHT.

In the case of *Pahari*, I have referred to this as the shifting boundaries of ethnicity, which on the most general level includes all ethnic groups of CHT in opposition to the dominant Bengali. At this level, there are bonds of solidarity and cultural overlapping between the indigenous communities, such as Marma, Bawm, Tanchanga and so on, which they often say, they are part of shared history in the CHT and face a common reality of shared deprivation and marginalisation by the dominant Bengali and the State. Below this level of shared identity, there is another level where Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga, who see themselves locally as distinct ethnic groups. At this level, socio-cultural practices, such as marriage organisation,
inheritance and language have been the salient feature of ethnic boundary maintenance.

I call this dynamic process 'negotiating identity'. Among ethnic groups in the CHT, identity construction is a constant process of negotiation, a negotiation of self and collectivities. The phrase 'negotiating identity' is mainly derived from the reading of Anne Schiller's (1997) discussion on indigenous identity construction in Malaysia, a similar ethnographic reality to CHT. Anne Schiller explains how construction of "Ngaju" and "Badhay" identities is a process of "negotiation", by which they deal with their ethnic and cultural status between "indigenous society" and the present Malaysian State (ibid.: 183).

In the case of CHT, following Anne Schiller's model, identity construction can also be seen as a process of negotiation and fluidity. The notion of fluid ethnicity is of paramount importance in any understanding of CHT society. Being a Marma, Chakma, Bawm and others is related to the processes of groups’ ethnic identity based mainly on linguistic or socio-organisational criteria. But at another level, being a Pahari, Jhumma or Adivashi is directly related to the processes of broader collectivities, and the politics of constructing a supra-community based on CHT land and resource rights in opposition to the Bengali. This supra collectivity is clearly defined in terms of a 'recreated community' with the development of common historical experiences of marginalisation and deprivation and the territorial space of CHT.

I argue that this spiral and fluid nature of identity construction is a process of 'negotiating identity' embedded in everyday day life experiences among the diverse ethnic groups in the CHT. For example, Marma people in Roangchari, in a localised form, identify themselves as Regesa based on particular settlement and habitual attachment in relation to other Marma groups elsewhere in the CHT. And again in the context of inter-ethnic relationships, the category Regesa becomes the expression of Marma identity as opposed to other ethnic groups, such as Tanchanga and Bawm, around them in Roangchari (I have discussed this point in Chapter Three). Yet at another broader collective level, the same Marma people assert being Pahari along with other ethnic groups invoking a sense of common CHT history, tradition and
belonging, and a sense of lived experiences of shared deprivation by the state regimes in Bangladesh.

Thus, one must be aware of the processes of identity construction in terms of layers such as, *Pahari/Marma, Pahari/Bawm* or *Pahari/Tanchanga* and so on. In the context of CHT, I suggest that analytical notions, ‘unity’, ‘diversity’, ‘multi-ethnicity’, ‘ethnic mobilisation’ and ‘social movement’ must be understood in the processes of ‘negotiating identity’. In this thesis, I position myself in this line with the argument that the question of ethnicity is not a question of fixed static, bounded ‘tribal’ people in the CHT as most of ethnographers have been monotonously reporting for so long. From my ethnographic experience it is very pervasive that contemporary CHT society is dynamic and fluid, constantly shaping or being shaped by both internal and external forces.

**Multi-ethnicity in CHT as Diversity in Unity**

The notion of ‘multi-ethnicity’ is seen as one of the unique characteristics of CHT in contemporary literature. Loffler rightly pointed out that “within one and same *mouza* in the CHT, one may find four groups speaking completely different languages, building different types of houses, wearing different clothes, believing in different customs and religions” (1990: 36). He further observed that the multi-ethnic nature of CHT is not analogous to the situation elsewhere in South Asia.

Nevertheless, Loffler’s ethnography remains close to the colonial stereotypical model which emphasises that cultural diversity among the groups is fixed and stable that forms the CHT society. This is clearly a very idealistic view. Loffler’s analysis of inter-ethnic relationships is symbiotic. He describes the CHT groups as independent and isolated units without exploring the processes of interaction between the Bengali surround them. His study lacks an interpretation of internal dynamics; what kinds of inter relationships exists among the groups that constitute multi-ethnic society in CHT. I argue that Loffler’s conceptions of “stability”, “equilibrium” and “symbiosis” are poorly suited to the analysis of inter-ethnic relationships and the political situation in the CHT.
There is another trend of arguments that again completely ignores the internal dynamics of the groups. This perspective suggests that internal ethnic divisions are increasingly irrelevant to the common struggle of cultural politics against the state (Schendel 1996, 2001; Mohsin 1997; Tripura 1992; Dewan 1990). Of course this political analysis is obviously relevant in the context of contemporary ethnicisation and the processes of collective social movements but the diversity aspects of their ethnicity has been fully ignored.

I hold the view against some of the prevalent opinions that broader collective identity formation is the only issue in the CHT. I argue that this view clearly undermines the potential sources of multi-ethnic relationships in the discourse of identity construction. Of course, Pahari, Adivashi and Jhumma are social movements of ethnic mobilisation as a common struggle against the state policy, which is crucially important to peoples' lives and livelihood. Nevertheless, it is also equally important to understand the internal dynamics at local level because in such politically contested situations like CHT ethnic groups negotiate their social relationships in everyday life in both a contextual and fluid manner. The fact is that ethnic groups in CHT primarily emphasise their distinctiveness as a prime source of ethnic marker but simultaneously they manipulate these into a broader level of identification in particular situations and contexts.

Anthropologists working in multi-ethnic areas opine that the subtle interplay of group formation practices is central, and in most cases give an impression that inter-ethnic marriage is one of the bonding factors for the constitution of multi-ethnic society. Philip Burnham, in the context of Northern Cameroonian group “Mbороro”, suggest that inter-marriage, residential propinquity and pattern of leaderships all combine as elements in the constitution of local groups and multi-ethnic society (1996: 97). Oddvar Hollup (2000) also suggests the similar view that inter-ethnic marriage is catalyst to the formation of multi-ethnic society of different Indian migrants’ groups in Mauritius.

In the CHT, however, this is not the case. Among ethnic groups, inter-ethnic marriage practices still seem rigid and less tolerated. Ethnic endogamy is a common form of marriage practice. The prevalent nature of this marriage practice is, in fact, a
mechanism of ethnic boundary maintenance. The local level socio-organisational
data shows, as we have seen in Chapter Three, how ethnic groups maintain their
cultural diversity and group identity within a multi-ethnic locality. Some of these
testimonies illustrate the clear consciousness of maintaining distinct group identities.

Let me explain this further, cultural diversity maintenance among the groups is still perceived as protecting and preserving one’s tradition and culture. As I have explained in Chapter Four, language has been the idiom of ethno-linguistic identity of the groups, which in turns key to maintenance of cultural diversity. Both Tanchanga and Marma are Buddhist by religion, and have separate temples side by side practicing Buddhism in linguistic ways leaving religious identity aside. Religious practices are expressed in linguistic terms making cultural boundary operational among the Buddhist Marma and Tanchanga. The same is true for the Christian Bawm and Tripura. In addition, taking ethno-names as part of proper names is also a mechanism of diversity maintenance as being Marma, Bawm or Tanchanga.

Nonetheless, I suggest that cultural boundary maintenance is apparently active among the groups in CHT but they are not fixed bounded categories. In fact, ethnic diversity can also be seen as sources of unity at the broader level. For example, development of script movements by different socio-cultural organisations is not only an expression of one’s distinctive ethnic identity but also assertion of indigenousness in the CHT as a whole, as opposed to Bengali. Recent development of indigenous language movements, as an organised discourse, in relation to the present education system in the CHT transforms ethnic diversity into unity.

Furthermore, in the process of celebrating the traditional *Biashabi* festival, ethnic groups become ritualised in the form of a collective body through gathering and activities. Dances and music of different ethnic groups display the fragmentation of cultural elements in a singular body of indigenous *Pahari* culture. Each group express as different ethnicity but also blends into a panoramic view of common cultural unity in the form of a collective festival, *Baishabi*. In the political discourse, metaphorical representation of this diversity become the source of inspiration in collective mobilisation as the phrase reads “We Are Ten Flowers in One Garden”
(discussed in Chapter Four). In this articulation, the CHT multi-ethnic society can be seen as 'diversity in unity'.

The notion ‘diversity in unity’ is also reflected in other forms of collective development. For example, formation of a steering committee for the Banderban puroshava election and land rights movement with multi-ethnic representation is a political process of broader identity construction in which ‘diversity in unity’ is publicly displayed. Composition of the Pahari Okka Parishod and Vomi Odikhar protest movements, in terms of membership, is one glaring examples of the politics of ‘unity within diversity’. The underlying emphasis on the inclusion of each ethnic representation in this social movement is clearly a part of collective mobilisation of diverse entity in the CHT. I argue that the notion ‘diversity in unity’ is, more precisely, a question of multi-ethnicity which is, in fact, the basic structural principle of CHT society. Within this relationship ethnic groups are organised both in cultural and political terms on the basis of priority, and in the face of external force and also to challenge the state policy towards the CHT.

I argue that identities are constructed or manufactured, not given entities. It is important to deconstruct identity in the context of CHT because these groups are not neatly bounded ‘tribes’ but actually part of the much bigger political field. In terms of contemporary politics in the CHT, diverse ethnic groups find it strategically easier to merge together to form a bigger category of hill people. This merging of groups is reflected in the range of vocabulary regarding ethnic identification such as Pahari, Jhumma, Adivashi and so on.

**Pahari Movement/Mobilisation**

In the contemporary politics of CHT, construction of Pahari identity is more inclusive encompassing all ethnic communities other than Bengali. Nowadays, the popular slogan in CHT Amra shobi Pahari, pahar moder ghor-bari (we are all Pahari, the Hill Tracts is our homeland) is orchestrated to demonstrate hill groups are actually 'one people' and arguably the sole steward of CHT land: challenging present ‘Bengali settlers’ and the state regimes (see Chapter Six).
It is also an ethnic mobilisation by focusing on the necessity for uniting all the ethnic groups as Pahari working together for the cultural right and access to CHT resources, and preservation and development of common ‘indigenous’ culture. To ethnic organisations such as Pahari Okka Parishod, Vomi Odikhar Committee, for example, jhum is a matter of social and cultural right; right to preserve this tradition is crucial to Pahari. From this perspective, one could clearly foresee the identification of Pahari would appear to be a politically more appropriate to broader level ethnic mobilisation.

Two components in the construction of a unified Pahari identity include its shared historical past and its present day marginalisation by the State. The appeal of shared CHT history is not precisely that of an historical past, but the present-day construction of the past. In this sense, for their part, ordinary people hold their own model of significance and actual experiences of Pahari community: as locality, as present construction of the past, as empowerment, and as a means of recovering CHT land. The elements of marginalisation, shared deprivation and land dispossession are all embedded in Pahari collective ideology. The tension between communal ideology and individual expectations are also of paramount importance. The question of survival has greatly motivated Pahari to resist khas land lease.

The process of identity formation, I argue, does not take place separate from people’s everyday lives. For the ethnic peoples in the CHT, their assertion of Pahari identity is in most cases directly related to their survival or struggle for land and livelihood. In this context, the notion collective Pahari becomes the meaning of lived experiences. Lived experiences are the conditions that Pahari, in general, face in day-to-day activities with the Bengali and state institutions.

As discussed in Chapters Five and Six, in recent times Pahari have experienced the serious threat of losing their land by government expansion policies through khas land lease, reserve forests and new establishments such as cantonments. In each case Pahari access is heavily restricted to their traditional land. Their traditional jhum cultivation is becoming politically contested. Jhum cultivation is considered by the state as problematic and not conducive to modernity, an obstacle to successful forest conservation. In this process, Pahari firmly believe that they are increasingly being
alienated from the land and forest in the CHT. These feelings of shared lived experiences are articulated in the politics of indigenous language movements, election processes, and the *khas* land protest movement (discussed in Chapters Four, Seven and Eight).

*Pahari* mobilisation and opposition to their marginalisation take place in the domain of what I refer to as ‘collective resistance’. Examples of such resistance movements are their overwhelming participation in collective activities in order to challenge the present Bengali state policy towards the CHT. Their organised activities are also expressed in defence of their rights to CHT land and forests. Therefore, *Pahari* social movements are not simply concerned with the acquisition of land but also a question of survival, a ‘common problem of collective realities’. In political discourse, being a *Pahari*, offers a dignified alternative to the hardship imposed on these people by the State.

I argue that the assertion of *Pahari* identity is intertwined with shared deprivations and increased marginalisation of diverse ethnic peoples in the CHT. It is arguable that this contemporary development mainly concerns the recreation and construction of collective identity in the form of ethnic mobilisation. This study promotes a deeper understanding of the multi-ethnic nature of the Bangladeshi State and provides an assessment of the relationship between ethnicity, environment, development and the State. It also contributes to the wider anthropology of forest-dwelling peoples of South Asia. Furthermore, it challenges the political use of environmentalism and anthropological knowledge in national and regional disputes over the control and use of natural resources.
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326


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Appendix - 1

There is very little information about the ethno-linguistic knowledge of these people before the colonial period. During the early part of the 20th century G. A. Grierson conducted a linguistic survey of different tribes of the CHT including the Bawm but excluding the Marma and Tanchanga. Long after that European anthropologists, such as Lucian Bernot, Pierre Bessaignet and Loffler, carried out anthropological studies on the CHT, which give scant information on their languages.

Among them only, the linguist Bernot (1959) classified the languages of the ethnic groups of the CHT as being of Tibeto-Burman origin. A few researchers, however, differ from the above views regarding the categorisation of the language family (Khaleque 1998; Moniruzzaman 1984). Moniruzzaman (1984), in particular studying the phonological system of Tanchanga and Chakma languages concluded that they are of Indo-European family origin. Unfortunately, these studies are not in-depth ethnographic studies, and provide only limited data on language. Their findings in this regard are not yet conclusive on the classification and genetic relationship of these languages. However, their works, though overlapping views exist, suggest some hypothetical family tree to which the ethnic languages can be related.

This study thus demands a careful scrutiny of the linguistic behaviour of diverse ethnic groups in the CHT with a view to find their genetic and historical relationship. On the basis of the findings of other research and application of a lexical reconstruction method permitted me an identification of differences in the cognitive and semantic realms of the three ethnic communities, Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga in Roangchari. Firstly, in order to trace out historical relationship with broader language families I focused on comparative data using published research works of Grierson (1903), Hutchinson (1909), Lewin (1869), Bernot (1959), Bessaignet (1958), Loffler (1990), Moniruzzaman (1984), Islam (1984) and Khaleque (1998). Secondly, with the use of the glottochronological method\(^{155}\) for

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\(^{155}\)Glottochronological method is a linguistic technique used for measuring the relationship of languages on the basis of similarity and diversity among the phones and morphemes of the languages.
lexical construction among these groups my immediate purpose is to examine the diversities that exist in the phonemic, morphemic and syntactical levels of their languages, which are observable today.

On the basis of available information and comprehensive structural analysis of Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga languages the following relationship can be held to be tenable.

**Classification of the eleven languages/dialects in the CHT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Linguistic family</th>
<th>Languages sub-family</th>
<th>Ethnic groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indo-European</td>
<td>Indo-Aryan sub-family</td>
<td>Bengali, Chakma, Tanchanga</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Sino-Tibetan      | Tibeto-Burman sub-family | (1) Marma, Chak and Mru  
2) Bodo (kok-borok)  
(3) Kuki-Chin group |
|                   |                      | (2) Tripura  
(3) Bawm, Lusai, Pankau, Khyang and Khumi         |

Source: Based on the secondary ethno-historical sources and personal investigation on linguistic aspects

From the above chart, all the present dialects and languages of eleven ethnic groups in the CHT belong to only two major family groups. It seems most likely that the Tanchanga language descended from the major linguistic group of Indo-European linguistic family which bears close resembles and similarity both in phones and morphemes with neighbouring Chakma and Chittagonian languages. On the other hand, Marma and Bawm descended from another major family group namely Sino-Tibetan family but in course of time they split into two distinct lines within this language family. The Burmese family language group comprises of Marma, Mru and Chak, while Bawm, Lusia and Pankhu and Khang share many similarity in their dialects derived from chin-chin group of Sino-Tibetan language family.156

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156 This analysis is based on the linguistic data derived mainly from the Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga ethnic groups: the degree of similarity and dissimilarity that exits at the phonemic and morphemic level of the three languages.
It appears from my own enquiry as well as writings of the scholars that the supposed genetic and historical relationship of the Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga language can be presented in the following genealogical language tree diagram.

From the foregoing diagram, among the three languages/dialects in question we can directly relate the Tanchanga dialect to the broader sub-family of Indo-Aryan language. On the other hand, Marma and Bawm languages are variants of Tibeto-Burman sub-family within the Sino-Tibetan broader language family. Evidences in support of this observation have been further obtained from the analysis of phonetic feature of the three languages. Although I have done a detailed structural analysis of phonemes and morphemes of Marma, Bawm and Tanchanga languages through
application of lexical reconstruction method, space does not permit me to present them in full length.

However, these findings clearly show the relationship of Tanchanga and Chakma dialects with Bengali and Chittagonian dialects in particular. It is important to note at this point that the entire CHT region and the neighbouring Chittagong district was under Arakanese rule before the Mogul period. Aryan languages have penetrated into CHT from western direction (Bangladesh, India and Assam). On the other hand, the languages of Bawm, Lusia, Khumi, which belong to Sino-Tibetan family, are derivations of Kuki-Chin group of Tibeto-Burman sub-family from the eastern direction while Marma language is related to Burmese group of the same Tibeto-Burmese sub-family. These two branches, however, share many linguistic features of Sino-Tibetan language family which infiltrated into CHT from the eastern direction (Burma).