

# ETHNICITY AND IDENTITY POLITICS IN THE CONTEXT OF CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS OF BANGLADESH

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## Abstract

This article concerns ethnicity and identity politics in Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh. This article used the power relation approach of Foucault, Althusser, and Mills, Barth's idea of ethnicity and boundary maintenance, primordial and instrumentalist approaches to ethnicity, and primordial and socio-constructionist approaches to identity. The politics of identity formation and movements of Bangalee, Chakma, and Tripura ethnic communities are associated with multidimensional issues. Some of these are - collectiveness, struggle for existence, ensuring rights, protecting traditions, and securing land and natural resources of the hills. The study used qualitative data collection methods such as observation and participation, key informant interviews, life history, case studies, and narratives. Data analysis followed the qualitative technique by interpreting various aspects or layers of meaning and relationships among ethnic communities. The findings further show that Chakma and Tripura communities bear a nationalist and political ideology through the term Jumma, while Bangalees have a reconstructed image of the hill Bangalee. This article, thus, critically examines the politics of identity formation in CHTs, focusing on inter-ethnic relations of power and political practices.

**Keywords:** Ethnicity, Ethno-politics, Identity, Jumma, Power Relations, Traditional Rights

## Introduction

Academicians, scholars, activists, and politicians have attention to the contexts of power, politics, and identity in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (hereafter CHT), Bangladesh. Bangalee, Chakma, and Tripura people in CHT identify themselves through distinctive cultural practices, language, regional enclosure, political belongingness, and association of groups. Strong groupness, collectivity, and boundary maintenance are evident among these communities, a process Barth

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(1969) described as self-ascription and mutual recognition. Here ethnic boundaries provide a sense of organization, order, and group membership in their social environment<sup>1</sup> (Mahmud, 2015). Thus, ethnic identities can lead people to see their interests as united with the interests of a group (Joireman, 2003). The current situation in CHT has two stages: pre–Peace Accord, a history of unwanted tensions and armed conflicts until 1997, and the post–Peace Accord, a minimization of disputes<sup>2</sup>. Thus, the peace accord remains a bone of contention in national and local politics (Rashiduzzaman, 1998; Bal & Siraj, 2017).

Differences in politics and group identities of the ethnic communities show the ideological construction of identity with political mobilization (Mahmud, 2015). James Scott (2009) argued that internal colonial cultural and administrative processes characterize the formation of nation-states. These are thus ethnic boundaries, and Glazer and Moynihan (1975) argued that this identity is a politicized social fact (as cited in Mahmud, 2015). However, identity-based struggles, politics, and struggles have another angle. Alcoff and Mohanty (2006) argued that identity-based activities are politically limited, and identity-based groups have a particular interest group plan.

However, socio-historically, identity refers to qualities of sameness and connection to others (Erikson, 1980 [1959]; as cited in Mahmud, 2015). In contrast, Hall (1995) argued about identity as a process considering diverse social experiences. According to Appiah (2005, p. 66–69), “there are three sorts of structure for collective identity – availability of terms in public discourse to pick up the bearers of identity, internalization of labels or markers as part of individual identities, and the existence of patterns of behaviour toward those labels of identity. This article argues that ethnic and national identities lead to cultural assimilation, ethnic loyalties (demonstrating political modernization), and multiculturalism, i.e., inter-ethnic relations among different communities in CHT. This article, thus, presents the contexts of politics and identity (Mahmud, 2015) of the Bangalee, Chakma, and Tripura living in CHT.

This article is written based on the ethnographic accounts from my Doctoral thesis (2015) fieldwork, drawing insights from conversations and long-term engagement with the Bangalee, Chakma, and Tripura peoples living in three different villages of Khagrachari *Sadar Upazila*. This article has six sections. Section one briefly introduces the contexts, followed by arguments and methodology in section two. Section three highlights some historical facts about the Chittagong Hill Tracts and a short profile of the Bangalee, Chakma, and Tripura communities. Section four

focuses on the realms of power, politics, and inter-ethnic relations of the ethnic communities and their differential aspects of addressing ethnic identity. Different ethnic communities in CHT have formed other local political groups to protect their rights and traditions and engage in national political parties. Section five presents an understanding of the ethno-political aspects of identity formation with ethnographic accounts. Finally, section six provides some concluding remarks.

## **Methodology**

### *Theoretical Perspectives*

The notion of power is significant in understanding the ethno-political aspects of the ethnic communities in CHTs. Louis Althusser (1984) studied how state institutions oppress people and how they build themselves as individuals; for him, individuals are just puppets of the ideological and repressive apparatus, and power acts from the top downwards (as cited in Mahmud, 2015). In contrast, Foucault (1980) argued that power functions in the form of a chain, exercised through a net-like organization, and individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application. Mills (2003) argued that power is a system, a network of relations encompassing the whole society (rather than a relationship between the oppressed and the oppressor), and individuals are the locus where the power and the resistance to it are exerted (as cited in Mahmud, 2015). Foucault (1970) further argued that the state builds a system of relations between individuals so that the political system works (as cited in Mahmud, 2015).

Ethnicity means the essence of an ethnic group (Chapman et al., (Eds.), 1989) in comparison with other such groups and as the classification of peoples and group relationships within the context of self-other distinctions (Eriksen, 1993; as cited in Mahmud, 2015). Primordialism approach to ethnicity, first used by Edward Shils (1957), distinguished certain kinds of social bonds such as personal, primordial, shared, and civil ties (as cited in Mahmud, 2015). For these, Geertz (1963) suggested that the interaction of the state with personal identity is primordial ties (Hutchinson & Smith (Eds.), 1996; as cited in Mahmud, 2015). In contrast, instrumentalists treated ethnicity as a social, political, and cultural resource for different interest – and – status groups. One of the central ideas of this approach is the socially constructed nature of ethnicity and the ability of individuals to ‘cut and mix’ from a variety of ethnic heritages and cultures, forging identity (Hutchinson & Smith (Eds.), 1996; as cited in Mahmud, 2015). With an understanding of the modern world’s bureaucratic state and capitalism, McNeill (1986) argued that

ethnic communities take new political importance to be united and homogenous, producing conflicts in states composed of several ethnic communities (as cited in Mahmud, 2015).

However, in analyzing ethnicity Fredrik Barth (1969) argued that ethnic groups are categories of ascription, identification by the actors themselves, characteristic of organizing interaction between people, and having specific boundary maintenance strategies (as cited in Mahmud, 2015). With the transactional and instrumentalist perspectives in anthropology, Barth's model emphasized the strength of the social boundary of ethnic groups and how transactions across the border strengthened it (Hutchinson & Smith (Eds.), 1996; as cited in Mahmud, 2015). And Stuart Hall (1995) mentioned that the politics of representation sets in motion an ideological contestation around the term ethnicity that engages differences depending on the cultural construction of new ethnic identities (as cited in Mahmud, 2015).

I have used two approaches to analyze identity. Firstly, a primordial approach that considers the sense of self and belonging to a collective group as a fixed thing defined by common ancestry and biological characteristics (Mahmud, 2015). Secondly, a social constructionist approach assumes a predominantly political choice of specific features that form identity (Erikson, 1974; as cited in Mahmud, 2015). Thus, the first approach treats identity as a group phenomenon (Mahmud, 2015), and identity denotes a fundamental and consequential sameness among group members (Thompson, 1989; as cited in Mahmud, 2015). With the emergence of political conflicts in which issues of ethnicity played a significant role, this approach led to an acceptance of objective differences between social groups as a basis for group distinction and political mobilization (Mahmud, 2015). However, from a subjective approach, the instrumentalist theories still gave ethnic groupness an essentialist quality (Mahmud, 2015). Political strategy-making, sometimes overflowing into violence, often gave ethnic groupness negative connotations that caused a return to a primordial view of ethnic groupness, as the ethnic group is understood to be fighting for its distinctive values (Smith, 1986; as cited in Mahmud, 2015).

This article explains how power relations have broadened the scope of ethnic communities to exercise power over other ethnic communities (Mahmud, 2015) and develop their capacity for resistance. Thus, relations between individuals and society go beyond the exercises of power of institutions, groups, or the state. Political strategy, inter-ethnic relations, and ethnic groupness are significant in

realizing identity formation. Hence, the ethnographic accounts shed light on how the Bangalee, Chakma, and Tripura communities maintain power relations in their interactions with each other and the state and their politically mobilized processes of identity formation (Mahmud, 2015).

### *Problem-field and Objectives*

I conducted the fieldwork of this study in three *paras* or villages (*Beltali, Patanjay, and Singinala*)<sup>3</sup> of Khagrachhari district (*Sadar Upazila*) of CHT for one year and six months (from April 2011 to December 2012) with three breaks (each stay was for three months). The nature of the study was an ethnographic one. The respondents have been all the household heads (83 in Beltali, 77 in Paltanjay, and 53 in Singinala paras) of Bangalee, Chakma, and Tripura ethnic communities. The methods include observation and participation, key informant interviews, life history, case studies, narratives, and literature review. However, data analysis followed qualitative research by interpreting various aspects of relationships. The main objective of this article is to understand the contexts of identity formation of different ethnic communities in CHT. This article further draws attention to the formation of political groups by various ethnic communities to understand the nature of ethno-politics, inter-ethnic relations, and identity.

### **A Brief Cultural Profile of CHT: Bangalee and Small Ethnic Communities**

The establishment of the Chittagong Hill Tracts and its administrative units went through a history of the struggle of different ethnic groups. According to Ishaq (1971, p. 30-32, 252-256),

During the British regime, Kuki raids were recorded in 1859, 1866, 1869, 1888, and 1892. In 1860, the independent tribes, known by the generic name of Kukies, committed murderous outrages on British subjects in the adjacent district of Tipperah. With this incident, in January 1861, a military force assembled at Barkal to punish the offenders. Accordingly, several similar incidences occurred in 1862, 1863, and 1864, including an attack on Bangalee wood-cutters. These events continued until 1875, when various other tribal raids took place in the Hill Tracts, and during those years, the military launched their final expedition in 1898. British annexation of Lushai Hills in 1891 gave the District of CHTs the sub-division status. The 1900 Regulation-I formed the district again and divided it into three circles (and in Mouzas): Chakma, Mong, and Bomong (as cited in Mahmud, 2015).

The CHT Manual, made under Regulation-I of 1900, was intended to protect the rights and interests of the tribal hill-men (Mahmud, 2015). Since 1920 outsiders did not have sub-letting of land, with few rules amended in 1930 (Mahmud, 2015). However, with the establishment of Pakistan in 1947, CHT came under the jurisdiction of a new state facing changes and development. CHT ceased to be a tribal area on January 10, 1964, with the commencement of the Constitution (First Amendment) Act, 1963 (Act No. I of 1964), and until 1956, the administrations of the districts of CHTs were taken as excluded areas (Kamal et al., (Eds.), 2007, p. 4; as cited in Mahmud, 2015). With the Constitutional Act 46 in 1959, the Pakistani Government changed the special status of CHT from excluded to the tribal area, which made a higher influx of plain-land people in CHTs (Gain, 2000, p. 18). And the construction of the Kaptai Dam in 1962 was responsible for the displacement of many local people (Mahmud, 2015). People lost their hearths and home submerged by water and considered this incident a curse to their fate (Mahmud, 2015). In 1950, the Government established a separate police office with eleven police stations in the three subdivisions until 1967 (Mahmud, 2015).

After the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1979, the then Bangladesh government introduced Bandarban, Khagrachari, and Rangamati Local Government Parishad Law, now known as Hill Tracts District Parishad Law (Kamal et al., (Eds.), 2007, p. 4-6; as cited in Mahmud, 2015). However, the Bangladesh Government established three separate districts in the years 1981 (Bandarban District) and 1983 (Khagrachari and Rangamati Districts) (Mahmud, 2015). Till now, seventeen different departments are running under the Hill Tracts District Parishad, and the Ministry of Chittagong Affairs started to work in 1998 (Mahmud, 2015).

The following discussion shows a short profile of the Bangalee, Chakma, and Tripura communities. Historically, two factors played significant roles in the settlement of Bangalee in Singinala *para*, and the CHTs – one is the exchange of food and other commercial materials between the Bangalee and the different ethnic communities of the hills. The other is the development of Chittagong Port and the city's expansion, which established the practice of an exchange economy in place of a subsistence economy (Mahmud, 2015). Regarding origin and migration, the Bangalee of the village came from various parts of the country, including Noakhali, Feni, Chittagong, Comilla, and Dinajpur, for agricultural activities, business, and new livelihood, among others (Mahmud, 2015).

Chakmas of the Beltali and Paltanjay *paras* consider themselves indigenous residents. They address themselves within their communities as Changma, but

to outsiders, they are known as Chakma. However, the Burmese, Rakhine, and Arakanians called the Chakmas *Sak*, *Thak*, or *Thek*. The Tripuras also called them *Kurmu* in the same sense as fair (Chakma, 2011, p. 33-35; as cited in Mahmud, 2015). According to their oral history, their ancestors had come from the Tripura, Mizoram, Arunachal, and Assam regions of Eastern India, i.e., from the Indo-Aryan group (Mahmud, 2015). Two legendary stories of origin (known as *Pelagians* or narrative operas) are *radhamon-dhanpudi* and *chadigang-chhara* (Mahmud, 2015). In the *palagaans* the *gengulis* (a group of bards playing violin or flute in Chakma rural society) mentioned the ancient settlement of the Chakmas as Champaknagar<sup>4</sup>, from where the Prince of Champaknagar Bijoygiri conquered many regions, including Chittagong (its name mentioned as *Chadigong*). Today these Chakma people believe that they are the descendants of those of Bijoygiri's soldiers who conquered Arakan (Kamal et al., (Eds.) 2007, p. 38; Dewan, 1991, p. 38; as cited in Mahmud, 2015). The Chakmas also address their ancient history as *Bijog* or *Bijok*.

The Tripura is one of the ancient ethnic communities living in the Indian subcontinent and CHTs. The Bangalees sometimes call the Tripuras *Tipra*; in India, they are familiar with the term *Tripuree*; the Chakmas call them *Tibira*, and the Marmas and Rakhine call them *Mrong* (Mahmud, 2015). In search of their origin and ancestors, I have found it relevant to the findings of Dalton (1978 [1872]) that the people of Tripura are said to have the exact origin as the Kasharis (similarity of religion, customs, and appearance) who, living in the Brahmaputra valley, had emerged from barbarism. Dalton (1978 [1872]) mentioned that the Tripuras (Tipperahs), inhabitants of the Tipperah hill ranges, were driven to this part of the country by a Burmese invasion. Their first King Asamgo is said to be the ancestor of Trilochun mentioned in the *Mahabharat* as King of Tripura (Dalton, 1978 [1872], p. 109-111; as cited in Mahmud, 2015). According to Probhanshu Tripura (2007, p. 202),

These Tripuras originated from Mongolia, and Bodo or Boro, one of their many groups, was dominant in the Indian subcontinent before the Aryans. The Aryans used to call them Kirat (savage), Danab (giant), and Asur (monster). An influential group of the Bodo or Boro started its settlement in the basins of the Ganga, Shitalaskha, Brahmaputra, and Dhaleshwari rivers. Later they renamed the province Tripura and claimed themselves as a non-Aryan community and original inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent (as cited in Mahmud, 2015).

### **Power, Politics, and Inter-ethnic Relations**

The relationship between the Bangalee, Chakma, and Tripura is competitive and cooperative (Mahmud, 2015). Historical contexts of CHT have bound them to capitalize on their connections with different political parties. The classification of ethnic identity, with political interests and boundary maintenance (for instance, uses of the terms *Jumma* for the Chakma and Tripura, and settler or Pahari Bangalee for the Bangalees), played a significant role in creating social solidarity. The debate on indigenesness<sup>5</sup> and political activities (Chakma, Tripura, and the similar communities of CHT are not recognized as indigenous by the constitution of Bangladesh<sup>6</sup> and are termed ethnic minorities) is instrumental. In their study on entitlement and deprivation of diverse groups in Bangladesh, Ali and Shafie (2005, p. 31-32) argued on contested categories and embedded politics of the ethnic communities in the CHTs followingly,

In Bangladesh, since her inception, we have observed the dilemma in political concerns between the ideologies of national homogeneity and ethno-national heterogeneity. Notably, in the CHTs, we have observed how the sense of being Bangladeshi seemed to have faded out as a category of identity and replaced by an emergent sense of belonging and a new imagined category of homogeneity centering on the practice of Jhum cultivation at a more regional level. [...] Two central and bounded categories have been formed and labeled as Pahari (hill people) and Bangalee (plain dwellers).

Many of the incidents in CHT over the last few decades have been subject to the problem of national homogeneity and ethno-national heterogeneity. Due to this, the realms of power and politics have two significant issues. Firstly, there have been conflicts among settler Bangalees, ethnic communities, and state law enforcement agencies<sup>7</sup> (Mahmud, 2015). Chakma and Tripura communities have developed connections with different political parties and state authorities to secure rights over resources. The rehabilitation process of the landless Bangalees from other areas into CHTs has been a demographic shift (political migration) – generating a majority-minority dictum. Secondly, taking their minority status and settler issues in the hills, Bangalees find their strength through forming and participating in different political groups (Mahmud, 2015). These problems reshaped the nature of ethnic relations on an instrumental basis. Thus, as Eriksen (1993) and Geertz (1963) suggested, a strong division of power holders and powerlessness leads to inter-ethnic relations and primordial ties.

Different ethnic communities have formed other political groups (considering local, regional, and national issues)<sup>8</sup>. Noteworthy features of the political groups formed



by Chakma and Tripura are – shared historical memories, involvement in typical power politics to control their influences on land, division of interests in political activities, and leadership feuds (Mahmud, 2015). Some of these political groups are – *Pahari chattra parishad* (in Bengali) or Hill student council (PCP), Hill women federation (HWF), *Parbatya chattagram jubo samiti* (in Bengali) or CHT youth association (PCJS), *Parbatya chattagram jono samhati samiti* (in Bengali) or Chittagong hill ethnic peoples' coordination association (PCJSS), *Jono samhati samiti-reformist* (in Bengali) or Coordination association-reformist (JSS-R), and United people's democratic front (UPDF) (Mahmud, 2015). For the Bangalee, the political parties are *Somo adhikar andolon* (in Bengali), or Movement for equal rights, and *Parbatya Bangalee chattra parishad* (in Bengali) or Hill Bangalee student council (PBCP) (Mahmud, 2015).

At the national-level politics, many of the Bangalee, Chakma, and Tripuras belong to either *Awami League* (in Bengali) or Bangladesh Nationalist Party (Mahmud, 2015). In most instances, getting positions in the political parties forming the Government help determine their vital status in the local and national political arena. The engagement with national-level political parties resembles Hall's (1995) hypothesis of politics of representation with a cultural construction of new ethnic identities. The following cases and findings justify Foucault's (1980) theory that power circulates as a chain, and the state builds a system of relations between individuals to operate the political system. Sunendu Tripura (35), a leader from *Pahari Chattra Parishad* (PCP), recalled his initiatives and reasons for engagement with local political groups in the following way:

Our target is to safeguard the welfare of hill students and the autonomy of hill people, protect traditional rights and resources, remove security forces from the hills, and establish indigenusness, and freedom of voice. We are ready to sacrifice our lives to fulfill our objectives. Most of the members of PCP believe that better days will come (Discussion at Singinala, Khagrachari, CHT, July 2011) (as cited in Mahmud, 2015).

The activities and thoughts of Sunendu Tripura demonstrate their organized effort against the state hegemony over traditional rights and reasons for forming various political groups engaging men, women, and young people from different ethnic communities. In a discussion, Jitendro Chakma (65), a *Parbatya chattagram jono samhati samiti* (PCJSS) leader, elaborated on the causes and consequences of their socio-political movements and encounters in the hills. He stated,

PCJSS, founded in 1972, is CHT's strongest local political party. The Government of Bangladesh signed the Peace Accord with us in 1997. We aim to secure our economic, social, cultural, and political identities. Construction of the Kaptai Dam and the settlement of Bangalee people in CHT have destroyed our habitat, endangered our tradition, and increased competition for natural resources (Discussion at Patanjay, Khagrachari, CHT, July 2011) (as cited in Mahmud, 2015).

The accounts of Jitendro Chakma refer to how their current situation resulted from past experiences that took their lives, land, and resources. However, the Bangalees have different experiences in the hills. In this study, the Bangalees are those the ethnic communities have invited to introduce the plain land cultivation process in the hill areas. Omar Ali (40) is one of these Bangalees whose parents have come to CHT this way. Omar Ali is a Bangalee leader from *Somo adhikar andolon* (SAA) and expressed his views in the following way:

Political parties such as SAA and PBCP have been established to strengthen our trustworthiness among the ordinary Bangalee people in the hills. Some of our major activities are – organizing public meetings, processions, and press briefings, raising our voices, and facing the challenges of our survival strategies. The situation in the hills is not always the same, and we face difficulties from time to time as we have to interact with the Chakma, Tripura, and other ethnic communities in everyday activities (Discussion at Beltali, Khagrachari, CHT, October 2011) (as cited in Mahmud, 2015).

However, Mahbub Uddin (38) argued, “like the Bangalees, several young Chakma and Tripura men are involved with Awami League or BNP to exercise political and economic power in the locality. Their connection with the Government has given them strengths, benefits, and support in favour of their political activities” (Mahmud, 2015). Thus, most of the political leaders have mentioned the following factors for political relations: interpretation of self-identity related to a politics of identity formation, defending economic, social, political, and cultural identity, preservation of natural resources of the hills, and prioritizing community beliefs and practices, which reflect their senses of belongingness, community pride, and ethnic identity (Mahmud, 2015). The construction of inter-ethnic relations is, thus, related to the forced settlement of the outsiders, creating discrimination and exclusion, isolating the ethnic communities from their rights, and extensive establishment of law enforcement agencies by the state at the cost of displacement of ethnic communities (Mahmud, 2015). As Hutchinson and Smith (1996) mentioned, the

above factors show a primordial tie where the state and Government have specific relations with individuals and groups.

In a group discussion Latif Mia (49), Manindra Chakma (46), and Bikash Tripura (42) argued that the factors responsible for differences among them are – access to political power, access to economic resources, and an identity crisis. Access to political power controls the mechanism of and access to financial resources (Mahmud, 2015). As a result, they compete to get close to the power domain. Latif, Manindra, and Bikash agreed to follow their community strategies to exercise their land and natural resources control. For them, a majority-minority<sup>9</sup> dichotomy creates a conflict of traditions, i.e., a politics of numbers. Thus, ethnic communities connect with national political parties to work together or get financial, social, and political benefits. Access to power, then, goes to different spheres of these communities.

In another discussion, Majed Hossen (33) and Shadhon Tripura (37) argued that dominant political groups in the hills control identity politics and have always preferred peaceful relations. Thus, pre-conditions for peace in the hills<sup>10</sup> are: changing state policy of forceful settlement, recognizing indigenous identity in the state's constitution, and understanding their vast cultural variations and traditions. However, the above findings show that the ethnic groups amalgamate social bonds to the relations of religion, blood, race, language, region, and custom (a primordial approach). And individuals can 'cut and mix' from various ethnic heritages and cultures and create group relations (an instrumental approach).

### **Ethno-political Aspects of Identity: The CHT Context**

The formation of identity is closely associated with ethno-politics in CHT. The following findings support the primordial and social-constructionist approaches to identity. The primordial approach treats identity as a group phenomenon, binding members on exclusive common characteristics. At the same time, the social-constructionist approach sees identity as a predominantly political choice of specific features. Chakma and Tripura people consider their identity to be associated with culture, language, and traditional social and political practices. According to Piashi Tripura (36),

We have faced lots of trouble. I have seen my parents and grandparents fight for resources, protect women and children from harassment, and defend our

motherland. The issue of our identity crisis is not new. We always want to live in peace, but that did not happen, and our fellow people sacrificed their lives. We started to make a political move to establish our identity and secure our existence (Discussion at Singinala, Khagrachari, CHT, March 2012) (as cited in Mahmud, 2015).

Piashi and her friends, while discussing the issue of collective identity and political activity related to identity, recalled that they use the term *Jumma* or *Pahari* for a collective identity (associated with traditional cultivation practices) (Mahmud, 2015). They also shared that the local political party PCJSS tried to secure their political and economic autonomy. Other political groups (such as PCP, PGP, HWF, and UPDF) are actively working to protect their indigenous identity. But after signing the 1997 peace accord, they noticed that the other ethnic communities of CHT questioned most of the activities of PCJSS (Mahmud, 2015). Thus, they realized their indigenous identity was politicized, which led them to develop ways to organize indigenous political groups to demonstrate their indigenesness. The politicization of indigenous identity resembles Joireman's (2003) hypothesis that ethnic identities can lead people to be united and match their interests with the interest of a group and Glazer and Moynihan's (1975) argument that identity is a politicized social fact.

The Bangalees are facing another type of problem in CHT. Jamil (39) and his friends at a local tea stall in *Beltali para* commented on their contemporary issues. They shared that in the context of CHT, they feel they are minor and culturally different from the ethnic minority communities. Though the notion of Bangalee gives them an advantage of power and confidence (Mahmud, 2015), the problems they face revolve around their settlement issue in CHT. Momin (38), one of Jamil's friends, argued that there is a common belief among the Chakma and Tripura that this settlement process has destroyed their resources and increased competition. Thus, Bangalees created another type of identity as *Parbattya Bangalee* or *Pahari Bangalee* (Hill Bangalee) (Mahmud, 2015). However, the following points from ethnographic fieldwork illustrate some significant aspects of identity formation, power, and politics in the hills.

Firstly, development policies by the state have dislocated hill people from their land, resources, and homestead areas (Mahmud, 2015). Such is the case with establishing the Kaptai Dam to produce electricity. They used the term *Jumma* to show collective identity. Secondly, a constitutional safeguard for their recognition as separate communities – autonomy for the CHTs with its legislature, retention

of the 1900 CHT Manual, the continuation of the offices of tribal chiefs, and provisions restricting the amendment of the CHT Manual and imposing a ban on the influx of non-tribal people into the CHT (Mohsin, 2003, p. 22; as cited in Mahmud, 2015). Moreover, the entire CHT has been kept open since the 1950s for unrestricted migration and acquisition of land titles by non-indigenous people in violation of the spirit of CHT Regulation-1900 (Adnan, 2004; as cited in Mahmud, 2015). The Bangalees argued that ignoring linguistic and cultural variations in CHT will never bring peace and create new avenues for identity politics. However, following Hall (1995), it is evident that identity is a process with diverse social and political experiences in CHTs.

### **Conclusion**

Apart from economic, cultural, political, and territorial aspects, what matters essential for the Bangalee, Chakma, and Tripura people in CHT are ethnic identity and peace. Ethnographic stories refer to state authority's need to recognize traditional beliefs, values, and cultural differences. This article illustrates three arguments: Firstly, one should not undermine ethnic communities' indigenous identity due to cultural differences. Secondly, regarding political activity, a sense of ethnonationalism is working among the Chakma and Tripura, resembling demands for the retention of the 1900 CHT Manual. Thirdly, understanding the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the political history of Bangladesh is significant in dealing with the situations in CHT.

However, the primordial approach to ethnicity and identity formation distinguished certain social bonds such as personal, primordial, shared, and civil ties (Shils, 1957, p. 113-45; as cited in Mahmud, 2015). Geertz (1963) suggested that the state's interaction with personal identity is based on primordial ties. The instrumentalists treated ethnicity as a social, political, and cultural resource for different interest – and – status groups. This article argues that these approaches have tried to show the underlying meaning of ethnicity and ethnic identity of the Bangalee, Chakma, and Tripura. However, these approaches generated issues of ethnic and national identities leading to the incorporation of cultural assimilation, ethnic loyalties (demonstrating economic and political modernization), and multiculturalism (Mahmud, 2015).

The findings of the article show that Althusser's (1984) analysis of power as acting from the top downwards is partially true in the case of the ethnic groups in the CHTs and, as Foucault (1980) argued, individuals are the vehicles of power are

also applicable in describing power relations among these groups. Accordingly, the boundary maintenance among different ethnic groups, formulated by Barth (1969) and taking individuals as the locus of power and resistance (Mills, 2003), further elaborates the nature of ethno-politics and identity formation in the CHTs. This article depicts that Chakmas and Tripuras consider their movement a national consciousness organized around their cultural and political image as *Jumma*. The Bangalees living in the hills demonstrate a deconstructed image of ‘hill Bangalee.’ These activities are closely associated with their culture, language, ethno-political, and ethnic identity.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> In this context, Anderson (1983) argued that boundaries assist people in creating bonds based on shared ideas and emotions as part of a group in contrast to others... they don’t need to know each other personally (as cited in Mahmud, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Peace Accord was signed on December 2, 1997, in Dhaka at the Prime Minister’s office between Government and *Parbattya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity* (PCJSS). Under the framework of the constitution of Bangladesh, the National Committee on CHT Affairs, on behalf of the government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh and the *Parbattya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti* (PCJSS), on behalf of the inhabitants of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, to elevate political, social, cultural, educational, and financial rights and to expedite socio-economic development process of all citizens in CHT, agreed (Tebtebba Foundation, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Villages in the hills are locally termed *paras*.

<sup>4</sup> By some, it is said to be near Malacca; this would ascribe to them a Malay origin. While on the other hand, many assert that Champaknagar is far from the North-Western Provinces of Hindoostan (Lewin, 2011 [1869], p. 62; as cited in Mahmud, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> ILO Constitution No. 169 defines indigenous people as “peoples in independent countries who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonization or the establishment of present state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own

social, economic, cultural, and political institutions” (International Labour Standards Department, 2009, p. 9; as cited in Mahmud, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Tension was generated due to the fifteenth amendment act of the Constitution of Bangladesh (2011), stating “people of Bangladesh shall be known as Bangalee as a nation, and the citizens of Bangladesh shall be known as Bangladeshis” (substitution in article 6(2), “unity and solidarity of the Bangalee nation, which, deriving its identity from its language and culture, attained sovereign and independent Bangladesh through a united and determined struggle in the war of independence, shall be the basis of Bangalee nationalism” (substitution in article 9), and “culture of tribes, minor races, ethnic sects, and communities – the State shall take steps to protect and develop the unique local culture and tradition of the tribes, minor races, ethnic sects, and communities” (insertion of new article 23A) (Bangladesh National Parliament, 2011; as cited in Mahmud, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> These processes helped the then government of Bangladesh to recognize CHT as a national security problem, developing settlement programs for rehabilitating landless Bangalee (Roy, 1998; as cited in Mahmud, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Eidheim (1971) showed that negative stereotyping can be interrelated with a shared cultural repertoire and that both aspects are probably necessary components of a stable system of inter-ethnic relations (Eriksen, 1993; as cited in Mahmud, 2015).

<sup>9</sup> Eriksen (1993, p. 121) argued that an ethnic minority could be defined as a group numerically inferior to the rest of the population in a society... a minority exists only concerning a majority and vice versa (as cited in Mahmud, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> This does not indicate that complete unrest prevails in the hills, but this is also true that the contemporary situation is not out of anxiety (Mahmud, 2015).

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