

**BEYOND CHECKPOINTS:  
IDENTITY AND DEVELOPMENTAL POLITICS IN THE  
CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS, BANGLADESH**

Submitted by

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To

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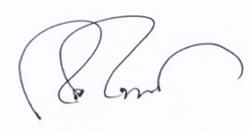
## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this thesis contains no material that has been extracted in whole or in part from a thesis that I have submitted towards the award of any other degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis.

All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics/Safety Committees (where required).

And, the people and places mentioned in this thesis are real people and places in pseudonyms. Therefore, no information provided in this thesis merits legal significance and cannot be used against any person or group as evidences for jurisdiction of any kind.



**Bokhtiar Ahmed**

February 09, 2017

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## **List of Acronyms:**

**ACU:** Australian Catholic University

**ADB:** Asian Development Bank

**AL:** Awami League

**AUSAID:** Australian Agency for International Development

**BDRCS:** Bangladesh Red Crescent Society

**BNP:** Bangladesh Nationalist Party

**BRAC:** Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee

**BSS:** Bachelor of Social Science

**CAPSTRANS:** Centre for Asia Pacific Social Transformation Studies

**CHT:** Chittagong Hill Tracts

**CHTDB:** Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board

**CHTDF:** Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Facility

**DANIDA:** Danish International Development Agency

**DC:** Deputy Commissioner

**DU:** University of Dhaka

**EU:** European Union

**FAO:** *Food and Agriculture Organisation*

**FGD:** Focus Group Discussion

**GDP:** Gross Domestic Product

**GNI:** Gross National Income

**HREC:** Higher Degree Research Ethics Committee

**HSC:** Higher-secondary School Certificate

**IDP:** Internally Displaced Person

**IFRC:** International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

**ILO:** International Labour Organisation

**INGO:** International Non-governmental Organisation

**MNF:** Mizo National Front

**MSCD:** Master of Social Change and Development

**MSS:** Master of Social Science

**NGO:** Non-governmental Organisation

**NORAD:** The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation

**(PC)JSS:** *Parbattya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti* (Peoples' Solidarity Union of the Chittagong Hill Tracts)

**PDCB:** Promotion of Development and Confidence-Building

**PRA:** Participatory Rural Appraisal/ Participatory Research & Action

**RRA:** Rapid Rural Appraisal

**PRSP:** Poverty Reduction Strategic Paper

**RU:** University of Rajshahi.

**SSC:** Secondary School Certificate

**TCI:** Tribal Cultural Institute

**UN:** United Nations

**UNDP:** United Nations Development Program

**UNESCO:** United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

**UNHCR:** *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*

**UNFPA:** United Nations Population Fund

**UNICEF:** United Nations Children's Fund

**UPDF:** United People's Democratic Front

**UoW:** University of Wollongong

**UP:** Union Parishod (Union Council)

**USAID:** *United States Agency for International Development*

**WB:** World Bank

**WFP:** *World Food Program*

**WHO:** World Health Organisation

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# **Abstract of Thesis**

## **Title:**

Beyond Checkpoints:

Identity and Developmental Politics in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh

## **Abstract**

This thesis is about contemporary identity and developmental politics in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh. Based on ethnographic research among the Pangkhuas, one of the twelve marginal ethnic groups living here, the thesis examines the everyday forms of identity and developmental practices in relation to a continuous hegemonic articulation of the state's presence in this geopolitical margin. The central methodology of the research has been multi-sited ethnography characterized by anti-essentialism. A number of key themes and issues are explored in this thesis. First, the process of state hegemony is examined with a focus on its extraordinary articulation of nationalistic imaginations about communities living in the CHT and its colonial genealogy. Second, I argue that displacement is the most compelling norm of settlement in the CHT where the enclosure by the state has politically reproduced the settlement patterns of the region. Third, the complex and ingrained forms of identity construction among the hill communities are examined, explaining how identities are constantly reconfigured by the people themselves or by the State's attempts to conscript them into governmental nomenclature. Fourth, I explain how the Pangkhuas, as well as other marginal communities in the CHT, become subjects of a developmental pedagogy that identifies their own tradition and culture as a barrier to their progress. Fifth, the thesis discusses a certain cultural politics of turning the communities from 'fugitives' to 'citizens' who have historically resisted political conscription by the state. I argue that a political process of conversion and cooption reproduces the Pangkhuas as 'secondary citizens' of a liberal nationstate. Sixth and finally, I illustrate how the Pangkhuas encounter the hegemonic enclosure of the state both through dissident and resilient strategies in relation to political strategies of other CHT communities in general, who tend to seek a future in the global alliance of the indigenous people confronting the hegemony of nationstates.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction: Place, People, and the Problem

#### The Place

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in Bangladesh is the thematic location of this research. As an ethnographic work methodologically committed to 'multi-sited' mode of inquiry, this research draws first-hand evidence from different places of the CHT region and from diverse people and cultures inhabiting here. The ethnographic details presented here emerge from routine sojourns across different places of the CHT and encounters with people from diverse backgrounds. However, the research has also harboured itself in a particular location, a Pangkhua village in the eastern CHT, for an in-depth ethnographic inquiry into the issues it has encountered in multiple places and in multiple forms. By the same token, the research has a particular focus on the Pangkhua community living in this village. Before introducing the place and people of my particular focus, I would like to offer an overview of the CHT region including reflections on the socioeconomic and political history that characterizes the region.

The CHT is a large region in respect of physical area and lies at the extreme Southeast border of Bangladesh. The region is comprised of three districts, namely Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachari. It is located between 91°45' and 92°50' to the east longitude and 21°25' and 23°45' to the north latitude. It has a total land area of 13,184 square kilometres (5,089 square miles), which is approximately one-tenth of the total area of Bangladesh. The three hill districts are bounded on the north by Tripura State of India, on the south by Arakan Hills of Burma (present day Myanmar), on the east by Lushai Hills of Mizoram and Arakan Hills of Burma, and on the west by the Chittagong district.

In 1947, during the birth of Pakistan, the east part of Pakistan (present day Bangladesh) got its administrative hold over the CHT. At that time the indigenous population of the CHT comprised 97.5 per cent of the total population living in this region and the Bengali population constituted only 1.5 per cent. This statistics helps us to assume that the entire territory has for centuries been remote and isolated from daily contact with the world where centralized government was the norm. Loffler and Brauns (1990) note that until the last century, the Bengalis living outside the CHT knew very little about the place and people, and held an impression that the region was supposedly inhabited by monkeys. Even though

the situation has changed nowadays, one can still find the trace of that impression embedded in the naming of one of the districts, Bandarban, which means ‘forest of monkeys’, deriving from its Marma version, Myaw-se-koing (The dam of monkeys).

The cartographical existence of this region can be found in the first publicly acknowledged map of Bengal drawn in 1550 (Chowdhury 2003). However, the territory had “frequently changed hands between the rulers of Arakan and Tripura” (Chowdhury 2003) long before its cartographical presence. It was occupied by the king of Arakan in the year 953 and late in 1240 reoccupied by the King of Tripura. In 1575, the Arakanese King recaptured the area and held his possession till 1666. It became a part of the Mughal Empire between 1666 and 1760, when it was named Karpus Mahal that indicates the first commercial agro-product of the region –the cotton. In 1760, the Mughal ceded the area to the East India Company. It became a part of the British Empire when the British occupied the CHT in 1860. The British occupants referred to it as 'Chittagong Hill Tracts' (*Parbattya Chattagram* in Bengali). ‘Administratively, they brought the Chittagong Hill Tracts under the Province of Bengal. The Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation of 1900 instituted a local system of tax collection with the headmen and chiefs at the apex’ (Chowdhury 2003).

This administrative status, which was given to the CHT by the implementation of the Regulation of 1900 confirmed a separate administration of the CHT. This special status of the CHT resonated in a later act of 1935 enacted by the then government of India. In the act of 1935, the CHT was declared as a ‘Totally Excluded Area’, which was an indication of their separate or special political and legal status. At this juncture, we should know the fact that most of the people in the CHT were basically self-governing entities without any centralized political structure. Despite this special status, the acts of 1900 and 1935 subjected the area and its people to a highly centralized political structure. And the non-state people gradually started to feel the intrusive presence of ‘State’ in their day-to-day affairs.

With the end of colonisation along with the partition of British India in 1947, Chittagong Hill Tracts became part of East Pakistan and later, the region became a part of Bangladesh when the country achieved independence in 1971. All these chronological intrusions have shaped and reshaped the fate of the territory and its people. But the first major change of the territory’s political structure and associated cultures took place soon after the British took possession, because the rulers who invaded this territory before the British had the prime intention to collect tributes from the local chiefs. They seldom intervened in the local socio-

political structure of the region. The mode of production, which thus existed therein, can roughly be called a 'tributary mode of production' in a vast landscape of anarchic, economic production. It means the rulers who came before the British did not own the means of production. But with the advent of the British rule, the capitalist mode of production emerged in the name of centralized political structure. It was the first time the CHT people were exposed to the governmentalities of state.

Their exposure to the state formation processes was furthered by the creation of Pakistan and India as two separate modern nationstates where the Chittagong Hill Tracts was placed under the jurisdiction of Pakistan (Chowdhury 2003). The region and its people again witnessed a fresh round of state-making in 1971 when their fate as citizenry was attached to the newly independent Bangladesh. The region during this time also experienced a period of drastic changes and attempts towards "development" were made. "During the early eighties as part of the countrywide administrative reforms, the Chittagong Hill Tracts were divided into three separate districts" (Chowdhury 2003) as mentioned earlier. But despite all these state-making modern processes, the CHT people have managed somewhat to retain their non-state socio-politico-economic structures and processes, albeit to a very limited extent today. As a result, there is a peculiar situation marked by the coexistence of parallel administrations that recognize both state and non-state management. For example, even though the state management system has divided the area into three districts, the non-state management or indigenous chiefdoms are still recognised in three circles –the Mong Circle, Chakma Circle and Bohmang Circle.

The CHT people differ significantly from the majority of Bengalis, who are predominantly Muslims. Though differences also exist among the CHT people themselves in terms of language, ethnic identity, religious practices, and social organisations, the indigenous people share a common material culture based on a traditional form of subsistence food production called *Jum*. Their method of cultivation (shifting cultivation or slash and burn agriculture), clearly distinguish them from the majority of the Bengali population. Jum cultivation has been practised in this region since earliest-known time. All the different ethnic groups practise Jum with a little variation. Usually Jumming is done in the relatively inaccessible part of the region. It is a method where the land once cultivated must lie fallow for a considerable number of years so that the used land can regain its fertility and natural vegetation. 'Thus it happens that, when all the land in the vicinity of a village has been

exhausted by Jumming, the whole community has to migrate to a fresh place' (Lewin 1912). Though Lewin back in 1912 perceived this movement of people as 'migration', the term clearly indicates that 'migration' here had been operationalised in terms of its modernity and/or the state-induced binary opposite of 'sedentarism'.

It must be said that this binary opposition and the term 'migration' have simply failed to grasp the dynamics of peoples' movement and the associated socio-cultural norms prevalent in the CHT. This is so because, even though the people of this region back in the time of Lewin and to this date move from one place to another in order to manage Jum, this movement does not come with any sense of impermanency for the people concerned. For a long period of time, even before the emergence of Bangladesh, the CHT people used to perceive the entire region as their abode and hence they never thought of private ownership of the land in which they lived or worked. It means even the notions like 'sedentarism' and 'permanency' have far different semiotic connotations to the people that may sound unusual to the state-oriented people and their philosophy. For example, due to private ownership of land, the state-oriented people have become familiar to count it as 'sedentarism' if someone has a permanent house in which to live. Yet, for the CHT people, 'sedentarism' stands for the right to live within the entire territory marked by its distinct topography, ecology, agricultural pattern, non-centralized political structure, culture and so on. Therefore, as long as they are moving within this territory they do not feel themselves to be less sedentary than the state-oriented people. Unfortunately, the legacy of this misconception is still haunting us even today and will be widely discussed in Chapter Three of my research.

Suffice to say that this misconception has multiple and complex connections with a plethora of other misconceptions that have been developed regarding the life, environment and resources of the CHT people. For instance, we frequently see that the slash and burn agriculture practised by the indigenous people of the CHT is often criticised for loss of timber and soil erosion. But it does not require someone to be an environmental scientist to claim that this system of cultivation worked effectively for centuries and there was no ecological crisis reported in this region. It again takes our attention to the distinction between the life-worlds of state and non-state people because it is only during the time when the state started to interfere directly into the life and culture of the local people that the problem began. Presumably the problem is not about the real situation per se rather, it is more about the definition of the real problem premised on the misconceptions mentioned above. We can note

here in a straightforward way the case of population transfer by the government during the 1980s and 1990s which is arguably still an on going process. Shifting cultivation cannot maintain a very large population because, as we have come to know already, after cultivating a parcel of land, it has to be left fallow for quite a few years. Moreover, the banning of Jum was imposed on various occasions by successive governments following the first ban by the British Government in 1860. They banned Jum on about 25 per cent of the total forest area of the CHT. Additionally, in order to discourage shifting cultivation and to replace it with plough cultivation, they imposed tax on Jum cultivation.

The population pressure created by the government's population transfer program, defining vast area of forest land as reserved and the banning of Jum; all these facts together help us to identify a range of complexities in relation to the differences between people properly governed by a state and non-state indigenes regarding the definition of the indigenous life, culture, and resources. The very first difference regarding state-oriented people's notion of 'house'-based sedentarism and indigenous people's territory-based sedentarism has a bearing on these complexities. Since the plain land people duly governed by the state continually perceive the indigenous people as 'nomadic' who can be forced to move anywhere in the hill, a population transfer program had been implemented without any major repercussion from any corner other than the indigenous themselves. Furthermore, since plough cultivation was thought of as the sole marker of sedentary lifestyle as well as the ideal for a modern state, Jum was regarded as a part of the wrongly assumed 'nomadic' life of the indigenous people and hence not befitting the state and its governmentalities. As a result, while the forest stood for the life and living of the indigenous people, the state governments always measured it in terms of rational economic calculation defining forest lands as 'reserved', 'cultivable', 'non-cultivable' and so on.

The village of Mahalu<sup>1</sup>, the key ethnographic site of this research, is a creation of this historical process of appropriation of the territory by state powers. The small village in the eastern CHT, situated on the bank of a major tributary river of Kaptai Lake, was established by Bangladesh military in the year 1969 as part of 'strategic hamleting' during the insurgency years, which has been detailed in Chapter Four of this thesis. The village is home to around a hundred Pangkhua families who were relocated here from evicted villages. At present the

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<sup>1</sup> Mahalu is a pseudonym for the actual village I worked. The pseudonym has been employed to comply the

village has a population of around 500 people, the majority of whom depend on Jum cultivation. More ethnographic details of the village will unfold in the subsequent chapters as I dig further into the ethnographic experiences I gathered among the Pangkhuas living at Mahalu. In the following sections of this chapter, I shall first present an overview of the lifeworlds of the various people in the CHT. This will be followed by an outline of the central analytical problem underpinning this ethnography and an overview of the chapters in this thesis.

### **The People and Their Identities**

The misappropriation of the non-state entities by the state would become more evident if we take a closer look at the people of diverse ethnic backgrounds, particularly the Pangkhuas under study, in the CHT. A nationstate is frequently characterised by the propensity to design a repressive policy of centralisation and imagined integration which had always proved troublesome for the indigenous people around the world. ‘The desire to be recognised... the search for an identity, and a demand that the identity be publicly acknowledged as having import’ (Geertz 1973, p258) persuades the modern nationstate to impose the structure of a single nationhood on diverse population. As a result, the heterogeneity among the indigenous people seems an obvious problem in claiming a nationstate as modern and civilised. Consequently, it is the state this time that has proved the fact that the indigenous people around the world are the ultimate binary opposites of the state-building processes. In the case of modern Bangladesh, there exists a strong racialised discourse on the indigenous communities in the CHT based on their phenotypic resemblance to surrounding ethnic groups of East and Southeast Asian nations, which make the CHT a so-called ‘Mongoloid’ fringe in Bangladesh.

The disturbance felt by the State regarding the indigenous people is very much evident when it comes to the encounter between the Bangladesh nationstate and its politically marginalised, that is, the CHT people. The perplexity had been reflected over and over again in the state’s constant attempts to make a demographic map of the CHT people followed by an equally disturbed feeling of having failed to construct the desired map with proper statistical accuracy. It must, therefore, be mentioned that whatever the numbers and description we have, they are ‘conjectural –one account lists twelve tribes, while the other lists eleven’ (Ali 1993, p166). It must also be mentioned that I do not have any desire to end this confusion regarding their demographic profile since I am aware of the discursivity that the entire

process of this kind of profiling entails. Thus, instead of trying to make the scenario more accurate, what follows is an attempt to present a precise description of various ethnic communities of the CHT, based on some available written materials I examined and interviews I conducted with the community people, so that the potential readers of this research work can have a glimpse of the population about whom the central arguments of the thesis are made. The ordering of the groups is not based on their population size or political dominance, rather it follows an alphabetic order to avoid the political implication of the population size which is the preoccupation of the ethnic politics in the CHT. However, as the group of my particular focus, the discussion on Pangkhua follows the rest of the groups. Unlike most of the inventories of people and cultures in the CHT, the discussion has also included Bengalese while acknowledging their distinct history of settlement in the CHT.

The **Bawms** are a Kuki-Chin-speaking population mostly residing in the Bandarban district of the CHT. They have a close cultural and linguistic affinity with the Lushais and Pangkhuas. Bawm means ‘unity’ in their language. They maintain group differences with the Pangkhua by tying up their hair knots at the centre of the head whereas the Pangkhuas tie them at the back of the head. The present-day Bawms are predominantly Christians along with some who practise animistic rituals related to Jum cultivation. At present, the Bawms live in the Bandarban and Rangamati districts of the CHT.

**Bengalis** made up almost half of the CHT population according to the population census in 1991. They form the dominant group politically empowered by a politics of nationalism (Mohsin 1997). A majority of the Bengalis living here are settlers transplanted by the state. Most of the transplanted Bengali population in the CHT are plain-land farmers who now engage in diverse livelihood activities in the CHT. Most of the Bengali settlements are located in the vicinity of town centres or military camps which indicates a certain politics of neighbourhood-making. The majority of them live in poor conditions despite comparative advantage and incentives from the government while a few among them have become dominant both politically and economically. Although the Bengalis living in the CHT have religious differences where the Hindus make up a minority among them, together they form the increasing migrant community in the CHT which has been at the core of the politics in the region.

The **Chaks** live in Baishari, Naikkhongchori, Alingkhyo, Kwangjhiri, Kamichora, Krokhhong and other areas of the Bandarban district of the CHT. In Bangladesh, the Chaks

are few in number. According to the primary census of 1981 there were only 960 Chaks in Bangladesh. The Chaks identify themselves as Asak. But they are known to the Arakanese as the Saks. In Burma there are two ethnic communities who have similar characteristics as the Chaks. They are Ganan and Kadu and they also identify themselves as Asak. The Chaks have two clans in the CHT, the Ando clan and the Gnarek clan.

The **Chakmas** are the largest ethnic group of this area making up more than half of the indigenous population. They identify themselves as ‘Changma’. The Chakmas are not exclusively the inhabitants of the CHT. They are also to be seen living in Tripura, Mizoram, Mikirhil and Arunachal State of India. There is another group known as Doingnuk living in the Akiab district of Arakan, Burma, who are said to be a group emerging from the Chakmas. Their language belongs to the Indo-Aryan family. It appears as a corrupt form of Bengali using a corrupt form of Burmese symbolic alphabets (Grierson 1898, p29). Chakmas are Buddhists by religion.

Like the Marmas living in Bomang and Mong Circle, the Chakmas also belong to a traditional chiefdom. The Chakma circle is headed by a Chakma Raja and this position is strictly hereditary. Each circle is divided into numerous Mouzas which are headed by a headman. The headmen are appointed by the Deputy Commissioner (DC) and on the recommendation provided by the local circle chief. The position of the headman is theoretically not hereditary, but in practice, it is. The headman has among other things, to collect revenues and maintain peace and discipline in his Mouza. Each Mouza consists of five to ten Paras or hamlets which are known as ‘adam’. These are hamlets with their own Karbari or hamlet chief. The post is also generally hereditary. Each “adam” is made up of clusters of households.

**The Hyous** are more commonly known as Kheyangs in Bangladesh. Lewin informs us that in 1869 the Kheyangs were a small community (1869, p94). They had social organisations which were similar to those of the Mros and the Khumies. Their political allegiance was owed to the chief of Burma. According to the primary census of 1981 there were only 1501 Kheyangs in Bangladesh. They refer to themselves as Hyou. Their language belongs to the Kuki-Chin group (Chakma 1993, p92).

The **Khumies** are a relatively small ethnic group. They live in the southern part of the CHT, chiefly in Ramu and Thanchi of the Bandarban district. Their numbers are dwindling

every day and many of them are crossing over to the Arakan. There are two groups of Khumies present there. The Arakanese refer to one of the groups as Awa Kumi and the other group as Aphy Kumi. The Khumies are described as Buddhists but the beliefs and religious rites they observe resemble the nature of animism. Their language is part of the oral tradition which falls under the southern branch of the Kukish section (Shafer 1955, p105).

Among the ethnic communities living here in Bangladesh and those who belong to the Kuki-Chin linguistic group, the **Lushais** are said to be the most important for their fierce relationship with the colonial state. Presumably, they migrated to the CHT from the Lushai Hills of India, following British conquest of the Lushai Hills in 1892. The colonial history records them as the most fierce tribe in the region due to their warrior nature reflected both in inter-group feuds and resistance to the invading state. They prefer mountaintops as their abode. Like other groups in the CHT, they also elect a village chief known as ‘Lal’ who used to lead them during war and important social events; otherwise there was no difference between him and the villagers (Lewin 1869, p99-101). Previously the Lushais were animist; ‘Pathian’ is their chief god. They have a language of their own which is called Lushai. During the colonial era, the Christian missionaries converted the majority of the Lushais to Christianity. In Bangladesh a smaller number of Lushai people live in north-western parts of the CHT, around the Sajek area. From the 1981 census of Bangladesh we can discern that there were about 1098 Lushais.

The **Marmas** have the second largest population group in the CHT. The name Marma is derived from the Burmese words ‘Mraima’ or ‘Mranma’. The Marma have their ancestral habitat in Burma (present day Myanmar) and in Arakan. Their language and their culture have their roots in Burmese and Arakanese culture and language. People with the same heredity as the Marma of the CHT are also present in Cox’s Bazaar and Patuakhali. They identify themselves as Rakhain. The Marmas practise Buddhism. The Marmas are organised around two circle chiefs --in Bandarban, the Bohmang king and in Ramgarh of Khagrachari, the Mong king.

The **Mros** call themselves Murusa. Among the habitants of Arakan, the name of the Mro is also very significant. They primarily speak the Mro language, a language of Tibeto-Burman origin. In the last decade, a new religious belief named Krama is spreading among the Mro. The belief was preached by a prophetic character named Manle Mro. The revivalism

within this new religion seems to be crafted against the spreading Christianity and, to some extent, modernistic transformation of their life.

The **Tonchongyas** are thought to be a major branch of the Chakma. Lewin states that the Tonchongyas owed their allegiance to an Arakanese chief known as Phahproo. But the Chakma king did not look kindly upon that and sought to push them back to Arakan. Many Tonchongyas then moved back to Arakan during that onslaught (1869, p66). The Tonchongyas are the fifth largest indigenous ethnic community. Tonchongya people live in Rangamati, Bandarban, Roisyabili and Sadhikyabilli, Ukhia and Teknaf. According to the census of 2001, the number of Tonchongyas is 31,164 in the CHT (Solidarity 2002, Bangladesh Adivasi forum). Their language consists of Pali, Prakrit and ancient Bangali. Their religion is Buddhism.

The third largest ethnic community in the CHT are the **Tripuras**. Sometimes they are also referred as Tipra or Tipperah. Aside from in the CHT, the Tripura live in Sylhet, Comilla and on the Sitakunda hill. The Tripura people mainly speak various dialects known as 'Kokborok', the standard dialect of the 'Debbarma' tribe spoken around Agartala and is the official language of the Indian State of Tripura. According to the 2001 census, around 90 per cent of the Tripura people are ardent followers of the Vaishnava Hinduism which is heavily influenced by their neighbouring Bengali people. The rest are Christians, mostly Baptists.

The **Pangkhuas**, the focus group of this research, constitute one of the ethnic communities of the south-eastern CHT. The Pangkhuas and the Lushais have much in common with each other in the aspects of language, social organisations, culture and so on. Both ethnic communities have descended from the Lushai Mountain and Mizoram and moved in the CHT hills. Lewin had treated them together along with the Bawms who had sprung from a Lushai group (1869, p95). The Pangkhuas believe that in the past they used to live in a place called Pangkhua on the Lushai hill. 'Pang' means Shimul (silk cotton) flower and 'Khua' means village. The Pangkhuas can understand some of the Lushai tongue. In the past, both of the communities used to keep long hair and used to tie it in a ponytail. Their culture also has some similarities with the Bawm culture. But the respondents of my study believed that they had been branched off from the San nation of Burma. And perhaps these similarities influenced British administrators like Lewin (1869), Hutchison (1909) and many alike to impose their own imagination while categorising the CHT people.

In terms of population size the Pangkhuas are one of the very small ethnic communities living in the CHT. The national census of 1991 mentioned their total number as 3227. But most of the Pangkhuas of my study village do not consider that to be correct. As per their estimation, the total should be higher than this. Here again we see the numbers game and rules of governmentality plotted by the state. The plot would be clearer if we see that in the 2001 census the state-led statistics refrained from producing any population size on the basis of ethnicity.

Presently, most of the Pangkhua people are Christians. They had been converted to Christianity during the colonial period. In the Pangkhua society, males act as the head of the household. They have a clan-based social system. People are usually expected not to marry within the clan. Patrilineal clans are strictly exogamous. Even though group endogamy is the ideal type preferred by their social convention, due to their very small population size they build marital relationships with other ethnic groups of the CHT like the Bawm, Chakma, Tonchongya, Marma, Khyeang, Mro, Tripura, Lushai and and so on. Conversion to Christianity had brought many changes in their age-old marriage tradition. Giving bride price to the bride's family is a common social practice among the Pangkhuas. It eventually reflects the recognition of female folk as an important production unit and hence, bride price is given as a form of compensation to the family going to lose the labour.

Their production system is mainly dependent on hill farming. *Jum* is their main source of livelihood. In the past they used to grow all necessary crops and spices in *Jum*. But as the government had imposed a ban on it and delimited their *Jum* fields in some specific areas, it has become very difficult for the Pangkhua families to produce enough agricultural products for their annual consumption. As a result, their exposure to market forces is increasing every day. Due to the shrinkage of *Jum*, traditional social organisations and practices are also under threat. Thus traditional *Jum* centric religious festivals like *Rua Kha Mini*, *Var Lam Phen*, *Zing Seth* and so on are becoming less practised nowadays. As most of the Pangkhua families live in remote hilly regions of the CHT, it is really difficult for them to find alternative income sources. Even though some of them try to start their own businesses, in most cases they remain apprehensive due to some previous bad experiences where they found themselves unfamiliar to the rules of games set mainly by the mainstream society. Because of their extreme economic hardship, migration to Mizoram of India has become a common phenomenon among the Pangkhuas.

Even though they love to call themselves Pangkhuas, they are categorised in mainstream discourses in many different ways. The most common among them is the word ‘*upozati*’, which is an all-encompassing blanket term for indigenous minorities in Bangladesh. *Upozati* is a Bengali term corresponding to the English word, ‘Tribe’, which was basically employed by the British colonial rulers in order to put their colonised subjects into clear-cut categories (Bal 2007, p2). In the post-colonial period, many new nations have still been using this term with an aim to replicate the political legacy and governmentality they have learnt from the British colonisers. The term aimed to distinguish the non-Bengali ethnic people from the majority Bengali populations. In official classification, the term ‘*upazati*’ came along with elements denoting unequal relationships, dependence, and domination between the Bengali and non-Bengali ethnic populations.

In various ways, the term entailed a systematisation of hierarchical relationships actuated by linguistic, social and cultural differences. The same kind of hierarchical classification has been marked by Andrew Turton in his book, *Civility and savagery*, where he has showed the same process operating in the Thai political arena. He has named this hierarchical classification scheme as the ‘pair model of relationships’ (2000, p1). The pair model of relationships works in the fashion of binary opposition where the former stands for progress, civility and many such positive epithets, and the latter denotes backwardness, primitiveness along with all other negative features. In the statist discourse of Bangladesh, a similar classificatory scheme is in use which came with pair Bengali: *Upazati* where *Upazati* stood for an inferior social status of those who are forest dwelling primitive people and hence in no way up to the standard to be accommodated in the boundary of a ‘zati’ or nation. This subordination of the non-Bengali ethnic people has not only been manifested in the dominant ideology and/or cultural spheres of the mainstream Bengali people; rather, it was given a definitive semantic expression by using the word *Upazati*.

The term *upa* is a Bengali prefix which means ‘sub’ and the word *zati* corresponds to English as ‘nation’. It means that the non-Bengali ethnic people of Bangladesh have been considered as a ‘sub-nation’ which eventually goes hand-in-hand with the binary oppositions or pair model mentioned above. This formal classification has been influenced heavily by the literature and texts produced by earlier ethnographers, mainly the British colonial ethnographers and administrators, as well as contemporary historians and social scientists. Prashanta Tripura (1992, 1993) is of the opinion that the process of developing antagonistic binary opposites had been started by the British colonialists who tried to envelop the diverse

ethnic peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts into one category i.e. “tribal people”, which eventually produced a dichotomised ethnic dichotomised ethnic relations model framed as ‘Bengali vs. Tribal’. Due to these reasons, in recent times, the colonial constructs and statist discourses centring on the Bengali-*upazati* relationship have been questioned by a good number of anthropologists (Van Schendel 2000; Tripura 1992, 1993).

As the term ‘*upazati*’ was found to be derogatory for the self-esteem of the non-Bengali ethnic people, they rejected this term. Another term which is still in use to refer to the CHT ethnic people is ‘*pahari*’ which corresponds in English use as ‘Hill Dwelling’. Even though the term carried an environmental denotation in it, the binary opposition based demeaning epithets mentioned above could be easily found at the connotative level. But this time, instead of overthrowing the term, the CHT ethnic people began to appropriate it in order to build a common identity (Bal 2007, p10) and to form a collective struggle against the exploitation inflicted by the state and its preferred people. During the 1970s the JSS (*Jana Sanghati Samiti*), the regional, armed, political party of CHT, invented another common identity marker, *Jumma*, which had a clear connection to their traditional mode of agriculture known as *Jum*.

The Pangkhua people not only went through the discursivities embedded in all these terms, but also experienced that these terms placed them in a very complicated encounter with the state and with the political parties and activists struggling against the state’s mistreatments. During the latter part of the 1970s, the then military ruler of Bangladesh designed a population transfer and relocation program in order to colonise and disorganise the CHT. The Pangkhuas were among those ethnic groups who had been uprooted from their original places of residence and relocated in different planned villages. My study village, Mahalu, is one of those planned villages. It is commonly claimed by other ethnic groups of the CHT, mostly those whose members are actively involved in armed or political struggle, that the Pangkhuas, instead of showing any mark of resistance, collaborated with the military regime. Thus the replacement of the term ‘*Upazati*’ with ‘*Pahari*’ or ‘*Jumma*’ put them into another form of identity politics, this time originating in the internal political terrain of the CHT.

Another term, ‘*Adivasi*’, also deserves special note here since the *Pangkhua* people, along with other ethnic groups of Bangladesh, were exposed to another level of identity formation and its associated political trajectories due to the usage of this term. The word *Adivasi* can be

divided into two halves '*adi*' (meaning earliest) and '*vasi*' (meaning inhabitant). It carries in it the ideology of the English term 'aborigine' (Bal 2007, p10) and/or 'indigenous' and/or 'autochthonous'. The idea of using this term was mainly proposed by a group of ethnic group leaders, civil society members and development organisations in order to bring all non-Bengali ethnic groups of the country under one identity marker. The involvement of the development organisations in this part of identity-making deserves close examination since I believe that the invention of this term implies a set of new modalities and/or governmentality (disciplinary, regulatory and order-making practices) allied to the aesthetics of development crafted by state and non-state agencies.

## **The Problem**

Academic discourse in Bangladesh has long been portrayed the CHT as a 'problem' in general. It has been discussed as a problem of national integration, ethnic insurgency, internal and international forced migration, man-made environmental disasters, land disputes, underdevelopment, loss of cultural properties, ethnocide, human rights violations and so on and so forth. Although the accounts vary in their understanding of the problems, numerous books have been published in the last decades. Most of these books are not about the CHT per se; they mostly speak about a problem called CHT, or a problem in the place called the CHT (e.g. Kamal and Mridha 1999). The majority of these accounts are haunted by nationalist hegemony, an evolutionary imagination deriving from modern anthropological knowledge, and an emerging discourse of a transnational indigeneity in relation to human rights. In this flow of academic works on the CHT, mine requires an overview of my understanding of the so-called CHT problem before we proceed to the actual chapters.

In its broadest sense, this thesis is an ethnography about a particular margin of the Bangladeshi state that situates itself at the anthropological junction of understanding notions like identity, development and power, and nevertheless, their intersections. It primarily engages lived experiences from the everyday life of the Pangkhua, my focal group among the hill-dwelling societies in the CHT, but eventually diffuses to social orders and groups in multiple sites to emerge as a study of the nexus of relationships between a postcolonial liberal nationstate and one of its territorial and cultural margins. It looks at the political domains of identity and development as historically embedded in the bewildering range of mobility and enclosures that reproduces the CHT as a margin of the state on a daily basis. Such nexus of

relationships and domains of political practices constitute the epistemological ‘field’ of this ethnographic dissertation.

The nexus of relationships this research intends to reveal is primarily embodied in the historical conscription of the CHT in the successive variations of the state. At this point, the study reflects the historical conditions in which the Pangkhuas’ relationship with the emergent nationstates has been shaped. This reflection inevitably involves revisiting the historical emergence of the Bangladeshi state and nationalism following the partition of British India in 1947 whose diverse legacies historically determined the nature of the state’s presence on this particular margin. In the same respect, it also encompasses a close examination of contemporary disciplinary, regulatory and order-making practices by the States which in effect, signify the nature of the minority relations they develop and maintain along their borders. Moreover, the ingrained properties of marginal politics against the hegemony of the State, their everyday manifestations both in forms of resistance and accommodation, or alliance and segregations, remain as the essential constituents of the knowledge this research has produced on the marginal existence of the CHT people beyond territorial and cultural proximities of those state projects.

The research is not only a mere portraiture of an ethnic minority within the Bangladeshi state, but also maps its marginality among the CHT minorities themselves. It considers seriously the socio-cultural, political and economic linkages the people of this minority maintain across the state borders and therefore seeks to learn how such trans-territoriality of the Pangkhua identity is contested with other forms of given identities like citizenship, nationality or the ‘Jumma’ identity invented by the indigenous movement for territorial autonomy and self-determinations. The study strives to illuminate one of the most obscure forms of identity among the CHT people- the ‘Zo’ Diaspora, and therefore learns how this identity is negotiated under political norms set by the state’s power and persuasions. It unfolds the complex formations of identities in the CHT and therefore provides an analysis of its implications for a politics of exclusion and inclusion within the governance and development of the CHT. In this vein, the study also engages itself with scholarly and public discourses of identity to reveal the implicit politics of being and becoming variant forms of political entities like Pangkhua, Jumma, Tribe, Ethnic, Minority, Indigenous, Settlers, Voters, Nationals or Citizens in the CHT.

In the milieu of the changing perspectives in development theory and practices, present research intends to depict the CHT people both as subjects of and actors in development. It explains how the multi-layered process of development in the CHT is interwoven with the individual experience of identity politics or displacement and thus results in unintended or negotiated consequences. It examines the euphemisms stemming from the notion of development and progress and their pragmatic role in the making of Bangladesh as a developmental state and thus reproducing its minority cultures. By asking how minority identity is informed in relation to the state's vision of development, my research explores development both as an object of human desire and as a relation of power. In this respect it also looks at the dimensional changes in power relation derived from the recent development interventions by the global agencies.

Given these focal points of this ethnography, its specific objectives can be summarised as follows: i) To develop a historical understanding of the relationships between the CHT and Bangladesh nationstate to illustrate the legacies that intrinsically determined the minority relations here. ii) To develop an ethnographic mode of investigation capable of experiencing the innate nature of the issues. iii) To examine the CHT as a distinct case of identity and developmental politics where development interventions and practices by the state and other agencies have reproduced the people as marginal political communities. iv) To examine displacement as a regulatory sanction by the state that dissociates the CHT people from their traditional economy in accordance with a certain political economy of settlement. v) To grasp the complex construction of identities in the CHT and their political contestations in terms of territorial claims, development and as means of negotiating power. vi) To explain the interrelations between development, displacement and identity which in essence constitute the minority relations in the CHT.

Given the specific objectives I have carried out in this research, the rest of this introduction is dedicated to present an overview of the following chapters. The second chapter of this thesis focuses on the methodological contour followed in my research on the Pangkhuas of the CHT. Instead of listing the methodological tools and their associated theories step by step, I have tried to narrate my methodologies in the form of reflexive narratives. In doing so, the first thing that I took into consideration was the influences and intentions I went through in various phases of this research. And it must be mentioned here that the phases did not start spawning only after the onset of my decision to do a doctoral

research on the Pangkhuas. Rather, my academic background, my anthropological training in an institution at a time when the functionalist tradition was the only method taught, of late, my teaching career in anthropology at the University of Rajshahi, the shift of my academic interest towards history, politics, linguistics, neo-Marxism, post-structuralism, postmodern critique of anthropological research paradigms, subaltern historiography –all these together had played a pivotal role in bringing out the primary phases of the influences and intentions through which I have arrived at the decision to carry out the present research. The influences and intentions have been crystallised in my methodological preferences characterised by the shift towards interpretive tradition along with multi-sited/sighted ethnography, reflexivity, anti-essentialism, conscious subjectivity and many others which can be covered under the term ‘experimental eclecticism’. Thus instead of viewing the CHT as a ‘field’ or ‘research site’ where the ‘other’ have been living in isolation for years, I considered the CHT as a complex result of many historical forces comprised of global, national and local agencies.

This alternative approaches to the research location helped me to grow a sense of self-criticism prior to enabling me to be aware of the unequal and hegemonic power relation between the researched population and the researcher, that is, myself. But that does not mean that I relinquished a kind of self-indulgence by being immersed into some sort of ‘narcissistic reflexivity’ and went far away from the balance between subjectivity and objectivity. In order to maintain that balance I followed the ‘participant objectivation’ method outlined by Bourdieu. This method helped me to be cautious about my own subjectivity without eliminating the possibility of its intrusion into the research process. The ‘participation objectivation’ method also showed me the way to duel with the ‘neutrality crisis’, an objection recurrently posed against the postmodernist critical theories. Throughout the research, due to the influences and intentions mentioned above, I never equated scientific neutrality with my axiological bias towards the population I studied and also towards the theorisation of my methodologies which started from the days of my teaching in a university. I did seven months of fieldwork in a Pangkhua village from January to August, 2010. Participant observation and documentary observation were two broad, intertwined methods employed to ensure the balance between reflexive objectivity and textual reflexivity. The participant observation method served as the source of experiential knowledge collected through following people’s lives and their practices. Documentary observation came intersected the former to make room for analysing the contextual basis of various other information obtained through documentary means.

The third chapter, titled “Bangladesh: State, Nation and Imagination” will touch upon the nation-building processes engendered by the Bangladesh state in the form of imagination and as a normative concept as well. The central aim of this chapter is to examine the historical formation and contemporary craft of the nation-building in relation to the marginalised ethnic population of Bangladesh. The Bangladesh state has asserted its hegemonic dominance in various forms over the ethnic people of the CHT in order to ensure an imagined homogeneity among its entire population irrespective of their identities related to class, ethnicity, gender and so on. The tool that was in use in regard to the ethnic populace of CHT, begun soon after the country gained independence in 1971, was the deployment of a complex set of governmentality. Contrary to the so-called mainstream Bengali population of the area, the minority ethnic groups have been demonstrating their resistance towards the presence of these symbolic state-making processes from the very beginning of their encounter with those forces which came in the name of the state. As a result, I have addressed these populations as ‘non-state’ people which has eventually ushered in the question about the lack of interest among anthropologists to make the ‘anthropology of state’ possible. And the reason was found lying in the age-old evolutionism-backed ethnocentric and statist theoretical paradigms that used to imagine these populations suffering from socio-politico-economical stagnation which in turn helped rationalise the ‘State’ as the only political formation where every society and its people must reach in order to avoid being treated as ‘irrational’, ‘non-modern’, ‘archaic’, ‘backward’, ‘nomadic’, ‘secessionist’ ‘rebellious’ and so on. As my understanding was founded on the critical paradigms of anthropology, rather than the positivist-empiricist versions, I tried to bring out the complexities and the disjuncture that took place due to the unequal encounter between the state-oriented populations and their binary, that is, the non-state populations.

Numerous encounters have been narrated and documented in this chapter with an aim to show how the state, far from being always coercive, employs various ‘subjectification processes’ in order to bring a sense of imagined consciousness among the people about their position in a scheme of imagined classification characterised by an embedded scale of hierarchy within it. Having such line of reasoning, I tried to sketch out how the nationalistic zeal of the greater Bengali population was made the only version of nationhood to be celebrated which had denied the inclusion of other ethnic identities into its frame of nationalism. As soon as Bangladesh achieved its independence, the then prime minister of Bangladesh, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, proclaimed all its citizens to be known

as 'Bengali'. Not only did he invent an all-encompassing 'Bengali' identity, he affixed this identity politics with his secularist notion of nationhood with an aim to counteract the religious fervour engraved in the pre-independence model of nationhood and thence the 'Bengali' has been equated with 'secularism'. But when in 1975 Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was killed in a military coup, the military rulers who came into power brought religion, in this case Islam, onto the surface and 'Bengali' nationalism was redefined as 'Bangladeshi' in order to make a difference from the Hindu Bengali population of West Bengal of India. Consequently, religion came to play a great role in the imagination of nationhood in the identity politics of Bangladesh. Both versions of nationalism worked as a double-edged sword when they were applied to the people of the CHT. Not only were they deprived of the option of not having to engage in this state-oriented identity politics, but they were also systematically alienated from their own land, from their right to use their own linguistic and cultural expressions, from their right to practise their age-old shifting agriculture and much more. All these were made possible in the name of national identity which came first in association with secularism and later with religion.

None of the versions of national identity could fit with the ethnic peoples of the CHT and hence they remained the obvious 'other' commonly imagined as the 'secondary citizens' of the state. With no respect shown for their preferences, their identity had been termed according to the statist imagination and all the ethnic groups were referred to as '*Upazati*' (sub-nation) which also had been given constitutional guarantee. This term clearly shows that the 'Bengali'/'Bangladeshi' identity was set as the only version of nationhood and the people of the CHT had been ascribed as '*Upazati*' whose ultimate destination was to be assimilated into a *Zati* (nation). The subjectification process did not end here. The people also have been reproduced and then used as voters in national elections through which nationalist political imagination has been ingrained in their everyday lives. Like other postcolonial societies, a group of elite had been raised here who work for the political parties that have been serving as the cause of subjugation of the CHT's people. The chapter ends with my axiological bias toward these subjugated, marginalised and exploited people. Recalling the influences and intentions of my research described in the methodology chapter, I again made a call to challenge authoritative knowledge production processes and hence to replace them with new experimental perspectives, not to make a naive attempt to describe their cultural repertoires but to use those repertoires in order to unveil their subjugation by the state and its nation-building imagination.

‘Chittagong Hill Tracts: The Location and Dislocations’ is the fourth chapter of my thesis and deals with various terms used in social science literatures regarding placement and displacement, location and dislocation, and temporality and sedentarism. This chapter offers one of the central themes of my thesis prior to attempting to contribute new thoughts and knowledge in the anthropological study of social dislocation. The chapter starts with its statement of dissatisfaction with the ongoing stereotypical categorisation of people as ‘IDPs’, ‘migrants’, ‘settlers’, ‘tribal’, ‘indigenous’ and/or with the classificatory definitions of displacement and the use of statistical facts in order to justify those classifications. What I have tried to argue in this chapter is that most of the discussions about place and location have still been confined within the modernist notion of binary oppositions where location is thought to be the compulsory antithesis of dislocation and placement is the antithesis of displacement. It is further argued that on the basis of these essentialist modernist notions, some people have wrongly been categorised as ‘tribal’, ‘indigenous’ and so on which has eventually helped to make the state the only possible imagination for a nation and hence the people termed as ‘tribal’ and/or ‘indigenous’ have been theorised as ‘disordered’ who must be ‘ordered’ through various processes of governmentality crafted by the state. And the state, along with the statist theoretical paradigms, while dealing with the binary between ‘order’ vs ‘disorder’ is found to go hand-in-hand with the modernist paradigms where one term of the binary is seen as ‘positive’/’superior’ and the other as ‘negative’/’inferior’. As a result, it has become very easy and handy for the state to prove that the tribal and/or indigenous people belong to the ‘negative’ axis of the binary oppositions characterised by their age-old static nature of nomadic living and shifting agriculture which eventually serve as sources of destabilisation and disjuncture for the modernist notions of place and location characterised by permanent place of living, sedentary agriculture and so on. But instead of trying to show that it is only the state that has constructed the master narrative alone, I have also questioned the epistemological inferences drawn in social science literatures regarding location and place. What I have found is that the epistemological inferences are of no exception than the state in essentialising location, place, and sedentarism as the final destination for all human being.

Displacement, dislocation, shift and so on have been categorised consequently as essential ‘disorder’ that goes against basic human nature and will. But it remained unthought-of that, for some people, displacement can be a movement from place to place of their own will. Moreover, it also remained unimaginable that, for some people, displacement and dislocation

may not correspond to any notion of ‘temporality’ and/or ‘nomadism’. This indicates that the narrow definition of ‘permanency’ and/or ‘sedentarism’ evoked by the statist discourses eventually termed the ‘tribal’, ‘indigenous’ people, in this case the Pangkhuas of CHT, as ‘disordered’ since for the ‘tribal’, ‘indigenous’ people there is no absolute correlation between ‘permanency’ and ‘sedentarism’. Moreover, it is found in my fieldwork that their vision of habitat is comprised of an entire ‘ecological zone’ quite different from the ‘household-based habitat’ made possible by the modernist boundary-based political imagination. For example, the Pangkhuas of the CHT perceive mobility as a regular norm of their life and they do not hold any binary opposition like location vs dislocation. Rather, dislocation plays an integral part in the making of their idea of location. When they shift from one location to another, which I consider to be erroneously termed in modernist discourses as ‘nomadism’, they never perceive it as ‘dislocation’ or ‘displacement’. The failure to grasp this free play between the two terms of the binary in the life of the CHT people has led to the above-mentioned misconceptions and hence they have always been regarded by the state as people with no sense of permanent place and location. This chapter thus suggests that we must step away from viewing the ‘settlement’ problems faced by the ‘tribal’, ‘indigenous’ people through some fixed binary categorisations. Instead, the historical complexes of political frictions between the state and its geopolitical margin, that is, the ‘tribal’, ‘indigenous’, should be taken into consideration which may help us to make an ‘anthropology of state’ possible.

The fifth chapter, titled ‘Pangkhuas: A Jigsaw Puzzle of Identity’, deals with the various trajectories of the making and unmaking of Pangkhua identities. A close observation over the intricacies involved in different processes of their identity construction reveals the ‘non-state’/‘anarchic’ version of their life-world, which had hitherto remained unobserved in all existing academic discussions on the Pangkhuas or any other ethnic community of the CHT at large. It is argued in the chapter that though it may seem to an onlooker that the Pangkhuas have been using some identity markers solely shaped by the state, an involved ethnographer may come upon a completely different conclusion. When the Pangkhuas say that they are a ‘peaceful tribe’, they actually conform to the statist version of their identity. Yet, this conformation does not mean that they do not have the capacity to make any difference. Their politics of resistance lies not in their attempt to ‘be different’ to the statist discourses, but in their assertion to ‘be indifferent’ to whatever the caricature is that is created by the state. The term ‘indifferent’ does not mean their inaction. Rather, they constantly negotiate their

strategic choices and positioning based on the situation while encountering the incursion of the state and its hegemonies. It would, therefore, be more anthropologically interpretive to describe this ‘indifference’ as an integral part of their active but strategic participation in the statist discourses and the craft of governmentalities. The same is true when they assume the identity markers like ‘innocent’, ‘poor’, or even ‘wretched’. This interpretation is equally applicable when we see their responses to the invented forms of ethnic resistances constructed by the PCJSS<sup>2</sup>, the regional political party that triggered the imagination of ‘Jumma’ identity and as well as the ‘Shanti Bahini’, the military wing of PCJSS. Even the staunch sympathisers belonging to the mainstream academia have failed to grasp this pliable nature of their making and unmaking of various identities and thus have failed to take ‘non-state’ as their point of departure. As a result, in mainstream administration, media, literatures and scholarship they had been demonstrated as people in need of some fixed identity markers in order to fit them into the state-making processes. But this chapter eventually challenges those ‘standardisation’ processes which I believe do not lead to a proper understanding of the people who have repeatedly fled the “oppressions of state-making projects in the valleys” (Scott 2009, p.ix). The issue of the absence of written history further validates my claim offered in this chapter. In most cases, especially when it comes to the dominant scholarships in Bangladesh, the absence of written history among most of the indigenous people is seen as a sphere which could not flourish due to the subjugation inflicted by the statist history. But what remains mostly unsaid is that the absence of written history echoes the context of the anarchic fluidity of their identity formation that reflects their conscious political choice not to have any written history and thus not to have any state as well.

The final chapter before the conclusion is ‘Development: the Pedagogy of Progress’. This chapter mainly focuses on the critical disjuncture between inherent moral desire of development rooted in human social instinct and development as part of a campaign of moral subjection aimed to infiltrate the state and its governmentalities. It would be a misinterpretation to take this chapter as posing a rejectionist attitude towards development. Instead of challenging the notion of ‘development’ emanating from the collective consciousness and/or human social consensus, this chapter critically evaluates the processes of ‘development telling’ that have made a discursive version of ‘development’ possible. Attempts have been made to appropriate this critical evaluation at the backdrop of the

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<sup>2</sup> Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (People’s Solidarity Union of the Chittagong Hill Tracts)

Pangkhuas imagination of pre-modern worldview related to development and their encounter with the modernity-induced hegemonies of development. My ethnographic journey in the CHT and among the Pangkhuas in particular reveals the fact that ‘development’ in the form of a moral, social desire had always been with the Pangkhuas which was in considerable equilibrium with their own cultural and natural settings. But the state-led, neoliberal development projects and plans never showed any respect to the thriving development the indigenous people have been fostering for ages. This disrespect characterises in the making of indigenous identity as uncivilised, primitive, barbaric or wild, awaiting full-scale incorporation into the modernist neoliberal version of development, the only precondition to be graduated from the state-led school of development. A whole range of development activities initiated by the state has been critically evaluated to support this argument. But the more revealing part of this chapter lies in my evaluation of the NGOs and INGOs working in CHT who regularly claim their moral, ideological and ethical difference with the state-organised development projects. Although the NGOs and INGOs distinguish themselves heavily by introducing new tools like PRA, RRA and so on which look more democratising, sympathising, empowering, inclusive in comparison to that of the state, a critical look over their inherent attempt to motivate the indigenous people towards development unfolds their very hegemonic nature. The NGOs and INGOs also imagine the indigenous people as people without any affluent past, without any sense of desire for development, lazy, alcoholic, burdened with Jum cultivation, and lacking rational calculative ways of thinking. The widely perceived contesting relationships between state and NGOs/INGOs are hard to find here. Rather, they seem quite complementary in outlining certain discourses of pedagogy of development which demand that the indigenous people conceive their way of life as the root causes of their underdevelopment and thus need to submit before the developmental hegemony which I believe has paved the way for the state to retreat from its apparent benevolent role, creating a vacuum successfully filled by the governmentalities crafted by the NGOs and INGOs termed in this chapter as ‘subjection to development’.

In the final chapter, I offer some inconclusive reflections on the contemporary forms of political change in the CHT. It outlines that the political transformations in the CHT I intend to explain in this thesis are three cross-cutting processes in three distinct political domains I have identified. First is the transformation from non-coercive and non-hierarchical forms of political arrangements to coercive and hierarchical forms of political office and practices. This mostly features in the state’s appropriation of traditional political formation among the

indigenous communities. The second is a convergence of hegemonic technologies of power in governmentality, which grossly indicates a shift in the order-making functions of the state. It is a shift from coercive dominance to non-coercive technologies of power constituting a certain political hegemony. A similar process can be observed in a third political domain, the local forms of resistance against the state dominance, which is also converging from counter-violence to non-violent strategies of political resistance.

The transformation of indigenous political formation from non-coercive/anarchic systems of social order to coercive forms of political agency and governmental order-making, is manoeuvred by what I call a politics of conversion and cooption. In this process, the state converts the very nature of political power prevalent in anarchic political entities through legislative recognition of those so-called 'traditional' or 'customary' institutions. The second domain of change, the transformation of governmentality from coercive dominance to hegemonic technologies of power, I view as part of its own political commitments to global liberalisation. I emphasise the hegemonic technologies of governmentality gradually replacing violent means of order-making which reflects a new political need of the state to reappear as 'normal', rather than its long acclaimed 'state of exception'. In the third domain, the indigenous resistance is apparently shifting from coercive political resistance to conformist resilience. I explore this shift in the context of an emergent transnational discourse of indigenism which now constitutes the most compelling form of identity struggle in the CHT. I view this shift as a new form of politics of the indigenous in a global matrix.

## Chapter 2

### **An Ethnography Beyond Checkpoints: Influence and Intentions**

‘O mother earth beneath  
O god of life above  
as true as you are  
[for the sake of thou truthfulness]  
Bless *Babu* with our language  
Bring our hyperboles to him soon’<sup>3</sup>

Before I start delineating the ethnographic details of my fieldwork experience I must encounter, as I believe, a question highly relevant for anthropologists of the day. Should I include my socio-cultural, academic, ethnic circumstances while writing about the ‘others’? My reading of the post-structuralist and post-modernist theoretical understanding of ethnography and the tenets of ‘reflexivity’ proposed by Bourdieu influenced me to think that my biographical sketch is significant in understanding the conditions that made this study possible. This chapter will discuss the fieldwork and methodology of my study by placing the fieldwork in terms of the situations that paved necessary ground for this research, the checkpoints that both the people studied and the ethnographic tradition in anthropology are going through, my own biography that shaped me as an anthropologist willing to look beyond the checkpoints and then the descriptions of the research sites where the ethnography was carried out.

#### **From Single-site to Multi-sites**

The first phase of the fieldwork began when I started documenting the Pangkhua language in July 2004 for the ‘Chittagong Hill Tracts Language Documentation Project’ that the Program in Linguistics at the Dartmouth College was running in collaboration with the American National Science Foundation. Mine was the first scientific effort to document Pangkhua language since Lorenz Löffler’s (1985) preliminary report based on his

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<sup>3</sup> Extract from a Juang prayer wishing the success of Nirmal Kumar Bose’s ethnographic endeavour among them in 1928. *Babu* refers to the ethnographer who sponsored the offering and festivity. See Bose 1949, p8. Translation by present author.

consultation with a Bawm speaker who had some proficiency in Pangkhua. Apart from arranged and circumstantial recording sessions, I paid considerable attention to the ethnographic details of Pangkhua life which was of obvious importance to understand essential properties of the Pangkhua language, one of the most obscure languages of the world in terms of available linguistic data. By the end of 2006, I had a pidgin-level proficiency in Pangkhua language, considerable acquaintance with every family in the village, an overall idea about their livelihood, social organisation, kinship patterns, social mobility, political organisation and most importantly, an abstract inference regarding their life-world drawn from its reflection in the huge amounts of oral texts I gathered for linguistic analysis. At the same time, they also had considerable knowledge about me, including curious bits of my personal life, carried back by consultants visiting me in my own social sphere or gathered through direct socialisation with my family and friends on their occasional visits with me to their village.

The ethnographic details I had observed during these two years in the CHT and my cross-disciplinary learning on the macro-political systems formed the basis for the ethnography I planned as my doctoral research. But this time when I returned for another seven months of fieldwork in February 2010, I was determined to have a contextually multi-sited mode of ethnographic investigation. Of course, my ethno-linguistic fieldwork between the years 2004 and 2006 was a bonus because it had provided the necessary insights that only sustained living in a single site rewards. As my objectives had shifted from language to the study of everyday forms of identity, development and power in the CHT, considering it as an epistemological location offering new perspectives on the larger social orders which historically undermined the marginally ethnic societies here meant it inevitably needed a mode of observation and participation capable of reaching many intangible realms of social realities which were abundantly produced and conditioned by the multiplicity of macro-constructions in the brisk of technological revolution, state formation and expansions, open market capitalism, or emergent world systems like development and globalisation. So a re-imagination of space was unavoidable in outlining the methodology to be used. The answer lay in the move towards a multi-sited contextuality from ethnography's traditional single-site location. Generally, 'ethnography is predicated upon attention to the everyday' (Marcus 1995, p99) forms of life, 'an intimate knowledge of face-to-face communities and groups' (Marcus 1995, p99). What I had to do was to expand it from an over-committed localism to transcending systems, expanding its focus from locally conditioned aspects of life to the very

presence of these systems and the local practices they engender. The goal was no longer a ‘holistic representation, an ethnographic portrayal’ (Marcus 1995, p99) of the locality as victims of these invading systems. Rather, it aimed to produce an ethnography of a marginal cultural formation in a given time and space, that eventually becomes also an ethnography of the grand systems which marginalise such localities. Such critical perspectives on traditional ethnographic rendering imbued me with the feeling that we should look beyond the checkpoints trying to guard the traditional way of ethnographic writing. This idea of academic checkpoints has eventually led me to re-evaluate from a wider socio-political consideration the state-run physical checkpoints I encountered several times during my linguistic research. The next section will thus be an attempt to shed light on the ‘checkpoints’ in CHT and the ways my attempt to transcend those checkpoints shaped my fieldwork.

## **The Checkpoints**

Countless security ‘checkpoints’ symbolise the state of political exception governing the CHT and reinforcing everyday mobility rules on the politically enclosed lives of her people. They not only stand for a cartographic sense of ‘national security’ but also represent decades of structural and collective violence the people have been experiencing here since the mid-1970s. Checkpoints represent an extraordinary articulation of sovereign state power over people’s lives and livelihoods, tangled with a constant threat of potential danger, even if nothing has happened in a given part of the region for years. They are the frontlines of governance here which constantly reconfigure people’s relation to their place –through a series of coherently violent political practices. They are, first and foremost, threads by which the marginal communities in the CHT are knitted to the nationstate of Bangladesh. Contrarily, they are also the most noteworthy symbols for the huge gap between individual freedom promised under state sovereignty and the daily functioning of the state’s apparatuses within a zone of exception, where exception has been the everyday norm year after year. They are the landmarks that most empirically characterise the CHT as a distinct margin of the Bangladeshi state or as a distinct political territory, so to speak, which constitutes the thematic location of this research.

In the early years of my research trips to the CHT, I used to catch a night coach from Dhaka. I remember waking up from the drowsy depth of my travel exhaustion shortly before dawn, when the bus stopped at any of the first checkpoints to the hill town centres like

Rangamati, Bandarban or Kaptai. With the cabin lights abruptly turned on, I could see one or two armed soldiers aboard. Anyone not fitting the permissible descriptions they have in mind, would be questioned and, if necessary, pulled off to the 'officer post' for further questioning. Their cautious scrutiny of the people and goods carried by the bus were the moments that always gave me the feeling of entering into a zone of exception, a zone of permanent emergency, a historical zone where doing ethnographic research inescapably entails a series of methodological and theoretical checkpoints hitherto unknown in my anthropological career. Several times in my numerous travels to further remote localities in the CHT, I also had a similar feeling of crossing a border despite the fact that I am 'by birth' a Bangladeshi citizen. Anyone travelling in the CHT can see this grid of security check-posts demarcating a discursive political boundary that the territory has historically developed with the rest of the Bangladeshi State. My experiences of 'security' by the state may serve as a reasonable point of departure to explicate the influence, method, and intentions of this research I have done in the CHT.

In congruence of the security checkpoints mentioned above, the methodological aspects of my research were conditioned by a set of physical, institutional and epistemic checkpoints. I played the role of intruder in a few of them and observer in some others. I negotiated the cultural checkpoints that the historical encounter between a valley and a hill culture engenders, checkpoints between power and powerlessness, checkpoints between theory and method, checkpoints between objectives and ethics; there were literary checkpoints of translating my experiences that involved at least three fundamentally different linguistic traditions, and most importantly, checkpoints between a conscious ethnographer and his random socio-political self. Perhaps checkpoint is the word that allegorically signifies the most compelling norms of the place where it has been done, the way it has been done, and the disciplinary and literary circumstances under which it has been written.

I had never been among any of the recent wave of Bengali tourists adventuring onto the highest mountain tip of the Bangladeshi territory or photographing the sunbeams on the Kaptai or Boga Lake in the dawn, or the exotic life of the 'Pahari' (hilly) people in the wilderness; neither was I a development worker, government official, or a human rights activist with whom I was often mistakenly associated by the local people. My sustained presence in a given Jumma village was always a bit confusing for its people. They wondered about my passionate attention to and engagement with small, single bits of their life, and

especially about doing nothing ‘significant’ other than that day after day. My casual acceptance of ‘exotic’ foods, particularly so-called ‘haram’ (forbidden for a Muslim) meats; indifference to the social status suitable for a Bengali academic, willingness to share collective efforts like pushing a boat in the lean water season, or denial of any privilege offered as a social superior had been at the core of both their admiration and curiosity towards me. In every Jumma village I lived during the last six years, these were things that always presented me as a Bengali sojourner with some strange attitudes.

Having known me for a few years, my Pangkhua friends at Mahalu finally could conclude about this strangeness in a curious sentence; ‘Well, he is a *kor-pa* with a *saap*’s mind’ (He is a ‘Bengali guy’ with a ‘white/western’ mind). ‘Kor’ is the Pangkhua word for the Bengalis and ‘pa’ is a common suffix that indicates masculinity; ‘saap’, which I suspect to be a Pangkhua deviation of the colonial Bengali notion of ‘Shaheb’, originally borrowed from Persian *Sahib* to refer to white colonial masters, which now stands for the Anglo westerners in general. In fact, their conclusion about me was the outcome of a comparative observation between me and a few visiting Western development professionals they had hosted lately. Although it was an inaccurate description of who I am, what I do or how I think, it never filled me with any sense of indignation or prejudice. Rather, I was a bit tantalised by the way it pushed me towards a self-scrutiny about why was I different from most of the Bengali visitors they came across. Is it the ‘Western’ science that I had been living with for more than a decade? Is it my training in ethnographic methods that shaped all of my so-called ‘attitudes on field’? Why did they find the anthropologist within me ‘Western’? Is it the science itself or the secular and progressive quarter of the postcolonial, modern Bengali Muslim society I belong to? When the subjects of my observation observed me, I felt that they did it in a more curious way. Yet, it is hard for me to answer those questions impersonally. Instead, what I can offer is a pertinent glimpse of my becoming an anthropologist which might be helpful in understanding the ethnographic research paradigms that influenced me while doing this research.

### **My Journey towards ‘Experimentation’: A Partial Biography**

My early anthropological training as a student of the department of anthropology at the University of Dhaka started in an academic environment where ‘functionalist’ theories and methodology were the most dominant tradition we were taught. We were extensively and

repetitively trained to describe peoples' knowledge, behaviour and artefacts in a given community singled out from its broader context for intensive investigation. The notion of 'fieldwork' always surfaced in our mind with fetishised imageries like Malinowski in his tent of the Trobriand Island, writing the 'magical' rituals surrounding the Kula exchange, or Radcliffe-Brown looking at the collective weeping of the Andaman Islanders with a wondering gaze, or Evans-Pritchard minutely taking notes of the age markers in the foreheads of the Nuer people.

Of late, my teaching career in anthropology at the University of Rajshahi made a shift of my academic interest towards history, politics, linguistics, neo-Marxism, post-structuralism, postmodern critique of anthropological research paradigms and subaltern historiography. All these together had played a pivotal role in getting me outside a disciplinary boundary strictly guarded by many of my predecessors in Bangladesh with a rigid sense of what could be regarded as anthropology and what could not. Gradually, I was 'drawn towards an experimental moment in the human sciences' (Marcus & Fischer 1986) '...characterised by eclecticism, the play of ideas free of authoritative paradigms, critical and reflexive views of subject matter, openness to diverse influences' (Marcus & Fischer 1986, p.x). A deeper understanding of this experimental moment helped me develop a tolerance of uncertainties arising in the field, and most importantly, an awareness of the incompleteness that every project of fieldwork entails. A brief overview of the pertinent aspects of this experimentation and its further outcomes is required to understand the rationales of the methodology I have adopted.

### **Fieldwork in Field-methods: A Confluence Report**

Any contribution to the field of anthropology today involves a set of methodological challenges which eventually occupies a preliminary objective of the research project itself. Since every ethnography needs its own comprehension of relevant theories and methods, my ethnographic elicitation of contemporary practices of identity and development in the CHT also had to formulate its own precision of what both ethnography and anthropology might mean in the given context. While aiming to craft a mode of investigation capable of experiencing those realms of reality which are often lost in the instrumentality of most other methodologies in use among the social scientists, I eagerly learned from every new idea and critique I came across with a self-imposed provision not to essentialise any of them. I began

with a scepticism that as a site of my research, the CHT should not necessarily mean what the ‘field’ in conventional practices of ethnography suggests –where the ethnographer is expected to witness, record and then describe an ‘other’ culture in imagined isolation, absolutely based on his or her experiences gathered through intensive living in a single-site of research. Instead, I tried to be intrinsically responsive to a complex and radical restructuring of both ethnographic theory and methods emerging from the experimentations in the 1980s and 1990s.

The central methodological challenge for me was to appropriate new treaties these experimentations had already fostered to effectively articulate global and national histories with the local site and lives under my ethnographic inquiry. The source of inspiration was a series of theoretical insights on world system narratives which revived historically embedded social sciences by inviting themselves ‘to be filled in and debated through the production of regional and micro-geographic social histories and ethnographies’ (Marcus 1995, p97). Particularly, Wallerstein’s (1976) notion of ‘grand systematic narrative of world history’ and its anthropological expansion; Wolf’s (1982) version of the macro-system narrative, where he articulated it with the ethnographic study of the local situations and people, had been a constant source of inspiration. I also contrasted these ideas with their further exemplifications (e.g. Nash 1981; Comaroff 1992; Sahlins 1993; Burawoy 2003) to achieve more confidence in my loyalty to the history-power nexus and multi-sited contextuality while doing my ethnography in the CHT.

In developing the methodology, I remained aware of the criticism that the hegemonic concept of ‘field’ in ethnography is largely an over-determined context for the invention of differences through which anthropology segregates the world into ‘fields’ to validate the projects of single-sited fieldwork. There were also other postmodern mavericks who constantly warned me about the hegemonic nature of anthropological authority and the roles of ethics and power in the production of ethnographic knowledge. They enabled me to see ethnographic writing practices as ‘enmeshed in a world of enduring and changing power inequalities’ (Clifford 1986, p9).

The criticisms, mainly mounted by the postmodernist and poststructuralist quarters, earned impressive responses from many anthropologists in the last two decades. The eclecticism facilitating the emergence of these new modes of ethnographic research had found its first consensus view at the School of American Research in Santa Fe around the year 1984. The

advanced seminar outcomes, later edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus (1986) in the volume titled *Writing Culture: the Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, became the most influential work in redefining the work of ethnography in a world where realities in every way had become too complex and fluid for a sensible segregation which was essential to the prevailing modes of ethnography. The seminar featured names like Vincent Crapanzano, Renato Rosaldo, Stephen Tyler, Talal Asad, Michael M. J. Fischer and Paul Rabinow, whose works had influenced much of the succeeding ethnographic endeavours. In his seminal introduction to the volume, James Clifford outlined the methodological context of ethnography in the contemporary world as their response to a grave representational crisis they had identified in its earlier paradigms:

‘Ethnography is actively situated between powerful systems of meaning. It poses its questions at the boundaries of civilisation, cultures, classes, races, and genders. Ethnography decodes and recodes, telling the ground of collective order and diversity, inclusion and exclusion. It describes the process of innovation and structuration, and itself is a part of these processes’ (1986, p2).

In addition to power, historicity was their other major epistemic concern. Ethnographies have always been, as Marcus has observed, written in the context of historic change, the formation of state and world systems and the evaluation of a world political economy (1986, p165). But the descriptive empiricism failed to reflect this greater context because it had never put the ethnographer and his writing under any reflexive scrutiny. They emphasise the intensification of our focus within the ethnographic context, widening it from observing social action to construction and circulation of cultural meanings because the closely observed ‘field’ is historically embedded in much larger and more impersonal interlocking systems in which ethnography as an act of empirical description was never interested before. Marcus also points out that the convention of ethnographic writings has shown the major events and large systems on its subject population usually portrayed as victims of those. But it has hardly produced any answer to the ‘macrosociological questions about the causes of events or the constitutions of major systems’ (1986, p168) like the state or globalisation. This was a key argument that played a very significant role in determining the state and world systems as objects of my research which is further elaborated in the next chapter. For now, the most crucial influence their book had on my methodology was a critical sense of the differences between ethnography as a mode of social investigation and ethnography as a form

of written cultural knowledge. It infused the awareness about the often unexamined gaps between fieldwork and writing which I learned to fill in simultaneously with reflexive objectivity and participant objectivation.

The question of reflexivity in contemporary ethnographic research has profoundly changed its disposition at least in two major respects: the nature of the ethnographer's engagement in the life of subject population and its ethical concerns. As I have mentioned before, the emphasis on reflexivity was largely instigated by the maverick nature of postmodern anthropology, yet it poses a potential danger of self-indulgence which may destabilise the delicate balance of subjectivity and objectivity within the ethnographing self. The postmodern critiques of objectivity disregard the positivist constructions that one can truly extricate himself from his subjectivity or can neutralise his social existence and therefore, advocate for self-reflexive narration of subjective experience which Bourdieu (2003) finds extremely at odds with scientific reflexivity. The 'narcissistic reflexivity', Bourdieu's term for the postmodern hermeneutics, does not consider other possibilities that lie in the objectivist tools of anthropology, like applying them to the ethnographic field itself or to the scholastic biases the ethnographer has in his possession while erroneously confining it on the individual self of the ethnographer. What he suggests as a technique of restoring scientific balance between the objective and subjective mode of enquiry is his notion of participant objectivation. For Bourdieu, "participant objectivation", as the objectivation of the subject and operations of objectivation, and of the latter's conditions of possibility, produces real cognitive effects as it enables the social analyst to grasp and master the pre-reflexive social and academic experiences of the social world that he tends to project unconsciously onto ordinary social agents' (2003, p281). Drawing from his own research experiences, he shows how 'idiosyncratic personal experiences methodically subjected to sociological control constitute irreplaceable, analytical resources, and that mobilising one's social past through self-socio-analysis can and does produce epistemic as well as existential benefits' (2003, p281).

Bourdieu's insistence on turning 'observation' to 'objectivation' means the objectivation of the observer's subjectivity. While it sounds quite close to something that the Rice Circle's critique of ethnography endorses, Bourdieu's view of their 'pseudo-radical denunciation' is harsh and unsubscribing. According to Bourdieu, the hermeneutic process of cultural interpretation eventually indulge in interpretive scepticism which may even slip over the biographical particularities of the social enquirer which the postmodernists themselves put at

the centre of enquiry. Such over-emphasis on subjectivism turns their ethnographic immersion anti-scientific by reducing it to the recording and analysis of the pre-constructions that the ethnographer as a social agent engages in the construction of reality and thus trivialising the social conditions under which the pre-constructions emerge (2003, p282). The process of participant objectivation, as Bourdieu suggests, helps to illuminate not only the lived subjective experience but also the social conditions of possibilities within that experience by objectivising the ethnographer's subjective relation to the object. What I learned from Bourdieu is to objectivise the social world that has determined my world-view and knowledge which I engage in my anthropological practice. It involved close scrutiny of my particular positioning within the so-called sects and guilds of anthropologists, their organisational structure, power relations, traditions, values, disciplines, cross-lingual dilemmas and so on. That is why the reflexivity of my observation and analysis not only objectivised my social origin, membership of identity groups or other elements of my individuality but also my position within the objective institutional milieu which decisively shaped many aspects of this ethnography.

However, Thomas's (1991) attempt to make a distinction between practising anthropology (fieldwork) and writing anthropology (ethnography) was another helpful analysis in this respect. With the help of this distinction, he envisaged a way to encounter the current crisis of anthropological analysis triggered by the 'Writing Culture' project. Instead of rejecting the necessity of being reflexive about the history-power nexus, Thomas tried to find out some corrective measures to bridge the existing gaps of representation made by ethnographers so that the central place of writing fieldwork learning remains just as important as it was previously. He recognises the existing limitations in ethnographic writing, namely the exoticisation of the studied population, showcasing a stable and unitary culture, and the biased positioning of the ethnographers stemming from their privileged status embedded in the unequal trajectories of history. But he refuses to overthrow the tradition of writing the field experience and, in defending his argument, he proposes rather to write against 'analytical fiction', a term borrowed from Marilyn Strathern (1988, p10).

Unlike the 'critical anthropologists' he is not always interested in smelling the notion of exoticism in anthropological writing. In the same vein he is not willing to say that writing is only about demonstrating the 'difference' that 'other' people possess. In contrast, he puts forward some highly suggestive alternatives of the words 'difference' and 'other' in order to bring new insights into the representational problem by which field-anthropology is now

bewildered. He replaces 'difference' with 'distinctiveness' and 'other' with 'another'. The epistemological tenets of these new wordings are quite thought-provoking and offer interesting insights about writing in anthropology and the cultural representation that follows.

Thomas invites us to find out newer ways to write fieldwork experiences that the fieldworkers learn from another culture. In that sense, he contends to write against 'ethnography', but not to write against 'writing' since it is writing again which has the power to expose ourselves to the multiplicities of cultures at home and abroad, to the history-power nexus, and last but not least, to the distinct features of another culture which may bring constructive changes in the spheres of dominant thought patterns that we have at home. Although his stance worked as a constant alert for me not to indulge myself in provocations of turning ethnography into 'analytical fiction' which he thinks the fashion of 'critical anthropology' subtly offers. Still, I find him in much less contradiction to the 'critical' quarter than what he himself perhaps thinks. In fact, it was not the critical anthropology that championed the attack on the 'exoticising' tendencies in ethnographic truth; rather, it was triggered towards anthropology, along with many other empirical and fictional traditions of writing, from the field of literary criticism, specifically, by Edward Said's 1978 book, *Orientalism*. Said's attack on the genres of writing developed in the west to represent non-Western societies was well-defended on behalf of anthropology by Marcus and Fischer's arguing that his 'brush' is 'broad and indiscriminate' (1986, p1). His attack was precisely on the rhetorical devices which make Western authors active, while leaving their subjects passive. These subjects, 'who cannot represent themselves' or 'who must be spoken for' from a positivist point of view, are generally located in the world dominated by Western colonialism or neo-colonialism, exactly from where the modern ethnography historically emerged. But what distinguished the era of experimental ethnography is the 'sophisticated reflection by anthropologist about herself and her own society that describing an alien culture engenders' (Marcus & Fischer 1986, p4). It is never a suspicious refusal of the ethnography's capacity to interpret social reality on the basis of reliable knowledge of cultural alternatives, or its ability to critique and suggest reform in the way we live.

The anthropological scrutiny of the 'home' and 'field' dichotomy in relation to ethnographic rendering of the social reality was also significantly furthered by Lila Abu-Lughod (1991). In her ground-breaking essay, *Writing against Culture*, she urges not to portray people as something object-like, coherent, seamless and distant from the

ethnographer's own society which arguably constitutes the notion of culture in ethnographic theory. Her dual geopolitical positionings, living in the 'West' and working in the 'East', allowed her to build an insight about the problem of cultural categorisation of communities into distant and alien cultures. She argues that such categorisations inevitably strengthen the hierarchical ties those societies have with larger geopolitical structures of power (2000, p262). Her proposition to write 'against culture' does not necessarily imply that cultural distinctions do not exist. What she insists upon is that the 'discourse of familiarity' is always supplemented by a counter-discourse that implies individual differences within the ethnographer's home society. But the counter-discourse does not exist in the ethnographer's 'familiarity' with distant communities. This absence of counter-discourse, which is usually lost in the scientific exercise of 'culture', produces and reinforces a sense of difference and distance between the 'home' and 'field'.

What these new insights depict is a fundamental change in theorising ethnography's location, subject matter and methodology, to which my research owes much intellectual energy. It was committed to the re-evaluation of the exclusivity of culture as the object of ethnographic inquiry and I believed that the study of any given cultural formation should be seen as the study of much larger systems of which the located culture is a part. I seriously considered the challenge such new perspectives had put forth to the unproblematic division of space which constitutes the location of ethnographic fieldwork, and the attention to the transcending nature of phenomenon that ethnographers intend to study (c.f. Gupta & Ferguson 1992). As a result, like most of the contemporary ethnographic accounts, mine also in some way deals with macro-phenomena as they are reflected in what constitute the margins of the phenomenon itself. It intended to be part of the ethnographic practice that examines 'macro' or 'world' systems like the state, market, development or globalisation from their respective margins. While this explains the governing intention of my research, I would like to elaborate more on the methodological intentions here.

### **Methodological Intentions: Multi-sited Contextuality and Anti-essentialism**

My research is multi-sited and has surpassed the idea of an isolated local situation because as the thematic location of my research, the CHT could not be accounted for something ethnographically focused on the intensive investigation of any single site. Undeniably, a Pangkhua village in Rangamati district remains the primary locale of my ethnography. But

what it seeks to explain is a much larger and equally complex process through which the historical states and nationalisms have reproduced the site of my research as a margin and its people as ethnic minority. It assumes that the politics of minority relations is considerably evident in the everyday political practices of development and identity and therefore enacts them as a particular focus of the research. Beside the Pangkhua village and my long-standing relationships with many of its inhabitants, the research also incorporates the experiences of different locations and communities I interacted with during my previous fieldworks and other secondary means of engagement with the CHT. So, my ethnography is an outcome of a research conducted in diffused time and space. It cumulates participant knowledge gathered from two distinct phases of fieldwork within a time span of six years beside constant intellectual engagement with the places, peoples and issues it talks about. Each phase of fieldwork had a distinct focus but eventually intersected with each other in many respects.

One of the reasons that provoked me to choose a multi-sited mode of investigation was my ambivalent positioning in relation to the ‘home’ and ‘field’ distinction of the social space. It was impossible to ignore the fact that the society I belong to and the larger political order it enforces, are both indivisible parts of my ethnic identity of a Bengali Muslim, no matter how far I recognise them as part of my individual self. So, a nationstate with all its political, cultural and economic legacies follows me wherever I go. ‘Kor-pa’ (the Bengali guy) may have been my obvious third person entitlement when my fellow Pangkhua villagers talked about me, despite the fact that over the years I secured many more intimate fictive kin-terms as names for the relationships I have with a given family or individual. Whenever or wherever I was living in the CHT, the ‘home’ in a greater sense never abandoned me. What happened in the parliamentary caucus in Dhaka about the status of the marginal ethnic groups in the new constitutional amendments or what a Bengali settler did to his Chakma debtor in a remote corner of the region had direct consequences for the situations in which I worked. It was the experiential reality that led me to situate my research in multiple sites as the practices and realities it was concerned with were inherently multi-sited. For me, the home and field distinction was not credible at all. When my Jumma friends inevitably considered me as an exceptional Bengali individual with some special interest in their life, a greater part of my own interest was devoted to the historical presence of my home society, the appearance of the nationstate in its particular geopolitical margin, so to speak, of which I am a credible citizen. My dual positionings as a Bengali academic and a socio-politically sensitive ethnographer in the CHT could be demoralising if I were about to write a traditional monograph on, for

instance, the Pangkhua culture. But I turned these limitations to my advantage by choosing to contextualise the so-called external ‘macro-constructions of a larger social order’ (Marcus 1995, p95) I represent, to ‘multiple sites of observation and participation’ (Marcus 1995, p95). I found and reflected about myself in a hinterland of the ‘local’ and the ‘national/global’, or the ‘life-world’ and the ‘system’ (Marcus 1995, p95) and thus managed to place my ethnography both within and outside of those entities as an effort to undo the problematic binaries in which they are involved.

The task of the research became investigating and ethnographically constructing ‘the life-worlds of variously situated subjects’ (Marcus 1995, p96) with the threads of transcending systems. As a result, what began as a study of a single Pangkhua village circumstantially became also the study of the Bangladeshi state including its global and regional embodiments. The logics of everyday practices I sought in a single village like Mahalu were multiplicatively produced, partly within sites of the modern interlocking institutions under the political umbrella of the state. That is why strategies of quite literally following such connections, associations, and identified relationships that I observed at Mahalu eventually led me to multiple sites of observation.

Assuming multi-sited cultural formations and practices as objects of study rather than the locally conditioned aspects of a particular set of subjects allowed me to follow every path, connection, and trajectory emerging in the course of fieldwork. I started with the advantages of a good amount of first-hand knowledge on the CHT in general and a participatory familiarity of a single site that my ethno-linguistic fieldworks in a particular Pangkhua village had provided. In the last week of January 2010, I returned there with a new set of interests and perspectives which derived both from my past field experiences and recent theoretical trainings on identity, development and power. I was focused on the refined examinations of their resistance and conformity to a multiplicatively produced dynamics of encapsulation from these three perspectives. It required attentions to a much broader context of relationships among different local and cosmopolitan groups and individuals, objects and grounds of encounter and responses, mobility patterns, and to ‘a process of being mutually displaced from what has counted as culture’ (Marcus 1995, p96) or identity for every individual or groups. The heart of inquiry was not anymore the reclamation of a cultural backwater or its preservation against aggressive changes, but the newly contextualised cultural formations and actions in the marginal situations to which changes in the larger and

hegemonic economic and political orders have given rise. Such intentions cannot be satisfied within a single site or single mode of investigation. Instead, I needed a strategically balanced mode of intensive and extensive investigations. For me, the best course of action in achieving that balance was to place myself right on the village I know about most, keep all my research skills available for use, and then let on-the-ground situations to be the guiding principle in choosing specific techniques.

I remained aware of the historical ties the traditions of fieldwork maintained with colonialism or any successive forms of power but did not quite ignore the strength of ethnography as a holistic and conscious presentation of the ‘located aspects of human condition from inside’ (Wills and Trondman 2002, p395). By the same token, I examined the ‘symbolic forms, patterns, discourses and practices’ (Wills and Trondman 2002, p395) which give a phenomenon shapes but escaped the mere structuralist assumption ‘that the whole meaning of a phenomenon is written on its surface’ (Wills and Trondman 2002, p395). I dug into the historical and territorial trajectories to map the formation of issues across and within the CHT and at the same time maintained reflexivity of my own positionings, production of knowledge and their historical relationship with the subject population. Thus, my methodology benefited from the extensive use of crosscutting methods and techniques without essentialising any of them.

### **The Fieldwork: Following Life, Objects, and Metaphors**

The basic framework of the fieldwork has been a relatively simple employment of the essential paths of action in a multi-sited ethnography that Marcus (1995) suggested in his remarkable essay on the emergence of multi-sited ethnography which is systematically following the people, things, texts, metaphors, stories, conflicts and individual lives that an ethnographer comes across on a given site of research. My research has followed the marginal lives of the hill dwellers from site to site, through the avenues emerging from the intensive stays at a chosen Pangkhua village in the CHT. For the seven months of my fieldwork, I was primarily based at Mahalu, a frontier Pangkhua village south of Rangamati Hill District, close to the both Burmese and Mizoram borders with Bangladesh. The village had a population of roughly 500, consisting of around a hundred families. I had occupied a guest room at the village community hall but stayed mostly with a Pangkhua family whom I knew from my previous fieldworks there. The basic aspiration of my stay there was to

maximise participation in the village life and to remain focused on the practices relating to the state, displacement, mobility, development, and identity. The activities included descriptive recording of the everyday life of the village, economic and political practices and most importantly, learning how the Pangkhuas negotiate the diverse presence of the transcending systems like the state or development.

This time, I had arrived in Mahalu in the beginning of the farming season when most of the families were living in remote farming camps in dense forests, several of them requiring more than twenty hours of travel that involves a long boat ride and walks across ragged, hilly terrain. I started following them to those camps where intensely social and interactive evenings followed their hot, humid and laborious days. The travels had often been a real challenge to my 'plain-land' ability to walk such distances and there were also security concerns like the fear of being kidnapped by any of the local or cross-border insurgent groups, which was routinely injected by the security folk at the checkpoints and by a few of my Pangkhua friends. Yet, the reward for the risk and labour was inspiring. It brought me a deeper intimacy with several families I stayed with at the farming camps. On a few occasions, following some violent communal conflicts in different parts of the CHT, I was refused 'approval' by the concerned military base to travel in remote localities, and had even at times, to return Mahalu after a short logistic trip to the nearest town of Rangamati. I used such disruptions as an opportunity to travel to other parts of the CHT including a few other Jumma villages in the Bandarban district. Though partly a coincidence, my travels also covered the entire route that Francis Buchanan travelled while writing his pioneering ethnographic account on the CHT in the year 1798 which considerably shaped my historical imagination of the CHT. Despite occasional inaccessibility, the village of Mahalu was my base from where most of my travels followed different connection and trajectories.

I also travelled to numerous places with my fellow Pangkhua villagers from Mahalu. I accompanied a few of them in their visits to relatives and friends in neighbouring Pangkhua villages, to the town centres, different government and NGO establishments and on some of the informal cross-border trading ventures though without finally crossing the border. I had been to multiple educational institutions where capable Pangkhua families send their children and accompanied them many times in their routine travels taking the produce of the Jum to the nearby market. I also joined a bridal cavalcade to a remote Pangkhua village near the Mizoram border which was very significant to my understanding of the trans-border social

mobility among the Pangkhuas. I spent nearly a week there under a tense political climax that arose as a result of the killing of a Bengali moneylender by one of his Chakma debtors and this caused grave concern among my hosts regarding my safety in the fear of anticipated communal violence that might ensue. The days were crucial to my experience with the ingrained properties of a culture of fear, local power relations and the complex political equations in which they are involved. I also accepted every possible invitation from my Jumma friends living in the towns of Bandarban or Rangamati which acquainted me with the emergent educated middle class among the indigenous population. I also travelled along the bordering villages wherever my friends at Mahalu had relatives or friends. The travels in the CHT with my Pangkhua friends had been the most precious moments of learning for me as during those long biding hours we had nothing to do except chat with each other and I owe considerable part of my knowledge to my companions on these journeys by boats or other modes of transportation.

Another aspect of following people's lives involved tracing the circulation of manifestly material objects of study. In the face of an emergent commodification of livelihood, following the commodity chains was important. It was the principal means from which to infer the economic change the people were going through. It provided me empirical illustration of the fine-grained circulation of objects like how a hunted jungle pig eventually ended up as the extra bit of money for a schoolboy at a remote missionary boarding school to buy a mobile phone long-promised by his father or how the traditional rice liquor was replaced by manufactured lemonade in ceremonial exchanges or how a standard bag of spices is sold upfront for 20 per cent of its actual market price. It helped me to identify the dividing line between self-sustenance and mercantile dependency of the people, the fetishised view of the new commodities among them and the desires they stimulate. It also enabled me to identify a profound bricolage of things, the unique significances and possibilities a foreign material may contain for the local people. For example, once a Pangkhua friend of mine and I had to row back and forth an hour's distance in the middle of the night to return two disposable plastic water bottles that we had borrowed from a family while buying rice wine. That was a moment to realise how the value of things might differ according to the context in which they are put. Following things also involved the exchange of gifts that underpinned essential norms of social organisation; the various forms of mercantile exchange that shows the disparities between an invading and local economic order, and last but not least, the random household materials that evidentially describe their transformation from an anarchic

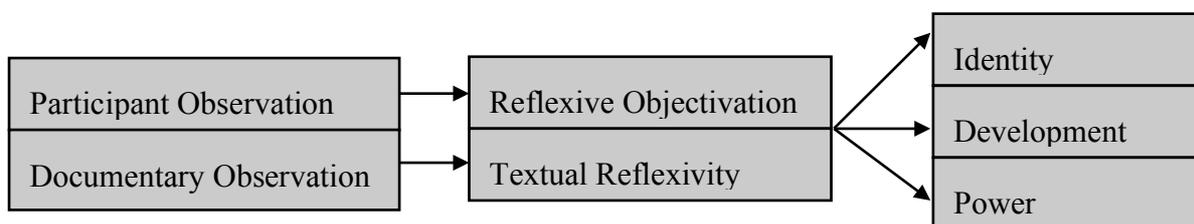
and self-sustaining mode of economic production to the conscription to a centralised economy of interdependence.

Perhaps the most critical but theoretically important part of following people's lives was comprised of the metaphors, conflicts, stories and individual biographies. I was fortunate to have a good amount of linguistic and literary data recorded in the earlier phase of my fieldwork among the Pangkhuas. This was my principal means to make an inference in the realm of discourses and ideologies, modes of thought and, most importantly, to decipher the implicit properties of the practices I was trying to understand. Throughout my fieldwork, I paid careful attention to the 'circulation of signs, symbols, and metaphors' (Marcus 1995, p108) in the random reflections of reality both by the indigenous people and the state agencies. The texts range from school books, letter of appreciations, signboards, depiction of the people in scholastic narratives, identity cards, development promotional material, paintings in the walls of military camps, tourism promotions, media representation of the indigenous to the latest debate about the renaming of the indigenous population in the Bangladesh constitution. The most delicate and critical arguments of my analysis are derived from this part of my observation which widened my ethnographic canvas beyond any geographic limits and allowed me to synthesise whatever I thought to be relevant to my work. The journey in this path was full of unexpected trajectories which reinforces my claim that my methodological framework aims to effectively escape the danger of presumed ideas that often leads the ethnographer to see only things they want to see. For example, once I travelled to visit the Tuichong River that had a mythical significance in the construction of the Pangkhua identity, without any specific idea of what it might offer for developing my knowledge about them. The week I spent with my Pangkhua friends in a village on the bank of this river that literally divided the Bangladesh territory from the Indian, enhanced my knowledge with a plethora of new information about their current trans-border mobility and their perception about the state borders rather than any significant historical insights on the Pangkhua identity.

So, the methodological framework of my research can be seen as a sum of two broad and intertwined modes of ethnographic engagement which I like to call Participant Observation and Documentary Observation, respectively characterised by reflexive objectivity and textual reflexivity. As a whole, the observation was focused on the thematic issues of the research which is to say the practices and forms in the domains of development, identity and power

while maintaining a scientific objectivity. Since the information and knowledge I gathered in my fieldwork were wide-ranging and intricate in nature, a broad categorisation was obvious needed to synthesise them properly. So, I categorically directed my observation both on everyday practices and the documentary forms they produce to organise those practices. The Participant Observation was the source of experiential knowledge and information which served as the contextual basis of analysing the information obtained from the other mode of engagement which I called Documentary Observation. The flow chart below illustrates the central framework of my methodology:

Diagram: Methodological Frameworks



The operational definition I had for participant observation needs further elaboration. For me, participant observation stands for the mode of engagement during my protracted stays at Mahalu and shorter presence in the different corners of the CHT and in some cases, related events like political demonstrations or policy campaigns in Dhaka. This has been the key source of first-hand information gathered through an engagement disciplined by reflexive objectivity. The participant observation should derive not merely from romantic assumptions such as ‘being among people’, ‘just like them’, ‘do what they do’, and ‘live like them’. Rather, for me, participation always was being in my own role of an academic researcher that my friends at Mahalu recognised socially in the course of my long attachment with them. For a few families, I was no different from a family member sharing quite personal relationships, but still my common entitlement within the village was ‘pupa’ (teacher) which gained a wider acceptance among the villagers as I used to tutor young Pangkhuas who were struggling to pass the HSC or SSC finals for consecutive years. Besides tutoring different school subjects to these fortunate youths from relatively rich Pangkhua families, my knowledge of a greater world was something that attracted their attention in general. For many of them, I was the most accessible source to meet their curiosities about the world beyond their reach. This was a key to engage in conversations with people at Mahalu or any other village. Usually I avoided unsettling people with my intense queries or plethora of questions immediately after meeting someone. Rather, what I tried to express was an easy-going appearance that made me

manifestly available for a casual chat. Almost without fail, this was something that evoked people's curious approaches that I always attended to eagerly, answering their questions within my capacity to do so. As a listener, I was also able to make people talk. This was the beginning of almost every new thread of connections I followed empirically in this research.

My participation in their life was simple and I tried to participate in different spheres of their economic and social life as much as I could. When going to stay there, I took the minimum possible necessities with me and procured most of them locally. I accepted every invitation, be it a marriage, ritualistic feast, religious ceremony or funeral. A crucial part of economic participation with the community was through the exchange of gifts which involved delicate consideration. I remained aware of ethical concerns surrounding the gift exchanges. I avoided giving luxury goods or something so valuable that would oblige them to me as a social superior. My gift items were usually daily necessities like kerosene, cooking oil, food and some household necessities which they usually buy from the market. I paid cash to a few of my key consultants and interpreter who spent routine hours assisting me in my work. The family I stayed with had a long-standing social relationship with me and my family which involved a constant sharing of their economic struggle since the first time I came to Mahalu. They had always been my host family there, which also made them a part of my identity among the fellow villagers.

A principal source of information was obtained through my 'key consultants', a term adopted from field-linguistics to intentionally replace the acquiescent notion of 'key informant' which presumably puts ethnographer into an agent and his subjects into a patient role. The participant observation also involved several conventional methods like focused observation, unstructured interviews, focus group discussions (FGD) and case studies. The techniques were applied depending upon their effectiveness in a given situation. The interviews reluctantly followed a checklist or thematic guidelines and involved interpreters who were usually also my key consultants, but in cases where the respondents were able to speak the Bengali or its Arakanese variant named 'Chittagonian', interviews were carried out without an interpreter. All arranged interviews were recorded in audio format and included the interpretations. Photography and videography on economic activities, locations and events made up another important technique of documentation. The collected data were restored in different formats. Written field-notes and sometimes the recording of self-narrations were important documentation techniques for relatively analytical observations.

The interview guidelines were constantly reviewed on the basis of general observation and interviews already conducted. At the later parts of my fieldwork, when I was making short visits to different parts of the CHT to achieve a comparative view of a few issues, I applied quicker techniques and methods like structured interviews and focused group discussions. Interviews and FGDs in locations other than Mahalu were more arranged whereas at Mahalu they happened more or less circumstantially. Locations outside Mahalu include a few other Pangkhuas, Mro, Khumi, Chakma, Marma, Tonchongya, Bawm and Heo villages, the district towns of Bandarban and Rangamati, and, to some extent, the Bangladeshi capital city of Dhaka. The people I worked with in these shorter trips were my friends from different identity groups, government and NGO officials, regional leaders of both indigenous and settler communities, and experts and activists of different anchorage. The travel by country boat, which is the only public transport for most of the region, was a great opportunity to learn from local people and I made use of this to contrast my learning with a more random and wider background. The primary unit of analysis for observation and analysis in the field were both individual and family.

By documentary observation I broadly mean my engagement with the forms of information and knowledge that are constructed by related social groups and systems in retrievable forms like symbol, text, formal document, sign and metaphors, whereas a larger part of the knowledge I obtained through participant observation does not have a documentary existence except for my own memory and its reflections in this thesis. It also can be extended to my analytical observation on ethnographic data I have recorded in the field, a constant observation on the media coverage of the CHT over a period of three years, a wide of range of texts I read on the CHT, and also to close scrutiny of the documents, signs and metaphors governing everyday life of the people in the CHT. In dealing with those documents, I liberally borrowed tools and techniques emerging from ethnographic appropriation of qualitative inquiry that now strongly bridges contemporary anthropology and cultural studies. I used several techniques of qualitative document analysis more common to the field of cultural studies. The most effective application of techniques like textual and discourse analysis, or in some cases, semiological tools, was on identity issues and the normative presence of the state and its embodiments.

My strategy to discipline my observation and participation in this research was to employ both my subjective and objective possibilities in an auto-catalysing role against each other. I

have tried to objectivise my participation in this research with positional self-reflexivity. In this sense, it was a process of reflexive triangulation of my theoretical knowledge, social position and the subject of study, which I named reflexive objectivation. The engagement with documentary realities might be better understood as textual reflexivity where the triangulation involved inquisitive reflections on the production of the texts, their representations and my subjective reading of them. The reflexive objectivation includes not only my social self, but also the institutional knowledge by which I objectivise my ethnographic gaze which in fact means turning it against my own anthropological knowledge. My conscious choices of secondary sources and literatures reflect my commitment and sympathy to certain intellectual guilds both at home and abroad. The academic milieu and traditions which constitute, according to Bourdieu, my 'academic unconscious' as an individual social enquirer, was to some extent consciously objectified. Observations made on the first phase of fieldwork, when I was documenting Pangkhua language, were decisive to my further accomplishment of theory and methods which means it was the reality on the 'field' that has largely determined my academic inclinations in the years between my fieldworks. In my own 'rites of passage' as an anthropologist, I took my field experiences through two distinct knowledge traditions inscribed in two different languages of Bengali and English while living at the core of the grand systems of which the CHT is a margin. A degree of objectivation was achieved in my intellectual accomplishments in these years as I already had advantages of lived experiences in the location of my research which guided me through the course I prepared for it.

### **Writing Across Ethical and Literary Checkpoints**

The fieldwork and subsequent research firmly followed an institutional protocol set by an ethical audit system that was largely biomedical in nature. The ethical acceptability of the research was reviewed by a formal body responsible for auditing research using humans as participants. But the ethical concerns were far more profound and ingrained than mere protection and risk management. Almost every move and events in this research had serious ethical concerns and considerations. The incredible complexity of power relations among the people or identity groups with whom I was randomly working needed ethically sensitive decisions. This was the most important challenge of maintaining ethical reflexivity in my work. I was also constantly working with realities and information that had legal and political

resonances. Following the institutional ethics protocol, I consciously protected my fieldwork data from any person or agency having any conflict of interest with the people under my study. I employed pseudonyms for the interviewees and case studies, even for the actual location and name of the village I worked. I also continuously shared my research as much as possible with the people to make their participation well-informed and with consent. Yet in many cases, my ethical obligations obliged me to make a choice among contesting interest groups because in certain circumstances, an objective impartiality inevitably meant supporting the more empowered which could never be an acceptable ethical position. The ethical reflexivity does not really release the ethnographer from restraining themselves from politically chosen subjective actions. In fact, such arbitrary and circumstantial actions, which eventually reflect the 'reflexive activist persona' (Marcus 1995, p99) of the ethnographer, provided an effective way to articulate many of my research questions. I have elaborated this in relation to particular cases and events in the successive chapters.

On the other hand, the major differences between ethnography as a mode of social inquiry and a piece of mediated knowledge about particular social facts are determined by the process of writing the fieldwork experiences. As we have discussed before, contemporary ethnographic research focuses the writing self of the ethnographer where the task of self-reflection is far more complex and challenging given the well-identified political implications of the ethnographic knowledge and the politics of its production. Due to my social position, institutional affiliations and claimed empirical authenticity, the facts I reproduced in this thesis always had potentially political implications. I had to choose a position for myself among contested political interests and opinions of different social groups I talk about in this research. To set an example here, my choice of calling the people at Mahalu Pangkhua, rather than their other self-recognition as 'Zo' people, was at the time an ethically and politically contested choice. I had to be aware of the fact that my reflections on their diverse forms of identity might have direct influences on their contemporary struggle against the state and other agencies where recognition of identity still remains the central battleground. I did not quite disengage myself from their greater political struggle for the sake of positivist promise of a value-free social science. Rather I maintained an ethical positioning throughout the process of writing with a speculation of possible political resonances.

I was aware that my subjectivity itself was subject to a translation dilemma as I wrote this ethnography in a language in which I do not think. In addition to the common writing

dilemmas contemporary ethnographers face in relation to reflexivity, the writing of relatively embedded actions and events, the discursive milieu under which they occur, or the subjective narration of the private feelings like my trust, suspicion, doubt or fears and many other parts of my so-called lived subjective experiences, often struggled to be translated in a language of which I am not a native speaker. For example, the political humours in Pangkhua language were translated first into my own language, Bengali, in my head, then into English in writing. The original expression, at least a certain degree of its cognitive effects, was inevitably lost and thus it became more an objective piece of information rather than subjective reproduction of a social situation. In the same manner, absolute subjectivity had slimmer chances to survive through such rigorous translating process. So, it was obvious that the knowledge produced in this dissertation has inexorably undergone an objectivation of experiences through translanguaging convergence. At the same time, the simulation of the contents at the epistemic level, establishing causal relationships among them and their analytical frameworks was more a subjective affair.

As every ethnography is essentially an incomplete and partial form of knowledge, this work does not incorporate all my experiences in the field. I neither claim to have mediated all the facts I have witnessed during my fieldwork nor have I claimed this work to be an all-encompassing body of knowledge about the CHT. Rather I insist this work is a subjective narrative of the people and places it deals with. The writing process was subjected to a diverse range of social, political and institutional conditions which eventually shaped the structure of the thesis I have presented here. The writing experience has been more like a craftsmanship where experiences have been first written in scattered notes throughout the duration of the research, without having a consistent and coherent framework. I took scattered field notes throughout the fieldwork without any conscious effort to maintain logical connections among them. These apparently unrelated notes did not quite indicate any coherent structure of my thesis until I finished my fieldwork. My theoretical inclinations, subjective interpretations of the facts I recorded and unwritten memories of the field situation played a crucial role in crafting a structure of the thesis later on. Even in the months of writing, the field data I was using influenced the structure of the thesis significantly. I restructured the chapters quite a few times during the writing periods. The end result is not solely what I intended to write at the beginning. In places, the writing experience itself determined the nature of many significant parts of the thesis.

## Chapter 3

### Bangladesh: State, Nation and Imaginations

“The nation in Bangladesh is a nation because it intends to be a nation and nothing else.”

- National Professor Abdur Razzaq, 1981

#### **Ethnography of the State?**

As part of my fieldwork I took a huge number of photographs and came across numerous phenomena which emanated from the Pangkhua people's day-to-day encounter with the presence of the state and its articulation in the margins. One of those photographs and one incident need special attention here which I believe have considerable bearing upon the identity formation of the Pangkhua people in relation to the re-enforcement of state's presence in their life.

One of the photographs captured the large green leaves of the Segun (*tectona grandis*, commonly known as Teak) tree in a corner, and a helicopter looking like a flying dragon in the vast sky that occupied the rest of the frame. The photograph gave me a feeling of confronting two great historical symbols of state-making in the CHT in one single photograph. The Segun Tree –the most precious timber that occupies a major place in the country's furniture market - was first introduced in this area around the 1850s, in the advent of the colonial enclosure of the region. It still remains, not only as one of the most precious resources from the CHT, but also as a strong symbol and historical evidence of 'botanical colonialism' –which is regarded by many contemporary historians as the earliest stage of ordering nature and environment for state appropriation. In other words, this is widely known as 'scientific forestry'. Since the introduction of teak plantations, the state enforced and ossified itself here in multiple ways and forms, and perhaps the most compelling among those was its sophistication in what James C. Scott (2009) called 'distance demolishing technologies'.

The incident hinted at above was about the construction of a helipad close to the army camp in the Alikhiong reserve forest. Each family of the study village had a quota of labour to pay off –one member and an eight-hour-day's labour in return for a rice meal with egg

curry and nothing else. It reminds me of the photograph having a flying helicopter behind the *Segun* tree. What could be a better example while telling the story of Pangkhua identity and developmental politics and the state's everyday presence and re-enforcements in their life than a helicopter?

The photograph was both theoretically and symbolically appealing of course, yet, ethnography is not merely a single frame of a photograph. I found myself worried about a sea of issues that needed to be addressed to bring together the helicopter, the *Segun* tree and the egg curry meal served to my Pangkhua friends by the military as the only payment for a day's hard work. The state's presence in precarious lives and locations cannot be understood without a scrutiny of the state itself; in this case, the state of which I myself am a credible citizen. The facts about the state's presence cannot be explained without an adequate understanding of its historical emergence, cultural trajectories and political practices. What I was supposed to write was an ethnography that experiences the Bangladeshi state in a territory where its presence had been extraordinarily articulated; an ethnography that would be simultaneously about the state and the marginal lives it had reproduced through a dominant enclosure of their territory. Was I looking at an ethnography of the state itself? I found myself with a plethora of questions about ethnography and state.

Is an ethnography of the state possible? Until very recently, the possibilities of an ethnography of the state would have been regarded as an absurd and meaningless pursuit when ethnography was undisputedly about peoples without fully established linkages to and belonging to a state or civilisation. While ethnography serves as a principal source of cultural knowledge for states and civilisations, helping them to learn, represent, and reproduce the societies beyond their 'proper' administrative expense, is it possible to turn it against the state itself? Moreover, when the craft of ethnography is largely perceived as a holistic depiction of small-scale societies, to what extent is it capable of handling such a large political system like the State? Can ethnography be entrusted as a truly scientific research about the State? If yes, then what would an ethnography of state look like? A number of anthropological approaches have emerged in recent years that paved the ethnographic way of understanding state.

Any attempt to answer the questions posed earlier first requires a profound re-imagination of our very ideas of 'society' and 'state' and the problematic binary in which the development of anthropological thoughts have engaged them; it is an inevitable move from the banal claim that the so-called 'archaic' societies are reminiscences of a pre-state past and

therefore can be solely explained in evolutionary terms like, for example, historical materialism. The Marxist perspective of the state, preoccupied by its idea of class and surplus, largely relied on the Morganian idea of social evolution that explained state as an evolutionary accomplice of human society rather than a historical dialectic between the state and society (and evolution of political power), and, therefore, failed to understand enough the non-state forms of political orders that ran the majority of societies until the last one per cent of human history, that is, when the state emerged as a universal cultural operator. Even until the nineteenth century, states had no de facto control over the everyday functioning of societies in greater part of the world. Anthropology's historical tie with the colonial state-making and governmentality was also a major predicament for the development of any anthropological critique of the state and, therefore, political anthropology shared a marginal position in the western political theories of state. Since the 1970s, certain theoretical premises for answering those questions have been seriously articulated in anthropology, yet barely attended to by the majority of its practitioners until the very recent past when ethnographic accounts became objects of historiographic analysis. Ethnography's attention to the political dimension of non-state societies had largely overlooked the dialectical relationships between the historical state and the societies beyond their administrative control.

One of the earliest theoretical breakthroughs in this regard was Pierre Clastres's 1974 book, *Society Against the State*, which he concluded saying:

It is said that the history of people who have a history is the history of class struggle. It might be said, with at least as much truthfulness, that the history of people without history is the history of their struggle against the State (p218).

The proposition was aptly extracted from his rigorous critique of the prevalent paradigms in 'Anglo-Saxon' political anthropology which was then gradually gaining a voice in Western political philosophy due to its empirical experience with the political life of archaic societies –the people without history and without state. Like other forms of cultural life of the archaic societies, the notion of power also was governed by an evolutionary mode of thinking which often deteriorated into ideologies of ethnocentrism. With a close examination of the typologies of societies based on the nature of their existing political power, Clastres showed how an ethnocentrism deriving from the evolutionary imagination led to a misunderstanding of the nature of power itself. The influences of political thinkers like Nietzsche or Weber created an unquestioned conviction in Western scholarship that political power is only

manifested within a relationship that ultimately comes down to coercion, or demonstrates a definable relationship of ‘command-obedience’, and therefore, where these relationships are not observed are societies without power (Clastres 1974, p11). This resulted in really dedicated efforts to experience and conceive the forms of power among anthropology’s subject societies as embryonic, as an evolutionary opposition to the state power or the ‘adult State’ in the West (p18). Societies, like that of hill-dwellers in the CHT, were imagined in a pre-political stagnation, like historical virgins awaiting political conscription by the state to become truly political societies.

In his phenomenal book *Seeing Like a State* (1998), anthropologist James C Scott offers us a very careful analysis of the systematic enclosure of such societies by historical states. Beginning with a very simple question –why the state has always seemed to be enemy of people who move around, he identifies ‘sedentarisation’ as a perennial state project, perennial because it ‘so seldom succeeded’ (Scott 1998, p1). With dedicated evaluations of some of the greatest social engineering by the states in modern history, Scott envisages that sedentarisation, a state function also evident in the context of the CHT, is the “state’s attempt to make a society legible, to arrange the population in ways that simplified the classic state functions of taxation, conscription, and prevention of rebellion” (Scott 1998, p2). Legibility, as Scott argues,

...is a precondition and central problem in Statecraft. The premodern state was, in many respects, blind. It knew little about its subjects, their wealth, their land holdings and yields, their location, and, their very identity. It lacked a map, a measure, a metric to have a synoptic view. As a result, interventions were often crude and self-defeating (1998, p2).

The sovereign power of the state, originating from its monopolistic legitimacy over violence, does not alone suffice to establish the state as driving force of social and economic life. The sovereign State power, which according to Agamben, simultaneously exists outside and inside the law (1995, p15), in fact, lays only the political foundation to engineer a much greater degree of transformation of society and environment. The people and their societies are made legible through a series of comprehensive reforms like:

...the creation of permanent last names, the standardisation of weights and measures, the establishment of cadastral surveys and population registers, the invention of freehold tenure, the standardisation of language and legal discourse, the design of cities, and the organisation of transportation....

...(The) designs of scientific forestry and agriculture, layouts of auditable and profitable plantations, collective farms, ...(cluster) villages and strategic hamlets, all seemed calculated to make the terrain, its products, and its workforce more legible, (more simplified), and hence, (more) manipulable- from above and from ...(within) (Scott 1998, p2).

In keeping with these emergent paradigms of understanding state power in marginal locations, contemporary anthropology has observed a series of critiques questioning classical ethnographic endeavours as being indifferent to the role of state among the societies they have ethnographically portrayed. The relationship between the state and the societies on its margins has been fundamentally revisited in contemporary anthropology. Anthropology now, through its vast ethnographic archive, has drawn a new attention to indigenous groups inherently defined as non-state peoples presenting a challenge to the modern nationstate (c.f. Nagengast, 1994). In recent years, anthropology's contribution to Western political theory has been significantly enhanced. Ethnography is also increasingly gaining a voice in the new current of academic scholarship revisiting the 'State' from liberal, post-colonial or post-structuralist perspectives whereas traditionally it was not even acknowledged as a proper subject matter of ethnographic investigation. The presence of the state in classical ethnographic writings, like those of Montesquieu, Maine or Evans-Pritchard remained 'ghostly' and obscured, largely due to the colonial construction of anthropology's subject population as 'stateless' societies. Despite the fact that the ethnographic study of so-called stateless societies has always been haunted by the very presence of the 'language and figure' of the state (Das and Poole 2004, p4), the historical construction of such marginal societies as exception from or discontinuation of administrative rationality and political order has excluded the state as a primary object of ethnographic inquiry.

The restoration of the state as the proper subject matter of ethnography begins with the assumption that the state is always an incomplete project that requires continual reinforcement, primarily achieved through the 'legitimated monopoly over violence' (Das and Poole 2004, p7). This Weberian view of the state has been extended further by anthropologists arguing that such continuous re-articulation of the state is best evident along its margins and, therefore, the anthropological study of the margins of the state facilitates the understanding of the crucial sites where the state can be experienced in its most critical forms. Such an ethnographic view of the margins of the state, as Talal Asad suggests, comprises three central theoretical directions. The first perceives the margin "as peripheries or territories in which the state has yet to penetrate"; the second, as "spaces, forms and

practices through which the state is continually both experienced and undone through the illegibility of its own practices, documents and words”; and, finally, as the “space between bodies, law and discipline” (2004, p279). These theoretical approaches are highly suggestive when applied in the case of the CHT where my research aims to learn how the Bangladeshi nationstate is continuously restored through the governmental and local practices of identity, development and power.

This new mode of ethnographic research is primarily concerned with the practice and politics of life on the margins and its relation to the political, regulatory and disciplinary practices of the state. This approach is, in many senses, a considerable shift in the ethnographic research paradigm. Das and Poole (2004, p5) argue that this indicates the end of an era when ethnography studied a domain of presumably stateless people and their practices through the language of the colonial states. Beside the functional school in anthropology, the latter has its roots in the early Marxist and postcolonial writings where ethnographic sites are imagined as ‘nostalgic sites’ for the discovery of the embryonic political forms (Das and Poole 2004, p5) which, in effect, endorsed the state as a universal cultural operator inevitable for these societies. The essays in their edited volume (2004) are mostly concerned with certain aspects of the state’s order and transcendence by which its presence in a given society can be understood. As the state is, before anything else, about order, Das and Poole draw our attention to the presence of administrative and hierarchical rationalities in the signs of a political and regulatory apparatus. In other words, this is about examining the language of the state in relation to these marginal societies rather describing them through it. The work of ethnography here is to identify every possible form of the state’s presence in local life, and then analyse the local manifestation of bureaucracy and law, and to explain how the cultural “interpretations or appropriations of the practices and forms... (re)constitute the modern liberal (nation) state (itself)” (Das & Poole 2004, p5).

Citing the ‘Nuer’ of Evans-Pritchard (1940) as evidence, Das and Poole attempt to explain the silence of colonial ethnographers about the presence of the colonial state in the sites where they were learning how order is maintained in these ‘stateless’ societies. Their portrayal of balanced pre-state political society was meant to ignore the disorder caused by the colonial state. This critique of the early ethnographic works has nullified the local forms of legal, economic or political authorities as the exclusive focus of political anthropology. Methodologically, Das and Poole are sceptical about jumping into the idea that, since pure

stateless societies are only imaginative forms of political order in the contemporary world, political anthropology is something about the incomplete or less-articulated forms of the state, both in the colonial and postcolonial world. Rather, they argue that such “illegibility, partial belonging, and disorder... (in) the margins of the state constitute its necessary condition as a theoretical and political object” (Das & Poole 2004, p6).

The ethnographic study of the margins combines a number of theoretical standpoints. First of all, it rejects the idea that the “margins are peripheries (or territories) seen to form natural containers for people considered insufficiently socialised into the law” (Das & Poole 2004, p9). Instead, its understanding of the margins is occupied by the “specific technologies of power through which states attempt to ‘manage’ or ‘pacify’ these populations through both force and pedagogy of conversion intended to transform ‘unruly subjects’ into lawful subjects of the state” (Poole 2004, p9). Secondly, it assumes that the modern state is largely constructed through its writing practice and therefore ethnographers should concentrate on the documentary and writing practices by the state which consolidate its control over its subjects. Thirdly, at the same time, the “state is continually both experienced and undone (at the margins) through the illegibility of its own practices, documents and words” (Asad 2004, p279) and the ethnography should map this illegibility while studying the margins. Finally, the margins are also space between bodies, law and discipline, so the production of a bio-political body should be taken into account as an original activity of the sovereign power of the state.

Notably, most of the recent ethnographic works were done in the margins of the states which are widely labelled as ‘new’, ‘developing’, ‘weak’, ‘partial’ or even ‘failed’ states in different spheres of political discourse. Whatever may be the inherent reasons of such stigmatisations, the margins of these states, including the CHT, are, in many cases, emergency zones. This has prompted another concern that the state practice in the emergency zones, or ‘state of exception’, “cannot be understood in terms of law and transgression, but rather in terms of practices that lie simultaneously outside and inside the law” (Das & Poole 2004, p15). Following Agamben (2005), it also attracts crucial investigations like how the practices of exception work in the margins or how economic and political citizenship is claimed in emergency zones where the legislative mandate of the state is suspended against potential threats upon its sovereign power, upon its legitimised monopoly over violence. Such theoretical assumptions are well-grounded in Ferme’s (2004) ethnographic account on the

detrterritorialised citizenship practices in the Sierra Leonean border where she examines how the state regulates mobility across different parts of borders and checkpoints based on the identity documents of the people in mobility. She finds the identity in an inverse relation to the state therefore reveals its arbitrary role as reflected in the ‘conflicting spatiotemporalities’ of state practice. Similarly, Poole (2004) focuses on the temporal disruption in the ‘endless and seemingly arbitrary flow of paperwork’ in her accounts on the marginal Peruvian peasants (2004, p17). While Ferme focuses on the arbitrary power of the state, Poole emphasises the pedagogic aspects of the documentary practices by which the gap between membership and belonging are determined.

So, what we have observed in the past two decades is the emergence of the anthropology of the state which offers new theoretical paradigms supported by an increasing number of ethnographic accounts that seek to understand the state through close encounters. Claims have been put that the anthropological approach offers a far richer perspective than other studies in the sense that anthropologists firmly ground it through the ethnography of the everyday lives of people encountering and engaging with the state in multiple ways, in multiplicatively constructed sites. Anthropologists are also at the forefront of treating the state as an on-going process, to be perpetually negotiated and mediated. They have made the understanding of the state “an open field with multiple boundaries and no institutional fixity” (Trouillot 2001, p217). They have successfully established that understanding the societies on the margins of the state can be an effective way to look back to the state itself. A great array of ethnographic scholarship has been dedicated to do so in recent years, particularly in relation to the states’ historically emerging from irrigated mono-grain valley agriculture. This method of food production is one of the most generic material forces that formed states historically and then marginalised societies beyond their administrative threshold. The perennial presence of the Bangladeshi state in the CHT is an ideal case to explore from this point of view.

### **The Nation: Bengali or Bangladeshi?**

“The nation in Bangladesh...” said national Professor Abdur Razzaq of Dhaka University, “...is a nation because it intends to be a nation and nothing else” (1981, p4). The most celebrated political thinker of post-independence Bangladesh, who left a profound influence on contemporary Bangladesh intelligentsia, was speaking in the 10th year of independence at

the University of Dhaka when the country was shambling under military rule following a series of coups since the mid-1970s. By then, the country had already been sealed with epithets like ‘basket case’ of corruption or ‘test case of development’ in international development discourse, particularly by the US government. After that historic speech by Professor Razzaq, the nation experienced nearly 10 years of military dictatorship, then another 22 years of a fragile parliamentary democracy characterised by political violence and public unrest. Recurrent natural disasters, downward development indexes, increasing poverty and social discrimination and a poor human rights record were attributed to the country’s international profile. The country also topped the corruption index of Transparency International quite a few times since the 1990s; it was ascribed as ‘failed state’, or a potentially failed state, in its most positive sense, in much national and international political rhetoric. In the last two decades, neoliberal economic reforms have led to the deterioration of working conditions for the emerging urban industrial working class, and have stifled agricultural production in an ailing economy. The state government, on the other hand, has been frequently accused of violating its own legislative mandate by extra-judicial killing, interference with the judiciary, and for its discrimination against ethnic minorities, including alleged genocide in the CHT.

However, what the nation in Bangladesh ‘intends’ to be as a nation has been widely disputed between the major nationalist political parties in the post-independence era. Professor Razzaq’s view of the ‘State of the Nation’ in 1981 traces the origin of what is now disputably known as Bengali or Bangladeshi nationalism in 1905 when the unified Bengal was first divided into two separate constituencies, allegedly as part of the ‘divide and rule’ policy of the British Raj. Although Bengal was reunified in 1911, the rupture of two separate Bengals remained at the core of nationalist politics against Britain’s imperial rule. The Bengali-speaking people of the British Indian empire, as Razzaq observed, “...vowed to unsettle a settled fact and to a large extent succeeded in unsettling it” (1981, p2). In 35 years, the nationalist Muslim elites in East Bengal were able to establish a widespread political sentiment that refused to seek a future in the greater identity of an Indian nation whereas their counterpart in West Bengal enthusiastically responded to the ‘siren call of Indian Civilisation’ (Razzaq 1981, p4). Although all these are popularly conceived as the consequence of the dividing imperial policy and then the infamous ‘two nation theory’ of the Muslim League, the kind of strand like the Muslim Bengalis in East Bengal has been an integral part of the decolonisation of British India. People in different parts of the

subcontinent, in diverse ways and scales, had denied immersing their identities in a greater national identity, reminiscences of which still prevail as so-called ‘secessionist movements’ in many parts of the subcontinent as it has prevailed in the CHT for thirty long years.

Nationalist historiography in contemporary Bangladesh more or less resembles the patterns of the elitist historiography of postcolonial India which have been remarkably summarised by subaltern historian Ranajit Guha (1982). The history of the nation and nationalism has been dominated by the neo-colonial and neo-nationalist bourgeoisie which credits the development of nationalist consciousness to the colonial institutions, governance, and liberal ideologies in the first instance and to the neo-nationalist heroes, political institutions, and ideologies in the latter. The history of nationalism is widely perceived as ‘a function of stimulus and response’ deriving from the political and ideological actions by the elites. This reduces nationalism to a pedagogical process where great nationalist leaders steer people with ideologies of self-esteem and thus liberate them from oppressive colonial rule. Professor Razzaq’s legendary speech also echoes the same fact by stressing that the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, “had forged an indivisible fusion between himself and the nation” (1981, p5). This is what made the hero of Bengali nationalism the supreme symbol and mediator of the Bengali identity that previously had refused greater Indian identity by embracing the state for Indian Muslims— Pakistan, and then, in fewer than 25 years, rejected Pakistani nationhood for the sake of their Bengalihood – a national identity primarily defined by the language they speak.

The origin of present-day Bengali/Bangladeshi nationalism could easily be traced back to the language movement of 1952 when Bengalis in East Pakistan, especially students at the University of Dhaka denied accepting Urdu as the state language of Pakistan. On 21 February, a students’ protest on this was put down in a massacre by police. Since the mid-1950s, Pakistan was ruled by the military oligarchy which was in fact a legacy from the British Raj based in West Pakistan. When the partition of 1947 included West Bengal into the Indian federation and East Bengal into the Pakistani federation, Bengalis in the latter, which was then renamed East Pakistan, confronted a grave dilemma of political identity. Nationalist imaginations were caught between their historical past with West Bengal, a relationship best exemplified as ‘Siamese Twins’ (Van Schendel and Bal 1998, p9), and their political future with the Islamic federation of Pakistan, a confederation that was remarkably called a ‘Pantomime Horse’ of religion (Pilger 1986, p331). While they shared a common cultural and

linguistic background with the non-Muslim Bengalis in the West Bengal, Muslim Bengalis in East Pakistan had almost nothing in common with the people in West Pakistan except for a fragile thread of Islam. Even geopolitically, both the parts were separated by 1200 miles of Indian territory. In the 1960s, a series of political upheavals occurred in East Pakistan against the discriminatory and racist views of West Pakistani regimes towards the Bengalis. Regional economic exploitation and denial of political rights were also at the core of the political anger among the Bengalis against West Pakistani rule. In the general election of 1970, the Awami League, the regional party of the Bengalis demanding autonomy for East Pakistan, won an overwhelming majority in the National Assembly but was denied the transfer of power by the military rulers in the West. The thread of Islam, the last remaining thing to hold the two parts of Pakistan together, was severed at midnight on 25 March 1971, when the Pakistani military cracked down in Dhaka, killing several thousands of Bengali civilians by dawn. In the nine months of liberation war that followed, an estimated three million Bengalis were killed and more than 15 million ended up in refugee camps in neighbouring Indian states, particularly West Bengal. In December 1971, the Pakistani army surrendered in Dhaka and the political map of South Asia was redrawn by the creation of a new nationstate called Bangladesh.

Irrefutably, the emergence of Bangladesh was a denial of religious nationalism inherent to Pakistani nationhood which was further grounded in economic exploitation and political dominance. It was largely reflected in the first constitution of Bangladesh which was founded on secularism, socialism, democracy, and Bengali nationalism. Although religion was separated from the state and nationalism, the Bengali majority in Bangladesh did not cease to be Muslims. Bengali nationalism in Bangladesh was largely defined by the language which put a glorious claim on the language movement of 1952. Yet this appeared to be problematic for many of the Bangladeshis who struggled to distinguish themselves from the Bengalis in West Bengal of India.

In the early years of independence, the economy was shattered by the war, and a new political hegemony, which eventually turned out to be a one-party rule in 1974, had created a context of anomie that engulfed the newly born nationstate. In 1975, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was killed in a military coup. A murder which remains as the most tragic political killing in the postcolonial subcontinent caused little mass protest back then. The military governments that replaced his party, despite a series of coups and counter-coups in the late 1970s and early 1980s, could remain in power until 1990. Like most other military regimes in post-

independence South Asia, they brought out religion from the closet once again, in this instance Islam, to the political foreground. Islamic symbols were re-installed in the constitution, and finally, Islam was declared the state religion in 1986. 'Bengali' nationalism was redefined as 'Bangladeshi' nationalism to draw a distinction from the Bengalis in West Bengal and therefore, religion was partly restored as the defining element of national identity, although this is disputed among the major political camps until now.

In 1990, a mass movement against military rule brought about the end of the despotic regime. By then, Bangladesh as a nationstate already had a major split in the nationalist imagination. The reincarnation of Islam in nationalist identity shaped two conflicting discourses of identity upheld by two major nationalist parties who have been swapping state power in every election held since 1990. For the mass of people this remained as the central dialectic of a national identity. Being a Bengali and a Muslim at the same time was not easy. Islam in historical Bengal has always been a part of people's identity and political struggle against the rigid mosaic of the caste system prevalent in Hindu social structure. It emerged fairly well outside the political perimeter of the state and found providence in the syncretistic tradition of the vernacular society. Islam as a religious doctrine and as an element of religiosity of the commons is not the same. The Bengali word for religion, *Dharma* or its Persian borrowing *Deen*, has multiple meanings in their language and bears multiple connotations in their psyche. It simultaneously stands for duty, nature or properties of an object or person, principles, and consequence of one's deeds (Bhadra 1994, p3). Vernacular Islam in Bengal historically has a Sufist inclination which allowed a distinct deconstruction of the doctrine itself. It situated in Bengal as bricolage where the masses localised it in the course of their historical struggle against the caste system and lately, against the colonial state. Islam in Bengal should be understood in this historical and cultural premise.

So, the central dialectics of the Bengali Muslim identity is a dilemma of vernacular culture with reminiscences of pre-Islamic traditions and a bricolage of the Islamist doctrine where each historically conditions the perception of other. The caste system has, on the other hand, influenced the social structure of the Bengali Muslims who are divided into *Ashraf* and *Atraf* Muslims, a caste hierarchy deriving from the prejudices of the elites among the Muslim population. Vernacular tradition has localised the Islamic doctrine which used Islam as a political identity of the subaltern population who historically escaped the repressions of the caste hierarchy by embracing its egalitarian ideologies. It is of limited use to explain Islam in

Bengal without its multifaceted linkages to subaltern politics of resistance to and resilience against hegemonic forms of political power. However, during the Pakistan era and disputably in the Bangladesh era, the political dimension of the religion was altered. Islam was enshrined in the state and nationalist politics not in the syncretistic form but as an orthodox doctrine. For the elite ruling class in West Pakistan, Islam in Bengal or Bengali Muslims as Muslims were not Islam or Muslims per se. As a result, the idea of a Muslim Pakistan, where the Bengali Muslims dreamed for their inclusion in the state's arrangement of power, It excluded them from its propagation with the logic that they are not Muslim enough to be in a decisive role for the new state of Indian Muslims.

However, nationalist imagination in Bangladesh, both secular and religious, is thus predominantly haunted by the binary of Bengalihood and Islam. It portrays historical Bengal as a homogenous whole, in terms of language, history and culture. The crisis of national identity, which still haunts the nationalist politics in Bangladesh and its chauvinism, has overshadowed the presence of other non-Bengali and non-Muslim ethnic identities living in the territory. The nationalist history of Bengal barely pays any serious attention to the ethnic minorities. They are marginalised and even sometimes demonised in the historical discourse of Bengali nationalism. Nullifying the 'other' culture has been the most compelling trend in the historiography which also had far-reaching political implications. The negligence is reflected in the systematic alienation of these minorities from land, linguistic and cultural exclusion from the mainstream education and their reproduction as other cultures founded upon a 'postcolonial orientalism' (Ahmed 2006). Bengali nationalism is inherently exclusionary since it is historically founded on the Bengali language, and of late, on religion. Both constituents are politically contested in the contemporary domain of majoritarian democracy practised in Bangladesh which undermines the minority question in nationalist politics. Both of them are exclusionary and indifferent in relation to the diverse cultural minorities living in Bangladesh (Blei 2005). Like the other parts of the subcontinent, ethnic identities beyond the dominant national identity formed a marginalised political entity and thus were treated as 'secondary' citizens of the state.

### **Imagination: The State as the Name Giver**

In late January 2010, I had just returned to the CHT after three long years. By the second week of February I fell sick at Mahalu. Evening fevers for two consecutive days reminded me

the fact that I was living in a place known for its incredible variety of malaria. Terrified with the stories of malaria deaths in the area, I travelled to Bandarban town for a diagnosis. While recovering from the illness at my favourite hotel in this southern CHT town, the news –first in the form of a rumour, then as a leaked confidential government document, and finally as a newspaper report, seeped into the indigenous polity here. For many of my Jumma friends, who took great care of me throughout the illness, the news was of a grave concern. It originated from a confidential government circular signed by the assistant secretary at the Ministry of the CHT Affairs to the district commissioners in the CHT which advised them to refer all the indigenous groups in Bangladesh as *Upazati* (tribe) and to avoid the notion of *Adibashi* (indigenous) which, as the ministry anxiously observed, many of the intellectuals, academics and journalists were using for the same. It reminded the government officials that ‘*Upazati*’ is the only official title for the ethnic minorities living in the Bangladesh territory in reference to the Bangladesh Constitution, the *Hill District Council Ordinance*, the *CHT Regional Council Ordinance* and the *CHT Accord* of 1997, and therefore, they should not use any other name in their documentary functions. The leaked circular propelled sheer disappointment among many of my Jumma friends here. Since the *Peace Accord* of 1997, Jumma was no longer an appealing political identity for many of the educated indigenous youth. Rather, recognition as *adibashi* became the political goal for the social movements among the educated class in the post-treaty CHT. For a few years, their political struggle for self-determination within the Bangladeshi statehood had become centred on their demand for constitutional recognition of their identity as *adibashi* or indigenous which is perhaps the most important shift in the identity struggle of the CHT people against the nationstate of Bangladesh.

However, the official order also enraged indigenous leaders, human rights organisations and a concerned group of the civil society in Dhaka. Many of them condemned the move and urged the government to formally designate the indigenous population in Bangladesh as *Adibashi* (Chakma, 2010; Roy 2010). This was not at all a new attempt to consolidate their identity in a blanket term of *Upazati*. In the year 2006, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also issued the same advice to the Ministry of the CHT Affairs (Roy 2009). What was interesting is that the government itself in many instances, like the message of the President and Prime Minister on International Indigenous Day Souvenirs, stated the word ‘*adibashi*’. But clearly now there was an evident need to consolidate the identity of the non-Bengali people in Bangladesh into ‘*Upazati*’, and ‘*adibashi*’ was not a comfortable option for the government in

the CHT. In Bengali language, 'adibashi' means the earliest dwellers of a given place which would destabilise both the formal and covert land policies of the government. It would also destabilise the government's role in the politics of settlement in the CHT by recognising indigenous groups as the earliest inhabitants of the territory, which according to the governmental stance, to some extent would nullify the state's historical and political claim on the territory.

However, it had been just three weeks since I began my fieldwork in the CHT in order to write a dissertation on the identity and developmental politics here when frightening things started to happen. Since January 2010, the CHT was featuring national dailies for differing reasons which portrayed a curious scenario of the state of the CHT at that time. Throughout the month, the print media in Bangladesh, who are reputed for their liberal stance, published reports and editorials on various CHT issues. The concerns were about the 'Adibashis' in the national education policies, the Prime Minister's promise to implement the peace accord signed in 1997, her video conference with the mass gathering at Rangamati, the civil society's advocacy on mutual cooperation between Bengalis and 'Adibashis' in the CHT, or the central bank governor's promise to provide the 'Under-developed Tribes' with social lending services. On the flip side, there were continuous reports on land-grabbing by the Bengalis which was fuelled by their political connections with the major political parties. There were also reports on indigenous protests against tourism and eco-park projects, against increasing brick fields in southern CHT that were massively exploiting the trees of the forest, or against social forestry, and so on.

Around the same time, the dailies in Dhaka and local newspapers in the CHT were also publishing investigative reports on the growing tension between the Bengali settlers and indigenous people in different places of the Rangamati district. There were also a few incidents of gun fights between JSS and UPDF, two factions of the former indigenous resistance that were divided - against and in favour of the peace accord. On 27 January, an official delegation convoy carrying Santu Larma, the chairman of the CHT Regional Council who also heads a faction of the JSS, and Chakma Circle Chief Raja Devashish Roy, was ambushed three times between Rangamati and Khagrachari. The incident was considered part of the routine clash between two factions which was causing most of the death toll since the peace accord.

On 1 February, a series of clashes between Bengalis and indigenous people was going on at Baghaichari of the Rangamati district following an attack and torching earlier in the week of a few indigenous houses, allegedly by Bengalis. Both the incidents were strongly condemned by the human rights watch groups in Dhaka and the concerned groups of the civil society while the government's most significant move on the CHT was issuing an official order from Dhaka, stating that the indigenous people of the CHT should be called 'not Adibashi but Upazati'. The security arrangements and policies within the CHT had changed. I was denied approval both to return to Mahalu and to stay in any other indigenous neighbourhoods in remote places.

However, fearing more attacks by the Bengali settlers, many of the indigenous people, as they do almost everywhere in the CHT whenever there is tension between Bengalis and Adibashis, took shelter in the forest and stopped going to the market to sell or purchase goods. Uncertain reports of attacks on the hill people and vandalism were coming across the region and some media were reporting these as clashes between two communities. Ten people were confirmed as seriously wounded in a clash in Khagrachari town (PCJSS 2010). Finally, on 20 February, terror broke out on a large scale at Baghaihat. There are some historical antecedents of events at Baghaihat. When the nation in Bangladesh was offering tributes to the martyrs of the 1952 language movement which is the political origin of Bengali nationalism, indigenous settlements at Baghaihat were burned to ashes. National dailies were assuming that four to seven people had been killed already. The administration restricted journalists and human rights activists from entering the area. Bodies of murdered Adibashis were discovered even after two days of the clash. 'Whose Ekushey?'<sup>4</sup> wrote an enraged and frustrated Naeem Mohaimen, a blogger and human rights activist:

Perhaps there was some extra caution on this day. It's Ekushey. There are four names to remember, and a red letter year. Salam, Barkat, Rafiq, Jabbar. 1952. How inconvenient to have to add Buddhabati, Laxmi, Liton, Bana Shanti and Nutunjoy Chakma, 2010. Bengalis killing non-Bengalis. On Ekushey February. It won't match with that beautiful national narrative. There's sponsorship money at stake, get your priorities right (Mohaimen 2010).

One of my best friends at Bandarban was then preparing a seminar paper on the importance of primary education for the indigenous children in the native language. The

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<sup>4</sup> Ekushey means twenty one in Bengali. The term usually refers to the language movement of 1952, the political origin of Bengali nationalism which occurred on 21 February, 1952.

paper was supposed to be presented at a seminar due on 22 February. The seminar was organised by the then Tribal Cultural Institute (TCI), a government organisation for the preservation of ethnic cultures of the CHT. The occasion was to observe the National Mourning Day, 21 February, which had also been recognized as the International Mother Tongue day by the UNESCO in the year 2005. When the draft of the paper was submitted, he was advised by the concerned officials at the Institute to replace ‘Adibashi’ with ‘Upazati’. My Khumi friend, who was the first Khumi in Bangladesh to become a university graduate, had no choice. He was compelled to refer to his people, including other distinct ethnic identity groups living in the CHT, as ‘Upazati’ –a term he and his people find derogatory. He did not forget to mention this while presenting his paper before the audience that included most of the local political establishment. He was scrutinised by the authorities on that occasion and this had far-reaching consequences. In 2012, on my last visit to Bandarban, I witnessed his being harassed in every possible way by different authorities for his explicit solidarity with the demand of recognition as ‘adibashi’. He was ‘blacklisted’, as a high security official told me during one of the inquiries about my friendship with the young Khumi man, for his arrogance towards the authorities, which allegedly, is evident even in his Facebook ID that starts with the word ‘indigenous’.

In the third month of my fieldwork, the Bangladesh Parliament endorsed a new bill on the restoration of the indigenous culture that was called the Ethnic Minority Cultural Institute Bill. It was the most liberal stance that the ruling party could take by subtly offering a way out from the self-contradictions in their political imagination of the indigenous non-Bengali societies living in Bangladesh. In the following week, the Tribal Cultural Centre in both Rangamati and Bandarban, where I was a regular visitor in their respective libraries, changed their signboards. The signboards now read ‘Khudra Nri-goshthir Shangshkritik Protishthan<sup>5</sup>’ in Bengali. The classical Bengali words in the signboards had little appeal to the public, even for the Bengalis, let alone the indigenous population. I asked the Bengali shopkeepers around the TCI at Bandarban whether it made any sense to them. As I was expecting, they responded negatively. The ‘Nri’ in Bengali was an antiquated term that was resurrected from the Sanskrit, particularly to name the science of anthropology during the so-called Bengal Renaissance.

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Cultural Institute of Small Ethnic Communities’

All these together depict the nomothetic role of the state in the CHT that struggles in one of its most classical functions –ordering identities of the subject population for order-making purposes. The ethnic chauvinism inherent to Bengali or Bangladeshi nationalism has never allowed any room for a distinguished ethnic identity where minorities could be recognised by their own name. From the constitution to other legislative documents, all the ethnic minorities have been bundled in singular blanket terms against the majoritarian claim of Bengali identity. Even in public forms of knowledge like the school texts, where individual groups merited some mentions, their names and traditions have been seriously misrepresented. Yet, assigning one single name for all the non-Bengali indigenous communities living in Bangladesh remains as the most significant reflection of the nationalistic imagination of other cultures that comply with the administrative needs of the state. Who gives a name to whom is a question of power. This practice of power is one of the oldest forms of a relationship based on command and obedience. The practice is, according to some thinkers like Umberto Eco (1995), as old as the human history itself. In theological traditions like the Semitic religions, the relationship of command and obedience begins with the naming. One who gives the name, also gives the laws –one becomes the ‘nomothete’ or law-giver by beginning with giving a name. The state is the most powerful nomothete that gives the name and law to the people whom it finds insufficiently conscripted in its nationalist imagery.

What all these facts indicate is a grave perplexity and inconsistency of the Bangladeshi state’s imagination of the people who do not aptly fit the nationalist schemata. The government-speak binary of ‘adibashi’ vs ‘upazati’, or in their English version, ‘tribe’ vs ‘indigenous’, requires an extensive investigation to understand the real nature of this dilemma with which I was confronted in the early months of my fieldwork. In beginning with the etymological legacy of the notion of ‘tribe’ in the governmental language since the colonial era, one would easily notice that what is tribe is largely defined in relation to what is not a tribe. The popular imagination of the English word ‘tribe’ has a distinct governmental connotation in the sub-continental context. The postcolonial ethnicity discourses in South Asia largely inherited this colonial notion to indicate the societies living in absence of civilisation or lacking a substantial state intervention like taxation or electioneering.

### **Tribe vs Indigenous: What’s in a Name?**

The term tribe was first brought into official use soon after the independence and partition of

British India in 1947. The new Indian constitution formalised the notion of tribe by enlisting 744 tribes across 22 states through the constitutional order of 1950 that explicitly named them ‘Scheduled Tribes’. The governmental adoption of the word tribe was the legacy from the various legislative documents emerging in the context of the decolonisation of India. The governance of late colonial India was based on some legislative documents like the *Indian Council Act of 1909*, known as the *Morley-Minto Reforms Report*, the *Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms Report* that formed the basis of the *Government of India Act 1919*, and the *Simon Commission Report* of 1927. These constitutional reforms set the context for the *Government of India Act 1935* that promised the Indian states a greater autonomy and, more importantly, to set up a national federal structure. Legislative reforms in the final decades of British rule were preoccupied with the nationalist upsurge that was eventually divided into the religious identities of Hindu and Muslim. Yet the employment of the term in those documents was not as certain and rigid as it is now in the case of the neonationalist governments. These documents mentioned the tribe along with other phrases like the ‘depressed class’, ‘lower castes’ or ‘races’.

Much anthropological information was needed for the British power in India to enforce its rule on an incredibly diverse cultural landscape of South Asia. The Great Revolt of 1857, which had cost numerous lives of the British colonisers and their families, was a historical lesson about the governmental significance of anthropological knowledge for the British Raj in India. The revolt, along with other causes, was instigated also by an anthropological ignorance prevalent within the colonial power. The British military command in general failed to understand the cultural sensitivities of the Hindu and Muslim soldiers serving in the colonial army. The revolt is known to have been triggered by the soldiers’ refusal to use ammunition containing animal fat because they had to bite the ammunition before putting it in their guns. After such a bloodied cost for some anthropological ignorance on the colonial power’s part, the British Raj conducted a tremendous volume of anthropological research in the latter half of the colonial rule.

So, it is not difficult to trace the origin of the word ‘tribe’ both in colonial administrative documents and anthropological writings. In those texts, the naming of the societies outside the Hindu and Muslim societies is also profoundly linked to the transformation of governmentality during the end of the colonial era. The British government’s use of the word ‘tribe’ derived intelligibly from its reference to the societies living in the absence of

civilisation within its colonial empire. Most of the earliest documents were written in English. The word 'tribe' was reproduced by postcolonial ethnicity discourses to refer to the societies that classical anthropological accounts used widely to refer to the people without god, law and king. The concept cannot be understood apart from the rational idea of social evolution in anthropology in the colonial era.

Modern anthropological knowledge of India was largely invoked by the employees of the East India Company who rigorously wrote reports on population, economy, agriculture, land and environment, tradition, rituals and history. The whole body of knowledge was institutionalised first through census, surveys and gazetteers and then by scholars of both Western and native origins. Although the primary purpose of such research was administrative, it was also highly influenced by the rational scholarship on human societies that Europe was preoccupied with (Van Schendel and Ball 1998). Social evolutionism, as Clastres (1974) said, is the oldest accomplice of ethnocentrism; this can be equally said about the state powers that sought to reproduce the non-state population in its frontiers. The deconstruction of the marginal population, whose economy and society the precolonial forms of feudal state-making could not appropriate properly, was shaped by colonial governmentality and its rational scholarship committed to Darwinian evolutionism and its running mate, orientalism. The assumption that the people of the world can be categorised according to their stages of 'civilisation' played the central belief in sorting the colonial subjects of India into 'Aryan' and 'Non-Aryan' races. The binary proposition of nation and tribe originates from this primary division and its incredibly complex internal segregations. By the end of the eighteenth century, the pre-British civilisations in India and their conscripted population were gathered along the two major religious identities of Hindu and Muslim whereas people outside these civilisational entities, mostly the 'non-Aryan' races, required formal recognition to be conscripted into the new colonial civilising project which was, in other terms, the historical force of modernisation in South Asia. The development of anthropological knowledge in the subcontinent and its reflection in political discourse should be understood on this historical premise.

The word 'tribe' is a problematic concept in the subcontinental context. Many scholars have criticised the word as inappropriate and derogatory to the self-esteem of the people to whom it refers. For the mass of people, the word 'tribe' inevitably means savages, primitive, raw, simple, underdeveloped, barbarians, or other such terms which barely reflect the

political, cultural and economic characteristics of the societies to which they refer. Many of the historians also argued that 'tribe' is more a colonial construction and its governmental use is different from its use in the anthropological texts. The word 'tribe' is a word of much wider political implications than any of the etymological tenets might suggest. The word found its providence as a governmental notion within the linguistic dilemma of colonial governance that Bernard Cohn (1996) called a friction of 'the command of language and the language of command' (1996, p16). This is one of those words that the nationalist governmentality in South Asia inherited from its English-speaking colonial predecessors.

Like every project of state-making, British India also developed its governmentality based on audits of both population and natural resources. Auditing is a historical accomplice of every project of state-making. Various forms of census and surveys including a considerable number of anthropological accounts were carried out in British India. The term 'tribe' was appropriated through such auditing of the population by the British colonial administration that pioneered the modern state-making in Indian history. The auditing had to confront the caste-based social stratification of India which orientalist historiography nullified as being a static, irrational and antiquated form of social organisation and therefore sought to justify a rational categorisation compatible with the administrative purposes. In this historical milieu, governmental employment of the term 'tribe' acquired much more significance than its actual etymological origin. It had the attributed orientalism that the Western colonialism had infused into the notion. In addition to that, the term was deconstructed in a way that restored the caste structure of the Hindu societies, which was largely imitated by the elite Indian Muslims and also assigned the term 'tribe' for the large numbers of marginal identities beyond these two dominant religion-based social organisations. The colonial reproduction of ethnic identities reproduced the prevalent social identities under two major religions and therefore bundled the other into 'tribe' and thus placed the communities in an identity struggle –a contest between these two societies constructed upon two great religious traditions.

However, the proposition that the caste-based society in India 'was static, irrational and antiquated' is fairly contested by historical facts. Like the Vaisnava movement in the sixteenth century, Bengal clearly demonstrates a social reform that profoundly challenged the idea that Indian societies were coherently antiquated. In fact, acknowledgements and restoration of the caste system in India by the colonial power was a boost for the caste-based

societies in India which faced challenges by the revitalisation movement like the Vaisnavites (Bose 1949).

It should be noted that although until 1947, the indigenous communities in Bangladesh shared a common legislative history of identity-making by the state of the indigenous people in present-day India, they have a distinct history of identity politics after the independence and partition of British India. Unlike the Indian Federation, the communities here did not have the constitutional recognition as a 'scheduled tribe'. In the Pakistan era, the indigenous in the CHT had the legislative entitlement in terms of territory as the government restored the 'excluded area' status of the CHT ascribed in the CHT Manual of 1900 and was directly ruled by the federal government in West Pakistan. However, indigenous communities living in plain land Bangladesh had no constitutional recognition. In fact, they were invisible entities in the demographic representation of the country's populace. After the independence of Bangladesh, the special legislative status of the CHT was also voided.

In the post-independence Bangladesh, the English word 'tribe' was enthusiastically replaced by a Bengali word 'Upajati' in governmental discourse due to a nationalist commitment to the Bengali language owing to its glorious historical claims to the language movement of 1952. 'Upa' - is a common prefix that has diverse meanings in Bengali. It can be associated with something minor, backward, secondary, subsidiary, nearness, deviation and so on. Its closest equivalent in English is 'sub'. 'Zati' might refer to a group of people of the same genre, caste, lineage, and category. In post-independence Bangladesh there were substantial attempts to translate the administrative and bureaucratic language that was still mostly English. There is a curious gap between the English etymology of the word 'tribe' and its historical adoption by the state governments both in India and Bangladesh.

What is tribe? What would be the Bengali synonym for it? In contemporary public discourse *Upazati* is the most commonly used term to refer to the non-Bengali indigenous people of Bangladesh. The term has been invented as the binary opposite of the nation. It supposes the Bengalis to be a 'Zati' and their political and cultural others as Upa-zati. The term is often equated with its English synonym, tribe. Although both of them refer to the barbarians, primitives and backward societies derogatorily, the English equivalent does not involve the nation as a binary opposite. As the stem, 'zat' also connotes the idea of caste in the Bengali language. The word 'upazati' has very curious meanings in classical texts of Bengali literature. As the *Bangiya Sabdakosh* of Haricharan Bandyopadhyaya, the most

reliable dictionary of the Bengali language suggests, the word can even be explained as what Agamben called 'homo sacer' in his account of sovereign power and 'bare life' (1995). Sridharmamongol of Manik Ganguli, one of the religious texts of the nineteenth century, shows the use of the word as "kemone bodhibo noy upazat" ('how shall I kill one who is not a upazat') which eventually means that one who is a 'upazat' can be killed within the moral sphere of religion (Bandyopadhyaya 1966, p421). 'Upazat' in its most common meaning stands for wretched castes or untouchables.

However, the reference to the non-Bengali indigenous societies and cultures in the Bengali language is inconsistent and vague in many respects. The 1950 *Land Ownership Act*, which voided the feudal land ownership set by the permanent settlement of 1793, referred to the non-Aryan population of the flat plain India as 'aboriginal caste and tribes'. The Act was restored by section 47 of the Bangladesh constitution which means that the ethnic minorities in Bangladesh could be referred to as 'indigenous', 'aboriginal' and 'tribe'. The Small Ethnic Community Bill of 2010 also used the term 'indigenous' while defining the 'ethnic community'. The same term was coined in the *Fiscal Law of 1995, Poverty Reduction Strategic Paper (PRSP)* of 2005 and 2009, and also in the eminent *CHT Regulation Act 1900*. The last document mentioned the CHT people both as 'indigenous hillmen' and 'indigenous tribe' whereas in the *District Council Act 1989* and *Regional Council Act 1998* they were referred to as 'Upazati'. In their International Indigenous People Day message, all the heads of the state referred to them as Adibashi in several instances.

The other key term now politically contesting the state's notion of Upazati, 'indigenous', is a global term that came into use in the 1990s, particularly since the UN's observance of the year 1993 as the International Year of the World's Indigenous Peoples. The term is significantly distinguished from the prevalent jargon used to refer to pre-modern social formations both in the colonial and post-colonial world. Its global expanse contains the common experiences of various forms of political struggles undergone by the small groups on the margins of the modern nationstates. Although the terms epistemologically refers to the same groups of people previously ascribed as tribe or aborigines, it essentially connotes the groups' historical right to their territory as the earliest inhabitants of the land. That is why indigenous has been the iconic name for marginal identities in their struggle for land and their political entity in negotiating with the state and its nationalist claim on their territory. Besides acknowledging fundamental rights to a territory for specific people in specific nationstate,

indigenous is now more a cosmopolitan banner representing the political, cultural and social struggle by the people who seek to strengthen themselves through global alliances.

The problem with the term is also its historical claims on the territory. In the absence of reliable historical records, historical rights over habitats become much concerns of political contestations. One may ask how deep shall we dig and how far the information of settlement is going to resolve the political disputes surrounding the historical claims on land. Is it possible to map the entire history of settlement in a given place, say for instance, the CHT, where numerous identity groups have settled, escaped and fought battles over a period of thousand years? Indigenous is more about the political struggle of the marginal communities against the state rather than a mere historical claim like being the first ever inhabitants of a given territory. Yet, it might become also hegemonic, as in Malaysia where ‘Bhumiputra’ serves as the dominant political identity of the Malay nationhood, and therefore, immigrants and other marginal groups are discriminated against.

Adibashi is increasingly standing as the Bengali equivalent of the term indigenous. The English notion of indigenous does not recognise the possibilities of its people residing in any place other than the one in which they now reside. The notion of adibashi in Bengali emphasises the ‘foremost’ inhabitants of a territory. The term is increasingly appearing in the English texts of different genres in the subcontinent. Anthropologist David Hardiman first noted the term during his fieldwork in the Nagpur of India when he suggested that it was emerging in the 1930s (Hardiman 1987). ‘Adi’ in Sanskrit means ‘earliest’ and ‘bashi’ means inhabitants. ‘Adi’ can be related to ‘onadi’ which means antiquity and ‘bashi’ can be also related to ‘abash’, which means habitat. The English transliteration of the word in India is ‘Adivasi’ whereas in Bangladesh it is more commonly ‘adibashi’. The political contestation of the term is also significantly different in India and Bangladesh. Many historical accounts suggest that many of the Adibashis has migrated to their present-day location under certain historical conditions like natural calamities, state expansion, wars, inter-group conflicts and so on. These, to some extent, nullify the semantic construction of ‘indigenous’ and ‘adibashi’. Yet, most contemporary scholars prefer the term to recognise their historical struggle and resistance against the state. As a result, adibashi is more a political identity than a cultural or historical form of identity.

There are some other loosely oriented terms in use to refer to the non-Bengali native societies in Bangladesh. Some people use ‘shomprodai’ but this is often difficult to

distinguish from ‘shamprodayikota’ or communalism in Bengali political rhetoric where it is more exclusively used in the discourse about the Hindu-Muslim relationship in the subcontinent. In Bangladesh, there is another ecologically determined ascription to particularly native societies in the CHT called ‘Pahari’ or ‘hill dwellers’. The term is relatively less derogatory and in many cases, unobjectionably assumed by the communities themselves. Despite its widespread use both among the indigenous groups and Bengalis in general, the term was ignored by the political forces as it separates the CHT groups from the other indigenous people in Bangladesh. During the peak years of indigenous resistance against state hegemony, the term Jumma was invented by the political movement to create a political unity based on their subsistence tradition. The term originates from both ecological and ethnic meanings indicating the distinctive cultivation practices in mountains, different from river valley agriculture. The term was politically reinvented in the ethnic movement since the 1970s, particularly by JSS. The term also contained potential for a distinct sub-state nationalism in the CHT. However, since the peace accord of 1997, the term was largely abandoned by many of its users themselves with their growing strategic interest in aligning with the global alliance of indigenous people to confront the state hegemony.

Who gives names to whom is a question of power. The terms discussed above are used discriminately in public discourse, political rhetoric and in formal documents. There are also unexamined gaps of translation which become problematic to the semiotics of the words. Their semantic constructions are often inflected by their other synonyms, circumstantial applications, and rhetorical reproduction and even by the transformation of governmentality. Also, most of the translations do not have absolute consensus. The use of the terms ‘tribe’ and ‘indigenous’ was a phenomenal case of translation dilemma emerging from the translation of governmental languages to give them a post-colonial nationalist guise.

### **Imagination in Action: Nationalist Spiral of the ‘Tribal’**

The TCIs in the CHT religiously follow a Bangladeshi bureaucratic standard. Officials and personnel typically enjoy unmonitored work hours with a very limited workload. It is easily possible to maintain a second or more business engagement during the same hours, if it is somewhere close-by. I became quite well-acquainted with long waiting times and repeated visits to meet officials who could authorise me to use the library. Often it was challenging to gain permission to copy materials or to to ascertain the presence of library staff to do that. In

one of those corridor waiting-times, I could hear a loud voice in Bengali, possibly over the phone:

“No, sorry, I can’t give you Kheyang Dance party tonight, all my people are engaged. Most of them are visiting Cox’s Bazar for Grameen Phone Adibashi Mela. I can only organise a Murong Party if you insist.”

The voice was from downstairs and I could not resist an inquiry. He was a young, well-dressed Bengali man, quite apologetic to the person on the other end for his inability to organise a Kheyang dance party.

“Brother, I should remind you that I told you last week that this month will be very busy. Lots of programs have been scheduled. I can’t organise any Bamboo Dance, Kheyang, Khumi or Bawm dance. I have only few Marma and Tripura boys and girls available.”

This conversation can be regarded as evidence of the everyday resonances of governmental or political naming, as the nationalist way to look at its cultural other. It is hard for someone without adequate background knowledge to understand whether the names uttered in these pieces of conversation are people or goods. For the TCIs in the CHT, ‘culture’ is something that they ‘preserve’ and ‘exhibit’. These benevolences of the state or governments in the forms of ‘preservation’ and ‘exhibition’ manifestly declare these cultures as ‘dead’ or antiquated. Museums and archives, which constitute every TCI’s major establishment, are the places where this thing called ‘tribal’ culture could be found. Since the 1990s, the sites of their habitat have been represented as nostalgic and romantic sites to experience nature in its virgin form. The emerging corporate power in Bangladesh is also taking advantage of nationalist misrepresentations. In pace with the emergence of open market consumerism, ‘tribal’ culture and its nationalist imagination are being used to stimulate consumer desire in the mass media, even sometimes, as objects of it.

The naming discourse serves as a Lacanian psycho-analytical model of identity construction where entities, be it the individual or the whole, construct the self in opposition with and by deconstructing its ‘other’. Yet, the name-giving or identity-making has pragmatic influences on the life and livelihood of the people named. The imaginations of people as a bunch of societies who missed the train of civilisational development, or as a cultural backwater, or in the worst cases –primitives or savages, is the dominant public view that supports the political subjugation of those people by the nationstate. They also create the

consensus view on the development of those communities and therefore the colonial imaginations linger in postcolonial situations. This allows the state to enclose those people and peripheries in the name of development or civilisation or modernity.

Most notoriously, the discourses also legitimise the infringement of their land rights and the reproduction of their places as sites of military might and nationalist romance. An increasing amount of land in the CHT is being given to outsiders, both companies and individuals, by both legal and illicit means. Government placement and transfers in the CHT are compensated with a risk incentive that evidently shows the state's appropriation of the territory as a risk zone. The CHT is also, for many branches of civil administration, including the police and Ansars, a punishment posting. The swap of power between two major nationalist parties is inevitably followed by an administrative and bureaucratic reshuffle. The CHT is mostly burdened with unsatisfied employees who have been penalised by this transfer due to corruption, misconduct, or claimed links with the opposition parties. My own experience with the government security services, once while accompanying a western academic in his work in a remote Bandarban town named Ruma, serves as an example. We were constantly watched by a team consisting of agents from three government secret services. During a time of socialising with them, I was amused to discover that all of them are from one particular coastal district of Bangladesh whose residents are presumably supporters of the then opposition party. With a hint of humour I tried to check with them and found them to agree strongly that their home district was the obvious cause of their stressful posting here. The conviction came with regret about their being a helpless irritant in our work and mobility in the area. I also remember witnessing angry, powerful elites in Dhaka streets often threatening with a CHT posting the traffic police who caused them dissatisfaction by stopping their cars for signal violation. This depicts the portrayal of the CHT in the elite nationalist imagination that constitutes the essential norm of governance in the CHT.

The discourses helped the nationalist self-imagination to become a monocultural, homogenous, and seamless whole. The cultural minorities were ascribed as Upazati, an entity etymologically destined to be absorbed by a Zati. This also helped to build a consensus for the local and international NGOs' development intervention, offering the same imagery of their living in the absence of civilisation and it shadowed the fact that their interventions contributed to the dispossession, alienation, and economic marginalisation along with temporary economic remedies. The phenomenal case is the USAID loan investment in the

Kaptai Hydroelectric Project. The development interventions, particularly those funded by Christian charities in the West, also became politically counterproductive as the right wing of the nationalist politics used them to associate the indigenous people with so-called anti-Islamic institutions.

Besides their naming, the indigenous people have also been reproduced and then used as voters in national elections which were the principal means by which to embed a nationalist political system in their political life. As a result, a group of nationalist elite emerged among the CHT communities who even run the elections for the party that has an explicit stance for an Islamic nationhood. One of the parts of the imagination was glorifying the marginally ethnic culture, –the commodification of their material and aesthetic culture or performing arts which attracts both Bengali and foreign tourist as patrons. In the subcontinental context, they have been used as foot soldiers of political parties. They have been used to militarily undermine other ethnic minorities. India's recent deployment of Naga and Mizo regiments against the Maoist rebels in central India, the majority of whom are 'Adivasis', remains as an obvious example of this.

Understanding the marginal societies should be premised on a commitment to end their subjugation and exploitation. The authoritative knowledge has to be challenged with new perspectives that not only reveal their cultural properties but also portray the nature of their subjugators. They are represented by a group of mediators whose emergence should be understood in relation to the state and other political frameworks.

The naming discourse constitutes the moral foundation for the state's sovereign right even over people's lives, over their bodies. In the course of this history of state-making, the language of genocide has entered the public vocabulary with routine incidents of bloodshed; 'ethnocide' has been normalised in public discourse. Thousands of desperate people have been pushed to the very brink of existence. Equating the structural violence of the state with the violence of the armed resistance of the indigenous does not help much to understand this reality. In recent years, Bangladesh has been ascribed as a failed state in international developmental rhetoric. Of course, it has most of the limitations typical of the South Asian majoritarian democracies. The state's own legislative mandate is unable to curb its use of violence. No matter how noble the objective is claimed to be, the Bangladeshi state relies on coercion as the means to an end here in the CHT. This sounds extreme but if the objectives did not require coercion then the state would not be required.

## Chapter 4

### Chittagong Hill Tracts: The Location and Dislocations

‘What are you looking at? Ah! water?  
It’s not! It’s tears of you and me  
A sea of agony swallowed a thousand lives  
It’s Tannyabi’s Melancholy  
Whatever was yours, Whatever was mine  
everything lay under the water that shines.’<sup>6</sup>

#### Mapping Displacement

The only passenger boat to Bilaichari, a small shanty town in the remote south of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh, leaves the district town of Rangamati at dawn, six days a week. Whenever I catch that boat on my way to Mahalu, I usually occupy a room on the rooftop of the trawler, locally converted to a double-decked passenger boat. By sunrise, the boat cruises at the centre of a large section of the Kaptai Lake. The breathtaking beauty of the first shiny sunbeams on the tranquil lake water always calls to my mind the lines above from Felajeya Chakma’s poetry; I feel as if the morning breeze whispers its melancholy to me: ‘It’s not! It’s not water.’ Yet, my job in the region had little room for poetic indulgence. Here, I was concerned with purely empirical facts about this lake that were echoed poetically in his poetry. As poetry is an inseparable part of the social facts that a community mediates through various forms of texts they produce, the agony of his verses also prevails at the heart of the reality I was trying to understand through ethnographic empiricism. For every socio-scientific chronicler in the CHT, displacement is a much compelling phenomenon to think about. Yet, very few of their tools have the capacity to reach what Edward Said said, the “unhealable rifts forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true” (2000, p173) vicinity. This chapter is primarily about my experience of employing applied socio-scientific knowledge of human

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<sup>6</sup> Extracts from ‘Kijingot Pug’ Ber-dui’ by Felajeya Chakma, collected in Dewan et al. (eds), 2006. English translation mine.

displacement in a particular ethnographic site. As an ethnographic location, the CHT cannot be described without the tremendous varieties of dislocations that shaped the geo-cultural formation of the region. As a result, forms of ‘dislocation’, in one term or other, has been an inseparable part of every sociological account written on the CHT. The anthropological understanding of the CHT as an ethnographic site, therefore, should begin with the wide range of mobility and enclosures that characterises the location of this research.

From the very beginning of my ethnographic engagement with the CHT, I maintained a keen eye on the diverse forms and patterns of dislocation and settlements here which I tried initially to comprehend through the prism of a much received scholastic notion of ‘displacement’. The multi-sited mode of my ethnographic inquiry allowed me to sojourn among different identity groups in the CHT and to learn their experiences of alienation from what was meant to be their ‘own place’ for each of them. The communities included both indigenous minorities and migrant Bengalis of various identities, whose historical mobility and settlement in the CHT turned the region into a unique crossroad –a crossroad between two great historical cultures, a crossroad between the peripheries of the Indian and Southeast Asian civilisations or, so to say, a distinguished margin of the sovereign and colonial state-makings in these two regions. Yet, present conditions of displacement in the CHT and their essential ruthlessness overwhelmingly shadow such historical propositions. In 2005, when I first began researching the CHT, I was standing inescapable facts, such as, according to government estimates, that the CHT then had about 90,000 of ‘internally displaced’ families along with another 12,000 ‘refugee’ families repatriated from India after the accord of 1997. Thirty-eight thousand Bengali settler families were also considered internally displaced (Norwegian Refugee Council 2002, p110); more than 50 per cent of the indigenous population were forced to flee massacres, arbitrary detention, torture, and extra-judicial executions (Amnesty International 2000, p12). The Rangamati Hill Tracts, one of the three administrative districts of the region, alone accounted for 35,595 indigenous and 15,516 non-indigenous families identified as ‘Internally Displaced Persons’ or IDPs (Karmakar and Chakma 2009, p18).

The stereotypical categorisation of people as ‘refugees’, ‘IDPs’, ‘migrants’, ‘settlers’, ‘tribal’, ‘indigenous’, ‘Jumma’,<sup>7</sup> or the classificatory definitions of displacements and

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<sup>7</sup> A collective political identity among the indigenous tribes in the CHT, particularly fostered by ethnic movements in the Bangladesh era. See, Van Schendel 1992a.

statistical facts associated with them, appeared quite problematic as I dug further into my fieldwork. Theoretically, I had adopted for my research a broad definition of displacement that primarily seeks to understand human relationship with place and experiences of disjuncture. I tried to contextualise displacement in the great historical mobility and enclosures in the region rather than confining it to specific cases like displacement caused by the Kaptai Dam. As a result, one of the earliest difficulties was to articulate these specific statistical facts in the sites of my research which, in a way, punctuated particular groups of people from the rest of the population, based on some spatially and temporally defined functional categories of displacement. From the very beginning of my fieldwork, I struggled to employ those categories for the people I was coming across. I found the stories of dispossession far too profound, complex, and intense to fit the operational categories prevalent in general sociological discourse on displacement. While all facts and figures punctuate a particular group of people precisely from the greater whole, in those early days, I failed to extricate any particular group as a people displaced from the other because the ‘other’ barely existed in reality. I hardly remember any family in the CHT which had not been dislocated at some point in the near past. Such difficulties provoked an epistemological inference drawn from those deductive notions of displacement since their classificatory definitions were of obvious importance for a comparative understanding of the nature and forces of displacement in the CHT.

Throughout its history, human populations moved from one place to another, either forced by natural or manmade disasters, or of their own will. Humanity today is shaped largely by the sum of its great historical displacements. Such incredibly profound complexity of the phenomenon has always been a challenge for the modern social sciences that engage human mobility as an object of systematic analysis. Their effort to formulate rational scholarship on human mobility resulted in a set of inherently ambivalent analytical categories. ‘Mobility’ itself is an all-embracing term which includes both linear movements from one place to another and circular forms of population movement within a specified geographic expanse. For contemporary social sciences, ‘migration’ and ‘displacement’ have been two rudimentary categories by which, though often interchangeably, they seek to understand and explain the processes of dislocations. Human mobility defined by ‘migration’ refers to the supposed “movement of people across a specified boundary, national or international, to establish a new permanent place of residence” (Guinness 2011, p58). The United Nations (UN) has even specified a standard duration of residence to define this ‘permanency’ (Guinness 2002, p4).

The notion evokes inquiries about the causes and consequences of migration, yet offers little connection to the factors that specify ‘boundaries’ –what lies at the heart of the notion itself. Migration typologies largely depend on distance, duration, and causes of mobility, but barely illuminate the multiple ways in which time, space, and people are constructed by transcending political and economic systems. The most dominant epistemology of migration is embedded in demographic facts and figures where it is perceived in relation to population size. For such propositions, population is a deduction of the number of deaths from the number of births and then again deduced by the numbers of in-or-out migrants. Perceiving migration through quasi-mathematical demographic change makes it difficult to conceptualise and measure human mobility as the socio-cultural and political transformation of people and places rather than a mere demographic event. In spite of that, the term serves as a basic epistemological tenet of explaining a wide range of human mobility like rural depopulation and counter-urbanisation or movements across international boundaries.

Displacement, the other extensive category to refer to certain types of human dislocation, is epistemologically based upon the individual will to move from one place to another. The notion is increasingly substituting for migration typology like ‘forced migration’. It assumes sedentary living as an ideal condition that suggests its subject populations are immobile until and unless uprooted by specific economic, political, and environmental causes. The notion signifies displacement as a state of exception rather than a normative process of social transformation. Definitions for displacement within contemporary social sciences are precise and functional in nature. With an inherent emphasis on ‘willingness’ of the displaced groups, displacement is often discussed in relation to process, event, or conditions like internal or external migration, exile, diaspora, asylum, resettlement, refuge, forced displacement, disaster, development, assimilation, deterritorialisation, and, nowadays more significantly, modernisation or globalisation. Such scholastic discourses on forms of dislocations also assign individuals with displaced forms of cultural or legal identities like migrants, asylum seeker, refugee, settlers, sojourners, native, indigenous, transnational, ethnic minority, expatriates, and IDPs. Since ‘willingness’ of the displaced is the primary ground on which displacement is distinguished from other kinds of human mobility, the agenda of human rights becomes an obvious embodiment of displacement discourse. Articles 13 and 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the UN in particular and other clauses of the same in general, put forth an international conscience on displacement, and their implications are often objects of academic studies and political rhetoric.

In recent decades, a normative framework of knowledge about displacement has emerged from such international developmental and human rights concerns about the impacts of displacement. Despite being firmly embedded in the wider context of human mobility and enclosures as a process, displacement has become a term of specific implication, mainly in relation to legal frameworks, mitigation efforts and human rights advocacy. In the early 1990s, when displacement within national boundaries had become an international agenda for agencies like the UN and other human rights organisations, the notion of the IDP gained prominence as a relatively new category to explain forced dislocations. The definition emerged from the need to identify the population concerned and their particular needs, information management, legal implications, and from, most importantly, formulation of policies to manage and mitigate population relocation (Mooney 2005, p10). The operational definition for internal displacement had two fundamental assumptions; first, the involuntary nature of dislocation, and second, its demarcation of national boundaries recognised by international laws. The nature of dislocation in this respect is also widely seen as a state of 'exception' or 'disorder' which attributes a temporal value to the notion itself. As a form of legal or political identity, recognition like the IDPs assumes a territorially defined national identity without considering the possibilities of coexisting defiant forms of self-esteem among people. The origin of such institutional definition of the IDPs can be well-traced in UN documents, one of which defines IDPs as '[p]ersons or groups who have been forced to flee their homes suddenly or unexpectedly in large numbers, as a result of armed conflict, internal strife, systematic violations of human rights, or natural or man-made disaster, and who are within the territory of their own country' (UNCHR 1992, p17). The entire definition epistemologically correlates a range of circumstances that appears as an exception of a normative order under which people previously could sustain their belonging to a given place. The 'home' connotes the idea of a fixed residence and, therefore, displacement is understood as eviction from that particular place of residence while inherently excluding the economic and cultural relationships a community maintains with the larger environmental settings. It insists on specific causes of displacement rather than suggesting any generic context that engenders conditions of displacement. And more problematically, it takes national territory for granted as a homogeneous whole, and, therefore, ignores unique properties of marginal locations where the state itself maintains a differently configured role. Although consensus on these terms to define certain forms of displacement is loosely

oriented, a pragmatic scholarship is emerging from such institutional frameworks of understanding displacement.

Patterns of displacement in the CHT, however, exhibit many arbitrary characteristics that challenge the universality of such spatio-temporal assumptions and oblige us to look at habitual aspects of displacement historically embedded in a complex political friction between the state and its geopolitical margin. First, the presumption of sedentary living is problematic in a sense that it entangles legitimated private possession of a specified amount of land. While it is an effective instrument to explain disjuncture in permanent mono-grain agricultural societies politically organised around the valley states, it is not necessarily a historical condition of settlement in mountainous frontiers like the CHT. Historically, the indigenous inhabitants of this region practised a shifting mode of food production known as 'slash and burn' or 'swiddening' as defined in agricultural or peasant studies. In CHT, it is commonly called 'Jum' which means both a range of cultivation, foraging, and hunting activities, and the territory where they occur. As a form of agriculture, Jum is radically different from that of river valley agriculture in terms of method and technology of cultivation, land use, and socio-political basis of production. It has historically developed a distinct relationship between land and people based on an ecologically determined material culture. Recent historical scholarship on the region suggests that this particular mode of food production is better understood as a form of livelihood that is independent of state regulation, and was politically chosen by many groups of people who historically fled state-making projects in the valleys (Scott 2009). Such anarchic mode of food production led to an incredibly complex history of circular mobility in the CHT which determined the economic, social, and cultural organisation of Jumma communities living here. The sense of place among Jumma people is more territorial rather than the idea of an enclosed neighbourhood with legitimated private possession of specific amounts of household land. The mountainous forests are an indispensable part of their sense of home where they dwell for considerable part of the year in shifting farming camps. It is an economy composed of semi-nomadic agriculture with occasional hunting and foraging. As a result, their alienation from their own place does not necessarily involve eviction from the place of permanent residency. If they are alienated from the forest they exploit to sustain their own livelihood, a condition that they are experiencing in large scale at present, a Jumma village may have the absolute experience of being displaced while its people still live in the same domicile. Their settlements cannot be accounted for as a permanent house since cultivation practices generate a natural context of

both circular mobility and territorial sedentarism. In this respect, the presumption of permanent residency to understand their displacement becomes too simplistic and eventually foreshadows a great extent of displacement they encounter from within.

Furthermore, a wide range of displacement in the CHT does not necessarily ensue 'suddenly or unexpectedly' or 'in large numbers' at a time. Many cases may appear as an unforeseen disaster for the marginally ethnic communities here, like the Kaptai Dam, political violence, or natural calamities. Yet, 'suddenness' as a distinguishing feature of displacement slips over many forms of systematic displacement that the territorial enclosure by the Bangladeshi state engenders. The Jumma communities and a considerable number of Bengalis relocated here live under a constant threat of displacement; many of them with several experiences of being displaced in their lifetime already. Displacement has been a fairly routine part of their marginal existence for decades. In this regard, 'unexpected' or 'sudden', as a defining principle of displacement, appears problematic in understanding its ingrained nature in the CHT as apparently 'sudden' causes of displacement have been so recurrent that they form a constant basis for alienation of the minority groups from their traditional land. Similarly, the CHT has observed many identified cases of people being displaced in large numbers, yet a greater amount of displacement occurs in ingrained and diffused forms which the idea of 'large numbers' excludes from its propagation. The issue of willingness also requires an analytical reconsideration at least in two respects. First, when people's economic and cultural relationships are disrupted over a long period, dislocations might not reflect their actual will, which is at times completely undermined by political hegemony. Second, applying causal categories like 'push and pull factors', a typology of willingness prevalent in migration studies, trivialises the fact that both types of factors are simultaneously ensued and managed by different political agencies of the state. Willingness is a delicate notion to measure through rationalisation, particularly when it is both constructed and defined by powerful consensus that the state endorses.

Last but not least, displacement as a standardised notion presumes cartographically defined national boundaries and thus, complies with relevant legal frameworks. The national borders that today divide the CHT from the two adjacent northeast Indian states and a Burmese state, were arbitrarily enforced upon its people after the decolonisation of British India. Given the fact that boundaries were drawn with sheer indifference to many of its peoples' historical territoriality, in the CHT, they first created enclaves and then marginalised

eleven distinct identity groups with ‘diasporic’ linkages to what had become ‘foreign countries’ almost overnight. While our common understanding of displacement conforms to the legitimacy of such borders, for many identity groups in the CHT, they are arbitrarily imposed and in many ways, undone by them. For the Pangkhuas, whose experience of displacement I shall mostly refer to in this chapter, the most general typology of migration or displacement, ‘internal’ and ‘international’, is irrelevant since their diasporic identity of ‘Zo’ people confronts the borders as disjuncture rather than territorial consolidation. This, along with further dilemmas of identity politics, determines the nature of the state’s presence and policies in this region which use displacement as an integral part of its enclosure of such cultural margins through coercive border-making practices. The scenario is at odds with any categorical proposition like ‘internal’ or ‘international’ since their traditional land itself had been divided and redefined by political events with no realistic connection to the way they perceived their habitat for centuries. They became migrants in their own territory while their traditional mobility patterns had become subject to a series of legal and political regulations.

So, ‘displacement’ as a putative category may well slip over people’s actual experience of uprootment due to such coherent spatio-temporality of its facts and figures. While we intend to understand it on the grounds of intangible realities like ‘willingness’ and ‘sense of a place’ or as a moralising discourse like ‘human rights’, it is often prove inadequate to reach many essential depths of those very human experiences. Therefore, in this chapter, I explore ‘displacement’ as an essential constituent of the dominant mode of political and economic relations in the CHT. While acknowledging the analytical and pragmatic implications of measuring the ‘facts and figures’ of displacement in a given time and space, I argue for a better achievement of historically informed social, political, and economic relations that persistently reproduce the contexts and political necessities of displacement. My analysis of displacement in the CHT focuses on a few basic political determinants of mobility and enclosures which constantly reproduce such contexts of displacement. In the remaining sections of this chapter, I first recount how displacement in the CHT is a historical legacy of the colonial and postcolonial state formation that turned 12 distinct minority cultures into enclaves in this territorial margin of the Bangladeshi State. Then, I outline how I differ from the implicit assumption that ‘displacement’ is essentially the temporal consequence of a particular political conflict or development project and, therefore, can be effectively mitigated by moral, ethical, or legal responses to particular cases. Instead, what I offer as a complement is a generic political economy of displacement that suggests it is an essential

constituent of the political order the state enforces on its margins to sustain specific political and economic relations and, therefore, any solution to it requires greater political consensus to become sustainable. In this sense, my version of ‘displacement’ as a mode of human dislocation has surpassed the ideas of those operational categories like ‘displaced’, ‘refugees’, ‘IDPs’, ‘migrants’, ‘settlers’, or even ‘indigenous’ for that matter. Here, I am concerned with some intangible realms of dislocation which exist outside the measured facts and figures of displacement, but dispense similar experiences of dispossession. My aim is also to problematise the extraordinary articulation of regulatory and disciplinary practices by the state/s in this politically punctuated territory, and to provide a subsequent analysis of how displacement is a necessary entailment of these practices.

### **State-making in the CHT: From Homeland to Dreamland**

As an ethnographic site, the CHT has very few parallels when we consider its geopolitical location, diversity of tongue and culture and a distinguishing history of political enclosure by state powers. This small hilly terrain occupies 13,184 square kilometres of south-eastern Bangladesh, 10 per cent of its national territory which is administratively divided into the three frontier districts of Bandarban, Rangamati, and Khagrachari. Historically, people of 11 distinct minority cultures inhabited the region along with a more recent history of dominant Bengali settlement which has been literally patronised by the state and nationalist politics for decades. Besides such political reproduction of its demography, ethnic insurgency and counter-insurgency, development projects and industrialisation, massive exploitation of land and forest resources, coercive state control over settlement, and mobility patterns have been essential parts of state-making in this region. Since the late 1970s, the state’s violent domination and territorial enclosure was confronted by indigenous resistance both in non-violent and militant forms. Although an accord was signed between the indigenous resistance and the government in 1997<sup>8</sup>, CHT still remains an exclusive political territory, literally confined by security checkpoints. As a rationalised administrative form, the state’s historical presence at this margin has an exceptional articulation that offers a unique context to rethink displacement as a substantial mode of political order.

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<sup>8</sup> For a full text of the accord, see The CHT Commission 2008, <http://www.chtcommission.org/information-about-the-chittagong-hill-tracts/the-cht-peace-accord/> (Accessed 24 July 2009)

Until 1900, the CHT had a prolonged isolation from the modernisation of society and state in British India. Before the 1860s, the hill tribes had a regional autonomy in this ethnically defined territory which survived the medieval Mughal rule and the first half of British colonial rule (see Ahmed 1996; Barua 2001; Kabir 1998; Mohsin and Ahmed 1996; Van Schendel 2000). The absence of any centralised governance, along with localised forms of political and social organisation, and simple methods of economic production allowed this people to sustain basically self-governing small political entities without a highly formalised political system (Mey 1996 [1980], p18). In 1860, the British government that succeeded the East India Company after the ‘Great Revolt’ of 1857 enforced federal rules here by declaring it an administrative district. By the Act XXII of 1860, the former ‘Carpus Mohol’ became the Chittagong Hill Tracts (Kabir 1998, p13). Two reasons may have been at work behind this administrative reform. First, to impose effective military control over the region since this belt, including the Himalayan basin, was a sort of shadow colony for the British over which they needed to have full control after the ‘Great Revolt’. Second, law and order needed to be enforced to secure the newly introduced plantations like tea, cotton, and rubber including the exploitation of its abundant forest resources (Ahmed 1991, p68). In fact, like most other peripheral societies, the CHT also experienced the very first presence of the modern state in its most coercive form, driven by certain economic dreams and a political paranoia. The Act of 1860 is considered to be the earliest legislative document proclaiming political enclosure of the CHT by a modern state power.

This intervention was followed by further economic, civic, and administrative reforms. But unlike the successive nationalist governments, the British were never really enthusiastic about the merger of indigenous communities with its subject population in the rest of India who had already mounted a momentous nationalist uprising against Britain’s colonial rule. The *CHT Regulation Act of 1900*, commonly known as the *CHT Manual*, restricted internal migration somewhat by setting up the district office as the regulating authority of settlement and, thus, proclaimed to be an administrative manual that ‘... consolidate and localise each tribe round its chief’ (Mey 1984, as quoted in Ahmed 1991, p66). This suggests a policy to safeguard indigenous political formations. Still, the Act entrenched intrinsic colonial policies including: (a) strengthening the common policy of ‘divide and rule’; (b) to hold stable political order and legislation which was necessary to increase revenue from resource extraction and plantation; and (c) to minimise the possibilities of any greater Indian nationalist uprising (Ahmed 1991, p59). The 1900 CHT Act had also divided the territory into

three administrative units under the traditional chiefdoms: the Chakma, Bomang and Mong Circles. The Act partially recognised the traditional authority of hereditary chiefs from majority Chakma and Marma communities, but denied their claim for recognition as a 'semi-independent local state' which would have protected them from the Bengali expansions. However, throughout the colonial era, the state's vision of the territory was more economic than governmental. There are several instances in the Act of 1900 that clearly demonstrates the colonial state's perception of the territory as an economic dreamland and how its political enclosure reproduced many of its people as 'criminal tribes'. It was this Act that formally turned this region, which was the homeland of the Jumma people for centuries, into an economic dreamland for the state.

*The Government of India Act 1935* declared the CHT as a 'totally excluded area' which restricts political interaction of any sort with the rest of India. This Act also brought some dimensional changes in the local power structure. The CHT was now directly ruled by the federal government in Delhi instead of the state government in Kolkata and the circle chiefs achieved some advisory power in policymaking at the cost of reduced local administrative power. In 1947, when the new state boundaries were drawn on the map of British India, the CHT was included in India, and Ferozpur of Punjab was in Pakistan. But to prevent possible Sikh insurgency, Ferozpur was brought back to India, and Pakistan was compensated with the CHT. Soon after Partition, Pakistan, the state for Indian Muslims, initially applied the same perspective of its preceding colonial government. In 1955, the CHT was entitled to a 'special status' which brought it under direct federal rule from Karachi. It was opened up to outsiders after the military regime came into power in 1958. Despite some weak legislative restrictions on settlement, the increasing influx of settlers, mostly from the poorer segment of the dominant Bengali majority of East Pakistan and West Pakistani industrial investments began to undermine the lives of indigenous people (Ahmed 1991, p67). The construction of the Kaptai Dam between 1959 and 1963, funded by the USAID, submerged 40 per cent of total cultivable plains in the region. About 100,000 people, mostly Chakmas, lost everything under water and out of them 60,000 were reported to be deprived of minimum compensation. Around 10,000 fled to India as refugees.

The Bangladesh constitution of 1972 was the first legislative instrument that nullified the special administrative status of the CHT. This, along with the devastation caused by Kaptai Dam and other state repressions had given rise to an armed ethnic resistance led by the

Parbattya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS) and its military wing, 'Shanti Bahini' (literally, the 'Peace Army'). The Bangladesh state's primary response to what it typically calls insurgency was sheer militarisation of the region. According to some estimates, in the 1980s – the peak years of conflict– the region had an armed military or paramilitary combatant for every three unarmed indigenous person. Every act of guerrilla warfare conducted by the Shanti Bahini was retaliated to through massacres of adjacent villages, executions, summary justice, extermination, and genocides. Until 1997, the CHT observed incidents of routine bloodshed which forced around 100,000 indigenous people to flee to the other side of the state borders. Unfortunately, the indigenous population in these Indian and Burmese states were also experiencing almost similar circumstances induced by the relevant state powers. However, in this political climate of 'insurgency' and 'counter-insurgency' since the mid-1970s, successive governments implemented a planned resettlement of poor Bengali populations from other districts to the CHT. This resettlement program remained the primary 'non-military' activity by the state to establish its nationalistic claim on the region. Settler Bengalis, who amounted to only 9 per cent of the total population of the CHT in 1959, shot up to 49 per cent according to the 1991 census. Most of the settlers were poor, landless peasants who volunteered for the settlement program. But now a few among them controlled most trades and politics, whereas the majority of them lived in poor conditions despite comparative advantages from state agencies. The resettlement program has made the settler population an inseparable part of the CHT and its power relations.

However, while the entire scenario was a typical case of state-making in a previously less or ungoverned territory, displacement was mostly regarded as and reported in numbers of victims of isolated incidents. The emphasis on the specific cases of displacement largely suppresses the fact that the conditions of displacement originate from the legal enclosure of the territory, primarily by the Act of 1900 which altered the very nature of land possession in the CHT. The Act brought the entire territory under state ownership by designating them as reserve forest or unclassed state forest, which in effect dispelled the hill peoples' traditional right over their historical pasture. While this served as the principal means to alienate hill people from forest lands both by the colonial and postcolonial states, it was barely taken into account to understand the nature of displacement here. Historically, the customary land rights of the hill people were maintained through informal social consensus rather than written legal documents. Such legal enclosure of their land had changed their livelihoods into criminal acts; since then it has served as one of the most fundamental legal grounds of displacement in

the CHT. Although the regulation protected their access to those forest lands marginally, at the same time, it created scope to vandalise the ecological setting of the territory through industrial and commercial extraction of its natural resources. Since the enclosure enforced by the Act of 1860, the forests in the region had undergone what is known as environmental colonialism, the earliest stage of state enclosure of hitherto ungoverned territory. Over the decades, the indigenous people were denied access to increasing amounts of land. The natural vegetation was replaced by commercially appropriable timber woods and, therefore, indigenous people were barred from cultivating those lands. It also affected their traditional means of extracting forest produce including foraging and hunting practices. The environmental colonialism was followed by development interventions, militarisation, population transplantation, and, most notoriously, a resettlement program of strategic hamleting. While these remained as the principal means by which the Bangladeshi state enclosed the territory where it also claimed to have difficulties in establishing sovereign power, displacement was an obvious entailment of every means employed.

### **A Journey by Boat to Mahalu**

It is not difficult for travellers with some anthropological intentions to notice how localities in the CHT have been politically reproduced since the evidence is plenty and easily identifiable. As mentioned earlier, the CHT is a mountainous, rugged terrain that, historically, posed an administrative challenge to state powers which could barely penetrate this region until the second half of the twentieth century. Francis Buchanan's 1798 (van Schendel 1992b) account is a brilliant description that shows how little control colonial administration had in this region. The transportation in the region was literally confined to within the course of the Karnafuly River and its four major tributaries in the northern CHT, and along the course of the Sangu River in the south. These river routes were also highly subjected to seasonality as most of the tributary channels were navigable for only six months a year. As a result, the state had no effective control over most of its parts. For the central and northern CHT, the Kaptai Dam was the biggest leap in the history of state-making in the CHT as it not only generated electricity, but also provided round-the-year navigation to a vast region that was previously inaccessible. The dam itself was far more significant than just displacing around a 100,000 people or producing 100 megawatts of electricity. It laid the necessary context for systematic displacements that were lately ushered by population transplantation and militarisation. In

fact, the lake helped to reconfigure the settlement and mobility patterns in the region from a security point of view while newly emerged navigation routes served as strategic pathways of enforcing state control. Insurgency since the 1970s was a perfect excuse to first militarise the region and then coercively manoeuvre a certain geopolitical transformation that can reinforce the state's presence in the territory. Thus, the construction of the Kaptai Dam not merely displaced an identified group of population; it was the bulwark to transform both settlement and mobility patterns in the CHT which systematically displaced a much greater number of people both from their land and ecology and basic material cultures based there.

The boat journey to Mahalu is a journey through this history of displacement. One can also catch a boat for Mahalu from Kaptai, a northern shire of Rangamati district where Karnafuly has been dammed. The jetty is juxtaposed with two crucial establishments, the Kaptai Dam and its power plant on the right, and a military garrison on the left. It can be said without much controversy that this is where the history of the modern CHT had begun. The majority of the Bengali civilian population in this small town resettled here because of their connection with the dam; and two large paper mills were established here in the 1960s. The army garrison is located on a junction of several hills which looks like a small island in the huge water body. Mahalu is at least a half-a-day's boat journey from here, a physical distance of less than 40 kilometres. The sentry post of the garrison that stands in the backdrop of a giant wall painting illustrating a band of Bangladeshi soldiers pointing their muzzles to an identical Jumma village, serves as the first of the six security checkpoints where every boat has to stop for security screening on its way to Mahalu. The route is generally known as the Reingkhiong Line to indicate the flow of the Reingkhiong River which joins Karnafuly from the south at an hour's distance from Kaptai. The route is policed by military checkpoints at strategic bends and routine patrol teams in 'speedboats'. Speedboats are highly restricted in the area; only authorities like the military and, in very few instances, the civil administration and aid agencies are allowed to use them. Local country boats with slow one-stroke engines have to register with both military and local governments and can operate only in specified routes. Any deviation from that has to be reported in the army camps beforehand.

My friend Abul Kashem is proudly the oldest boat operator on the Kaptai to Farua Bazar route which is the most remote destination for regular passenger boats through the Reingkhiong Line. His large-engine boat can operate only up to Bilaichari in the lean water season from where he transfers his passengers into a small log boat for the rest of the journey.

Every time I arrived to catch his 2 o'clock down-trip to Farua, he greeted me with an amiable smile spreading on his sunburnt face. 'I am going to be late for home tonight,' said the Bengali man in his 40s, suggesting that he would have to stop longer at security posts as quite often, being an unfamiliar passenger, I had to appear for long-questioning sessions while he waited with the rest of his regular local passengers. My knowledge about the neighbourhoods we passed by in this journey mostly came from his casual chats while steering the hull in his rear cockpit. Kashem has been running his boat since he came here with his father from Noakhali, a coastal district of southern Bangladesh, after the terrible cyclone of 1970 that washed away his ancestral village. Since then, he has witnessed the making of numerous Bengali and Jumma neighbourhoods that stand today on the banks of the Reingkhiong. 'There was nothing,' he insisted each time I asked him about the old days. He informed me:

This military camp and the adjacent Bengali *Para* [neighbourhood] was built after the Shanti Bahini's attack on Bilaichari armed police camp; this village was set by the military for the hillmen who they brought from somewhere in the Borkol line; look at this Para, they were brought here from the Gilamoon hills when the Shanti Bahini set up a hide out there; this Bengali Para were set by the forest department's contractor....

Kashem seems to be a cruising chronicler of the settlement history of the Reingkhiong embankments besides being a key person in supporting the inhabitant's mobility towards the outside world. On those long hours on board, I also met people from different localities amongst whom many became familiar faces.

The floating stories on 'Kashem Boat', as his business is locally known, clearly vindicate the sheer political significance of Kaptai Lake. Historically, as evident from the earlier travel accounts, such as those of Buchanan, the indigenous people in the region, particularly the Zo tribes, lived well away from the seasonal navigation routes in small villages surrounded by abundant mountainous forestland part of which they cultivated in shifting turns of fourteen or fifteen years. Although land was legally appropriated by the Act of 1900, the state could not establish de facto physical control over a vast region that lay far beyond navigation routes. Damming the Karnafuly River facilitated an extended navigability along its four major tributaries including the Reingkhiong. This primarily enabled the state to establish control over forest resources which radically replaced the natural vegetation of the forests with timber wood extraction and re-plantation. This displaced many riverside Jumma settlements by pushing them to move to more remote locations where the forest department was yet to

penetrate. In the 1970s, when the indigenous resistance against state hegemony turned counter hegemonic by militarising itself, the primary response from the state was a strategic hamleting of the indigenous localities. Most of the Jumma villages that one passes by today on the banks of the Reingkhiong were established by the Bangladesh military – their inhabitants were forced to move here from frontier mountains where they had sought refuge from increasing state expansions. Like military camps and their grid of checkpoints, the villages were also set in strategic locations to bring them under constant surveillance and policing. The official documents in many instances mention this mechanism in maxims like ‘Tribal Development’.

Extended mobility and reinforced controls on it also supported a compatible resettlement of the Bengali population in protected villages adjacent to military facilities. The military was also accused of using these poor, landless peasants from plain land Bangladesh as human shields against the guerrilla attacks by the Shanti Bahini. The 1980s witnessed the biggest flow of relocated Bengalis in the region who were offered government incentives for settling in the CHT. While travelling along the Reingkhiong or elsewhere in the CHT, it is not very difficult for someone to distinguish the Bengali settlements from the Jumma villages. The settlement patterns are evidently determined by the type of economic and political relationships each community developed accordingly with the ecology and political authorities. The Bengali houses are usually built on flat terrains close to the military camps and transportation. Most of them have clay walls with tin roofs standing on clay pedestals which are highly vulnerable to flash floods during the monsoon. Bengalis primarily engage in commercial fishing and forest resource extraction like timber or bamboo businesses. I hardly remember any Jumma engaged in commercial fishing as a group or working in large cargo boats carrying forest goods across Kaptai Lake. The region, particularly the Sazek valley and the Reingkhiong, produces most of the bamboos used as raw material in two of the largest paper mills in the country, the Chandraghona and Karnafuly paper mills. It is nearly impossible to know whether inhabitants of these clustered villages were recorded as IDPs or as refugees since they do not identify themselves as either. Similarly, some researches include the Bengali ‘settlers’ among the IDPs which has certain political implications, but little is known about the displacement they suffered somewhere in ‘plain-land’ Bangladesh before they were relocated here. Like these people, there are many who live a displaced and dispossessed life outside the known definitions and figures.

The housing pattern of the Jummas on the other hand, is impressively compatible with the geological and environmental setting. Most of the hill tribes, regardless of their ethnic identity, build elevated houses on steep hills. The main structure of the house stands on strong wood columns that support the floor which is fixed at one end to the front yard or walkways in the steep hill with an open-ended triangular hollow underneath. Both the floor and walls are made of closely knitted bamboo canes. The hollow under the floors allows rainwater to flow through without destabilising its foundation. The space is also used to store fuel wood and for raising livestock. The roofs are traditionally made of thatches. The average Jumma household consists of a small terrace that serves as the foyer of a large living room surrounded by one or two additional rooms including the kitchen and its open back terrace. The Jumma villages on the banks of the Reingkhiong, however, are fairly modified when compared to such an idealistic design of the Jumma houses. The majority of them have a much larger population than that of traditional Jumma villages in other parts of the CHT. Most of their roofs are made of tin rather than being thatched. Every village, almost without exception, has a long concrete staircase which is the most visible modern structure; some of them do not have any other concrete structure except this.

The accounts I gathered on my routine journey along this route clearly suggest that most of these villages were set up by the military roughly around the 1980s. Before that, inhabitants of these villages lived on remote hilltops where they had much easier access to Jum lands and, perhaps, a necessary distance from state influence. After the Shanti Bahini attacked the Bilaichari Police camp and an adjacent Bengali neighbourhood in 1984, all remote villages in less penetrable locations were clustered on the banks of the Reingkhiong. The clustering also involved a political scrutiny of people and those suspected as insurgents had to flee or face persecution. The neighbourhoods along the Reingkhiong resulted from a coercive political project that the state needed to implement to sustain its economic and political goals. On my numerous journeys, or sitting on the terraces of the village huts, I often witnessed military speedboats patrolling in the river. Columns of armed soldiers sit on each side of the boats, pointing their muzzles at the neighbourhoods. Several times I also have been confronted by them on my long walks to remote villages or farming camps, or in the Jumma villages I lived in –a long file of heavily armed soldiers walking like an idly crawling snake through the neighbourhoods, looking at a marooned people whose language, culture, or livelihoods are barely intelligible to them.

The Pangkhua village of Mahalu is an ideal case of strategic hamleting. The village was set by the Bangladesh military in 1979. The official documents still call it the ‘Pangkhua Rehabilitation Centre’ though it does not offer any idea about what and where they have been rehabilitated from. It consists of several hills of an average height of 300 feet, half-circled by a sharp bend of the Reingkhiong River. Since the mid-1970s, the area had been one of the earliest places where armed indigenous resistance groups began fighting the national armed forces. In 1976, the Shanti Bahini had its first guerrilla ambush of a police patrol boat at a bend a few hundred metres away from the present village of Mahalu. Surrounding areas were also known to have hideouts of both the Shanti Bahini and some cross-border guerrilla groups fighting the Indian or Burmese military on the other side of the border. The Reingkhiong River, though hazardously dry or notoriously turbulent depending upon seasons, is the only means of travel here. On the other side of the border, both the Indian and Burmese states were executing a similar kind of enclosure as the Bangladeshi state in the CHT and were notably resisted by the indigenous inhabitants of the Indian state of Mizoram and the Chin state of Burma.

According to the cadastral records, Mahalu was previously part of a Chakma Mouza<sup>9</sup> which was divided to create the Pangkhua Mouza. The establishment of the village officially claims to be the act of benevolence such as rehabilitation but, in fact, has resulted from strategic military decisions. This was also part of a military strategy of divide and rule which was aimed at using the cultural and genealogical differences among the Jumma tribes. Like the other Zo communities among the CHT tribes, Pangkhuas also lacked any visible participation in the indigenous movement led by the JSS, a political front mostly dominated by the Chakmas. The JSS also accuse Pangkhuas, along with other ‘Zo’ communities, of collaboration with the military.<sup>10</sup> Their indifference to the Jumma nationalist movement and submissive negotiations with the army saved them from fierce persecutions, but did little to protect them from displacement. They were also allegedly used as ‘human-shields’ like the settler Bengali population as mentioned earlier. In many cases, they were placed as examples of ‘peaceful coexistence’ in front of national and international human rights observers of the region. The guest house at Mahalu hosted such delegations on several occasions. While their

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<sup>9</sup> Mouza is a cadastral term to indicate a demarcated area under a headman. It is also the primary administrative unit according to the 1900 Act.

<sup>10</sup> The JSS throughout condemned the government and military for applying a ‘divide and rule’ policy through privileging few small groups among the Jummās. However, their own view of the marginality of these groups is unclear. See, JSS 1999, *Parbattya Chattagramer Shangram* (Struggle in Chittagong Hill Tracts), Rangamati.

leaders vindicated harmonious relationships with all the authorities and Bengali neighbours, they were victims of silent displacements.

Mahalu today is home to around a hundred Pangkhua families relocated from different parts of the CHT since the early 1980s. Like most other clustered settlements along the Reingkhiong, the village also has a long staircase from the wharf which leads to the main trail on the hill tops. The residents are divided into three 'blocks' under three different Karbaries.<sup>11</sup> The village has a primary school on the left of the wharf and a two-storeyed building on the right that serves both as guesthouse and as a community hall. There are a few other modern structures within the village, like two abandoned school buildings, a church, and several houses of the village's elite. The blocks are numbered according to their distance from the wharf, which is the gateway of the village and, ironically, also according to the economic and social status of their occupants. Block One consists of the most prosperous families who barely depend on Jum cultivation and have availed themselves of external sources of earning like-paid jobs in both the private and public sectors. Many of them also run their own businesses and hold political influence of varied sources and descriptions. Pangkhuas at Block Two comprise relatively poorer families who depend partly on Jum cultivation besides small trading or low-paid temporary jobs. The poorest and most dispossessed families reside in Block Three. The majority of them struggle to survive while being solely dependent upon Jum. A few of them take up casual opportunities to work as labourers for the forest department, in road construction or sometimes for the military.

The scenario was quite curious given the experiences I had in remote indigenous villages in other parts of the CHT. I have not come across any village that has such a clearly defined socio-economic composition. According to population size and socio-political organisation, Mahalu is in fact a combination of three different standard Jumma villages. The people at the first block are the oldest inhabitants in the village whereas those at the other two came later and are vulnerable to further displacement. The village is surrounded by the Reingkhiong and Alikhiong forest reserves which inevitably make their cultivation a criminal act. Every year they have to negotiate with the forest department to grow food in the hills. Many families cultivate remote lands more than a day's walk across the mountains where they have to live for the entire agricultural season. Such disruption in normative rights to land and territory forms a constant basis for systematic dislocations. Perhaps dissociation from Jum cultivation

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<sup>11</sup> Traditional village chief, recognised by the 1900 CHT Act.

is the most crucial and least attended to force of displacement in the CHT. Jum cultivation is a traditionally organised and highly collective process as I have witnessed also in several other villages of the CHT. Each year, the village leaders decide which part of the surrounding forest will be cultivated and allocate each family a certain part of it. The families perform some rituals on that land before they slash and burn the bush. Traditionally, they do not sell labour within their community. So, families work for each other in certain stages of cultivation like during plantation and harvest, which involve a traditional labour organisation based on group relations and a gift economy. There are customary obligations to provide food to the helping family. The entire process is now increasingly disrupted by external controls over land, territory, and settlement. The relocated Pangkhuas at Mahalu have lost their lineage-based labour organisation which has eventually infused paid works within the community. Such systematic alienation from the traditional subsistence economy is a slow but steady process that does not result in massive displacement in a given moment but still accounts for a greater amount of it.

Almost every adult at Mahalu has a memory of being displaced as the village itself was 'set' in the early 1980s. Pangkhua families from different locations, among whom many had to leave again under certain constraints, were relocated here over a decade. Many of them have a part of the family living in different places of the Indian state of Mizoram, and in fewer cases, in the Chin state of Burma. There is cross-border mobility, partly due to social linkages and partly for small-scale trading. Such mobilities are illegal since they occur without any formal documentation. The entire border in the CHT does not have any immigration posts, and like their Bangladeshi counterpart, the Indian and Burmese authorities also highly restrict foreigners in the states of Mizoram and Chin. As a result, like their historical territory and traditional livelihood, social mobilities among the Pangkhuas were also disjointed by the emergence of this new border in 1947. Many families at Mahalu were first displaced by the Indian security forces in Mizoram as suspected 'insurgents' during the years of Mizo resistance led by the Mizo National Front that fought the Indian state until they won a considerable degree of autonomy in 1984. In those years, a large number of Pangkhua families had fled Mizoram across the fairly recent state border which itself was younger than many of them. In the 1980s, they were again displaced within or from the CHT under village 're-clustering', one of the principal counter-insurgency measures practised by the Bangladesh military in the CHT. Lom Lian Pangkhua, another good friend of mine, lived in Block Two with his family of seven members. A tender-hearted old man in his 70s, he shared his own

account with me during an informal discussion in 2005, of the long way his family ended up settling in this village:

[A]long with roughly 40 other families, we fled our ancestral village in Mizoram (presumably around mid-1970s) after a few youth of the village were pulled off and shot by the Indian army after a battle between the army and Mizo insurgents in down town Aizawl.<sup>12</sup> We had no idea where to go as we Pangkhuas are hill dwellers and do not know any means other than the Jum to survive. For survival we need hills, streams, and forests. We were fleeing as far as possible from Aizawl. Some of us had relatives in different parts of the Kaptai, Sazek, Borkol, and Naniarchor.... I did not realise exactly when we crossed the border. My family, including nine others, settled in a small Pangkhua village near Sazek. But the problem was scarcity of land. Many of us returned to Mizoram as the village did not have enough accessible Jum land to support all. The rest of us managed to find small places in the hills to grow food. Then the army camps were set as soon as the Chakmas had started fighting the army in different places.

One evening a young officer arrived in our village with his troops; they were very tired and angry after a day-long walk across the hills. He listed each family and then ordered everyone to leave the village before the next sunset. We assured him that we were not Chakmas and we had been peaceful. He asked about our community and finally could figure out that we belonged to a peaceful group without any association with the Chakmas. Then he ordered us to move to Bilaichari. For some time, we had been hearing that a Pangkhua leader named Lal Eng Liana was setting up a village there with the help of the Bangladesh military. So, a few of us went to see him. He was already setting up this village with Pangkhua families coming from different parts of Rangamati and Bandarban. The army also took off part of a Chakma Mouza and made him its headman. He allotted us this place in 'Block Two'... gradually we could pursue the army and forest department to allow us to grow crops in the forest ... but land is getting very scarce these days as we do not cultivate the same land each year; after every harvest we leave it to rest for a few years. But now many of us buy white fertiliser from the Bilaichari Bazar to recultivate the same land; sometimes it works and sometimes it does not and not all of us can afford it. This year we were supposed to cultivate the 'north', but the army says we cannot do that part now, so we have a problem. My brother's family left for Mizoram last month and I am awaiting his news. If he finds that the situation is better over there, I shall move as well.

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<sup>12</sup> The capital city of the Indian State of Mizoram.

Unfortunately, that good news never came and Lom Lian lived in Mahalu until he died in 2008. His story largely represents settlement history of almost every Pangkhua family in Blocks Two and Three. Despite a scarcity of cultivable land and forest pasture, Mahalu has some relative advantages over average Jumma villages. Their conforming role in political conflicts and living in an accessible location brought them a few external economic opportunities. Many poorer families were able to work for road construction, first under the Food for Work program of the Bangladesh government and, lately, under a food security program supported by the World Food Program. It is one of the fortunate villages that had, though interrupted, a primary school throughout its existence. It is also easier to send children to high school or colleges in Rangamati from here. People can also access temporary employment in various private and public interventions. Yet, for many Pangkhua families, who eventually fled this village, such advantages were a difficulty instead. Some of them now live in distant villages in deeper forests where it is easier to cultivate Jum. I met a young nephew of Lom Lian whose family moved to Uluchari from here at his home, a place of nearly twenty hours' walking distance. My father was very scared when the military sent us to live here,' he said in a musing tone. 'He was an old-fashioned person who thought that living in this village requires more and more money-making as it is close to Bilaichari Bazaar where his kids would find fancy things that they don't really need at all'. So his father decided to leave for Uluchari, well away from the expanse of money and transportation that may destabilise his ability to make a living in the face of increasing consumer needs.

In the early 1990s, a few families at Mahalu also fled during the famine which hit different parts of the CHT where large regions were replanted with bamboo groves to assure raw materials for the paper mills in the Kaptai. In every five to ten years, the bamboo groves started flowering; the Jumma people traditionally view this as a sign of famine and do not cultivate nearby lands. The flowering causes an oversupply of food for the rodents, enabling them to multiply in numbers within a very short period. When the flowering is over, the rodents become uncontrollable in the Jum and in most of the cases, people lose all their crops. As a result, many areas had consecutive crop failures and people were forced to move elsewhere. The Jumma people like the Pangkhuas are also increasingly being subject to other forms of agricultural diversifications, mostly involving a shift towards cash crops like spices and tobacco instead of food grains for self-consumption. A large number of them also switched to fruit cultivation and not surprisingly, failed to profit by selling them in the markets. I saw long queues of boats carrying bananas and pineapples, waiting to be sold at

Kaptai, Rangamati, or Bandarban. Rawkip Lian Pangkhua, who used to grow pineapples in Bandarban before moving to Mahalu, told me that once he waited for two days with a boat full of pineapples at Bandarban jetty. The Bengali buyers from Chittagong sat idle for two days watching them grow anxious about the perishable fruits and finally asked for a price far less than their production cost. Some of them sold it at that price and others, frustrated, threw all their fruits into the Sangu River. That year he could no longer send his children to school as they all had to work on farms. He failed to manage farmland in the following year and had to move here.

As an ethnographer, my experiences with the disjuncture of the Pangkhuas and other Jummas from their land were difficult to articulate with the notions and facts prevalent in the socio-scientific discourses on the same. The first problem for me was that it does not recognise state-making as a fundamental cause of a diverse range of displacements that the people in the CHT constantly encounter or to which they are vulnerable. The positivist assumptions and definitions of displacement slip over its actual endurances as I have witnessed at Mahalu or elsewhere. How can we explain such political transformation of places by modern states which use displacement extensively as an essential tool to achieve its political and economic goals on their margins like the CHT? Do our spatial forms of knowledge about displacement play a somewhat complimentary role in such transformation by presenting the causal facts as isolated and incoherent? Undeniably, such knowledge is necessary to design mitigation measures, but again one may ask if the mitigation of isolated cases suffices to end the threats of systematic displacement like the one with which my friends at Mahalu continuously live? Does the normative discourse of displacement not undermine the facts about a profound alienation of people from their land evidently engendering from the extraordinary presence the state maintains in this margin? Contemporary anthropology offers several perspectives that can illuminate a political economy of displacement the state enforces to establish itself in such politically punctuated territory. The perspectives also theoretically challenge the spatio-temporal values given to the notion of displacement and help us to map a generic political economy to address the issues of dispossession among the marginal communities.

### **Displacement as ‘Order’: The State and Minorities on a Margin**

The state is, before anything else, about order. While admitting this fundamental assumption

of the political theories concerning state, anthropology has a different point of departure that paves unique ways of rethinking the state and its order-making functions. As alluded to in the previous chapter, the restoration of the state as a proper subject matter of ethnography begins with the assumption that the state is always an incomplete project that requires continual reinforcement, primarily achieved through the 'legitimated monopoly over violence'. The reproduction of the CHT as a margin and its people as minorities emerge from a very typical mismatch between nation and state. The political boundaries of the nationstate, particularly whose boundaries are actually legacies from the colonial past, often include local bunches of identity and culture incompatible to the nationalist scheme. Most of the nationalist regimes consider such incompatibilities as a threat to the 'holy monument' of their national integrity. Thus, a territorial locale like the CHT becomes a political margin which eventually congregates a historical encounter between power and powerlessness.

Eriksen (1991, 1993) views this contrast as a totalitarian versus segmentary ideology in a relationship of exclusion and inclusion. For him,

The uniqueness of nationalism ... (lies in) a modern, abstract, and 'binary' ideology of exclusion and inclusion, and (also in) its powerful symbolic as well as practical aspects (which had been) contrasted with 'segmentary' ethnic ideologies" (1991, p1).

The margin of the state is formed from locales where the appearance of the state is significantly different from the rest of its territory and the experience of the state by the people, who though not exclusively, make up the minority, is fundamentally different from the rest of the citizenry's. The minority refers to the local identity and culture/s incompatible with the nationalist ideology of belongingness. Beside the dimensional differences of the state's presence as order-making functions, the margins of the states are increasingly featuring forms of struggles that challenge state monopoly over violence (Poole 2004). But this should not be taken as a conclusive perception of the margin or minority. Every margin has its own historical particularity which Lipuma mentions as 'historically constructed character and trajectory' (1997, p61). For instance, small groups like the Pangkhuas in the CHT exhibit a very different art of being or not being governed which may include simultaneously antagonistic and submissive strategies. The historical transformation from 'clan people' to 'citizens', involves a political space where national culture and identity are constantly rearticulated both by the state and locals. From the state's point of view, this articulation is 'given and accepted as progress' and does not recognise prevalent indigenous

identities beyond itself. The limits of the nationstate, its region and its cultures ‘exist only as they are imagined, institutionalised and contested in the public sphere’ (Lipuma 1997, p62). The culture of nationhood, what Lipuma suggests as ‘the culture of empowered consensus’, is also a form of such contestations.

What ‘order’ means for the Bangladeshi state, in the context of the CHT, is largely defined by a few of such ‘empowered consensuses’ and ‘historical trajectories’ embedded in the nationalistic claim it puts on the CHT. For example, since the 1960s, perhaps everyone has the same answer to what is the first economic and development challenge for the Bangladeshi state—its overpopulation. The implicit public view of the CHT is built upon the fact that this 10 per cent of the national territory was inhabited by less than 5 per cent of the population until the 1960s. This gave justification to the resettlement of the Bengalis in the region which pushed the density figures almost equal to the national average by the 1990s. As a result, such forced and legitimised forms of displacements in the CHT appear to be a miniature version of *lebensraum*<sup>13</sup> which reproduced the CHT primarily as a geopolitical margin of the Bangladeshi state. The resettlement program along with the environmental impacts of the Kaptai Lake, fundamentally reconfigured people’s relationships with the place, for both settlers and indigenous people. The way the state redefines human relationship with the territory depends on its economic and political perception of the given territory. In the case of the CHT, the Bangladeshi state possesses an exclusive economic imagery of the region and uninterrupted resource extraction becomes the main concern of what it enforces as ‘order’. Most of the infrastructural developments in the CHT are clearly dedicated to facilitate transportation of forest resources and security arrangements are also focused on regulating these trades. For a few consecutive years, people from Block Three at Mahalu were employed in a ‘food for work’ program in the hills to construct a road through the southern forests of the village. The year they completed the unpaved road, they were prohibited from cultivating that part of the forest as it became a ‘reserve’ to protect new plantations of timbers after a very quick depletion of the existing ones.

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<sup>13</sup> The term ‘lebensraum’ was first coined by the German geographer and ethnographer Friedrich Ratzel, which eventually worked as a popular motivation behind Nazi Germany’s territorial aggression in the Second World War. Ratzel believes that lebensraum, which literally means ‘habitat’ or ‘living space’ in German, is a universal human tendency which leads people to acquire another land after successful adaptation in one location. In the case of Bangladesh, the CHT is viewed as a land which needs to be occupied to manage the population pressure in the rest of its territory. The idea played the major motivation behind the resettlement program in the CHT and the logic of lebensraum is well-reflected in its different aspects.

The structural violence within the state, as we see it as the dominant order-making function in the CHT, has long been recognised as the foremost causes of displacement in Bangladesh (Guhathakurta and Begum 2005, p18). The political and cultural dominance over ethnic minorities was enhanced by the Islamisation of society, state, and constitution since the late 1970s (See Jahangir 2002, p123; Rahim 1997, p247). Like its neighbouring countries in South Asia, displacements in Bangladesh also do not necessarily fit the classifications like 'external' or 'internal' displacement since the factors and linkages of displacement historically transcends the national boundaries set in 1947 and redefined in 1971. Religion was used extensively to determine and defend the national boundaries in both the Pakistan and Bangladesh era except for the early years of independence when secularism was one of the founding principles of the newly born democratic republic. Moreover, adoption of the modernisation paradigm of development as the central economic policy also inscribed new dimensions in the politics and governance which subsequently caused displacement.

The order-making role of the state in the CHT also has a transnational dimension. The mobility pattern in the CHT is historically linked to a greater flow that emerged from the colonisation of India's northwest and, to some extent, Burma. Unlike the rest of British India, the colonial state penetrated here more in terms of economic exploitation than establishment of political hegemony. Such colonial expansions later formed the basis for an ethnic and nationalist hegemony by the Bengalis that was ossified and challenged in postcolonial South Asia. Historically, the Bengalis, one of the central ethnic traditions of the Indo-Aryan civilisation, were also the forerunners of colonial modernity. The colonial investments in booming economic sectors like timbers, cotton, or tea plantations employed Bengalis extensively across Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and though distinctively, the CHT. Numerous Bengali appointments in plantations and administration in the colonial era led to a major demographic shift for the Bengalis who are still engaged in political conflicts in places of what many call the 'Mongoloid Fringe' of India (Bhaumik 2005, p144). The Bengalis have faced displacement in diverse ranges across these states of India. As in the case of the CHT, the Bengalis in Assam and Tripura also form a dominant political force of elite nationalist bourgeoisie that runs all the state governments in South Asia. But the elite nationalist politics is not without inner contradictions. The nationalist politics in Bangladesh also has two feuding camps who swapped power in each of last four parliamentary elections. The first, led by the Bangladesh Awami League endorses 'Bengali' nationalism, which is presumably inclined to a secular imagination of nationality. The other, which consisted of the Bangladesh

Nationalist Party and its Islamist allies, proclaims to be 'Bangladeshi' to demarcate differences from the rest of the non-Muslim Bengalis living in West Bengal or other parts of India. Both camps also blame each other for being 'pro-Indian' and 'anti-Islam' or 'pro-Pakistani' and 'anti-Indian'. The rivalries and their regional linkages always had significant resonances over the way the state maintains order in the CHT. The CHT has been reported on for cross-border insurgency, terrorism, arms, and drugs smuggling. In many instances, the Indian and Bangladeshi governments have accused each other of harbouring insurgents across the CHT border (Mohsin 1997, p207). The CHT has been used also by many interest groups as strategic routes for carrying arms and other consignments across Indian and Burmese borders. The Bangladesh state has a complex and altered role in relation to these cross-border issues.

So, as an 'emergency zone', the order-making practices in the CHT are characterised by a legitimised 'exception' of the normative land rights of its citizens which means that the state is unable or unwilling to fulfil its own legislative mandates here. Bangladesh claims to have little control in this region and, therefore, insists on a violent surveillance mechanism and arbitrary controls over mobility, settlements, and, over the whole of life. But the state use of violence as an order-making tool also enacts specific economic and political goals which relegate people's own rights, efforts, and ways to form a locality. Thus, the resettlement of the Bengalis, construction of Kaptai Dam, ethnic conflicts, counter-insurgency operations, alienation of indigenous tribes from the subsistence economy, deforestation, plantation, industries and the military bases become parts of an inter-linked mode of economic and political dominance which the state perceives as 'order' in the CHT.

## Chapter 5

### Pangkhoa: A Jigsaw Puzzle of Identity

‘We are a peaceful tribe’

(Anonymous Pangkhua Respondents, 2004-2010)

#### Who are the Pangkhuas?

Since the year 2004, when I started living among the Pangkhuas periodically, I kept asking them a few abstract questions like, ‘Who are the Pangkhuas?’ or, ‘What does it mean to be a Pangkhua?’ Garbled in both translation and my inability to articulate them in a more explicable way, I often obtained answers far away from my actual object of enquiry. The most common answer I used to get to the first question in those early days had little to do with what ‘identity’ might mean to my ‘trained ethnographer self’ or in anthropological discourse in general. It was a small, simple and humble part of a sentence in Bengali- ‘amra ekta shantipriyo zati’ –‘we are a peaceful tribe’. In some cases, ‘peaceful’ or ‘Shantipriyo’ used to be replaced by a more cautiously chosen Bengali synonym meaning ‘peace-loving’, ‘innocent’, ‘poor’ or even ‘wretched’. It took me a while to realise that my Pangkhua friends had fairly determined ways to present themselves before visitors who arrive on boats, all the way from downstream Reingkhiong.

It took many years of ‘un-peace’ around, utilising an Orwellian ‘Newspeak’ which has a Bengali equivalent –‘Ashanti’– to bring ‘shanti’ or ‘peace’ to the centre of a people’s self-assertion. On the morning of 18 July 1976, a police patrol boat was ambushed near the Mahalu Hills bend of the Reingkhiong River, where my Pangkhua village of Mahalu is now situated. The Bangladesh state’s military history in the CHT marks this as the first affirmed guerrilla operation by the ‘Shanti Bahini’ (the Peace Corps), the military wing of the PCJSS (Ibrahim 2001, p110). They also carried out two more successful attacks on the adjacent Farua police camp and the Dhupsil army camp in the same year. These were the early beginnings of decades-lasting terror and violence in the CHT that was later defined as ‘insurgency’ or ‘counter-insurgency’, particularly by texts produced at the military operational directorate in Dhaka and its supporting institutions (Ibrahim 1991, Ahmed 1994).

The Bangladesh state's response to its first so-called 'threat to territorial integrity' was spontaneous and quite eloquent. It began with typical context-producing counter-insurgency measures like massive military deployment, village regrouping, strategic hamleting, and population transplantation. By the early 1980s, most of the Pangkhuas, like many others living in small hamlets across the border, were rounded up in large cluster villages. Mahalu Pangkhua village was initially set up in 1979 as 'Pangkhua Settlement Camp', observing another ceremonial inauguration in 1980 when it was renamed 'Pangkhua Rehabilitation Centre'. Over the years, Pangkhua families from the least penetrable locations were pulled in here by the army. Many fled within months after forced relocation but the village could gradually secure a stable population of roughly 500, consisting of around a hundred families, who now live in three clustered groups.

None of this was unique for many Pangkhuas who, at some point of their life, had lived in or fled similar circumstances on the other side of 'Radcliff's fateful line'<sup>14</sup>. In Mizoram, the peripheral resistance against state atrocities began roughly a decade earlier than in CHT. On 28 February 1966, the Mizo National Front (MNF) guerrillas launched 'Operation Jerico' in their bid to form an independent Mizoram. After several weeks of fierce battles with them, the federal forces regained state control over the region and declared Mizoram, then the Mizo Hills District of Assam, a 'disturbed' area under the *Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958*. Massive numbers of armed forces were deployed, and were entitled to additional legislative support with the *Defence of India Rules 1962* and the *Assam Maintenance of Public Order Act 1953*. They performed the task of coercively transplanting 82 per cent of Mizoram's total population into 101 strategically 'protected and progressive' villages in just four years. In the first 10 weeks of 1967, 106 small mountain villages were dismantled and more than 50,000 people were bundled into 18 villages. By 1970, around 230,000 people from 473 relatively autonomous neighbourhoods were relocated into these 'new' or 'voluntary' grouping centres (Ibrahim 2001, p. 57). Strategic hamleting is a conventional military tactic against guerrilla warfare which was invented by the US military and first applied in the Vietnam War. It was widely adopted by the national armies of the subcontinent within a few years of its invention.

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<sup>14</sup> The partition of British India in 1947, in fact, decided the fate of millions of people by drawing new boundaries almost on a frantic weekend what Willem van Schendel called 'Radcliffe's Fateful Line'. Sir Cyril Radcliffe, the chairman of the Boundary Commission admits the fact as "I was so rushed that I had not time to go into details" (Van Schendel 2005, p. 39). The CHT was one of such negligible details that the formation of two big nationstates could hardly bother about.

## **Fleeing Identities: A Single Story**

‘Grouping years’ was one of those common phrases by which my elderly Pangkhua consultants at Mahalu distinguish this era of coercive enclosure from the fading memories of a life that was much different. Reisang Lal Pangkhua, one of my longest-serving consultants on the Pangkhua language, had arrived to Mahalu in the late 1990s. He was born around 1960, presumably, in a small village called Vatuampui which is somewhere ‘up’ near the Mizo Township named Lunglei. He was almost ten when the actual war arrived in their small village of about twenty families. He remembered watching a small band of MNF resistance fighters on an early winter morning when he was helping his father in Jum. They were the first real sign of the war he had heard about for a long time –young Lushais in trousers and shirts, and of course, with rifles strapped on their shoulders. The Indian troops also arrived soon after, pursuing the ‘Mizo Party’<sup>15</sup> and they killed a few Pangkhua villagers on different occasions while patrolling in the early weeks. The village chief tried sorting it out with the military and was told that it was difficult for patrolling troops to distinguish Pangkhua folk from Lushais, whom they call Mizo, especially in cases of sudden encounters in the bush. So, they should either move to new grouping villages set up by the army in a ‘safe’ zone, or help the army to find the MNF dugouts. By then, a few of the enraged relatives of the murdered Pangkhuas had already joined the MNF side, including Reisang’s elder brother. In the following months, the military wreaked savage retribution on whomever they believed to be linked with ‘insurgency’ and, finally, their village was ordered to disband and families were asked to move to a Lunglei village set up by the army.

That was the first time Reisang Lal Pangkhua faced a dislocation in the form of ‘grouping’. The new village was a large ghetto next to a military base. They could not sustain themselves for more than a few weeks as there was no suitable mound in the nearby forests to grow food, epidemics like cholera, diarrhoea, chicken pox and malaria broke out and above all, because ‘survival was increasingly subjected to the possession of money which they utterly lacked.’ His parents decided to flee to the other side of the Bangladesh-Mizoram border, where many of their relatives had already sought refuge. After a long, creeping flight of four days across mountainous forest and its innumerable rivulets, and though unconsciously, a new state border, they arrived in a Pangkhua village at Sazek Valley where

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<sup>15</sup> Pangkhua cooption of the English word ‘party’ refers exclusively to armed political groups.

a few other ‘Khualring’<sup>16</sup> families were living. But his brother, who had trained already with the MNF, stayed back in Mizoram and gradually became a prominent person among the local resistance fighters. However, they managed to ‘elevate’ a modest house in the new village, Olonkor, found some land to Jum, and were converted to Christianity by some missionaries who helped them get through the months before their first harvest. For the next few years, life appeared to be more or less the same as it had in Vatruampui, except for the anxieties of his parents for his brother who was fighting the Indian military somewhere ‘up’ in Mizoram. Although the entire geo-political scenario would change over the decades to come, Reisang never met his brother again.

Since the ‘surfacing’ of the ‘JSS Party’ or, as some of the Pangkhuas called them – ‘Chakma Party’, the CHT version of the hill peoples’ armed resistance against the retributions of the nationalist valley states in the region–, the ‘grouping’ resurfaced in everyday life. By the 1980s, the Shanti Bahini had de-facto control over the bordering parts of the CHT. Their ambush and raids on the military or paramilitary, or later, on relocated poor Bengali settlements and their more fierce aftermaths engulfed every indigenous village in the hills regardless of their particular role in the chaos. The Pangkhua village of Olonkor was evicted by the army in 1982 and Reisang’s family was relocated first in a deserted Chakma village near Gondarchora and then again to Battholipara in the Bandarban district where the military needed them to work on road construction. This time his father decided to return to Vatruampui as Mizoram was observing a ‘cease fire’ to hold negotiations between the MNF and the federal government. Since then, Reisang has not met his father either.

Reisang had some schooling, though interrupted, during the years spent in the Sazek valley and Gondarchora. It enabled him to speak and write in Bengali moderately well and this has eventually proven to be a very useful skill. The military appointed him as teacher at a new primary school they had established. Besides teaching Bawm, Pangkhua and Mro children in the school, he used to scout for the military occasionally. As the reward for his labour was quite satisfactory, he decided not to return to Mizoram with his father. Within some years, he married, secured land on which to grow pineapples and raised some livestock like pigs and Gayals (*Bos Frontalis*, a large cattle commonly found in southern Bangladesh and Northeast India) and eventually fathered seven children. He still believes that this period of his life was the most secure in terms of a developing livelihood, prolonged settlement and

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<sup>16</sup> Name of the Pangkhua clan to which he belongs .

a substantial ‘guarantee’ of life. In 1986, the MNF settled a peace accord with the Indian government which eventually turned Mizoram into an autonomous province of the Indian union. Ten years later, the JSS signed an accord with the Bangladesh government that promised fundamental administrative reforms in favour of the Jumma people, including gradual withdrawal of the army camps. Although the accord was poorly implemented in the years to come, the military base Reisang used to work with was one of the few that were withdrawn as an early gesture of political will to implement the accord. This meant a huge risk for the Pangkhuas living in his village because of their alleged association with the army in the years of armed Jumma resistance. Moreover, the army did not want them to live so close to the border and ultimately issued an eviction order. In January 1999, Reisang moved to Mahalu with his family, leaving behind the livestock, his teaching job and the pineapple plot.

Reisang’s narrative of enclosure and flights reflects a generic story told by most of the families living at Mahalu today, although very few among them, like him, had any beneficial link with the invading state power or the resistance against it. Most of them had confronted, on incredibly unequal terms, ‘the last great enclosure’ of two postcolonial state-making projects at many points of life. The scenario has long been recognised as coherent in the age of nationstates, when their overwhelming forces –like ‘distance-demolishing technologies’, military intervention, environmental colonisation, population transplantation and, despite anything to the contrary, conscription in state-friendly nomenclature of identities– produce and reproduce the context of living for the people who are not yet fully incorporated into states. “While they ... (were) still in a position to generate contexts” for their own locality, as Arjun Appadurai also observed in the case of Yanomamis against the Brazilian polity, they were “increasingly prisoners in the context-producing activities of the nationstate, which makes their own efforts to produce locality seem feeble, even doomed” (1996, p. 186). Such reproduction of peripheral locality, as the Pangkhuas experienced it in Mizoram and the CHT along with many other neighbouring self-governed groups, demarcates an ordained era of engulfment by the state of its previously un- or under-governed territory and people. This chapter focuses on certain aspects of identity construction among the Pangkhuas in this era of the final engulfment.

## **Situating People and Place in History**

From a geo-political view, the CHT can be well-understood as a ‘shatter zone’ where, according to James C Scott (2009), sovereignty and taxes stopped and ‘ethnicity’ and ‘tribe’ began. It had been a zone of relative autonomy where large numbers of people sought refuge from expansion of states, empires, slave-trading, wars, taxes, and natural disasters. It has the ‘diagnostic characteristics’ of a shatter zone –the ‘relative geographical inaccessibility’ and the ‘enormous diversity of tongues and cultures’. Historically, it was a part of the land that was never India, China, Burma or Bengal proper. It makes up a tiny slice of the 2.5 million square kilometres of mountainous terrain at the periphery of nine South and Southeast Asian states that has been recently named ‘Zomia’ by Willem van Schendel (2002). This deconstruction of the region “as the largest remaining ... (zone) of the world, whose peoples have not yet been fully incorporated into nationstates”, or its further development by Scott as ‘friction of terrain’ (2009, p. ix), pushes our understanding of state-making in pre-state societies towards a new paradigm. In the state-centric history of such regions, forms of kinship, subsistence, or identity, are described as ecologically or culturally determined rather than politically chosen which consequentially fails to address the fragmentary and circumstantial aspects of identity construction on the hills.

The Pangkhuas also reasonably fit Scott’s imagery of “runaway, fugitive, maroon” (Scott 2009, p. ix) people who, according to his *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*, have fled the “oppressions of state-making projects in the valleys” (Scott 2009, p. ix), over the course of two millennia. Historically, at least according to evidences reflected in colonial and nationalist records, they exhibit norms that can be read as what Scott called ‘deliberate and reactive statelessness’ (2009, p. x). They have always lived in rugged terrains, well away from the expanse of taxation, slavery, epidemics, sedentary mono-cropping or court-centres of the state, had flexible social structure based on segmentary lineage system, practised swiddening agriculture that formed the basis for a relatively egalitarian economy, had a nonliterate oral culture and most importantly, preferred kinship-based small and self-governed political units to any centralised system of governance. Written records of the Pangkhuas, particularly accounts by colonial administrators or nationalist men of letters, also vindicate their historical positioning as ‘state-evading and state-preventing native people’ in at least two respects. Firstly, almost all of these accounts have a figurative lament on their dwelling in impenetrable locations or on

their living in absence of ‘civilisation’. In fact, they were the people who made up, with many other neighbouring identity groups, the ‘Wild Races’ of Captain T H Lewin (1870) or the ‘man in raw form’ of Abdus Sattar (1971) whom the state’s project of rule could hardly ‘bring to heel’ until the last century. Secondly, the records, almost without any exception, fail to appropriate the pliable nature of identities lived by the hill peoples like the Pangkhuas. The hill peoples of the CHT, particularly who are neither Chakma nor Marma, have been recorded in inconsistent, vague terms throughout written history. In this instance, the Pangkhuas were recorded with names like Cuci, Koongky, Koonky, Kooky, Lan-ga, Lang-ga, Lanka, Layn-ga, Lingta, Linkta, Loo-sai, Loo-shee, Zou, Bawm, Pangsa, and of course, on the other side of border, Mizo. It is reasonable to assume that such misappropriations do not entirely derive from ignorance or limitations of the civilisational narratives of the state; politically chosen uses of manifold identities by the people themselves in a given historical moment also play a determining role in this respect.

The Pangkhuas made their first appearance in colonial texts through Francis Buchanan’s 1798 account of southeast Bengal (Van Schendel ed., 1992) which was understandably brief and blurred. Apparently, Buchanan did not write about any ‘tribe’ named Pangkhua in his pioneering account of the CHT, except for just two brief references by a ‘Mo-roo-sa’ (p. 71) and a ‘Kiaung-sa’ (p. 74) –chiefs he met– to a tribe named ‘Paung-sa’. On his 11-week voyage to the CHT, he never thought he would meet any Pangkhua people. Yet, throughout his journey he had heard about randomly named fugitive people whom even his Bengali aides, or the friendly Chakma or Marma people he came across, did not know very well. In fact, he was facing an ambiguity that still preoccupies the modern nomenclatures of identities among hill dwellers. The temporal and pliable mode of identity construction there was always problematic for the state, its scholarship, or administration that opted for any economic and cultural standardisation. However, among the peoples Buchanan personally met and described in variable terms –the Marama, Saksa, Moroo-sa, Bon-zu, Sak, Tippera or Doingnak– can be traced, as Van Schendel (1992, p. 98) aptly did, to their present-day manifestations of Marma, Chakma, Mro, Bawm, Chak, Tripura or Tonchongya. Buchanan also heard about other ‘rude tribes’ like Hhwe-myi, Shein-du, Hkyaw, Kaung-me, Paung-sa, Lang-ga, Kungki or Lingta whom he could not meet despite being very keen to do so. Following significant persuasion by Buchanan, the Marma chief, Kaung-la-pru, finally managed to gather some ‘Lang-ga’ people for his inspection. On 18 April 1798, Buchanan

wrote of his first encounter with one of those ‘obscure tribes’ which I believe to be the first recorded anthropological description of the people whom now we call Pangkhua:

In the forenoon Kaung-la-pru sent me six Lang-ga men and two women. They had entirely Burma countenances, but were very ill favoured, and seemed to be still more rude than the Mroo or Mo-roo-sa. To cover their nakedness they held in their hands small pieces of cloth, that surrounded their waists: but this, I was told, was on account of their having come among strangers for at home both sexes go absolutely naked. ...That ever since they have become tributary to the English, by living under Kaung-la-pru, they have enjoyed peace: but that formerly they had wars with Bonjoogies, who made many of them slaves. ... They have no writing, nor priests: nor could I discover that they had any belief in a god, nor in a state of future existence. ...their language has some affinity to the Burma: but they did not seem to understand the Ma-ra-ma dialect, a proof perhaps of their not having been long dependent on Kaung-la-pru. *They name their own tribe Zou.* By the Ma-ra-mas they are named *Lang-ga*, which by the Bengalis is corrupted into *Lingta*. By the Bengalis they are commonly called *Koongky*, Which we have corrupted into *Kooky*, or as it is written in the Asiatic Researches *Cuci*” (Buchanan 1798, p. 93-94) (italics added).

We would have been left with no certain clue that these people, whom he called ‘Lang-ga’ and eventually came to know as ‘Zou’, were the Pangkhuas had he not decided to record a short inventory of words from their language (Buchanan 1798, p. 94). After comparing his little inventory with the one I developed during my fieldworks and with Lorenz Löffler’s *Report* of 1985, I am firmly convinced that these Lang-gas were the Pangkhuas who still claim to be Zo, though, usually in the last instance today. Buchanan’s inventory includes words for different body parts, natural objects, numerals, animals and actions. Except for four out of his 49 entries, all are identical to the lexicon inventory I had developed since 2004. It was not impossible that they were another group now known as Bawm, who also speak a Central Chin language very close to the Pangkhua, but Buchanan described them separately as Bon-joo which was lately clarified as a corruption of their self-description, ‘Bawm-Zo-Mi’. Moreover, as a native speaker of Bengali, I am sceptical that the exonym ‘Lingta’ is a Bengali corruption of their Marma name, ‘Lang-ga’. Rather, it is more likely to be a derogatory notion drawn separately from the Bengali word, ‘Lengta’ (which means naked), to imply their clothing habits. Although Buchanan did not name the informers telling him about their nakedness at home, he is known to have been accompanied by Bengali servants for the whole period of his journey and whose influence on him was not unfeasible.

Buchanan's portrayal of the Pangkhuas is nothing more nor less than a classic example of a civilisational standard set for non-state people. This is a standard that was historically set by the invading states and their two necessary entailments, salvational religions and rational scholarship. It instantly designates them to any linguistic manifestation of that standard like 'barbarians', 'primitive', 'nomadic', 'raw', 'savage' or 'tribe', which in effect, mean a people whom only the state can salvage from their 'poor', 'solitary', 'nasty' and 'brutish' life. In this respect, Buchanan's remark about the pacifying role of British colonial rule in the CHT is a perfect reflection of a Hobbesian rationalisation of sovereign state power, where it plays a salvational (though tax-collecting) role over a "war of all against all" state of nature" (Hobbes 1651, p. 64). Such narratives, as Scott also suggests, never consider any possibilities that the 'barbarians' can be the exact reverse; they can be a "state effect" or "barbarians by design" (2009, p. 8) or for that matter, the Pangkhuas might well have invented or strategically adopted their identity rather than that it was traditionally or culturally determined. Whether they were "self-barbarised" at some point of history and that their dispersed mobility pattern was nothing but a strategic choice to evade the state, remain a matter of much historical inquiry but we have nothing substantial at hand that can scientifically prove anything otherwise.

Buchanan's observation on their relationship with Kaung-la-pru also deserves further scrutiny in this regard. Buchanan made his trip during a historic period when the region was recovering from protracted proxy wars between the British and Burmese empires. We may mark it as the earliest phase of incorporation of the region into the modern state. Buchanan's account found them to be in a tributary relationship— which he believed to be fairly new— with the chiefdoms. By the end of the eighteenth century, when the Indian empire entered its colonial guise, the state was more irresistible than ever in this last remaining refuge of the non-state population. It first turned many of the frontier self-governed groups, like the Marmas or Chakmas, into tributaries of the distant state powers which allowed their small chiefdoms to flourish in a moderate structure of hill feudalism that at times cooperated with and at times resisted the invading colonial state. Mey (1980, p. 25) shows that the Chakmas were already significantly influenced by the valley culture of the Bengalis by 1860 when the CHT was formally annexed by the British in India. The Marmas, the second largest indigenous population in the CHT, had influences from the Arakanese culture. Both the adoptions by two majority groups among the Jumma minorities, who still hold all three Circle Chief Offices, indicate a transformation of society and politics towards a dialectical balance

between state invasion and anarchic modes of economic production or political organisation. Until the second half of the nineteenth century, the colonial state was virtually unable to enforce law or taxation in this region due to the lack of effective transportation or military technology, demographic reality, or to some extent, because of limitations of the colonial strategies of state expansion. So, the chiefdoms were the foremost grounds and perhaps the only choice for the colonial state where it could implant its political agency. For the Chakmas and Marmas, to include only the feudal oligarchy among them, the state was at times a threat, a guarantee and an attraction. Their positioning on the historical crossroad of state and statelessness turned them into a mediating political force that maintained strategic relationships with both sides.

The 'Koongies' or 'fugitive tribes' were a third element in this historical landscape. They also developed inconsistent and strategic relations with the tributary chiefdoms, depending upon their ability to escape starvation, the pursuit of slavery or the consequences of inter-group wars. Many 'Koongy' groups were known to raid frontier Chakma villages. Among the Chakmas in general, the notion of 'Koogy Dor' (Koongy Fear) still prevails as the remembrance of fierce attacks by Koongy bandits who used to come down from the Lushai hills. Yet, the first official document on the troubled relationship between a hill chiefdom and colonial government presents them in a very different role. The 1777 administrative report on the CHT found the Koongies as allied with rebellious Chakma chief 'Ramoo Cawn'. As Lewin quoted in his 1869 account, "He has now assembled men in yet larger bodies ... large bodies of Kookie men, who live far in the interior parts of the hills, who have not used fire-arms, and whose bodies go unclothed" (Lewin 1869, p. 21). They were also known to raid the Marma villages of southern CHT more than ten times between 1830 and 1847, whereas the later accounts vindicate an emergent patron-client relationship between them (Mey 1980, p. 59). Again, in 1872, we see the renowned Chakma Circle Chief Queen Kalindi, despite her long-standing dispute with the colonial regime, providing military support to the English expedition against the 'bandit tribes' of Lushai Hills (Khisa 1996, p. 19). Such ambiguous political stands firmly suggest that their relationship with the state or state-like arrangements was circumstantially determined, where keeping the state as far away as possible, remained as the basic norm.

Once we consider that the identities among the Pangkhuas were informed by such 'friction of terrains' or the 'fugitive', 'barbarian', 'raw', or 'Koongky' in this case, are state

impositions on people historically fleeing or resisting the state, we start to see facts that were previously shadowed by our much received wisdom of social evolution that portrays the state as the evolutionary destiny of all human societies. It reconfigures them, the nonstate societies, as active agents of history rather than their widely perceived image as the ‘left behind’, ‘backward’ or ‘living ancestors’ of mankind who were meant to be incorporated into a state. This also helps us to illuminate their struggle and strategies of self-determination in the contemporary world of nationstates or while living in the same marginal locations which no longer defend them from state pursuits.

### **‘Ogres are like Onions’: The Anarchic Layers of Identity**

In the mid-summer of 2010, when navigation routes in the CHT were reduced nearly to the expanse of the main reservoir of the Kaptai Dam, I was on a hectic trip following the upper course of the Reingkhiong River. This was a route where large passenger boats used to operate in all seasons until the 1990s. Due to the long-term impacts of Kaptai Dam and deforestation-led soil erosion, the riverbed rose to such a level that in dry seasons it could not contain enough water even for small log boats. The small boat I was sharing with another passenger had a tiny single-stroke engine attached, but we could barely use it as we had to alight from the boat to push it forward in short intervals. My fellow passenger was the forest department ranger of Farua Reserve Forest, a Bengali man in his forties. Although worn out by this hot, humid and laborious trip, he was still curious about my reasons for taking this ‘pain’. Curiosity turned to absolute surprise when I told him that my business in the area roughly included an understanding of Pangkhua language, history, culture and identity. ‘How can such an impossible thing be someone’s job?’ he nearly exclaimed. What he said next in a visionary tone was really striking to me:

I have been around this area for more than five years; still I have great difficulties with ‘Pahari<sup>17</sup> Names’, let alone their language. Their names are strange; you cannot write them in Bengali. Say for example, you need to sue one of them for illegal timbering; you write what you hear from your witness and then pursue the man, right? The ‘Karbari’ (village chief) won’t understand the names you read out. Even if your witness finally manages to identify him, you will find that he has a name very different from what you previously reported to

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<sup>17</sup> The common Bengali attribution to the hill people which means both people and produce of the hills.

court. What identity are you looking for? They don't have any, they are all like onions; you will find nothing even if you have peeled every layer off.

Rude, racist, and shallow of course, but his difficulties are no different from what the state's project of rule encounters in its attempts to appropriate personal identities in the CHT. Also, I could not absolutely ignore his comparative 'wisdom' of personal identity and 'onions' due to fresh influences from two modern texts of extremely different genres. At that time, I had just partly read Scott's *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of the Upland Southeast Asia*. (2009) which instantly revived my valuable learning from Subaltern History that the hegemonic discourse is a crucial space where representations of the subaltern help to understand the hegemony itself. The book also provoked my imagination to decipher the same history of state-making offered in one of my favourite animation films, 'Shrek' (2001). The ogre in this absurdly modern fairy-tale lived in a swamp where a kingdom named 'Duloc' relocates 'all fairy-tale creatures' to make itself the 'most perfect kingdom' in the world. But for Shrek the ogre, the swamp was nothing but the symbol of an absolute freedom from a world that has no room for ogres. As the marvellous story rolls on visually, we find the ogre describing himself as an onion! "No!!! Layers, onions have layers, ogres have layers, onions have layers, you get it? We both have layers". Shrek's impatient answer to his mate, "the talking, annoying Donkey", who was showing an irritating concern about what ogres are actually like, was the first thing to come in my mind as I heard the forester's remarks. It also reminded me of the fact that it took me more than a year of acquaintance to know that the ultimate self-recognition of my 'query-scarred' Pangkhua friends is 'Zo'. In fact, the ethnographer inside me was feeling more like the Donkey with irrelevant concerns about who the Pangkhuas actually are. Several times in the last six years, I was bewildered by the sudden discovery of such pliable 'layers' of identity. Seen from a state's point of view, both Shrek and my co-passenger forest official were right – 'ogres are like onions'. No matter how far you peel them, you will find no history. They are 'people without history'.

Scott, along with many others (Wolf 1982), shows us that the 'people without history' are, in reality, people without 'written history', who perhaps had historically chosen not to have any. After six years of conscious pursuit, I still do not have a 'satisfying' answer to how and when this group of Zo people became Pangkhua. What I was offered as explanations utterly fail to meet the criteria of historiographic reasoning. 'Pang' in Pangkhua language refers to

Cotton tree (*Gossypium arboreum*), a native plant that bears ethno-botanical traces in the region as far back as 2000 BC, and probably the first plant to be commercialised as an exportable and taxable agro-product. For the first few decades of state interventions in the CHT, taxes and tributes were paid in cotton instead of money. The first administrative name ascribed to the CHT was 'Karpas Mahal' which means 'The Cotton Shire' in Bengali. 'Khua' is the common name for villages, both in the Pangkhua and Bawm languages.

So the word 'Pang-khua' may suggest either 'people living in a village signified by cotton tree' or 'a village with people signified by cotton tree'. Both of them provide enough temptation for anthropological speculation. The 'tree' can be explained in totemic terms with people, it can be a name given by any neighbouring group to imply their other self-description as 'fun-loving people' or used just to mount a new group boundary in a given historical context. Surprisingly, my Pangkhua friends at Mahalu never agreed or disagreed with any of these propositions. Sometimes they looked impressed with the novelty of such reasoning, and, at other times, looked ashamed for not having a proper explanation of their group identity. But these never appeared to be something that really mattered to the becoming of what they are.

This is a reality that nullifies most of the methods, including some of my own, to 'scientifically' or 'empirically' map identities on such crossroads of historical state-making projects. It is impossible, if not irrelevant, to describe identities among the hill people in terms of exonymous rationality. People and places are referred to in such variable ways that strangers with historical, or shall I say –state-centric attitudes–, will find it a condition nothing more or less than anarchy. The same group may be referred to in differing names by different neighbouring groups, government documents, even by the group themselves, depending upon to whom or where they represent themselves. Although living in a very small geographical expanse for centuries, different groups may have their own names for the same people, location, rivulet, hill or landmark, or even for the settling-in Bengalis. In remarkable compliance, the Pangkhua self-perception of 'Zo' is also independent of any historically authentic trajectory relating them to the other Zo peoples, or to the notion of Mizo, or to a territory for that matter. To become a Zo, they do not need a single story that invariably tells why and how they are the same people as Bawm, Lushai, Khumi, Kheo or numerous Kuki-Chin speaking groups in Mizoram or in Burma or why they are different.

The scenario is entirely at odds with any enquiry of identity that promises historical authenticity. In 1798, Buchanan ‘discovered’ them first as ‘Lang-ga’ and then ‘Zou’. Seventy years later, Lewin (1869, p. 99) found them as ‘Pangkhos’, barely distinguishable from the Bawm, who had “sprung from two brothers” and maintained group differences by different positionings of hair-knots on their head. He also believed them to be fugitives from a Khumi mountain kingdom. This was a story much exemplified by later historians of the region including Hutchinson (1906) who also sought to situate them in segmentary clans of the Bawm. Spielmann’s 1968 account of the Bawms suggests that the Pangkhuas were their prisoners of war rather than descendants of common ancestry and actually were captured by a dominant Bawm clan (as cited in Mey 1980, p. 21). Similarly, Lewin (1869, p. 78) found them living in a condition where “every village is a small state, owning fealty and allegiance to no one save their own special leader”, whereas in 1926, J. P. Mills witnessed them living in the same village with the Bawms, both paying taxes to the Chakma Circle Chief (Mey 2009, p. 38). I have friends who could not clarify, even after dedicated reviews of their own descent line and matrimonial relations, whether he or she is ‘more a Pangkhua’ or ‘more a Bawm’. Presumably, they also have similar interconnections with the Lushais. Similar interconnectivities can be traced between Chakma and Tonchongya, Mro and Khumi, Marma and Rakhains, Heo and Chak. Several times at Mahalu, I also heard a distorted story of two ‘Khua’ (villages) intersected by a river, one having plenty of ‘Pang’ (cotton) trees for which people on the other bank (presumably Bawms or Lushais) called them or their village, Pangkhua.

These all together depict quite a temporal and spatial mode of identity construction among the Pangkhuas and other CHT communities. My comparative analysis of these historical accounts thinly suggests that the name, ‘Pangkhua’, is a fairly recent cooption of identity by the ‘Zo’ people that Buchanan described, which occurred roughly between 1800 and the 1860s, shortly before Lewin described them in an intertwined existence with the Bawm. At the moment, I have no other historical evidence at hand for this argument except for another unclear assumption by Buchanan (1798, p. 74) which says “the appellation Paung-sa arising from some circumstances in the payment of revenue”. Given the agro-political history of the ‘Pang’ or cotton tree and if it really has anything to do with the notion of ‘Pangkhua’, the name possibly derived in an emergent context of concentrated and auditable mono-plant horticulture which was novel to the prevailing cultivation practices on the hills. ‘Pangkhua’ seems to be an identity adopted by a distinct group of Zo people in the face of state

intervention in the area. The name itself seems to have emerged from their historical encounter with the state. Similar facts can be explored within the 'Bawm' identity which means 'unity'. While the state and its scholarship portray their identities in their own canvas of archaism, in reality, these identities are historical symbols of their struggle against the state.

Before we risk our historical quest for Pangkhua identity to proceed further, it is worth noting the nature of identity discourse among them. For this, what we have in the absence of written history, is their tradition of oral testimonies which were substantially recorded by ethnographers since the mid-nineteenth century. Perhaps creation stories among them would be the most relevant example to learn the innovative and anarchist modes of historical self-making. Lewin in 1869 recorded a 'creation myth' which he believed to be 'characteristic' in origin, both for the Pangkhuas and Bawms.

Formerly our ancestors came out of a cave in the earth, and we had one great chief, named Tlandrok-pah. He it was who first domesticated Gayal; he was so powerful that he married God's daughter. There were great festivities at the marriage, and Tlandrok-pah made God a present of a famous gun that he had. You can still hear the gun; the thunder is the sound of it. At the marriage, our chief called all the animals to help to cut a road to through the jungle, to God's house, and they all gladly gave assistance to bring home the bride- all save the sloth (the huluq monkey is the grandson) and the earth worm; and on this account they were cursed, and cannot look on the sun without dying. The cave [from] whence man first came out is in the Looshai country close to Vanhiulen's village, of the Burdaiya tribe; it can be seen to this day, but no one can enter. If one listens outside, the deep notes of the gong and the sound of men's voices can still be heard. Sometime after Tlandrok-pah's marriage, all the country became on fire, and God's Daughter told us to come down to the sea-coast, where it is cool; that was how we came into this country. At that time mankind and the birds and beasts all spoke one language. Then God's Daughter complained to her father that her tribe were unable to kill the animals for food, as they talked and begged for life with pitiful words, making the hearts of men soft, so that they could not slay them. On this, God took from the beast and birds the power of speech, and food became plentiful among us. We eat every living thing that cannot speak. At that time, also, when the great fire broke from the earth, the world became all dark, and men broke up and scattered into clans and tribes. Their languages also became different. (Lewin 1869, p. 95)

The story implies changing political arrangements, forced downward migrations from the mountains, and, at the end, an explanation of group differences. Yet, what interests me in particular is the explanation of why they eat ‘every living thing that cannot speak’. Even today, food habits remains one of the foregrounds on which the hill people are stigmatised by the Bengalis and, though trivially, among the groups themselves. Buchanan’s account narrates an interesting event in this regard. He was told by a Moroo-sa chief named King-dai that the Bengalis “falsely attribute to them (the Mro), the eating of cats and dogs. This is done by a tribe only named Paung-sa (Pangkhuas)” (1798, p. 71). Later on that day, when he verifies this with a ‘Kiaung-sa’ (Heo) chief named Aung-ghio-se, he finds that the Mro chief actually has “deceived” him when “he alleged that he did not eat Cats, and Dogs: for among the Mroo this practice is universal” (p. 74). What seemed to be a deception to him practically indicates a politically crafted self-assertion. In fact, King-dai knew the basis upon which they were scrutinised by the civilised valley cultures as he was quite aware of their stigmatisation among the Bengalis. It also means that when Buchanan observed them in an assumed savagery, he himself did not go unobserved. So, it remains as 200-years-old evidence of their politically reactive role that seeks to manoeuvre the identity discourse surrounding them. Such efforts are also evident in Lewin’s creation story where the Pangkhuas have an even more innovative justification for eating all creatures that cannot speak.

However, in the year 2004, almost 150 years after Lewin’s story, and well before I had actually read him, I recorded another creation story among the Pangkhuas living at Mahalu. My consultant, Ramkhup Lal, who died in 2008, was then the oldest person in the village. He was an amazing storyteller to whom I owe most of the wonderful Pangkhua stories I have recorded. His personal image among the fellow villagers resembled that of a sage whose wisdom is outmoded by the ‘new’ age they now live in. They were often surprised by the value I placed on his stories that were untold or unheard for so long. In my early acquaintance with him, I put forward the same old questions, ‘Who are the Pangkhuas? Where do they come from?’ He reluctantly started with a localised version of the biblical Genesis. My interpreter Lalhim, who possibly knew that better than he, could sense that this was not something I longed to record. So, he interrupted him and clarified something I only could assume, and Ramkhup enthusiastically came up with a different, lengthy story. Following is an excerpt from that:

As our forefathers said, human seeds were first spread in the field and then levelled with a feather from a hen's tail to grow all of them as equals. But none of them had sprouted at all. *Pathian* (God) spread the seeds again but this time did not level them. Then they grew but some were lame, some were blind, some poor and some rich. As there was not enough room for all, *Pathian* tried to stretch the earth [to fit them all]. It resulted in a long solar eclipse. Many of the humans became monkeys in the dark, the rest were washed away by a subsequent flood... only a sister and her brother survived. [Water and fire plotted their marriage]<sup>18</sup>... Now all human beings are descendants of them... Children moved to different places and they lost contact with each other. As a result, some became *Changma*, some *Kor* (Bengali), some *Marma*, some *Bawm*, some *Khumi*, some *Tonchongya*, some *Mro*, some *Chak*, some *Hyio*, some *Sap* (white people) and some the other races... All of them had their own religion, like we had 'hill-worship' [that involved] killing of Gayals<sup>19</sup> by spearing... After that a new *Pathian* was introduced and we abandoned all other, became believers of God and followed his path. [However,] when all sections grew [in population size], they had started to meet each other on the frontiers and all races were fighting wars. When the British Government came to know about this, 'Lungni Sap'<sup>20</sup> came to pacify [them]. He first convinced Routhangpui, the Lushai leader of Mizoram, and then he came to influence all people on earth. Then silver metal money was introduced, some were flower-shaped, some were round and had the 'crown-wearing lady'<sup>21</sup> engraved at the centre. That is how 'Lungni Sap' could rule over the earth. That is why [now] people 'dare' to meet each other and communicate, as they do not kill each other anymore.<sup>22</sup>

It starts with an explanation of human inequality whereas the genesis recorded in 1869 began with the glory of a sovereign chief who married *Pathian*'s (god) daughter. Now, in the twenty-first century, the 'Pathian' does not live "in the west, and takes charge of the sun at night" anymore, as they said to Lewin (1869, p. 95). Rather, he is now reintroduced as having a son named 'Lalpa' (Jesus) instead of a daughter who was 'married' to their great chief and could ask her father to change the world in their favour, or could show them where to go in

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<sup>18</sup> This constitutes a large and distinct part of the story that might have influences from the biblical Genesis.

<sup>19</sup> *Bos Frontalis*, a breed of large cattle commonly found in Bangladesh and Northeast India. It is the domesticated form of Gaur. This is one of the oldest types of domesticated livestock in the CHT.

<sup>20</sup> Means a white man named 'Lungni' whom I believe to be T H Lewin himself, who was at a time a conqueror, anthropologist, administrator and perhaps, the most influential 'white man' in the history of colonial state-making in the CHT.

<sup>21</sup> Presumably, coins engraved with the face of Queen Victoria.

<sup>22</sup> I recorded the creation myth on 2 November 2004 at a Pangkhua village in Rangamati Hill Tracts. The narrator was Ramkhup Lal Pangkhua. This has been extracted from the joint translation by me and Lalhim Liyan Pangkhua.

disasters. Their other god, 'Khozing', who loved them 'specially' and used to be 'the patron of their tribe', seems to have disappeared. Curiously, what both versions have in common is the reference to a 'dark-age' when group differences emerged. In fact, it is where the later account bridges the former. It combines a unique narration of human inequality and concentration of people which led to the 'dark-age' that left none but two siblings alive. Then human history begins once again, this time accommodating the Semitic Genesis, colonial rule, introduction of money, wars and so on. This is a historical persistence that requires no authenticity or certain trajectory. It leaves eternal space for innovation and imagination by individuals. This is an anarchist form of past-making that does not rule out contributions from the people who actually live it. It even has room for the state, if we remember that Ramkhup's story at the end recognised its 'pacifying' role, yet retains the same potential for evading any given norms of authenticity which is on the other hand, the fundamental basis of the state's historical legitimacy.

So, identity formation among the Pangkhuas should be understood in this context of anarchic fluidity. What appears disturbing to a 'properly' historical eye becomes the strength of the society being observed. This is something that Scott (2009, p. 234) accurately called "the advantage of not having a history". The relatively powerless hill people, as he argues, "may well find it to their advantage to avoid written traditions and fixed texts, or even to abandon them altogether, in order to maximise room for cultural manoeuvre" (2009, p. 235). This is an 'advantage' that best suits the people like the Pangkhuas who have constantly reconfigured histories and identity in the interest of survival. In the remaining part of this chapter, I shall recount a few contemporary forms of such reconfiguration of identity by varied processes of conversion and cooption.

### **Being a Pangkhua at Mahalu Today**

From the very beginning, the Pangkhua village at Mahalu had an assembly hall to hold official gatherings of the villagers. It is situated on the right side of the main wharf, from where a long concrete staircase leads up to the main trail of the village. In 1990, the assembly hall was rebuilt with a fund from the Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board (CHTDB). Now the new assembly hall is the only two-storeyed building in the village. The top floor has two guest rooms with modern facilities. Sometime during my 2010 fieldwork, I found a thick register in one of those rooms. It had a nicely laminated red cover with a cross of golden

ribbons pasted at the front and the title read 'Visitors Book'. I was filled with a curious excitement as I saw the first entry of the book dated 9 November 1980. To me it meant the entire official history of the village since the very first year of its existence. As I turned over the pages my curiosity increased. I could figure exactly from where the early self-assertions of my Pangkhua friends originated. I realised that when they say 'we are a peaceful tribe', they actually speak the language of the state. Every note in this official 'history book' was written by the men of laws or letters who visited them on different occasions in the last thirty years. All of them reveal, in one way or another, a hegemonic discourse that ultimately negates the arbitrary curves of identity among the people they 'visit'.

The visitors who signed their respective parts in this unofficially 'official history', included high-ranking military persons, police and forest officials, bureaucrats, development officers, local government representatives, professors and, lately, the indigenous leaders and NGO workers. The remarks in general show appreciation of the 'innocent', 'peaceful' and 'hardworking' nature of the people they describe, their heartiest hospitality, 'thirst' for 'development', 'discipline', or success in a prescribed farming project. Some accounts also expressed a 'hope' that 'one day' these people would become 'creditable citizens' of the country whereas some lamented their 'backwardness', 'poverty' and 'lack of education'. Almost all the remarks before 1990 described them as 'rehabilitated' Pangkhuas whereas many of the later period describe them as the 'beneficiary' of development projects. In short, the book is a comprehensive documentation of an epoch when the people discussed were finally converted from fugitive subjects to potential citizens.

Their role in the 'Jumma' movement reveals another important aspect of their political life and identity making. Like the other Kuki-Chin groups in the CHT, they also allegedly took the government side in the years of armed Jumma resistance. My personal observation in this regard is that very few people among them worked in isolation for the military and administration whereas the collective response to the Jumma movement was, in the worst case, an absolute political indifference. This was widely seen as the results of a 'divide and rule' policy of the state and was never investigated beyond this point by any scholar. In my view, this is better understood as the state's use of already existing cultural boundaries in its coercive enclosure of the CHT which inevitably suggests a failure of the Jumma movement in blotting out group differences from its propagation. As an invented ethnonationalism, the 'Jumma' emerged to demarcate a cultural boundary that could restore the hill people's claim

to the territory in the face of massive in-migration of poor Bengali peasants and other forms of state expansion, environmental colonialism and exclusionary nationalism (Van Schendel 1992, p. 121). The construction of the Kaptai Dam in the early 1960s, a wave of racial and political hatred by the nationalists for their partly antagonistic role in the 1971 liberation war of Bangladesh, constitutional denial of peoples' diverse identities by the newly born Bangladeshi state and brutal retribution during the 'insurgency' years served as the political context of this movement. In fact, the Bangladesh Constitution of 1972 was the first to void the special administrative status of the CHT as an 'excluded area' officially entitled to by the *Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation Act 1900*. It is not that the Pangkhuas could escape the everyday consequences –like the forced displacements– of the 'Jumma' uprising and resistance. In those days, to offer another quick example, they also had to get their shopping list approved at the army camps before they could go to the town centres to purchase the stated items. On return, the military would verify the goods on the list. This was a strategy to deny supplies to the Shanti Bahini camps. Many also had to pay tolls to the Shanti-Bahini though this was relatively trivial in nature when compared to the constant, coercive and security-related scrutiny under which they lived.

However, it is no wonder that the Jumma movement, which sought to unite all the swiddening groups here, was largely dominated by the Chakmas. They have been the majority group among the Jumma population. They were the worst victims of the Kaptai Dam as they owned most of the arable plains that were swamped by its reservoir. The Chakmas also had a little 'renaissance'<sup>23</sup> of their own that brought among them about a group of educated middle-class people who achieved a political voice distinct from the feudal chiefdoms. So, they were the most capable of crafting such a modern imagination of collective identity that could achieve some form of autonomy and recognition for the people it represented. Their historical familiarity with state mechanisms was also a political advantage. And of course, many of them were politically committed enough to risk everything to resist the state's retribution on their people. For them the 'Jumma' was the self-making of a heroic kind that fought the state to achieve autonomy of a given territory, a pursuit hardly different than the state's itself. It requires a certain background of a sedentary life considerably interwoven with the state to imagine such claims on a given territory; we

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<sup>23</sup> Here I borrow an analogy derived from historical discourse on the emergence of the Bengali middle-class 'Bhadralok' that was coined Bengal Renaissance.

have seen in the earlier sections that the Chakmas and Marmas had those sorts of connections historically with the state.

By comparison, sedentary living is much more a recent phenomenon among the Pangkhuas. In the last six years, I hardly met a Pangkhua family who had been living in the same village for more than twenty years. They invariably referred to the Shanti Bahini and their disputing factions or the Burmese and Mizo resistance groups as ‘party’. Some of them admitted that they felt less threatened when they encountered the ‘Mizo Party’ just because they speak nearly the same language. Still, most of them seem to have no clear idea about the exact causes for which the Mizos were fighting. For them, the Indian or the Bangladeshi state exists only in the form of militaries, currencies, elections, identity cards, school testimonials, forest departments or the television. They neither consider it a political system to which they belong nor do they have any particular political bond with any of the resistance groups. It was not difficult to find their close relatives in the ‘Mizo Party’, but they always viewed the party as the affair of the Lushai people who were the dominant group within the MNF. As they associate ‘Jumma’ with the Chakmas, the notion of ‘Mizo’ among them also refers to the Lushai, not an identity they share politically.

Their positioning in the demographic imagery of Mizoram is even further marginalised. Both the ‘insurgents’ that the Indian armed forces fought in Mizoram and the population that was dispossessed and then ‘protected’ in ‘progressive’ villages, were randomly known as Mizo. As a notion, the Mizo is a blanket term for the people with coherent Zo identity beneath which the Pangkhuas have quite an elusive position. Modern records on ethnic identities in Mizoram, like the ‘Scheduled Tribe’ censuses, do not refer by name in their inventory to any tribe named ‘Pangkhua’ or ‘Zo’. The 2001 Census of India sorts the ‘scheduled tribes’ population of Mizoram –94.5 per cent of the total– into 15 categories where around 80 per cent of them are put into three indistinct categories like ‘Any Mizo (Lushai) Tribes’, ‘Any Kuki Tribes’, or ‘Any Naga Tribes’. Identities beyond these exonymous accreditations are nullified, no matter how passionately they are lived by people.

So, the manifold identity the Pangkhuas reveal at Mahalu today is a combination of sheared and shared identities. Their identity has been constantly sheared by the dominant state powers and the Pangkhuas responded by circumstantially choosing or coopting identities like ‘Pangkhua’, ‘Jumma’, ‘indigenous’, ‘Bangladeshi’, ‘Bawm’ or ‘Christian’. The 46 names the Bangladeshi state has in its latest category of ‘Small Ethnic Community’, which

it seems to be in the process of making as an alternative to the long-standing notion of 'Upazati', does not include any group named 'Zo'. On the other side of the border, the Mizo state does not appropriately endorse any group named 'Pangkhuah' or 'Zo'. Thus, they become people who have lost their historical selves on the crossroad of two state-making projects. Surprisingly, it hardly bothers my Pangkhua friends who are quite happy to introduce themselves as 'Pangkhuah' and who never forget to write it as a surname in documents. They or their cross-bordered relatives from Mizoram also seem to have no trouble with how Mizoram is graphed in statistical figures. All they know is that they were part of a 'Zo' people who have been living in this mountainous terrain from time immemorial. The historical emergence of the state has divided their self and soil. The 'Zo' identity is now their own hidden piece of a historical jigsaw puzzle that they are unable to solve or match anymore.

## Chapter 6

### Development: the Pedagogy of Progress

“There is no doubt that the social instinct, inherited by man and therefore deeply rooted in him, had in it the germs of later development and strengthening, notwithstanding even the hard struggle for existence.” (Kropotkin 1922, p. 47)

#### A Developmental Desire

In 2004, I met my friend Ramsiang Lal Pangkhua for the first time. It was the peak of monsoon in Bangladesh when I made that first trip to Mahalu. The journey to this border Pangkhua village during this time of the year was a difficult one. A weeklong heavy downpour had caused a turbulent flash flood that carried large wood trunks from upriver. Navigation was difficult and risky. I had travelled all the way from Rajshahi to Kaptai by bus, a distance of roughly 800 kilometres, in twenty-four hours, including small breaks in Dhaka and Chittagong City. I had no clue, no certain direction about how to get to Mahalu from Kaptai except for the name of the village and the only person I knew there – Ramsiang’s eldest son, Laltran. I met him months ago at Bandarban Town. He was my consultant for the Pangkhua language which I was documenting as part of a research workshop on language documentation.

Very few people at the Kaptai Jetty knew about their village and fewer had even been there. Soon I realised that it was quite late in the day for a passenger boat to Mahalu. I could not hire any boat privately since each of the boatmen I approached answered that it would be quite risky to start at this time of the day since the military would not allow any boat to go beyond the Bilaichari checkpoint after dark. Since there is no commercial place to stay the night at Bilaichari, I took their advice and decided to stay the night at Kaptai. Finding accommodation for the night in Kaptai was difficult because the small town had no tourist facilities. I inquired unsuccessfully at a couple of government guesthouses maintained by specific departments. I remembered nostalgically the warm comfort I had enjoyed at the military guesthouse in 1998 on my first visit to Kaptai during my first visit to the CHT. Back then I was a fortunate tourist who had a friend in the military commanding a remote camp of

the region. I was just a curious undergraduate on a holiday, not an anthropologist in a proper sense. Now, however, I stayed the night at a shanty hotel adjacent to the jetty and next morning caught the first passenger boat bound to Farua Bazar, which is about an hour upriver from Mahalu.

The journey was more dramatic than I had imagined. On each of the four security checkpoints we came across, which belonged to different security forces like armed police, border guards and the military, I was identified as an investigable passenger and therefore pulled off the boat for questioning while the boat waited with the rest of the passengers. I started feeling guilty after the third one since my fellow passengers, mostly indigenous hillmen, were delayed due to my presence on the boat. I was feeling like the trouble-making co-passenger. The fourth checkpoint was attached to the zonal headquarter of the military. I had already learned from the previous checkpoints that places beyond this post are ‘operational areas’, according to the military vocabulary. In fact, the military is the supreme administrative authority for these places. I felt relieved when the boat was asked to leave without me although it indicated a longer questioning session than the previous ones.

Perhaps thanks to my university professorship, I was cordially asked to wait at the cosy visitors’ room of the garrison and informed that a superior officer would like to meet me there. I met a young Marma gentleman waiting at the visitor’s room and he introduced himself, in his remarkably good English, as the regional coordinator of a development program run by the UNDP. I remembered noticing the white, UN-marked speedboat at the wharf. The gentleman told me that he could give me a lift up to Mahalu on his way to Farua Bazar, provided that the military allows us to go. The officer arrived with a sincere apology for keeping us waiting. I explained to him my intended business in the area, which was then the documentation of the Pangkhua language. He seemed to be curious. Then, he briefed me on the risk factors they manage in the area, like the activities of the cross-border and local insurgents. Over refreshments of chilled lemonade and cookies, he told us about some gripping cases of abduction and kidnapping in the recent past. However, he assured me that the village of Mahalu is relatively safe as the leaders of the village are closely associated with the military and, therefore, ‘trustworthy’. Moreover, the military has two smaller bases close to the village. So, I could go and stay there. However, I should not go anywhere other than Mahalu. Even at Mahalu, I should stay at the guesthouse, not with any of the families in the village. Relieved by the decision, I agreed instantly to comply with his instructions.

The UNDP worker was not as fortunate as I. The officer told him that they were not informed through the proper procedure about the UNDP trip that day and there was not enough time to arrange security for the UNDP team. So, it would be better for them to come back some other day, duly informing the army. The UNDP official tried politely to present some arguments but the young military officer regretted that he could not allow him to go that day. The gentleman was disappointed, shrugging apologetically towards me. Afterward, when he was heading back to his team on the speedboat, the sentry at the checkpoint stopped a small engine boat for me which was heading to Farua. The three hillmen on the boat, whose specific identity I could not figure out at the moment, looked apprehensive. The sentry asked them to drop me at Mahalu, recorded the boat number and name of the owner in a small notebook and waved his hand to start off. The people on that boat, Tonchongyas from a neighbouring village of Mahalu, were friendly and curious and I learned much from them about the settlements we passed by. I was feeling quite comfortable to be finally with people who actually know where Mahalu is and how to get there, and of course, also knowing that there were no more checkpoints before Mahalu.

After such an eventful journey, the boat landed me on the wharf of Mahalu at noon, a day I clearly remember even though so many years have passed since then. The day was already intense from an ethnographic point of view because the journey had provided curious observations on the state of the CHT. I felt clearly that things had changed significantly since my last visit to the CHT and since the peace accord of 1997. The region was undergoing the highest degree of intervention by a range of diverse agencies from the outside world. A large part of this intervention is recognised formally as developmental intervention. Throughout the history of the modern CHT, almost all governmental authorities, including the military, had explicit development agendas as an essential part of their administrative role here. Now, international developmental institutes have become a part of the social change that the so-called modern world outside was designing for the CHT.

The norms and dilemmas of regional politics in the area and also the national policies on the CHT are now increasingly being determined by these interventions. Since the accord of 1997, various international human rights agencies have earned a greater degree of influence here. At the same time, the accord has further sharpened the settler vs indigenous divide as some of the Bengalis here allege that the most of the international aid is discriminately dedicated to the indigenous communities. In different parts of the CHT, particularly at the

town centres, I remember posters of the Shamadhikar Andolon (Equal Rights Movement)<sup>24</sup>, demanding equal shares of developmental aid with the indigenous. The developmental interventions by transnational agencies are also evidently influencing the manifold identity politics in the CHT and this is changing the balance of power here. For instance, a large number of the educated middle class youth of Jumma origin work for different development organisations. These emergent middle class professionals, like some of my oldest Jumma friends, now constitute part of the urban Jumma elite and have a new political voice empowered and protected by international human rights forums and global indigenous movements. The young Marma man I met at the checkpoint clearly represents a group of indigenous youth who, remarkably, play a decisive role for the first time in the region's history, in the development interventions in the CHT. Yet, I was still more curious about the majority of hillmen outside this emergent social class who use their indigeneity and other elements of social and cultural capital to make an attractive living, which in the last instance, is an empowerment, certainly, both against the state and within their own society. Ramsiang was the first person I befriended outside this emergent educated Jumma middleclass.

I stepped into the only grocery-cum-tea stall next to the wharf where a few of the villagers were chatting; I could feel their curious and friendly gazes on me. I asked cordially for directions to Laltran's house, and after listening to my efforts to pronounce the name properly, they could figure out who I was looking for. The shopkeeper asked me to sit down and sent someone to find someone I thought would be Laltran. The shopkeeper, a good friend afterwards, told me that Laltran had not been at the village for the last few months as he was having private tuition in Rangamati to prepare for the HSC examination next year. This was quite embarrassing for me as I knew no-one else in the village and was aware already that there was no way to return to Kaptai or Rangamati on the same day. I felt like a stranger, uninvited and unexpected in a place he knows very little about. However, the young man whom he sent to look for someone returned with a man in his early forties. It was Laltran's father, Ramsiang. We shook hand and he sat next to me. Soon he flooded me with kind words in his considerably good Bengali, saying that he had heard a lot about me from his son and was so proud that his son had the opportunity to work with such a 'dignified' and 'educated' person like me. More embarrassed with the kind appreciation, I said that, in fact, I was

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<sup>24</sup> A platform for Bengalis who think that they are discriminated against by the development agencies as most of their interventions aim to benefit the indigenous only. Therefore, the central objective of the organisation is to obtain 'equal share' for the Bengalis living in the CHT.

fortunate to have his son as my consultant because very few of the Pangkhuas living in Bangladesh could do the work he had done for me and that, in fact, I was there to start a longer linguistic research.

Ramsiang took me with him to his house. While stepping across the long, concrete staircase that leads to his house in the village, I realised that this person knew much about me, my attitudes, my eating habits and my profession. He seemed to be glad to know that, despite being a 'Muslim', I can handle any kind of food that the 'Paharies' traditionally eat. When we arrived at his house, a typical Pahari house made of bamboo and tin on strong, wooden columns, Ramsiang showed me a well-prepared bed and asked if I would like to have some rest. He brought out a packet from the closet nearby and took from it four or five shotgun shells and a few fireboxes and started scratching gunpowder from matchsticks. Sensing my curiosity, Ramsiang explained that he had a licensed gun for hunting. As the shells were very expensive, he used to remake the shells from iron balls used in fishing nets and gunpowder from the fireboxes. I curiously watched him preparing the shells with amazing skills. At the final stage, when he was burning the plastic end of the shell to fix it tight, I felt quite scared. However, nothing went wrong. He stood up with his gun on his shoulder. 'I have to leave you all by yourself for the rest of the afternoon', he said apologetically. 'I am going on a hunt; let's see what god has sanctioned to your fate.'

This was the beginning of the friendship I now have with Ramsiang, a renowned hunter among the Pangkhuas. He is not only a good hunter but also has a reputation for being smart with outsiders, able to handle high officials with his manners and knowledge of etiquette, and above all, for his foresight which enabled him to keep all of his seven children in school despite being one of the poorer Pangkhuas in the village. It took me the next few years to realise that hunting is one of his significant means of earning money or getting food whenever he is confronted with sudden needs like my being an unexpected guest that afternoon when he had nothing else with which to provide me a good meal. That night he returned with a monkey and some wild vegetables from the jungle. His wife, the affectionate lady for whom I came to have a high regard, cooked them. We had a fabulous supper with rice and meat soup along with vegetable salad.

Since then, in the long course of our friendship, his has become a second family for me. I have shared and experienced his family's struggle to achieve '*unnoti*', as he used to say, the Bengali synonym for the words like 'prosper' or 'development'. The family is primarily

dependent on Jum cultivation. As well, Ramsiang had a constant eye to every opportunity he could avail himself of to assure food and education for his children. He is always doing something – hunting, collecting firewood from the forest, planting or harvesting from the Jum, meeting an influential person in the village who could help him send one of his children to the Christian missionary boarding school or to the Buddhist boarding school in Rangamati, or borrowing some money from a relative in order to send his daughter to study in a missionary school at Kaptai.

On relaxed evenings, he used to collect some rice liquor from the neighbouring Tonchongya village, the only luxury he had in his life. We used to share that in his little hut, straight for him and with water for me. He needed to get drunk in order to ask any favour from me. ‘Dada’ or brother, as he called me, ‘Shall my children prosper in life?’ ‘I am a wretched Jum farmer; I don’t want them dying like me working on the Jum their entire life. Can they really prosper with the education I am providing them?’ These questions of his, which he asked me countless times, gradually depicted an inescapable yearning for development, for progress, or to prosper, which my friends at Mahalu now live with.

I had no ready answer. His questions derive from a dream, a fathomable desire, that many of the Pangkhua families who have children studying in different schools now live with; a desire to prosper through education. For Pangkhuas at Mahalu or elsewhere, this is no easy thing to achieve. Throughout the CHT, schools are built and abandoned as a routine practice. In 2004, the village of Mahalu had two school buildings with no students or teacher. The schools were built by different development authorities and then abandoned, as the appointed teachers were simply unable to live in a place like Mahalu, or among people like Pangkhuas. The primary school running at the time survived because it could finally find some local teachers.

Yet, running schools in the CHT does not guarantee a proper education as language appears as the biggest predicament for the Jumma children who can eventually reach school after evading other socio-economic barriers to education. The children who manage to pass the primary level confront the new challenge of acquiring lodging and food around town centres where high schools are mostly situated. It is not surprising that none of the Pangkhua parents expect their children to pass the qualification exams like SSC or HSC at the first attempt. I joined in several ceremonial feasts, marked by the sacrifice of a rooster or pig, wishing success for the examinee Pangkhua students. My Pangkhua associate of this

research, one of the brightest students among the Pangkhua youth, required three attempts to pass the HSC. To my knowledge, none from the Pangkhua community in Bangladesh has ever studied in a Public University to the year 2010. Yet, education is something that has engulfed many of my Pangkhua friends' moral desires.

What does education mean to most of the parents who do their utmost to keep their children in school? My realisation is that they view education as their children's escape from the Jum cultivation which no longer remains a promising livelihood and clearly does not offer a future. The families struggle, as Remsiang's does, to acquire land for Jum cultivation every year. The method of cultivation has been interfered with expensively by neo-technique means of farming like the use of fertilisers and pesticides. The amazing crop diversity, the most distinguishing feature of Jum cultivation, is being destroyed by interventions of cash crops like spices, tobacco, or fruits. Crop failure is now more and more recurrent. They have no doubt that their traditional subsistence economy possesses no future for their next generation. Even for the families who achieve a successful Jum, the produce is barely sufficient for their subsistence as needs have increased in pace with the modernisation of life. Newly emerged needs like education, communication technologies or new mercantile consumer products advertised in the mass media have largely redefined their moral desires. Many of them had to engage in different trades like fishing or logging, petty trading across the border, working in the tobacco cultivation or for different government concerns like the 'Food for Work'.

Against the scholarly perception of development that I had in mind, their view of and drive for development presented quite a distinctive idea about change. Their idea of development appeared to be the most important object of desire. The ideas and imaginings about development are simultaneously characterised by their struggle to survive in a moribund food-producing life, and an attraction to a future that has no room for their present livelihood. Their imaginings of and struggles for an economic future in the CHT are now determined by a radical transformation from the self-sustained mode of livelihood they had for centuries to a new mode of life characterised by dependence on the outside world. Education is the only visible escape from the uncertainties of the food-producing communal life that is now threatened. It is the most essential strategic resource to make a way out of it.

I confronted Ramsiang's question in many different forms and shapes from his fellow villagers. Soon I found myself as their most readily available person with valuable knowledge

about the future they await. Parents often asked me for advice and information about better educational opportunities for their children. Significantly, what I noticed was a desire for economic aid and opportunities from the outside world which reflects an important moral shift from their independent subsistence food producer community. Undeniably, the baseline survival of most of the families at Mahalu is still the Jum cultivation. Yet, every family strives for a diverse range of opportunities as a substitute to Jum cultivation.

This particular perception of development, which is enmeshed with an emerging moral desire, however, renders quite different attitudes towards developmental change than what the enormous body of literature on so-called ‘tribal development’ in the CHT suggests. Most of the literature of development on the indigenous people of the CHT is a figurative lament about their indifference to developmental change which eventually identifies their own nature, behaviour, or traditional cultural practices as the major predicament of their socio-economic progress. The same lament is also used to identify the causes of their impoverishment. Their moral aspirations to achieve ‘unnoti’ or development, as I have experienced among the Pangkhuas and other identity groups in the CHT, invite an epistemological query about the notion of development itself. It is often difficult to define it as a moral desire for development, as striving to prosper, when it appears as a desperate struggle to survive at the same time. Education, for instance, is therefore not a choice to achieve a better life, but instead, a ruthless challenge— a hard struggle for existence.

### **Development as Moral Subjection**

Arguably, it is difficult to draw a dividing line between the struggles of existence and desire for development. Can the social instinct of what Kropotkin called ‘later development’, be observed as the ideological or moral constituent of developmental imaginations? It leads me to delve deeper into the current predicament of how one should address the social instincts of my Pangkhua friends which are now manifested in new forms of moral desires like education or mobile phones. Understanding this aspiration for development I have experienced among Pangkhuas requires a contrast with what the dominant discourse of development emphasises grossly as ‘developmental change’ or ‘progress’. Undeniably, development is a founding belief of modernity where its predominantly Western rationality supposes that it can change the world for the better, beyond geographies and cultures across the world, through deliberate and cooperative attempts to change a society for the benefit of all its members. In its most

sociological version, development is fundamentally different from economic growth explained in terms of GDP or GNI which is more interested in the social conditions under which production occurs and which eventually transforms the society. The idea or notion of “development springs from the most optimistic moment of the modern rational belief, whereas mere growth is (not only) practical (or) technological, but also (a) ...prejudiced (instrumental) thought” (Peet & Hartwick 2009, p. 3).

For contemporary development agencies of all descriptions, development is planned change –a set of planned interventions to change the future in people’s favour. At the same time, who determines the change, who designs this change and how it is implemented and what the consequences are have always been a set of inherently political agendas. Development cannot be explained without an equal focus on political practices as it possesses the inherently extreme potential to intervene in the life of the commons through the ideas and actions of a few. The idea of progress, the moral foundation of developmental change, originates from the major philosophical legacy of secularism left to our contemporary social sciences by the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. This view of progress, along with its diverse derivations and embedded imaginings, assumes an appallingly naive and unilineal path of social change according to which all societies are progressing effortlessly and infallibly from higher degrees of poverty, deprivation, repression, and ignorance to higher degrees of affluence, civilisation, democracy and rationality. This belief of modernity historically claims to have superseded the ‘dark-age’ attitude, characterised by the overwhelming domination of religion and church, because of its commitment to science and rational knowledge. It has therefore, become a transformation from badness to goodness, from scarcity to affluence and from ignorance to knowledge. It poses “as an irreversible movement”, as Shanin observed, “from an endless diversity of particularities, wasteful of human energies and economic resources, to a world unified and simplified into the most rational arrangement” (1997, p. 65). For the last two centuries, the dominant ideology of progress has been manifested in academic and political discourse in words like modernisation, development, civilisation, growth, industrialisation, globalisation, and so on and so forth. The notion of progress also built its own moral legitimacy through keeping strong connections with the industrial revolution, colonialism and neo-colonialism. It became a shared moral sphere for both capitalist and socialist imaginings for a future society that were highly contested during the Cold War era.

By the end of the twentieth century, liberal imaginations of development became more inclined to individual freedom and human rights in the face of an emergent ethical discourse originating from relatively critical quarters like the dependency theorists, Marxists, or environmental critics. The idea of development in this era entails, as Peet and Hartwick outline, human emancipation in two of the senses of the world:

...liberation from the vicissitudes of nature, through greater understanding of earth processes followed by carefully applied technology; and self-emancipation, control over social relations, conscious control over the conditions under which human nature is formed, rational and democratic control over the cultural production of the human personality (2009, p. 3).

According to them,

[i]n both senses, external and internal, development entails economic, social, and cultural progress, including, in the latter sense, finer ethical ideals and higher moral values. Development means improvement in a complex of linked natural, economic, social, cultural, and political conditions. Developmentalism is the belief in the viability and desirability of this kind of progress. A good example might be Amartya Sen's *Development as Freedom* (2000), concerned with how society grants individuals the capacity for taking part in creating their own livelihoods, governing their own affairs, and participating in self-government—although we do not find him following this through with a political economics of societal transformation (Peet & Hartwick 2009, p. 3).

However, social Darwinism and its more ideological form –secularism– are still the rudimentary paradigms of modern knowledge about development. It has therefore, grossly missed social instinct as a constituting element of developmental change. For Darwin, as one of his earliest critics Kropotkin (1902, 1922) has observed, “moral sense is thus not the mysterious gift of unknown origin which it was for Kant” (1922, p52). He goes on to say that:

Darwin was therefore quite right in considering that the instinct of ‘mutual sympathy’ is more permanently at work in the social animals than even the purely egotistic instinct of direct... (self-interest) (Kropotkin 1922, p. 17).

This understanding of human evolution can lay a strong basis of understanding development as a moral desire or as a process of rudimentary moral conscience. Unfortunately, it is too

often forgotten by social Darwinists. As a result, Darwinian influences on the social sciences reduced the understanding of morality among premodern societies about the study of primitive rituals, customs and beliefs of savages, into the functional role they play in a given culture. Those moral aspects of the societies, deriving from fundamental social instincts, were not considered to be anything universal or permanent, rather were imagined as antiquated forms and systems of thought which the principles of evolution or progress would gradually replace with rational belief.

My experience with the idea of development and imaginings of a future society or state of life among the Pangkhuas reveals fundamental differences with what is meant by the term for the emergent neoliberal world order and its developmental scholarship. For centuries, the small villages in the CHT had developed zone-specific forms of life, their own customs and socio-politico-economic traditions, part of which have been qualified as useful through years of experimentation and hence became a repertoire of their habitus and shaped their instinctive habits and the imperatives of life which again was remoulding the habitus and thus the process went on and will go on, *ad infinitum*. This is how each group evolved its unique morality, its particular form of ethics, which the seniors –the preservers of the tribal customs– had been protecting in the form of cultural knowledge, reflected in symbolic and mythological expressions. Their sense of morality and justice, both in economic and social respects, is largely reflected in many of the stories I recorded between 2004 and 2007. Similar things can be observed in their customary laws. Like most other ‘primitive’ societies of the world, nature appears to be their first and foremost moral teacher which is clearly evident in the cultural reminiscences of their premodern life. The stories I heard from the elders of the village, along with the crowds of curious children and youth, have been transmitted from generation to generation. The moralising knowledge, sometimes in the form of practical instructions, is transmitted through oral traditions where one can find a radically different portrayal of the societies which are being rapidly transformed by developmental interventions.

Many of the fairy tales and legends depict their past through imageries of an affluent society managed by customary principles of mutual aid within the society. Among them, my favourite example would be a story named ‘Zong-te Thiam’ or the story of the baby monkey. The long story amazingly narrates principles of mutual cooperation in Jum cultivation. As per the customary labour organisation among Pangkhuas, selling labour within the society is

forbidden. The entire cultivation process is ideally managed by ritualistic exchange of gifts and treats –what is called ‘anlom’ in Pangkhua. The story is about a monkey, a hen, a bear, and a cat doing ‘anlom’ together. Each of them was supposed to work, as human families in reality had to do, in every member’s land in turns. As per the social norm, the host was morally obliged to feed his workers with the best possible food. The moral aspect of the story is in how every animal acted to gather and cook food for his friends. While bear made the best sacrifice, by cooking his own thigh for his friends, the clever monkey, the ‘bad’ character in the story, cheated others on his turn. Such stories frequently reflect an affluent state of life, where food is abundant in nature and life is free of subjugation. In brief, my ethnographic inference from their oral tradition suggests that today, their sense of morality and desire is constructed on the presumptions of an affluent past, a disrupting present, and an uncertain future.

The memories of the past depict an affluent society based on mutual cooperation and the abundance of nature. The speculation about the future is characterised by the systematic alienation from this past, which eventually exposes the society to mercantile dependency and competition. The developmental future for the Pangkhuas is at the same time a threat to their basic livelihood and an attraction full of new desires. The collective process of Jum cultivation inevitably requires family labour. On the other hand, the educational path to development does not really allow children to work with their parents, eventually causing a cultural rift between the parents and children. With numerous other forms of such contradictions, most of the families at Mahalu are now thus caught between their own past with the food production and foraging, and their children’s possible future through the path of education. An entire way of livelihood, including the vast body of knowledge about sustainable living in nature is thus confronting a threat to existence. At the same time, they have neighbours whose children have found jobs in NGOs or schools and have a guaranteed income at the end of the month. This constitutes the most desirable future life that many of the Jumma parents dream for their children, a life independent of Jum cultivation, free of manual labour, free of threats to the continuity of their traditional economy with which it is now confronted.

Their past, on other hand, seems to be just the reverse of the modern imaginings of development that are constructed upon certain narratives of a wretched past and the promise of an attractive and affluent future. In the biographical narratives I recorded at Mahalu or in

other places, elders frequently recall memories of past plentiful harvests from the Jum, enormous amounts of vegetation for foraging and high numbers of animals for hunting. This idea of affluence should be understood as something like the ‘Zen road to affluence’, as Marshall Sahlins (1968) has aptly noted, where “wants are finite and few, and technical means unchanging but on the whole adequate” (Sahlins 1968, p. 4), where people can enjoy an unparalleled material plenty with a low and simple standard of life. The popular modernist view of economic life in a tribal society with a subsistence or anarchic economy, on other hand, has always been that it was terribly difficult and unpleasant. The assumption is not only a popular view, it still underlies the thinking of many social scientists and development planners.

One of the examples of such a modernistic view is Nasir Uddin’s recent account of the perception of the ‘better life’ among the Khumis in the CHT. Although critical to the modernist paradigms of development in his theoretical discussion in the opening parts of the essay, when it comes to analyse his ethnographic observations, Uddin uncritically surrenders to the modernist hegemony of development that measures development on the basis of the extent of mercantile consumption of consumer goods by a subject populace. In fact, Uddin delves further into a more problematic mode of analysis by using a Khumi phrase ‘nebu-heina’, which according to him, stands for ‘better life’. He equates the term, in a very simplistic fashion, to the extent of the Khumi people’s increasing engagement with consumer culture and therefore sets forth a binary between a wretched past with subsistence food production and mercantile consumerism. “...the Khumi have generated their own way of transitions for moving towards...” as he concludes his essay,

...nebu-heina with the experiences they gain through the contacts with Bengalis, markets and urban centres. Ostensibly, it seems as if the Khumi also follow the growth model of development or modernisation theory of development by uplifting their standard of life from hill life to semi-urban or urban life by adopting urban features. One can also argue that the Khumi perception of development also concerns economic development that classical economists talk about because they, in fact, in search of better life, are producing surplus to make themselves financially well-off so that they can change their standard of life, which seemingly goes with the universal development model of the formalist school (Uddin 2014, pp. 72-73).

Even less aware of potential dangers of essentialising a vernacular term with his own modernistic faith on development, Uddin does not hesitate to declare that such adoption of

consumerism is the obvious 'nebu-heina' for Khumi people without any concern for the complex way the mercantile logic itself infuses new moralities among its subject population. Rather, he is keener to impose his scholastic understanding of development on a vernacular word that has evolved in the culture under his study, independent of the developmental imagining he is enforcing now on the term 'nebu-heina'.

The societies in the CHT, according to such scientific and modernistic views, lie at the bottom of the thermo-dynamic scale –least energy use per capita per year than any other mode of production. For this kind of view, lack of technological progress in these societies is the most crucial indicator of their being at the backward edge of social evolution. 'Progress' and 'development' are assumed to be the most fundamental ways of human intervention in social evolution, which is equipped with new technologies and scientific knowledge and their subsistence economy and traditional knowledge are viewed as embryonic and therefore underdeveloped. This dilemma has provoked me to explore the Pangkhuas at Mahalu, as well as the indigenous population of the CHT, as moral subjects of development who, at the cost of their own morality, accept the moral norms established by the developmental hegemony. The process of subjection undermines their own historical imaginings, tradition and values built upon the moral principles of mutual cooperation, and therefore, infuse a new form of morality, through a certain pedagogical discourse characterised by the mercantile values of competition with each other.

But how would it look if we make an attempt to conceptualise modern development discourses as pedagogy of "moral subjection"? Pandian here is of the opinion that "prominent anthropological critiques of development in the 1990s focused on the powerful discourses and institutional apparatuses that had schematised official developmental aims and practices in the decades following the Second World War" (2008, p. 161). Many of its critics, like Escobar in 1992, looked at the possibilities of a new imagining of our collective future beyond the positivist idea of development which he phenomenally called 'post-development era'. These views largely unsettled the liberal imagining of development in the post-war era. Recently, the scholarly imagining of development also has been influenced largely by Foucault's notion of 'governmentality' (1991) as an insight to unfold the issues of welfare and improvement under colonial and postcolonial statehoods. Employing Foucault's methodology to critically examine the developmental discourse, Escobar shows how the discourse enables the rulers, to subject their populations to an infinite variety of interventions,

to more encompassing forms of power and systems of control ... (including) killing and torturing and ... condemning their indigenous populations to near extinction” (1995, p. 52).

Similarly “Foucault’s emphasis on the governmental ‘conduct of conduct’ has opened up a wide range of sites for critical scrutiny, from rationality of urban planning and public health...” (Mitchell 1988, 2002 cited in Pandian 2008, p. 161), to the workings of forest bureaucracies... (Li, 1999; Agrawal, 2005 cited in Pandian 2008, p. 161), to the official management of rural lands and livelihoods” (Moore 2005 cited in Pandian 2008, p. 161). Anthropology’s concern for development is now more about the ‘micro-politics’ of development, dealing more with how “social, political, and spatial practices through which programs of improvement are imposed, exercised, negotiated, and contested” (Pandian 2008, p. 161).

### **Development as Alienation: the Power of Policy**

The anthropological study of ‘micro-politics’ of development in the CHT does not necessarily exclude the understanding of larger political orders like the state and globalisation, or the social consequences of the ‘developmental policies’ they have historically played here. They create the necessary political conditions for the micro-politics to occur. The history of development in the CHT has always been intertwined with the interventions by the state. State-making is the fundamental vehicle of development here, or in some cases, the other way round. From the very beginning, the official history of the CHT, mostly in governmental documents, shows that ‘development’ has always been a part and objective of ‘administrative’ affair. Since the 1760s, state interventions in this region have brought about major transformations in the economic systems of the hill-dwelling societies here. Amena Mohsin’s 1997 account, *The Politics of Nationalism*, includes a comprehensive review of developmental interventions by the state in the CHT. Her analytical review of the ‘politics of development’ shows how the administrative and developmental interventions in the CHT have been inseparable from the colonial era to 1997, which is, significantly, the year of the Peace Treaty that has radically altered the political conditions of interventions through administrative reform which is arguably in favour of the indigenous population.

The interventions in general have far-reaching resonances in their historical relationship with the territory, like, for example, the introduction of freehold tenure of land, which is

hitherto unknown among many of the hill people, or like mercantile exchange which is increasingly substituted for subsistence food production. The consequences of these interventions are manifold. Many of the interventions have a benevolent appearance, justified with the civilising discourse of colonial governmentality and postcolonial hegemony of development. In the post-independence era, the legacies of the colonial governments have been restored by the nationalist governments which add a hint of the age-old civilising discourse in the name of national development. The natural resources of the CHT, including its geographic features, have been used as prerogative inputs in national development. The discourse of development or the scholarly accounts on development in the CHT have direct political implications for the conflicting identity groups in the CHT. Despite its essentially egalitarian ideologies, the notion of 'development' can be used, as it has been in the CHT, in different political purposes and actions, as a political weapon. It has been one of the central instruments, both in the geographic and cultural sense, of state-making in the CHT.

During the intervention by the British colonial state around 1760, the hill-dwelling societies in the CHT had an economic system harmonised with the environmental settings. The natural resources were used in a traditional way of sharing which was governed by a sense of communal ownership and customary cultural values. Jum cultivation was not a mere technology of food production; it was a way of life that organised elementary aspects of their social and cultural life. Earlier anthropological accounts of the region, such as Buchanan (1798), Lewin (1912; 1870; 1869) and Hutchinson (1906), clearly suggest that the concept of surplus and private profit was totally absent in their subsistence-based food production and foraging practices. The rugged nature of the terrain, poor transportation and lack of a market for industrial produce kept the early stage of interventions as peripheral, confined to limited tax collection from trade the region had with the plainland traders. The hill dwellers were known to use cotton as the payment for the limited number of goods they exchanged with the Bengali traders. According to Lewin (1869), the hill dwellers also paid revenue to the circle chiefs in cotton which was then collected by the British government from the circle chiefs. This seemed to be the only linkage they had with colonial economy. The CHT cottons, along with the rest of its production in India, were used by the textile industries in Britain. Around 1789, as Mackenzie's 1884 account suggested, the revenues started being collected in cash rather than in kind. By the end of the seventeenth century, money was introduced to their economy, principally as a means of paying tax and tributes to the circle chiefs, and eventually to the state governments. This caused an increased dependency on trading with Bengalis to

acquire cash to pay tribute and taxes. It also instigated debt in their economy as Bengali moneylenders were already in place to offer exploitative deals to the 'ignorant' hill dwellers.

In 1860, as has been discussed in earlier chapters, the CHT was formally annexed by the British. Besides other strategic reasons for this enclosure, maximisation of revenue was another primary objective of this administrative reform which also divided the territory into three chiefdoms. After these reforms, taxation became more comprehensive than ever. There were newly introduced taxes on land, transportation, market places, trades and forest produce. The new taxes were accompanied by justifications like 'progress' or 'development' which were claimed to be the government's contribution to their economy and society. The first direct assault of development came on their basic livelihood, the Jum cultivation. Their method of cultivation was deemed as 'primitive' and 'technologically inferior', as a complete waste of the resources invested in it. The ideology derived from the imperialist chauvinism remained as the constant ideological source of colonial state-making. The CHT Manual of 1900 explicitly prohibited internal migration which was in essence a restriction on their shifting mode of cultivation. This also aimed to create freehold tenure which was so obviously meant for collection of individually determined taxes. The attempt to introduce fixed monograin plough cultivation instead of multigrain shifting cultivation, which was actually an effort to increase revenue, was campaigned on as the central development effort by the state in the CHT. The chiefdoms were the primary mediators of these reforms. It was not possible for the government to identify individual families, whose farming shifted from one place to another every year, to collect tax. The introduction of monograin plough agriculture in whatever plain land the CHT had would partly solve the problem of collecting taxes. However, in many instances, the chiefs opposed the idea of direct tax collection and could retain their tax-collecting authority.

The CHT Manual of 1900 was the legal basis of the fundamental changes the CHT consequently underwent. It radically altered their economic basis, political formation and customary rights over their territory. Before the Manual, the village or 'Mouza' chiefs, locally known as karbaries and headmen, used to assume office through hereditary rights. The primary source of a chief's authority was social consensus. The Act handed it over to the authority of the circle chiefs to appoint them. The chiefs, in accordance with their strategic relationship with the British Raj, assisted the government where the interest of each ran parallel. The introduction of plough cultivation, particularly in the flat plains within the CHT,

caused further social differentiation among different hill societies. These were particularly in the river valleys where the inhabitants were mostly Chakmas, and to some extent, Marmas in the southern CHT. This provided them a comparative advantage among the hill tribes as modernisation arrived quickly in the regions following market places, concentration of population and education for the upper classes among them. The rest of the communities continued to cultivate Jum in the hill slopes as they had done for centuries. The introduction of plough cultivation also opened the land for Bengali peasants with thousands of years of experience in river valley agriculture which is predominantly irrigated monograin cultivation. Many of them were hired by feudal Chakma or Marma families to cultivate their lands. The trade deriving from this new form of agriculture was dominated solely by migrant Bengalis. Finally, parts of the CHT were governmentally appropriated through the introduction of plough agriculture which had given rise to the present-day town centres in the CHT.

In 1868, the British colonial state claimed ownership of all lands in the CHT. The claim was resisted by the circle chiefs who were the hereditary collectors of revenues. While sovereign and legal rights over land were being disputed between two historical subjugators – the colonial government and their feudal counterparts– the widely held perception of land rights was absolutely ignored and considered irrelevant. Land was perceived as a communal pasture by the hill societies, rather than as having any legal rights binding them to any permanent tenure with any given piece of land. Before state intervention of any sort, there were stories of inter-tribe wars over territorial claims, yet the perception of land ownership in a modern sense was historically absent among the hill dwellers. The reminiscences of this still prevail in folk imagination, where land rights are imagined only in relation to community or village, kinship groups, and sometimes mythical spirits, which is demarcated in a very different way. The chieftom's influence and control over different village communities was based on clan and tribal divisions rather than territorial divisions which became a logical ground for the colonial state government to nullify the circle chief's right over land which meant the sovereignty of the chief is recognised as being only over people, not over the territory.

Consequently, the legal battle was overwhelmingly won by the government and it established supreme legislative rights over land in the CHT. The claims were detailed and ratified by the 1900 CHT Manual. It laid the legal foundation for private permanent tenure on land in the CHT by stating that “a tenant directly under government shall have permanent and

heritable rights on the land for which he pays tax” (CHT Manual 1900, Rule 34, Section 11). Now there was a district office from which to solicit that right of an individual who wanted to register his right to a given piece of land which was up to 25 acres per family. The land tax could be given directly to the government or via his village headman. Besides permanent tenure over plough-cultivable flat plains, classified lands were also given as ‘usufruct’, which meant that the state would still retain the ownership rights over these lands hitherto given to people for Jum in return for tax through the local headman. This was particularly for people who had no actual concept of ownership. Thus, by the 1900s, the lands of the CHT were legally enclosed by the colonial government where ownership of the land was vested with the state, unlike the rest of Bengal where the Zamindars were absolute owners of land through the *Permanent Settlement Act 1793*. One of the legislative documents of the era lays this historical claim over the territory of ‘semi-civilised’ tribes saying,

It appears advisable, as opportunities occur, to make the semi-civilised tribes inhabiting these hills understand more and more that the lands they occupy form an integral portion of Her Majesty’s dominion in India, and that the government alone is the fountain of all honour (Government of Bengal 1874, p. 144 as cited in Mohsin 1997, p. 89).

Besides this legislative appropriation of land ownership, the enormous forests in the territory were opened up for commercial extractions. Although the CHT Manual had an ineffective ban on land possession by outsiders, an increasing amount of land was leased for commercial exploitation. Forest produce was carried through the rivers to the Chittagong port city. Government representative collected tolls. Although the toll authority was given to the Circle Chiefs for a while in 1864, it was reassumed by the government in 1871. The *Indian Forest Reserve Act 1865* explicitly prohibited people from entering the forests and this meant their entire livelihood, social formation and material culture would become illegal. Since the early nineteenth century, the natural vegetation of the forest started to be replaced with commercially important timber woods which were needed for building British Navy ships and were used as railway-sleepers (Mohsin 1997, p. 90). Increasing amounts of land were also given to European entrepreneurs for plantations of products like tea, coffee and oranges. The hill people’s communal rights to the forest were thus suspended. No measure was in place to compensate them for their lost livelihood.

So the British governmental policies towards the CHT were determined by its economic goals which became a legacy for the Pakistani government which took over the territory after

the partition of 1947. The notion of 'tribal development' was now supplemented with the notion of 'national development' for which the CHT appeared to be an abundant source of natural resources. The CHT still continued to be governed by 1900 Manual which secures a special administrative status of the region. The regional exploitation of East Bengal, then East Pakistan, also included the CHT. The water resource of the CHT was the first thing to be utilised in the industrial development in East Pakistan. Between 1957 and 1962, a hydroelectric project was constructed by damming the major river of the region, the Karnafuly. The project, implemented with the financial and technical assistance of the US Aid, aimed to generate 120 megawatts of electricity, to control floods in the downstream of the Karnafuly, to increase navigation facilities in inaccessible parts of the CHT, to enhance protein supply by cultivating fish in the reservoir and to facilitate a larger extent of forest resource extraction for which the extended navigation routes would provide transportation. All these developmental goals have served to enhance the government's administrative presence in the territory. Some of the benefits of the project went in favour of the Bengalis migrating to the CHT. The electricity was outsourced to Chittagong City.

The project, implemented without any social impact assessment, submerged 54,000 acres of cultivable land owned by indigenous people which amounted about 40 per cent of the total cultivable land in the CHT. About 90 miles of roads and 10 square miles of reserve forests also went under water. Ten thousand Chakma families with plough land and 8000 Chakma Jum cultivator families lost their land and home under water. It reportedly also affected around 8000 Bengali settlers and 1000 Marma families. The rehabilitation plan of the government was poorly implemented. Most of the affected families were deprived of compensation of any kind. Among the displaced population, an estimated 40,000 people crossed the Indian border and became refugees.

The Kaptai hydroelectric project, however, could supply 0.5 per cent of East Bengal's total electricity supply and only 3 per cent of its commercial and industrial energy needs. Considering its miniscule output and the sufferings it brought to a large number of the hill population, the project was perceived as a development-induced disaster. Although the Kaptai Lake later became an attractive tourist site and source of commercial fishing which eventually benefitted the state and the Bengali communities it had transplanted here, the hill people and their traditional culture were turned into objects of amusement and entertainment where wealthy Bengali tourists came and openly viewed indigenous cultures in a derogatory

fashion. This was something that is still deeply resented by the relatively self-conscious section of the indigenous polity here. The dam also caused grave damage to Jum cultivation in the area by reducing the amount of available land and through its devastating environmental impacts. The rodent-flood had become more frequent than ever as an increasing amount of land was brought under bamboo grove cultivation to assure supply to the paper mills established at Kaptai. The cultivation cycle of Jum was reduced from 10-15 years to 4-5 years which had further environmental impacts.

The destruction caused by the dam had far-reaching, long-term impacts among the hill dwellers, particularly the Chakmas. It created a new political consciousness among them which was later manifested in their political struggle for autonomy and an urge to achieve education as the most obvious means of survival. The late 1960s were the peak years of Bengali resistance to the discriminatory colonial rule by the West Pakistanis. The hill people were utterly excluded from the emergent nationalist consciousness in the rest of East Bengal as it was exclusively determined by the language. Such factors had given rise to a sense of alienation from the nationalist imagination and state for the indigenous hill people in the CHT. The minimum legislative safeguards like the Special Status Provision of the CHT were withdrawn by the Bengali political elite. At the backdrop of the Kaptai Lake crisis, the political exclusion also served as the cause of grave frustration among the indigenous people. The benefits of developments like the Kaptai Dam or newly emerged government and industrial employment opportunities were monopolised by the Bengalis. Commercial exploitation of the forest resources accelerated rapidly. The Karnafuly paper mill, the largest of its kind in Asia, was established in the year 1953, which employed less than 1 per cent of its employees from indigenous groups. In 1962, the government further classified a new kind of forest named Protected Forest where Jum cultivation was completely banned. The forest was exploited by Bengali contractors. The withdrawal of settlement restrictions, expanded waterways of the Kaptai Lake and government incentives helped an increasing number of Bengalis to settle in the CHT. The protected forest scheme caused the first-known case of starvation in the CHT. The hill people quite rightly blamed the settler Bengalis for all their miseries. Bengali nationalism, ossified through its struggle against the West Pakistani regime, had little appeal for the hill cultures. Their widely felt indifference to the liberation movement and the partly antagonistic position by a few elites among them derived from this context, viewed by them as an affair of Bengalis against the West Pakistanis.

The administrative policies of the British colonial government, driven by its economic dreams, had fundamentally alienated the hill people from their age-old subsistence pattern – their means of production which was absolutely tied to the forest. The attempts to introduce plough cultivation in permanent tenure, and again, its destruction by the Kaptai Dam in the Pakistani era, reflect the nature of the state’s developmental interventions which had an inherent ideology of civilisational narratives. The hill dwellers had been repeatedly stigmatised as ‘primitive’ or ‘barbarians’, or ‘wild races’ who practised a primitive mode of subsistence with primitive technologies. The hill people and their culture still carry that stigma and it remains to the present day as a basic assumption for whatever ensued in the name of development in their life.

The nationalist chauvinism in post-independence Bangladesh overshadowed the distinct nature of life and livelihood among the hill dwellers. The common imagination of the hill people was that they are averse to developmental activities. The view was fallacious, given that almost all developmental activities carried out by the state in this region had marginalised the hill dwellers, as demonstrated above. Since the colonial era, an increasing number of state interventions had nullified their rights over resources and vested them in the state over which the common people had no control at all. Major development initiatives by the state in the Pakistani era –like the construction of the Kaptai Dam or the industrialisation and commercialisation of forest resources, or scientific forestry– disenfranchised the hill people from their territory. Since independence, the Bangladesh government has undertaken a number of development projects for the CHT. The Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board (CHTDB) was the earliest project to address the macro-level development of the region.

In 1976, the CHTDB, in recognition of its distinct development needs, was set aside as a separate development authority for the CHT. The formation of the body was partly the legacy of the Pakistani era, particularly the forest development reports and rehabilitation reports of the Kaptai Dam, and partly advice from the government’s international development partners. The Board was assumed as the functionary authority to implement different small-scale development projects while encouraging local participation and decentralisation of decision-making in the preparation and implementation of the development programs. Yet, these motivations were largely missing in the actual operations of the Board (Mohsin 1997, p. 121). Different agencies of the government – including the military– as well as the international

donor agencies were key decision-makers in the Board's operation and policies. The Board's policy inherently included the idea of eliminating Jum cultivation by engaging hill communities in wage-earning activities in industries or other development projects. Such developments of the hill people, which were often amalgamated with notions like 'mainstreaming', inherently defined the nature of transformation from subsistence economy to mercantile economy. There were extremely limited opportunities for the hill people to become wage-earners where they had to compete with an increasing number of Bengalis. Yet, the developmental policies of the CHTDB aimed explicitly to transform the increasing number of the indigenous population into wage-earners in the forests or in other developing industries. The developmental governmentality in the CHT is not only ignorant of the way of life of its own subjects, but also lacks confidence in their capabilities, completely disregarding their desires and aspirations regarding a future life.

The first of the major interventions under the CHTDB was an agricultural program named in Bengali, *Joutha Khamar*, which means Cooperative Farms. The aim of the program was to settle 'landless' Jumias into a settled form of land use, transforming them from multigrain subsistence food producers to monoplant horticulture, producers of fruits or spices for market. No attempts were ever made to understand the actual nature of their landlessness. The second major intervention was in education, which successfully developed infrastructures like school buildings and hostels within a short period of time. It also ran some teachers' training and scholarship programs for students, yet the state of education in the CHT remained a developmental failure in terms of the enrolment of indigenous children in the schools. Linguistic and cultural barriers could easily be identified as the reasons of this failure. The educational program was also known to have favoured the Bengali settlers in terms of employment of the teachers and officials. Most of the schools were built around town centres and large settlements, which were predominantly inhabited by Bengali settlers. With their other advantages like language and economic ability, they were better able to take advantage of the educational development than the indigenous population. The third intervention sector, health, also developed infrastructural facilities like hospitals and health complexes. The health programs were dedicated mainly to family planning, children and reproductive health care. UNICEF and WHO supplemented this program with support for safe drinking water and malaria control. The fourth major intervention was *Bazaar* or market development. Under this program, more than a hundred markets in the region were provided with extended infrastructure. The trades in the bazaars of the CHT are greatly dominated by

Bengali traders. As a result, Bengalis again were the primary benefactors of the program. There were also livelihood programs like fisheries which could do little to engage Pahari people in commercial fishing. The CHTDB also contributed to the development of transportation and communication infrastructure along with the civil and military administration here.

The sectors of developmental interventions by the CHTDB still remain the primary aspects of interventions both by government and transnational development agencies although the institutional process and political equilibrium have changed between the GOs and NGOs. Transformation from subsistence food-producing, 'semi-nomadic' anarchic people to mercantile food-producing, civilised citizens remained the central objective of all development interventions here. Inevitably, the nature and views of this intervention cause an alienation from their past, from their tradition and from their social life. Development in the CHT is more a political ordering of nature, society and people for governmental purposes. The political function of development in the CHT context is therefore a justification of the state's military dominance over the life and livelihoods of the Jumma communities living here. Development provides legitimacy to other violent order-making activities the state carries out in this well-known margin.

The accord of 1997, however, has already fostered some identifiable changes in the developmental practices in the CHT. Whatever flaws the treaty between the government and the PCJSS on behalf of the indigenous communities of the CHT might contain, it has earned a certain degree of political autonomy, by aligning the indigenous civil society and political parties into a recognised political force. It has opened up the territory for international development agencies for direct interventions, or for work with the indigenous communities with reduced governmental regulations. The agencies hired young educated people to a large extent from the indigenous communities. A great number of local NGOs were formed by the same social group which could engage part of the Bengali civil society and NGOs in their favour and could access financial donations from different international aid and charity agencies<sup>25</sup>. More than 16 years of peace, although substantially interrupted on different occasions, also helped the developmental interventions to be implemented well. Various

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<sup>25</sup> The donor agencies in the CHT include, according to an inventory of the year 2004: AsDB, AusAID, Government of Denmark, European Union, FAO, Government of Germany, IFRC & BDRCS, ILO, Government of Netherlands, Government of Sweden, UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP, USAID, WHO and World Bank.

multilateral and bilateral development treaties have been signed and are being implemented. The development agencies in general have expressed commitment to support the peace process and to increase their efforts to develop the region. As a result, there is a noticeable increase in the participation of indigenous people in the development work. The developmental assistance constitutes a considerable part of their desire to prosper in life.

The largest development intervention in the post-treaty era was coordinated by the UNDP under its component called the Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Facility (CHTDF) in collaboration with different government and CHT institutions and its international partners like USAID, NORAD, AUSAID and the governments of Japan and Canada. The largest project in this development scheme, designed according to new sociopolitical conditions under the peace treaty, is called Promotion of Development and Confidence-Building in the CHT (PDCB) for which the UNDP ran a ‘need assessment mission’ in 1998. The major sectors of intervention the mission identified were agriculture, education, health, infrastructure, and communication. A gender perspective, a commitment to address gender disparities, is the only uniqueness the program possesses when compared to the development intervention of the CHTDB era. The development goal in this instance was determined as:

... to support the government of Bangladesh, and to further enable the CHT institutions and the communities, to pursue socioeconomic development based on the principles of self-reliance and decentralised development initiatives, in order to reduce poverty across the region, and building greater confidence, and trust for resolving long standing issues critical to development and peace (HDRC 2009, p. 10).

The program is considered to be a ‘recommencement’ of development efforts under new political conditions.

The perspective mentioned above reflects, in general, the finest imagining of Western-led developmental philosophy for the ‘developing world’. The long-term impacts of these development inputs are yet to be assessed. However, a baseline survey conducted by the project in the year 2009, 12 years after the peace accord, indicates that about 62 per cent of the households in the CHT, regardless of their ethnic origin, live below the absolute poverty line, while 36 per cent are ‘hardcore’ poor. Among the indigenous population, 65 per cent live below the absolute poverty line and 44 per cent are ‘hardcore’ poor. The figures are 59 per cent and 31 per cent for the Bengalis in the region (HDRC 2009). This reflects a general state of impoverishment among the CHT people at present although the determinants and

measuring tools, which are based on calorie intake, require sceptical handling from anthropological perspectives.

However, since the peace accord, development activities in the CHT have become, now more explicitly, part of the peace process –an instrument of conflict management which is governmental by nature. The international donor agencies emphasise the importance of ‘structural stability’ for crisis prevention and ‘local capacities’ for sustainable peace (Gerharz 2012, p. 145). Their common interest in the CHT originates from experiences of managing what they call ‘intra-state conflicts’ predominantly appearing in developing countries or newly born nationstates. The inherent logic behind these interventions is that conflicts have economic roots in underdevelopment and poverty. So the most visible change the peace accord of 1997 has brought about in the CHT is the highly ‘visible’ development activities of different NGOs. The developmental signboards have outnumbered commercial signboards in remote places. This perhaps might have put pressure on the military, which is becoming more visible in signboards in pace with the NGOs. The Bandarban to Chimbuk road, the most attractive and convenient tourist drive in the CHT, features hundreds of signboard campaigns, both by the NGOs and the military. On the entrance to every hill town, the military’s welcoming messages to tourists are displayed in giant billboards, incorporating the faces of young couples from each of the communities living here. On the way to Chimbuk, the military introduces every tribe in the CHT in individually dedicated signboards. The anthropological knowledge attached to these, in places, is often misrepresented.

Bangladesh is a country with one of the greatest NGO densities in world. The role of NGOs as a major civil society actor, and, as one of the largest employers of the differentiated middle class, is of great political importance. This development of the development organisations in Bangladesh has its roots in the local and global political history. Since the 1970s, playing the ‘test case’ for international development and aid doctrines has enabled the country’s NGOs, led by internationally celebrated Grameen Bank and BRAC, to achieve a high degree of competence and professionalism. The NGOs have not only gained a great degree of political influence in the interplay amongst state, market and civil society, but have also taken over many developmental responsibilities from the government. The governmental role of the state has always been featured as a ‘pacifying role’ throughout the history of state-making in the CHT. Development has been the key to establish a political hegemony that could help maintain stable conditions for economic interventions.

What has changed since the ‘peace’ is that development is now largely carried out more by the authorities whose primary source of dominance is not coercion. The representatives of development, the well-intentioned professionals who might be described as ‘do-gooders’, are now increasingly from the indigenous communities. It appears that the NGOs have filled a vacuum created by a state retreating not from its coercive order-making role, but from the largesse it typically offers for people under domination. Their role has also been criticised by many of the indigenous activists I have interviewed for defusing political anger and doling out as aid or munificence what people ought to have by right. They have definitely created a professional, educated middle class who now form an influential part of the Jumma elite, whose earlier generations had resisted the state both politically and militarily. From the most critical quarters, they have been accused of turning people into dependent victims for the purpose of blunting political resistance. But there is no doubt that the NGOs in the CHT now form a political buffer between the government and indigenous people of the CHT.

### **The Pedagogy of Progress: Developmentalisation of Consciousness**

In June 2010 at Mahalu, I attended a developmental awareness-building workshop targeted at the young Pangkhuas. The workshop was organised and conducted by a local NGO in collaboration with the UNDP which was then implementing its large-scale development program called ‘Confidence Building’ in the CHT. The facilitators of the workshops were young university graduates from different CHT communities working for the NGO concerned. The workshop was hosted locally by a Pangkhua school teacher from the most influential family of the village. The participatory action research workshop ran for five consecutive days and most of the youth of the village attended the workshop as it offered meals and some cash for attendance. My mostly silent participation in the workshop allowed me to document a very compelling developmental discourse that reflects the doctrine’s view of their life and how it attempts to bring about developmental changes in it. For the first part of the participatory workshop, the participants made inventories of their material culture, like the dresses they made, procure and use, their food items, their economic activities, their educational activities and so on. Each group presented them for others on large flip charts. They also made lists of the household and livelihood tasks, as per gender roles, which they do on a daily basis. They produced diagrams of their healthcare network including different sources of healthcare, modern and traditional health practitioners and other care-providing

institutions. Changes in their clothing, food habits, health care and livelihood were identified and listed by the participants. Much of the workshop tools were devised to explore the gender relations which reflected the community's gender value. The decision-making processes were explored where most of the community decisions were rendered to be a 'participatory' decision. Their assets were assessed; the state of education was also measured with some participatory tools. Finally, there was a participatory planning session named 'Vision 2030' which attempted to explore the participants' view and collective dreams of their community by the year 2030.

On a large sheet of brown paper, as large as a roll of wallpaper, the social map of future Mahalu was drawn by the young participants of the workshop. It had an impressive sketch of the landscape, the hills and the streams, houses according to their block-wise distribution, the community buildings and schools now running in the village. The blocks, which as I said earlier also reflect the social stratification of the village, were intact in the future vision. On the right-hand side of the social map, they also set legends for every important landmark. The surrounding hills were portrayed as Jum land. The map was impressively detailed indeed. It included small details like the types of houses according to their building materials. The participants were then divided into groups to speculate about the future of the village. Each group was supposed to present graphically their dreams about the village and how they want their future village to look like by 2030. The first group portrayed the values they wanted to develop within their society during that time span as mutual cooperation, helping each other with kindness, showing empathy towards each other and combined efforts to develop in life, justice, equal participation in decision-making, honesty, and freedom for both men and women. The values, expressed in struggling Bengali synonyms seemed to be something very distant from their present life. Yet, the laughter from the participants made the process quite like playful fun which the participants were really enjoying.

The second group presented their economic dreams for the village. Now the Jum land was replaced with homestead agricultural lands. Next to the agricultural lands, there was a hospital, a computer-training centre, an adult education centre and a youth club which was emphasised as a concrete building rather than an ordinary tin-shaded building. There was also a gymnasium for physical exercise (for both male and female) and a church house fenced with a brick wall, adjacent to a religious training centre for children. The third group, whose plans were presented by a young girl, wanted to present in Pangkhua language but this was

first denied by the facilitators and the audience as the audience were enjoying the struggling Bengali of each presenter. Finally, however, she was allowed to present in Pangkhua. Her imagination about their future included many social activities which form a central part of Pangkhua life in general.

The rest of the workshop was mostly discussion sessions led by the officials of the NGO. The facilitators were from the Chakma, Marma and Tonchongya community who had studied social sciences at some public universities. They explained well how the NGO works in collaboration with international donor agencies, their organisation, networks and their development mission and vision. The framework was familiar to me as it followed the most widely practised participatory appraisal of the development industry that has dominated NGO development initiatives in Bangladesh since the 1980s. The discussion also covered the delicate relationship between the government and the NGOs working in the CHT which has long been a political issue in the regional spectrum. However, planning was markedly emphasised as the key to development. The norms of the planning, as the most impressive facilitator was emphasising, are how to survive in the face of economic difficulty, how to preserve their culture and how to prosper in life. Initiatives were defined as the beginning of development which begins with planning. All of the CHT groups were drawn as a flower, each individual community as a petal of that. At the centre of the petal, the bud was curiously named 'Upazati/Adibashi/Jumma/Pahari'; the identity dilemma appeared to be so indispensable. The flower-shaped diagram connected with arrows to the donor agencies like UNDP, ADB, DANIDA, other NGOs, CHTDB, and Islamic Mission.

The examples of development planning, as suggested by the facilitators of the workshop, were mostly infrastructural, like building roads. They insisted that the decisions of developmental inputs must be consensus decisions. For example, the route of a proposed road should be designed by the communities themselves. If it is a rubber plantation, that also should be decided by the people of the surrounding villages and the aim of the rubber plantation should be to employ the Pangkhua Jum farmers. What he was emphasising lay at the heart of the participatory development paradigm which insisted that development planning should be developed by the 'target' population themselves, not the people with expert knowledge from outside. At this stage of the workshop, the participants looked somewhat lost. The enthusiasm for dreaming about a future, which seemed to be quite enjoyable, disappeared. They agreed that all the development they have received in the past

years was decided by some elites among their community or officials from the institutions concerned. When asked whether the Pankhuas are able to make decisions about their development needs and plans, silence engulfed the audience.

It appeared that no one had confidence that they can decide their own development. When questioned repeatedly about whether they can express their opinion or not, they agreed that their opinion should be incorporated; yet this was a kind of reluctant nodding to keep the facilitation moving. The facilitator, who seemed to be considerably trained in participatory and empowerment discourse within the development sector in Bangladesh, was quite critical of imposed and non-consensual development initiatives and practices. The entire discussion was rendered visually through diagrams where a few of the human figures represented the outside experts. In an effort to make his arguments more appealing, he referred to them harshly.

They come on speedboats, visits us for an hour or two, and then go back, sit in meetings and decide about our development. The communities they decide on behalf of have very little to do with their decision-making.

He gave the building of Kaptai Dam as the classic example of non-participatory, expert knowledge-induced development. The agony this development had brought for the Paharies was immeasurable. He also included tea and rubber plantations as examples and explained how such industrial plantation was meant to replace Jum cultivation. He was quite aware of how the subsistence economy was being replaced by wage-earning systems of livelihood and how the Jum cultivation helped to maintain the ecological balance. His knowledge about ecological sustainability was really impressive.

However, as the facilitation proceeded, I started to admire the kind of consciousness these young Pahari women and men had developed about community empowerment and their perception of participatory development. Yet, when they turned to the limitations of the Pahari people to be integrated in the development, I was ill at ease. The discussions then had changed the tone and essence. The facilitators insisted that the causes of the underdevelopment of the Pahari people lay in their ignorance and tradition, their lack of capacity to speculate about a future or devise a plan, their indifference towards education, their laziness, indulgence in drinking and festivities, reluctance to toil, and so on and so forth. I was uncomfortable because my experience with the Pahari way of life and their subsistence

economy reveals anything but an absence of toil or striving for affluence. The parents were being accused of not parenting their children properly, for not guiding them towards education or for being ignorant about the value of education. At that time, some parts of my conversations with the village elites in different times were echoing in my mind. For example, I was once told by a young educated lady from the village elite that the reason she does not like her village people is because they are ignorant about the value of education. ‘They sing...’, as she was telling me, ‘for three nights to eat a single pig sacrificed for a festivity’. The portrayal of their tradition, their way of life was clearly identified as the root cause of their own underdevelopment. At the same time, being confined to Jum cultivation, the lack of will to access better economic opportunities was also identified as a predicament of their development. Drinking rice wine was identified as a waste of rice and a cause of young people’s indulgence. The entire audience of the workshop nodded strongly at such reasoning and looked ashamed of the underdevelopment caused by their very own nature.

I felt really tantalised by my historical knowledge of their life. The empowerment narratives of the development began contesting in my mind what I had read in Lewin’s portrayal of the Pahari villages where “every village is a small state, owing fealty and allegiance to no one save their own special leader” (1869, p. 83). What I was experiencing among these emergent young Pangkhuas, or inside the young facilitators, was completely the reverse of their parents’ imagining of a past life. The desires reflected in their future village are hardly different from what the state’s project of governance wants, an alienation from their subsistence pattern of life which would eventually evict them from their traditional rights to the land and environment. Their conforming response to this intervention appears to be a cooption which represents a new political consciousness, hitherto unreported by any literature. It seems that development is not merely dominance of its subjects in the CHT, it is gradually taking the shape of a hegemony based on new forms of moral desires which the state and modernity offer as a compensation for their land, livelihood and tradition. Thus, it has colonised their consciousness in favour of the political domination by the state. It is substantially part of their divergence from the fugitive to citizen, from one kind of subjection to another, from resistance to resilience.

So the moral desires for a better life, evident among my Pangkhuas friends, should not be mistaken merely as a thirst for development. Rather, they vindicate their subordination to a hegemonic discourse about their past and future. This has provoked me to explore the

Pangkhuas at Mahalu as subjects of a certain development paradigm emerging from advancing neoliberal intervention. The Pangkhuas have been ascribed as ‘underdeveloped’ in many instances like the visitor book in the guestroom and from powerful people and organisations. ‘Underdevelopment’, as Gupta has argued, is a postcolonial identity (1998, p. 11). The developmental hegemony requires them to be the ultimate subjects of an order preordained by dominant power relations so that they start blaming their own nature as the primary obstacle to progress. At the same time, it has a demand, through a certain pedagogy of developmental discourse; it demands them to be educated and to work harder to develop themselves to overcome the limits of their nature. This “subjection to development” (Pandian 2008, p. 159) has become part of a set of ordered norms with a heavy overlay of certain moral bindings, a certain kind of engagement with their historical selves, and above all, a normative relationship with the outside world or the state. Development, in this regard, becomes a particular pedagogy, a moral aspiration and also a relationship of power. It bears a promise of affluence and fulfilment on the condition that they abandon their traditional way of life, becoming aware of the barriers to development inherent in their life. The ideologies of development are currently mobilised by the state and other development agencies to transform them from fugitives of development to developed citizens. Their emerging developmental self is well-reflected in this new moral devotion to education, health practices, and livelihood-makings.

## Chapter 7

### Conclusion: Towards a Final Enclosure

“Societies with non-coercive political power are societies without history, societies with coercive political power are historical societies.” (Pierre Clastre 1974, p. 24)

#### Some Tentative Formulations

As far as contemporary anthropological paradigms are concerned today, every ethnography is potentially an incomplete project. The social facts mediated by this form of socio-scientific knowledge are inherently partial and to some extent, incoherent. The classical ambition of ethnography, describing a given culture from a holistic perspective, has long been abandoned by the majority of its contemporary practitioners due to a recent paradigm shift of ethnography's method, subject matter and location. As an ethnography committed to these paradigmatic shifts, which I have discussed in Chapter 2, mine also has confronted a sceptical dilemma to conclude itself in precise and conclusive forms of social facts or in omniscient findings. As chronicles of contemporary cultural formation in a rapidly changing world, ethnographies are inherently incomplete and inconclusive in nature. This piece of written work also contains only some subjectively crafted fractions of experiences from the actual fieldwork and writing process it has undergone. It does not claim to reveal an all-encompassing, omniscient knowledge about the CHT today. Rather, it is a subjective reflection on certain aspects of social change the CHT is undergoing, particularly since the peace accord of 1997. What this account intends to be is an ethnographic narrative of some contemporary forms of social change in the CHT which are both emerging from and evident in the existing political practices of identity-making and developmental changes.

First, this thesis is a comprehensive presentation of what I have largely witnessed as an ethnographer in the CHT over the five years of my ethnographic engagement with the place and its people which includes about one year of intensive and protracted field placement. Second, it encompasses the political transformation of these societies over a time-span of about fifteen years, presuming that the peace accord of 1997 marks a radical change in the political conditions of the CHT. Both indigenous and settler societies are experiencing

significant changes under the new political conditions the Peace Treaty has created. The years between 2009 and 2012, the last four years of this era which constitute the formal time span of this research, are significant years in which to observe changes evident after the first decade of the peace accord –changes which are now considerably comprehensible, substantially ossified and more easily measurable than ever. Hence, I am concerned here with the historical significance of these changes in the context of state-making, a central object of inquiry throughout the thesis. My intention is to understand whether these changes indicate or not the beginning of an era of final enclosure of the territory by the state’s power and its governmentality.

According to the subdivisions practised within anthropology, this work mostly belongs to its branch of ‘political anthropology’. While determining certain forms of social change as the object of its inquiry, it has assumed the political agencies and their practices as the most decisive mobiliser of social change. The theoretical questions my research has attempted to address are not very far from the most fundamental questions of political anthropology in general. The research has situated itself on a chosen crossroad of society and state, with a theoretical commitment to Pierre Clastre’s legacy in contemporary political anthropology. It has experienced the CHT as a multiply constructed, contemporary space where these two entities –society and state– are critically contested on a daily basis. Within the nexus of the relationships between contemporary societies in the CHT vs the Bangladeshi nationstate, this account has witnessed how these societies are transforming from an anarchic mode of political tradition to state organisation of power characterised by modern political rationalities typical to a civil society. Such an inquiry theoretically resembles one of the most central objectives of political anthropology where its liberal and positivist quarter observes precisely the transformation of societies from the so-called ‘pre-political’ stagnation to political progress defined and measured by the degree of enclosure by a state. The two extremes of this gradual and continuous progress are, on the one hand, the society with fully established linkages to a state, and, on the other, societies without ‘political power’ in a modernistic sense. There is an inestimable number of intermediate degrees and forms of spatiotemporal political orders between these two extremes, as I have experienced in the CHT, which makes rational categorisation almost impossible. Yet, in the case of the CHT, some distinguishing features of this transformation have been identified and therefore have become objects of focused observation. These features constitute the central theme of the inherently non-conclusive discussion which will enfold my ethnography.

Throughout the research, I have carried in my mind two fundamental lines of inquiry prevalent in the paradigm of political anthropology. The first of them is, ‘What is the nature of political power?’, which often pushes someone to more ontological inquiries like, ‘What is society?’ The second line of inquiry has been, ‘How can we explain the historical continuum between non-coercive forms of political power to coercive political power, and the determinants of the direction and nature of such a continuum?’ The inquiry inevitably pushes someone, as it has happened in every chapter I have written here, to the course of understanding history. The first line of inquiry also involved the contrast between the everyday forms of power I have experienced in the field and its scholarly perceptions prevalent in the anthropological discourse in general. Beginning with a healthy scepticism about the conviction that power is only realised within a typical social relationship of command-obedience and manifested within a relation that ultimately comes down to coercion, I have placed administrative hierarchy and violence as the key instruments through which to understand contemporary political practices in the CHT. Yet, I have stepped away from another basic assumption of classical anthropology that where these relationships are not observed, societies are without power. Rather, I remain open to forms and practices of power deriving from non-coercive and non-hierarchical sources like social consensus or customs and traditions, (or state hegemony for that matter), which are essential to the antiquated anarchic social order among the communities living in the CHT. At the same time, changing forms of indigenous resistance have been specific objects of observation. Moreover, regarding the second line of inquiry, I do not perceive the transformation of governmentality from non-coercion to coercion as a one-way progression. Instead, I emphasise a crosscutting process where coercive dominance also converges on non-coercive political hegemony.

The convictions above have been realised through my persuasion of the six objectives I set forth at the beginning of my research. As I have discussed in the first chapter, my first aim was a broad one – ‘to develop a historical understanding of the relationships between the CHT and the Bangladesh nationstate to illustrate the legacies that intrinsically determined the minority relations here’. In this vein, in Chapter 3 I have scrutinised the historical roots of nationalist imaginings in Bangladesh and their bearings upon the minority relations it maintains today. The same venture can be traced in my attempt to explain the reproduction of the CHT as a geopolitical space in Chapter 4. The second objective – ‘to develop an ethnographic mode of investigation capable of experiencing the innate nature of the issues’ has been dealt with in Chapter 2 where I have explained my positioning in terms of emergent

ethnographic methods to reach the often intangible realms of realities I have mentioned above. The third objective –‘to examine the CHT as a distinct case of identity and developmental politics where development interventions and practices by the state and other agencies have reproduced the people as marginal political communities’– has been dealt with in Chapter 6 in continuation from the preceding chapters. Examining ‘displacement as a regulatory sanction by the state that dissociates the CHT people from their traditional economy in accordance with a certain political economy of settlement’, the fourth objective of the research, has been adequately investigated in Chapter 4. The question of identity politics, its complex construction in the CHT and political contestations which constitute the fifth objective, has been mainly discussed in Chapter 5 with inevitable connections to Chapters 3, 4 and 6. The sixth objective –‘to explain the interrelations between development, displacement and identity’– stands epistemologically as the central inquiry of this research and I would like to ponder it in this concluding chapter.

My ethnographic inquiry in the CHT, the reading of literature and the analytical process of writing this thesis have thus rendered three basic trends of political transformation which I intend to explain here. They are three crosscutting processes involving the complex identity and developmental politics I have explained in the preceding chapters which occur in three distinct political domains I would like to identify. **First** is the transformation from non-coercive and non-hierarchical forms of political arrangements to coercive and hierarchical forms of political office and practices. This mostly features in the state’s appropriation of traditional political formation among the indigenous communities. The **second** is a convergence of hegemonic technologies of power in governmentality, which is manifested more in the form of development, clearly indicating a shift in the order-making functions of the state. It is a shift from manifested coercive dominance to apparently non-coercive technologies of power constituting a certain political hegemony. A similar process can be observed in the **third** political domain, the local forms of resistance to state dominance, which is also converging from counter-violence to non-violent strategies of political resistance centring on a new form of identity politics.

The transformation of indigenous political formation from non-coercive/anarchic systems of social order to coercive forms of political agency and governmental order-making, is manoeuvred by what I call a politics of conversion and cooption. In this process, the state converts the very nature of political power prevalent in anarchic political entities through

legislative recognition of those so called 'traditional' or 'customary' institutions. The second domain of change is the transformation of governmentality from coercive dominance to hegemonic technologies of power which I view as part of its own political commitments to a global liberalisation mostly posited as development. I emphasise the hegemonic technologies of governmentality gradually replacing violent means of order-making which reflects a new political need of the state to reappear as 'normal', rather than its long-acclaimed 'state of exception' in the CHT. The third domain, the indigenous resistance, is apparently shifting from coercive political resistance to conformist resilience. I explore this shift in the context of an emergent transnational discourse of indigenosity which now constitutes the most compelling form of identity struggle in the CHT. I view this shift as a new form of politics of the indigenous identity in a global matrix.

These form the three-way spectrum of transformation I would like to elaborate as the most compelling norms of social change occurring in the CHT at the moment. What follows next are some preliminary ethnographic notes on the changes occurring across these three distinct domains of politics –the pre-state political formation, state intervention, and resistance to state intervention. The changes in various forms and domains of governmentality, of course, are not inconsequential. The cumulative effects of these three domains and forms of changes are now leading the CHT towards a final enclosure. The Peace Treaty demarcates the beginning of this era. The promises in this treaty clearly vindicate a paradigm shift of governmentality. As we have seen in Chapter 4, the CHT is governed by an extraordinary governmental articulation of the state, based on its principles of exception, legitimising a violent order-making. What we are now witnessing is a shift towards a normalisation of governmentality based on a new political hegemony. It is possible to arrange these three domains in historical order where cooption of anarchic political orders dominates the earliest era of enclosure; a governmental shift from coercive dominance to developmental hegemony emerges as an intermediary stage; and the new forms of identity struggle reflected in the political discourse of indigenosity correspond to the contemporary state of identity politics in the CHT.

A consistent politics of otherness has been at work decisively throughout the history of state-making in the CHT. Colonial Europe found its 'primitive' and 'oriental' other to deconstruct its own entity defined by modern rationality and civilisation. In the nationalist era, the nation or 'Zati' found its mirror opposite, 'Upazati', to deconstruct its own identity.

Bundling the non-Bengali minority into blanket terms like ‘Upazati’ or ‘adibashi’ for that matter, in essence, serves the nation to allow it to become what it intends to be as discussed in Chapter 3. On the other hand, the nature of political movements among the indigenous has been conditioned by this cultural politics of the state. In earlier chapters I have reflected upon how this deconstruction of a cultural other is used as a moral justification of coercive rule. Here I am concerned with the political recognition of this cultural otherness of the indigenous populations which has been object of their resistance movements until now. I argue that the legislative recognition of a political identity, or struggles for such recognition, are parts of a system of assimilation that the state uses to enhance its governmental control in the territory. The political space of the state is no longer restrictive in a rigid sense as the liberal political rhetoric might suggest. The nation-state reproduces its marginal populations, such as the hill-dwellers of the CHT, through specific modalities of subjugation but this should not mean that it only restricts its political and administrative forms of power for the indigenous. The indigenous “subjects are ambiguously located in relation to the nation-state (and its governmentality) precisely because of the multiple and fragmented nature of the latter” (Ghosh 2006, p. 507). This process of assimilating indigeneity through cooption of individuals and political systems of indigenous origin constitute what I call the politics of conversion and cooption. This is a political differentiation within the indigenous population that is created and maintained by the state. This often comes with a certain kind of political recognition of the ‘indigenous other’ which is simultaneously a political inclusion and a cultural exclusion. I find this dilemma as the most decisive trend of changing governmentality in the CHT which has been barely addressed by academics until now.

### **Conversion and Cooption: The Politics of Recognition**

Throughout my ethnographic engagement with the CHT, I have encountered incredibly diverse forms and patterns of political practices. The nature of political practices and their inherent agencies are so fragmented and diffused that I often struggle to distinguish between political agencies deriving from the state and reminiscences of anarchic forms of political traditions. The political institutions, of both modern and customary origin, have conditioned the state of each other in such a complex way that it is now hard to find any categorical ideal for any of them. As a result, I have relied on the theoretical presumption that political power and practices can only be differentiated depending upon the extent of the use and disuse of

violence and hierarchy as the source and means of political authority. I presumed the overt and covert bases of violence as the distinguishing feature of the political practices to be of modern or state origin on the one hand, and social consensus and customary traditions as the defining attributes of anarchic forms of political practices on the other. I was never short of modern theories establishing violence and hierarchy as the basis of modern state power, yet the question was where to find evidence that the political order was non-coercive and egalitarian before state interventions.

It was not until I met Ramkhup Lal Pangkhua that I could realise the possible forms of political organisation that managed the societies in the CHT before state interventions. Among the Pangkhuas, Ramkhup Lal Pangkhua was the oldest person I have met and his stories have already secured a significant place in this work. He was the 'Karbari' of Block Two at Mahalu. The information surprised me when I learned this for the first time after a considerable period of my acquaintance with him because there was nothing in his functions, appearance and attitudes that could be associated with the modern sense of political authority. I consider him a representative case of non-state forms of political offices among the Pangkhuas, not because he was the oldest person in the village or for the fact that the wrinkles in his face would provoke someone to imagine him to be the symbol of antiquity. Rather, it was for his incompatibilities to the functioning of the emergent governmental authority today. The first and foremost thing that distinguishes his political actorship with other emergent forms of political agencies at Mahalu, or elsewhere, was his unfamiliarity with any language other than Pangkhua. He did not speak or understand the language of the political agencies deriving from the state. When compared with other emergent political functionaries within the village, he seems to be the representative of the most antiquated forms of political organisation. What distinguishes him from other political functionaries in the village is his appearance that made him indistinguishable from the people under his political authority. His was one of the poorest families in the village, solely dependent on Jum cultivation. He didn't speak any of the empowered languages like Bengali or Chakma. He had never engaged in any occupation other than Jum. What surprised me on the first few encounters with him was his political position and his marginal economic position even within the community. Clearly, his was a political function fundamentally different in nature from other kinds of political agency in the village.

I could ascertain gradually that the basis of his political role is fundamentally different from what the state and government perceive them to be. The first and foremost source of his authority is a social consensus, a consensus among others to acknowledge him as their 'Karbari'. He did not have the authority to punish or penalise anyone. He was a leader only in the sense that his people wanted him to mediate collective and interpersonal affairs of a varied description. His duties as a 'Karbari' included many things whereas his authority was very limited –almost zero. He was a leader defined not by his authority, but rather by the responsibilities with which his people have entrusted him. An example of Ramkhup's role as such a mediator is a story told by another villager on an occasion of my inquiries about Ramkhup's role as a 'Karbari'. Once Ramkhup was ordered by a military camp to arrange a certain quantity of chickens within a very short time since the camp was about to host the family of a high-ranking official on a pleasure trip to the area. He immediately collected twelve chickens from seven families in his block. He delivered them to the camp early in the morning. Often, the military do not pay enough for such supplies. In the evening, Ramkhup collected a certain amount of money from each family in his block which made up the total cost of those chickens and then paid those seven families the standard price of the chicken. Thus, the entire thing was a redistribution of loss. The material loss of the families whose chickens he had taken away for the military was redistributed among all the families which represented a small, yet very significant, aspect of their political struggle against the state and the role that mediators like Ramkhup play there.

However, the conversion of indigenous political formation by the state was a conversion of non-coercive anarchic forms of social order to coercive forms of political agency and governmental order-making. The transformation is guided by certain politics of conversion and cooption. What I mean by this politics of conversion and cooption is that the pre-state political formation, in forms of clan or tribal chieftains, was not based on coercion or command and obedience. Rather, it was more fundamentally based on a social consensus. The chief is a chief not for his disposal of authority with the potential for performing violence, but rather, his people's consensus in handing over to him the responsibilities for maintaining order and resolving disputes. The office of those chiefs is not characterised by authoritative decision-making, rather, it was more about being a mediator of collective decision-making. The Karbaries like Ramkhup were not leaders per se; rather they were the social mediators.

However, the conviction that the pre-state political formation in the CHT was non-coercive needs further clarification as one might find it speculative rather than evidential. Closer ethnographic encounters with the Karbaries and the recently documented customary laws<sup>26</sup> clearly suggest that the political office-holders had no authority to exercise coercive power upon their villagers. The customary laws, even when recognised by the state, do not entitle the political functionaries like Karbari or headmen with judiciary power to enable the use of violence. Yet, this should not be mistaken for the inter-tribe wars that have been widely reported in historical accounts. The clan chiefs may lead martial expeditions against enemy tribes, yet they have no authority to exercise coercion within their own chiefdoms. The role of a clan chief was characterised by mediating functions like representing his village to the circle chiefs or collecting tribute or taxes on their behalf. In fact, Ramkhup represents the last few political mediators of their anarchic past, which Lewin witnessed and reported thus:

Formerly the head of a village (or what we miscall a Talookdar) was appointed by the chief being generally the most able man of the village was set forward by his fellows to be their mouthpiece and through whom they pay their tribute. ...this was what was formerly the custom (Lewin 1867, p. 96).

When the state starts using these political systems for its order-making purposes, the offices are inevitably attributed a fundamentally different kind of political power that is based on coercion. The state converts powerless social mediators into powerful leaders and authority. As the systems are predominantly hereditary, within two or three generations, we observe completely new kinds of political practices in these domains of traditional political offices. When powerful agencies like the military acknowledge them, their nature of leadership is altered. An example would be the experiences I have had with young folk assuming office from their fathers. Their use of this office is mostly about a complex relationship with state agencies where the community interest and their personal interests are in dispute. The state alters the nature of this political institution from within. My encounters with several other Karbaries in the CHT, who are significantly much younger than Ramkhup, have quite different experiences. The political practices in which they are engaged are evidently determined by state agencies. The majority of them seem to have redefined the

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<sup>26</sup> See the 12 volumes of 'Koposhongho Law Series' 2007 (edited by Chakma, Roy & Dey) which are the first comprehensive documentation of customary laws among the CHT communities.

traditional role in a way that makes them part of a social class with internal political dominance and substantial influence conferred by state agencies.

However, the political foundation of this conversion can be explored in a particular politics of recognition that predominated in the political struggle of identity from the very beginning. The politics of recognition has its origin in the earliest enclosure of the region during the colonial era. As far the history of state-making is concerned, the colonial state had no substantial governmental role in the CHT until 1860. The role of the state was limited to tax and tribute collection, through political subordination of the hill feudalism that played a mediating role between the state and the statelessness of the majority of the hill societies. In 1860, the territory was formally annexed as an administrative district under the British Raj. Administrative headquarters were established in Chandraghona, a place close to the Kaptai. In 1868, the headquarters were relocated in Rangamati. The annexation, however, did not establish any homogenous kind of governance. The annexation was essentially an ‘exception’ of the governmentality the British Raj had in the rest of its Indian empire. The ‘exception’ was the recognition of the traditional chiefdoms which was formalised by the *Rules for Territorial Circles in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, 1884*. This was the legislative distinction the CHT had, in a varying form, until the independence of Bangladesh in 1971. However, the act created five administrative circles which restored two prevailing chiefdoms in Chakma and Bohmang Circles, and created a third chiefdom called Mong Circle. The remaining two, mainly dense forests, were reserved for the government. Boundaries were drawn on maps and maintained administratively. This was the first legislative document triggering a governmental reproduction of territory. The chiefdoms built upon clan and tribe relations were, to some extent, redefined as sovereign over territory and people through their recognition by the state.

The administrative policy was revised by another act called *Rules for the Administration of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, 1892*, which reformed the circles by merging two reserve circles into one, leaving three chiefdoms as they were territorially. The reform was aimed mainly at a hierarchical reproduction of the territory by creating smaller administrative units. The act divided the entire district into 33 Blocks, ‘*taluk*’ in Bengali, and ‘*Dewans*’ were appointed for each block. Each block was then divided into several mouzas, each having a Headman as the mouza chief. The mouza consists of more than one village where the Karbari is the administrative authority from a governmental perspective. The *Chittagong Hill Tracts*

*Regulation Act 1900*, known as the 'CHT Manual' is a refined version of these two acts, which established the governing policies of the CHT for the rest of the colonial era. The CHT Manual has an explicit aim of modernising the local forms of administration which entitled Circle Chiefs and Mouza Headmen to some authority of jurisprudence. Thus the government-speak terms like Headman, Mouza, Manual and Blocks had entered the public vocabulary and begun ruling their political life in a new manner. According to section 40 of CHT Manual of 1900, the government had conferred on the Chiefs and Headmen and Karbaries a special authority of jurisdiction on the basis of 'Tribal Laws'. This spirit of the CHT Manual has been reflected in almost every successive legislative reform in the CHT.

So the colonial government's policy in the CHT had an assimilating tendency since the very beginning of state-making. Apparently what the state was trying to restore was a native form of political structure that existed outside the proper administrative expanse of the state, with uncertain trajectories. The restoration effort through recognition of the traditional or customary legal and political systems in effect altered the very political nature of leadership in the indigenous societies. The legal recognition was the appropriation by the state power of an anarchic mode of political organisation which is fundamentally different in nature. The Headman or Karbari existed before the administrative intervention by the state as Buchanan witnessed in 1798. He even talked about '*Ruasa*' which was reproduced as Dewan in the act of 1900. Yet, their source of authority was not their disposal of coercion, rather, it was determined by values and moralities fundamentally different from the modernistic sense of power. It was the tribal custom and inter-tribe relations as well as the anarchic trends that allowed the indigenous to develop a larger political order like the Hill Chiefdoms. Yet, the Karbaries or village chiefs were anything but the village level representative of a hierarchical order maintained by the monopoly of violence or enforcement of laws.

The recognition of these political offices by the colonial state was, in effect, a conversion of this political organisation, an encapsulation in the giant political structure of the state. Yet, during the early colonial era, state intervention was mostly limited to tax collection when the societies viewed tax and tribute-paying as a way to keep the state at bay. The hereditary chiefdoms thus played a mediating role between these societies and their subject population. What we are observing now in the CHT is a final enclosure of those traditional forms of political organisation, the transformation of these political offices by altering their fundamental nature where intrusive sources of political power are redefining the role of the

chiefs. I would characterise this aspect of transformation as a politics of conversion. The recognition of the traditional political formation made it the first point of contact for all governmental agencies among whom the military has been the most compelling in the last 40 years. Still today, the Karbari is the first point of contact for all governmental agencies. The Karbari has to negotiate with the agencies on behalf of his people. The governmental politics on the other hand, wants the Karbari to negotiate with his people on behalf of the state.

This process of conversion is supplemented by another transformation triggered by the implantation of modern political systems like electoral local government. The state is also creating new political agencies by the cooption of members from the indigenous societies into its articulated framework of governance. It began with the cooption of selected indigenous individuals in the state's arrangement of power. The political agency these kinds of political practices create is characterised more by the nature of the individuals who hold these offices. As a political agency, such positions can be used for opposite purposes and in a contradictory manner. I know a few of the indigenous folk who held offices in units like the Union<sup>27</sup> or as Upazila<sup>28</sup> chairman. These people undoubtedly play an agent role in the governance of the CHT. Some of them conform completely to the governmental agendas for the sake of personal gain. They assume these positions as part of their own struggle to make a fortune within the intruding political system. Another few, on the other hand, use these offices for the purpose of the collective interest of the people he or she represents. Whatever may be their interest, they build up a certain relationship with nationalist politics. The way ideological contradictions within the nationalist domain are confronted by these leaders is curious.

I know three Union Council Chairmen of indigenous origins in the CHT. The first two were never re-elected. One of them, a Pangkhua, according to people of his own community, has used his authority to enhance his personal property and eventually transferred all his wealth to Mizoram which is relatively secured for people like the Pangkhuas. The other person, in fact, had further achievements in his political career. He was elected the Upazila chairman later on and his wife, thanks to his strong lobbying among the military, was made a parliamentarian through reserved quotas for women during the military regime in 1980s. Both of them did exactly what average politicians in the local councils in Bangladesh do. The

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<sup>27</sup> A small administrative unit consisting of a few villages.

<sup>28</sup> Larger administrative unit consisting of a few unions.

villagers allege that they are corrupt and authoritarian. Their primary sources of authority remained their connection with the army which they had developed during the insurgency years.

This, however, reflects only a part of the story. There are many other examples of these political leaders playing a committed role for the causes of their own people or allied political struggles of the indigenous people. One of the most interesting people I have met among them is Bijoychondro Mro. In 2006, on a student field attachment trip, we were delayed somewhere near his village because of vehicle wreckage. He was then the Chairman of a Union at Bandarban district. When I met him in 2006, he was aged nearly fifty. I was surprised to know that he was in his fifth term of Chairmanship. It means he was chosen to be the chairman when he was twenty-five and he has been the chairman for almost half his life. However, when we were approaching his village, anxious about the distance as it was nearly dark, we met people from the village. When we asked them about Chairman Para, as his village is now known, some of them said that ‘You guys better be quick, the chairman might fall asleep. He has been drinking for two days in a row. It was the harvest festival for the Mro’. They were right, as when we arrived at Chairman Para, Bijoychondro was quite intoxicated. But his joy was genuine, his only words repeatedly said being, ‘Welcome, welcome, very good very good’. However, in the morning, Bijoychondro was a different person. He was well-dressed and apologised cordially for his inability to accompany us the night before. He helped us to find transport back to the highway.

I was surprised by the way his people receive him. In the course of my friendship with him, I often wondered about his relationship with the community which was quite different from the general practice featured in these political offices in Bangladesh. The living room of his house was another exhibition of a certain political strategy to confront a state political system. Local governments in Bangladesh are greatly subjected to national politics and often determined by their officeholders’ obedience to the major political parties. In his front room, however, the entire wall was full of political posters and pamphlets. Interestingly, the posters included those of all political parties in the Bangladeshi nationalist politics who are violently antagonistic to each other. Displaying posters from both ideologically and politically conflicting political quarters depicts a kind of strategic indifference to the nationalist politics. Yet, the strategy is apparently resistant, a kind of seemingly ‘nonsense’ attempt to keep all quarters of politics – national and regional– happy, and perhaps, at bay as well.

The role of individuals is very important in defining the emergent forms of political authority in the CHT. It is hard to generalise the immediate consequences of these political institutions as the individuals largely determine the nature of the authority. If the leader emerges in an organic manner then the scenario is different. Who is an organic leader? For me it was quite simple: one who does not speak the language of power. Some of them use these offices as the means to confront the state. Bijoychondro Mro is the example of one who uses his authority for a different purpose such as upholding the interests of their collective life. I have a friend, a young Mro Headman, who was arrested by the authorities a few years ago for protesting against an acquisition of Jum land by the military for their artillery base. What makes Bijoychondro or my friend different from two prior leaders I know is their inseparability from the people whom they represent. Their role is analogous to the idea of organic intellectuals put forward by Gramsci (Hoare & Smith 1996, p. 12). The differences between a leader and a mediator can be mapped by their actorship in relation to coercion and hierarchy. A mediator mediates the collective consciousness. His genius is that he is not independent, rather that he is held in the hands of collective will. As a result, political power in a modern sense is not a necessary condition to carry out his duties as a leader. His functions as an authority require no coercive power.

The order-making of the state, on the other hand, is fundamentally based on hierarchy and coercion. It coopts people like the other two UP Chairmen to achieve its goal to establish political order. So, the transformation of indigenous political agencies by the state is a transformation from a non-coercive form of political power to a coercive form of power. In this process, the relative distinctions of their otherness 'would be recognised, somewhat adjusted to, but with a final (enclosure)' (Ghosh 2006, p. 508), and are incorporated into the governmentality. Such governmental inclusion and recognition of 'tradition' or 'ethnicity' have thus become a part of the governmentality itself. The modernisation and rationalisation of tribal customs are an emerging part of this kind of governmentality. This addresses the age-old governmental need to discover, document and then convert the indigenous customs into instruments of governance which allow the state to rule the subjects according to a converted form of their customary law- and order-making. Those coopted play the role of mediators between mainstream society and marginal lives in this transformation.

## **Development as Governmentality: From Exception to Normalisation**

The change within the governmentality of the state is a second modality of change to which I would like to draw attention. This change is an identifiable transformation of governmentality since the Peace Treaty. There is an increasing tendency to rely more on hegemonic technologies of power rather than on military dominance. This includes not only the developmental interventions, but also the various political bodies formed after the Peace Treaty like the regional council. The regional council has become a political representation which could make decisions on behalf of all the indigenous communities. This has been the first electorally formed authority of the CHT people formally recognised by the state. Yet, this has also created local political elites. For the first time in the CHT, there is a political body of the indigenous which can carry out state functions, curiously with a demonstrated opposition to the state. The indigenous resistance in the Jumma era had the imagination of state-like governance which they would manage themselves. The movement is successful in the sense that it could finally obtain a formal share, however flawed, in the governance of the CHT. From some perspectives, this is a significant achievement, a gradual shift towards what the movement actually wanted to achieve. However, the movement's goals, even if it had won absolutely what it had dreamed of, would be the same transformation, from one kind of political system to another.

This new form of changing governmentality is again mostly characterised by a recognition of its historical 'ethnic' other. This is perhaps the most significant achievement the Peace Treaty has earned the Jumma movement. The treaty explicitly recognises the CHT as a 'Tribal Populated Region', and 'the necessity for protection of the character of this region and for overall development for it' (CHT Treaty 1997). It bears a promise to accomplish governmental tasks in conformity with the subject populations' different subjectivities distinct from homogenous citizenry. The subjugation is now realised through recognition with promises of a less coercive government with benevolent developmental goals. The treaty promised the gradual withdrawal of military from the region and it has opened the territory for direct development interventions by international agencies. Yet, the treaty not only undermines indigenous identity by 'enforcing' the term 'Upazati', as section B of the treaty says, but also reproduces the indigenous for governmental purposes. This has complex effects on the construction of a new ethnicity discourse among the indigenous. Recognition of 'tribal' nature of the territory, identifying special developmental needs, is a cumulative effect

of massive and persistent armed revolt before the Peace Treaty. Past experiences of insurgency have pushed the government towards a compromise as the forms of governance dedicated to the management of political violence do not meet the needs of a neoliberalising government. There is an increasing demand to keep repression, brutality and some legacies of colonialism outside the governmental imagery of the state (Ghosh 2006). This is a convergence between disciplinary and governmental forms of power which, according to Foucault, go hand-in-hand with an aim to construct the entity of modern biopower (Ghosh 2006).

As a result, increasing numbers of governmental projects are being marked by liberal notions of welfare and improvement (Ghosh 2006). The reservation of quotas in the public sector job market and seats in educational institutions, land commission and cadastral surveys, population censuses, emphasis on education in mother tongues and massively displayed commitments to preserve ethnic culture all seem to be dedicated to the construction of a discourse of positive discrimination –a benevolent effort to minimise the sins of history. A government inventory of identity is more important than ever for the majority of the population to receive any fruits of development. This has prompted an urge among the indigenous populations to be on a list. They now understand the importance of being on a list, on a nomenclature maintained by the authorities, both state and non-state. The identity discourse among the indigenous is being increasingly shaped by a powerful flow of governmental paperwork. This can be related to developmental subjugation and moral desire which I have discussed in Chapter 6 and the politics of identity-making in Chapter 4.

The coercive forms of order-making often interrupt the state hegemony which it requires to restore in the face of a global concern for the indigenous. Although the Bangladeshi state's position on these international treaties is deceptive, it has a real interest in enhancing a hegemonic order over coercive management. Peace was needed by the state to implement a second stage of conscription or enclosure of the territory and its inhabitants. The most visible impacts of development since the peace era are communication infrastructures. Mobile phone networks were prohibited in the CHT until the year 2008. Now networks of communications have revolutionised social mobility in the CHT. Development in the CHT, as I have argued in Chapter 6, has always been an instrument of governmentality, an inseparable part of state-making. Development is the dominant form of non-coercive order-making which is often

seen as a supplement to military dominance. Development is one of the central promises of the CHT treaty along with strengthening of the local governance.

All these changes can be seen as a liberalisation of the state. It looks as though the state is now liberalising its presence in the CHT. The liberalisation is mostly dedicated to increase the acceptability of the state to normalise the governmental patterns and structures. It is introducing basic documentary functions of the state like identity documents, voter lists, applications to different bodies, legal documents, gun licenses, testimonies and school certificates into the endless flow of paperwork in which people must be involved. Peace was required to carry out the cadastral survey. Peace was required to carry out mineral exploration. Peace was needed to unleash the tremendous trade possibilities with the land-locked states of India and Burma. So a new wave of documentation is in place out of which the cadastral survey has been an issue of much contempt among many of the indigenous. The difference between dominance and hegemony is the difference of normalisation. When the subjugation becomes normalised, it becomes non-coercive and it confronts less resistance. Until the Peace Treaty in 1997, the paradigm of governance in the CHT resembled what Agamben (2005) called a 'state of exception'. What the era of peace has clearly witnessed is a gradual shift towards hegemonic technologies of power to create a new governmental paradigm characterised by 'normalisation'.

### **Identity and Indigeneity: The Politics of Small Numbers in Global Matrix**

The third modality of political change in the CHT I want to reflect upon is a change in the forms of indigenous resistance. The thirty years of indigenous resistance has given birth to a distinct social class who generally now constitute, in one way or another, the civil society among the indigenous populace. The younger generation within this group has a new political voice outside the hereditary chiefdoms and their associated feudal oligarchy. A good number of people in this group have experiences of the Jumma Movement in the era of militant resistance. The movement used to claim the political representation of all hill societies in the CHT. What this new generation now mostly differs from in their role in the Jumma era is a shift of their political goals and representation. Although they still negotiate with the state in terms of a traditional claim on the territory which their parents were defending from the state, they now claim the political representation of a new category called 'adibashi'. The strategies also have shifted. They rely on transnational alliances as sources of protection and power

while confronting the state. The CHT people, along with other indigenous groups in Bangladesh, have found a new front: the transnational sphere of encountering the nationstate. Transnational alliance is now an established source of political power to confront the state. In defying the state, transnationality has become a source of empowerment. This new political equilibrium has a basis in the foreign policies maintained by the Bangladeshi state. An example of this is that in the last three years, on most of the occasions when Bangladeshi Prime Ministers made statements on the CHT, they were occasions of meeting delegates of international organisations who explicitly support indigenous causes in the CHT.

As in many other nationstates today, transnationalism is a political space in the making for the indigenous polity in Bangladesh. ‘Adibashi’ is not merely an identity in the making, it represents a new form of political struggle among an emergent section of the indigenous. It is their way out to a new political space from where to confront the nationstate. It not only prevails in the numerous forms of activism to achieve recognition from the state, ‘adibashi’ is their path to spaces extending out to the global cities where migrant CHT people organise demonstrations to condemn government atrocities in the CHT, or to the virtual spaces on the internet. One of the problems this shift raises is that when such transnational spaces meet “up with a specific national context of indigenesness” (Ghosh 2006, p. 502), it nullifies particularities for the sake of generalisation. One might also ask whether this transnationalism is a postnational liberation for these indigenous communities as a whole. In the case of the CHT, this politics of new space to some extent undermines a long history of political struggles named the Jumma movement through which the communities have been able to achieve a certain degree of autonomy within the formal dominion of the nationstate. Undoubtedly, the “political idioms, aspirations, and imaginaries” (Ghosh 2006, p. 502) of the Jumma movement were given shape outside the contemporary discourse of ‘indigenesness’.

The discourse of indigenesness has given rise to an increasing enthusiasm among indigenous youths who are determined to save the authenticity, innocence and purity of indigenous cultural traditions from the tyranny of the nation-state. It is a discourse based on the claim that the ‘indigenous’ people and their traditions are more pristine, as opposed to the Bengali settlers, in some respects at least, than the state and market. It has already destabilised, to some extent, the state’s historical claim on the territory, as we have also seen in Chapter 3, and therefore appeared to be a new front of resistance. From a critical point of view, this transnational discourse is marked by an awkwardness because it excludes a vast

number of indigenous deprived of developmental progress, who are engaged in everyday forms of the old struggle against the neoliberal projects endowed by the state. The transnationalism inherent to the notion of 'adibashi', has no realistic connection to the people whose sense of place is confined to their pasture where they face constant threats of displacement. The transnational thus makes a wide array of actual struggles invisible in the dominant political discourse. The histories of indigenous are narrated today, as Kaushik Gosh has observed also in the case of the Koel-Karo movement in Jharkhand,

...as an assemblage of the prior context of nation-state policies and coercions and the operation of a transnational indigeneity movement that is locally translated and deployed by activists and indigenous people against the oppressions of that priory context (Ghosh 2006, pp. 504-505).

What is implicit in the discourse of indigeneity today is that "it has the effect of making invisible the histories of the struggles" (Ghosh 2006, p. 504) of non-state 'societies against the state' in the binary discourse of the state and citizenship, with its emphasis upon 'recognition' of the transnational imaginary of indigeneity.

However, in the course of this transnational discourse of indigeneity, a significant middle-class indigenous leadership has emerged. Many of these leaders have a significant level of higher education and proficiency in English which enabled them to access jobs in different international concerns. Many of them have been educated in First World countries in a cosmopolitan cultural milieu. They have pursued the causes of CHT people in international indigenous forums hoping that this would create a form of resistance to the atrocities of the state. This new form of politics has been possible in the context of direct developmental interventions by various transnational organisations, particularly the UN, who employ the majority of these activists. It is interesting to note that they enter into this political space through a discourse based on the same primitive essentialism. To be included in the transnational category of 'indigenous', they have to accept the same cultural exclusion and exceptionalism that determined their relationship with the state earlier in their history.

On the other hand, this transnational discourse has also given rise to a new group of indigenous leaders who are no longer involved in the traditional economic production and are therefore excluded from everyday forms of struggles about land and territory among their 'precariat' majority. They are more keen to perform a subjectivity that fits the examples of the transnational indigenusness that has, to a large extent, little significance on the actual

places of struggles, against alienation from the land and life. It reduces the legibility of struggles of land and territory by creating a new group of indigenous political leaders solely alienated from such everyday struggle and encouraged to represent a transnational indigenous practice having minor importance in the local context of political struggle. Thus, it contributed a leadership crisis among the indigenous people who are resisting displacements recently intensified by the neoliberal projects. For example, this transnationalised indigenous leadership maintains a deliberate silence on many issues of real struggles of their marginal sections. In recent years, the food production in the CHT has been devastatingly interfered with by tobacco plantations and other commercial agro-production. Although the plantations have severe socio-economic and environmental impacts, reported by a series of media accounts in the last three years, the issue could hardly draw the attention of the indigenous youth who routinely demonstrate on the Dhaka streets demanding their recognition as 'adibashi'. They seem to be sufficiently indoctrinated in the neoliberal developmental hegemony that is determining the future of the CHT more than any other forms of socio-political change.

A transnational CHT community is also in the making who, with their diasporic relationships and commitments to the place, are becoming an important political voice. There are academics writing extensively on the causes relating to the CHT as well as human rights defenders and, of course, development professionals. As many of the old-school politicians among the indigenous polity think, they might not be just opportunists. I have witnessed a strong commitment of those people for the CHT. This strategic shift is most evident in their struggle to achieve recognition as Adibashi which would enable them to become a part of the global indigenous movements supported by many transnational organisations like the UN, the ILO or the EU. This politics for recognition now constitutes the latest form of struggle by the indigenous youth to find a place in the constitutional, legal, and governmental rationalities of the nationstate. This is a movement that has emerged as an unintended consequence of the state-making in the CHT. As we have seen in Chapter 2, the state seems to be quite aware of the potential of this movement and therefore has adopted a policy to supersede this in every possible way. One of the most bitter experiences I had with the state policy towards this movement was that on the eve of the World Indigenous Day 2012, on allegations that we were assisting our indigenous friends to observe the occasion, I was pushed out of Bandarban by governmental authorities, along with an American linguist with a background of more than twelve years of research on the CHT languages.

However, the binary discourse of a coercive nation-state and liberating transnationalism requires careful handling. The binary is informed by existing debates of indigeneity taking place simultaneously in the worlds of the academy and transnational activism. NGOs, INGOs, and the liberal civil society constitute a dominant source of this discourse. This is a new form of indigenous subjectivity that, to some extent, nullifies the long history of people's struggle against the state which we have discussed in earlier chapters. Perhaps a way out of this political complexity of recognition could be the positioning of particularities against generalisation. It takes only forty-five words to recognise all the distinct communities living in Bangladesh in the constitution. It can easily say that Bangladesh is a territory belonging to people known as those names. A Chakma, a Marma, or a Pangkhua for that matter can be called by their respective names, without putting them into a large political category like the 'adibashi' or Upazati. In this respect, mine is a clearly unexpected critique of indigeneity. It provokes assumptions that the erroneous image of the 'tribal', isolated from wider social contexts, is no longer tenable and this revised understanding therefore calls for a modified imagining of indigeneity where identities and localities are constantly transforming through unprecedented communication with global forces. It attempts to transform the local forms of indigenesness into an imagined transnational pan-tribalism.

So, the most significant change in the indigenous resistance is its shift from a coercive form of resistance to a conforming resilience evident in the uncritical conformism to the transnational discourse of indigeneity and developmental hegemony. The shift has been widely symbolised by the surrender of the Shanti Bahini in 1997. Yet, conformism and resilience do not warrant a complete submission to the state. Diverse forms of state evasion are an elementary part of this new kind of politics of indigeneity and the vast majority it has excluded from its propagation. For many people, state evasions are also individual strategies of survival in the face of economic alienation triggered by neoliberal interventions, or against repressive sanctions by the state for one's political opinion. There are also cases of identity fraud to achieve advantages from different agencies. Sometimes, identity is also negotiated for people's cross-border mobility. So whatever their resilience towards the state might look like, there is an indispensable rift between their self and the state. As the objects of their desire have shifted, they now struggle to find a suitable place in the state's arrangement of power, this time without challenging the state militarily, without challenging its monopoly over violence. What the Peace Treaty means for the CHT, along with many other things, is that the indigenous resistance has accepted the monopoly of violence of the state. It has

therefore changed their political morality towards the state. Now the struggle is about finding a place in the state's arrangement of power. Whatever may be the nature of this resilience, it might not be a political choice, but a reality deriving from a change in regional politics, in both the national and international sense. The Indian policy regarding Bangladesh was a determining factor in the existence of these resistance groups.

However, the educated youth, who once used to join the Jumma resistance, the self-making of a heroic kind, now find their future in transnational agencies. Now some of them argue that they do not have any political inclusion in a state that demands them to be its citizen. The arguments are simple, yet deserve closer attention. One of my Jumma friends, now claiming recognition as indigenous, once posted in her Facebook that 'If citizenship is inescapable, then why not citizenship of Australia, or Canada? They have better recognition for their minorities.' What such arguments indicate is that their political consciousness has a new spectrum, from local to global, which eventually confronts the national sphere. There is a growing interest among the transnational agencies to empower them through international protocols of rights. It can be said that this strategy is more about conforming locally but challenging globally. It is quite likely that nationalism never could ideologically motivate the CHT people. The CHT is not an exclusive example of such transnationality challenging the national enclosure of people's identity. It is increasingly confronted by many nationstates in global forums. Yet, what we must not forget is that such discourse of indigeneity creates new social differentiation. The dreams of the societies it talks about split from within. Dreams of the privileged class and dreams of the deprived do not converge.

My intention behind this critique of the notion called 'adibashi' is not about disengaging from the long struggle of the indigenous to protect their land. Rather I have tried to provide an analysis of some discursive practices attached to this notion which constitute the most compelling identity discourse among a political elite emerging from the older history of colonial governmentality. It is not a denial of the possibilities of a global alliance among people confronting nationstates on implausibly unequal terms across the globe. In fact, I would argue that such alliances are of immense importance in the era of developmental nationstates driven by the logic of neoliberal globalisation. Real subaltern struggles are important in order to politically counteract the real actors and agencies responsible for this final enclosure. To confront them in new political spaces requires transnational alliances. It is necessary, however, to understand the significance of the transnational indigeneity discourse

which coopts a group of indigenous individuals to establish a developmental hegemony that undermines diffused yet crucial forms of the realpolitik of indigenous life, thus becoming a part of the changing governmentality. Yet, we should remember that not all conformity is a welcome wagon. Conformism is often, for many of the indigenous people, a strategy to save whatever is possible. If these forms are not understood as resistance, that would be a denial of their last weapon to confront the state.

So, what we are witnessing at the moment in the CHT, perhaps, is the last, greatest enclosure of a territory by a state. The Peace Treaty is significant in a sense that this indicates the end of an era when state sovereignty is challenged by a nonstate form of politics. This also means the end of an era of locally determined indigenous resistance. The proposed cadastral survey would establish freehold tenure leading to a much higher degree of commodification of land. The absence of a legally appropriate document of land ownership has long been identified as a cause of indigenous people's alienation from land. Yet, in the same vein, it was a protection since land was difficult to solicit for selling to the outsiders. The introduction of tenure would enable the owners to sell the land more easily which would eventually cause alienation when coupled with other socio-political factors. The governmental shift to the hegemonic means of power does not necessarily mean any end of coercion. Coercive dominance in the modern world does not survive without hegemonic accomplices. The new kind of governance emerging in the CHT has a new kind of justification for coercion which is determined by a discourse of authenticity and legitimacy. Cadastral surveys, population censuses and the ordering of ethnoscape and landscape are necessary preconditions for governmentalities transforming to hegemonic domination. Historical authenticity is the moral commitment of modern political power. Political violence is often triggered by historical invention and innovative historical discourse by the writings of history. Historical claims are contested by the means of violence. Violence is justified with the moralities deriving from the claims of historical authenticity. As we have seen in Chapter 4, authenticity is not an essential element of the premodern form of past-making. The sense of time is not essentially the sense of history as it is for modern historical imagination. So the moral commitment to authenticity distinguishes modern society from the societies under relatively low modernity, the societies under modernistic transition. Future social movements in the CHT have to recognise state-making as the central phenomenon. No change can be sustainable here which does not problematise state-making. Such social movements would eventually restore the state, and thus will become part of the problem itself. The fruits of such

changes would favour only those coopted by coercion and would create new forms of marginality.

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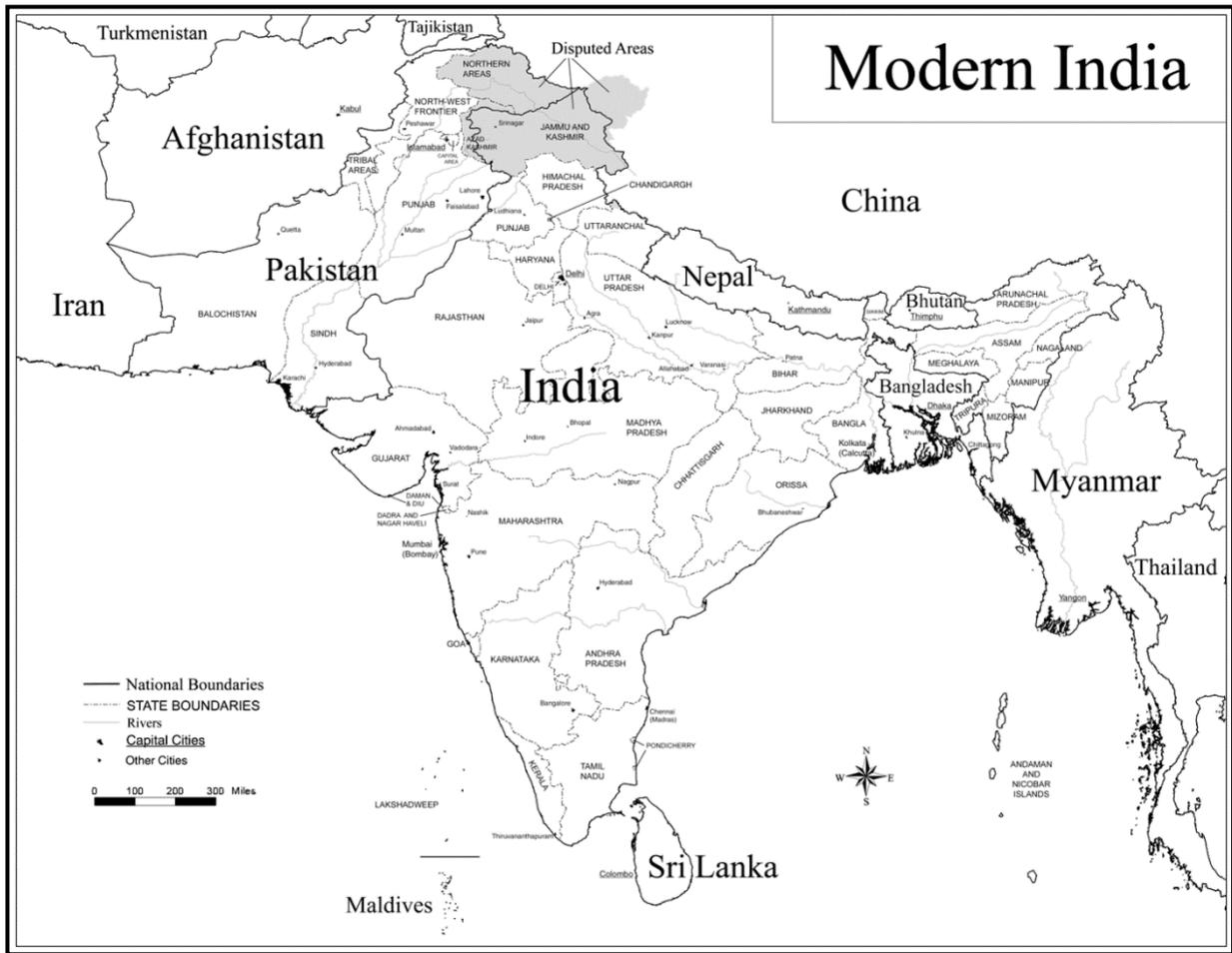
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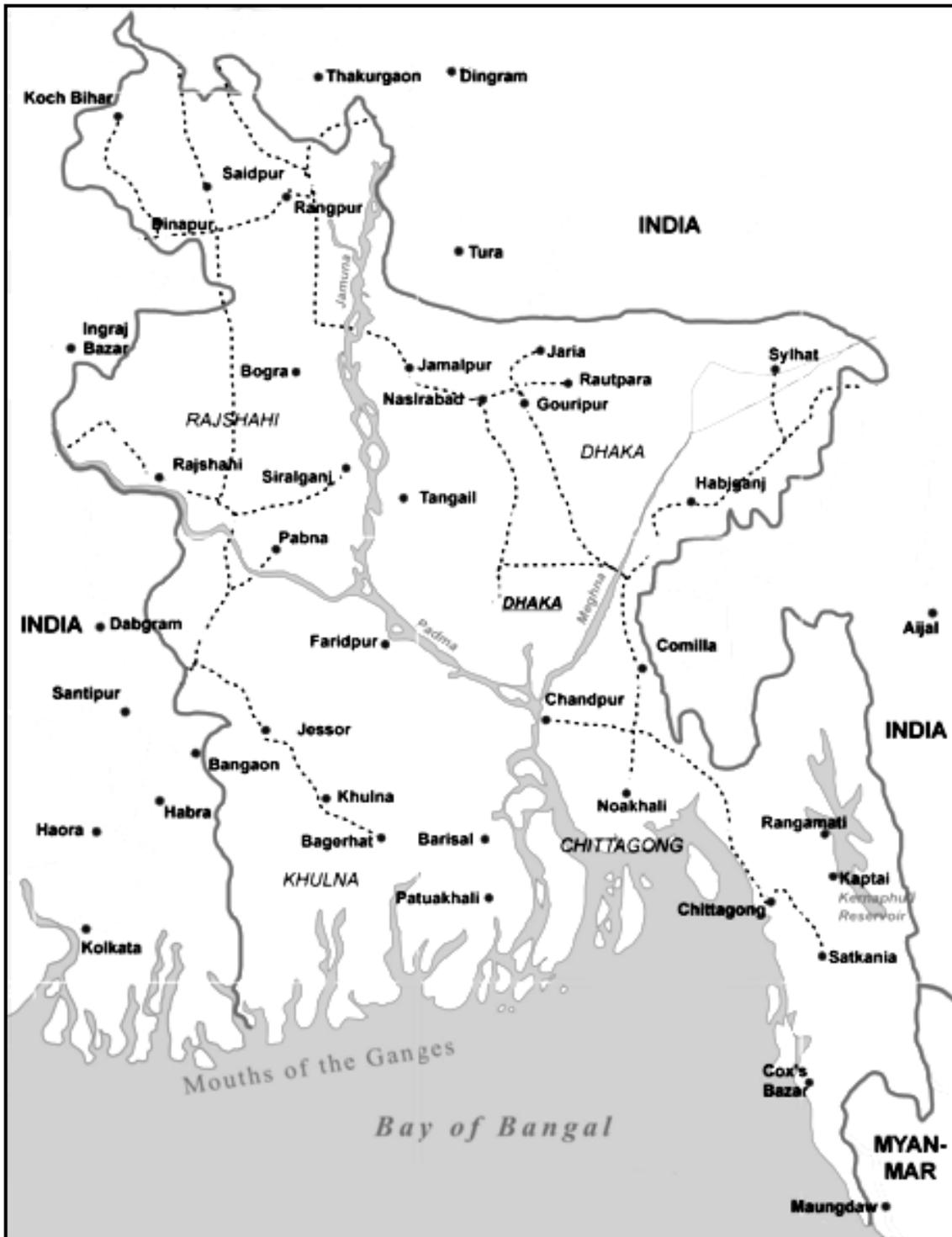
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## **Appendix 1: Maps**



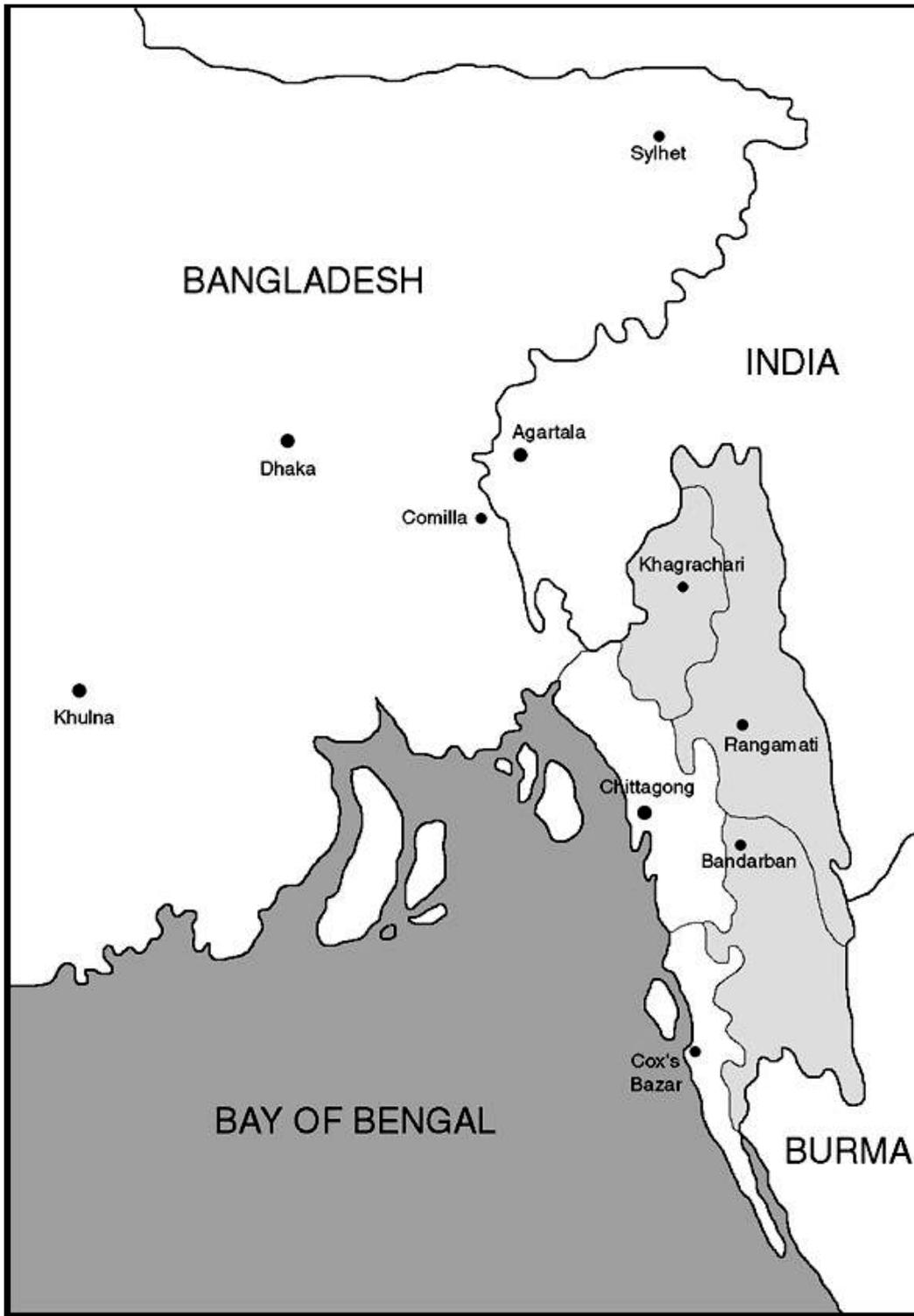
**Map 1: The Indian Subcontinent**

(Source: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Modern\\_india.png](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Modern_india.png))



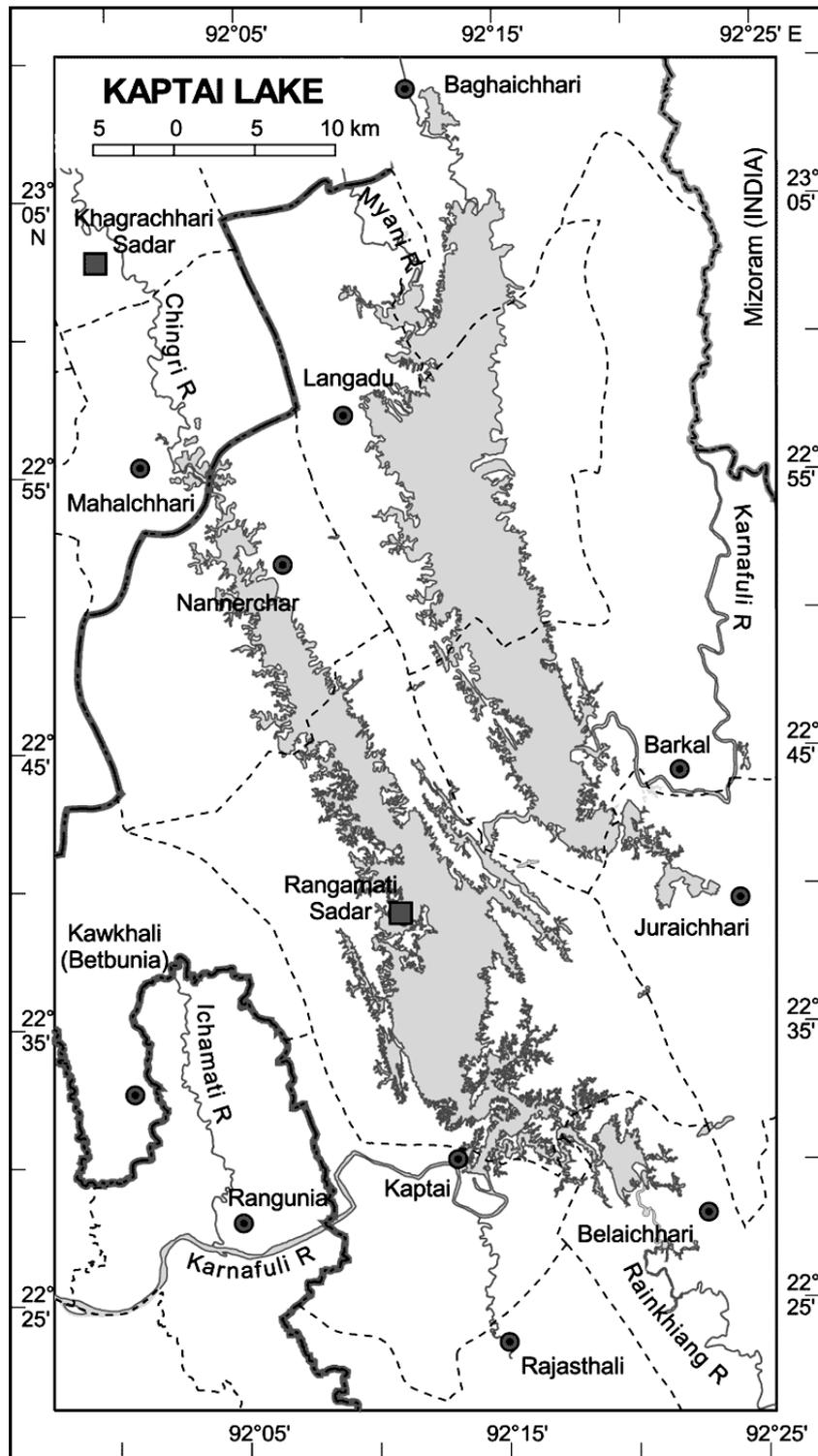
Map 2: Bangladesh

(Source: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Atlas\\_of\\_Bangladesh](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Atlas_of_Bangladesh))



**Map 3: The Chittagong Hill Tracts**

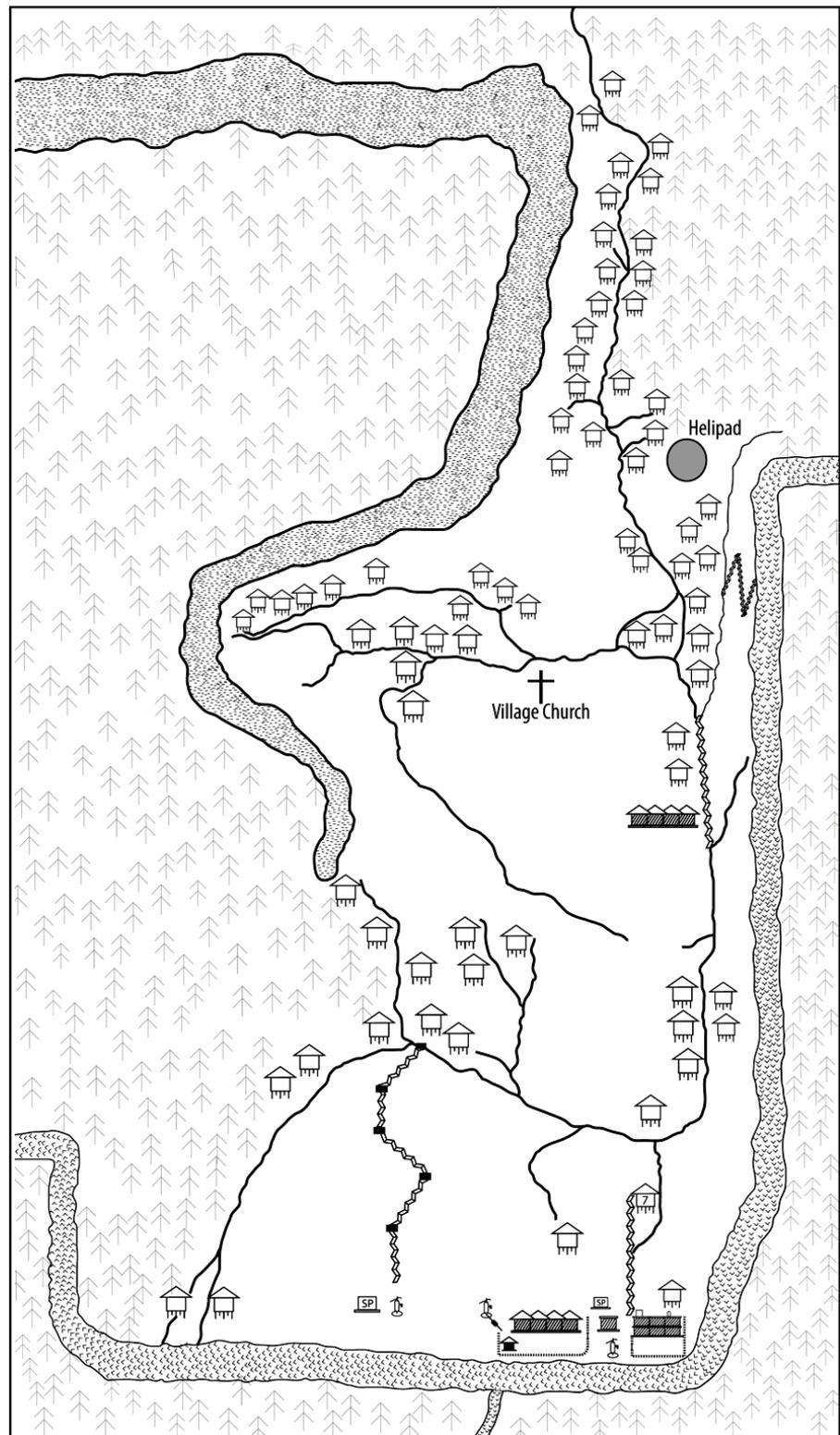
(Source: International Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission)



**Map 4: The Kaptai Lake**

(Source: Banglapedia)

- Legends**
-  Reserve Forest
  -  Kaptai Lake
  -  Reingkhiong River
  -  Shop
  -  School
  -  House
  -  Staircase
  -  Walkways
  -  Tubewell



**Map 5: The Village of Mahalu**

(Source: Sketched by author during Ethnographic Fieldwork in 2010)

## **Appendix 2: The State in/of the CHT: A Pictorial Glimpse**

(All the Photograph were taken by the author during travel and fieldwork in the CHT  
between the years 2010 and 2012)



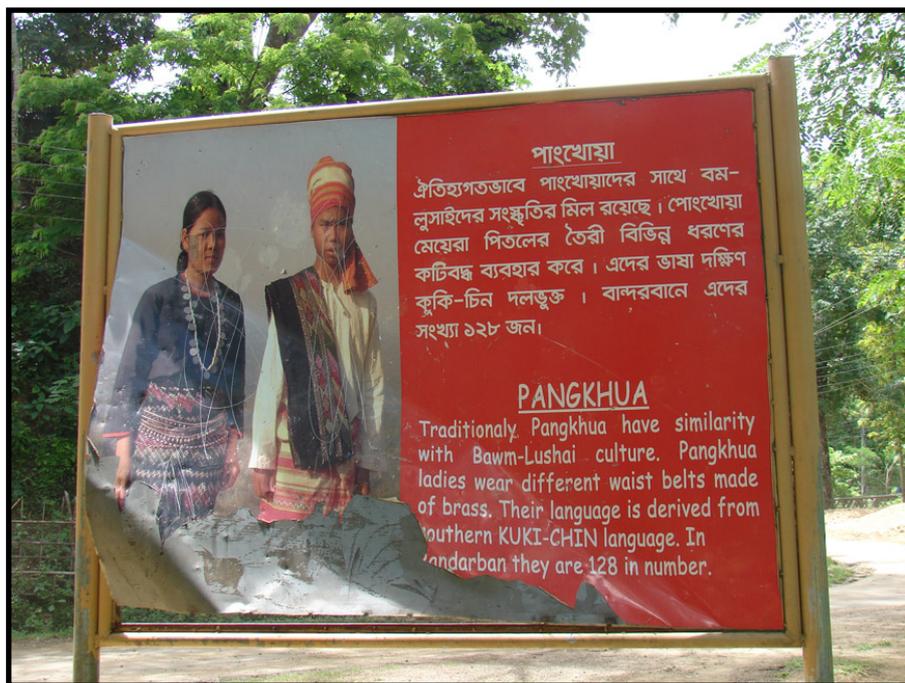
**Image 1:** A warning sign ahead of a checkpost in one of the gateways to the CHT.



**Image 2:** The military welcomes visitors in the CHT. Billboard features three indigenous girls in a welcome gesture.



**Image 3:** The military introduces the CHT communities to the visitors. Billboard in front of an army camp on a popular tourist drive.



**Image 4:** A state-commissioned introduction to the Pangkhua.



**Image 5:** A section of neighbourhood at Mahalu showing the housing architectures.



**Image 6:** Land-grabbing by the Bengalis is a burning issue in the CHT today. The signboard is an ownership claim on the land by two Bengalis.



**Image 7:** Military campaigning for communal harmony.



**Image 8:** A police checkpoint on a popular tourist drive.



**Image 9:** Military introducing a relocated Bawm village named after a District Commissioner.



**Image 10:** A military warning post indicating an artillery zone in the CHT.



**Image 11:** Tourist industry's representation of the 'tribal' and commodification of their culture.



**Image 12:** Villagers' attempt to protect their source of drinking water from misuse by the tourists.



**Image 13:** Signboards of development projects. The presence of NGOs and INGOs is increasingly visible in the CHT now.



**Image 14:** Signboards of informal primary schools run by the NGOs. Education is at the heart of the development efforts in the CHT.



**Image 15:** Developmental representation of the indigenous life. A hygiene campaign poster in the CHT.



**Image 16:** Empty Coca-cola bottles returned from the CHT for refilling. Consumerism is emerging among hill societies.



Image 17: A national identity card issued to a Pangkhua showing the state's appropriation of identity.

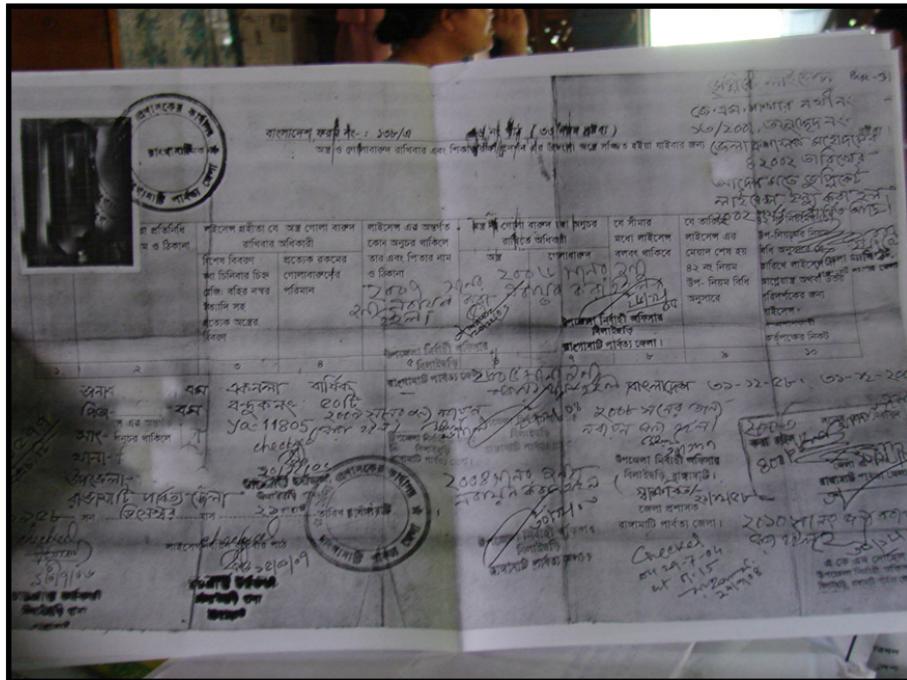


Image 18: A gun licence issued to a Bawm, showing the emerging flow of paperwork



**Image 19:** Silver Jubilee memorial of the Church at Mahalu. Evangelical Christianity is now the primary organizing principle of social life at Mahalu.



**Image 20:** Pangkhua women at Mahalu working in newly introduced tobacco cultivation.

### **Appendix 3: ACU Ethics Clearance and Extension**

2012 161V Extension approved

Kylie Pashley <Kylie.Pashley@acu.edu.au>

Wed 06/11/2013 14:02

To: Prof Tim Scrase <Tim.Scrase@acu.edu.au>;

Bokhtiar Ahmed <bbahme002@myacu.edu.au>;

Cc: Kylie Pashley <Kylie.Pashley@acu.edu.au>;

Ethics Register Number : 2012 161V

Project Title : Beyond Checkpoints: Identity, Development and Power in the  
Chittagong Hill Tracts

Data Collection Date Extended : 31/12/2013

Thank you for returning the Ethics Progress Report for your project.

The Deputy Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee has approved your request to extend the period of data collection. The new expiry date for data collection is the 31/12/2013 .

We wish you well in this ongoing project.

Kind regards,

Kylie Pashley

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