

THE MAKING OF POLITICAL FORESTS IN THE CHITTAGONG HILL  
TRACTS, BANGLADESH: THE STATE, DEVELOPMENT AND  
INDIGENEITY

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation offers an anthropological and genealogical account of forests and social forestry, in particular the way they came to be constituted over time in one particular social-ecological context of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), Bangladesh. It draws on ethnographic fieldwork to examine how discourses of forest and forest relations in CHT since British rule have changed and shaped agrarian relations of the hill peoples and their relations to power. As such, this dissertation explores forest history in relation to an ‘ethnically’ different and ‘small group’ of population living within a nation-state so as to understand how nature/environment is constituted as a terrain of governmental power, subject formation, and state building. The analysis is informed by Michel Foucault’s ideas of discourse, power and knowledge; Peter Vandergeest’s and Nancy Peluso’s theory of territorialization and political forests; K. Sivaramakrishnan’s critical work on the production of colonial state, society, and knowledge in a forested region of colonial Bengal, and Tania Li’s and Arun Agrawal’s theoretical and ethnographic work on governmentality, indigenous communities, and resource struggles. The chapters of this dissertation are organized around the political regimes of Britain, Pakistan and Bangladesh, highlighting continuities and discontinuities in the making and remaking of political forests. Throughout the chapters, there run several underlying themes: opposition to jhum cultivation; development; environmental change; and social forestry. These overlapping themes take distinct forms in relation to the discourse of political forests at each juncture of a particular historical development. Through this analysis, this dissertation argues that the ethnic conflicts in CHT are rooted in the policies and practices of political forests, in particular industrialization of forest resources that resulted in the dispossession and marginalization of hill

peoples. However, the persistence of the conflict is primarily due to counter-insurgency developments, especially ‘social forestry.’ The dissertation illustrates how hill peoples’ political opposition to the state and forestry programs through insurgency and alternative development have, in fact, helped to create and expand political forests. While many scholars write accurately but too generally about the land issue as the crux of the prolem ethnic conflict and insurgency in CHT, this dissertation explains not just that land is problem, but why and how land is problem. In sum, this dissertation contributes to the rich scholarship in South Asian historical political ecology, with a focus on Bangladesh and the emerging field ‘Zomia Studies.’ The dissertation aims to deepen our understanding of the relations between violence, forests and development in CHT and addresses the absence of ethnographic research on ethnic conflict in the CHT in general, and on issues of its forests and lands in particular in Bangladesh.

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to Shammi Akter, my loving wife, and to Somprite W. Chowdhury, my wonderful daughter. I could not have done this without them.

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## **Acronyms and Abbreviations**

ADB	Asian Development Bank
BA	Bangladesh Army
BAOA	Bangladesh Adivasi Odhikar Andolon
B. E.	Bengali Era
BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistic
BIHPAA	Bangladesh Indigenous and Hill People Association for Advancement
BIPF	Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples Forum
BNP	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
CCF	Chief Conservator of Forests
CF	Conservator of Forests
CHT	Chittagong Hill Tracts
CHTDB	Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board
CHTDP	Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Project
CHTWA	Chittagong Hill Tracts Welfare Association
CO	Commanding Officer
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
DC	Deputy Commissioner
DCF	Deputy Conservator of Forests
DFO	Divisional Forest Officer
DGFI	Directorate General of Forces Intelligence
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization

FSP	Forestry Sector Project
FD	Forest Department (Department of Forest)
FIDC	Forest Industries Development Corporation
GOB	Government of Bengal
GOBD	Government of Bangladesh
GOC	General Officer Commanding
GOEB	Government of East Bengal
GOEP	Government of East Pakistan
GOP	Government of Pakistan
HDC	Hill District Council
ICIMOD	International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development
IISH	International Institute of Social History
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
IWGIA	International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs
KHP	Kaptai Hydroelectric Plant
KPM	Karnaphuli Paper Mill
M. P.	Magnesium Phosphate
MOA	Ministry of Agriculture
MOCHTA	Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs
MOEF	Ministry of Environment and Forest
MRG	Minority Rights Group International
NACC	National Adivasi Coordination Committee
N.D.	Not Dated
NGO	Non-Government Organization



OC	Officer- in- Charge
ODM	Ministry of Overseas Development
PBSA	Participant Benefit Sharing Agreement
PCJSS or JSS	Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samhati
RDC	Research and Development Collective
RF	Reserved Forests
RS	Rupees
SEHD	Society for Environment and Human Development
T. S. P.	Triple Super Phosphate
TK	Taka
UK	United Kingdom
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund
UNO	Upazila Nirbahi Officer
UPDF	United People’s Democratic Front
USA	United States of America
USF	Unclassed State Forests
VCD	Video Compact Disc
VCF	Village Common Forests
VDP	Village Defense Party
WB	World Bank
WGIP	Working Group on Indigenous Population
WHO	World Health Organization



Photo 1.1: Typical Landscape in Chittagong Hill Tracts.

## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

The telling of “natural” or environmental history is not immune to ideology, idealism, or moral judgement — all of which have political consequences.

— Peluso (1996).

#### 1.1 Unexpected and/or Unknown

Located in the southeast of Bangladesh and bordering Myanmar (formerly Burma) and India (see Appendix A: Map 1), the Chittagong Hill Tracts (hereafter CHT) is a forest region considered vital to the security and economic interests of Bangladesh (Ibrahim 1991). For centuries, a number of “racially” differentiated ethnic groups (so-called “tribes”<sup>1</sup>) have inhabited CHT.

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<sup>1</sup> The governing regimes and Bengalis have considered all the “indigenous” hill peoples of CHT as “tribes.” The nomenclature of indigenous peoples’ “tribal” identity is primarily political and bears no significance in the daily lives of the communities. In fact, village-based affiliations as well as other conventional and territorial institutions concerning civil and criminal laws, forests, and revenue were and still are more important units of social and political organization in CHT than the “tribe” *per se*. Therefore, I use quotation marks when referring to so-called “tribes”. It is important to note the fact that the British invented the term tribe for the hill peoples of South Asia in

Notably, these indigenous peoples of CHT (hereafter “the hill peoples”<sup>2</sup>) have experienced wars and armed conflict over a very long period. In 1971, the Bangladesh liberation war began in what was then East Pakistan against the West Pakistani military regime, and the nation of Bangladesh was born. The hill peoples were indifferent or divided over the East-West Pakistan conflict. In 1972, a regional political movement emerged, led by the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (Chittagong Hill Tracts People’s Solidarity Association, hereafter the JSS for short), whose leaders demanded cultural recognition of the hill peoples and political autonomy for CHT, which led to armed resistance against the Bangladesh security forces and lasted for almost twenty five years.<sup>3</sup>

The insurgency<sup>4</sup> was followed by a military coup in 1975 and the rise of a military dictatorship in Bangladesh (see Chapter IV for further discussion). In 1997, after twenty-five

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the 1840s as part of a race and caste classification system (Skaria 1997). The term lacks a clear definition and continues to be contested (Beteille 1992; Scott 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Some indigenous groups of CHT collectively refer to themselves as “Jumma” as a political identity and at times as “Pahari,” meaning hill people (Schendel 1995; Chowdhury 2002). Instead of hill people (singular), I use “hill peoples” (plural) to refer to the Jumma/ Pahari groups, recognizing ethnic and cultural diversities and differences among the hill peoples themselves. In so doing, I neither intend nor wish to imply political differences among the hill peoples along ethnic lines. Moreover, the ethnic nomenclature, particularly the term ‘indigenous peoples’, as used in the dissertation reflects the terms used by the local people and is intended to protect the hill peoples’ rights over land and other resources in CHT. It was beyond the scope of the dissertation to enter into a debate that troubles the category of indigenous identity, especially in South Asia (see Karlsson and Subba 2006; Barnes 1995; Shah 2007).

<sup>3</sup> The term Bangladesh Security Forces refers to all the military, paramilitary and voluntary forces in CHT engaging in counterinsurgency war and includes the army, Bangladesh Border Guards (previously Bangladesh Rifles), Air Force, the Police and the *Ansar* (Ibrahim 1991).

<sup>4</sup> I use the term ‘insurgency’ in its conventional and in a more general sense (as a specific form of violence against state authority) to refer to hill peoples’ resistance movement for political autonomy, in particular the armed resistance, in order to highlight the nature and strategies of the movement. Even though insurgency and counter-insurgency are statist categories embedded in the logic of sovereignty and control, my usage of counter-insurgency is not intended to endorse or promote statist understanding of insurgency, but incorporates a critical understanding of it, and my usage of insurgency is closer in meaning to political autonomy. Significantly, I see insurgency as site specific phenomena rooted in local history, resources and social relations but also connected to material and ecological changes as well as power relations. Recently there has been a great deal of interest in the ways that environmental resources shape and are shaped by violence (Peluso and Watts 2001; Peluso and Vandergeest 2011) though scholars of political ecology have documented the role of violence in resource struggles for decades (Skaria 1999; Sivaramakrishnan 1999).

years of low intensity war (Wallensteen and Sollenberg 1998), the government of Bangladesh signed the CHT Treaty (hereafter the Peace Treaty) with the insurgency movement leaders thereby ending the war in CHT. While the Peace Treaty opened the region for local government and civilian rule after decades of isolation and counter-insurgency, major provisions of the Peace Treaty remain to be fulfilled, including the withdrawal of military camps, recognition of customary land rights of the hill peoples, and the cancellation of land grants and leases given to businesses, Bengali settlers and government agencies (Baer 2011; see also Mohsin 2003). Thus, many have argued that the ethnic conflict has remained unresolved, leaving behind a violent and brutal legacy (CHT Commission 2009).<sup>5</sup>

My concerns over the impacts of ethnic conflict and war on the hill peoples led me to develop a proposal to study two projects: the forest plantation and resettlement scheme of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Project (CHTDP) that was introduced during the height of the insurgency (1979-1993), and a subsequent project on social forestry that was launched after the Peace Treaty of 1997 and ran until 2006. Both projects were funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). My interest in these projects was rather theory driven, stimulated by post-structuralist anthropology and political ecology, particularly works drawing on Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality (e.g., Sivaramakrishnan 1999; Vandergeest and Peluso 2001; Moore 2005; Li 2007; Agrawal 2005). My interest was mainly related to the study of soil and land classification of CHT by Forestal (see Chapter IV). I had come across a reference to

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<sup>5</sup> In 1998, immediately after the Peace Treaty, the JSS was split into fraction; the anti-Peace Treaty faction created a new regional party, the United People's Democratic Front (UPDF). Since then, the JSS and UPDF have engaged in a bitter armed conflict that has killed hundreds of hill people. Most recently, the JSS has further split over conflicts among the leadership regarding implementation of the Peace Treaty; this has resulted in the creation (in 2008) of another regional political party, the JSS (M.N. Larma), in 2008, and has further complicated the internal armed conflicts. In an interview with me, the movement's leader and the president of the JSS (Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma) blamed the army for the divisions of the JSS and internal armed conflict. He also insisted that that if the Peace Treaty is not fully implemented, it is very likely that the JSS will resume the armed resistance.

Forestal's study at the time of my MA research, but it was not relevant to me then (see Chowdhury 2002). However, as I grappled with the framework of governmentality and territory, I came to acknowledge a way of reading Forestal's study of CHT as an environmental discourse that would make an interesting comparison with social forestry discourse. I was very excited about my research proposal, as I thought I was going to do a "big thing" showing how discourses of sciences (biology, forestry, geology, soil science, etc.) shaped environmental rationalities and subjectivities in CHT and became a hegemonic discourse of development. My choice of field site in CHT was informed by my interest in making this theoretical contribution. As such, I proposed to explore the practices, rationalities and effects of environment and development programs when implemented in a particular time and place, including their entanglement with landscapes, livelihoods, and ethnic identities. However, I encountered numerous obstacles to my fieldwork that I describe below, and had to modify my research plans in CHT.

Based on the modified research plan, this dissertation offers an anthropological and genealogical account of the making of forests and participatory forestry of CHT, in particular the way forests came to exist during British rule in South Asia, and the ways the forests in CHT have hitherto changed through colonialism, industrialism, counterinsurgency, development and war. The analytical focus is on the discourses and practices of *making* and *remaking* of what I, borrowing from Vandergeest and Peluso (2001) identify as "political forests" in CHT, and resistance to these discourses and practices forest making. I use the terms "making" or "remaking of forest" to refer to the processes in which place or space, and resources (including but not limited to land, water, trees, bamboo or bush), come to be identified as forests and thus become a forest. I provide detailed accounts of how forests became a trope of imagination about the hill peoples' economy, identities and society, and also provided the technologies of the

state's power and domination over the hill peoples. I demonstrate that CHT was not a "territorial space" when the British (East India Company) seized it in 1757, but rather a frontier occupied by different groups of people who were consistently mobile because of conflict and war among the traditional states of Hill Tripura, Arakan and Bengal (compare Scott 2009).<sup>6</sup> CHT remained a frontier in British India until 1860, constructed as such by the absence of plain land agriculture and the perpetuity of violence; it was neither ruled nor governed by the British, nor did it have a local indigenous sovereign. Political power was instead shared among many local indigenous elites and contested both by the state and the peoples governed (see Chapter II).

Put differently, I would argue that forests in CHT did not exist before their construction in the late 1860s. In 1860, the region was annexed to the British Empire in India under an exceptional administration. By the end of that decade, almost the entire CHT had been made into forests and state property as part of a strategy of state-making in CHT following the Forest Act of 1865. Subsequently, by the end of the century, a large area of CHT, approximately one fourth of the region, had been made into Government Reserved Forests. The remaining area was designated as Unclassed State Forests (USF), in which the civil society of the hill peoples was built, recognizing hill peoples' customary rights to settlement and agricultural practices including *jhum*<sup>7</sup> cultivation, i.e., slash-and-burn agriculture. Beyond law, what made the forests in CHT intelligible were discourses of frontiers and sovereignty that enabled the government to control the hill peoples, in particular their usage of land and forest for agriculture and domestic needs. Since then, forests and forest relations formed by local ecology and by different regimes of political power and ideology have remained fundamental to governmentality in CHT; forest

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<sup>6</sup> Here I use the term "territorial space" to mean a spatial scale or a container for culture which is demarcated either in theory or practice for the control of population and resources within it, such as a locale, city, or state, across which social processes move (see Agnew 1993).

<sup>7</sup> As this Bengali term is used frequently in this dissertation, it will not be italicized in subsequent uses.

relations in CHT have been altered by colonial paternalistic policies of political isolation, and by post-colonial industrial development and counter-insurgency war. In turn, all of this has shaped the hill peoples' agrarian and ethnic relations, and their relations with the State and other political powers. In particular, industrial development in CHT in the early 1960s significantly changed forest relations. I would argue that industrial development represented the ecological watershed moment for CHT; it not only reinforced the processes of marginalization, dispossession and land alienation of the hill peoples, but also led to the insurgency, and thus counterinsurgency, resettlement and "development".<sup>8</sup>

In grounding my argument, I will explore the genealogy of development in CHT, especially the practice of horticulture-based resettlement of the hill peoples; I will also examine the effects of resettlement and development programs on hill peoples' lives and livelihoods. I will demonstrate that "development" programs in CHT are not only coercive but also ethnocentric, lacking concern for the food security and cultural knowledge of the hill peoples. The effects of development have led to further dispossession, marginalization and land alienation of the hill peoples.

By examining forests and forest relations, I also tackle environmental and agrarian changes in the region since British rule. I challenge the dominant narratives of environmental

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<sup>8</sup> In its modern use (i.e. since the 19<sup>th</sup> century), the term 'development' relates to economic changes in societies; however, after World War II, development became synonymous with planned social changes and modernization of the economy in so-called "Third World" countries and was related to industrial and infra-structural development associated with "nations" and "nation-building" (see Myrdal 1968; but compare Escobar 1995; Esteva 1992). Since the 1960s, development became a highly contested and debated term. It has several renditions: one that considers it primarily as a statist project of improvement, and another that encompasses a more nuanced and complex relationality between the state and civil society. Inspired by the post-structuralist turn in social sciences and humanities, contemporary scholarship (particularly anthropology) takes development as assemblages of discourses and institutions (Escobar 1995), will to improvement and governmentalities (Li 2007), anti-politics cultural projects of rule (Ferguson 1994), or forms of state-making and production of the legitimacy of rule (Sivaramakrishnan 2000). Building on contemporary anthropological discourse on development, I use the term 'development' as an assemblage of discourses and institutions and a form of government to refer to both colonial and post-colonial plans, programs and projects of sedentarization, agrarian changes and resettlement of the hill peoples that are directed to the improvement of life and things.

change that frame hill peoples' agricultural practice (namely, jhum cultivation) as the primary cause of "deforestation" and "soil erosion". I argue that environmental and agrarian changes in CHT are neither unidirectional nor even; they are directly related to state policies of resource extraction as well as discourses of industrialization and counterinsurgency development. I will show that the changes in the northern part of CHT (inhabited by the Chakma, the largest group of the hill peoples) are more consequential than changes in the southern part of CHT, and in turn I will explain the ethnic and spatial dynamics of these environmental changes and insurgency and counter-insurgency development.

At the same time, I deal with practices of scientific forestry and its strategies of territorialized resource control in CHT. I will illustrate variations in the application of territorial strategies in the management of the Reserved Forests and I suggest that these variations are mainly caused by the relative inaccessibility of the Reserves, but also influenced by local ecological conditions. Importantly, scientific forestry and its strategies have been fractured by landscape, ecology, and at times insurgency, resulting in neither full control over the Reserved Forests nor control over the representation of the Reserves.

Finally, I also examine the 'forest plantation program' and the 'forest villager system' that emerged as part of colonial scientific forestry. I demonstrate that the arrangement of the 'forest villager system' and related *taungya*<sup>9</sup> cultivation (i.e., the plantation of forest along with shifting – slash and burn – cultivation) represent the earliest form of the participatory forestry regime, which, until recently, has been practiced in CHT. In turn, I challenge the newness of participatory social or community forestry that is currently being mobilized by the Forest Department and indigenous movements. I will demonstrate that the social forestry program in

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<sup>9</sup> As this South Asian and Southeast Asian term is used frequently in this dissertation, it will not be italicized in subsequent uses.



CHT hinges upon conflicts over control of the Reserved Forests between the Forest Department and the army, and is marked by state intervention and domination of the Forest Department. The social forestry program has further helped to mobilize an indigenous movement in CHT which is now articulated with a form of community forestry called “village common forests” (VCF), in an effort to gain recognition of hill peoples’ indigenous identities and customary rights over forest resources (see Chapters V and VI).

This dissertation draws on my multi-sited fieldwork research in Chittagong Hill Tracts and approaches that include my lived experiences with the hill peoples in their communities, participant observation, interviews, and archival document research. Although my experiences with the hill peoples were limited and fragmented by circumstances in CHT, and my archival research could be more comprehensive,<sup>10</sup> my purpose here is to contribute to forest history, its trajectories and limits in relation to “ethnically” different and ‘small group’ populations living within nation-states so as to understand how nature/environment is constituted as a terrain of governmental power, subject formation, and state-making. While this dissertation engages with broader theoretical issues related to political ecology, indigeneity, and development, it does not engage in substantial theoretical critique or theory-building. Nor does it engage in comparisons, such as comparing hill and plains peoples, or Bangladesh and South Asia. Even though I recognized the connections and commonalities between South Asia and Southeast Asia, I was unfortunately not able to trace these links . This is a choice that I made: my dissertation is rather descriptive by intention.<sup>11</sup> I chose a descriptive ethnographic focus for my dissertation because I

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<sup>10</sup> This is partly due to a lack of organized archives in Bangladesh.

<sup>11</sup>The main reason that I made this decision is because I realised that I was in a unique position to fill a major gap in the historical and ethnographic understanding of CHT. Prior to my work, the most contemporary ethnography of CHT was by Wolfgang Mey, published in 1980, based on fieldwork conducted in 1968-1969. Mey is the first and last European ethnographer who wrote a comprehensive account of CHT. Since then, some ethnographies have been written by Bengalis but these have been traditional community studies that do not consider the larger political

saw the need for a better, more accurate and consistent foundation for CHT studies. CHT has figured prominently as a case study in many critiques of development and social justice, but scholars since the 1970s have been relying mostly on secondary sources and activist reports. Despite the prominence of CHT in Western academia, there has been no single review of the literature on CHT, with no consistent dialogue, checks and balances among scholars. For example, John Bodley uses CHT as a case study in his book *Victims of Progress*, a very significant work on the impact of modernity and development on indigenous peoples (Bodley 1975, 1999). However, Bodley's account is too vague or unclear; he mentions a resource crisis among hill peoples that he suggests was caused by a combination of commercialization, population growth among Bengalis, and industrial development. Bodley's account is typical of many scholars who write critically about the effects of modernization and development on indigenous peoples in CHT (e.g. Mey, A. 1981; Mey, W. 1981; 2006; Penz 1992). I agree with the intention of these scholars, but my dissertation offers a more comprehensive explanation and a fuller picture that is “closer to the people”.

As such, this dissertation is a contribution to the understanding and knowledge of the CHT region and of the hill peoples and Bangladesh more broadly; second, to the discipline of anthropology; and third, to area studies, in particular to South Asian historical political ecology and Zomia Studies. My hope is that this dissertation will help deepen our understanding of the relation between violence, forests and development in CHT, as there is a clear absence of

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economy nor the region as a whole. This gap in knowledge is significant, and I decided that it was a higher priority to fill this gap with careful ethnographic detail than to write a contribution to theoretical debates in areas such as subaltern studies, colonial governmentality, or debates on South Asian colonialism and conservation.

ethnographic research on ethnic conflict in CHT in general, and even less on issues of its forests and lands.<sup>12</sup>

Regarding the CHT region and hill peoples, this dissertation provides much needed clarity to the cultural geography of CHT, particularly the ethnic groups as well as civil, land and forest administration. For instance, to date there has been a great deal of confusion and uncertainty among scholars on the number of ethnic groups in CHT. This dissertation, particularly my map of ethnic groups and appendix of how hill peoples' groups call each other, clarifies the number of groups and their general locations; it also offers an ethnography of changes in the economy, communities, and livelihood strategies of the hill peoples, including evidence of social mobility among specific ethnic groups. Furthermore, no academic scholars of CHT to date have described exactly how the region is administered. Of those who have published on CHT, only the present Chakma Chief addresses the issue of administration, but even the Chief's account is short on details of local administration (e.g. Roy, D. 2002a). This dissertation provides ethnographic details of local administration, including the roles of Mouza headmen and Karbari, with particular attention to little known forest villages. Significantly, many scholars note that CHT is presently a "military zone" but they do not go beyond this level

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<sup>12</sup>After Claude Levi Strauss' visit to CHT in 1950, there was a great enthusiasm for the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) among French and German scholars and students of anthropology resulting in some original ethnographic monographs, mainly in German and French (e.g., Bernot, L. 1967; Mey, W. 1980; Mey, A. 1979; and Spielmann, 1968); only a few of these accounts are available in English as seminar papers, commentaries, books and journal articles (see Barua 1969; Branus and Loffler 1989; Kantikar 1968; Mey, W. 1981; Mey, A. 1981). Unfortunately, this enthusiasm was cut short by the closure of CHT to foreigners in the early 1960s on the pretext of the security of the state. Since then and up to the 1990s, CHT remained off limits to the outside world because of the Bangladesh liberation war and subsequent counter-insurgency war that began in the mid 1970s. Meanwhile, CHT emerged as a classic case of development displacement (Bodley 1975). In the early 1980s, the region and its indigenous communities also sprung to the attention of international news and human rights organizations as well as Bangladeshi and international scholars across many disciplines because of human rights violations, displacements and counter-insurgency led development (Schendel et al. 2001). Recently, CHT has become the object of studies and inquiries by a number of Bangladeshi academics and students including myself (e.g., Chowdhury 2002; Dewan 1990; Mohsin 1997; Nasir Uddin 2008; Rasul 2003; and Shafie 2001); however, none of these studies consider forest issues and politics.

of generality. This dissertation goes into specifics of how military control has actually been practiced and extended, to the point that – as I argue – the military is the de facto administration of CHT. Finally, this dissertation has clarified the ecological and ethnic basis of the insurgency movement, its programs, projects and its spatial scope in the region and provides a foundation for future research.

With respect to anthropology, this dissertation demonstrates my commitment to anthropology's fieldwork method. As I will describe shortly, my fieldwork experience had a huge effect on my understanding of the hill peoples and the issues of CHT. The story of hill peoples' internal displacement and their experiences with state-led development that I encountered in Alikadam Upazila, particularly in Matamuhuri Reserve, was not what I had planned to study, but when I returned to Canada and began writing the dissertation, I made these experiences central to my arguments. In other words, this dissertation demonstrates both the centrality of fieldwork research in shaping my arguments as well as my commitment to social justice. This connection between fieldwork and social justice is a strong characteristic of anthropology; my dissertation is an affirmation of these anthropological priorities.

With respect to area studies, particularly South Asian historical political ecology, this dissertation provides a case of regional forest history from Bangladesh. Interestingly, South Asian historical political ecology, a subfield of investigation into nature, culture, history and politics, has been largely dominated by scholarship on regional histories of forests in India, with a few accounts of Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka (e.g. Grove et al.1998; Arnold and Guha 1995). Regrettably, Bangladesh is not merely underrepresented in South Asian historical political ecology, it is almost absent, except for occasional reference to colonial Bengal of which Bangladesh was once a part. My aim is to contribute partly to this missing story, complementing

K. Sivaramakrishan's pioneering work *Modern Forest* (1999). *Modern Forest* examines the making of state and forest in Bengal during British rule, dealing mainly with the Bengal districts of Burdawan and Midnapore which now form parts of West Bengal and Jharkhand of India. Understandably, the parts of colonial Bengal which now form Bangladesh are not considered comprehensively, though there are references to Chittagong, Chittagong Hill Tracts, and Sundarbans.

The contribution of this dissertation to Zomia Studies is largely a comprehensive account of CHT, illustrating historical and contemporary changes in state and hill peoples' economy, ecology and society; it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to make comparison between CHT and other upland regions of Southeast Asia or South Asia. It is important here to mention that Zomia Studies is a recent initiative of Willem Van Schendel and James Scott, and represents an emerging ecological area study of upland and so called "Hill Peoples" of Southeast Asia and South Asia that includes the Chittagong Hill Tracts (Schendel 2002; Scott 2009). Indeed, Schendel's work on Bangladesh in general and the region of CHT in particular has been key to the conceptualization of Zomia Studies and the problem of existing approaches to area studies that focus too much on political or state boundaries (see IISH n.d.). Some scholars arguments go so far as to claim that CHT should be regarded as more of a part of Southeast Asia rather than South Asia (e.g. Mey, W. 1980; Schendel 1995, 2009; Schendel et al. 2000). These arguments tend to be based on ethnic or racial discourses rather than on real political economy. I remain somewhat skeptical of these political arguments, because of my past research on the JSS insurgency movement. I do not wish to engage in the political argument about whether CHT "belongs" in South Asia or in Southeast Asia. Instead, my research has led me to understand and support Schendel's and Scott's effort, through Zomia Studies, to define a common region that

spans parts of both South Asia and Southeast Asia and is marked by common ecological factors as well as people's marginal relations to their respective states. In my case, I certainly found that my understanding of CHT was greatly helped by my reading of the relevant literature on ecology and marginalization in Southeast Asia. The fact that Southeast Asian perspectives were important to my dissertation as the South Asian ones, supports the contention of Zomia Studies that there are important commonalities across the two regions. However, this is an intellectual observation, not a political one; it does not necessarily lead to any particular conclusion about whether or not CHT should be part of Bangladesh. The actual identity of CHT is a matter for the people to decide, and I do not take one side or the other in this political debate.

As mentioned before, several unexpected events hindered my research plans in CHT, and it is important to mention some of these challenges in order to clarify the revision of my research project and the difficulties of fieldwork in CHT. In October 2006 when I arrived in Bangladesh, violent political unrest had led to a military-backed civilian interim government and an indefinite emergency rule throughout the country. The emergency rule soon became normalized, and despite the possibility of successful negotiation with the government authorities to carry out fieldwork, a further uncertainty emerged. My repeated inquiries about the implementation of the projects and sites did not produce viable responses. On the one hand, the hill peoples' traditional elites and political leaders who were opposed to the social forestry project insisted that the government had cancelled the project and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the main funding agency, had withdrawn its funding.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, forestry officials at the Head Office of the Forest Department in Dhaka acknowledged the hill peoples' opposition to the social

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<sup>13</sup> It is worth noting that my contact with indigenous elites and political leadership of the hill peoples not only failed to provide any information on the social forestry project; they also felt "offended" by my persistent inquiry about the status of its implementation, which, they believed, simply did not exist.

forestry project but rejected the claims that the project had been cancelled by the government and insisted that the project was underway. Interestingly, the forestry officials refused to provide specific locations where the social forestry project had been implemented or any contacts for further inquiry. Both the forest officials and hill peoples' leaders showed little interest in my inquiry about sites of the afforestation and resettlement scheme of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Project of 1979. They were unequivocal in their opinion that the scheme had been implemented primarily by the army and there was little probability that resettled village(s) would still exist because of the continued violence and displacement of the hill peoples during the counter-insurgency war.

Following these developments, between March and April, 2007 I contacted friends and colleagues in the Department of Forestry at Shah Jalal University and at the Head Office of the Forest Department in Dhaka for assistance. I then established myself in a network of forest officers in CHT and at the Head Office of the Forest Department in Dhaka, where I determined that the social forestry project had two schemes – one in Lama Forest Division and another in Bandarban Forest Division. Over the course of the project, the scheme under Lama Forest Division had been forced to change its project site to the Matamuhuri Reserved Forest and had been completed, while the other scheme under Bandarban Forest division had been abandoned.

In November 2007, three months after arriving at the Matamuhuri Forest Range office in Alikadam Upazila (sub district) of CHT, I settled in 'Rizaroa,'<sup>14</sup> a forest village in the Matamuhuri Reserved Forests, next to 'Nyapara', a Bengali village with 10,000 people, on the outskirts of the northern boundary of the Reserve. There I found the Reserve to be an "open

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<sup>14</sup> For anonymity throughout this dissertation I use pseudonyms for hill peoples' villages in which I lived or did fieldwork and at times for Bengali villages when they might serve as a landmark to reveal the identity of the hill peoples' villages. I alert the readers to a pseudonym by putting it within single quotation marks the first time I use it. In subsequent uses, I do not apply quotation marks. Pseudonyms are also used for the people whom I interviewed, excluding state authorities and political or traditional leaders.

forest”, with a large number of inhabitants (approximately 15,000) in over a hundred villages up to where the headwater of the Matamuhuri River separates the Reserve from Myanmar. Among the inhabitants of the Reserve, the Murucha (Mro) people are believed to make up eighty percent; others include the Marma, the Tripura, the Tanchangya, the Chakma, and the Bengali. Interestingly, the Forest Department recognizes only the old forest villagers and their inheritors belonging to the Marma, the Murucha, and the Tripura who live in Babupara, Meringchar and three other forest villages in between. The Forest Department has only nominal control over the movement of forest produce and forest villagers; it is largely the army that controls the entire Reserve and all the villages with four permanent army camps inside the Reserve. Significantly, beyond a few patches of newly planted forest, there were hardly any trees in most of the Reserve. As I spent more time in the village, I discovered that stories of illegal logging of the Reserve were the talk of the village and local villagers spoke incessantly about it.

Once I was settled in the Reserve, I met a group of Bengali seasonal sharecroppers and found tracts of plough land mainly around Rizaroa. A very few forest villagers of the Reserve, mostly Marma, controlled possession of these valley plough lands and have over the years become relatively wealthy by producing tobacco and vegetable cash crops, grown with assistance of Bengali sharecroppers and, at times, wage labourers. However, the majority of Marma forest villagers are marginal jhum cultivators and seasonal daily wage labours since they lack access to lands inside and beyond the Reserve. The Murucha forest villagers, by contrast, have mainly remained jhum cultivators. Many in the vicinity of the new social forestry plantation have abandoned their villages to move deeper inside the Reserve in search of a livelihood by jhum cultivation; their movement has been influenced by a further complex set of reasons, which I will discuss in Chapter V.



Despite troubles with local indigenous research assistants and language barriers (see the fieldwork section below), my fieldwork with forest villagers' communities went well, and for the first time, I experienced first-hand the hill peoples' communities, their participation in the forest development project, and issues surrounding their livelihood. As my fieldwork proceeded, I came to know one of the sites for the forest resettlement program that took place during the insurgency and war within Alikadam Upazila, which importantly led me to the villagers of 'Golden River', a forest village under the Tain Range of Lama Forest Division. My fieldwork with the Golden River village community was an eye-opening experience that led me to unearth the history of forest operations and programs in CHT during the counter-insurgency war, including the Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Project of 1979. An initial lead into my research on forest programs during the counter-insurgency war was the 2007 Annual Report of Lama Forest Division and an up-to-date brochure of the Division. I received both documents from the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) of Lama Forest Division as a kind gesture of his office immediately before he retired from his job with the Forest Department in March 2008. In part, the courtesy was an attempt by the DFO to make amends for his initial non-cooperation with my fieldwork research (which I discuss in the fieldwork section of this chapter below). Examining the documents led me to discover that there are nine forest divisions in the three administrative districts of CHT, six of which – including the Lama Forest Division – were created during the counter-insurgency war as part of the forest plantation and resettlement program (see Appendix A: Map 5).<sup>15</sup> By the end of fieldwork in July 2008, I had also visited seven of the eight other forest divisions in CHT and collected current brochures of these forest divisions, and very recently the remaining one. In reading the brochures, I gathered that the Forest Department had

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<sup>15</sup> To the best of my knowledge, academics and human right activists concerned with the issues of CHT hardly knew of the existence of these nine forest divisions and their forest programs.

implemented several forest plantation and resettlement projects concurrently during the counter-insurgency war as either a sequel to the afforestation and resettlement scheme of 1979 or independent of it. Altogether, these projects and schemes alienated about 217,995 acres of common land in the Unclassed State Forests (USF); these common lands are also referred to as *Mouzas* (i.e., a collection of villages as a revenue unit). The brochures confirmed what I had learned about Lama Forest Division: that is, the hill peoples had abandoned many wartime resettlement villages. I thus surmised that a discourse of forest resettlement projects was a key technology that got articulated with the counter-insurgency war and ‘development’ and, in turn, produced unsettlement and land alienation of the hill peoples.

In considering the ways in which the hill peoples of CHT have been systematically marginalized and alienated from their land over time, I wish to argue in this dissertation that their marginalization and exploitation can be linked to the forest policies and practices that were adopted first by British rule in colonial India, and then successively by Pakistan and Bangladesh. Importantly, despite differences in terms of ideology, ethnicity, class and technologies of rule, there appear to be some obvious similarities between the colonial British and present Bangladesh experiences in CHT. Both regimes’ initial challenges in CHT began with concerns for the security of the territory as well as the control over the resources in CHT with little concern for the economy and welfare of the hill peoples; they both responded with military and administrative reorganizations that incorporated elites; and I will argue in Chapters II and IV that both governments pursued policies of making and expanding their territorial control over forests. I must concede that in arriving at this dissertation’s arguments, I was deeply saddened by the similarity between colonial British and Bangladeshi regimes in relation to the hill peoples (but

compare, Penz 1993), perhaps because I was not ready to accept the ‘colonial’ nature of Bangladesh, the country I was born into and love.

## **1.2 CHT: Cultural Geographies, Economy and Polity**

In this section, I present a general overview of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) with its specific cultural geographies (including land and forest),<sup>16</sup> economy, and political and civil administration as it exists today. This overview is important not only because CHT is ethnically diverse and because there have been ethnic conflicts in the region, but also because the civil, forest and land administration of CHT are highly complex and often confusing. As such, this section provides an historical account of changes in land and forest management, polity, and civil administration in CHT.

CHT contains an area of 5093 square miles (13,295 square kilometers) or about 10 percent of the land of Bangladesh. At present, almost one third is “Reserved Forests”, and the remainder is “open forest”, known as Unclassed State Forest (hereafter USF).<sup>17</sup> In contrast to the low lying alluvial plains in the remainder of Bangladesh, the land in CHT primarily comprises chains of hill ranges interspersed by valleys and river drainage systems, which are locally known as the Feni, Karnaphuli, Sangu and Matamuhuri.<sup>18</sup> Because of the topography of the region (see Photo 1.1), there is a lack of suitable land for intensive agriculture: only 4 percent of the USF

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<sup>16</sup> Here and throughout this dissertation I use the term cultural geographies loosely to refer to cultural specificities of a place, including ethnicities, ecology, and social classes and organizations.

<sup>17</sup> This estimation is based on fieldwork data I collected during 2007-8. At present, the land area of the Reserved Forests is 1,598 square miles which includes 1,253 square miles of old Reserved Forests created during British rule and 345 square miles created recently.

<sup>18</sup> As an offshoot of Himalayan hill ranges, CHT hills range northeast to southwest and are an average height of 2000 feet (600 metres), with the highest peak approximately 4034 feet (1300 metres) in the southern region. Among the rivers, the Feni and the Karnaphuli run transversely across the hill ranges in the north where the valleys are mainly formed by tributaries of the Karnaphuli (Chengri, Maini, and Kassalong). In the south, the Sangu and Matamuhuri rivers are the main drainages that run parallel until they enter the plains and form the valleys (Ishaq 1971; Lewin 1869).

land (located around the valleys) is cultivable plain land, which are locally referred to as “plough land” (see Forestal 1966e).

Numerous ethnic groups inhabit the region, of which the hill peoples include eleven ethnic groups<sup>19</sup> and are considered to be the “original” inhabitants of CHT (Lewin 1969; Hutchinson 1909; Schendel 1992; but compare Scott 2009). Among the hill peoples, the Chakma are the largest. The others are: Marma, Tripura, Tanchangya, Bawm, Panku, Lushai, Khumi, Khyang, Sak and Murucha (Mro) (see Appendix A: Map 4). With the exception of the Tripura, all the hill people groups are undoubtedly of Burmese-Arakanese origin and are mainly Buddhist or Christian. With regards to religious faith, the Tripura in the north of CHT follow Hinduism and the Tripura in the south, known as Usui, follow Christianity. These characteristics, along with their traditional method of shifting or jhum cultivation, distinguish them clearly from Bengali “plainsmen”, who are predominantly Muslims.

Besides the hill peoples, there are several ethnic groups who have lived in CHT since the British rule, namely the Santal, Rakhain, Ghurkha, Burua, Bengali and Ahomia. Of these groups, the Santal, Gurkha, and Ahomia were brought into CHT by the British during the mid nineteenth century for government work;<sup>20</sup> the Ghurkha worked as the frontier police, and the Santal and Ahomia were employed as coolies of the British government. The Rakhain found in CHT were the Arakanese refugees of the First Anglo-Burmese War of 1824 who have remained in CHT;

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<sup>19</sup> There is considerable disagreement about the number of the hill peoples’ groups and their boundaries, combined with confusion over accurate designations, as these groups have adopted new names over time. These issues have been further compounded because of the use of multiple languages such as Bengali, Chakma and Burmese for the designation of the groups. My account of the communities of the hill peoples is based on my study of historical texts as well as my interviews of key resource persons and rural villagers. This conforms to the JSS’s account, which is supported by the Chakma’s chief, Raja Devasish Roy. See Appendix B for alternative names used by Bengalis and the groups themselves.

<sup>20</sup> Until recently, these groups have been overlooked by both the government and the political movements of the hill peoples, and they are generally put together as “others” in government representation of the communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

however, the overwhelming majority of the Rakhain refugees left CHT to inhabit the Cox's Bazar and Potuakhali districts. The Barua mainly inhabit Cox's Bazar district, a neighboring district of CHT and are also found in CHT; they identify themselves and are identified by others as Bengali. Bengalis had never inhabited the region before the British occupation of CHT; they mainly began to inhabit the region during the Pakistan regime as they took up administrative positions left by the British and filled the ranks of industrial labourers and commercial posts created by industrial development in the 1950s. After Bangladesh's independence, Bengalis again began to settle in CHT as part of state-sponsored settlement projects. At present, the hill peoples constitute a majority, albeit diminishing, population in the region, totalling 845,541 or only 0.5 percent of the nation's total population of 149 million in 2011; whereas the Bengali population in CHT has increased to the extent they now comprise almost half of the total population of CHT region (see Appendix C).

Most of the hill peoples still depend primarily on jhum cultivation, or at times wet rice cultivation, in conjunction with hunting, fishing, trapping, herding, and gathering. This is definitely the case with the Bawm, Chak, Pankhu, Khumi, and Murucha. However, with a growing urban population, a significant number of the hill peoples (particularly from the Chakma, Marma and Tanchangya and Tripura communities) are involved in non-traditional occupations (Roy, D. 2000; Tripura and Harun 2003).<sup>21</sup>

A number of overlapping national, local, regional and traditional institutions of governments in CHT currently exist, but the administration is a complete anomaly, partly because in theory, if not in practice, nearly the entire CHT is still considered forest lands and

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<sup>21</sup> Non-traditional occupations include cash crop agriculture, market oriented fruit and tree plantations, trading, commercial fishing, and jobs in both private and government offices.

therefore state property (or *Khas land*).<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the jurisdictions, functions and authorities of various government institutions are confusing, conflicting and vague. CHT is currently divided into three administrative districts: Bandarban in the south, Khagrachhari in the north, and Rangamati in the centre (see Appendix A: Map 2). As elsewhere in Bangladesh, CHT districts fall under Deputy Commissioners' (DCs) oversight for civil, criminal and police administration. CHT is also conventionally divided into 25 *Upazilas*<sup>23</sup> (sub-districts), which are further divided into 110 union councils for local government. In addition, CHT has a unique and exceptional traditional administration and revenue system called "circles" in the USF land that have existed since the 1880s, excluding the regions of the four compact Reserved Forests under the authority of the Forest Department since 1871. Coinciding slightly with the territories of CHT districts of Bandarban, Khagrachhari and Rangamati, these administrative and revenue circles are known by the ethnicity of the traditional chiefs of Bohmong, Mong, and Chakma respectively (see Appendix A: Map 3). A circle chief or '*Raja*' heads each circle, which is further divided into *Mouzas*<sup>24</sup> (government revenue units) under headmen or Mouza headmen. Mouzas are conventionally comprised of several villages with a *Karbari*<sup>25</sup> or village headman for each.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Khas land* refers to agricultural land owned by the government and managed directly by the land revenue officer of the government (see Barkat et al. 2001).

<sup>23</sup> As this Bengali term is used frequently in the dissertation, it will not be italicized in subsequent uses. Furthermore, when the term is plural, I will add an 's' to assist the reader's comprehension according to English grammar, although this is not how the plural is actually formed in the Bengali language.

<sup>24</sup> As this Bengali term *Mouza* is used frequently in the dissertation, it will not be italicized in subsequent uses. Furthermore, when the term is plural, I will add an 's' to assist the reader's comprehension according to English grammar, although this is not how the plural is actually formed in the Bengali language.

<sup>25</sup> As this Bengali term is used frequently in the dissertation, it will not be italicized in subsequent uses. Furthermore, when the term is plural, I will add an 's' to assist the reader's comprehension according to English grammar, although this is not how the plural is actually formed in the Bengali language.

<sup>26</sup> All positions of chiefs, headmen, and village headmen are in principle hereditary but chiefs of the circle are currently government appointed; the chiefs appoint the headmen in consultation with Deputy Commissioners (DCs), and the chiefs also appoint village headmen in consultation with the headman and village residents. The position of *Karbari* appeared to be a conventional practice of the chiefs and headmen and is certainly not part of the Regulation of 1900.

Chiefs and headmen exercise specific duties and powers in collection of taxes on lands and households of jhum cultivators. They are further empowered to settle family and civil disputes including land titles and petty crimes other than crimes against the state. The British invented this traditional administration and revenue system following the annexation of the region in 1860 but it was only formalized by the regulation of 1900 (Lewin 1869; Hutchinson 1909; Bertocci 1989).

In addition to the chief's circle, CHT has an overlapping local government system for each district known as Local Government Council, later renamed Hill District Council (HDC),<sup>27</sup> which were established with a two-thirds majority of hill peoples as part of CHT Accord of 1988 and which provide limited authority over small industries, health, primary education, agriculture and some other matters.<sup>28</sup> The Peace Treaty of 1997 reorganized HDCs and added two new institutions to supplement and coordinate the district councils at national and regional levels respectively: the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs (MOCHTA) and CHT Regional Councils. However, the political and administrative roles of these bodies have not yet been fully clarified (CHT Commission 2000; JSS 2011). The Upazilas and union councils have remained under the control of the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives, whereas the Hill District Councils and Regional Council are under the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs. As of 2008, the government had transferred seventeen government

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<sup>27</sup> The Hill District Council consists of one Chairman, twenty Councillors from the hill peoples' communities, and ten Councillors from the Bengali community in the respective districts of CHT region (see MOCHTA n. d.).

<sup>28</sup> The government and a beleaguered faction of the JSS signed CHT Accord in 1988 leading to the establishment of three local government councils in the districts of CHT through the Local Government Council Acts 19, 20, and 21 of 1989. On the basis of the Peace Treaty of 1997 the Local Government Councils were renamed as Hill District Councils on September 2000, and by the amendment of the Local Government Council Acts 19, 20, and 21 of 1989, 68 functions of 33 government subjects (and/or departments) were agreed to be transferred to the Local Government Councils Hill Development Council (see CHT Commission n. d., for the full text of the Peace Treaty).

“subjects” to HDCs and most recently another five subjects, but the Regional Council is yet to be made effective (JSS 2011; Mohsin 2003).<sup>29</sup>

One of the fundamental contradictions of CHT body politic and administration was and still is the ownership and rights over forest and land in USF. The Regulation of 1900, which laid the basis of governing the USF and formalized the administration and revenue systems, gave the then Deputy Commissioner absolute power to control and distribute land and forests in USF. This expressly recognizes or implies an array of individual and common rights of the hill peoples over land and forest in USF. Private forests, commercial plots and plough lands, whether they be freehold (rights with perpetuity) or lease (rights for a specific period), are examples of individual rights and are regulated by the Deputy Commissioner. Common rights are not specific but generic entitlements of the hill peoples (through customs and practices of jhum cultivation) to use forest resources for domestic purposes, to graze cattle on village pastures, and to occupy non-urban homestead plots. Of homestead plots, the right to occupancy without formal settlement is specifically reserved for hill peoples. Chiefs, headmen, and village headmen primarily regulate these rights and are responsible for collection of land revenue and jhum taxes (Hunter 1973; GOBD n.d.).

In the first few decades after the departure of the British, the government’s policies of national integration, industrial development and displacement posed considerable limitation to jhum cultivation (Chapter III), but the common property regimes in land and forests in USF were generally left unaltered. However, immediately following the insurgency in 1979, the Bangladesh government amended Rule 34 of the Regulation of 1900 through a military

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<sup>29</sup> The departments/subjects include: Agriculture, Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industry Corporation, Bazaar Fund, Cooperative, Family Planning, Fisheries, Games, Health, Livestock, Primary Education, Public Health, Public Library, Shilpakola Academy (that is, Performing Arts Academy), Social Welfare, Tribal Cultural Institute, and others.



ordinance. This change permitted the Deputy Commissioner and the Divisional Commissioner to allow any Bangladesh citizens to have access and to settle land in CHT. It further provided a ceiling of a maximum 100 acres that the Divisional Commissioner and 25 acres that the Deputy Commissioner could offer to a business for settlement and commercial use, with a maximum of 10 acres for individual agricultural use (GOBD n. d.). This led to a fundamental change in ownership, rights and management in lands and forests in the USF over the following decades — a direct result of the government policies of Bengali settlement, commercial land leases, development resettlement and forest expansion as part of counter-insurgency programs (see Chapter IV). In turn, the common property regime in the land and forests nearly collapsed as individual rights and absolute state ownership in the USF became dominant and fundamental to the management of USF land and forests. Notwithstanding these changes in ownership, as in the past, commercial extraction of forests in USF land has remained subject to the permission of the Deputy Commissioner(s) and the supervision of the Forest Department, regulated by the Forest Transit Rule of 1973.<sup>30</sup> Lately, the army has also become party to the supervision of forest transits from CHT (see also, ADB 2001a: 34-35).

The other significant anomaly is the ‘forest village system’<sup>31</sup> within the Reserved Forests. The forest village system began in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as part of plantation programs instituted by the British after years of experimenting with temporary hired labor, mainly in the Kassalong and Renikhyong Reserved Forests, and later in the 1950s in the Matamuhuri Reserved Forests. Unlike revenue villages in Mouzas under traditional and civil

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<sup>30</sup> Recently, the Forest Transit rule of 1973 was repealed to be called the Forest Transit (Control) Rule of 2011 (FD n. d.).

<sup>31</sup> Interestingly, the English terms forest village as well as forest villagers are also used in the Bengali or hill peoples’ languages. To the best of my knowledge, there are no alternative local terms for forest village and forest villagers in the Bengali language, although I cannot say the same about hill peoples’ languages. Interestingly, during my fieldwork in CHT, I was so much used to these terms that it did not occur to me that they are English terms.

administration, ‘forest villages’ were controlled by the Forest Department, but customarily governed by Karbari (village headmen) and Forest headmen although forest villages form a part of the local government of union councils. It may be relevant here to mention that forest villages were not councils or *panchayats* that were formed in the early 1900s in Kumaon in British India (Agrawal, A 2005), but were communities of forest villagers conventionally formed by Karbaris. However, no formal rules exist to select Forest Karbaris or headmen; Forest Karbaris are typically selected by fellow forest villagers based on their status, power and abilities as well as willingness to serve the community, whereas Forest headmen are selected by the Forest Department. Based on the Forest Department’s records, documents, and my interviews with forest villagers of Matamuhuri Reserved Forest, I found that forest villagers including Karbari usually received 2 acres of cultivable land as a tax free grant (without ownership or control) to supplement their food production from taungya cultivation and their earnings from paid forest work. The Forest headman, however, received 3 acres of land as well as lump sum allowances. Significant aspects of the forest village system were: i) villagers must perform both paid work and non-paid work (e.g., “begar” or mandatory free labour) which “may be ordered by the Forest Officer to be done for the preservation, protection and improvement of the ... Reserved Forest”, and ii) forest villagers must not work for “other employers without permission of the Forest Officer.”<sup>32</sup> From my field work in villages of the Matamuhuri Reserve and my perusal of government texts, it seems clear that until recently the Forest Department maintained considerable control over the forest villagers and forests, control which has only recently fallen into “chaos” (see Chapter V).

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<sup>32</sup> Quoted from the forest villager agreement I collected from Matamuhuri Forest Range garbage about to be burned. See Appendix D for text of the form reconstructed of torn parts, copies found in the garbage.

Besides these structural and functional anomalies, a further aspect of CHT politics is the role of the army (see also the ensuing fieldwork section). Despite the Peace Treaty, the CHT has remained a highly militarised region in South Asia, and the intervention of the army in everyday affairs of government and administration in CHT is a fact of life.<sup>33</sup> In addition to regular policing and patrolling of waterways, cities, towns, markets and roads under the pretext of security, the army is involved in a wide range of administrative, economic, and political activities including but not limited to infrastructure development, distribution of relief goods, and overseeing commercial timber extraction. A report by the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) sheds light on some of these extra-legal army activities, including human rights violations, but the report is short on detail and local experiences of the hill peoples (IWGIA, 2012). Moreover, unelected political elites of the hill peoples and Bengalis have represented the HDCs and the Regional Council on an ad hoc basis. The Regulation of 1900, based on a rationality of common property regimes of land and the overdeveloped powers of the Deputy Commissioner(s), remains a fundamental instrument in the polity and administration of the CHT (Roy 1998). Therefore, I submit, problems with governance in CHT are not simply due to ethnic conflicts or violence, but also due to a lack of principles and policies for the governance of the hill peoples, and their rights to land and forests. In other words, the fundamental problem of governance in CHT has been the lack of state interest in concern for the welfare of the hill peoples' communities.

To conclude this section, and to repeat, first the colonial regime and more recently the government of Bangladesh have systematically intervened in the governance of CHT land and forests, manipulating the various land and forestry regulations in order to maintain control over

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<sup>33</sup> Despite the Peace Treaty, the army and its networks still oversee and partly control the entry, exit and movement of people and goods within CHT.

resources. These interventions have resulted in institutional expansion of the state and bureaucracy while incorporating traditional and political elites. Meanwhile, the hill peoples have been dominated by the state, and the land and forests in CHT have been controlled for the despotic interest in ‘things’, i.e., the territory, sovereignty and security of the state itself or for *raison d'état* as well as in the interest of Bengalis .

### **1.3 Political Ecology of Forests: Beyond the Myth of State and Community**

How is the space of forest constituted, and what are the social, historical, and political forces that make forests and the regime of participatory forestry? In this section, keeping in mind the rich debate over colonialism, scientific forestry, and conservation in the context of South Asia (especially the contributions of Ramachandra Guha, Richard Grove, Arun Agrawal, K. Sivaramakrishnan, Paul Robbins, and Vasant Sabherwal)<sup>34</sup> I hold that Michel Foucault’s notion of governmentality and interpretations of it offer a useful perspective to examine the ways in which forests have come to exist or been produced as an effect of governmental power — made the object of expert knowledge, regularized, simplified, and disciplined, managed, and planned for. Thus, I draw upon a critical political ecology perspective that builds on Foucault’s notion of governmentality and its limits (e.g., Vandergeest and Peluso 2001; Sivaramakrishnan 1999; Sabherwal 1999; Robbins 2004; Moore 1996; Li 2007; Escobar 1996; and Agrawal, A 2005). I begin my discussion with the concept of governmentality to illustrate theoretical and conceptual

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<sup>34</sup> The debate is a dispute between Ramchandra Guha and Richard Grove concerning the roles of the colonial state in conservation in South Asia (Guha 2000; Grove 1995). One of the key differences which can be highlighted is that Guha and Grove focused on two different periods of colonial governmentality, while generalizing experiences of ‘forest conservation’ in South Asia during British rule: Guha starts in 1870 with the making of the Forest Department and focuses on scientific forestry, while Grove, not really a colonial apologist, focuses on the earlier period and shows that there was neither a glorious period of harmony nor evil colonial masters, but rather a complex scenario of how environmental knowledge was constituted in the British empire, how it traveled, and the ways in which state officials and elite scientists in colonial India drew on discourses of science and politics for advocacy of forest conservation.

nuances for my use of this and other related terms that I use in this dissertation. I then consider recent works on critical political ecology and discuss how they have tackled the concept of governmentality to examine forests and participatory forestry as sites and strategies of governmental power and politics.

Foucault used the term governmentality to refer to the forms of ‘governmental rationality’ and/or to the arts of ‘government.’ Governmental rationality for Foucault means a way of thinking about the nature, practice, and knowledge of government. Government implies the “conduct of conduct,” “the right disposition of things” or “the techniques and procedures for directing human behaviours” (Foucault 1991, 1994). According to Foucault, governmentality emerged in mid-eighteenth century Europe through a process that bracketed off modernity from earlier societies and their regimes of truth, power, and ethics. At its birth, it represented regulatory forms of bio-power (power over life) and discipline, and involved shifting ‘the problematic of sovereignty’ (how to protect the “fragile link” between the sovereign Prince and his territory) to ‘the problematic of governmentality’: how to be ruled, how strictly, by whom, to what end, by what methods, and how to introduce ‘economy’ into management of the state (Foucault 1991; Gordon 1991). With this change, the purpose of the government became not to act upon government itself but “the welfare of the population, the improvement of its conditions, the increase of its wealth, longevity, health, etc” (Foucault 1991:93). In so doing, it also became necessary to govern with economy a complex of people and things: not inhabitants alone, nor territory as a bounded entity, but “men in their relations, their links, their imbrications with those other things which are wealth, resources, means of subsistence, the territory with its specific qualities, climate, irrigation, fertility, etc” (Foucault 1991:93).

Thus, in Foucault's use, the analytic of governmentality is not the language of state (sets of institutions that maintain governments), nor is it the government (the personnel and organization with defined responsibilities for ruling and directing the affairs of a state). According to Hansen and Stepputat, "In this view, the modern state is not the source of power but the effect of wider range of dispersed forms of disciplinary [and regulatory] power that allow 'the state' to appear as a structure that stands apart from, and above [what we generally call] society" (Hansen and Stepputat 2001:4).<sup>35</sup> This is, however, not to say that Foucault denies the existence of "states", but makes the state "one among other provinces of power rather than its sovereign director" (Moore 2005: 6). Li (2007) argues this position clearly, and I think her position agrees more with Foucault's: Foucault suggests that governmentality is both "internal" and "external" to modern states, depending upon the tactics of government, which makes it possible to continually define and redefine what is or is not within the competence of the state (Foucault 1991: 103).

Moreover, the analytics of governmentality imply a certain relationship of government to disciplinary and sovereign power: the emergence of governmentality does not eliminate sovereignty or discipline as forms of power but "renders all the more acute the problem of sovereignty... and all the more acute equally the necessity for the development of discipline" (Foucault 1991:102). However, the power of sovereignty-discipline-government varies in terms of their objective, targets, and means or strategy: sovereignty as a form of rule is at times expressed as a "right to death" and is exercised through the juridical and administrative apparatus of the state. The object of sovereign power, then, is "the exercise of authority over the subjects of the state within a definite territory – for example, 'the deductive' practices of levying taxes, of

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<sup>35</sup> Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat, in a collection of ethnographic studies of the postcolonial state, somewhat disagree with Foucault and argue that governmentality has "not necessarily weakened the state in terms of the capacity of policies and designs to create social effects" (Hansen and Stepputat 2001:16).

meting out punishments” (Dean 1999:18). Discipline, on the other hand, “concerns the exercise of power over and through the individual, the body, its forces and capacities, and the composition of aggregate human individuals (classes, armies, etc.)... The object of disciplinary power is the regulation and ordering the numbers of people within that territory, e.g., in practices of schooling, military training, the organization of work” (Dean 1999:18). While governmentality utilizes the techniques, rationalities and institutions of sovereignty and discipline, the object of governmental power is in contrast the welfare of the population and the improvement the conditions that caused these to vary (Foucault 1991).

I follow these insights to define and limit the scope of this dissertation. I have already made it clear that this dissertation is on the making of forest and resistance to it in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh and is neither about *the* state, nor *the* government of Bangladesh, nor the state regimes that preceded it in the region of CHT. Rather, part of this dissertation will examine the material and discursive production of forest (and its positioned practices designed by various governments, institutions and their experts) as relations of power, and explore the ways in which landscapes of CHT and livelihoods of the hill peoples are governed and disciplined both for improvement of the hill peoples and for the wealth and security of the state. In my use, government, to borrow Donald Moore’s words, “includes state practices, but it is neither limited to nor isomorphic with them” (Moore 2005:6). However, in this dissertation, I will remain open to questions about the extent to which the colonial and postcolonial state apparatus of Chittagong Hill Tracts was and is being governmentalized. I consider the triangle of sovereignty-discipline-government as a contingent relation of power rather than as a stable one, and I will examine the ways and extent to which sovereignty-discipline-government work together in the culturally and

geographically specific context of CHT in the practices of making of forest and participatory forestry.

Turning now to political ecology and the complex relationship between governmentality and forests, let me consider the work of K. Sivaramakrishnan who has applied Foucault's concept creatively to examine the production of colonial state, society, and knowledge in a forested region of colonial India. Sivaramakrishnan (1999) takes governmentality to be forms of "state-making" that involve the production of state and society in colonial South Asia and also involve the production of colonial knowledge i.e., representation of colonized peoples and landscapes. To be specific, he suggests there were two distinct regimes of state-making in colonial India that produced the forest and shaped its management in colonial Bengal: the East India Company regime (1767-1859) and the Crown regime (1860-1947). The distinction between the former and the latter lay in the introduction of conservation during the Crown regime, when forest policy was framed and institutionalized through strongly centralized scientific management in various parts of India (Sivaramakrishnan 1999: 21). These processes culminated in forest reservation in those lands – in some cases irrespective of existing land use – which had already been designated as forests by the Company regime, therefore creating a class of state-owned land dedicated to specific types of tree production under the regime of scientific forestry. During this period, scientific forestry emerged as a development regime through the rhetoric and imperative of conservation ideas. It drew on a language of improvement, casting the colonialist project in terms of reclamation of peoples and lands (Sivaramakrishnan 1999: 211-3). However, in normalizing and disciplining forests and forest communities under the control of the Forest Department, colonial science— a particular modern regime of representation and governmental technology— never had a unified coherent doctrine, but was always fractured, both by social



formations and regional geographies. For Sivaramakrishnan, this kind of regional diversity in state-making is “the product of natural, social and political processes” (Sivaramakrishnan 1999: 25 and 216-218). In sum, he shows that forest conservation in colonial Bengal emerged as contingent and contested forms of state-making that were informed by i) ecological, cultural and political diversities of landscapes; ii) emerging local discourses of place, property and identities; and, iii) the specific history of local administration and conflict within the government (Sivaramakrishnan 1999; 1995). He further acknowledges differences between reserved and protected forests in terms of how each is defined by customary rights and privileges of local users over land and forest resources, and marked by differences in terms of strategies of territorialization, power and forest conservation practice. These points are absent in the otherwise accomplished works of both Guha (2000) and Skaria (1999).

The value of Sivaramakrishnan’s approach, for my purpose, is not the ‘making’ or ‘breaking’ of the colonial state in South Asia, but the diverse and complex ways through which the process of forest conservation was constituted. I suggest that given that the Chittagong Hill Tracts were part of colonial Bengal, the experience of forestry in CHT is consistent with Sivaramakrishnan’s account of forest history and conservation, its contested and contingent origins, and local and regional diversities, but it is not so consistent with his account of the “general pattern” of the development of forest conservation in colonial Bengal. According to Sivaramakrishnan, the general pattern in Bengal “was one where reservation mostly took place in the 1880s, initiation in the planning in the 1890s, and the approval of the short-term (ten to twenty year) plans in the period of 1900 to 1910” (Sivaramakrishnan 1999: 253). The CHT differs from this pattern not only in the timing of the working plan regime, which only began in

the 1920s in CHT, but also in the variation in the application of territorial strategies and control of forests within the region.

One of the fine points of Foucault's concept of governmentality is the way in which governmentality depends on territory and its quality.<sup>36</sup> Sivaramakrishnan's (1999) work helps us understand the conditions and consequences of contingent processes of conservation in South Asia during British rule – what Li (2002) identifies as “rule accomplishment” – and underscores the deviation, failure and exemption of the rule, but there is limited discussion of “functional territorialization”, i.e., nature's inner qualities and intelligibilities (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995). This brings me to the work of Peter Vandergeest and Nancy Peluso, in particular their theory of territorialization (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995; Peluso and Vandergeest 2001). Vandergeest and Peluso developed this theory in the mid 1990s in examining forest management in Thailand, and their theory was rather more informed by sociological theories of the state in relation to territory than Foucault's suggestive remarks on governmentality and its link to territory. Still, in retrospect, the theory is one of the most generative illustrations of governmentality and territory, especially in relation to the way in which forests come to exist and get territorialized and managed by government institutions while at the same time being contested by forest dependent communities. Recently, both authors have engaged critically with Foucault's concept of governmentality, and reworked and expanded the theory of territorialization with various analytical and conceptual frames, namely, political forest, customary rights, and insurgency and counterinsurgency violence, in order to illustrate post-colonial forest practices in Southeast Asia (Peluso and Vandergeest 2001, 2011). My fieldwork

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<sup>36</sup> It should be noted that Foucault never examined the ways in which the rise of population brought the government of the state directly into contact with its territories and their qualities, and said very little or nothing about the cultural form, i.e., scientific or other kinds of discourses through which lands and territories took objective form (Braun 2000).

experience in CHT suggests that there are some striking similarities between Southeast Asia and Chittagong Hill Tracts in terms of forest practice in relation to post-colonial insurgency and counterinsurgency development; thus, I find Vandergeest and Peluso's work an important intervention in critical political ecology for explaining and understanding forest practice, politics and strategies of power in the context of both colonial and postcolonial CHT.

Vandergeest and Peluso (1995) define territorialization as processes by which, whether it be in practice or in theory, a particular geographical boundary or space gets defined to regulate people and resources within the boundary or territory. Beyond the conventional use of the term to define a state's boundary and political identity, they use territorialization to examine the development of internal spatial organizations of the state and the government, especially the government agencies which are endowed with territorial and functional jurisdiction over population and resources; they call this process "internal territorialization". In so doing, they map the development of the modern state of Thailand as it emerged during the twentieth century through internal territorialization, which entailed organizing the state's territories both vertically and horizontally into various spatial organizations such as villages, regions and provinces on the one hand, and ministries of the government on the other. In particular, Vandergeest and Peluso unravel the processes and strategies of internal territorialization in relation to land and resources through which 'forests' emerge as a subject of government and also as an object of control, planning and management. In Thailand, they show three phases of the process that make forests through strategies of reservation, demarcation and "functional territorialization" —that is, mapping the forest in terms of nature's intelligibilities, e.g., slopes, soil types, and vegetation (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995:408). In this sense, Peluso and Vandergeest (2001) hold that the idea of forests only exists as "political forests" which helped to constitute and were constituted

by a particular discourse of state property and a related discourse of “customary rights.” In turn, political forests not only “revolutionized people’s lives and livelihood [of rural people and population] but created new, almost inescapable means of imagining land, resources and people” (Peluso and Vandergeest 2001:762). Importantly, Peluso and Vandergeest (2011) have recently broadened their analysis of political forests to examine specific forms of violence, i.e., insurgency and counterinsurgency, and the institutional effects of such violence on the practice of forestry, on the consolidation and expansion of political forests, and on the legitimating of cultural projects of rule. Illustrated through cases of insurgencies and counterinsurgencies from Southeast Asia in the 1950s-1970s, Peluso and Vandergeest argue that both insurgencies and counter-insurgencies have enabled not only the establishment and extension of political forests but also their normalization.

Thus, in this dissertation, I engage with Vandergeest and Peluso’s framework and the links between territorialization, political forests, and violence. I find the term political forests a valuable starting point to understand the making and remaking of forests in CHT, as it speaks clearly to post-structuralist ideas that the categories of our knowledge, whether they be nature or forests, cannot pre-exist before representation or construction but depend on discursive and non-discursive practices much like categories of “madman” and “sex”, as Foucault has shown brilliantly (Foucault 1988; 1980). Further, I agree with Vandergeest and Peluso (1995) that the making of forests is predicated on territorial strategies for control of land and resources, and that variation in the application of territorial strategies is contingent upon the function of forestry in the economy, the relative accessibility and value of forests, and the modalities and ideologies of rule. In applying Vandergeest and Peluso’s theory of territorialization in CHT, I argue that since the annexation of CHT into the British colony of Bengal in 1860, colonial civil administrators

had been confronted with violence in the region till 1900; these administrators advocated and pursued a protectionist policy for stable agrarian order and, at times, for the welfare and improvement of the hill peoples. As forest conservation in Bengal began during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, there emerged fierce conflicts between colonial forest and civil administrators in CHT about the extent to which forest conservation should be adopted (but compare Guha 1990; Sivaramakrishan 1999; and Peluso and Vandergeest 2001). This conflict also involved concerns for the protection of CHT from violence, and in turn shaped the difference in the control of forests between Reserved Forests and Unclassed State Forest (USF) on the one hand, and the conservation agendas in CHT on the other.

Further, I argue that the agenda of the conservation and control of Reserved Forest and USF in CHT changed significantly during post-colonial regimes. These changes were related to industrial development and displacement in CHT during Pakistani rule (1947-1971) and the subsequent insurgency and counter-insurgency (1975-1997) in the region during Bangladeshi rule. A key technology to the changes was the functional territorialization or mapping of qualities and capacities of land and resources in the Reserved Forests as well as USF. In the 1960s, 'functional territorialization' enforced the control of the Reserved Forests for industrial needs and markets. It further articulated a discourse of development, "optimum land use", an environmental discourse for the management and control of land and forests in USF that became hegemonic during the insurgency and counter-insurgency in the mid 1970s (see Chapter IV). The insurgency and counter-insurgency have completely altered the mechanism that had been in place for the control of the Reserved Forests and USF with contradictory results. In the USF, as part of counterinsurgency development discourse, there has emerged an individual rights regime of land alongside the new territorial forests based on state property regime. At the same time, the

control of the Reserved Forests was fractured by the insurgency and counterinsurgency, leading to deforestation and permanent encroachment of the Reserves by the hill peoples. It was in this specific conjuncture of the encroachment and deforestation of the Reserved Forests, and the conflict between forest officials and the army over control of the Reserved Forests, that the social forestry (a global discourse of development, environment and governmentality) emerged in CHT as an extension of existing social forestry program of Bangladesh. The social forestry program in CHT also draws upon an earlier model of development in CHT that had been mobilized during the counter-insurgency for the expansion of territorial forest in USF. The model was a resettlement of jhum cultivators for forest work with a horticulture program. The forest villagers, whether they settled legally in the Reserved Forests or encroached into them, have emerged as new subjects of development as participants and labourers for commercial forest production. Social forestry has further stimulated a political opposition, an indigenous movement of the hill peoples that has articulated an alternative model of community forestry as an example of indigenous culture for the recognition of indigeneity and customary rights over land and forest in CHT.

Beyond the theory of territorialization, I further draw upon Tania M. Li's (2007) approach to governmentality to examine these postcolonial developments, their approaches to communities, and the links to political forests that have been mobilized by the Forest Department in CHT as forms of participatory forestry since 1960. Writing extensively on governmentality, development and social movements, Li has developed a critical approach to governmentality that takes development and environmental projects as a heterogeneous "assemblage" of actors, discourses, institutions, and practices (to name some of the elements) and examines how and by whom they are assembled; how they constitute their fields of intervention and the target

population; and their rationalities, effects and limits. This approach helps me to examine the practices of development of the Forest Department in CHT, untangling the assemblage of actors, discourses, institutions, practices and objectives, whether they are being mobilized by the government agencies or by indigenous movements. Li's approach further enables an analysis of the effects and limits of the development programs and the ways in which they shape and change hill peoples' lives and livelihood strategies, their social and ethnic relations, and their relations of power. In so doing, I build my arguments on social forestry based on fieldwork; indeed, my fieldwork experience resonates with some observations that Li (2001; 2010) has developed provocatively. As Li (2001) observes, a significant aspect of recent community-based resource management and forest conservation is that conservationists and their advocates concede that coercive measures fail when they threaten subsistence and everyday livelihood, yet the same conservationists and advocates are seemingly reluctant to acknowledge that "rural people may also resist conservation measures for reasons that are very much like those urbanities (including ourselves): convenience, greed, or the desire to catch up with, or get ahead of, others near and far" (Li, 2001: 163). Most recently, Li (2010) has demonstrated striking similarities between colonial governmentality and recent indigenous movements in Asia in terms of their protectionist agenda for "managing dispossession." My analysis and representation of environmental developments in CHT explore these contentions and provide ethnographic arguments about how the conservation agenda of the state agencies and indigenous movements work in practice, and how the indigenous movement draws on colonial protectionist policy in its struggle for resources and identity.

#### **1.4 Fieldwork: Foreigner in My Own Country**

This dissertation is based on a multi-sited ethnographic approach, combining archive, library and ethnographic research carried out in CHT and Dhaka from November 2007 to December 2008 in three phases (see Fieldwork Photographs below). I began my fieldwork in Alikadam Upazila of Bandarban district under Lama Forest Division. In my fieldwork in Alikadam, which I completed in April 2008, I focused on examining practices of social forestry and forest resettlement projects. During this phase, I lived in Rizaroa and Meringdome villages of Matamuhuri Reserve, and in the bungalow of Train Forest Range, which is next to Golden River, the forest resettlement village of the Tripura community. In all three villages, I used several methods for collecting data, including participant- observation, in-depth and informal interviews, directed group conversation, life histories, and surveys. There were a total of 45 long and short interviews of 35 men and 10 women representing occupational class categories, namely jhum cultivators, wage labourers and farmers; they were selected after careful analysis of data on household income and occupations. I also often participated in and observed various routine activities of the Forest Department; for example, daytime patrolling, community meetings, and private forest investigations in both the Matamuhuri and Tain Ranges. Additionally, I read forest registers and office files including official correspondences and annual reports in the Forest Ranges and Lama Forest Division Office. Moreover, I interviewed several forest staff, including the Range Officer of Matamuhuri Forest Range and the Divisional Officer of Lama Forest Division, both formally and informally.

In June of 2008, I resumed my fieldwork research, which involved examining an indigenous movement of the hill peoples, “Saving the Village Common Forest” (hereafter, VCF movement) in the Rangamati district. Led by Taungya, a local NGO of CHT, the VCF movement is part of the hill peoples’ movement; the movement represents “village common forests” as the



indigenous culture of the hill peoples and their customary practice of common property forests management. During months of fieldwork with a research assistant within a village community participating in Taungya's VCF projects, I interviewed 8 men and women of the village, as well as Taungya's personal and indigenous leaders; I read projects, documents and reports; and I observed Tanungy's daily office work. In this way, I further investigated the insurgency movement of the JSS and the social movement of the Committee for the Protection of Land and Forest led by loosely organized civil society groups of the hill peoples. My research with these social movements continued until the middle of August 2008, when I conducted document research in the Deputy Commissioner Office's library; there, for a period of two weeks, I examined historical documents of revenue and forest reports of CHT from the time British rule. After this, I extensively searched through documents in the libraries of the Forest Department, the Ministry of Forest and Environment, the Asian Development Bank, and the University of Dhaka for forest working plans, forest laws, forest projects' plans, proposals and completion reports. In particular, I read and later collected all forest development projects' proposals, plans, and evaluation reports implemented in CHT since Bangladesh gained independence. During this period, I also interviewed the Director of Social Forestry Circle, a prominent bureaucrat and writer on forest histories and social forestry in Bangladesh; and Jyotirindra Bodipriya Larma (J. B. Larma for short), the leader of the JSS and the chairman of the Regional Council. This followed a month of archival research at the Bangladesh National Archive located in Dhaka, where I found a few relevant books and documents. The challenge at the Archive was that there is no modern system of cataloguing, and all the documents, books and other references are handwritten and numbered in the registry. There are also limits to access and services in the Archive.

Given that my research involved ethnically and politically diverse groups of people and organizations, often supporting differing ideologies, interests, organizations and spatial configurations, I faced many challenges in the field. The power and influence of the army was the single most difficult challenge in CHT since the army controls the region for security purposes. My encounters with the army began while en-route to the Alikadam Upazila, following a visit to the Lama Forest Division Office in Lama Upazila to obtain permission for fieldwork in the Matamuhuri reserve. I arrived at Lama Upazila in July 2007, and it took days before I was able to discuss my fieldwork with the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO). The DFO held doubts about my research in part because he could not relate social anthropology to the issue of social forestry or forests. To avoid responsibility, the DFO advised that I submit an application ‘properly’ through the Range Officer of Matamuhuri Forest Range, to whom he reluctantly introduced me when the latter visited the Divisional Forest Office. The Range Officer, in turn, offered me a ride to Alikadam in his car. At a security checkpoint on the Lama - Alikadam road, the army stopped the car and I had to explain to them the reason for my visit, details, contacts and personal information. The next morning an agent of the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) followed me to my lodging at Matamuhuri Forest Guest House. Although the agent was ‘impolite,’ he agreed to meet with me and the Range Officer. Following this meeting, he insisted that I obtain ‘residence permission’ from the Alikadam Cantonment and asked questions I had answered earlier at the roadside camp. I reacted to his style and manner of questioning, and resisted his ‘interrogation’ by pointing out that I was a citizen of Bangladesh and that my family had provided service to the government and the army. The conversation soon turned to a debate and the agent told me to prove my identity with government documents. This surprised and terrified me as I began to anticipate an unpleasant incident. Since Bangladesh was

under emergency rule, I exercised self-control and assured the agent I would contact the Cantonment authorities through the civil or police administrative authorities, as any citizen should. I also gave him my passport. My proof of identity and citizenship somewhat appeased the agent, although he then proceeded to leave the Range Office, taking my passport without my consent. This incident greatly angered me, because I felt like a foreigner in my own country.

In the weeks that followed, I began to anticipate the army's interference in my research and, based on ethical grounds, I decided not to meet the Cantonment authorities. I instead turned to the officer in charge of the Upazila police administration and the executive officer of the civil administration (a.k.a., Upazila Nirbahi Officer in Bengali, or UNO for short), for their assistance and residence permission in the Upazila for my fieldwork. The UNO had attended the University of Dhaka (which I also attended) and understood my concerns with the Cantonment authorities and the importance of fieldwork research in the Matamuhuri reserve. Nevertheless, neither of these officers accepted my application or request to conduct fieldwork research in the Upazila. They told me that meeting the Commanding Officer (CO) at the Cantonment would be the only alternative for obtaining permission if the DFO was not helpful. The Range Officer also declined to accept the application.

Over this period, I grew more resistant to meeting the CO and accepting the army's powers. I therefore resigned myself to associate with government officers of the Upazila civil administration and Matamuhuri Range staff to build social networks within the Upazila for support, rapport and trust. I also occasionally visited Dhaka city for consultation with Ahmed Kamala – a former university professor of mine – and visited Chokoria Upazila of Cox's Bazar district for internet access. Interestingly, over time, the government officers began to develop an interest in my research project. In particular, the Range Officer developed a keen interest in

anthropological research on social forestry projects and became more sympathetic to my situation. He thus introduced me to the Forest Headman and a village Karbari of Matamuhuri reserve, and he offered the assistance of his office, staff and forest villagers if I agreed to do my research from the Range Office. Given contemporary anthropological critiques of representation and anthropological authority, I respectfully declined the Range Officer's proposal for 'armchair anthropology.' This decision angered the Range Officer, and he asked me to leave the Forest Guest House and find alternative accommodation.



Photo 1.2: One of many meetings with a village community of CHT to explain my fieldwork and gain their consent.



Photo 1.3: One of the film nights that I organized for the forest villagers of Matamuhuri Reserve.



Photo 1.4: Myself (left) collecting household information from a Murucha man (far right) in a forest village with the help of a young Murucha woman (centre) who is a grand-daughter of a Murucha forest villager.



Photo 1.5: Research assistants Bhubon Chama (far left) and Hla Marma (far right) collecting household information from Murucha and Tripura forest villagers.



Photo 1.6: Myself (left) and my research assistant Hla Marma (right) interviewing a Marma man, a resident in a forest village.



Photo 1.7: Myself (left) and my research assistant Hla Marma (right) interviewing a Marma woman, a forest villager.



Photo 1.8: Myself (right) interviewing Tripura villagers.



Photo 1.9: Research assistant Alap Alam (right) interviewing a Chakma participant (centre) in Taungya's VCF program.





Photo1.10: Myself (left) and my research assistant Alap Alam (right) retrieving documents that had been thrown out from the Matamuhuri Range Office and were to be burned.



Photo 1.11: Conducting research in Rangamati Deputy Commissioner's Office Library.



Photo1.12: Monthly meeting of Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) with key figures in the Upazila administration including Mouza headmen, local government representatives, NGO representatives and police officers. I was an observer.



Photo 1.13: One of many visits by DGFI agents to question me during my fieldwork in CHT. In this photo, the agent is seated to my left. Others present on this occasion were not army personnel and therefore I have removed them from this photo to protect their identities.

At this point, I understood that little possibility existed for independent ethical research, and I decided to leave Alikadam within days. While I was leaving the Forest Guest House on September 14th, the Forest Headmen, the Karbari, and the Range Officer came to bid me farewell. At this time, they requested that I reconsider the Range Officer's proposal, or meet the CO at the Cantonment. I again declined the offer, and the Range Officer said sarcastically, "If you have permission from the Chief Conservator of Forests (CCF) for the research, you can visit us anytime." As I left Alikadam for Dhaka in disappointment, I realized the Range Officer's comment provided a slim possibility for access. I knew that the Office of the CCF was in disarray since one of the ex-Chief Conservators of Forests and other senior forest officers had been arrested by the army's anti-corruption drive. Notwithstanding this, because of the support of my friends in the Head Office of the Forest Department at Dhaka and their networks, I successfully obtained a letter of permission to conduct my research in Lama Forest Division from the Chief Conservator Office, signed by an Assistant Chief Conservator of Forest (ACCF). An important aspect of the ACCF letter was an order to Lama DFO to assist with my research (see Appendix E).

Thus, I returned to Alikadam on November 1, 2007, and submitted a formal application to the DFO for permission to enter and reside in the Matamuhuri reserve for fieldwork research. According to security protocol in CHT, I also gave a copy of the ACCF letter to the UNO and the OC of Alikadam Upazila. The ACCF letter greatly surprised the Range Officer and other staff of Matamuhuri Range Office, let alone the Lama DFO. It also elevated my position in the locality and prompted the DFO's action for the official and unofficial process of my application. On November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2007, I was invited to join the DFO and the Range Officer in a meeting with the forest villager communities in the Matamuhuri Reserve. The DFO consented to my fieldwork

in the Reserve that day, contingent on my meeting the CO at the Cantonment at my convenience and arranged by the Range Officer. Finally, on November 15, 2007, after protracted bitter debates and negotiations with the Range Officer, I settled in the Rizaroa forest village and accepted a part time employee of the Range Office as a cook, with boarding arrangements in the Forest Beat office. On several occasions during these negotiations, the Range Officer and the Forest Headman visited the Cantonment and the Upazila Office to provide their personal assurance to the army authorities concerning my security. In spite of these assurances, DGFI agents visited me often during my stay in the villages of the Matamuhuri reserve (Photo 1.13), and on one occasion I was interrogated by a group of army officers inside the Reserve. In addition, a commander of a nearby army camp sent some soldiers to further inquire about me and to search my lodgings in Meringdome forest village. On yet another occasion, an army officer attempted to assault me in the Alikadam Bazaar as I was taking pictures of market-goers and their products. The event was later resolved in the Cantonment and the young officer offered me a handshake without apology.

In sum, based on my encounters with the army, the UNO (the executive officer of an Upazila) and other government officers, I gathered that the UNO and the DFO regularly report to the Alikadam Cantonment, which in turn holds monthly meetings with representatives of Union Councils of the local government and Mouza headmen of the traditional administration. Similarly, the army camps in the Upazila hold monthly meetings with village Karbari(s). Interestingly, I once met a group of protesting tobacco cultivators in the Matamuhuri Reserved Forest who had set out to meet the CO at the Cantonment. They were protesting the Forest Department's ban on tobacco cultivation in the reserve and seemed to consider the CO a public representative. The forest villagers, Bengali sharecroppers and forest employees also told me

about many similar deputations of public grievance to the CO of Alikadam Cantonment by all sections of people in the locality for favorable intervention. In fact, the army appeared to exercise overarching extra-legal power over the civil and local administration in CHT while under the pretext of security, and they also worked as primary gatekeepers to field sites in CHT.

Beyond the army, another serious challenge for ethnographic research in CHT is the armed conflict between the JSS and the United People's Democratic Front (UPDF), an anti-Peace Treaty faction of the JSS. These groups exercise a degree of control and they limit access to field sites in some parts of CHT. Although I was not confronted by either the JSS or the UPDF over access, their conflict influenced my research plan and choice of field sites. In particular, I never contacted the UPDF for my research and avoided long ethnographic fieldwork with VCF's project community in Barkal Upazila.

Another major challenge I faced in my fieldwork within the communities was the linguistic variation of the hill peoples, and also variations in the Bengali language. Hill people, generally men, use a specific Bengali dialect for inter-ethnic communication in CHT; the majority of the rural women of the hill people do not speak Bengali. To overcome these language barriers, I hired Bhubon Chakma, a university graduate and a member of the Chakma community. However, after settling in the Rizaroa forest village I determined that Bhubon did not speak local Bengali adequately and I therefore had to learn the language. To do this, I began to participate in *Adda* (an informal public space used to hang out in a group) with the Bengali and Marma men and women in the tea shops in the village. Hla Marma, a villager of Rizaroa, was my main language instructor and interlocutor. I discovered the tea shop to be an instrumental space and *Adda* a useful technique, which enabled me to learn local Bengali quickly and to begin

short conversations and dialogues across ethnicities and genders.<sup>37</sup> For longer conversations and interviews both in Rizaroa and Meringdom, I continued to rely on the assistance of Hla Marma, and also Hlachaong Marma, whom I hired to replace Bhubon Chakma. Similarly, while doing fieldwork in Golden River, the forest resettlement village, I hired Samel Tripura, a school teacher and villager, in addition to Alap Alam, a Bengali university student. Trained in anthropology, Alap Alam was of great help during the fieldwork both in Rangamati and Dhaka.

In terms of trust and rapport with the communities and other field sites in CHT, I enjoyed the benefit of social honor built up through my conflict with the army, and my social identity as a university teacher. However, to translate this social honor on the ground for information and knowledge, I employed what I call the ‘triple C’, a set of general principles that involved concern, care and critique, built in part on my critical reading of contemporary anthropological methodologies (e.g., Amit 2000; Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Marcus 1995; Messerschmidt 1981; and Narayan 1993). In practice, the triple C principles promote concern and care about persons and things in the field while remaining critical about information, knowledge and representation of them. They also acted as ethical codes that governed my self-conduct while interacting with people and things in a way that would contrast with the authoritative and coercive power of governments represented by the army, bureaucracy and Forest Department. To establish rapport and trust with the communities, I also had two main approaches: (i) unambiguous communication and ii) gift exchange. The communication involved community meetings with all villagers before taking up any fieldwork activity, where I explained in a simple manner and language the purposes, interests and stakes of my research and the importance of learning from the community through participation. In so doing, I retained my identity as a teacher, which was

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<sup>37</sup> Since occasional fierce debates among the villagers are very common in the rural *Adda*, discretion of researcher’s participation in *Adda* is a mandatory requirement; see also Chakrabarty (1999).

widely known in the locality, and generally presented myself as a teacher and writer who wished to understand and document what it was like to live in and around the hills and forests. In my presentation, I shared many personal stories and the struggles I had undergone to reside in the communities. Importantly, I evoked the memories of the stories of the great books and men of the religious traditions, and connected those stories to highlight the importance of writing and books for the survival of religions and cultures. To facilitate better understanding I ended the stories by saying, “Had there not been the great books, there would not be religion; and, without grandma’s and grandpa’s stories, there would not be the Marma, the Murucha or the Tripura.” My construction of stories about the great books took clues from the ongoing religious movement of Krama<sup>38</sup> and conversion of the Murucha from Buddhist to Krama that I had known for some time before my fieldwork from a colleague who did anthropological fieldwork with the Murucha in 1998 (Shafie 1999). The meetings and my stories proved successful, shaping the moods and attitudes of the communities in favour of myself and my fieldwork, though I must concede I was not entirely successful in eliminating their fear of the Forest Department for speaking to me.

Considering the limitations of going native and risks involving monetary exchange in rural indigenous settings, I found gift exchange a very productive strategy for creating strong rapport and social intimacy with individuals and the communities. In the communities of Rizaroa and Meringdom, I offered free bi-weekly movie nights since both forest villages had community centers equipped with furniture, a color television, VCD (Video Compact Disc) player and generator. In addition, I gave printed individual and group photos that I had taken to individual

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<sup>38</sup> Since the 1980s, the Krama, a newly invented native religion of the Murucha – with strong emphasis on education and monotheistic orthodoxy – has created a great tension among the Murucha. The tension is also shared by the other communities of Bandarban district. The story of the coming of Krama, in which a native Murucha young boy appeared as a “prophet” who then eventually “disappeared” for good, is the subject of talk and debates in many households.

members of the communities, and at times winter clothes to the poor and needy. Since the community of Golden River did not have a community center or electricity, I provided the community festival with food on holidays, and individual members of the community with clothes and photos as I did with the other communities in the locality.

It is beyond my scope here to further elaborate strategies involving my manner, courtesy, and respect that I employed in everyday interaction with individuals and communities for rapport. Nevertheless, I believe that my own childhood experiences of living in a village where I learned the behaviors, norms, values and folkways of village communities were instrumental in helping me to connect with the men and women in the communities.

In summary, over the period of one year I examined through ethnography the environmental development projects of social forestry, forest resettlements, and village common forests, and the ways they shaped and changed social relations and relations of power of the hill peoples when run by the Forest Department or indigenous NGOs. In my fieldwork research with projects' communities and organizations, I used several methods combining techniques of participant observation with in-depth interviews, informal interviews, directed group conversation, life histories, and surveys. In addition, as previously mentioned, I undertook extensive document and library research in CHT and in Dhaka. The significance of this methodology is that I did not rely totally on secondary data, and historical data was taken directly from original sources, much of which have not been exposed to scholarly examination or presented in their original forms. Most important, however, is the fact that the understanding and arguments I present here did not emerge solely from research, data, or evidence, but from differences of "structures of feeling", to borrow Raymond Williams' phrase, i.e., the lived and shared experiences of the place and communities, broadly defined (Williams 1977). In other



words, my feeling of being ‘other’ and ‘foreign’ never disappeared during the entire period of fieldwork in CHT, and there was a constant reminder of my own and others’ ethnicity as my local research assistants tried to dominate my relation to the communities through their selective representations of the communities, let alone the intervention of the army, civil officials and Forest Department. This difference of my being “ethnic” or “other” in terms of identities, positions and relations of power both enabled and constrained my knowing and unknowing of fields, lives, and issues of the hill peoples.

### **1.5 The Structure of the Dissertation**

The goal of this dissertation is to examine how discourses of forest and forest relations in CHT have changed and shaped agrarian relations of the hill peoples and their relations to power, and to describe the effects of such changes. I have organized different chapters around the political regimes of Britain, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and drawn on ethnographic accounts to help explain the chronological history of the making and remaking of political forests in relation to the hill peoples of Bangladesh. The dissertation, however, is not a history of forest *per se*; instead, it offers a genealogy of forests and forest relations as relations of power and how they came to be constituted over time in one particular social-ecological context of CHT.

In Chapter Two, I deal with British rule (1760-1947) in CHT to provide a historical account of the making of the state, society and forest in the region. This chapter shows that until 1860 CHT was the eastern frontier of the British colony of Bengal. Up until this point, ethnic relations in CHT were unstable and influenced by the adjacent princely states of Tripura and Arakan; the people were self-sufficient, politically decentralized and living in a ‘tribal’ system of governance. Though hills and land in the region were covered with trees, grasses, canes,

bamboos, bushes and jungles, they were not considered as forest or property of the state or community to be extracted for the market or regulated for conservation. The forest of CHT, as in other parts of Bengal, came into existence following the Forest Act of 1865 as part of the wider discourse and practice of sovereign rights over uncultivable waste land, timber trees, and jungle, in addition to the material interests of timber and revenue. However, unlike other areas in Bengal, almost the entire CHT comprised hills and forests. The specific conjuncture that led to making CHT as forest was the violence in and around CHT. Thus, the making of forest in CHT became a key strategy of power to govern CHT, and involved creating large areas of political forests in the borders, extending the Reserved Forests, and territorializing hill Chiefs' administration and civil administration; on many occasions, this denied the hill peoples' access and common rights of control over forests and land resources. In turn, British policy in CHT resulted in an exceptional system of government, an indirect rule of local elites under a protectionist and absolutist bureaucracy. The consequence of British rule was exploitation of forest resources, political isolation, and land alienation.

Chapter Three describes the Pakistani regime (1947-1971) and examines the remaking of the forest in CHT in relation to capital, knowledge and industries. It shows that the remaking of forest and participatory forestry had a differential impact on the Reserved Forests and Unclassed State Forest. In the Reserved Forests, remaking of forest was associated with the industrial needs of timber and scientific management over the forest and landscapes; the practices of taungya mode of participatory forestry by forest villagers remained unchanged. Changes in Unclassed State Forest were related to resettlement of the hill peoples displaced by industrial development (namely, the Kaptai hydro-electric power plant). The resettlement programs introduced considerable changes in agrarian relations and relations of power, and reframed a participatory

forestry program in USF. This chapter also describes the material and ecological contexts of insurgency and contemporary land conflict, while tracing the idea of CHT model of development which was taken up by the Bangladesh state after Bangladesh's independence as part of counter-insurgency.

Chapter Four presents accounts of insurgency and counter-insurgency programs of forest resettlement during Bangladesh rule, and examines the changing discourse of forest, forest settlement and agrarian relations in USF. The chapter explains the origin and geographies of the insurgency movement and maps the counter-insurgency development programs to illustrate changes in the control of Unclassed State Forest and agrarian relations as they exist today. This shows how counter-insurgency greatly transformed land, agrarian relations and relations of power through the expansion of territorial control of forests, the introduction of a private property regime in USF, and the introduction of other programs, including forest resettlement designed as a form of participatory forestry. The chapter also includes an ethnographic account of a forest resettlement project to provide an example of how development works in practice, its effects and limits, and the extent to which it shapes and changes the lives and livelihoods of hill peoples.

Chapter Five examines the effects of insurgency and counter-insurgency on the Reserved Forests in CHT. In particular, I illustrate the ways in which the insurgency and counter-insurgency affected, altered or facilitated ecological and economic changes in the Matamuhuri Reserve and its communities of forest villagers. This chapter questions the perceived wisdom that blames the hill peoples and their mode of jhum cultivation for forest encroachment and deforestation. Through narratives of local memories and history, I show that both encroachment and deforestation of the Matamuhuri Reserve are related to counter-insurgency and resource

conflicts between Bengalis and the hill peoples. Importantly, the chapter also deals with contemporary discourses and practices of social forestry to examine practices and limits of social forestry programs in the Reserve, and the ways in which it shapes forest management and forest villagers' relations to forest and lands. The chapter provides ethnographic arguments as to why the social forestry program will perpetuate unsettlement and displacement of the hill peoples and thereby perpetuate the ethnic conflicts in CHT.

Chapter Six deals with an indigenous movement of CHT and explores how indigenous environmentalism mobilizes civil society groups, NGOs and elites, and how it articulates indigenous issues with forest and environment and identity. In this chapter, I consider the indigenous movement led by Taungya, a local NGO of CHT, and its village common forest (VCF). The main success of the movement is not VCF but the mobilization of large groups of grassroots actors and educated young men and women who desire to help their rural cousins against forces of the state, market and business in order to protect dispossession and land alienation.

In Chapter Seven I provide conclusions and a synthesis of this dissertation. The chapter highlights the differences between colonial and postcolonial governmentality in CHT and further analyses the ethics of the practice of development and the rule of the Bangladesh state in CHT.

In sum, this interdisciplinary dissertation aims to cross the disciplines of anthropology, environmental history and political ecology to contribute to an understanding of the history, trajectories and limits of political forest in relation to “ethnically” different and “small group” peoples living within nation-states. It will further add to the epistemological critiques of contemporary development practices in the context of Bangladesh and South Asia (Marcus and Fischer, 1999). My attempt to critique environmental development knowledge and practices

follows a concern about the hegemony of development practice in the Third World and is not meant to critique “development” per se (Ferguson 1994; Li 2007). Rather, my aims are to increase our understanding of the limits of ideology in order to change policy and practices of environment and development in CHT, and to promote environmental and social justice in Bangladesh. Finally, this dissertation brings studies on governmentality and social movements into conversation with research on CHT, studies of South Asian historical political ecology, and South Asian historiography. My hope is that this dissertation will deepen our understanding of emerging debates on indigenous identities, government and the state in South Asia.

## CHAPTER II

### The Making of Political Forests and the Chittagong Hill Tracts

#### 2.1 Introduction

Building on the concept of “political forests” as discussed by Vandergeest and Peluso (1995; 2001), this chapter examines and illustrates the making of political forest and participatory forestry and the manner through which the discourses and practices of forestry shaped and changed the relations of forests and land in the Chittagong Hill Tracts during British rule (1760-1947). In doing so, I aim to make the category of the “natural forest” and the perceived “newness” of participatory forestry —what is commonly referred to as social or community forestry —into unfamiliar and archaic terrain. For analytical purposes, I divide the British rule into two regimes, a division that is in part based on the local history of CHT: the early British regime of 1760 to 1860 (which somewhat parallels the East India Company regime) and the late British regime of 1860 to 1947. Considering the making of political forest in the CHT, I concur with South Asian scholars who maintain that the development of forest had been uneven in British India (Rangarajan 1996; Skaria 1998; Sivaramakrishnan 1999). In particular, I follow Sivaramakrishnan’s arguments that during the early period of British rule, the British Empire in Bengal was primarily built on land revenue settlement, and forests were considered as limiting the expansion of agriculture. The British authorities saw a clear need for agricultural expansion into forests which included wasteland (Sivaramakrishnan 1999). The making of political forests in Bengal (including CHT) —through legal sanction, reservation, demarcation and control — only began after the first Forest Act of 1865, a result of widespread concern by state authorities over timber shortages across the British Indian Empire (Sivaramakrishnan 1997; 1999). Thus, I

argue that as landscapes, resources and governmental spaces of scientific management and political power, forests in CHT did not exist before their construction in the late 1860s. Having said that, I am not suggesting that land and hills covered with trees, bamboo, bushes, or jungles were not present in the CHT, but that the space and category of forests depended on acts of power involving discursive and non-discursive processes and practices. To be specific, I argue that the forest of the CHT arose as part of the discourse of sovereignty informed by the discursive processes concerning the frontier, and was contingent on state-making (but compare Sivaramakrishnan 1999). Drawing on Stuart and Walker (2003) and Mbembe (2001), I am using the term discourse of sovereignty more generally to refer to the bodies of political and legal statements such as laws, customs or conventions that define, deny and exercise the state's authorities and rights over space, life and things. In this usage of the term, "sovereignty" refers to persons, state or state authorities (including traditional or customary authorities) whose rights, including the rights of denial, are considered supreme or "natural", whether it be accepted, contested or resisted by subordinate political communities or groups.

In what follows, I begin by investigating the early British regime and its relations to forests and the hill peoples, and illustrate how CHT emerged as a landscape and place. I also illustrate how the identities of hill peoples were bounded and constructed through differences between hills and plains, and between settled agriculture and jhum cultivation. I show that until 1860, the land and hills of CHT were seen as barriers to agriculture, and the trees, bushes and grasses that covered the uneven terrain were seen primarily as places of wilderness. Importantly, the hill peoples were considered primitive and wild, and hence untenable for government and civilization. In this context, I would like to argue that the CHT may be considered a frontier that was shaped by the perceived differences between plains, hills and violence. By frontier, I mean

an imagined or a material terrain that is neither ruled nor governed by the state, but rather by local elites from whom the state claims political recognition in the form of consent, gifts, or tribute rather than taxes (Tsing 2003). I also intend it as a system of exceptional rule, where political power is dispersed among local elites; the economy is more or less localized within the community that resides in the social spaces; and the sovereignty, authority and the rights of the state over the spaces, resources, local elites and communities are shared and contested (Leach 1960; Peluso and Lund 2011; Sivaramakrishnan 1999).

Second, I deal with the making of political forests and the state in CHT, and the consequences of these practices on hill peoples' agrarian and power relations during the latter period of British rule. In particular, I examine the discourses that created political forests in the CHT and I illustrate differences between Reserved Forests (RF) and Unclassed State Forests (USF) in terms of their sovereign territorial control and customary rights. In so doing, I further consider the process of internal territorialization of USF that enabled state-making, including the civil administration of state authorities as well as the traditional administration of indigenous chiefs and headmen. I show how internal territorialization in USF differentiated agricultural lands and forests as well as common property and individual property for private agriculture with differential access rights and control. In sum, this section demonstrates the effects of political forests on hill peoples' agrarian relations, state institutions and emerging colonial governmentality in CHT, particularly the permanent dispossession of the hill peoples' control over land and forest as well as the economic differentiation between and among the hill peoples' communities.

Third, I examine forest management, mainly the management and control of the Reserved Forests. I demonstrate that forest management was primarily concerned with the Reserved



Forests and comprised timber extraction and plantation in the CHT shaped by relative accessibility, ecology and economy. The technique of forest plantation known as taungya<sup>39</sup> (i.e. forest plantation through jhum cultivation or slash and burn agriculture) institutionalized the “forest villager system” as part of forest management in the Reserves, and I demonstrate that despite its limitation, scope and scale, taungya forestry represented the earliest form of participatory social forestry in practice.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, in the concluding section, I summarize my arguments to consider the nature and rationalities of British rule in CHT. I argue that paternalistic laws, administration and discipline dominated British governmentality. Governmental concerns about the population did not arise to provide care for the wellbeing of the hill peoples, as governing the hill peoples was mainly concerned with the economic activities of individual jhum cultivators.

In sum, this chapter is about the making of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), the hill peoples, forests and the state at the southeastern border of colonial Bengal during British rule. The geographical scope of the chapter goes beyond Chittagong and CHT to include Arakan and Hill Tripura. In addition to the hill people groups, the chapter also makes reference to the so

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<sup>39</sup> Taungya is an agro-silviculture technique for forest plantation and was invented by Dietrich Brandis, the first Inspector- General of Forest in British India. It was first practiced for planting teak in the Prome district of Burma in 1856 and incorporated in general forest plantation, particularly the plantation of teak, throughout Burma and British India in the early 1860s after successful experimentation (Stebbing 1921: 367-391; see also Bryant 1994, 1997).

<sup>40</sup> The importance and concreteness of taungya as a form of participatory forestry had long been overlooked until recently, though taungya had widely been practiced in British India and Burma and has continued to be so in parts of Asia (Nair 1990; Peluso 1995). It is worth mentioning here that in Burma the practices involved Karen taungya cultivators, who would sow teak along with dry hill taungya cultivation in a systematic manner that provided benefits in addition to their taungya crops. These benefits varied at times and places and included direct payments, tax exemption, or usufruct rights on lands for their own use (Bryant 1994).

called Kuki-groups, namely the Shendu, the Lushai and at times the Panku and Bawm (see Table 2.1 below).<sup>41</sup>

## 2.2 Making of CHT as a Frontier

The East India Company took over Chittagong in 1760.<sup>42</sup> By the early 1770s, the Company had risen to political supremacy in Bengal and the British Empire expanded across South Asia and Myanmar (Burma). Nevertheless, the Chittagong plain—inhabited primarily by Bengalis, a stable and populous peasant community of Bengal—remained the eastern limit of the British Empire until 1860. The adjoining mountainous and forested parts of Chittagong in the east, known as ‘Capas Mehals’ and later as Chittagong Hill Tracts, were then inhabited and shared by the hill peoples’ groups as well as the Shendu and other groups of the Mizo people (of Mizoram, India); the British neither ruled them directly nor formally recognized the local chiefs’ sovereignty or political control. In his book titled, *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the Dwellers Therein*, Captain Thomas Herbert Lewin, the first Deputy Commissioner of CHT, summarized this in the following words:

On the 6<sup>th</sup> May 1784, Government wrote to Mr. Irwin, the Chief [Commissioner] of Chittagong, desiring to have his opinion fully, whether by lenient measures, the inhabitants of the hills, might not be induced to become peaceable subjects and cultivators of low lands. No practical result, however, ensued, and the tribes do not crop

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<sup>41</sup>It may be relevant to note that in the early years of British occupation, the term “Kukis” also referred to all hill peoples groups, excluding the Chakma, the Marma and the Tripura (Lewin 1969:28; cf. Schendel 1992: footnote 31).

<sup>42</sup> British rule in India began in Bengal in 1757 when the British East India Company’s forces led by Lieutenant-Colonel Robert Clive defeated the semi-independent Mughals’ Nawab of Bengal at the Battle of Plassey by arranging the defection of the Nawab’s commander of troops. At this time, the Mughal Empire itself was involved in a regional skirmish (Ludden 2002). The takeover of Chittagong by the British went along with Burdawan and Midnapore to “meet the expenses of the army which the British agreed to maintain for the support and assistance of the nawab of Bengal [and they together accounted for] one-third of the whole revenue of the Bengal” (Serajuddin 1971:12).

up again until the 21<sup>st</sup> April 1829, when Mr. Helhed, Commissioner, writes that he finds that the hill tribes are not subjects, but merely tributaries. ‘I do not recognize any right on our part to interfere with their internal arrangements. We have no authority in the hills; the payment of the tribute which is trivial in amount in each instance is guaranteed by a third party, resident in our own territory, and who is alone responsible. He derives his own profits from the arrangements under stipulations which have no place in his agreement with us. He is merely an agent, or mooktear, or medium of communication between his constituents and the authorities. He is not the ruler of the clan he represents, and possesses no control over the member of it. [. . .] Up to 1829, therefore, we seem to have exercised no direct influence or rule over the hill tribes. The near neighbourhood, however, of a powerful and stable government brought the Chiefs [of the hills] by degrees under our influence, and by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century every leading Chief paid to the Chittagong Collector a certain tribute or yearly gift made to purchase the privilege of free-trade between the inhabitants of the hills and the men of the plains. [. . .] Until the year 1860, it appears we did not interfere directly with the internal economy of the hills (Lewin 1869:22-23).

Published in 1869, Lewin’s book is considered “the first”<sup>43</sup> detailed account of the CHT, and Lewin as paramount authority on the CHT, but Lewin did not explain how and why this “non-interference” form of indirect relation developed and what it meant. Interestingly, Lewin republished the book as *Wild Races of the Eastern Frontier India* from London in the next year with a new introduction that described the hill peoples as “wild,” “savage,” “barbarians,” and “very little better, indeed, than the apes among who they reside” (Lewin 1870:2). He also claimed a “novelty” for his part in introducing them to English readers.

This characterization of the hill peoples, along with other patterns of silence and denial about the early colonial regime, suggests that the hill peoples, polity and landscapes of the CHT did not easily fit into an emerging governmentality of colonial rule in Bengal. In *Modern Forest*, Sivaramakrishnan (1999) explained these differences of colonial governmentality while he examined the making of state and forests in the southwestern colonial Bengal districts of

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<sup>43</sup>Much before Lewin, Francis Buchanan visited the region of Chittagong Hill Tracts and provided a very detailed account of the peoples and the region, which remained unnoticed and unpublished until 1992 (Schendel 1992). Nevertheless, we must give Lewin credit for publishing his account of the CHT first and for writing at length about the hill peoples. In 1912, Lewin also published *A Fly on a Wheel: or, How I Helped to Govern India* (Lewin 1912). An analysis of Lewin’s contributions in shaping the frontier administration is beyond the scope of this research.

Burdawan and Midnapore he argued that the differences were primarily based on a discourse of land revenue settlement in the plains. He called the hill regions a “zone of anomaly” where the making of the colonial state was thwarted by place, people and landscape. Despite some similarities between these western and eastern jungle regions of Bengal, one significant difference between them was that the British hardly attempted to govern CHT, the eastern part of Chittagong. Thus, I qualify this early British regime in CHT as a ‘frontier’, and I argue that the CHT as a frontier emerged not only from discourses of land revenue settlement and the difference between plains and hills but also hill peoples’ resistance and continued violence in the region. In this section, I describe and discuss this frontier relation of the British and the CHT with three specific purposes in mind. First, I challenge the perceived wisdom that forests are “natural” or “pristine” categories; instead, I demonstrate that what one refers to as forests in CHT were being used and altered in the past by hill peoples and other communities who lived in or around them. Second, I provide evidence (supporting the idea of political forests) that the existence of forests depends on discursive and non-discursive forces of power and strategies of territorial control. Third, and importantly, I explore the frontier relationship as it existed and the ways in which it bore significance to colonial governmentality that emerged (in CHT) during the late colonial regime.

What was CHT like before the British occupation of Chittagong? Historical accounts suggest that much of the area of Chittagong (including the CHT) had been a bone of contention for centuries among the traditional states of Arakan, Bengal, and Tripura, as well as among Portuguese pirates. The hill peoples and the other groups then living in the CHT and beyond had arrived in the region in different waves, the result of war and conflict with the traditional states of Hill Tripura, Arakan, and Bengal (Lewin 1869: 21-23; Schendel 1992: xv; cf. Roy C. 2000;

Scott 2009). Among these hill peoples' groups, the Chakma and the Marma were the most prominent and numerous. Both groups lived closely along the Chittagong plains and intermingled with the Bengalis, fearing attacks from the Bawm, the Pankho, the Shendu, the Lushai, and other groups to the East, all known vaguely as "Kukis" (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: Ethnic Groups of the Chittagong Hill Tracts by their Collective Group Name at the time of British Occupation of Chittagong and Chittagong Hill Tracts

Collective Ethnic Name	Members of the Group
The hill peoples ("hill tribes" of Chittagong Hill Tracts)	Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Tanchangya, Bawm, Panku, Lushai, Khumi, Khyang, Sak and Murucha (Mro)
The Kukis	Shendu and the Bawm, Panku and Lushai of the hill peoples

The Chakma occupied most of the central and northern portion of the region on the banks of the Feni and Karnaphuli rivers, and their territories also included Rangunia areas of the Chittagong plain (Hunter 1973; Qanungo 1998). The Marma occupied the southern part of the Karnaphuli River on the banks of the Matamuhuri and Sangu rivers, including the areas of Sitakund hills and Cox's Bazar of the southern Chittagong plain (Schendel 1992: 34-35, and 58-65). The Tripura lived in the north of the CHT, bordering the Hill Tripura (Tripura, India), and also in adjoining districts, such as Chittagong, Noakhali, Comilla, and Sylhet, whereas the Tanchangya were to the east of the CHT, close to the Chakmas. The Khumi, the Khyang, the Mrucha, the Bawm and the Pankho lived in remote southern and southeastern parts along the banks of the Matamuhuri and

Sangu rivers, at times with or around the Marma. The last two groups, the Shendu and the Lushai, primarily inhabited the land in and around the Lushai and Arakan Hills, the remotest eastern portion of the CHT.

The people in each group were autonomous, living in non-permanent villages based largely upon kinship (or fictive kinship) and/or “common descent” (Kuper 1982). Each group had a chief or chiefs, and each was independent of the others, internally uniform in tradition and customs (Schendel 1992). However, the position of chiefs among the Chakma and Marma was one of great power and importance, and by some accounts they were considered pre-colonial “rulers” of the region (Qanungo 1998; Roy C. 2000; cf. Lewin 1912). The chiefs of the Chakma and Marma had paid “voluntary” tribute to the Mughals for access to trade with Bengalis of the plains and they appeared to have control over forest resources. In addition, the Chakma chiefs held the *Zamindari*<sup>44</sup> of Rangunia from the period of the Mughals, for which they paid separate revenue (Serajuddin 1971; see also, Hutchinson 1909: 24). Both the Chakmas’ and Marma’ chiefs also had many subordinate officials, such as *Dewan* and *Rowaza*, who respectively oversaw their village communities, collected what can be called household tax or “jhum tax” from their kinsmen, and meted out justice.<sup>45</sup> Thus, the characteristic polity was the village community, governed by village elders, with political power dispersed among many “chiefs” (Schendel 1992, 1995).

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<sup>44</sup> *Zamindari* was a system of landlordship that first originated during the Mughals. It became a political system of government and the principle form of land revenue settlement in Bengal during the East India Company; thus, *Zamindar* refers to a landlord or landlordship (for details, see Guha, Ranajit 1996). In Bangladesh, the system was abolished immediately after the partition of British India as the then East Bengal, now Bangladesh, became part of Pakistan.

<sup>45</sup> I have called it household tax or at times jhum tax as it was levied upon a family of jhum cultivators. The tax is variously described as poll tax, capitation tax, or tribute paid by a jhum cultivating family to the chief of the community or the territory (Lewin 1869; Hunter 1973).

The region's economy was based on relatively self-sufficient village communities that practiced slash-and-burn cultivation, locally known as *jhum*, and all *jhum* land and other resources belonged to the community that occupied them (Roy, C. 2000; Roy, D. 2000a). Excluding young children, all members of a family participated in *jhum* cultivation, producing various types of rice, corn, melons, and vegetables. *Jhum* also produced a large quantity of cotton and the region, as Lewin (1869) noted later, was "well fitted both in soil and climate for the production of cotton" (Lewin 1869:8).<sup>46</sup> The extreme rarity of plough cultivation among the hill peoples cannot be attributed to technological ignorance or a "love for a wandering life" as Lewin (1869) argued.<sup>47</sup> David Sopher (1964) correctly points to two interrelated conditions for the absence of this mode of production. The first was "the existence of an excess of cultivable swidden land in relation to the needs of the swidden population. [The second] was the probable absence of a prerequisite to permanent cultivation, namely, a measure of internal security that impeded the spread of *plow* cultivation" (Sopher 1964:124).

Cotton, not money, was the currency among the hill peoples; all of the groups used it as "butter money" to trade with Bengalis for dried fish, salt, and other daily household items not produced by them. Cotton was also consumed by the hill peoples' communities themselves by weaving homespun clothes; the chiefs further used it to negotiate political power with the Mughals (Schendel 1992). It also is reasonable to assume that other occupations such as hunting,

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<sup>46</sup> According to W. W. Hunter, cotton export from the CHT during 1874-75 was 2,015 tons, which is partial but may give an idea about the quantity of cotton production in the region before the British occupation of Chittagong (Hunter 1973:84).

<sup>47</sup> Lewin argues the hill peoples' aversion to plough cultivation was so strong that when *jhum* land was exhausted from over-cultivation, they "steadfastly held aloof from the plough, preferring to earn a precarious subsistence by cutting and selling bamboo and hewing out boats. Some of them who could borrow a small amount of capital took up the profession of itinerant traders; [others might earn] their means of livelihood by rearing and herding cattle, for which the country afforded ample pasturage" (Lewin 1968:14).

gathering, fishing, weaving, and animal husbandry existed among all of the groups but production was limited to family consumption (see also Lewin 1869).

Turning now to the development of early British relations and policies regarding the CHT, the most significant influence was hill peoples' resistance. Known as "Chakma's resistance", hill peoples' resistance to the British began in 1772, and was the first ever peasant resistance against the British (East India Company) after 1757 in Bengal. Up until this point, and somewhat following the Mughals tradition, the British authorities had collected cotton "tributes" from the Chakma and Marma chiefs through Bengali contractors. Unlike the Mughals, however, the British claimed territorial jurisdiction over the hills and began expanding land settlement through various forms of temporary land revenue settlements. It is important to note that before the Permanent Land Settlement Act of 1793, the British had tried and experimented with various forms of temporary land revenue settlements in the plains, including *nowabad* (new cultivation), which brought fallow jungle lands into cultivation and was new to the Chittagong plain (Qanungo 1998). It was this policy of land revenue settlement in the Chakma's territory of Rangunia that set the stage for the Chakma's resistance. Rangunia was then under Ranu Khan, a prominent *Dewan*, and included a large area of plain land. With the Bengalis moving to Rangunia receiving land settlement, the Chakma chief and the Dewans withheld their tribute to the British in order to reclaim their land rights and privilege as well their sovereign rights.

They fixed the boundary between what they claimed as their jurisdiction and the plains; made it obligatory for the people of the plains to obtain *pattas* from them for cultivating lands within their jurisdiction, and to pay the rents to them; imposed a tax on the removal of grass, bamboo, firewood and timber from the hills; prohibited pasturing of cattle in the forests; and set up courts of justice for punishing trespassers (Serajuddin and Buller 1984:93, italic mine).



The intricacies of the resistance between the British and the hill peoples need not be rehearsed here (see Qanungo 1998), but they certainly gave birth to the discourse of wild and savage people, as one finds in Lewin's account of the hill peoples. Importantly, the resistance forced the British authorities at Chittagong to change their policies to deal with hill chiefs, and in turn brought about and shaped what I call frontier relations. Accordingly, in 1789, the government began making arrangements to collect taxes from jhum cultivators directly through recognizable chiefs of the CHT, depending on the chiefs' willingness to submit to British authority. The government further introduced money as a medium of payment of the government's share of jhum tax (or tribute) but allowed hill chiefs to fix the jhum tax according to their customs to be levied on jhum cultivators. Meanwhile, the British continued the policy of land revenue settlement in plains land with Bengali landlords and cultivators in its exercise to maintain sovereign rights over land. As a result, the Chakma were dispossessed from their rights over plains lands and pushed eastward into deep jungle areas of CHT. In turn, the Chakma chief was made a local agent of the British; however, unlike *Zamindars* or feudal landlords in the plains, the chief's rights, power and authority were not defined by any written agreement or laws. In hindsight, the British authorities considered the Chakma chief as merely an agent for collecting jhum tax from kinsmen or any group who the chief was able to command; that is, the British recognized the chief's right over his people only, but not over lands and other resources. However, as I show in the next section, the Chakma chief took his position as if he was a *Zamindar* much like in the plains, and engaged in bitter legal battles with the government during the late colonial regime (see GOB 1929).

In the south of CHT, the British also made a similar jhum revenue settlement directly with Bohmong Koonglafru, the prominent Marma chief (hereafter Bohmong chief), in exchange

for tax/tribute to be paid in money to the government. The Bohmong chief was further allowed to collect jhum tax from groups other than his “kinsmen,” such as the Khumi, Khyang, Murucha, and Tripura (Schendel 1992: 34, 63-65). It may be relevant to note that the Bohmong chief, Koonglafu, was driven away to Arakan by the Mughals in 1756 but returned to the region in 1774 after the British took over Chittagong (Hutchinson 1909).

In the meantime, in 1784, the British also installed another chief in the south of CHT from the small groups of Arakanese Marma refugees, known as Palangsa Marma. This followed the Burmese occupation of Arakan in 1784 that brought thousands of refugees to the south of the Chittagong plains. Although most of the refugees abandoned the Chittagong plain immediately for the southern coasts of Bengal, fearing an impending war between the British and the Burmese, a group of refugees settled in the valley of Matamuhuri under the leadership of a chief by the name of Marachi. In 1789, the British also changed the method of payment to money for jhum revenue settlement with Marachi.

Unsurprisingly, like the Chakma chief, both Marma chiefs were also denied rights to plain land revenue settlements, except to jhum cultivators— kinsmen and others who recognized them. The combination of the British land revenue settlement policy, particularly *nowabad* (new cultivation) in the southern Cox’s Bazar area of the Chittagong plain, and the incursion of Bengalis, pushed the Bohmong chief and his fellow groups gradually toward the hill areas of the south and the south-east; thus, in 1822, the Bohmong chief settled his residence in Bandarban at the bank of the Sangu River (Hunter 1973; Hutchinson 1909). Marachi, the Palangsa Marma chief (hereafter, Mong chief), and his followers also moved into the Sitakund hill areas of the Chittagong plain that had been abandoned by the Bohmong chief, and continued to live there until 1827 when the Mong chief received jhum revenue settlement in the interior hills in the

north of the CHT (i.e., present day Khagrachhari) (Hutchinson 1909; Bessainet 1958: 9). In other words, by the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the British policy of plains land revenue settlements had pushed the hill chiefs and hill peoples from the border in the Chittagong plain to the hills further east. This created a political, ecological and ethnic boundary between Chittagong plains and Chittagong hills, and the latter was to become and remain a frontier for some time.

Beyond the Chakma's resistance and the British policy of land revenue settlement, what made the CHT into a frontier and maintained it in this state was violence. Indeed, violence remained a signature feature of the CHT even up until the end of the nineteenth century (Hutchinson 1909:8-12). One aspect of the persistent violence was border conflicts between the British and the Burmese Empires. The Burmese occupation of Arakan in 1784 led to this border conflict between the two empires, as the British acceptance of Arakanese refugees increased the hostile feelings of the Burmese Court. The Burmese Court assembled armed men on the eastern side of the Naf River and began attacking "elephant hunters in the public service, and the peoples were killed or carried off and sold as slaves" (Hunter 1973: 121). These acts of violence by the Burmese raised British concerns about the security of Chittagong, and led the British to declare war with Burma in 1824 (known as the First Anglo-Burmese War). This was followed by the Burmese occupation of a British island near the Naf River, Shahpuri, and the killing and expelling of British subjects (Hunter 1973). The war ended during the same year, and the British annexed Arakan (Schendel 1992).

Although the British annexation of Arakan ended Burmese hostility and violence in the region, new violence by so called "kuki groups" erupted in the interior parts of CHT. Intergroup violence, plundering of jhum cultivators' villages, and killing and enslavement of men, women and children had a long history across the hill regions from Assam to Burma, and so too in parts

of the CHT (Shakespear 1909; Mackenzie 1884). It appears that the British authorities at Chittagong paid little attention to intergroup violence until 1830, and it was only when it disrupted the stability of the Bohmong chief's territory and security of revenue of the British that the internal conflict became visible to the British (Mackenzie 1884: 333). In the early 1830s, there were several raids in the Bohmong territory which were committed by the Murucha, Khumi or Bawm, who were the Bohmong chief's subjects. Interestingly, all these raids were upon Marma villages in the Bohmong territory, and were apparently over disputes regarding the position of chief among the Bohmong family members after the death of Bohmong Satung Pru. In 1847, the Commissioner of Chittagong, Mr. Henry Ricketts, personally intervened and helped to arm the new Bohmong chief for the security of his subjects and to give him additional remission to his revenue payment to the government. The government also sent a military expedition against the raiders. Nevertheless, the various clans of the Shendu and Lushai continued to engage in violence across the hill regions, including the Chittagong plain, and made numerous raids into parts of CHT. In response, Mr. Ricketts proposed to separate CHT from the Chittagong plain in 1847 (Mackenzie 1884:338). The government squarely opposed Mr. Ricketts' idea as it would have been inconvenient to define the boundary of the territory and its expenses, and it also opposed any consideration of removing its responsibility to protect the Chittagong Hill Tracts and solely protecting the settled parts of the Chittagong plain. An 1854 government police inquiry provides a detailed picture of the raids and several policies to deal with the subject of raids which is worthy of examination:

During the last seventeen years there had been nineteen raids in which 107 had been slain, fifteen wounded, and 186 carried captive. The whole of these forays were believed to be the work of [Shendu] or tribes from the south, the Superintendent exonerated both the Phu [Bohmong] chief and the Chukma Rani from all complicity. The Bohmong or Poang had stocked six posts, in which he kept squads of ill-armed retainers. But it did not appear they had ever prevented a raid or punished raiders. Efforts had been made through

the Arracan authorities to ransom the captives from the [Shendu], but without success: and it had been proposed to establish a line of frontier posts garrisoned by one [Marma] battalion; also to create a Joomea police under hill Chiefs, well armed and located at central thannas who should protect their neighbours from forays by the outer tribes. But to this there was the great objection of the expense, which the returns from the Kapas Mehal would be quite insufficient to cover (Mackenzie 1884:338).

It appeared that the government was concerned about the difficulty of using military expeditions to punish offenders, and it surely thought such an expedition would be unsuccessful not only because of the “unhealthy climate” but also the improbability of reaching the offenders and distinguishing them from others. The government further considered that establishment of military posts would be costly, lengthy and difficult. In the end, the government provided the hill chiefs, especially the Bohmong chief, with arms in 1858 to combat the raids, but this policy also proved unsuccessful in preventing raids. In 1860, a violent raid, known as the “Great invasion of Kukis”, took place in CHT. It was directly in response to this invasion that the government was forced to separate the CHT (the hill region to the east of Chittagong) from the Chittagong plain, and named it after Chittagong as the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). Accordingly, the CHT was made a district in 1860 for civil and revenue administration, with a boundary created to mark not only the existing political differences between Bengalis and hill peoples but also the ecological and ethnic divisions between them (Mackenzie 1884). The district was placed under a Superintendent within an exceptional administrative system unlike that established in the Santhal Pargana to oversee the administration of the CHT “in the simplest manner... respecting customs and prejudice of the hill people” without allowing Bengali middlemen to represent the people (Lewin 1869:23-24). The position of Superintendent was upgraded to that of Deputy Commissioner in 1867 under the Commissioner of Chittagong. The extent to which this shift in

the policy changed hill peoples' relations to the state, how and with what effects I will consider in next section.

In sum, through a careful reading and scrutiny of official government writings, I have tried to argue that from 1760 to 1860 the CHT was a frontier to the British Empire and that the British had claimed (un-successfully) to exercise sovereign power and control over the CHT. All chiefs paid arbitrarily fixed amounts of jhum or household tax as tribute. The chiefs' offices were considered as "estates" or "human taluk" by the British authorities (No. 532 1/07/1872 in GOB 1929: 48-61). The state authorities at Chittagong appointed chiefs according to custom, and when there was no dispute over recognizable inheritance, or the customary heir was a minor, the British authorities temporarily took over the office of the chief (Hutchinson 1909; Mackenzie 1884). Importantly, the Permanent Land Settlement Act of 1793 that was supposed to apply to the CHT was never implemented; the hill peoples did not receive plains land settlement. The only exception was the Chakma chief and a prominent *Dewan* of the Chakma who received a temporary wasteland settlement in their territory in 1818, cultivated by Bengali tenants (Hunter, 1973). The British authorities in the Chittagong plain also at times defied their own policy principles for dealing with hill peoples and made jhum revenue settlements with Bengali speculators. The authorities also commonly exercised their power to lease out *grasskholas* or land with grass, and allowed Bengali woodcutters and ivory collectors into the CHT. The British further collected a transit tax of all produce carried to markets at the border between the Chittagong plain and the CHT (Hunter 1973). The chiefs of the CHT had remained sovereign to the extent that they shared and negotiated their sovereignty with the state; they also appeared to have some rights and control over jhum lands and other resources, but ownership of the lands and other resources was always contested, neither recognized nor denied.

### **2.3 The Making of Political Forests and the State**

This section examines the origin of political forests in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), including how political forests shaped the state and in turn changed the frontier relations as well as hill peoples' relations to forests, land and power. The focus of this section is hill peoples' agrarian relations and customary rights. I will demonstrate that forests in the CHT originated as political forests only in the early 1870s as part of a wider practice of forest conservation in colonial Bengal as well as other parts of British India. Since then until to the end of British rule in South Asia, the land and hills with trees, bush, or jungle – in some cases irrespective of them – were created as forests in the CHT and also other parts of Bengal by the discourse of sovereignty and related discourses of land revenue settlement and customary rights. As such, the forests in colonial Bengal and elsewhere in British India were also constituted as territories of sovereign control and were shaped by several factors including but not limited to the conflict between civil and forest officials, local resistance, and most importantly the strategies of internal territorialization (Agrawal, A 2005; Rangarajan 1996; Sabherwal 1999; Sivaramakrishnan 1999; Skaria 1999; but compare Philip 2004). In turn, forests were enrolled in a new economy of public enterprise under a bureaucracy, for both conservation and timber demands, in contrast to agriculture and the agrarian economy represented by private property and interests (Agrawal and Sivaramakrishnan 2000). As I describe below, the case of the making of forests in CHT was consistent with this general pattern in Bengal, but with the important exception of the agrarian economy that was mainly based on a common property regime according to which jhum land was the common property of the hill peoples.

In British India, debates over forests, the timber trades, and conservation began in the provinces of Bombay and Madras as early as the 1800s. In stark contrast, the making of forests

in the CHT and other parts of Bengal for timber or conservation only began in the 1860s. This followed the enactment of the Forest Act of 1865 that marked a new beginning of forest conservation as well as resource conflicts in South Asia (Stebbing 1921:514-520; 1923:371; cf. Guha 1990).<sup>48</sup> To be specific, the Bengal government appointed Dr. T. Anderson, the Superintendent of the Royal Botanical Garden, Calcutta, as the Conservator of Forest in 1864, at the insistence of the central government. Anderson's inquiries of 1864 revealed that most of the forested land and hills from the Darjeeling Hills to the Sundarbans, and from the Jungle Mehals to Chittagong, whether they covered trees, bush, or jungles, had been leased for agricultural expansion or permanently settled with *Zamindars'* estates, and only a little was left for forest conservation. The government had little forested land under its control and had exercised only limited periodic sovereign control over the extraction of some tree or bamboo species and other forest products in different places (Stebbing 1923:375-403). This was so mainly because forests in Bengal during the early British regime were considered "limited agriculture", and thus classified as wasteland (Sivaramakrishnan 1997: 75; Stebbing 1921:61-76). It was also because (much like CHT, as I have just discussed) the other forested regions in Bengal (such as Jungle Mehals, or Santhal Pargannas, or Darjeeling Hills) were mostly inhabited by subsistence agriculturalists or pastoralist communities, remaining marginal to British economic interests, and at times, on the frontiers of its political powers (Sivaramakrishnan 1999). Nevertheless, at the beginning of forest conservation in Bengal, Anderson's work was limited to felling and making sleepers as well as forest planting in the areas of British Sikkim, British Duras and Darjeeling Terai rather than Bengal proper (Stebbing 1921:514-520). Mr. H. Leeds succeeded Anderson in

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<sup>48</sup> This was the case in all of northern British India. In Punjab Himalayas, Kumaon and Garhwal, the discussion of forestry did not start until the 1860s (see Brandis 1875 for details of the progress of forest conservation in British India before the Forest Act of 1865).



1867 as Conservator of Forest and gave forest conservancy in the CHT and other parts of Bengal a ‘proper’ start.

Concerning the beginning of forest conservation in CHT, the Chittagong Forest Division was created in 1868 under Leeds’ guidance; the Chief Commissioner of Chittagong was made a Conservator of Forest with an assistant conservator in his office (Stebbing 1923:371-431). In the same year, the forest of the CHT was surveyed locally and a proposal for conservation in the CHT was also forwarded to the Government of Bengal (Lewin 1869; Sivaramakrishnan 1997). Crucially, the forests of the CHT at that time had neither royal tree species of teak (*tectona grandis*) nor dominant tree species of Bengal such as sal (*shorea robusta*) and sissu (*dalbergia sissoo*); rather, they were comprised mainly of local timber species such as jarul (*lagerstroemia speciosa*), gramar (*gmelina arborea*), chapalish (*artocarpus chaplasha*), toon (*cedrela toona*) and chikrashi (*chikrassia tabularis*) which were considered to be fine timber (Lewin 1869, Appendix A; Cowan 1923a; 1923b; 1923c).<sup>49</sup> In 1871, as the Bengal Forest Rules came into force, almost the entire area of the CHT was declared state forests in accordance with the provisions of section 2 of the Forest Act of 1865 (Hunter 1973:29).<sup>50</sup>

Central to the forest law and its intelligibility that created forests in the CHT was a discourse of sovereignty, that is, the rights of the sovereign over forests. Emerging from state engagement in forests in Madras, Bombay, and British Burma in the late eighteenth century, this discourse further extended the colonial state’s rights to forest resources that held the state as the

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<sup>49</sup> One characteristic feature of Bengal forests was ecological diversity. Dominant forest tree species in Bengal were sal and sissu in the north and western regions, and sundari (*heritiera fomes*), gewa (*excoecaria agallocha*), goran (*ceriops decandra*), keora (*sonneratia apetala*) and other species in the south-western coastal region. Most other forests held a variety of local species.

<sup>50</sup> It is also noteworthy that in 1862, immediately after making the CHT into a district, the Deputy Commissioner of CHT set up tolls for river borne timber and other forest products, and these were leased to hill chiefs in 1864. In 1871, the Forest Department took charge of the main toll stations, leaving only one to the Mong chief (No. 532, 1/07/1872 in GOB 1929: 48-62, paragraphs 33-39).

absolute proprietor of forest land in British India. One interpretation of this discourse was, as Baden-Powell (1874) puts it:

Wherever the State is the absolute proprietor of forest lands, it can of course exercise its proprietary rights and keep these lands in a proper condition; even where its right is limited, it can, at any rate, protect so much as it has.

In the exercise of the proprietary rights, however, the State is not actuated by the purely selfish or temporary motives of a private owner or speculator. The State is to be considered rather as called on to fulfill a great public trust, on which it brings to bear the resources of the superior skill and knowledge at its command as well as the executive force of its servants and employes (Baden-Powell and Gamble 1874: 3).

Although this discourse was primarily built on European examples of forest management, it further justified the state's absolutist claim on interpretations of pre-colonial "native" rulers' authority, specifically the roles of Tipu Sultan of Mysore, the Amirs of Sindh, and the Alampra Dynasty of Burma (Stebbing 1921:34-38). For example, in 1874, in a conference paper on *The Defects of the Existing Forest Law (Act of VII 1865) and Proposal for a New Forest Act*, Baden-Powell writes:

A very large proportion of [the Indian forests] are admitted to be the absolute property of the State, at any rate in theory. The State had not, it is true, exercised that full right; the forest was left open to any one who chose to use it, *but the right was there*. Every native ruler closed, when he chose, whole areas of forests to preserve the game, and as in the well known instance of the forests of the Amris of Sindh, and in other parts, punished with the utmost cruelty the slightest trespass within the forest limits. Whenever this was not the case, people were *in the habit of doing* what they pleased, no one caring to stop them. Here, then, we have forest '*absolutely the property of the State*' (Baden-Powell and Gamble, 1874: 4-5; italics in the original).

This view held that customary practices of forest use in British India that had existed before British rule were a privilege; the villagers or rural communities who had used forests had never had forest rights. However, the view was not uncontested. In particular, the Government of Madras opposed this view and suggested that "the state had no rights on uncultivated lands

that were invariably ‘village property, not village privilege’” (Guha 1996). The pioneer architect of forest institutions in the British Empire in India and Burma, Dietrich Brandis, also differed with the view, though he strongly supported the state takeover of the forest in India and Burma (Guha 1996). Brandis argued: “Forest rights in India have had a similar origin and development as in Europe, with that important difference that the arbitrary dealings of the Native Rulers have interfered [with] growth with these rights and have in many cases restricted or extinguished them” (Brandis 1875:14).

What made the CHT a forest region? Compared with other forested regions in Bengal, the absence of land settlement in the CHT no doubt provided material grounds, but the main factor contributing to the actions of the time was the prevalence of jhum cultivation in the region. For example, in 1868, while participating in the debate on administration and political principles of the CHT, the officiating Commissioner of Chittagong Lord H. Ulick Browne wrote:

I have always been desirous to lay in some way a slight foundation for the usual system of cultivation, with a view to its ultimately displacing the [jhuming] system entirely. Had it not been, however, for the proposals to introduce forest conservancy into the Hill Tracts, I do not think it would have been easy to have even made a beginning in that direction; but as it is, though quite unable to recommend the immediate introduction of the forest conservancy system proposed by Mr. Leeds, the slight restrictions that I have already imposed on [jhuming] have, even at this early period, proved of use as a preparation for its very gradual suppression (No. 421, 12/11/1868 in GOB 1929:25-35, paragraph 13 ).

Still, what remains inexplicable is why most of the CHT was declared as forest. Given the progress of forest conservation and policies of that time (Stebbing 1926:192-212, 213), declaring most of the CHT as forest seemed not only aggressive but also inconsiderate. As noted earlier, there had been numerous murderous raids in the CHT and adjoining regions by “Kuki” groups, especially between 1860 and 1870 (Hunter 1973: 18-21). The violence by the Kuki groups in the region continued until the end of the nineteenth century. In 1898, the final military

expedition was launched against these groups which successfully ended the “Kuki raids” in the CHT and adjoining regions (Bessaignet 1958:10). How this violence affected the making of political forests in the CHT, I cannot ascertain; however, there are many examples in British India such as the Dangs Bhils in the Western Ghat, the Paharia of Rajmahal Hills of Bihar, and the Rampa tribal groups in North Arcot near Madras where the British used forest control as means to control and quell resistance (Grove 1995: 390; Skaria 1999). These are some of the colonial equivalents of post-colonial insurgency and counter-insurgency strategies that Vandergeest and Peluso have recently examined to theorize the role of violence of the making of political forests (Vandergeest and Peluso 2011).

Nevertheless, conflicts emerged between the civil and forest officials about reservation or the territorialized control of the forest resources in the CHT; the conflicts were related to the timing, methods, and extent to which jhum cultivation would be eliminated or dealt with. The Commissioner of Chittagong (E. E. Lewis) and assistant Conservator Davis, who was then a Deputy Commissioner of Chittagong Hill Tracts, opposed the reservation of forest in the CHT. Davis reasoned that “these forests were vast, inaccessible and very difficult to explore, since the only means of access was up the rivers and streams. Once the latter was left, there were no roads; few paths in the network of forest-covered hills” (Stebbing 1926: 194-5). Both the Commissioner and the Deputy Commissioner appeared to be advocating “Open Forest.” They also favored gradual suppression of jhum by plough cultivation for which the district was running a governmental scheme.<sup>51</sup> In 1875, Dr. Schlich, the Bengal Conservator of Forest, visited the

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<sup>51</sup> In 1869 the Government offered the hill peoples favorable terms if they would take up plough cultivation: they would be exempt from paying jhum tax to the chiefs and would receive a credit of £3.00 per family, payable within five years with 5% interest. By 1872, there were only 25 settlements and 78 applications pending for survey and demarcation, which amounted to 294 acres of land, from the Chakma and Marma. Given what was considered limited progress, the government began to offer more liberal terms in 1872 by increasing the advanced credit up to £8.00 to a family payable within five years without interest. Moreover, they would pay no rent for the first five years of a thirty year lease, gradually increasing up to 9 dime per acre from the 12<sup>th</sup> year, and the lease holder would be

Chittagong Hill Tracts and expressed dissatisfaction about the ways in which forests had been dealt. He argued strongly for reservation of the hill tracts forest even at the hill peoples' expense, and had a harsh debate with civil officials. John Beames, who joined Chittagong as Commissioner after the event, wrote about it in his *Memoirs of a Bengal Civilian*:

Dr. Schlich, the Head of the Forest Department, calmly proposed that the whole Mugh and Chakma population should be removed from their native hills! He did not say where they were to go to. He merely said, in the true departmental spirit, 'These people destroy the trees, therefore let them be sent away.' Of course, the district officers and the Commissioner strongly opposed this view. The Commissioner even went so far as to say that if trees and Mughs could not live together, he thought it would be less harm if trees were removed, which caused Dr. Schilch to foam at the mouth and utter bad words (Beames 1984:282).

It appears that that this debate ended with an amicable solution as Schlich proposed a plan to the government for forest management in the CHT that same year, conceding that jhum would continue for a long time. Some of the salient aspects of the proposal were: i) that there would be Open Forest under the authority of the Deputy Commissioner, and Reserved Forests under the Forest Department; (ii) that forest in the Sitapahar on the bank of the Karnaphuli River and on the Maini and Kassalong rivers (the tributaries of Karnaphuli River) would be reserved immediately; iii) that the Forest Department would be under the Conservator of Forest, Bengal, rather than the Chittagong Commissioner;<sup>52</sup> iv) that no logs of *telsur* (*opea odorata*), *toon* (*cedrela toona*), *jarul* (*lagerstroemia flosreginae*), *kamdeb* (*calophyllum polyaltha*), *gammar*

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allowed to cultivate jhum during the first year of the lease. Despite these improved terms, only 26 settlements were made by 1875, an increase of one from 1872, and most were made with headmen on behalf of 460 families of cultivators; the amount of the leased land was 4,256 acres and the cash advanced £3274.00. Even those who received money in advance wished to live by jhumming again. The resistance was partly the result of the chiefs' reluctance to encourage abandonment of jhum cultivation, which formed the main source of their earnings (1973:78-80). The government blamed local officials for not trying hard enough, and forced them to hire Bengalis to teach hill peoples how to plough (Beames 1984).

<sup>52</sup> At that time, most Bengal forests were under civil officers at the district levels and several local conservators of forest offices. The Bengal Conservator of Forests had limited jurisdiction and few forest divisions under his authority (Stebbing 1923).

(*gmelina arbora*), chapalish (*artocurpas chaplasha*) and chikrasse (*chikrassi tabularis*) would be allowed to pass the toll stations unless they measured 3 cubits in girth and 3 cubits from the thick end.

Apparently, the government approved the plan in the same year and this brought about the first Reserved Forest of 339 square miles in the CHT on the banks of the Maini River in 1875, removing five villages of hill peoples from the area (No. 265C 15/2/1875; and No.81F, 25/2/1875 in GOB 1929: 202-212). From that point until the 1880s, the forests of the CHT were regularly and systematically inspected (using elephants brought from Burma), surveyed, and demarcated for reservation by the Forest Department. The demarcation process was extremely slow, in most cases assisted by the administrative-political department. By 1884, a total of 1,345 square miles of the CHT was gazetted as Reserved Forests<sup>53</sup> as absolute property of the state under the Forest Acts of 1878 for territorialized control, dispossessing the hill peoples from the areas of the Reserves. Except for the Sitapahar Reserve, all the Reserved Forests were also placed strategically along the main rivers and their tributaries and up to the borders between CHT and Hill Tripura in the north and north-east, CHT and Lushai Hills in the east, and CHT and Burma in the south-east and south. In turn, these Reserves effectively cut off Lushai and other so called Kuki groups in the north and northeast from the hill peoples. The rest of the areas of CHT remained as open forest which was technically referred to as Unclassed State Forest (USF) or sometimes District Forest under the administration of the Deputy Commissioner of the

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<sup>53</sup> These were the Kassalong and Maini Reserves in the north of the CHT, bordered to the north and east by the Hill Tripura; the Renikhyong Reserve in the east of the CHT, bordering the Lushai Hills and Arakan; the Matamuhuri Reserve in the south of CHT bordering Arakan; the Sangu Reserve in the south east of CHT bordering Arakan and paralleling the Matamuhuri Reserve to the east; and the Sitapahar Reserve near the district headquarters (i.e., Rangamati). Regarding the areas of the Reserves, there are some differences (about a few hundred square miles) in the areas mentioned in CHT Regulation 1900 and areas reported in the 1973 Working Plan for Chittagong Hill Tracts North Division. According to CHT Regulation of 1900, the areas of forests were Kassalong and Maini Reserves (678.5 sq. m.), Renikhyong Reserve (215 sq. m.), Sangu Reserve (145 sq. m.), Matamuhuri Reserve (251 sq. m.), and Sitapahar Reserve (23.70 sq. m.).

District for control of population and civil administration. The USF remained under the control of the Deputy Commissioner until the end of British rule; however, there was a change in total area of USF, which decreased by about 104 square miles as a number of small areas were brought under the Forest Department as Reserved Forests during the early 1920s (FD 1973a: 24-29).<sup>54</sup> The role of the Forest Department in the management of USF only extended to the collection of revenue from timber and other forest products such as sun grass, cane, bamboo and so forth at toll stations, as well as the control of the movement of these forest products.

Nevertheless, the management and control of USF, and the hill peoples population within it, entailed the internal territorialization of civil administration in the district to formalize the state institutions that had been pending for some time for the forest reservation; it also entailed resolving conflicts among government officials. In the end, after more than a quarter century of debates among local officials and the Revenue and Political Departments of the Bengal Government, and several experiments, internal territorialization was completed in 1900 by the Regulation of 1900 based on Lewin's proposal. In turn, the Regulation shaped state institutions, agrarian relations and governmentality in the region; how and to what extent this internal territorialization of civil administration in the CHT worked out in practice, and with what effects, I discuss in the remaining part of this section.

Lewin first proposed a detailed plan of internal territorialization of local administration as early as 1867, having had firsthand knowledge of the hill peoples and the economy of CHT. The main features of the proposal were: i) the CHT would be divided among three principal chiefs with territorial limits, and every village would have a "responsible" headman appointed by the chief and acting under them, subject to the confirmation of the Deputy Commissioner; ii) the

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<sup>54</sup> The areas of these new Reserved Forests were: the Thega Reserve (70 sq. m.), the Shubholong Reserve (32.02 sq. m.), the Sitapahar Reserve (0.55 sq. m.), the Rangamati Reserve (0.40 sq. m.), and the Barkal Reserve (0.91 sq. m.) (see GOBD n. d.).

chiefs would be brought into agreement with clearly defined duties and responsibilities, and the jhum tax collected from the hill peoples and revenue paid to the government would be fixed; iii) the hill peoples would retain freedom of choice allowing them to move across territories; iv) the chief would not have perpetual jhum cultivation settlement and would not have land rights on jhum cultivation; v) all other cultivable lands would be brought under a distinct and separate settlement; vi) the hill peoples would be induced to adopt plough cultivation and to settle permanently in villages; and vii) there would be a census and register of the jhum cultivators and each chief would be responsible to pay revenues to the government (No. 185 T.M. 23/09/1867 in GOB 1929: 17-24). The Commissioner of Chittagong, Lord H. Ulick Browne, endorsed the proposal and sent it to the Secretary of the Bengal Government for approval, adding that a fourth division of Khas Mehals (Government Estate) would be created under the Deputy Commissioner and that the chiefs would be “at liberty to make land settlement in Khas Mehals as well as others.” In his letter to the Secretary, Browne further suggested that the hill peoples would pay jhum tax to the chief of that division or to the Deputy Commissioner if they were cultivating jhum within any of the four divisions, but if they took up plough cultivation on lease, they would pay rent for the land and would not pay jhum tax. He reasoned that “the change from [jhuming] and capitation-tax to land settlement will gradually diminish the power and influence of the chiefs if some counter-action is not applied, and this preferential claim to land settlement within their division will have that effect when, by the gradual tightening of the restrictions on [jhuming] in a course of years, plough cultivation increases” (No. 421, 11/12/1868 in GOB 1929:25-36). A significant aspect of Browne’s letter is that he raised the question of ownership of land in the CHT, given the nature of jhum cultivation settlement. Following Lewin’s



description of hill customs and of jhum settlement, Browne further argued that “the chiefs had no right whatever in the land” (No. 421, 11/12/1868 in GOB 1929:25-36).

The plan as a whole was objected to by the Secretary of the Government of Bengal and also by the Board of Revenue, Government of Bengal. The Secretary feared that changes were “so sweeping in their effects” to the hill economy that it was therefore “dangerous” to carry them out without a “distinct consent of the hill chiefs” (No. 270, 01/23/1869 in GOB 1929:36). The Board of Revenue found the plan, particularly the Khas Mehals, “disturbing”, as it was “injurious” to the chiefs’ interest. The Board also observed that the chiefs’ rights to the land were “theoretical,” implying that further inquiry and confirmation was required to settle it (No. 2177B, 4/12/1869 in GOB 1929: 36-39). The Commissioner of Chittagong failed to gain the “distinct consent” of the hill chiefs, and the government postponed the localization of the chiefs’ jurisdictions, leaving the chieftain system intact in collecting jhum tax from their “kinsmen” or others who acknowledged them. Ashley Eden, the Secretary to the Government of Bengal in 1870, reasoned:

It may be necessary for purpose of forest conservancy to place considerable restriction upon the extension of [jhum] cultivation, and such a step may tend to prepare the way for more radical changes to which, in other ways also, the mind of the people may become reconciled; but this subject must be considered apart (No. 295, 01/21/1870 GOB, 1929: 45-47).

However, the government confirmed state ownership of the lands and partially approved the plan for a census and maintenance of a jhum register to assess government revenue for each chief.

The creation of *Khas Mehals* (government estates) that would encourage the hill peoples into plough cultivation also received government approval, even though a similar scheme had already been attempted and failed (No. 295, 01/21/1870 GOB 1929: 45-47; No.532, 07/01/1872 in GOB 1929:48-61).

In 1873, while serving his second term as the Deputy Commissioner of the district, Lewin again moved a new proposal for nine internal divisions, with maps, in order to localize hill chiefs' jurisdictions so as to limit jhum cultivation. Following a government inquiry, the commissioner of Chittagong altered the proposal from nine to seven divisions. The proposal was approved with modifications after a long debate, dividing the CHT into five revenue circles: three hill chiefs' circles and two Khas Mehals under the Deputy Commissioner. The boundary was gazetted in 1880 but only took effect in 1884. In 1892, the hill chiefs' circles were further divided into 33 *taluk* (estates, or revenue circles) under middlemen, to which all of the chiefs were opposed. Moreover, the Khas Mehals proved "a complete failure as an administrative unit", paving the way for reconsideration of internal territorialization of the CHT and the Regulation of 1900 (hereafter the Regulation).

The Regulation abandoned both the *taluk* and Khas Mehals and divided the CHT into four territorial administrative and/or revenue circles: the jurisdiction of the Chakma chief in the center (Rangamati), the Mong chief in the north (Khagrachhari), the Bohmong chief in the south (Bandarban), and the Government Reserved Forests that were located across the CHT (Hutchinson 1909:12).<sup>55</sup> Under the office of the Deputy Commissioner, each hill chief's circle corresponded somewhat to a conventional administrative subdivision with each chief subject to the authority of a sub-divisional officer. Each subdivision was also divided into several police stations (*Thanas*) comprising numerous villages. Parallel to this conventional division, each circle was further divided into Mouzas comprising villages. There were 373 Mouzas and each was between 1.5 and 20 square miles, including hill, wood and wasteland.<sup>56</sup> The distribution of

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<sup>55</sup> In the Regulation of 1900, there is another division of the Maini Valley said to be under the Deputy Commissioner and regulated by him/her from time to time.

<sup>56</sup> By 1923, the number of Mouzas was reduced to 355 as the Forest Department took up 18 Mouzas for reservation (GOB 1923:4).

areas and Mouzas were: the Chakma chief's circle (1,221 sq. m.) 134 Mouzas, the Bohmong chief's circle (1,404 sq. m.) 107 Mouzas, the Mong chief's circle (703 sq. m.) 88 Mouzas, and the Maini Valley under the Deputy Commissioner of the district (269 sq. m.) 26 Mouzas (GOB 1927:4). As a rule each Mouza had to set aside 50 acres of the best plough lands as the *khas* land for the remuneration of the village officials (the headman).<sup>57</sup> In other words, besides conventional administrative sub-divisions and policing divisions of the district, the Regulation created an institutionalized two-tiered traditional chieftain system which abolished the kin mode of spatial and social organization and replaced it with a territorial organization of the state. In turn, the chiefs and headmen emerged as quasi-feudal elites and their loyalty to their kin was weakened.<sup>58</sup>

An important part of the Regulation was land rules that confirmed state ownership of the land that could be neither purchased nor sold among the hill peoples but was only to be used by the hill peoples (or at times Bengalis or businesses). The land rules further formalized the agrarian relations of the hill peoples, recognizing hill peoples' customary rights to use forest resources for domestic purposes to graze cattle on village pastures, and to occupy non-urban

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<sup>57</sup> Ironically, only as many as 86 out of 373 Mouzas had most of the cultivatable plough lands of the CHT, and many did not have even 50 acres of plough lands (GOB 1927: 3-8).

<sup>58</sup> I call chiefs 'quasi-feudal elites' because their incomes came mainly from household taxes on jhum cultivators, they were allowed to have police forces to maintain law and order, and they also held juridical powers. Nevertheless, the practice also created a self-elevation myth of nobility. Although the British did not recognize these chiefs as hereditary Indian princes (nor did the CHT become one of the Princely or Native states), all three were endowed with a certain aristocratic veneer. Schendel and others observe, "[D]uring the British period, the Chakma chiefs presented themselves publicly as Indian princes. They took the South Asian noblemen as their role model, stressed the myth about their North Indian origins, became considerably Hinduised and established marriage links with prominent families of Bengal. For them, to be raja was to be seen as a member of Bengal aristocracy ... The Bohmong and Mong chiefs chose a different style. Their role model was Burmese nobility" (Schendel, et al. 2001:37-38). Bernot (1967), with his anthropological insight, suggests, "the British created chiefs whose subjects recognize them as kings ... the legitimacy of the royal charge is not at all questioned, indeed quite the contrary" (quoted in Bertocci, 1996:133).

homestead plots with or without formal settlement.<sup>59</sup> Still, these rights were primarily regulated by the chiefs and headmen who were responsible for distribution of both jhum and plough lands among the hill peoples for cultivation, save for the overriding power of the Deputy Commissioner. In so doing, the land was divided into four categories for revenue purposes: i) jhum land; ii) plough land; iii) grass land or pasture; and, iv) non-agricultural land. The Deputy Commissioner retained the power for the management or lease of grass land and non-agricultural land. Jhum land and plough land on the other hand were placed under the jurisdiction of the chiefs and headmen for revenue and management. Jhum land remained as common property of the hill peoples and was to be regulated by customs and also at times by the Deputy Commissioner. Jhum cultivators were also allowed to move from one Mouzas to another as it was a customary practice of the hill peoples. However, the land that came under the plough became categorized as individual property with limited hereditary rights of succession, instilling a new regime of property and ownership which was to have a lasting influence. Significantly, in continuation of previous policy for the plough land in the CHT, the land rules formalized financial and other incentives for the hill peoples to take up plough cultivation that included: i) rent free plough land settlements on lease for the first three years of the lease; ii) exemption of jhum taxes; and iii) agricultural loans (Hutchinson, 1909:68-69). In part, the incentives were meant to compensate the cost of clearing plough land for cultivation as plough lands were then commonly covered with grass (Hutchinson 1909:93). Nevertheless, the Chakma, especially the Chakma chiefs and headmen, took the most advantage of plough cultivation (Bertocci 1996). The Marma elite apparently lacked interest in plough cultivation but they had to take it up, as explained by Bertocci:

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<sup>59</sup> One of the serious deficiencies of the land rules in the Regulation and the British policy was that most of these rights were partially acknowledged and very few were clearly defined (Roy, D. 2004).

As Bernot's fascinating account of this process relates, the would-be notables among the Marma took unto themselves the financially arduous and politically demanding task of establishing permanently settled and plough cultivated Mouzas of which they became headmen, thereby gaining official power over all the inhabitants, including Bengalis of their new domain. Thus, in Bernot's words, '[t]hat which financial inducement had been unable to accomplish was brought to fruition by the promise of honorific compensation ...and 'the coveting of the position of Headmen was the best stimulant inciting the Marma to take up the plough' (Bertocci 1996:1337).

The result of the land rules was economic differentiation among and within the hill peoples' communities: a small group of landed and affluent members of a new social and economic class emerged among the Chakma and Marma, alongside a Bengali landed class who had fragile land usage rights without guarantee (GOB 1927: 3-11; Hutchinson 1909: 68-9). On the other hand, most common hill peoples among the Chakma, Marma and other groups who entirely depended on jhum cultivation remained the "human property" of the chiefs, as Lewin called the jhum revenue system. By the Regulation, the common people would not only pay jhum taxes to the chiefs, headmen or the government, but also had to provide free labour (i.e., begar) and meet customary obligations to the chiefs and headmen. Significantly, within the first decade of the twentieth century, jhum cultivators were faced with a severe shortage of jhum land as the availability of jhum lands and the cycle of jhum quickly declined from 10 to 5 and/or 3 years, owing partly to the process of forest conservation.<sup>60</sup> Between 1905 and 1907 the crisis of jhum land became so acute in the Maini Valley of the Chakma chief's circle that the district authority was forced to open up 337 acres of Maini Reserved Forests for jhum cultivation (Hutchinson 1909: 76-77; CHT 1973b: 30). As I discuss below, the extent to which this crisis of jhum land facilitated the subsequent importing of taungya in the forest plantation later needs further research.

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<sup>60</sup> In the writing of district gazetteers, Hutchinson blamed the increase of the population for the decline of jhum lands in the first decade of the twentieth century (Hutchinson 1909: 76-77).

Importantly, the Regulation of 1900 formalized and changed power relations into a modern administrative system, incorporating rural indigenous elites with limited power into a centralized system of state authority. On the one hand, all executive, judicial and financial powers in the District were vested in the hands of the Deputy Commissioner, who was given special powers by the Governor of Bengal. The DCs of the other districts of Bengal did not enjoy these powers. On the other hand, the chiefs and headmen were empowered to collect tax for the state in well-defined areas of their territory, irrespective of ethnic background; to adjudicate civil and petty criminal matters of their followers; and to dispense justice in traditional courts. Both chiefs and headmen would receive a fixed percentage of total revenue in income and lands for their service to the state. In addition, the chiefs were allowed to have a tax-free Mouza and 25 acres of the best arable lands, and a Headman could keep 5 acres of the best arable land in his/her Mouzas for his/her service as freehold with inheritable rights (Chowdhury 2002: Appendix 1; see also Mohsin 1997: 84). This so-called traditional power structure was actually based on invented traditions and customs and resulted in a coercive regime of control and disciplinary power. In the Mouzas, records were kept and the headmen monitored every family's dependents, possessions, and mode of cultivation. This system continued upward accordingly: the headmen were under the chiefs and the chiefs were in turn under the control of the Deputy Commissioner and also formed an Advisory Council of the Deputy Commissioner for the administration of their respective Circles. The hereditary rights of succession to the positions of chiefs and headmen were maintained in principle, but were always subject to the approval of the central government and the Deputy Commissioner. The Deputy Commissioner of the district not only represented the government and sovereign but in fact over time became the sovereign whose forms of government and rationalities were taxation, law, administration, and discipline. The individual

household remained at the core of the economy, and colonial governmental rationality never developed beyond providing agricultural loans to promote plough land cultivation and limit jhum cultivation. In fact, there was little concern for the care and welfare of the hill peoples as a population: the censuses undertaken from 1872 to 1921 suggest that peoples, castes, and races were prominent categories. The hill peoples were rarely counted as population, and the population statistics never accounted for the health and well-being of the hill peoples (Hunter 1973; GOB 1923).

In the end, although the Regulation of 1900 remained the key instrument of the government in the CHT, there were some significant changes in the Regulation and British policy in the early 1930s relating to control over land and the restrictions on non-hill peoples settling in the CHT. These laws were spelled out in rules 34, 51 and 52. As an amendment to the Regulation, rule 34 restricted possession of land by outsiders, with exceptions for industrial, residential and commercial use of land (including plantation). Under rule 52, no non-hill peoples could enter or reside in the CHT without obtaining permission of the DC; this was made more explicit under rule 51, according to which the DC had the power to expel anybody who was found to be undesirable (GOB 1935). These changes were meant not only to protect hill peoples' economic interests from Bengalis but also to isolate the hill peoples from political development in Bengal, as the CHT was already declared a "Backward Tract" in 1920. This declaration came in response to the dramatic increase of the hill peoples' population as well as to growing anti-colonial movements across British India, especially the so-called "terrorist" movements against the British in Bengal. In effect, the Backward Tract law put the CHT under direct control of the Governor-General-in-Council, the executive of the central government; the provincial government of Bengal had no ultimate authority in the matter of the administration of the CHT.

The 1935 Government of India Act, which provided British India with limited self rule, changed the “Backward Tract” status further to that of a “totally excluded area”. As a result, unlike the rest of the India, the hill peoples were not provided with the franchise or other political rights. Thus, they were to remain isolated from anti-colonialist nationalist movements, and in turn were without elected political representatives to decide their political preferences during the partition of British India. This relative political isolation continued until the Pakistan regime, as will be discussed in Chapter III.

#### **2.4 Forests Management: Taungya and the Birth of Participatory Forestry**

In this section I discuss the forest management in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), particularly the management of the Reserved Forests during British rule. I illustrate the improvement to the plantation practices and related forest villager system and taungya forestry in the Reserved Forests. In doing so, I show how taungya forestry worked in the management of the Reserved Forests and as a form of participatory social forestry that emerged concurrently with so-called scientific forestry. I further demonstrate that the management and control of the Reserved Forests depended on a scientific forestry regime involving a Working Plan and related strategies of functional territorialization. However, scientific forestry never achieved its control over the Reserved Forests but was fractured by accessibility, ecology and political economy.

Forest management in the CHT primarily involved timber extraction from the Reserved Forests as well as the improvement of timber resources through plantation in the Reserves while regulating the movement and transit of forest products from Unclassed State Forests (USF). Tables 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4 below summarize some of these aspects of forest management. Tables 2.2 and 2.3 illustrate the differences in revenue from forest products (i.e., timber, fuel wood,



bamboo, etc.) before and after the Forest Rule of 1871 as well as the differences in revenue between the Reserved Forests and USF in the 1920s and the 1940s. These tables show that the overall extraction of timber and forest revenue from the CHT decreased sharply after the introduction of forest conservation measures as one-fourth of CHT came under the category of Reserved Forests. Partly, this was also because the extraction of timber and other forest products from the Reserves were limited. Table 2.4 points to the fact that although most of the Reserved Forests came into existence by the early 1880s, the actual success of the territorialization, management, and absolutist control of vast and inaccessible Reserved Forests was severely limited until the 1920s, with the exception of the Sitapahar Reserved Forest where taungya forestry for the plantation of *teak* as an experiment began in 1871.<sup>61</sup> However, as the Reserves were brought under a Working Plan in the early 1920s, the revenue from the Reserved Forests increased to the point that they generated three times more revenue than the USFs in the 1940s largely because of increased extraction of timber and other forest products from the Reserves (Table 2.3).

An important event in the management of the Reserved Forests in the CHT before the 1920s was the creation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Forest Division in 1909. Until then, forests of the CHT had been under the control of Chittagong Forest Division, which besides the CHT, also had large forest areas in Chittagong and Cox's Bazar, and lacked adequate staff for supervision. As the CHT was made into a separate forest division, all the forest lands within the district were transferred to Chittagong Hill Tracts Forest Division. This extended the surveying, mapping, and plantation activities of the forest management beyond the Sitapahar Reserve into the Kassalong and Renikhyong Reserves; all these Reserved Forests were brought under working

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<sup>61</sup> It is relevant to note that plantation of teak through the taungya system in the CHT had gone through a number of experiments till the end of 19th century to match the local climate, ecology, and plantation techniques before it was standardized in the 1920s by the Cowan working plan.

plans in the 1920s and they continued to be so until the early years of Pakistan rule (Cowan 1923b; Hutchinson 1909:73-4). Located in far-flung inaccessible areas, the Sangu and Matamuhuri Reserved Forests had been completely neglected from management since they had been brought into reservation (Cowan 1923a; 1923c). They were neither demarcated and surveyed nor supervised by the British. Jurisdiction over the Sangu and Matamuhuri Reserved Forests had also changed several times between Chittagong, Chittagong Hill Tracts and Cox's Bazar divisions (FD 1970).

In the early 1920s, scientific forestry became the norm in the forest management practices of the Reserved Forests (namely, Kassalong, Renikhyong and Sitapahar Reserves); however, the control of scientific forestry over the Reserves was limited in scope and scale, a result of the fractured political ecology of the region. Shown in Tables 2.2 and 2.3 below, timber extraction and plantation were the major planks of the management during British rule. Other practices of scientific forestry, such as surveying and mapping of the Reserves, had not been conducted scientifically or professionally, with the exception of the local Forest Department's partial and incomplete survey of Kassalong, Renikhyong and Sitapahar for the Cowan working plan (see Cowan 1923b; FD 1973b). Although occasional fires due to the "carelessness" of employees of timber purchasers or villagers passing by the Reserves were reported, fire protection in the Reserved Forests was never undertaken nor became an issue. This was partly because fire protection was largely contingent upon controlling jhum cultivation in the USF lands in the vicinity of Reserved Forests, which was partially controlled by the localization of the hill peoples by the 1900s. Control of the grazing lands was also not an issue: the Reserved Forests were closed to grazing all year long, but the hill communities as jhum cultivators had few

cattle and the USF land had little restriction on grazing (e.g. FD 1930; 1932; 1933; 1934; 1935; 1940; 1951; and 1954).

Under the Cowan working plan (1923-43), Kassalong, Renikhyong, and Sitapahar Reserves were divided functionally (i.e., functional territorialization) into various circles such as timber circles, bamboo circles, and at times, timber and bamboo mixed circles. Owing to the lack of maps and scientific surveys, Kassalong and Renikhyong were partially worked out along the river in the accessible areas (Cowan 1923b). Plantation was carried out by clear felling for timber followed by the taungya mode of plantation; the hill peoples, namely jhum cultivators, were mobilized as forest villagers for taungya forestry. Annual Progress Reports of the Forest Department between 1920s and 1940s suggest that the Chittagong Hill Tracts Forest Division maintained 4 forest villages on average consisting of 145 households across the Reserved Forests (e.g. FD 1930; 1935; 1940; 1951; and 1954). Based on my fieldwork experience with forest villagers in Matamuhuri Reserve, which opened for forest villagers in 1952 shortly after the end of British rule, I believe that the villages were probably structured according to traditional custom under a forest headman and forest karbari(s), and that the villages were settled temporarily near the working circles. The benefits for forest villagers of this settlement and their participation in forest work seem to have included exemption from paying jhum tax to the hill chiefs, cash payment for labor other than plantation, and access to forest products for their own consumption. However, the cash payments were “not made until the third year from initial plantation” (FD 1933:14). Other practices of forest regeneration appear to have been used on an experimental basis at times. Teak dominated the choices of species to be planted along with local timber species of toon, jarul, gammar, chapalish, and others. At times, other exotic species such as mahogany (*swientenia macrophylla*) were tried but were unsuccessful (FD 1973b).

Table 2.2: Forest Extraction and Revenue Income from CHT before the Forest Rule of 1871

Years	Timber		Minor Forest Products			Revenue Income (Rs.)
	Amount of Timber (CFT)	Value of Timber (Rs.)	Value of Bamboo (Rs.)	Value of Cane (Rs.)	Value of Sun grass (Rs.)	Total
1865	6,919,060	50,209	55,881	9,101	31,238	179,573
1866	11,417,808	31,886	98,373	15,407	32,785	217,201
1867	5,399,867	34,551	64,961	9,791	31,450	173,589

Source: Lewin (1869:124-127; calculations mine).

Table 2.3: Forest Extraction and Revenue Income from CHT after the Forest Rule of 1871 and Forest Conservancy

Year	Type	Timber (Cft.)	Fuel (Cft.)	Number of Bamboo	Number of Cane	Total Revenue Income (Rs.)	Surplus Revenue Income (Rs.)
1923 -24	RF	21,490	92,126	7,147,296	535,960	47,504	67,665
	USF	287,243	75,043	2,824,996	382,792	94,379	
1942 -43	RF	397,679	111,054	8,911,014	426,836	313,481	141,217
	USF	277,871	169,239	3,778,770	297,888	81,005	
Yearly Average (1923-43)	RF	131,997	116,757	6,665,899	238,556	91,612	43,252
	USF	219,133	92,742	2,301,916	177,323	69,671	

Source: Forest Department (1973b: 43-44) (Minor forest products whose amount or quantity seems vague are excluded from the table).

Table 2.4: Plantation in Reserved Forests of the CHT, 1871-1943

Name of the Reserve	Total Areas (Acres)	Plantation Before Working Plan (1871-1922) (Acres)		Plantation During the Cowan Working Plan (1923-43)			Total
		1871-1922	1919-1922	Sanctioned Area (Acres)	Plantation (Acres)	% of Sanctioned Area	
Sitapahar	15,168	1,113	Nil	3,440	3,305	99	4,418
Renikhyong	137,600	Nil	55	Nil	1,528	Nil	1,583
Kassalong	434,240	Nil	190	13,640	4,022	29	4,212
Total	587,008	1,358		Nil	8,855	Nil	10,213

Source: FD (1973b:33-36), the calculation and presentation is mine (% in round figures).

Table 2.4 shows plantation by taungya in the Reserved Forests of the CHT from 1871 to 1943 and also illustrates the gap between the planned and the actual plantation outcomes. Several factors are said to have contributed to this gap: the shortage of jhum cultivators; low market prices for timber; difficult communication networks; and other factors. The 1931-32 Annual Progress Report of the Forest Department explained this gap primarily on economic grounds and suggested that these problems were interconnected. It argued that for working out the plantation target, an area must be clear-felled; clear-felled timber had to be carried from the forests for sale; and timber had to be sold to market. If the demand and price for timber was too low, the plantation work would become economically unviable (FD 1933). This explanation exposes the rational economic thinking of the Forest Department but appears silent on sociological causes.

Writings and correspondence concerning the CHT by British administrators suggests there was much resistance from the hill peoples to work for the government and Forest Department. However, what was left out of the discussion was that there was also high demand from every government office for free and compulsory labor from the hill peoples. I would argue that there were two reasons why the hill peoples resisted working for the Forest Department. First, the workload and discipline were highly demanding as there were at least fifty specific tasks involved in the plantation through taungya forestry over a five year period. Second, the cultural and linguistic gaps that existed between Bengali foresters and hill people jhum cultivators made the work coercive and difficult, because communication failure often resulted in corporal punishment.

After the conclusion of the Cowan plan, the plantation work in Kassalong, Renikhyong, and Sitapahar Reserves continued from 1943-1952 under a preliminary working plan with a few modifications. However, in 1939, there was a significant change in the management of USF as a new policy of conservation in USF was introduced through the amendment of rule 41 of the Regulation 1900. This rule 41 empowered the Deputy Commissioner of the CHT to regulate and control jhum cultivation and the migration of jhum cultivators from one Mouza to another, and also included provisions for a Mouza Reserve under headmen. This origin of the Mouza Reserve is now contested as an indigenous tradition by an indigenous movement of the hill peoples for the recognition of indigenous identity and customary rights, and will be discussed further in Chapter VI.

## 2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown that the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) inhabited by many ethnic communities for centuries had been a frontier region to the British Empire in British India until the 1860s, when the British separated it from the Chittagong plains and created a district under exceptional administration. However, soon after the annexation of the CHT into the British Empire, almost the entire CHT was designated as a forest land. This making of forest was not only due to material interests in timber and revenue; it was also part of the wider discourse and practice of sovereign rights over uncultivable waste land, timber trees, and jungle. In turn, by the 1880s, one fourth of the CHT was made Reserved Forests and the remaining areas were designated as Unclassed State Forests (USF), recognizing hill peoples' access and common rights of control over forests and land resources. The hill peoples' rights to forests were solely for items for everyday consumption or household needs from USF production, and they had absolutely no rights in the Reserved Forests.

One consequence of the British land and forest policy was remaking the CHT into a feudal like territory; in theory if not in practice, all land and forests belonged to the state. The hill chiefs turned into salaried agents or service holders for the state, and their fellow "kinsmen" cultivating jhum became property of the chiefs. Concurrently, hill peoples' agrarian relations changed so much that although jhum cultivation remained the dominant form of economic activity, plough rent accounted for three-quarters of the district revenue income in the 1920s (GOB 1923: 9), which created class and status differentiation within and between the ethnic communities.

Most importantly, British rule also initiated ecological changes in the CHT. The USFs controlled by the Deputy Commissioner were highly exploited to meet the timber demands of

Chittagong mainly through auction sales and permits purchased by Bengali tradesmen. The sheer amount of timber and forest production suggests a different story of deforestation in the CHT than the taken-for-granted jhum cultivation. The Forest Department directly managed the Reserved Forests and controlled the movement of all forest products, including private homestead forests that were also subject to the control of the Deputy Commissioner and Forest Department as a rule. While timber extraction and plantation were dominant activities, forest management within the Reserved Forests was very much limited to the Sitapahar, Kassalong and Renikhyong Reserves. Although it was also limited in scale and scope based on taungya forestry, the plantation regime represents the earliest form of participatory forestry, incorporating hill peoples' communities in the management of the Reserves.

In sum, British rule shaped state institutions, social relations, and most importantly, social-ecological relations in the CHT. Apart from the Reserved Forests, the Deputy Commissioner held authority for all land in the USFs, and had exclusive powers to regulate, grant, and cancel all land settlements, whether they be industrial, commercial (e.g., market place) or agricultural (jhum or plough lands). The policies pursued by the colonial government in the CHT— including administrative exceptionalism, political isolation and protectionism —were mainly guided by British economic interests. As a consequence of these policies, hill peoples were marginalized and lost control of their land and forests.



## CHAPTER III

### The Remaking of Political Forests: Industrialization, Displacement and Resettlement

It is doubtful if tribesmen can be converted overnight into industrial labourers. In theory one could envisage a 'resettlement' of the displaced Chakma; that is keeping them to agriculture after transferring them to some other parts of the Hills. . . . [I]n all likelihood, this may prove difficult. But the economic and technical considerations which motivated the expansion of such industrial projects all over the world, usually lead to an underestimation of the hardship of affected people, i.e. the tribesmen in this particular case. [...] If the authorities were to fail in re-integrating the displaced tribesmen into the emerging industry or into other areas of agriculture the risk would be that these (sic) might either starve, or be thrown out on the road like new 'refugee' of some sort.

— Bessaignet (1958).

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines industrial development in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), the subsequent displacement and resettlement programs affecting the hill peoples, and the ways in which industrialization, displacement and resettlement remade political forests and economy in CHT during the Pakistan period (1947 to 1971). The chapter deals with the region of CHT, focusing on displacement, dispossession and resettlement of the hill peoples, particularly the Chakma. I provide a detailed account of resettlement discourses, policies and practices as they took shape and shaped the hill peoples' cultural geographies, economies, and relations of power in the 1960s. I also examine the birth of a new participatory forestry regime for the management of Unclassed State Forests (USF) that emerged alongside taungya forestry in the Reserved Forests. In turn, this chapter illustrates both the continuity and discontinuity of forest management in CHT with preceding institutional practices during British rule. It further explains the political ecology and background of the subsequent insurgency war and the strategies of

political and territorial control of forests that became hegemonic later during the period of Bangladesh rule in CHT.

To understand the background and consequences of industrialization in CHT, it is important to note that CHT became part of East Pakistan (a.k.a. East Bengal, and later, Bangladesh) within the state of Pakistan in 1947, at the time of the partition of British India.<sup>62</sup> The birth of Pakistan marked a new kind of “imagined community” in South Asia and also an ontological break from the British “imperial order of things”. The new order (of men, women and things) was associated with a discourse of “modernization” and “development”, more specifically industrial development; this development became synonymous with nationalism, national integration, and state control of economic activities (Myrdal 1968).<sup>63</sup> Driven by these discourses of modernization and development, industrialization in Pakistan including CHT became the principal economic strategy of the state in the 1950s in order to address the economic backwardness of Pakistan.<sup>64</sup> In part, this industrialization process was also promoted by

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<sup>62</sup>The position of the Chittagong Hill Tracts had been the subject of a fierce debate between the national elites of India and Pakistan, but the region was awarded to Pakistan (Mansergh 1983: 691-92, 737-740). There were protests in CHT against Pakistan which were met with a military crackdown at the inception of Pakistani rule (Ali 1993; Chakma, S., 1393. B.E. [1985-1986]).

<sup>63</sup> This is in fact related to the end of World War II and was marked by significant discursive (e.g., nations, development, third world, population, etc.) and non-discursive (e.g., spatial organization, state, administration, laws, etc.) shifts across the globe by the forces of national imaginations (Anderson 1991). National imaginations and international relations established nation-states as the paradigm of society for political liberation and economic development to which newly created states felt obliged to conform (Hobsbawm 1991; Hatcher 1975 Giddens 1981). These shifts also produced a new order of things and economy, irrespective of states’ political ideologies of socialism or capitalism. Pakistan was not an exception.

<sup>64</sup> The development and industrialization policies of Pakistan favored West Pakistan according to the interest of its Punjabi military and salaried classes who governed the country as an alliance of a civil-military dictatorship from 1958 to 1971. Another explanation for this uneven development is that the elite and ethnic groups of West Pakistan considered themselves the ‘core’ of the Muslim nation of Pakistan; hence, East Bengal, including CHT, was marginalized (Mohsin 1997).

Pakistani elites' desire for development and their feeling of "deprivation" of resources following the partition of the British India.<sup>65</sup>

The most detrimental effect of industrialization in CHT was the mass displacement of the hill peoples, resulting from the construction of a hydro-electric power plant. In particular, the twin forces of industrialization and mass displacement significantly changed the discourses and practices of political forests, and forest management, in CHT. Changes in the management of Unclassed State Forests (USF) were more significant than those of Reserved Forests; however, the Reserves were also remade in relation to capital, industry and the state's need for timber resources as well as in relation to knowledge and scientific control of these phenomena. The changes in USF were brought about in part by the Kaptai Hydroelectric Plant, and by its associated resettlement policies and discourses. The Kaptai Hydroelectric Plant (KHP) was completed in 1961, and a reservoir was built which created a large lake and, in turn, displaced tens of thousands of hill peoples. The displacement resulted in a number of resettlement projects by the Revenue Department but a large number of hill peoples, namely jhum cultivating families, were not considered for resettlement and had to remain displaced. At the same time, the Forest Department's resettlement program combined forest plantation with a new form of participatory forestry in order to control jhum cultivation; in doing so the program took over a number of Mouzas (i.e., revenue units as collections of villages in USF) entirely, further expanding the territorial control of the Forest Department in the USF.

In what follows, I examine these changes in political forests. I divide the chapter into four main sections representing the themes of this chapter. I begin by examining discourses of

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<sup>65</sup> Pakistan elites' desire for development and feeling of deprivation were rooted in the facts of the Partition, namely that India inherited most of the area, industrial cities, and forests of British India, whereas Pakistan (encompassing regions of Sindh, North West Frontier, and West Punjab, which were generally and constitutionally named as West Pakistan) and East Bengal were mostly rural agrarian economies, lacking both "modern" industries and large forest areas, except for a few in East Bengal and West Punjab (GOP 1957).

industrialization, industrial development, and changes in the management of Reserved Forests in CHT. Second, I trace the displacement processes and the resettlement policies, processes and practices that led to the marginalization of the hill peoples. Third, I examine the birth of a new form of participatory forestry for the management of USF that emerged as part of the resettlement of the hill peoples; this introduced a new strategy of political and territorial control of forest resources and livelihood. Finally, in the conclusion, I provide a critical review of the industrialization, displacement and resettlement discourses as well as their spatial and cultural effects on hill peoples' groups and economy. I also point to the specific effects of resettlements and other changes on the hill peoples' relations to land, forests, and power.

### **3.2 Industrialization in CHT: Remaking the Reserved Forests**

Beyond the Pakistani elites' desire for development and wealth, industrialization in CHT was directly related to the natural resources of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), namely forests and water. This happened in part because of the uneven distribution and quality of forests among the provinces of Pakistan. Indeed, with the partition of British-India in 1947, there emerged an acute crisis of timber in Pakistan; only East Pakistan (present day Bangladesh) had considerable forest areas, mainly in the CHT and Sundarbans. This uneven distribution of forests led to the articulation of distinctly different forest policies for East and West Pakistan ("two economies" forest policy) and industrialization of forest in CHT.

The "two economies forest policy" originated in 1949 at a forestry conference in Pakistan, and clearly informed the forest policies of 1956 and of 1966 as well as long term economic development plans (i.e., Five Year Plans). Briefly, the general discourse and policy of forest management for West Pakistan was in favor of conservation through 'non-territorial'

forest plantation programs along canals, roads, railways, and wetlands. In contrast, the discourse and forest policy for East Pakistan was timber extraction to meet the industrial and commercial demands of Pakistan, as well as the expansion of territorial control over forest areas for that purpose. More specifically, Reserved Forests of the Chittagong Hill Tracts were considered the only potential “untapped” resources for Pakistan (GOP 1957).

Thus, by the mid 1960s, there were at least nine large-scale industries and seventeen small industrial units in CHT directly related to the Reserved Forests, including the Kaptai Hydroelectric plant (Ishaq 1971: 156-9). Besides the Kaptai Hydroelectric Plant (hereafter, power plant), Karnaphuli Paper Mill (KPM) was the largest industry in Pakistan. The other large scale industries included saw mills, plywood industries, rayon industries, and cigarette and match factories (Ishaq 1971: 156-7). The KPM was completed in October 1953 by the state agency with a World Bank loan of Rs. (Pakistani Rupee) 4.20 million, and later it was transferred to a West Pakistani private enterprise, M/S Dawood Industries Ltd. The construction of the power plant, the most important industrial establishment in CHT and the very first of its kind in East Pakistan, began in 1954 with financial and technical assistance from the United States and was completed in 1961.

The power plant was built on the Karnaphuli River at Kaptai in the center of CHT. The choice of the site was in part a historical legacy of the British. Partly, this also happened because of the unique geology of CHT. Excluding the region of CHT, the rest of East Pakistan (Bangladesh) is comprised of flood plains river country that lacks the gradient necessary for a hydro-electric project (Ali 1993:178; Chakma, G. 1991).<sup>66</sup> The power plant created a reservoir,

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<sup>66</sup> The idea for a hydroelectric power plant in CHT was floated in 1906 and a proposal was made in 1946 after several studies because the rivers in CHT are the only ones of the then East Bengal that had the potential (Chakma, H. et al. 1995:15-7; Ali 1993:178).

which at its maximum capacity stands at a level of 108 ft R.L., and also a lake of considerable extent (about 256 square miles) (see Photo 3.1 and 3.2 below). The plant was planned to control floods in Chittagong, downstream on the Karnaphuli River. It was also envisioned to provide a hydroelectric capacity of 12000 KW for East Pakistan, which was thought to be enough power to supply industries and irrigation as well as over 18 million people in the central, eastern and southern districts of East Pakistan. Finally, and very importantly, the power plant was also designed to improve navigating on the waterway in the inaccessible parts of Kassalong and Renikhyong Reserved Forests in order to facilitate the extraction of timber (Chakma, G. 1991:25-26; FD 1960; Chakma, H. et al. 1995: 18; Sopher 1963:347). However, most of these projected benefits were never achieved (Bertocci 1996:141; Ahmed 1976).

One aspect of industrialization was a change in the management of Reserved Forests in CHT, mainly in Kassalong, Renikhyong and Sitapahar Reserves. The discourse and practices of the management of Reserved Forests continued to focus on timber extraction, and were followed by an artificial regeneration of industrial species (such as teak, garjan, and gammer) through the work of forest villagers and the taungya system of plantation. What changed in the management of Kassalong, Renikhyong and Sitapahar Reserves was the scale and scope of timber extraction, plantation and so-called “scientific management.” All these Reserves were surveyed and mapped through aerial photography for knowledge of the forests, their qualities, spatial distribution, accessibility, and for the practice and control of “scientific management”. In turn, the forests were remade as sites of regulation and accumulation in relation to capital, industry, and demands for timber. For example, KPM was given the right for 99 years to extract 100,000 thousand tons of air dry bamboo per year as its raw material from the Reserved Forests of CHT, namely Kassalong and Renikhyong Reserves (see Ishaq 1971: 156-9; FD 1960). Moreover, in 1959, a

semi-government corporation called Forest Industries Development Corporation (FIDC) was established and had a state monopoly for timber extraction and marketing in East Pakistan (Bangladesh). FIDC took over timber extraction in the Chittagong Hill Tracts Division from the Forest Department, which had already introduced mechanical timber extraction in the accessible part of Kassalong Reserved Forests (with financial and technical aid from the US) in addition to regular timber extraction using manual labor and elephants.<sup>67</sup> When the power plant project was completed in 1961, FIDC expanded its mechanical timber extraction projects further again with financial and technical aid from the USA and Canada (Forestal 1966a). FIDC and KPM separately built vast roads and communication networks within these Reserved Forests. These networks also connected to Chittagong through roads from Rangamati, passing through Kaptai industrial estates. The Reserved Forests to the south of CHT (that is, Sangu and Matamuhuri Reserves) continued to remain under Chittagong and Cox's Bazar Forest Divisions respectively, and without any working plan up until 1967.<sup>68</sup> Meanwhile, although the Matamuhuri Reserved Forest was brought under formal forest management in 1952, its management was limited to timber extraction and associated plantation of industrial species through participatory taungya forestry in the most accessible parts of the Reserve. Interestingly, this strategy for the management of the Matamuhuri Reserved Forest continued even when the Reserve came under the working plan in 1967 (see Chapter V).

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<sup>67</sup>In fact, the Forest Department had intermittently tried mechanical extraction since 1932.

<sup>68</sup> In 1967, a working plan for Sangu and Matamuhuri Reserves was made for a period of 20 years effective immediately based on an aerial survey and inventory of the reserves carried out from 1958 to 1962 with financial and technical support from the US. M/S Hunting Aero Survey Ltd conducted a survey under the scheme "Timber Extraction by Mechanical Means from the Chittagong Hill Tracts" which included "Inventory project of Sangu-Matamuhuri Reserved Forests" under the First Five Year Plan and continued under the Second Five Year Plan. Still, given its remoteness and inaccessibility, the Sangu Reserve remained virtually untouched and only a forest guard was posted to oversee the reserve (FD 1970).

The national context and political ecology leading to industrialization in CHT in the 1960s offers an understanding of the nature of industrialization in East Pakistan in relation to rural areas in general and indigenous ethnic groups in particular. Unlike in other parts of Pakistan, industrialization in CHT did not aim to transform the hill peoples as laboring subjects for industries. There was a clear disjuncture between industrialization, capitalist accumulation, and transformation of the rural economy in CHT. Industrialization in CHT was uneven and produced a “cultural division of labor” (Hatcher 1975). The hill peoples were not even considered worthy of employment in the industries because they were considered to be “not yet fitted psychologically or technically to fill up the ranks of industrial labor” mobilized in the district (Bessaignet 1958: 61). Unskilled workers came from the other parts of East Pakistan, while skilled workers came from all over Pakistan and even foreign countries. In all, industrialization in CHT opened up economic opportunities and employment for Bengalis which brought almost 100,000 new Bengali plainsmen into CHT for settlement.<sup>69</sup> A typical example of this is the KPM. Out of its labor force of 3290 persons, KPM employed only 14 hill people. The picture of employment of hill people was almost the same in all other industrial projects of the district (Bessaignet 1958:61; also Ishaq 1971:139). Thus, it was not industrialization *per se* but its effects, i.e. the displacement and subsequent resettlement of hill peoples that brought changes both in the life and the traditional agrarian economy of the hill peoples. I will now turn attention to this topic.

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<sup>69</sup> As it stood, in 1956 there were almost 30,000 unskilled labourers employed by nascent industrial establishments in CHT at the expense of the dispossession of the hill peoples.



### **3.3 Displacement, Dispossession and Resettlement**

In this section I consider the cultural geographies of displacement, dispossession and resettlement of the hill peoples. This will illustrate the uneven effect of industrialization on the hill peoples' groups and economy, the resettlement policies, and the cultural logic of the hill peoples' choice for resettlement. I have divided this section into two segments: in the first, I discuss the nature and scope of displacement and dispossession; in the second, I examine the resettlement discourse, policies and practices.

#### **3.3.1 Displacement and Dispossession**

The industrial displacement of hill peoples began with the Karnaphuli Paper Mills (KPM) in the vicinity of Kaptai in 1953, a future industrial zone.<sup>70</sup> However, the displacement caused by KPM did not raise much concern, as mass displacement of hill peoples was already looming large with the future construction of the power plant. In fact, there was a great deal of anxiety among the hill peoples, and uncertainty among the authorities and experts, on the extent to which the power plant's dam and reservoir (hereafter, Kaptai dam) would affect people and land in the area. In early 1954, an administrative inquiry committee was formed by the government to find out the effect of the power plant on administration and the district's headquarters, Rangamati. The inquiry revealed that despite certainty about the inundation of a large area by the power plant project, the power plant project authorities and administrative officials in the district were not proactive in preparing for the consequences. No cartographic air survey was carried out for the purpose of determining the would-be submerged areas; the project authorities even considered it

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<sup>70</sup> The KPM displaced about one thousand hill peoples, mainly belonging to the Marma community.

“an extremely complicated and expensive affair” and not “necessary.” The inquiry committee explained:

For the preparation of the maps which we required the Irrigation Engineers made use of the existing Survey of Pakistan maps which were really copies of the old Survey of India maps showing 5 feet and 10 feet contours. These were enlarged and lines were drawn roughly connecting the contours corresponding to 108 ft. R.L. and all area below R.L. 108 ft. thus obtained was colour washed. It is to be expected that the Survey of India and Survey of Pakistan maps are reasonably and substantially accurate and should serve the purpose. But a map drawn to a scale of one inch to a mile, which means a concentration to 1/ 63000 can hardly disclose a depression on the ground unless it were bigger than a furlong. Small depression and inlets below this size will be hardly perceptible and cannot be plotted and show in a map of such size. [...] We also discovered some serious defect in these maps, which must be attributed to faulty drawing of contours of the water spread area on the maps... [We were] surprised to find that... [t]he maps given to us were...not quite accurate (GOEP 1957: 2).

Therefore, there was no concrete estimation of would-be displaced persons. The inquiry committee was informed that the Kaptai dam would displace as many as 50,000 hill peoples, mostly Chakma, and a thousand Bengalis (GOEP, 1957:1). However, as the construction of the power plant progressed, estimates differed as to the number of people, cultivable farm lands (including jhum) and areas of Reserved Forests that would be affected. One of the earliest and most important studies of the power plant project, displacement and resettlement in CHT was David Sopher's (1963), conducted between 1960 and 1961, just prior to the completion of the power plant. Sopher, an American geographer, pieced together in late 1950s Revenue Department's information about the mass displacement of hill peoples; according to him, the most conservative estimates suggested about 80,000 people would have to be moved, and 52,000 acres of plough land would be submerged. Of the estimated 80,000 who would be displaced, 45,500 were mainly plough cultivators and the other 34, 500 were mostly jhum cultivators. Ninety percent of the plough cultivators were hill peoples while the rest were Bengalis. Sopher also noted that the actual number of plough cultivators would be much higher than estimated if

the number of hill peoples indirectly connected with plough cultivators were included (Sopher 1963:347-8). For the Chakma, the power plant project would eliminate most of the plough land in the middle valleys of the Karnaphuli River and the lower valleys of the Chengri, Kassalong, and Maini rivers, as well as land in many other smaller areas (Sopher 1963:347).

Nonetheless, when the power plant started its operation in January 1962, it resulted in far more detrimental consequences for the ecology, economy and people of the CHT than had been planned, estimated, and anticipated (Chakma, H. et al. 1995; Chakma, G. 1991). The Kaptai dam entirely changed the physical terrain and ecology to the north and middle of CHT. The dam formed several large bays joined together by small bays surrounding Rangamati, the only town and district headquarters of CHT, as if it were an island in the middle of the district, while placing the Chakma chief's residence under water (see Photo3.2). In particular, to the north there formed two large bays in the Chengri River and in the northeast there were bays at Subholong and at Kattoli occupying the southern half of Kassalong Reserve. Along the Renikhyong River, the Kaptai dam also formed a small bay and beside Rangamati was a very large bay (EPADC n.d.:3; see and compare Appendix A: Maps 2, 6 and 7).

As to the loss of economy, property and displacement, it is now widely held that the Kaptai dam submerged 256 sq. m. affecting 125 Mouzas, and uprooted 100,000 people of 18,000 families (that was one-fourth of the total population of the district according to the 1961 census). This included 54,000 acres of plough land which was 40 percent of the plough land of the district; 10.5 sq. m. of Reserved Forests; and thousands of acres of USF lands in the valleys of the Karnaphuli River and all its tributaries to the north and north-east (EPADC n.d.:2; see also Ishaq 1971; Ali 1993:179).<sup>71</sup> A vocational survey conducted prior to the completion of the power

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<sup>71</sup> Despite the loss of thousands of acres of the Reserved Forests to the power plant project, the total area of Reserved Forests in CHT remained almost unchanged as the Forest Department brought new areas into reservation.

plant listed 12,428 would-be affected families, of whom 7,143 (58%) were plough cultivators; 4,000 (32%) were jhum cultivators; 428 (3%) were wood cutters, day labourers, or others who were not dependent on land for earnings; and 857 (7%) were shopkeepers and businessmen (GOP 1963:15-16). In all, the estimated net loss of agricultural produce per year was worth of Rs. 20 million (EPADC n.d.:2).

Located in the centre and northern part of CHT on the bank of the Karnaphuli River and its tributaries to the north and north-east, the hardest hit by the Kaptai dam was the Chakma chief's circle. The Chakma circle, corresponding approximately to the Chakma' settlements, was the largest circle in CHT. The Chakma in general, the largest community of CHT, were considered to be relatively economically advanced compared to the other groups in CHT and became a well-settled peasant community by the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There were also farmers and landlords comprised of traditional elites among the Chakma (Jahangir 1979). According to Sopher's estimate, the Chakma represented 90 percent of the displaced hill peoples and as much as 90 percent of the total displaced plough cultivators; the others were Marma and Tangchangya (Sopher 1963:347-8). If the 1961 population census and estimate of 100,000 affected individuals are reliable, then more than half of the Chakma population was displaced. To put it differently, out of a total of 125 Mouzas affected, more than 100 Mouzas were under the Chakma chief, and the rest belonged to the Mong chief (GOP 1963; also Ishaq 1971).

The displacement process began in early 1960 before the monsoon rains and just a year before the completion of the power plant. The authorities advised people of the reservoir area by announcing through loudspeakers that they should register their choices of preferred resettlement locations individually or as a collective, and move to them (Sopher 1963; Chakma, H. et al. 1995). It is evident that although the government had a resettlement plan, the process of

displacement was completely ill-considered and under-communicated. Although there was a Rs. 2.5 million budget allocation for evacuation and movement of population under the rehabilitation scheme (GOP 1963; Rajput 1965), the displacement process was abrupt and led to a skirmish for choices among individual families, villages or Mouzas, especially for the Chakma. Sopher observes that the Chakma had four options: “(1) to move to higher ground within their own [Mouza] or one nearby or (2) to move away from the vicinity of the reservoir to (a) the Kassalong Rehabilitation Areas, (b) unreclaimed flat land in the upper Chengri and Myani Valleys, or (c) some other parts of the district.” Mouzas’ headmen could consult inventories of lands and areas, but only a few village leaders were able to get firsthand information of some of these areas. “Villagers’ true preferences may have been somewhat modified to conform with the majority choices as a result of pressure from headmen or other influential persons” (Sopher 1963:349). Local Bengali officials also exercised considerable pressure and induced choices upon the Chakma in certain directions.

In some villages, existing factions took opposing positions. A headman might advocate staying in the area on high ground in order to “wait and see,” expecting thereby to retain his position and prestige as [a] headman and his portion of the jhum fee. Someone else of substance might urge a unanimous decision to move to an area such as Kasalong, where he could seek new opportunities for formal recognition as a popular representative. A few persons of this kind were able to solicit and exploit government favors, especially because the established headmen have often been regarded by officials as “too conservative” and “uncooperative.” The influence of the chief, though indirectly expressed and varying in effectiveness with the closeness of his kinship ties to the [Mouza] population, tended to reinforce the recommendations of the headman (Sopher 1963:350).

In some other cases, Chakma headmen or other prominent villagers “sifted opinions and made recommendations in the course of visits” to prospective resettlement areas by individuals or small groups. The matter was then further considered within the respective family circles (Sopher, 1963:350).



Photo 3.1: View of the Karnaphuli River at the Chandraghona ferri crossing (Rangamati District) downstream from the Kaptai Dam.



Photo 3.2: View of Rangamati Deputy Commissioner's residential bungalow, Rangamati, on the shore of Kaptai Lake. Near the distant shore, there used to be a Chakma Chief's palace, until it was submerged under the lake.

Narratives of displacement compiled by Horikishore Chakma et al. (1995) suggest that the hill peoples' responses to the displacement process were dawdling and became chaotic as the reservoir regime began to inundate the areas permanently in a manner that had been unimaginable. Most of the hill people could not think of how the "flows of a river could be halted with a dam." Some elderly individuals even thought that "the government was doing that work to levy taxes. They were rather worried about paying taxes as they did not have to pay such taxes then." Many others thought "the dam would certainly collapse. Why move elsewhere?" (Chakma, H. et al. 1995: 28-30). Gyan Bikas Chakma's recounted memory represents the typical choice and action of the displacement process:

We, who were nearer the dam site, were hit first. Our house was about 15 km upstream from the dam point. The flood water engulfed our land and homestead before we could realize exactly what was happening. It was chaos. As the flood water surged, people- men and women -rushed to the top of the nearby hills with whatever belongings they could carry on their heads. They began to clear jungles to create shelters. People labored like hell, day and night. Many even lived under trees. But soon it became clear to them that all land and habitations had permanently gone under the water (Chakma, H. et al. 1995: 22).

He also remembered some of the worst parts of the displacement:

It's all right that human beings see their own good first. But [they] become simply selfish then... Few bothered about others at that time. Everyone concerned about his own survival, trying to save own belonging (Chakma, H. et al. 1995:22).

There was spread of diseases such as influenza and tuberculosis, and almost every family had at least one member who became ill. However, for some families, illness met with a tragic death of the family members as they fought between individual and collective choices to move away or not during the displacement:

Shankhamala Chakma, (60), of Keretkaba village in Rangamati Thana said her late husband believed that the dam and resulting lake would not last long...if they moved even for a few months the schooling of the children would be disrupted... 'So, we did

not leave the village, rather went up [to] a nearby hill. But as a matter of misfortune, we know our son who was the main reason we stayed, died later after a long illness. His father also died of TB (tuberculosis). But the water has never gone down again' (Chakma, H. et al. 1995:29).

Many suffered such traumatic experiences during the displacement. Shilbrata Tanchangya is one of them; a frail sad figure, who told of his suffering:

I still hear the booming sounds of the dam gate closing that continued throughout the whole night. By the morning the water had reached our door steps. The whole area had turned into a sea. We set free cows and goats, hens and ducks, and then begun rush with affected people to take their rice, paddy, furniture and whatever else possible to nearby hills. Then many people started clearing jungles on the hill to build shelters. Though every possible belonging was taken to the hilltop, many still went to their houses to spend the night. But many of them had to rush out of their houses at dead night when the swelling water touches them while they slept. We just helplessly watched our beloved homes going under the water. This dam turned us into paupers (Chakma, H. et al., 1995:20).

This story of Shilbrata Tanchangya resonates with the experiences of many Chakma peasants' and farmers' families. Importantly, it goes beyond common narratives of displaced families or communities to point to livestock and poultry, helping to imagine what happened to them, otherwise rarely mentioned in documents or writing on CHT, except in Sopher's account. Sopher (1963) noted with an anthropological insight: "A noteworthy feature of Kassalong settlement was the scarcity of pigs, partly because Bengali boatmen who had transported many of the [displaced] Chakma migrants had refused to allow their pigs on board" (Sopher 1963: 359-360).

In sum, the Kaptai dam completely inundated the material conditions of the rural peasant economy in the north of CHT (that is, its cultivatable and grazing lands) and forced rural hill peoples to abandon their cultural economy. The processes of displacement have led many hill people to believe that the displacement "was a great conspiracy" against the hill peoples (Chakma, H. et al. 1995: 22). "Conspiracy" is certainly an ideological interpretation of the



events. Activist academics have called the displacement an “ethnocide” or “destruction of culture” (Schendel et al. 2000). However, for state authorities, the displacement and loss of cultivable lands represented different problems; these were problems of planning the relocation and resettlement of the hill peoples on the one hand, and controlling jhum cultivation on the other.

### 3.1.2 Resettlement Policies and Practices

The resettlement planning had begun before the start of industrialization in CHT. Considering the anticipated spatial and cultural effects of the displacement on the Chakma chief’s circle, the principal policies for the resettlement were: first of all, maintaining the traditional territorial administration of the Chakma circle; and secondly, compensating and resettling displaced plough cultivators as a priority (GOP 1963). According to this policy, the Revenue Department (of the civil administration in CHT) undertook initiatives to find land for resettlement as early as 1952. However, the biggest problem facing authorities was said to be the acute shortage of land for resettlement in the district because of the Forest Department’s unwillingness to de-reserve any part of the Reserved Forests. It is important to bear in mind here that one fourth of CHT was still Reserved Forests; amongst the Reserved Forests, Barkal, Kassalong, Renikhyong, Sitapahar Reserves were located to the north and northeast of CHT and of the Karnaphuli River and its tributaries, and in most part around the Chakma chief’s circle (see Appendix A: Map 3). The Forest Department also had overlapping jurisdiction over USF or lands in Mouzas, and was in competition and a conflict of interest with the civil administration in managing the lands and people. Therefore, land searches for resettlement by the Deputy Commissioner of CHT in 1952 could only come up with as many as 22,000 acres of plough lands and 4,000 acres of jhum land in CHT which could be resettled with as many as 6,000 families, providing only 5 acres of land

for a family. Most of the lands were within the Chakma circle; however, many of them were in small parcels inadequate for community settlement (GOEP 1957; GOP 1963). Thus, the Deputy Commissioner argued for the liberal de-reservation of the Reserved Forests, which the Forest Department resolutely opposed, emphasizing the “acute shortage of forests, timber and other forest produces in Pakistan” (GOEP 1957:9). As an alternative, the Forest Department proposed the resettlement of hill peoples in the southern part of CHT in Bohmong circle.<sup>72</sup> The Conservator of Forest even went on to suggest that “If this adversely effects the revenue of the Chakma chief it will automatically enhance the revenue of the Bohmong chief and some sort of adjustment between them can be effected” (GOEP 1957:10).

The plans were discussed in a meeting of the inquiry committee in 1954, and the committee expressed reservations about the Forest Department’s plan. The inquiry committee suggested that resettlement should be given to the displaced Chakma within the Chakma circle as a priority and only those who could not be so resettled should be resettled in other areas within the district; in this case, the latter were displaced Bengalis or other groups such as the Marma and Tanchaynga. The inquiry committee also emphasized the need to maintain “the unity and culture” of the Chakma, and for that matter, the Chakma chief’s circle (GOEP 1957). It appears that certain compromises between the Revenue and Forest Departments were achieved, and the Forest Department de-reserved 26,026 acres of Kassalong Reserve for resettlement programs.

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<sup>72</sup> In more technical detail the Forest Department proposed as many as 2,749 acres of plough land and 46,500 acres of upland for the resettlement of 2,669 displaced families. The plan suggested that no less than 25 families would form a group, with displaced families divided into three categories i) those who depended entirely on jhum; ii) those who depended partly on jhum and wet rice cultivation; and iii) those who entirely depended on wet rice cultivation. Accordingly, the first group in each family would be offered 60 acres of uplands for jhum, 6 acres in a year for a 10 year cycle. The second group in each family would be given 2.5 acres of plough land and 25 acres of hilly lands for jhum; and for the third group, each family would be given 4 acres of plough land (GOEP 1957, Appendix, pp. 13-21).

The Revenue Department began its resettlement programs under the rehabilitation and compensation scheme in early 1959 and continued until 1965, involving a total expenditure of Rs. 19.6 million. However, much of the amount was spent for physical construction of roads, government offices and residential quarters, markets, religious centres, schools and other facilities (Rajput 1965: 27).

As far as the resettlement was concerned, the scheme was influenced by ethnicity and the class positions of the displaced while providing displaced families compensation for lands, allotting them non-submerged land for cultivation and homesteads, and assisting them to bring their land into production (GOP 1963; Rajput 1965). Sopher (1963) observes that up to 1961, a total of 4,938 families including Bengalis were resettled with 24,801 acres of land. Without exception, the Marma and Tangchangya who moved from the lake area went to the Matamuhuri valleys closer to the border of Chittagong district in the Bohmong Circle. Of the hill peoples, only 2300 Chakma displaced families (of plough cultivators) were given resettlement land in the Kassalong tracts, the biggest resettlement area with 10,000 acres of plough land made out of the de-reserved part of Kassalong Reserve. The land area of the Kassalong tracts was mechanically divided into blocks of varying width running from the river bank to accommodate the hill peoples of one Mouza. There were 570 Bengali displaced families who also received settlement within Kassalong; they comprised one-sixth of the households relocated in the area, to the dismay of many Chakma. These Bengalis were settled on the best Kassalong land near the bazaar and administrative headquarters of Marishaya that was 2000 acres of level and cleared land, almost ready for ploughing. Other Bengali cultivators who lost land to the Kaptai dam also received special inducement to resettle in areas next to the costal lowlands of Cox's Bazar district, such as the vicinity of Sialbukka and Faisyakhali (Sopher 1963:350). This illustrates not

only how resettlement worked on the ground, but also how resettlement was shaped by cultural politics and differences.

By 1965 when the resettlement scheme ended, the government claimed that it had resettled 10,271 displaced families over 18,690 acres of plough land and 21,477 acres of uplands (Rajput 1965). Although I cannot ascertain the accuracy of this claim, it is certain that a great majority of displaced Chakma families were not considered for resettlement programs, particularly families of jhum cultivators and labouring classes (i.e., day labourers, bamboo or wood cutters, etc.). There were at least 4000 families of jhum cultivators and 428 families of labouring classes (as mentioned before). What happened to them is still not documented. In a footnote, one account reports that 1,200 families of jhum cultivators moved into Kassalong resettlement areas (Rector 1967:77). In all accounts I know of, there is no report of what happened to the labouring classes.

Interestingly, a large number of Chakma peasant families who were living in Chengri and Shubholong valleys could not decide whether to move away or to stay near their submerged lands. Significant to this indecision was the hope of a crop during the low water regime of the Kaptai dam. In these two areas, “a point commonly made was that the surrounding hill could always be used for jhum as a last resort and also by way of insurance” (Sopher 1963: 354). So, the displaced Chakma families in these areas moved their villages to higher ground and hill areas (at times 40 to 50 feet) and resettled themselves locally. Still, there were around 5,000 Chakma families (consisting of about 40,000 people) who could not resettle themselves; they took refuge in India in 1964 under the Indian government’s program of “Operation Karuna (Mercy)” and

were resettled in Arunachal province. They call the journey *Bara Parang* meaning the “Great Exodus” (Chakma H. et al., 1995:20-22).<sup>73</sup>

A significant aspect of resettlement was the limited access to land, a new phenomenon in CHT. This limitation was a result of the policy of land distribution and cultural practices of land claims. The government set a policy of only compensating plough land cultivators, not jhum cultivators or other displaced groups; its rationale for this policy was the paradoxical and deceitful claim of limited land availability for resettlement. For plough land cultivators, the government policy was that every family would get one acre of new plough land per acre of plough land the family had lost, but this was limited to a maximum one acre per person in the family, and also to a maximum of ten acres per family. For example, a family of six persons that lost three acres would be given three acres; a family of six that lost ten acres would be given six acres; a family of twelve that lost twenty acres would be given ten acres of plough land. However, in the case of a family that lost more than ten acres of plough land, the family might be given additional “suitable hilly lands for gardening or terrace cultivation” (GOP 1963: 17). “Equity” and “justice” in the distribution of land were claimed to be the rationales for the policy; as I will argue below, this claim does not stand up to scrutiny. In putting the policy into practice, the government further marginalized displaced plough cultivators by their cultural capital and legal entitlement. In other words, to claim land compensation for land in the submerged valley, the government required written application and documentation of legal proof which is usually considered to be a practice of “high culture.” The practices show the lack of consideration of the

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<sup>73</sup> The government seems to have tried preventing migration to India but failed. At first the refugee Chakma families were given settlement in Mizoram but on Mizo refusal to accept Chakma into their region, they were made to resettle in Arunachal Pradesh, where they are still living. The Bangladesh government still does not recognize these refugees and they were not part of the repatriation of hill peoples from India according to the CHT (Peace) Treaty of 1997 (see also Schendel 2000).

cultural and social contexts of the hill peoples to whom the practices of bureaucracy and culture of writing were very unpopular and, at times, unfamiliar.

Therefore, it turned out that 8,000 displaced families lacked the necessary documentation to have their cases considered. Of the remaining 10,000 displaced families who could claim legitimate land rights in the submerged valley, only a fraction could fulfill documentary and other requirements required by the government. As a result, only those of a fortunate few could receive land compensation, as much as 10 acres as a maximum contingent upon the size of family, which fell far short of the loss sustained by most families (Ali 1993). Furthermore, these policies only applied in Kassalong resettlement areas, the largest and best managed resettlement. Evidently, only a few got the maximum 10 acres of plough lands as the average family size was around 7 members (according to the 1961 census) (GOP n. d.).

Narratives of Kassalong resettled families suggest that the problem is not only that most of them received some parts of upland along with plough lands, but also that much of the plough lands was subject to flooding during the full reservoir regime and monsoon season. Lack of grazing lands for livestock animals for ploughing further compounded the problem. In other resettlement areas where resettlement land was fragmented and dispersed, the policy of plough land compensation could hardly work out and, therefore, in many cases the policy was to negotiate for cash compensation far below the market price (Chakma, H. et al. 1995: 35-37; see also Sopher 1963).

The resettlement brought about a significant change in land use and agricultural production, which the government claimed to be “a new field for economic rehabilitation for better prospect” (GOP 1963). The new land use involved mixed-plantation of fruit orchards and agricultural plantation by hill terracing under the assistance of the Department of Agriculture and

the Rehabilitation Department. By 1965, the displaced families of 1,921 ex-farmers and 2,650 jhum cultivators were brought under these programs (Rajput 1965). The programs included cultivation of pineapple, orange, mango, litchi, lemon, guava, jackfruit, cashew nut, and banana as well as rubber. In 1965, an in-depth comparative study of the agricultural economics of Chittagong Hill Tracts (including areas of Kassalong resettlement, and locally resettled Baradam and Mitingachari mouzas) concluded as follows:<sup>74</sup>

This resettlement programme has not yet developed entirely satisfactorily and many of the resettled people have to supplement their income by jhuming. Taking over of former jhum lands for mixed plantations and the increased jhum activities of displaced families have together caused significant nature of jhuming in the Hill Tracts. Jhuming has spread where it scarcely existed before. Moreover, in many areas the length of jhum cycle had decreased. . . In some places, the cycle has eliminated completely (Rector 1967: 99).

Evidently, life became an unmitigated disaster for the majority of displaced hill peoples. For the hill peoples, the main problem of horticulture plantation was shortage of food, let alone adapting to new agriculture, poor hill soils, and inadequate government support for credits and marketing (Rector 1967:71-88). Still, as I will discuss next, for state authorities, mixed fruits plantation was *the only* potential alternative to jhum cultivation for hill peoples' livelihood strategies and became a key strategy for the control of political forests in USF later during the insurgency and counter-insurgency period in CHT. This strategy was generally attributed to the discourse of "optimum land use" that originated in the mid 1960s from a state sponsored study of land classification in the USF with the assistance of foreign experts and aid; however, my research found that the strategy was originally articulated locally by the Forest Department in CHT in the late 1950s as part of the resettlement program at that time (see Chapter IV). To my knowledge, besides the taungya, this resettlement program of the Forest Department is one of the earliest

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<sup>74</sup> The other areas included in this study were jhum cultivators of Bandarban and plough cultivators of Khagrachhari from the non-submerged areas.

forms of agro-forestry based participatory community forestry in practice. How did this form of agro-forestry mobilize communities for the control of political forests? What were the programs, how were they structured, and to what effects? To explore these questions, I turn to the next section.

### **3.4 Beyond Taungya Forestry: Resettlement and New Participatory Forestry**

Years before the power plant was to be completed, jhum cultivation emerged as a potentially serious problem for state authorities. Alongside the planning of resettlement for would-be displaced hill peoples, state authorities and experts also began planning an alternative to jhum cultivation, as well as a policy of a permanent end to jhum cultivation.<sup>75</sup> As the following statement of Pakistan's Second Five Year Plan of 1960-65 illustrates:

Jhum is a primitive technique of cultivation. It hugely destroys forest. Using permanent methods of cultivation by using more advanced technology of social development, jhum cultivation can be abolished. In many areas, land may not be found to settle jhum cultivators permanently; therefore, jhum cultivators should be made employable for vegetable cultivation, or cash crop cultivation on a small piece of land, or fodder cultivation (GOEP 1960: 53; translation mine).

Beyond its “primitiveness” and “ill effects” on forests, jhum cultivation was also considered as the cause of multifaceted problems for the sustainability of land, soils, and most importantly, the Kaptai dam and the rivers in CHT (GOP 1964; EPADC n. d.). Therefore, in 1962, the Forest Department took up a very different kind of resettlement project for jhum cultivators in combination with forest plantation programs, creating a new category of political forests and participatory forestry in USF lands. The resettlement project, the Working Schemes for the

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<sup>75</sup> Recall that the discourse of ‘moral economy’ in opposition to jhum cultivation had been the dominant discourse providing the main rationalities upon which the economy, communities, and state in CHT were built, accommodating the ideology and interests of foresters and the Forest Department in Bengal (see Chapter II).



Protected Forests of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, had two schemes: “the Pilot Project for Jhum Control and Jhumia Rehabilitation,” and “the Soft Wood Plantation in East Pakistan”. A significant aspect of this resettlement project is that it was not in fact a physical resettlement of unsettled jhum cultivators per se, but a resettlement of jhum cultivators into mixed fruit cultivation as a mode of living as well as a strategy to control jhum cultivation.

The resettlement programs further represented new ways of thinking, acting, and acting on action of others, in relation and opposition to jhum cultivation in CHT. In part, the ideas, structure and programs of this resettlement project drew upon a plan for the gradual elimination of jhum cultivation in CHT (GOP 1964: 46-48). The plan was prepared in 1959 by a divisional forest officer at the instruction of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, of which the Forest Department was then a part.<sup>76</sup> The plan proposed several strategies to control and eliminate jhum cultivation; these were: i) planned jhum cultivation; ii) leasing out lands for tea and rubber plantation; iii) horticultural research; iv) conservation of ridge top of hills for water while using the lower slope of hills for fruit orchards; and importantly iv) an immediate complete land utilization survey. In detailing out planned jhum cultivation, the plan combined some of these strategies and suggested that all jhum cultivators in each Mouza be compelled by laws or rewards to be organized for jhum cultivation in a consolidated block, and to grow cash crops, namely, fruit orchards or rubber and tea gardens. This method of cultivating jhum into blocks for growing cash crops would be continued up to five years contiguously to the previous year’s cultivation. After the five years of planned jhum cultivation and replacing jhum lands with fruit orchards, rubber plantation and tea gardens, a survey of each Mouza would be taken to determine

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<sup>76</sup> Wolfgang Mey suggested that the project originated in Forestal’s recommendation under the Master Plan of Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Project (see Mey 1984:106). This argument is also reproduced in my MA thesis (Chowdhury 2002).

if the crops could provide full time employment of the entire population of the Mouza; if not, the project would be continued for another five years. To the end of the project, the ownership of the fruit orchards or rubber plantation and tea garden of each Mouza would be given to the community and the rules for the management would be framed under section 28 of the Forest Act of 1927 (that is, the provision of “Village Forest Rules”). Alternatively, an account of each jhum cultivator would be kept; in the end, an area equivalent to the area of one’s fruit orchards or rubber plantation and tea garden was to be settled with him/her (GOP 1964: 46-48).

In putting this plan into a resettlement project, the Forest Department created a new category of forest, i.e., protected forest in USF according to sections 29 and 30 of the Forest Act of 1927, under a newly created forest division in CHT called Jhum Control. This protected forest took up six Mouzas entirely and one Mouza partially, a total of 35,226.6 acres of USF in the submerged area amid the loss of cultivable lands and displacement. The areas comprised three separate blocks known as Maini (13,363.8 acres), Renikhyong (9,747.5 acres), and Khaskhali (12,115.3 acres). The Maini and Renikhyong blocks are situated on the fringe of Kaptai dam near the Kassalong and Renikhyong Reserves respectively. The third, Khaskhali block, is situated on the border of Chittagong and at the intersection of the Chittagong and Rangamati roads (GOP 1964).

This resettlement project represents both continuity and discontinuity with taungya forestry and the management of the Reserved Forests. In part, the project followed the discourse and practices of scientific management of the Reserved Forest, such as a working plan regime, and the functional territorialization of landscapes into working circles, ranges (cutting series), and beats (felling series). Thus, the land areas in all blocks were divided into sixty acres of compartments based on qualities of lands which then were organized conveniently into beats,

ranges and working circles. An important difference in this land planning aspect of the forest working plan was a fruit working circle for the permanent settlements of jhum cultivators and their livelihood programs along with soft wood working circles for the plantation of forests (GOP 1964).

In this projecting and designing, the project aims were “to educate both, [foresters] and the local people in the best form of land use ... by which the [jhum cultivators] can be made self sufficient without doing much damage to the land” (GOP 1964:ii). Thus, jhum cultivation was banned in the protected forest areas of which 21, 277.7 acres were to be planted with fast growing softwood, and the remaining space (13, 948.9 acres) was to be mixed fruit gardens. For the resettlement, participation and benefits were instituted and defined in the law somewhat differently than those of the existing and past practices of taungya forestry in the Reserved Forests: each jhum cultivator family joining the project either by choice or by force of the law would receive a piece of selected land for taungya cultivation to produce their yearly food and vegetables, while planting and raising forests and mixed fruits trees under the direction of the Forest Department. The family would also receive wages for working year-round in the taungya plantation to supplement their income for the year, and had to work for at least three years. The Forest Department was to keep the records of the areas of mixed fruit and forest plantations for individual families of jhum cultivators over the years. At the end of the project, each jhum cultivator family was to receive the settlement of equivalent areas of plantation in the mixed fruit gardens for livelihood and income. Alternatively, any individual family of jhum cultivators who planted fruit trees in their cultivable jhum lands and raised mixed fruit gardens for five years would receive the land settlement of the mixed fruit gardens that had been planted and raised (GOP 1964:16).

Nonetheless, the project did not do well in practice. It had only raised 1900 acres of forest plantation and 2000 acres of mixed fruit plantation by 1967 when it got reframed and programmed differently under a project called the Master Plan of Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Project. The Master Plan project was based on a discourse known as “optimum land use” that emerged from a state sponsored study of forests, land, soils, and water resources in USA in the mid 1960s (Forestal, 1966a, 1966f). Although the Master Plan project ran until 1975, its forest scheme could not begin during that time; it was only after 1975, at the conjuncture of insurgency and counter insurgency, that the discourse of optimum land use came to further prominence and articulated with forest expansion through plantation programs (which I will deal with in the next chapter). As for the question of what happened to hill peoples who had been living in the area before it became Protected Forests, I could not ascertain if they were displaced, made to join, or voluntarily joined the resettlement project.<sup>77</sup> Nevertheless, it is certain that the Protected Forests dispossessed the population of the hill peoples who joined the program as they were cut off from their traditional and civil administration associated with customary rights to cultivation in the Mouzas according to the Regulation of 1900.

### **3.5 Conclusion and Discussion**

By the time of the partition of British India, the forest resources of East Pakistan (East Bengal) had been seriously curtailed; still, East Pakistan remained the better forested region in Pakistan, and CHT became the major forest region of East Pakistan in addition to a portion of Sundarbans (GOP 1957; FD 1960). As a result, differential policies of forest management between West

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<sup>77</sup> My interview with Divisional Forest Officers of Jhum Control Division in Rangamati did not go well. The officer was a young university graduate and protectionist; he even prevented me taking notes of the display board in the office. Other Divisional Forest Officers in the Rangamati Forest circle including the Deputy Conservator of Forest (DCF) and Conservator of Forest (CF) were highly cordial and helpful. In particular, the DCF office helped a lot by sharing some information about the Jhum Control Division, including a recently updated brochure.

Pakistan and East Pakistan emerged. Forests in CHT became subjects and objects of industrial development and other policies, which in turn greatly shaped and changed the discourse and practices of political forests and the control of both USF and the Reserved Forests in CHT.

Concerning industrial development, the effect of the power plant was the most detrimental and significant. Before the Kaptai dam, jhum cultivation was well adjusted as an agricultural practice given the climate, land topography and economy. There was also a large hill population that lived by plough cultivation in the middle Karnaphuli River valley and the lower Chengri, Kassalong, and Renikhyong valleys (EPADC n. d.; Recter 1967). However, the entire economy, ecology, and agrarian relations in the northern part of CHT were changed as the Kaptai dam unsettled and dispossessed one fourth of the hill peoples of CHT.

The resettlement of the displaced hill peoples' families met with failure. A common reasoning for the failure is technical, i.e., the lack of a comprehensive plan, lack of coordination among the government agencies, and lack of a long term policy (EPADC n. d.). The hill peoples considered the failure in political and ideological terms (Chakma, H. et al. 1995). Both arguments have their merits and share of truth as they respectively represent the discourses of science and politics. However, both arguments are missing concreteness; that concreteness is to be found in the discourses of forests which produced the land crises. Nevertheless, the cultural logic of hill peoples' resettlement and territorial choices, specifically, the Chakma resettlement, was an illuminating example of hill peoples' own sedentary character, and a territorial choice that proved that the common stigmatization of the hill peoples as "nomadic tribes" is not only misleading but also out of place.

The remaking of political forests and participatory forestry had differential impacts on the Reserve Forests and USF. In the Reserved Forests, the remaking of forests was associated with

industrial needs for timber and with the scientific management of forests and landscapes. The practices of taungya forestry in the Reserved Forests remained unchanged. Rather, changes in the practices of participatory forestry emerged along with the discourse and practices of the resettlement. The resettlement programs reframed the control of forests through the introduction of a new form of participatory forestry in USF. Although it is mostly unknown how this worked out on the ground and in practice, it appeared to be least successful, in my view, for reasons to do with agricultural programs. It seems to me that programs of jhum control and mixed fruit horticultural gardens were more futuristic and driven by fear, cultural biases and scientific discourses. They lacked common sense and concerns for the hill peoples' needs for cultivable land which was of great significance to them as the basic means of their livelihood and survival. The latter concern is essential for any development program to be successful in practice.

The resettlement programs also introduced considerable changes in the hill peoples' relations to jhum lands, a common property in USF, and led to the beginning of a *private* property regime on USF lands in CHT, although customary rights of hill peoples to use USF forest resources for domestic purposes remained unchanged. Because of the general crises of cultivable plough lands after the Kaptai dam, state authorities adopted policies of upland settlement in USF for individual right holders (lease with perpetuity, or for a specific period) as part of compensation of plough land loss to the displaced families that included the rights to sell or lease the land (see Dewan 1991). This land settlement policy not only undermined hill peoples' common generic customary rights over jhum land but also misrecognized them deliberately. Moreover, an amendment was made to Rule 34 of the Regulation of 1900 in order to allow Bengalis to receive land legally by purchase, lease or grant in USF, provided they resided in CHT (Amin, M. 2000:33 footnote). The amendment aimed to facilitate Bengalis

taking advantage of the economic opportunities opened up by industrialization in CHT. Thus, different forms of individual rights over USF lands emerged in the 1960s to become a dominant policy and practice for the control of land and forests in USF only later.

These changes in USF not only contrasted with and altered the previous policies and practices of the management of USF; they also contained an inherent contradiction and danger for the land revenue administration and customary rights of hill peoples over lands in general and non-urban homestead plots in particular. A crucial contradiction in the land policy was that although jhum cultivation was not officially banned, the customary rights to common land on which jhum cultivation relied were no longer recognized or regarded as valid by the Pakistani state. New land settlements could only occur on the basis of individual property rights for fruit horticulture or commercial industrial use. The policy posed a serious threat to the traditional administration of CHT, as jhum cultivation was the primary source of the Chiefs' revenues and was fundamental to the traditional administration of the chiefs and headmen system upon which the revenue and civil administration of CHT was built. This policy also meant that the Deputy Commissioner's powers to regulate, grant, and cancel land and land settlements in USF became more exclusive and absolute.

Concurrently, there were also several changes to the regulation of 1900 that sought to replace the British paternalistic policy of protection of the hill peoples. Although these changes were a result of the discourse and policy of Pakistani Muslim nationalism and national integration, they were significant to the political control of USF forests and land and are worth repeating.<sup>78</sup> The first of these changes was the introduction of a three-tiered local government

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<sup>78</sup> The discourse of Pakistan Muslim nationalism constructed hill peoples as the "enemy of Pakistan" or equally as "pro-Indian" while reinventing racial and anthropological discourses of tribe and primitive to describe "deficiencies" of the hill peoples in need of improvement (CHT Commission, 1991: 12; Organizing Committee, 1986: 44; Schendel et al. 2001: 110).

system (District Council, Thana Council, and Union Council) into CHT along with the rest of the country.<sup>79</sup> Although this local government system did not replace the traditional administration of the CHT, it surely undermined the traditional system. Under this new system, directly elected representatives to the Union Councils (known as Basic Democrats) had more power than traditional leaders (chiefs and headmen) because they controlled not only state welfare resources and funding to local communities and their distribution but also local development funds. The second change to the Regulation of 1900 was abolishing the special status of CHT in the constitution as a “Tribal Area.”<sup>80</sup> The third important change was ending the power of the Deputy Commissioner of CHT (i.e., Rule 51 of the Regulation of 1900) to expel non-indigenous hill peoples or Bengalis from CHT; this came on the order of the Dhaka High Court that Rule 51 violated the freedom of movement of Pakistan citizens within the country guaranteed by the Pakistan Constitution (Amin 2000: 44 footnote). This ruling reversed the legal protection that hill peoples had enjoyed, and opened up CHT legally for Bengalis. At the same time, the local and civil administration was completely staffed by Bengalis, while hill peoples in the government administration in CHT were transferred to other parts of the country (Mohsin 1997:46; Ishaq 1971: 251-271). The sitting Chakma chief at that time, Tridiv Roy, called this change in administration “the Bengalisation of the Tracts.”<sup>81</sup> Although the regulation of 1900 remained the

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<sup>79</sup> In 1948, the government disbanded the Frontier Police Force that was composed solely of the hill peoples of the CHT: “its members were posted to other districts while provincial (Bengali) police forces were deployed permanently to CHT” (Ali 1993:177).

<sup>80</sup> The CHT was initially administered by the Ministry of State and Frontier Regions, a ministry that dealt with the former partially or totally excluded areas. In 1955, CHT, being defined as a “Special Area”, was placed under the Ministry of Home and Kashmir Affairs and administered by the Central Government, directly through the Deputy Commissioner in CHT (Organizing Committee 1986:43). In the first constitution of 1956, the region was able to save its special status; but not for long. The Constitution of 1962 did not totally abolish the Regulation; it redefined CHT as a “Tribal Area”, and offered a kind of limited autonomy for CHT and other “tribal” areas of West Pakistan. However, shortly afterward, in 1963, the Acting President of Pakistan, Fazlul Quader Chowdhury, applying executive authority, abolished this special status for CHT. The CHT was removed from the list of tribal areas.

<sup>81</sup> Chakma chief Tridiv Roy writes: “Ninety percent of government functionaries posted to the Chittagong Hill Tracts were Bengalis who, barring notable exceptions, apart from lining their own pockets, set about the



key apparatus of the control of USF and the civil administration, the changes in laws and administration altered the relations of power, resulting in Bengali domination and the further marginalization of the hill peoples. In turn, these changes, along with memories of displacement and dispossession, sowed the seeds of ethnic conflict between Bengalis and hill peoples which later turned hill peoples' nationalism into armed resistance after Bangladesh independence. How this ethnic conflict happened, and the extent to which it shaped social relations and the relations to forest, land and power in Bangladesh, I will consider in the next chapter.

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Bengalisation of the Tracts. In the recruitment to Class I and II services, not even 5% was taken from amongst the hill people although there were qualified candidates. Even in Class III and IV jobs plainsmen were given preference" (Roy, T., n. d.; quoted in Schendel et al. 2001:77).

## CHAPTER IV

### Insurgency, Counter-Insurgency and Development: The End of the Forest Commons

#### 4.1 Introduction

When I was a young boy my father moved our family from Bamu (of Lama Upazila) to Tain (of Alikadam Upazila) near the Matamuhuri Reserved Forest. It was just before Bangladesh independence. The Pakistani army, Razakar (pro-Pakistan militia) and Muktiyoddha (Bengali freedom fighters) had been at war in Lama Hills and Aziz Nagar. The hill peoples were increasingly migrating into Tain and Alikadam. Times were hard. After a few years in Tain, my father moved to Kolapachar deep inside the Matamuhuri Reserve, because there was little land available for jhum. With few people in the reserved forest we had plenty of land to jhum and we were happy; there was plenty of rice, vegetables, sesame, cotton and other products even if we did about one acre jhum. During this time we also had cows, pigs, chickens and hens. Compared with Tain, we often had more rice than needed and it was often wasted, left unused or decomposing on the ground since markets were scarce and no one would buy rice at home. But we, the Tripura, were forced to leave the Reserve as a war broke out among Shanti Bahini, the Mro (Murucha), and the army. There were some Tripura in the Shanti Bahini along with Tanchangya, Marma, Mro and Chakma. The Mro joined with the army and started killing the Chakma; they told the Tripura and Tanchangya to leave the Reserve. We fled our home with nothing but the clothes on our backs. The army took us to Umtoli near Alikadam Bazaar and told us that the Tripura would live together and would receive land to build homes and jhum to raise fruit gardens and forests. In the end, we (Tripura) families came to this (Golden River) village after two years in Umtoli. The Forest Guard and Forest Officer came and showed us each plots of land that were scattered across the area. I lived here for only three years: the jhum was no good and I was forced to work in the forest plantation; so, I returned to Kolapachar. Although I have little money, I am happy since I do not have to think about how to get food every day.

Robin Chandra was 50 years old when he recounted this story to me. I met Robin coincidentally during my fieldwork at Golden River village when he came to the village to take his father-in-law and mother-in-law to live with him. Golden River is the one remaining forest village of displaced families of the Matamuhuri War who were resettled under development programs in the Tain Range of Lama Forest Division between 1985 and 1987. Understandably, Robin was busy since he was leaving the next day and had much work to do, specifically preparing

traditional luggage to carry all of his in-laws' belongings. He also wanted to visit friends and go to the nearby market for tea with many of them. Robin agreed to the interview at the request of his father-in-law, Ram Chandra, a 75 year old man who belonged to one of the poorest families and lived on income he received from selling sun grass and fuel wood. Interestingly, Robin spoke Bengali well and he became very passionate while relating his story to me. On the same day, I also interviewed Ram Chandra with the help of Rui Tripura, my local research assistant and a neighbour of Ram Chandra. On the next day, I joined the villagers to see off Robin, Ram and Ram's wife, Rupa Chandra, and felt extremely sad to witness the tragedy of Ram and Rupa becoming "refugees" again. More sadly, Ram had sold his homestead land to Rui before leaving the village, and I had to offer my assistance in writing the unofficial land agreement.

The stories of Robin and Ram underscore contemporary changes in the economy and society in CHT. In particular, they offer colourful images of changing relations to the land and forest in USF (Unclassed State Forests), and of the continued reproduction of dispossession, land alienation, and marginalization of hill peoples across CHT. These changes were a direct result of counter-insurgency and were in part a continuation of the earlier policies of land and resettlement undertaken by Pakistan. It is important to reiterate that USF in CHT refers to the entire land area of CHT excluding the Reserved Forests. Divided into numerous Mouzas (i.e., revenue units), conventional civil and traditional administrations of CHT are built on USF. The USF includes both plough land and jhum land. The latter was forest common until the early years of the Pakistani regime, at which point it began to change, as discussed in Chapter III.

To situate my experiences at the Golden River community in the field of forces and sedimented practices of forest and development in CHT, it is important to repeat that the hill peoples have been subject to war and at times armed conflict since 1971. The Bangladesh war of

liberation began in East Pakistan against the Pakistani military regime in March 1971 and ended by December in the same year. The hill peoples appeared either indifferent or divided during this period. However, a new war between Shaniti Bahini – an armed wing of Jana Samhati Samiti (JSS), the regional political party of CHT – and Bangladesh Security Forces began in CHT in 1975 as the JSS turned into an insurgency movement. The insurgency and counter-insurgency continued until 1997.

Beyond militarization and pacification, important counter-insurgency strategies included Bengali settlement, reorganizing civil administration, and development. Counter-insurgency Bengali settlement in CHT began in 1979 and continued until 1985. By the time the policy was brought to a halt, an estimated total of 400,000 rural poor Bengalis – approximately 80,000 families – had settled across the CHT with each family receiving a land lease grant of 5 acres in USF, with perpetuity of individual rights. This policy of state sponsored Bengali settlement was “considered to be effective counter checks on the insurgent movement by way of their counter-intelligence and supplying auxiliary military support to the Bangladesh army” (Haq 2000:55). Bengali settlement also entailed expansion and changes in civil administration for the service of Bengalis, and in turn, between 1981 and 1984, the CHT district was divided into three districts, namely Bandarban, Kahagrachari, and Rangamati.<sup>82</sup> The districts were further sub-divided into twenty- five sub-districts or Upazilas with populations between 20,000 to 40,000 under a magistrate as the chief executive officer (UNO) and several government departments and offices (see Appendix A: Map 2). This abolished the British administrative system of sub-division in the district and reorganized Police Stations or *Thanas* under the new administration. In the end, the counter-insurgency remade the state in the region into what can be termed an “overdeveloped

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<sup>82</sup> In part, the changes in civil administration in CHT in the early 1980s were part of a countrywide policy of decentralization and re-territorialization of civil administration.

state.” An important change and an addition to the new administration was the Hill District Councils (HDCs), which were established in 1989 with a two-thirds majority of the hill peoples as part of the CHT Accord of 1988. The District Councils have limited authority over small industries, health, primary education, agriculture and some other matters. The Peace Treaty of 1997 reorganized HDCs and added two new institutions to supplement and coordinate the district councils at national and regional levels respectively: the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs (MOCHTA) and the CHT Regional Councils. However, the political and administrative roles of these bodies have not yet been fully clarified (CHT Commission 2000; JSS 2011)

The idea of development as a strategy of counter-insurgency emerged as early as 1976 in a high level meeting among the state authorities and bilateral and transnational donor agencies on the eve of full-scale insurgency (ADB 1979:1-2). The government and their international allies of bilateral and trans-national development agencies<sup>83</sup> appeared to agree that while the insurgency was clearly a problem of “loyalty” of the hill peoples to the government, fundamentally it was a problem of “under development” of the CHT region (Wilson 1987:96). This belief led the government to establish the Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board (CHTDB; hereafter, Development Board) – a regional development authority – to plan, implement and coordinate ‘development’ in the CHT in the same year. In terms of its organizational link to bureaucracy of the state, the Development Board was placed under the control of the Cabinet Division, with the supervision of the chief executive of the government (i.e., the Prime Minister or President, depending on the regime in power). At the regional level, though the Development Board was initially run by civilian bureaucrats, the top executive

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<sup>83</sup> This includes Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Ministry of Overseas Development (ODM) of the U.K. Government, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the New Zealand Aid Programme, United Nations Development Program (UNDP), United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), World Health Organization (WHO), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Bank (WB) (see Arnes, 1997, for the roles of foreign aid in the militarization and development of CHT).

position was soon filled by the General Officer Commanding (GOC) of Chittagong Cantonment and continued to be so until 1994. Significantly, the Development Board was granted an unrestrained power for acquisition of land in CHT and extra- constitutional legal immunity for its actions (see GOBD 1976).

The key development programs of the Development Board included resettling hill peoples to industrial forest or rubber plantations, and financing Bengali private entrepreneurs for commercial rubber production with a lease of industrial land. In addition to the Development Board, the Forest Department emerged as an important agency for carrying out programs in collaboration with the Bangladesh Security Forces. The main logic of development has been to transform the agrarian economy of jhum cultivation with industrial forestry, commercial rubber plantation and horticulture, based on the discourse of “optimum land use,” a derivative discourse of the land use classification study of CHT in 1966. The result has been that development and other counter-insurgency programs, namely state-sponsored Bengali settlements, have withered away the common property regime of forest and land in USF almost completely.<sup>84</sup> In turn, there emerged in lands and forests of USF an individual property regime on the one hand, and absolute state property regime of forest on the other. Both have not only changed hill peoples’ customary access rights over land and forest in USF but have also led to the continued reproduction of dispossession, land alienation and marginalization of the hill peoples.

To account for the political ecology of insurgency and war, this chapter begins by examining the period of Bangladesh rule in CHT and provides an account of contemporary changes in the hill peoples’ relations to forest, land and power. This account will be continued in chapters V and VI. As such, this chapter focuses on counter-insurgency ‘development’ programs

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<sup>84</sup> In part, the changes were facilitated by the amendment of the Regulation of 1900, namely Article 34 regarding transfer and lease of the land through a military ordinance NO. SRO 72-L/79 in 1979 (see GOBD n. d.).

and explores the way in which development has changed forest commons and land relations in USF during the insurgency and war. In particular, I examine the afforestation and resettlement programs of the Forest Department in Lama Forest Division and their related effects on the lives and livelihood of the hill peoples' communities.<sup>85</sup> Unlike the forest resettlement after the inception of the power plant during Pakistani rule, the forest plantation and resettlement programs were specific development programs that were designed to be a new kind of participatory forestry for both the environmental security and livelihood strategies of the hill peoples. I chose Lama Forest Division mainly because of my fieldwork with a resettled hill peoples' community which provided me with the opportunity to explore further development programs in that region. However, Lama Forest Division is important in its own right: it is one of the six forest divisions that were created for the control and management of USF during the insurgency and war, and an important site of insurgency and counter-insurgency development in the southern part of CHT.

In what follows, I first discuss the cultural geography of the insurgency movement to provide the context of afforestation and resettlement programs. I then consider optimum land use discourse and the ways it was articulated in the plans and projects of development, forest expansion and resettlement of the hill peoples. In doing so, I will pay specific attention to the project, Integrated Afforestation and Jhumia Rehabilitation (IAJR), a scheme of the Special Five Year Plan of Chittagong Hill Tracts Region (1985-1989). Drawn up in 1984 at the height of the counter-insurgency war and the internal war among Shanti Bahini, the IAJR project played an

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<sup>85</sup> At present, there are nine forest divisions in CHT which almost correspond to the political and administrative boundaries of the region. The new forest divisions along with the year of official notification are: USF Division, Rangamati (1976), Kapati Pulpwood (1978), Bandarban (1982), Bandarban Pulpwood (1982), Khagrachhari (1985) and Lama (1985). The jurisdiction of Chittagong Forest division over Sangu Reserve was transferred to Bandarban Forest Division in 1982, and the Cox's Bazar Forest Division jurisdiction over Matamuhuri Reserve was transferred to Lama Forest Division in 2001. The previously existing forest divisions were: CHT North, CHT South, and Jhum Control (see Map 5).

instrumental role in the resettlement program of Lama Forest Division. I take up the case of Lama Forest Division as a third theme to explore counter-insurgency development programs and the ways in which they shaped and changed the practices of forests in USF within the Lama Forest Division. I then examine the effects of development on the life, livelihood strategies and social structure of the resettled community of Golden River. In sum, my analysis here provides a South Asian example of insurgencies, counter-insurgencies, and their related effects on land and forest commons. This will show that, much as in Southeast Asia, counter-insurgency in CHT targets land relations of hill peoples to alter the land usages of jhum cultivation in favour of a new economy of horticulture, rubber and state forest (Vandergeest and Peluso 2011).

#### **4.2 Insurgency: Cultural Geographies of the Movement**

The insurgency movement originated in the mid-1950s as an underground student protest movement – the *Hill Student's Association* – against the backdrop of the Kaptai Dam and anticipated dispossession of the hill peoples. The Association was at the heart of the protest against the Kaptai dam, and its prominent members were radicalized within a Marxist world view and associated with the then East Pakistan Student Union (a Pro-Chinese leftist student organization in East Pakistan). As early as 1962, they confronted the military rulers' ban on political activities in CHT by opening primary schools in CHT areas with a view to establishing direction and “political consciousness” among the hill peoples.<sup>86</sup> In 1966, the leadership of the Association formed the *Chittagong Hill Tracts Welfare Association* (CHTWA). This proto-political organization was concerned with compensation and resettlement of the displaced families and successfully mobilized the hill peoples to seek their cultural and political

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<sup>86</sup> Interview with J. B. Larma, the Chairman of CHT Regional Council and the President of the JSS.



recognition. In 1970, it successfully contested one of the two seats from CHT in election for the provincial legislative assembly of East Pakistan; the CHTWA's candidate Manabendra Narayan Larma, a young lawyer, won the election (Kisha 1996). In hindsight, this brought the main protagonist of the insurgency movement into the political forefront. However, the movement was overshadowed and marginalized by the autonomy movement in East Pakistan (1966 -70) and the subsequent Bangladesh war of liberation in 1971 to which the leadership of CHTWA appeared either indifferent or divided.

Nonetheless, on 15th February 1972 – immediately after Bangladesh obtained independence – the CHTWA leadership regrouped and formed the Jana Samhati Samiti (JSS), a regional political party of hill peoples, and M. N. Larma became the leader of the new organization. According to some accounts, the JSS originated from the Rangamati Communist Party, which was formed in 1970 by some “radical” leaders of the CHTWA who advocated armed struggle for the realization of hill peoples’ political, economic and cultural rights (Montu 1980:1510; but see also, Kisha 1996; Chakma, S. 1393 B. E. [1985-1986]).<sup>87</sup>

Before turning into an insurgency movement, the JSS participated in peaceful political campaigns from 1972 to 1975, amid preparation for a guerrilla war. Re-elected as a Member of Parliament (MP) in the national parliament in 1973, M. N. Larma had led the movement within the parliament for hill peoples’ cultural recognition and for the “political autonomy” of CHT; Larma lobbied the government until early 1975, but achieved neither goal. The latter demand of

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<sup>87</sup>According to Montu, Manabendra Narayan Larma and his younger brother Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma were the extremists in the CHTWA (Montu 1980), and these two brothers were also the leaders said to have established the Rangamati Communist Party (RCP) in 1970 (Ibrahim 2001:73). Given the RCP's clandestine nature due to a ban on the Communist Party during the Pakistan regime, it is plausible to infer that the CHTWA remained an umbrella organization for the RCP.

autonomy was partly guaranteed by the Regulation of 1900 and later denied during Pakistan rule (see Chapter III).

In December of 1975, the JSS initiated an insurgency for political recognition of the hill peoples as a “nation”, calling for “autonomy” of CHT with the status of a province. This followed the military coup in August 1975 and the subsequent rise of a military dictatorship in the country. This conjuncture was significant since it altered the politics and power relations in the country and regional relations between Bangladesh and India, a staunch ally during the Bangladesh war of liberation and the post-liberation government. The insurgency also followed the creation of the Shanti Bahini (Peace Force) and preparations for guerrilla war in 1973.<sup>88</sup> The Shanti Bahini mobilized the hill peoples’ political activists belonging to the Chakma, the Marma and the Tripura, together with pro-Pakistani militias of the Chakma (Chakma, S. K. 2011). Regarding the choice of guerrilla war, J. B. Larma, the ex-guerrilla Commander of the Shanti Bahini and now the Chairman of CHT Regional Council, explains in an interview with me<sup>89</sup>:

The cause of the plight of the hill peoples is lack of political power. This is mainly because of undemocratic and feudal leadership in CHT since British rule and also because of the military rule and Bengali chauvinist nationalism, expansionism and Islamic fundamentalism since Bangladesh independence. Therefore, as in the case of any political movement, the first and foremost objective of the JSS political movement is taking control of political power against state violence and oppression. Given we, the hill peoples, are small in numbers, and our economic condition, we had no option but to choose guerrilla armed struggle; peaceful political movement against state violence was not a practical alternative, let alone effective.

The conjunctures that led the JSS to mobilize Shanti Bahini were the state violence against the hill peoples as well as the Naga and Mizo insurgency movements of India. Even

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<sup>88</sup> The Shanti Bahini was formed in January 7, 1973.

<sup>89</sup> I had about eight hours of interviews with J. B. Larma that were conducted in five appointments between July and August 2008 in Dhaka and Chittagong Hill Tracts. The interviews were conducted in Bengali, and the translation is mine.

though many hill peoples, including the Mong chief Mong Pru Chowdhury, had joined the Bangladesh liberation movement and war, immediately after Bangladesh gained independence the hill peoples came under indiscriminate attacks by Bengali freedom fighters. This was in part due to the hill peoples' alleged support for the Pakistan military, and the pro-Pakistani roles of Tridiv Roy, the Chakma chief, and Aun Shue Pru, a member of the Bohmong chief's family (Chakma, S.1393 B.E. [1985-86]). Prime Minister Indira Gandhi of India is said to have intervened to stop this post-war violence but it was simply replaced with systematic state violence. As early as August 1972, an emergency was declared in CHT and the army was deployed as an 'Aid to Civil Power' to fight Maoist guerillas of a pro-Chinese Communist Party as well as pro-Pakistani militia forces including Naga and Mizo insurgents of India. In 1973, both Bangladesh and Indian armies carried out a joint operation mainly against Naga and Mizo insurgents, who had been given sanctuary in CHT by Pakistan since the 1950s; the armies successfully pushed the insurgents of India out from CHT (Ali 1993, but compare Mohsin 1997). It is important to note here that the CHT had a strategic significance for the Naga and Mizo insurgents. Its geographical contiguity with the region of Naga Hills and Lushai Hills was important and both regions were inhabited by different indigenous groups (or "tribes"). In addition, like CHT, these regions had been ruled by the colonial British with similar kinds of administration and laws, and there have been comparable movements both in Nagaland and Mizoram (Ali 1993: 22-57). These critical conjunctures of the Naga and Mizo ethno-nationalist movements seriously impacted the hill peoples. On the one hand, these nationalist movements created a sense of insecurity; on the other, they provided a model for nationalist struggle that could be reproduced by the hill peoples for their cause (Chakma, S. 1393 B.E. [1985-86]: 99).

The government responded to the insurgency by formally declaring a counter-insurgency war in CHT in October of 1976 (BA n. d.). The insurgency and government response to it continued until 1997 in what Wallenstein and Sollenberg (1998) deem a “low intensity conflict” (cf. Penz 1993). Nevertheless, despite internal war within the JSS during 1982-1984, the war between Shanti Bahini and the Bangladesh Security Forces intensified throughout the 1980s and both sides changed their tactics, attacking the civilian population and turning CHT into a “theatre of civil war” (Ali 1993:198). The main catalyst underpinning the increased combat and change of strategies was state-sponsored Bengali settlement into the CHT. In the beginning of the 1980s, the Bengali settlement also prompted policy debate and internal conflict within the JSS and the leaders were divided into ideological and strategic camps of “pro-Indian sovereignists” and “anti-Indian autonomists” (Shelley 1992:116-117). In 1982, the internal conflict of the JSS turned violent and resulted in a war among the groups of Shanti Bahini in which M. N. Larma, the founding leader of the JSS, was killed in November of 1983. By early 1984, the “anti-Indian autonomists” led by J. B. Larma had gained control over the insurgency movement (Chakma, S. K. 2011: 182-192).

The wars of the 1980s had several effects of critical significance for ending the insurgency and war in 1997. First, infighting among the Shanti Bahini meant they lost control in the southern Bandarban district of CHT, in part because the insurgents in the south supported a renegade faction that surrendered to the government (Chakma, S. K. 2011:188-89). The “renegades” also got themselves into the Matamuhuri war—a local war among the Shanti Bahini, the Murucha and the army in Matamuhuri Reserve and adjacent areas of Lama and Alikadam Upazilas—which paved the way for military control of Matamuhuri Reserve (this will be discussed further in chapter V).

Second, but more importantly, the insurgency and war displaced almost the entire population of the Rangamati and Khagrachhari districts, including the Bengalis, and thousands in the Bandarban district, mainly in Alikadam and Lama Upazilas. The displaced Bengalis from the villages of Rangamati and Khagarchari districts were relocated in cluster villages near security camps (Ibrahim 2001: 250-252; Shelly 1992). Among the displaced hill peoples of the Rangamati and Khagrachhari districts, approximately 100,000 (mostly Chakma) fled to the Indian state of Tripura as refugees, and another 100,000 Chakma, Marma and Tripura were forced to live in cluster villages which at times were programmed through resettlement schemes of the Development Board or Forest Department. In Bandarban district, the displaced Chakma, Tanchangya and Tripura of Alikadam and Lama Upazilas were resettled only through the Forest Department, which includes the Golden River community that I discuss in this chapter; however, the Murucha were given refuge in Matamuhuri Reserve.

Finally, the war of the 1980s forced the insurgents and military led government to negotiate a political resolution. Although the negotiation eventually failed, domestic and international politics forged a political will in the early 1990s for ending the insurgency and war. At the domestic level, in 1991, Bangladesh returned to a parliamentary democracy after a mass movement pushed out the military regime. At the international level, an international human rights group, *the Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission*, published a landmark report on the conflict and resulting human rights violations in CHT (CHT Commission 1991).

The second event that led to cessation of the counter insurgency war was military support from Bangladesh for the Gulf War of 1990-91 in which the UN sanctioned the invasion of Iraq that forced out Iraq from its 1990 occupation of Kuwait. At this point, the government negotiated a cease-fire with the insurgents and established renewed dialogue between the government and

the JSS. Progress on these fronts continued until 1997 when the insurgency ended with a Peace Treaty, although the conflict still continues to a lesser degree.

To conclude this section, let me return to some of the cultural, ethnic and spatial aspects of the insurgency pertinent to this chapter's discussion. Key to the development of the insurgency was the emergence of new educated and middle class political elites and youth in the 1960s who were independent of the traditional elites of CHT; this was especially the case among the Chakma (Chakma, S. 1392 B.E. [1985-86]:99).<sup>90</sup> Unsurprisingly, a strong Chakma presence also existed in the JSS and Shanti Bahini, which has at times led the news media and the government to refer to the insurgency as a "Chakma movement" (cf. Organizing Committee 1986:49, 52; Schendel 1995:125 ).

The insurgency also had an unequal spatial impact on the north and south of CHT due to the fact that the Chakma predominantly inhabit the north of CHT. The movement was also stronger in the northern districts of Khagrachhari and Rangamati than in the southern district of Bandarban, which was reflected in counter-insurgency programs and the violence throughout the conflict.<sup>91</sup>

As for the ideological basis of the insurgency, the movement articulated more of an ethno-nationalist than a Marxist or Maoist stance, although it was influenced by Marxist-Leninist-Maoist propositions about state, society and nations in relation to ethnic communities. Thus, the political programs expressed or articulated since 1972 by the JSS have never been independence or statehood but a "regional political autonomy" for the CHT's hill peoples.

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<sup>90</sup> In a fine analysis, Siddhartha Chakma, an anonymous writer from the hill peoples, qualifies the middle class in the context of CHT saying that the new political elites "formed a middle class among the hill peoples not by the standard of income or occupation, but in mind and intellect" (Chakma, 1392 B.E. [1985-86]:99, my translation)

<sup>91</sup> For example, there were thirteen reported mass killings of hill peoples by Bangladesh security forces during the 1980s and 1990s, and all of them took place in the north, whereas there were none in the south (see Levene 1999).

Furthermore, the JSS ethno-nationalist discourse advocated cultural innovation and articulation of a Jumma identity of the hill peoples as an alternative to identities of “hill men”, “tribals” or “*Upojati*” as prescribed by the state. Jumma as a collective identity emphasizes the ethnic difference of the hill peoples with respect to Bengali identity while at same time downplaying ethnic differences among the hill peoples themselves. Although many JSS publications expressed socialist ideals such as establishing an equal society free from imperialism, capitalism, and capitalist-bureaucratic exploitation, the movement’s *modus operandi* expressed clearly a democratic sentiment of the hill peoples that demanded a representative and elected local government to replace the administrative systems of traditional elites and an overpowering bureaucracy. Besides insurgency, these *political oppositions* were grounded within a vast network of grassroots’ organizations, like a de-facto state, and the following quotation from my interview with J. B. Larma illustrates this. In the interview, I asked Larma how the JSS became so successful in mobilizing the grassroots support of the hill peoples; Larma replied:

Yes ... we did not have only the political and war programs but also social programs and many organizations such as village panchayat, jhum cultivators’ association, woodcutters’ association, and also departments of agriculture, finance, education, health, justice, women’s welfare, child welfare, etcetera; I mean all kind of departments that people need in a society. We also had many social programs, for example, education. We encouraged parents to send their children to primary schools and communities to build primary schools. Our policy for building a school was that everyone in the community should help. Whoever had capacity to donate money would do so, and who did not have money to donate would provide material support such as bamboo or labour. For young adults, we encouraged vocational or technical education. Similarly, for income and economic improvement, we encouraged communities to raise fruit and horticulture gardens, and jhum cultivators to help each other. We also worked on health issues and how to be healthy. ... For example, we campaigned for sanitation, safe drinking water, iodine, and anti-malaria. We discouraged *puja* or religious prayer for wellbeing and protection from disease and strongly advised people to visit doctors. As a matter of fact, we had a group of doctors and a complete health department.

However, my fieldwork and interviews with forest villagers in Matamuhuri Reserve suggest that the insurgency movement coerced jhum cultivator hill peoples, and I heard several

fragmented stories about the Matamuhuri war and social conflict between the Murucha and Shanti Bahini. What stands out about local hill peoples' divided loyalties to the insurgency movement was not only the internal conflict or the differences of ethnicity, locality and leadership in Shanti Bahini, but also the domination of the local hill peoples by the insurgents. In particular, the insurgents who were predominantly Chakma imposed control over economic activities of jhum cultivation and bamboo extraction from Matamuhuri Reserve and also over social justice, namely, over "customs" of liquor making and sometimes "illegitimate" matrimonial relations between nieces and uncles among the Tripura. They also imposed an elaborate system of tax regime on jhum, domestic animals, bamboo and timber collection. It is relevant to note here that bamboo and timber were mainly collected by the Forest Department, government agencies and private businesses through Bengali labour or at times the hill peoples. Recently, Sneha Kumar Chakma, an insurgent commander, wrote an autobiography titled *Jeebonalekhyo* (Life Stories) in which he partly admitted this tax regime and prohibition of cultural practices such as 'adultery' (Chakma, S. K. 2011:126-127). These political oppositions within the insurgency movement are examples of what Vandergeest and Peluso (2011) call "alternative civilizing mission". The extent to which the alternative civilizing mission of the JSS was effective needs further research; however, it is certain that until the internal war of the JSS in 1982, the insurgency had operated from the Reserved Forests of CHT and exercised effective control over violence and resources across CHT. It further helped maintain the Reserves from illegal logging and deforestation; this was especially the case in Matamuhuri Reserve which was only deforested following the Peace Treaty of 1997, as I discuss in Chapter V. A similar scenario existed in other Reserved Forests of CHT and can be gleaned from newspaper reports that I read from office's files in the Tain Range. Nevertheless, to turn to the question of how and the extent



to which counter insurgency development altered forest relations in USF, let me consider the discourse of “optimum land use”, a key instrument of counter-insurgency development in CHT.

#### 4.3 “Optimum Land Use”: A Discourse of ‘Counter-Insurgency Development’



Photo 4.1: USF Land in Alikadam Upazila, Lama Forest Division. Note the hills that have been denuded and burned for rubber plantation by Bengalis.

What is the discourse of optimum land use? How and by whom does it get articulated into development projects, programs and resettlement of the hill peoples, and to what end?

The optimum land use discourse is mainly an environmental discourse of science – a technology of “power/knowledge” to use Foucault’s phrasing (Foucault 1991) – for thinking of how to govern relations among land, forests and hill peoples during insurgency and war.<sup>92</sup> The discourse originated in a government commissioned study of land usage and soil capabilities of the USF of

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<sup>92</sup> John H. Bodley’s *Victims of Progress* has represented the discourse since 1975 as a textbook case of development dispossession of indigenous people (Bodley, 1975:9-11; 1999:16-18). It has since appeared and been cited frequently in human rights reports, journals and articles as evidence of ethnocentric development policies of the State. A critical discussion of the discourse is still missing.

CHT in the late 1960s (Forestal 1966b; 1966c).<sup>93</sup> The study was conducted by an eleven-person team of experts from Forestal International Ltd., Vancouver, Canada (Forestal) including an agronomist, biologist, economist, engineers, foresters, geologist, soil scientist and others, and was supported through Canada Colombo Plan (Forestal 1966a).<sup>94</sup> In the end, it produced nine volumes of authoritative and original knowledge on forests, land, soil, and water resources of USF (Forestal 1966a, 1966b, 1966c, 1966d, 1966e, 1966f, 1966g).<sup>95</sup> Of these voluminous reports and technical details of the Forestal study, the following summary paragraphs are the best representation of the discourse:

The basic conclusion of this study of land use in the Chittagong Hill Tracts is that the age-old practice of shifting cultivation, attuned as it may have been in the past to the environment, can no longer be tolerated. . . . A change to a system of permanent intensive agriculture must be made now wherever possible, and the fertility of the soil will have to be maintained through better farming methods and greater input of fertilizer. . .

The inescapable conclusion is that the great majority of the land area in the Chittagong Hill Tracts is forest land and *the optimum land use* on all but a small portion should be the production of fast growing tree species and bamboo. This is not waste, despite the population pressure. The demand for wood and pulpable fibre is as great, if not as critical, as the demand for food. . . . More of the Hill Tribesmen will have to become wage

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<sup>93</sup> It is certain that the discourse of “optimum land use” is a part of a global discourse of land use; the genealogical account of the discourse is beyond the scope of this dissertation research. In their use of land and soils classification on which the discourse is based, Forestal’s reports referred to the land and soils classification of the United State Agricultural Department (Forestal 1966b, 1966c). Vandergeet and Peluso (1995) suggested a similar state project of land classification in Thailand for forest control in 1960s and 1970s through foreign aid (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995:412), as well as post-colonial states’ strategies of control of jhum cultivation across Southeast Asia (Vandergeest and Peluso 2006; cf. Blaikie 1985; Zimmerer 1996).

<sup>94</sup> The study was funded by foreign aid from Canada under the Colombo Plan programs (Forestal 1966a). The Colombo Plan was a system of bi-lateral cooperation between the Commonwealth countries, initiated at the first meeting of the foreign ministers of the British Commonwealth of Nations in Colombo, Ceylon (Sri-Lanka), January 9 to 15, 1950 (see Bryant 1961; Blackton 1951).

<sup>95</sup> The Forestal report that articulated the discourse of optimum land use is a rare document; Canadian National Library and Archive and the University of British Columbia have volumes IV, VII and VIII of the report. Because volumes VII and VIII are cartographic materials and volumes IV is on fisheries development in Kaptai Lake, they were not of much use for my purpose. In 2006, the Resource Sharing Department, York University, Canada, helped me find some of other volumes of the report and borrowed them from Swedish University of Agriculture Sciences. During my fieldwork in Bangladesh I found the entire collection of the report in the residential office library of the Deputy of Commissioner, Rangamati, but was denied access to it. In the end, in 2008, I collected the report (excluding the cartographic volumes VII and VIII) from the storage room of the Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation (BADC), Dhaka.

earners in the forest or other developing industries, and purchase their food from farmers practicing permanent agriculture on an intensive basis on the limited better land classes (Webb 1966:3232; emphasis added).

This conclusion is primarily based on steepness or slopes on the land and its soil qualities or what can be termed as “functional territorialization” (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995). In particular, the Forestal study classifies the topography and geomorphology of USF — nature’s vertical and inner intelligibility and knowledge — into sixty-three categories, of which twelve cover 96.6% of 3,894 square miles of USF. These most extensive twelve types are further subdivided, based on the steepness of land (Forestal, 1966b). Of the 96.6% of the whole area, the classification of land is as follows:

D	Land with high slopes representing 40 plus percent slopes	77.5%
C-D	20 to 40 plus percent slopes	01.2%
C	Undulating to rolling bumpy 20 to 40 percent slopes	15.5%
B	Mainly low bumpy up to 20 percent slopes	02.8%
A	Plain alluvial land up to 5 percent of slope	03.4%

A close reading of Forestal reports and recommendations reveal many irreconcilable contradictions. For example, class D land represents some of the best soil in CHT but is only recommended for forest plantation because of its steep slopes which, Forestal argues, severely restrict “permanent agriculture”. The argument for “the demand of wood and pulpable fibre” in the above statement is dubious, even on its own account. Forestal’s inventory of the Reserved Forests of CHT showed that the forest resources of the Reserves could support approximately 20 times the annual production of lumber in East Pakistan in the 1960s and two more paper mills

with a capacity equal to that of Karnaphuli paper mills (Forestal 1966e.1:8). What, then, is the Forestal logic of optimum land use and afforestation?

In fact, forest plantation must be established over much of the areas outside reserves, as a soil conservation measure. Due to present adequate supply of raw material from the Reserved Forests, these new plantations must have their justification solely in their protective value. The situation may well arise, however, whereby new plantations are more feasible and economic than the Reserved Forests (Forestal 1966e: 8).

Notice that the sketchiness of Forestal's logic and justification is neither based on needs of timber nor rational economic motive but on the apprehension and anticipation of the future feasibility of forest extraction. Notwithstanding the limitations of Forestal's recommendations, and its discourse of optimum land use, a Master Plan, Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Project, was drawn up based on that discourse in 1967 for a twenty year period. The Master Plan project aimed to bring as many as 200,000 families of jhum cultivators under the Standard Agriculture Holding (SAH) program, while raising half a million acres of forest by 1987; however, it only ran until 1972. During this period, it brought only 1702 families of jhum cultivators under the SAH program (ADB 1979: 64), and failed to begin the proposed forest plantation.<sup>96</sup>

A new way of thinking of the discourse of optimum land use began in 1976 at the conjuncture of the insurgency and war with the establishment of the Development Board in CHT, as I mentioned earlier. This resulted in a multi disciplinary reconnaissance mission led by the ADB (Asian Development Bank). The experts of the appraisal mission reconfirmed the

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<sup>96</sup> The Master Plan project was drawn up by the East Pakistan Agricultural Development Corporation (EPADC), which was renamed Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC). In 1974, the project was transferred from BADC to HDB, Horticultural Development Board. Besides 6 acre plots, the SAH program provided loans from the Agricultural Bank in cash and kind of TK. 5,500 to be repaid over 10 years with three years of grace period at 8 percent interest. HDB was supposed to restart its program in 1974 but failed to do so, only to begin again in late 1978 under the Development Board to be known as "Jothua Khamar" (collective farm), the very first project of the Development Board. See ADB (1979); Mohsin (1997); and Haq (2000) for technical details of Jothua Khamar and its critics.

“needs of development” in the CHT and shared the government’ concern about the security and sovereignty of the state. They also found optimum land use discourse as the ‘sound base’ of development intervention, projected and programmed under Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Project (CHTDP), a multi-sector project funded by ADB and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) during 1979-93 (ADB 1979:4). CHTDP programs included commercial and market oriented production of fruit, rubber and forest as well development of communication infrastructure and institutional agencies to support resource use and productivity.<sup>97</sup> The objectives were to provide “alternative strategies for food and ecological security” that, at the same time, would preserve the “socio-cultural integrity of tribal population,” and as an experiment to work out “a hill development concept capable of a model for future replica” (ADB 1979). To this end, CHTDP had two resettlement schemes: Upland Resettlement Scheme and the Afforestation and Settlement Scheme. Though both schemes were somewhat identical in terms of resettlement policy, the upland resettlement scheme was carried out solely by the Development Board involving resettlement of the hill peoples on a rubber plantation, modelled as “collective farming” (ADB 1994). The other scheme involving forest plantation and resettlement entailed creating a new forest division, Rangamati Unclassed State Forest Division, to be managed by both the Development Board and Forest Department. In its detailed planning, the scheme reads:

The main objective of the Afforestation and Settlement Scheme is to afforest the steep slopes outside of the reserve[d] forest, which are now being used for shifting cultivation, with suitable timber species that would benefit the economy, and provide improved

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<sup>97</sup> Since 1976 CHTDB has mobilized numerous development projects of roads and communication network alongside resettlement of the hill peoples (CHTDB, n. d., 1999, 2000; CHT Commission, 1991). Until then there were only 96 kilometers of all weather roads in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Originating in Chittagong they linked to Rangamati (then the District Headquarter), Kaptai (industrial town), and Ramghar and Bandarban (then sub-districts of the region) (ADB 1979: 11). At present, all the districts and sub-districts of CHT are connected through vast networks of roads with concrete surfaces, except for three sub-districts of Rangamati, i.e., Barkal Upazila, Belaichhari Upazila and Jurachari Upazila (BA n. d).

income and living conditions for the shifting cultivators and other landless families in CHT. [...] Integrated with this will be a settlement scheme for 300 families. . . In addition to a 0.25 acre house plot, they will be allotted 5.0 acres of upland for horticulture crops and bamboo. The settlers will clear, plant and subsequently maintain the afforested land and will be paid wages for these activities. They will be allowed to agro-forestry on the area being afforested each year. In addition, they will share the future income harvesting of plantation timber (ADB 1979: 24).

The fine print of CHTDP emphasized that each of the settler families would receive a supply of horticulture crops material free of cost, Tk.600 as subsistence allowance, and Tk. 600 as a housing grant in the first year of settlement (ADB 1979: 92). After five years from the implementation of the program, the government would decide whether the legal status of forest land ought to “be declared community forest or certain parts allocated to individual settlers” (ADB 1979: 24, footnote 2).

With the planning of CHTDP, the optimum land use discourse was elevated as a self evident truth and became a “material force” for the interests of the state and actors that was articulated through the practices of resettlement, forest and development intervention. Accordingly, the Development Board redesigned the Standard Agriculture Holding (SAH) program in accordance with CHTDP to be known as Joutha Khamar (collective farm). The program was to resettle hill peoples with 5 acres of upland and financial support for horticulture and rubber plantation. The project ran between 1976 and 1983, and reportedly established 59 Joutha Khamar(s) across the CHT. On average each Joutha Khamar had 60 households (CHTDB n. d.). In turn, CHTDP became the model of development in CHT and all the projects that followed CHTDP during the insurgency and war were designed with it in mind. In Table 4.1, I present a list of these development projects and programs that together have created another five new forest divisions in CHT over USF land in addition to Rangamati Unclassed State Forest Division. Unsurprisingly, the optimum land use discourse has remained the fundamental

rationale for all these projects. For example, consider the opening statement of the Integrated Afforestation and Jhumia Rehabilitation (IAJR) project:

The Unclassed State Forests of Chittagong Hill Tracts region are in critical condition due to loss of practically all top soils from the area, caused by the repeated jhooming (i.e., shifting cultivation). The age old practices of shifting cultivations... have deteriorated the soils to such an extent that [the cycle of shifting cultivation has been reduced from seven to ten years into a two to three year interval]. In addition to this, the excessive and continuous erosions of soils [from the areas] are silting up the bed of the main rivers along with their tributaries at an accelerated rate, resulting in floods [both in the region and Chittagong plains] and causing great threat to reduce the lifespan of the lone hydro-electric project of the country. . . . Forestal Forestry & Engineering International Ltd., Canada, reveals that the land use problems in the districts are so critical that immediate attention be given to take the problems on priority basis . . . The recommendations clearly spell out that D & C/D Classes land . . . of the Chittagong Hill Tracts region should be put under permanent tree covers, i.e., forest cover within this century. These recommendations were also subsequently supported by the Asian Development Bank mission during 1976-1978 (FD 1984: 3).

As seen in Table 4.1 below, during the insurgency and war, the Forest Department implemented seven forest plantation and resettlement projects including the scheme of CHTDP. A significant aspect of these was their integrationist approach to forest plantation and resettlement programs. The approach seems a strategy; on the one hand it helped state authorities to impose direct control over USF in order to increase wealth and revenue, and on the other hand it produced disciplined and subjugated subjects of land use in order to differentiate ‘enemies’ and ‘ordinaries’, as the counter insurgency demanded. Further, the integrationist approach suggests that state authorities and transnational experts recognized the tension between forest plantation afforestation in USF and livelihood issues of the hill peoples; this illustrates the way in which, as in the past, the making of forests is contingent upon the making and unmaking of agrarian relations.

Second and importantly, these projects altogether have alienated a quarter million acres of USF land but resettled no more than 3,045 families of hill peoples out of a projected total of 7,680 under various forms of participatory forestry.

Table 4.1: Afforestation and Resettlement Projects in USF 1979- 2000<sup>98</sup>

Name of Project/Years	Projected Plantation (Acres)	Projected Resettlement (Number of Families)
Afforestation and Resettlement, CHTDP (1979-80 to 1984-85)	18,000	300
Afforestation in the USF of CHT (First Phase) (1980-81 to 1984-85)	50,000	1,500
Development of Pulpwood Plantation in the USF of CHT (Second Phase) (1980-81 to 1984-85, extended to 1988)	34000	840
Integrated Afforestation and Jhumia Rehabilitation in the USF of CHT (Special Five Year Plan) (1984-85 to 1988-90)	55,000	4,000
Development of Pulpwood Plantation in the USF of CHT (Special Five Year Plan) (1984-85 to 1989-90)	9,943	140
Afforestation and Settlement in USF of CHT (Second Phase) (1989-90 to 1994-95)	23,734	550
Afforestation and Rehabilitation of Jhumia families in USF of CHT (Third Phase) (1994-95 to 1999-2000)	27,318	350
Reported Total	217,995	7,680

Source: ADB 1979, FD 1980; 1981b; 1984; 1993; 1994.

Third, if not in practice then in their plans, all the projects attempted a ‘new model’ of participatory forestry in USF, which remained vague about the legal status of planted forests and

<sup>98</sup> The projects Welfare of Rehabilitated Jhumia and Afforestation around Security Camps 1992-93 to 1996-97 and *Ashrayan* (Rehabilitation) are excluded from the list.



limited subsistence allowances. The model was clearly different from the earlier models of participatory forestry that were designed as part of forest resettlement following the Kaptai dam (discussed in Chapter III) and also from the taungya forestry of the Reserved Forests. The following paragraphs of the IAJR project plan make the point:

The scheme envisages afforestating 55, 000 acres of Unclassed State Forest areas of Chittagong Hill Tracts (Rangamati), Bandarban, and Khagrachhari districts during the plan period. Along with [the] afforestation the scheme also envisages rehabilitation of 4000 Nos. of landless shifting cultivators (i.e., Jhumia families) over 20,000 acres of Unclassed State Forests land. The rehabilitation programme includes allotment of 5 (five) acres of land to each family [for homestead, agriculture, forestry and horticulture]. The rehabilitation programme also includes financial help for construction of houses, [agriculture and horticulture instruments and supplies], and the cost of land improvement. Provisions also exist for rewarding the shifting cultivators for their best performance in raising crops in their allotted areas as well as in raising successful plantation ... [T]he Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board has submitted another scheme [for developing the rehabilitation centres to provide infrastructure facilities, such as community centres, primary schools, water supply, dispensaries, roads, etc.]. [...] The afforestation work will be carried out by the Jhumia families... [They will be allowed] to practice Agro-Forestry in the plantation areas and [will be paid] wages...for afforestation work. This will substantially improve the economic condition of the Jhumia families. To create a sense of participation and to associate the Jhumia families in implementing the scheme properly, it is accepted that rehabilitated Jhumia families will have the right[s] over the plantation and forest produce as per signed agreement between the Jhumia families and the Govt (FD 1984: 4 -5).

An important change in this model of participatory forestry was the third phase of the forest plantation and rehabilitation project. Designed after a twenty-year long forestry master plan (1993-2013) and a new forest policy of 1994 which endorsed participatory social forestry as a national policy, the third phase of the project included the hill chiefs and headmen among the beneficiaries of income from harvesting forest plantations (see FD 1994).

Finally, in the project plans, there was hardly any mention of the context of the insurgency and war, nor the state's concern for security and sovereignty. The IAJR project plan, however, provided some indirect evidence to the connection between the forest plantation

programs and counter insurgency. Regarding the selection of lands to be brought for afforestation and resettlement, the project plan states:

The [Mouzas] for afforestation and rehabilitation have been provisionally selected by the Law enforcing Agencies, District Administration, Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board and Forest Department and the guiding factors for the selection were exigency and necessity for rehabilitation of landless jhumia families which may vary, if required. These are difficult areas, no doubt, and the execution of work in these areas will be a challenging task. The successful implementation of the scheme, therefore, depends very much on timely fulfilment of assurance given by the Law enforcing Agencies, the District Administration, and the Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board (FD 1984:6).

Notice that forest plantation projects were contingent upon “law enforcing agencies” which was a local phrasing that referred to the Bangladesh army in CHT. Nevertheless, my reading of the review reports of these projects confirms that the landscapes and peoples of CHT did not offer an easy way out for implementation of the projects; on the contrary, they proved to be a messy and uncertain terrain. Thus, to explore the connections of counter-insurgency, forest projects and resettlement on the ground, I turn next to the case of Lama Forest Division.

#### **4.4 Lama Forest Division: Counter-insurgency, Afforestation and Resettlement**

Lama Forest Division was established in 1985 along with Khagrachhari Forest Division and they are the last two of six new forest divisions that were created during the insurgency and war (see Appendix A: Map 5). At present, Lama Forest Division comprises the land area of Alikadam, Lama, and Naikhyongchari Upazilas (sub-districts) of Bandarban district.<sup>99</sup> This

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<sup>99</sup> Between 1982 and 1984, prior to the formation of Lama Forest Division, Alikadam Upazila was part of Lama Police Station or Thana.

includes 41 Mouzas with an area of about 337,783 acres of USF land, and the Matamuhuri Reserved Forest.<sup>100</sup>

Notwithstanding militarization and war, the counter-insurgency programs in the localities of Lama Forest Division began with the Development Board's Joutha Khamar project of resettlement of hill peoples. Between 1977 and 1983, the project had established eleven 'collective farms' and resettled about 650 families of hill peoples in these localities. Lama Upazila had seven farms, and Naikhyongchari and Alikadam together had the remaining four (CHTDB, n. d.). The Joutha Khamar project soon followed and at times went along with Bengali settlement. As a matter of fact, Alikadam, Lama, and Naikhyongchari Upazilas were major locations of early Bengali settlement between 1979 and 1981 and, according to a conservative estimate, Lama alone had about 7,500 Bengali families settled during this period, Naikhyongchari had 1,956 Bengali families, and Alikadam 750 families (Ibrahim 2001: 149). This Bengali settlement together with the Joutha Khamars resulted in the alienation of about 70,000 acres of USF land in Alikadam, Lama, and Naikhyongchari Upazilas. During this period, the Development Board further alienated about 35,686 acres of USF land (as many as 1,427 plots, each plot about 25 acres) for commercial rubber production by Bengali private entrepreneurs in these localities (Rasul 2009: 84-85). Most of these land grants of industrial rubber plots were given to Dhaka based businesses, civil and military officials and their kin members, and at times, patrons (IWGIA 2012:22). Though the leases required the lease holders to plant rubber or other industrial crops, only a few did so until the Peace Accord of 1997; instead, they used the land as an opportunity to acquire industrial loans from banks without developing the lands, and at times they transferred the land to third parties (thereby violating the

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<sup>100</sup> The Matamuhuri Reserve had been under Cox's Bazar Forest Division and was transferred to Lama Forest Division in 2001.

lease contact). Interestingly, during my fieldwork in Alikadam Upazila, when I had the opportunity to observe a monthly meeting of the Upazila administration (see Photo 1.12 in Chapter I), I came to learn that most of the lease holders did not even pay land taxes and were tax defaulters; and Mouza headmen ended up paying the default lease holders' taxes at the request of the UNO (Upazila executive officer) on hope of future reimbursement.

Forest development programs — afforestation and resettlement of the hill peoples — began immediately in the localities with the formation of Lama Forest Division in 1985.<sup>101</sup> Between 1985 and 1999, these programs alienated 22,385 acres of USF land irrespective of the legal status of land, but only raised 9,827 acres of forest plantation (teak and local species of timber and softwood). The sites of the land and forest plantation are all within 10 km of the administrative centers and/or security camps, clearly determined by the convenience of security and communication rather than land quality. Importantly, although the resettlement program was said to be the core of all projects' forest plantation plans for a forest labour regime and for the improvement of livelihood of the hill peoples, it was not so in practice. In Table 4.2, I present the list of projects, projected plans, and their implementation status, that were carried out in Lama Forest Division; this shows that resettlement programs in Lama Forest Division were not only insufficient but also irregular.

According to an official brochure of the Lama Forest Division, the division only resettled 309 families, of which 259 were in the Tain Range between 1985 and 1996, and 50 were in the Duluchari Range during 1993-94. However, the brochure reports that the resettled villagers of the Duluchari Range abandoned the resettlement immediately, but it does not mention why

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<sup>101</sup> In Tain Range Office, I found documents that showed that even before Lama Forest Division was to be formed officially, the Deputy Commissioner of Bandarban District sent a phone message in October of 1984 to Lama Police Station that thousands acres of land were provisionally to be given to Lama Forest Division for the Integrated Afforestation and Jhumia Resettlement project.

(Lama Forest Division 1999). This means that the forest plantation and other forest work in the Ranges falling within Lama and Naikhyongchari Upazilas must have been done through wage labour of Bengali settlers.

Why were resettlement programs so irregular and insufficient? During my fieldwork in Tain Range and Golden River village community, I wondered about this question and I also struggled to understand who got resettled and where. I moved in and out of the Golden River village to the Matamuhuri Reserve and to the Lama Forest Division office. Through travelling and letting stories of field sites travel with me from the resettled villagers to the forest villagers, and by consulting forest staff and officers, project documents and office records, it became evident to me that the practice of resettlement was dependent on local factors of insurgency, military success against insurgents, and availability of wage labour. I also gathered that the establishment of Lama Forest Division and the resettlement programs within it were in fact a direct result of the Matamuhuri war and associated displacement. As noted at the outset of this chapter, during the Matamuhuri war the army forcibly removed the Chakma, the Tripura, and the Tanchangya from Matamuhuri Reserve and adjacent areas on account of their high participation rate and support for the insurgency. The Murucha were aligned with the army and formed the *Mro Bahini* as part of the Village Defence Party (VDP), a paramilitary force which became a junior partner of the army in the Reserve. However, the Marma forest villagers remained undisturbed and silenced for strategic reasons. According to all accounts of resettled families in Golden River, there were as many as 500 displaced families of the Matamuhuri war. The following narratives of Tripura informants resonate with most accounts of displacement that I heard:

During the war the army came to our village and told us that all of us Tripura had to move out to Alikadam. Everyone was in panic. The army is the government, what could

we do! They did not give us time; we were about 70 men, women and children brought near the bank of Matamuhuri River. There were many boats waiting. In two boats, children, old men and women were brought to Alikadam Cantonment. Adult men were not allowed in boats but had to walk. The army had stopped moving all *Challes* (piles of bamboos put together to float along in the river) at Alikadam in the Matamuhuri river to let people cross the river and walk over it to come at Alikadam. I walked to Alikadam and then the Cantonment. On my way to Alikadam, I had seen many boats rushing to Alikadam and the army everywhere.

All night and through the next two days, people came; all were Tripura, Tanchagya, and Chakma.

We, Tripura and Tanchangya, were given three days to bring back our rice,<sup>102</sup> pigs, cows and clothes from our houses, but the Chakma could not go back. At the house I had four pigs, 20 hens and chickens and 2 tons of rice, etc. I did not pick up chilli and ginger from the *jhum*. But when I went back I could bring (500 kg) of rice and clothes only. On the last day, I saw that the army and their Khaki people (Ansar- a Bengali paramilitary force) were breaking down houses and then burning them, village after village. They burnt my house in front of me and told me it cannot stand empty because the Shanti Bahini will hide there.

We all stayed in the cantonment for two months and, afterward, we were taken to Umtoli to settle temporarily.

From my reading of documents in Lama Forest Division and Tain Range, I further gathered that out of the 500 displaced families, 200 were resettled in Lama Forest Division between 1985 and 1987 and the remaining displaced families of the Matamuhuri war were resettled in Bandarban Forest Division and Bandarban Pulpwood Forest Division.<sup>103</sup> In other words, 200 families of the Matamuhuri war who were resettled in the Tain Range were the main success of the resettlement programs of Lama Forest Division. Of the remaining 59 resettled families of the Tain Range, 50 families were reported to have been mobilized from kin members

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<sup>102</sup> Rice was the common thing they could bring back because a cheaper price of rice could easily mobilize Bengali labourers and buyers in Alikadam Bazaar. However, because of the distance from Alikadam to the villages and terrains, there were many families who were physically unable to either go back or to find others to help them.

<sup>103</sup> The documents here include resettlement registers, files, and communication letters.

of the resettled families of a Tripura community in the Range during 1993-94. This, however, appeared to be a scam; in fact, only a handful of hill peoples' families had been resettled. The scam was mainly spearheaded by some of the Forest Officers of Lama Forest Division but also involved a few first-generation members of resettled families. In response to my inquiry, the Tain Range Officer denied the scam and argued that the families themselves had abandoned the program; however, the resettled families of Golden River disagreed with the Range Officer.

Table 4.2: Resettlement and Forest Plantation of Lama Forest Division by Projects during the Insurgency

Name of Projects/ Year	Projected Resettlement	Name of the Ranges	Plantation (Acres)	Number of Resettled Families
Afforestation on USF and Jhumia Resettlement 1st Phase (1980-85, Extended to 1989-90)	Nil	Tain	140	Nil
		Nakyongchari	1240	Nil
		Duluchari	320	Nil
		Sangu	80	
Special Five Year Plan (1984-1990)	450	Tain	3000	200
		Sangu	1000	Nil
Afforestation on USF and Jhumia Resettlement 2nd Phase (1992-95)	100	Tain	1070	50
		Nakyongchari	730	Nil
		Duluchari	380	50*
		Sangu	700	Nil
Development of Resettled Jhumia and Afforestation around security camps (1993-94)	Nil	Tain	405	Nil
		Nakhyongchari	345	Nil
		Sangu	20	Nil
Afforestation on USF and Jhumia Resettlement 3rd phase (1996-99)	25	Tain	694	9
		Nakhyongchari	473	Nil
<b>Total</b>	<b>575</b>		<b>10,597</b>	<b>309 (259)</b>

Source: Lama Forest Division (1999; asterisk in the original represents abandonment of the resettlement).

Many forms of corruption exist in government institutions in Bangladesh, and the Forest Department is no exception. However, what saved all the displaced of the Matamuhuri war from

the corruption of the Forest Department was the involvement of the army in the resettlement process. This should not be a surprise, as the resettlement happened at the height of the war, the internal war of Shanti Bahini, and the negotiations between the government and the “renegade” faction of Shanti Bahini. According to the resettled villagers of Golden River, it was the army who selected them for the resettlement in Tain Range and grouped them into 50 families headed by men, mainly husbands (and at times sons or sons-in-law in the case of families headed by widows). Among the documents of Tain Range Office, I also found all the names of the resettled families by ethnicity, gender and family size, and at times a group picture of the family was attached to its name. There were 121 Tripura, 69 Tanchangya and 10 Chakma families who were made part of the IAJR project and resettled in four villages near the security camps at Lama-Alikadam Road. According to the IJAR project plan, each resettled family was provided with a plot of 5 acres with individual property rights for homestead and horticultural plantation including forest trees. They all seem to have received about Tk. 17,200 each over a three-year period as allowance for livelihood and the cost of household construction, horticultural plantation, and a cow. In addition, all the families also received a copy of a written agreement between them and the Forest Department. Signed by the Divisional officer of the Lama Forest Division, the agreement confirmed the participatory nature of the forest plantation and accordingly, the resettled families would receive 25 percent of the total income after the cost from thinning and 10 percent from the final harvest. Unlike taungya forestry, the participation in forest work by the resettled families was limited to compulsory labour for men in forest plantation activities in exchange for wages organized under a village Karbari of resettled families. The rule of thumb was, as local informants and resettled families explained, each household had to provide a male labour for 5 days a week over five years from the beginning of



the forest plantation. Alternatively, every resettled village had to give 30 male labourers per day for 5 days a week over the five years. However, extra male labourers were always welcome and wages were paid according to market price.

However, within five years of resettlement, almost all the villages of resettled families of Tain Range were completely deserted by the resettled families apart from the Golden River village. Around the same time, the Forest Department initiated the process of making the plantation forest in Lama Division into a Reserved Forest. Completed in 2002, this made 13,375 acres land out of 22,385 acres of Lama Forest Division into reserved forest under the Forest Act of 1927, in contradiction of the IAJR project plan. This reservation of planted forest in USF was done in all new Forest Divisions across CHT, amid a protest movement of the hill peoples that was organized by a citizen group, the Committee for Protection of Land and Forest Rights. The movement was mainly based in Rangamati city, though it originally began in 1994 in Rajosthali Upazila, and was led by Sudatta Tanchangya, an ex- Maoist indigenous activist belonging to the Tanchangya community. After the Peace Treaty and up to 2004, the movement successfully mobilized both traditional and political parties' elites and became a mass movement of the hill peoples. The strategies of the movement included large public gatherings in cities, litigation, seminars, and lobbying the government and ADB. The key demand of the movement was and still is to cancel the reservation of USF land that was alienated by the Forest Department during the insurgency and war for forest plantation and resettlement programs. The movement regularly received national press coverage and the support of national NGOs and environmental activists. This was in part because it articulated the opposition to the ADB's countrywide Forestry Sector Project. The movement has apparently failed to achieve its goals (see also Gain 2002:187-221),

and surprisingly, it had hardly any effect on the communities in Lama Forest Division as they were completely unaware of the movement as such.

Nonetheless, in Lama Forest Division, there was a local resistance to the reservation of forest in USF land by a group of the Murucha through legal means. Their resistance took the form of filling an official petition to the Forest Settlement Officer of Bandarban district in accordance with the Forest Act of 1927, complaining that the proposed reservation included acres of individually owned land and risked displacement. In Tain Range Office I read documents that pointed to the fact that the complaint was withdrawn through a letter to the Settlement Officer signed by a handful of petitioners admitting their ignorance and false claims. In fact, the communities in Lama Forest Division were coerced by the Forest Department and did not receive legal or political help from the movement leader of the Committee for Protection of Land and Forest Rights or local government Hill District Councils. Strangely enough, as I will discuss in Chapter V, despite hill peoples' collective opposition, the ADB's Forestry Sector Project got implemented in Matamuhuri Reserve; most of the prominent indigenous leaders and political activists whom I met found it impossible to believe because the law requires the consent of the Regional Council for any development program in CHT (see also Chapter I). This underscores the fact that both the indigenous movement and hill peoples' political parties of CHT are disconnected from local indigenous issues, at least in Bandarban district; they tend to be elitist, a feature I will explore to some extent in Chapter VI. In the next section, I will consider how and to what extent counter-insurgency development and resettlement changed the life and livelihood of the hill peoples' communities.

#### **4.5 Development Effects: Life Aspects of Golden River**

Bengali Bazaar, a roadside market place, stands next to Tain Range Office and a military camp at Alikadam-Lama road, the main road of communication from Cox's Bazar, a plain land district, to the areas of Lama and Alikadam Upazilas. Situated on Silver Road, Golden River is a twenty-minute walk up the road from Bengali Bazaar and some Marma villages; there are some neighboring Murucha villages at a distance of the road. Far from Golden River at the end of Silver Road lies a large Bengali settlement, which moved there during the 1980s. At present, Golden River stretches about 2 square kilometres and has a total of 43 households, of which 20 are the original resettled families, 10 are beneficiaries of the resettled families, 8 are sons and sons-in-law of the remaining resettled families, and 5 are new residents. The new residents include a school teacher, a distant relative of a resettled family, and a family of three generations: Rana Tripura, his son, and his grandson. Interestingly, Rana Tripura is one of the displaced of the Matamuhuri war; he was resettled in Tankabotee under Bandarban Forest Division in 1986. He claimed to have been displaced again in 1990 by the Forest Department as the department reclaimed the land given to him. In 1994, Rana, his son and his grandson again resettled in Tain Range and received allowance for livelihood and the cost for household construction over a period of three years. The land to which they were entitled was promised but they had not received it by 2008.

Unlike the common Bengali's perception about hill peoples' communities being "tribes" or "clan" groups, Golden River (as in the villages in Matamuhuri Reserve) reminded me a lot of Bengali rural villages where I grew up before moving to the city. Though the community of Golden River shares Christianity as its religious faith, villagers are divided into several denominations, mostly Baptist with some Catholic, Evangelist and Full Gospel. The main

organization of social life in the Golden River is the hamlet; there are three hamlets, separated by rivulets, bamboo forest and jungle with an elusive boundary of where each begins and ends. Each hamlet has its own Karbari, or Village Headman, the lowest position of traditional administration of CHT, though all of them are not recognized by the Bohmong chief or local Mouza headman. In fact, this organization of the village and the communities emerged recently, in the early 1990s, until when the villagers had been spread far and wide and the community had been under a Forest headman (with no binding relation to the local Mouza headman). This circumstance of Golden River at present also emerged in part from the land policy for the resettlement program. At the time of the resettlement, each of the resettled families was offered 5 acres of USF land, including homestead plot. The families were forced to construct houses on their allotted land plots, despite protests by the villagers. Sibujit Tripura, aged 65, recalled the skirmish at Golden River:

We were brought here [Golden River] in trucks around noon by the army and then left to the Forest Department. Sreeram Tripura was selected as [Forest] Headman by the army, and had visited the place before with others; and he told us Tripura could not live in this place; the land and hills were very sandy, and there were only a few flat plains. But we had to move here. The Range Officer returned the next day along with Munshes (Forest Guards). By then everyone was unhappy because no one had had good sleep during the night: we made a few makeshift houses for women and children to sleep and thus men had to sleep under open sky. The Ranger and the Guards showed everyone the plots with a map and pointed where to make house, how many rooms, and how long. Everyone became angry and no one would follow the Guards' instructions. The Headman then told us: 'What do we do now? The government's decision is final, and we have to live here but let's make our house as we wish to.' On the third day, we received Tk. 1,500 as house allowance and we constructed houses under the Guards' watch. If one failed to follow the Guards' instruction they broke the houses, and Biju Tripura was once so mad he chased a Guard with a long knife up to Lama-Alikadam Road.

From my inquiry into the immediate past of Tripura society and economy before the Matamuhuri war, it becomes evident that the Tripura used to stay in a place for about 3 to 5 years at a time, depending on the availability and fertility of jhum land, and that they were an affluent

peasant community. Tripura custom dictated that when they changed a village site, the Karbari would try to find a place mainly in and around flat plain hills by rivers or rivulets. If the Karbari found a place, he would visit the place with other men of the village, mainly elders, to select a site on the bank of the river/rivulet for everyday use of water and bathing, and a site for the *Shashan* or graveyard. Afterwards the Karbari would ask the villagers to cut jungle growth around the settlement site and each male villager would choose his household location. During his sleep at night, the Karbari then tried to divine through dream whether or not the place would be good for the community's well being. Among the villagers, each household head of a family would also dream about the suitability of the location for his household and the well-being of his family. If the Karbari and most villagers had good dreams and felt good about the site of the settlement, the place would get selected and the villagers would move out to the new settlement. If not, the search for a new place would begin again. I would argue that the violation of this cultural logic during the resettlement at Golden River explains in part why some villagers of Golden River abandoned the village.

Economic reasons also figure prominently in the villagers' accounts of why they stayed or left Golden River. By all accounts, economic hardship and lack of food security are the main reasons for abandoning the resettlement village. Sova Tipura, wife of Sibua Tripura, stated succinctly in her broken Bengali "*lok besi, jhum kom, ar khana nai. Palabeiyto!*" ([We had] more people, [but] little jhum, and [there was] hardly enough food [for all]. [Some could not stay here], but must leave [the village])). Sibua helpfully explained:

A village of fifty families was unconventional, too many to be living on jhum cultivation in any place. Harvest from jhum in the area was also not good. In fact it was so scanty that men in the families had to find wage labour work for daily bread and butter, and still wages were not enough for a family to survive here. Therefore, those who did get plain land in their plots could not have survived in living here and left the village at their first

opportunity in 1990, and a few others later followed them, mainly to Matamuhuri Reserve.

The above statement about the relationship between the plain land in plot and staying in the village is credible but partial. From the survey I conducted in Golden River, I found only 12 households out of the 20 resettled families had between 20 and 80 decimal plain lands in their plots. Another factor that influenced the villagers' choice to stay put in Golden River was the leadership role of Moniram Tripura. The villagers I interviewed agreed that Moniram played a critical role in sparing Golden River from complete desertion. In the early 1990s Moniram successfully lobbied the local Mouza headman to become a Karbari (village headman) in the Mouza and brought most of the community households together into a new settlement site. However, this caused an unintended conflict among the villagers which was exacerbated by competition among the churches and a flow of resources from them, and led to the current divisions of hamlets of which one consists of only three households (including the household of the Karbari).

In economic terms, the communities of Golden River have remained jhum cultivators as they were in the past, but have turned into marginal ones with limited access to land and resources. In Table 4.3 below I summarize the main livelihood strategies of the remaining twenty original resettled families by household based on the survey I conducted. Table 4.4 below presents statistical comparisons of livelihood strategies among the three groups of Golden River: the twenty original resettled families, beneficiaries and the remaining others in the village.

Table 4.3 shows that 63 percent of the resettled families engage in at least four occupations for their livelihood, of which jhum cultivation, wage labour and selling fuel wood or sun grass figure prominently, and as many as 65 percent of these resettled families have access to plough land through ownership or sharecropping.

Table 4.3: Livelihood Strategies of the Resettled Families

Livelihood Strategies	Rank of Livelihood Strategies by Households				
	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	Quaternary	% Households
Jhuming	6	1	6	3	80%
Selling fuel wood & sun grass	4	10	2	0	80%
Wage labour	5	4	5	1	75%
Farming	4	2	2	0	40%
Horticulture garden	0	0	0	6	30%
Sharecropping	0	2	2	1	25%
Home garden	0	0	2	2	20%
Small business	0	1	0	1	10%
Salaried jobs	1	0	0	0	5%
Rent	0	0	1	0	5%
Not applicable	0	0	0	6	
Total Households (N)	20	20	20	20	

Data Source: Household Survey by the Author (March 15 to 21, 2008).

Interestingly, only 6 households (30 percent) of the resettled families have some income from horticulture gardens, a strategy that was envisioned as the main future livelihood strategy for the resettlement. In other words, 50 percent are mainly marginal jhum cultivating wage labourers, 30 percent are marginal jhum cultivating farmers, and 10 percent are marginal farmers and wage labourers. Of the remaining 10 percent representing 2 households, one household head is primarily a businessman, and the other is dependent on income from a job. In plain language, this means that more than a half of the original twenty families are primarily living on income from wage labour supplemented by jhum cultivation or farming, and more than a quarter of them

could depend on income from farming for most of the year but have to engage in wage labour from time to time.

Table 4.4 is a statistical comparison of livelihood strategies among the twenty original resettled families, beneficiaries and the remaining others in the village according to household and the multiplicities of livelihood choices. This shows that the economic conditions of the beneficiaries are little better than those of the twenty original resettled families. Their different degrees of dependency on jhum cultivation, wage labour, and selling fuel wood or sun grass can be explained in part by increased dependence on jobs and rents among the beneficiaries. In fact, the beneficiaries are mostly sons or siblings of the absentee resettled families and they have better education than their parents' generation.

Table 4.4: Livelihood Strategies of the Resettled Families in Comparison with the Beneficiaries and the Remaining Others

Occupation	Resettled Families	Beneficiaries	Remaining Others
Jhum	80%	50%	77%
Selling fuel wood & sun grass	80%	10%	85%
Wage labour	75%	30%	77%
Farming	40%	30%	8%
Horticulture garden	30%	40%	Nil
Sharecropping	25%	30%	46%
Homestead garden	20%	20%	Nil
Small business	10%	Nil	Nil
Salaried jobs	5%	60%	38%
Rent	5%	40%	Nil
Total Households (N)	20	10	13

Data Source: Household Survey by the Author (March 15 to 21, 2008).



In contrast, and understandably, the remaining others of Golden River, mostly the sons or sons-in-law of the resettled families, are among the poorest in the village, depending mostly on jhum, wage labor or selling fuel wood and sun grass . Unlike the beneficiaries, they are all completely landless families, their houses are built on their parents' or neighbour's homesteads, and they are also more likely to be sharecroppers, as much as the beneficiaries are rent collectors. In sum, the survey reveals that only a handful of Golden River families have some kind of food security for a year, while others struggle acutely or to some degree.

In hindsight, what surprised me about the economy of Golden River communities was the persistence of jhum cultivation and poverty. In my attempt to understand this, I found that jhum cultivation persisted not because Tripura are “tribes,” “primitive” or do not know about other uses of land or wet rice cultivation, but because of jhum's relative importance for the production of staple food for hill people in the ecological context of CHT. Poverty among the communities, however, seemed to be more of a structural issue, though it is admittedly a multifaceted problem. It was structural because the horticultural settlement meant that the communities would depend on wages for income and buy food from the market. Unsurprisingly, most of the households in Golden River failed to raise horticulture gardens; instead, they used their lands to grow sun grass and for occasional jhum cultivation, because they argue they do not have capital or resources to develop the land. Over the years, they remained dependent on incomes from wage labour and other minor occupations for their livelihood. Some of the Golden River communities had even sold their land, and a few had lost access of the land to Bengalis (including a Bengali anthropologist who seems to have conducted research in the region). This land grabbing by Bengalis has been a chronic problem in CHT since Bengali settlement, and is well documented

by human rights groups (CHT Commission 2000; Adnan 2004). Meanwhile, the Lama Forest Division alone earned more than a million US dollars since its establishment up to 1999, an average of Tk. 3,859,657 or about US\$ 85,000 a year even if counted conservatively (US\$1.00= Tk. 45.00) (Lama Forest Division 1999).

In sum, the effect of “development” has been structural poverty for hill peoples’ communities and the loss of customary access to land and forest in USF. Partly because of this, the communities at Golden River have grown more religiously conservative. Some families were even divided by religious faith in order to gain access to various churches’ resources, which were mainly low position jobs, support for schools, and children’s education, and at times financial assistance. An unintended consequence of all of this has been individual and collective suffering due to the loss of Tripura cultural identity and traditions, namely *Puja* (worship) and *Boisuk* (New Year’s celebration). All the men and women whom I interviewed or spoke to informally shared this opinion but some insisted they would rather die as disciples of Jesus or Mother Mary than change faith again. Others seemed more pragmatic, saying “It would not be possible,” or “I myself cannot change my faith, how will I change?” There were also changes in relationships between Karbari, Headmen and the communities. Neither the Karbaris nor the communities ever paid jhum taxes to the local Mouza headman, only the land tax. On the matter of civil disputes or justice, though the Karbaris and Headmen oversaw petty family and land disputes in the communities, I found that the Union Council of the local government was more powerful than those of Karbaris or Mouza Headmen. The positions of the Karbaris became more ceremonial and also a social link to the outside world rather than holding much importance for internal solidarity and significance.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the origins and cultural geographies of the insurgency movement and counter-insurgency development programs, and illustrated the resulting changes in forest, land and agrarian relations of the hill peoples and relations of power in Mouzas as they exist today.

This chapter has shown how the counter-insurgency greatly transformed the control of Unclassed State Forest (USF) land and agrarian relations through the introduction of a private property regime in USF and other programs, including forest resettlement. I have argued that the changes in the hill peoples' relations to land and forest in USF are directly related to insurgency and counter-insurgency in the region. In particular, the counter-insurgency development has resulted in the end of the common property of forest and land in USF which had come to exist in part through the making of forests in CHT in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In turn, there emerged in USF an individual property rights regime over forest and land on the one hand, and state property of forest on the other hand, which has reinforced the dispossession, marginalization and land alienation of the hill peoples. I have shown that the key rationale behind the changes is the discourse of "optimum land use," an environmental discourse of land use. Originating in the 1960s, the discourse mobilized both the state and non-state actors (transnational donors) on the eve of the insurgency, and was projected and programmed in order to transform the land use of USF and the economy of the hill peoples for development in the region. Focusing on Lama Forest Division, I have also examined the development and resettlement programs of the Forest Department and shown that the effect of development has been structural poverty and inter-generational inequalities within the hill peoples' communities. In part, the problems of 'development' programs are not only that they are coercive but that they are also ethnocentric, lacking knowledge of food security needs and the culture of the hill peoples.

## CHAPTER V

### Counter-insurgency and Political Forests: Matamuhuri Reserve, Forest Villagers, and Social Forestry

Government agencies are continually reclassifying and remapping territory to account for how people have crossed earlier paper boundaries. State land management agencies are forced to recognize local rights deriving from local classification, modes of communication, and enforcement mechanisms. Programs such as those awarding limited land rights to cultivators in reserve forest areas are simultaneously a state attempt to contain people's activities and a state response to what people had done to undermine previous such policies.

—Vandergeest and Peluso (1995: 416).

#### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I return to the story of Matamuhuri Reserve that I have discussed in the outset of this dissertation to examine and illustrate i) counter-insurgency effects on Reserved Forests; ii) contemporary changes in the economy and community life of forest villagers (i.e., taungya cultivators); and iii) practices and programs of social forestry, as emerging strategies of political forests for the management of Reserved Forests in CHT. As mentioned in Chapter II, Matamuhuri Reserve came into existence in the 1880s during British rule and had remained without formal management of the Forest Department until the early years of Pakistani rule. In the early 1950s, the Reserve was brought under formal management of the Forest Department but without any working plan. In 1967, a working plan was introduced for the management of the Reserve, which formalized the practices of industrial extraction of timber and other forest products, including taungya forestry according to scientific forestry (see Chapter III). Like the other Reserved Forests of CHT, the Reserve was one of the focal points of the insurgency and counter-insurgency war from 1975 to 1997, in particular the Matamuhuri war. As noted partly in Chapter I, the effects of the insurgency and counter-insurgency on the Reserve were colossal and manifold; to repeat, the Reserve is now largely controlled by the army and mostly without tree

forest cover because of illegal logging. In part because of these recent changes in political control and forest cover, the Reserve has been brought under a new strategy of management and political control which is commonly known as “social forestry.” Therefore, to complement my discussion in Chapter IV on counter-insurgency development in USF, in this chapter I delve into details of counter-insurgency and its effects on Matamuhuri Reserve. I illustrate the ways in which the insurgency and counter-insurgency affected altered or facilitated ecological and economic changes in the Reserved Forests and their communities of forest villagers. In so doing, I wish to extend Peluso and Vandergeest’s account of the effects of insurgency and counter-insurgency violence on political forests, suggesting that insurgency and counter-insurgency not only help to extend political forests but also produce new frontiers, a space of resources and people at the margin of the state, that is less integrated and without formal authority of the state (Peluso and Vandergeest 2011; but compare Scott 2009).

However, the main focus of this chapter is on social forestry programs that were implemented in the Matamuhuri Reserved Forest from 2002 to 2006 as part of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) assisted Forestry Sector Project (FSP). It is important to note here that the FSP was the largest social forestry project in Bangladesh and the first mainstream social forestry program in CHT.<sup>104</sup> I argue here that the introduction of the social forestry regime in Matamuhuri Reserve, primarily motivated by deforestation and encroachment in the Reserve, was in fact linked to the insurgency and counter-insurgency. I show that as in much of South Asia and Southeast Asia, social forestry in Matamuhuri Reserve has remained a form of state

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<sup>104</sup>In its original planning, the CHT component of the FSP was to be implemented in the USF lands of Lama and the Bandarban Forest Divisions from 1996 to 2001. However, the plan generated mass opposition in 1998 among the hill peoples with the participation of all regional political parties and traditional elites of CHT as well as several local NGOs including Taungya; as such, the plan was only partly implemented in the Matamuhuri Reserve. See Gain 2002: 187-221, for descriptive details on the indigenous opposition to social forestry in CHT.

intervention, as the discourse of social forestry reinforces the authoritative role of the Forest Department and the state's commercial and revenue interests (Sundar 2000a, 2000b; Peluso 1992; Gururani n.d.; but compare Agrawal, A 2001; 2005; Agarwal, B 2000; Rangan 1997). Unlike colonial Village Forest Councils of Kumaon, India<sup>105</sup>, or taungya forestry in South Asia and Southeast Asia that were based on a communal property system and the usufruct rights of all village residents, the social forestry programs of FSP represent a more formalized system of rights over access to resources based on 'social citizenship'<sup>106</sup> rather than membership of particular village communities, bearing important significance for participation and equity, especially gender equity. Nevertheless, Moses (1997) reminds us that an analysis of community based resource management is not likely to be successful if it does not take up what he calls "cultural ecology," going beyond narrow definitions of economic interest, utility and value. Considering the modalities of social forestry, including choices of species, I argue that social forestry in Matamuhuri Reserve is more detrimental than the anticipated benefit of revenue incomes, and that social forestry not only risks dispossession of hill peoples of the Reserve but also the ecology of the Reserve.

In what follows, I draw upon fieldwork undertaken in Matamuhuri Reserve and Matamuhuri Forest Range to describe the ecological and social contexts of the Reserve, followed by an inquiry into the nature and process of deforestation in the Reserve. These sections help to explain the effects of the war and counter-insurgency development on the Reserve during the

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<sup>105</sup> Village Forest Councils of Kumaon were established in 1930s in Uttarakhand and United Province founded on Class I and "civil" forests and have continued to date, numbering an estimated 4,805 councils by 1995 (Agarwal, B. 2000). Supervised and managed by both forest and revenue departments, these councils comprise a small body of elected representatives from the villages and are responsible for the improvement and protection of forests, while controlling and monitoring villagers' access to them (Agrawal, A. 2005; Guha 2001; Tucker 1984).

<sup>106</sup> I use the term social citizenship to refer to those institutional practices such as private property, work, welfare, education, democracy and so forth, through which citizens, either as individuals or as members of a group, become actors in civil society and exercise their citizenship.

period from the 1970s to the 1990s, and in turn, they also describe the conjunctures and changes in ecology and economy within which the social forestry program began. Next, I describe recent changes to the centuries' old institution of the 'forest village system' and its relations to the forest resources and power relations. In this section, I further compare and contrast the economy and livelihood strategies of two hill peoples' groups, namely the Marma and Murucha, to illustrate the ways in which the insurgency and counter-insurgency have changed ethnic relations in terms of access to resources as well as power relations in the Reserve. This follows an account of how social forestry practices changed and shaped the communities, economy and ecology of the Reserve. In sum, this chapter serves to clarify the practices, risks and limits of social forestry in the management of the Matamuhuri Reserve in particular, and the emerging practices of the management of the Reserved Forests in CHT in general.

## **5.2 The Matamuhuri Reserve: Local Political Ecology**

This section describes the social history, ecology and geography of Matamuhuri Reserve as well as recent changes in the ecology and cultural geography of the Reserve caused by the insurgency and counter-insurgency. The focus of this section is on changes in the human ecology of the Reserve and its adjacent areas, where Bengalis emerged as dominant group. Thus, this section explains how Bengalis became major participants and beneficiaries of the social forestry programs that will be describe later in this chapter.

The Matamuhuri Reserve is situated in the territory of Alikadam Upazila (or sub district) of Bandarban district and currently falls under the administration of Lama Forest Division (see Appendix A: Maps 2 and 5). The Reserve comprises 102,854 acres of land along the Matamuhuri River and is the second largest Reserved Forest of CHT, consisting of more than

half the total land area of Alikadam Upazila.<sup>107</sup> Bordering Myanmar in south, the Matamuhuri Reserve runs parallel to the Sangu Reserved Forest in the east and is contained within hills rising 1600 to 2400 feet above the river, which separate drainages of the Matamuhuri and Sangu rivers. The Matamuhuri River originates in the southern end of the valley and forms many streams joined by hundreds of creeks. From the headwater, the river is still the only means of communication into the Reserve from Alikadam Upazila proper, and runs approximately 64 kilometers to the end of its northern boundary at Babupara and 128 kilometers to its entry into Maheskhali Channel in Cox's Bazar district.

When the Forest Department brought the Matamuhuri Reserve under formal forest management in 1950, the forests in it were intact even though the Forest Department had not policed them. This was primarily because the locality was isolated with a relatively small population of hill peoples.<sup>108</sup> The Alikadam proper was then part of Alikadam Mouza, a revenue unit of traditional administration, a remote rural settlement like other Mouzas under the control of the Lama police station (i.e., Lama *Thana*). Its only link to the outside world was through the city of Chokoria of Cox's Bazar district, a two-day journey on the Matamuhuri River either by a small boat in the rainy season or bamboo rafts in winter (GOEB 1954:3).<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, the land area of the Matamuhuri Reserve is said to be 65,011 hectares (BBS 1986), which appears to misrepresent the land area of the Reserve. My calculation of the land area of the Reserve is from the Matamuhuri Range Office which corresponds to the forest inventory of the Reserve in the 1960s (see FD 1970). The total land area of the Mouzas of Alikadam Upazila is 23,569 hectares or about 58,240 acres (BBS 1986).

<sup>108</sup> This fact can be gleaned from the census of 1961 that counted the hill population by the Mouzas of CHT. According to the census, the six Mouzas which now form the Alikadam Upazila were then parts of Alikadam Union and had as many as 6,381 hill peoples (GOP n. d.).

<sup>109</sup> There was no road to Alikadam Upazila until 1982.





Photo 5.1: USF land near the northern boundary of Matamuhuri Reserve. Notice the bamboo raft passing on Matamuhuri River from the Reserve.



Photo 5.2: Some hills and land in Matamuhuri Reserve.



Photo 5.3: Riverbed (during dry season) in Matamuhuri Reserve. Alap Alam, one of my research assistants, is seated in the picture.



Photo 5.4: Bengali sharecroppers in Matamuhuri Reserved Forest harvesting winter vegetables. Beyond them, one can see hillside cash crop cultivation with social forestry plantation in the background.



Photo 5.5: Visiting a social forestry plantation site in Matamuhuri Reserve. In the image are my research assistant Bhubon Chakma (left) and a Marma forest villager (right). I am taking the picture.



Photo 5.6: Lama Forest Department meeting with forest villagers (referred to in Chapter I). The Divisional Forest Officer is seated in the foreground.



Photo 5.7: Matamuhuri Forest Range meeting with Bengali participants in a social forestry program, Matamuhuri Reserve. Myself and my research assistant Bhubon Chakma attended the meeting (not in the picture).



Photo 5.8: Forest Officers and Forest Guards confiscating illegally extracted timber near Matamuhuri Forest Range Office.

Uffo Marma, the first Forest headman, confirmed to me that no human settlement had existed inside the Reserve before the 1950s, although the Murucha, the Khumi, and the Tripura lived near and around it in other Mouzas. Interestingly, Marma described the Reserve “as if it was a green sky under the sky.” Reminiscing about his early days as a forest villager in 1950s, he stated, “even on a broad sunny day when I got inside the forest, I could barely see the sun or sunlight but only the shadows of leaves and trees. If you had a weak heart, the forest would scare you.” This observation echoes the first scientific inventory of the Reserve conducted from the late 1950s to the early 1960s through aerial photographs and field sample surveys. According to this inventory, the Reserve was a relatively thick dense forest of timber trees and bamboos of local species with only a small area under grass cover. The trees, like the other reserved forests of CHT, were a mixture of deciduous and tropical evergreen species; the latter were predominant, with civit, garjan, chapalish as the principal species. These three hardwoods comprised half or more of the commercial timber volume of the Reserve, with the remaining volume comprised of fifty different species of tropical hardwoods. However, bamboo untypically represented over 46 percent of the land as bamboo cover. It also grew as understory of tree forest in low hills and on the banks of creeks or streams (FD 1970). Unfortunately, the inventory does not provide accounts of the fauna inside the Reserve. However, in my interviews with forest villagers, they named ten to twenty species of birds in the Marma language that I could recognize only as peacock and wild hen. The Reserve also had large numbers of bears, deer, elephants, monkeys, tigers and wild pigs. Presently, with the exception of sparse wild hen and deer, the birds and animals seem to have disappeared entirely.

Since the 1980s, the political ecology of the locality of Alikadam has changed greatly due to the counter-insurgency and administrative development. The population of Alikadam Upazila

was estimated at 34,000 in 2001, of which Bengalis accounted for 59 percent and the communities of the hill peoples 41 percent. Among the hill peoples, the Murucha (Mro) make up as many as 7,676 persons, followed by the Marma (3,046), the Tripura (1,196), the Tanchangya (1192) , and the Chakma (389). These population statistics of hill peoples are dubious. Nevertheless, if we use them as a reference point, half of the population of Alikadam Upazila lives within 5 kilometers of the Reserve, namely in Alikadam Bazaar and Nyapara. Alikadam Bazaar is a rural town as well as the administrative headquarters of the Upazila with a weekly market place and the office of Matamuhuri Forest Range. Bengalis and Marma comprise the population of the town. On the other hand, Nyapara, located just across Alikdama Bazaar by the Matamuhuri River, is a densely populated Bengali village contiguous to the northern boundary of the Reserve. Popular estimates of the population of Nyapara are about 10,000, and no less than 40 percent of it is said to be Rohingya refugees from Myanmar who arrived in the 1990s. Significantly, both Alikadam Bazaar and Nyapara are located next to the prime river valley plain lands of the Upazila which are mostly occupied by Bengalis.

An important aspect of the current demography of Alikadam Upazila is the disappearance and dispossession of the Khumi, one of the hill peoples' groups that inhabited the locality. According to local narratives, most Khumi had left the locality of Alikadam to neighbouring Naikhyongchari Upazila by the early 1970s, displaced by the influx of the Chakma and Tanchangya who were pushed out by the Kaptai dam in the 1960s and later by Bengalis in the 1970s. The majority of the Bengali population of Alikadam Upazila is not part of the state sponsored Bengali settlement of 1980s; rather most are voluntary migrants from Cox's Bazar district. Bengali migration to Alikadam locality began with the establishment of the Alikadam Cantonment in 1974, which led to the development of road communications and connected the

locality for first time to Cox's Bazar and Chittagong districts in the early 1980s. This reduced the two day boat journey from Chokoria to Alikadam to an hour by motor vehicle. Significantly, the Cantonment and militarization in the locality helped to further Bengali migration. The Cantonment was also a key factor in 'turning' the locality, as Bengalis filled all positions of state administration, local government, and civil society institutions in the Upazila in 1984, in addition to taking control over trade, commerce, and businesses. Alikadam Upazila is currently well-connected to the district headquarters of Bandarban, Cox's Bazar, and Chittagong by roads with concrete surface and inter-city bus service.

### **5.3 Deforestation of the Matamuhuri Reserve**

Much as in other part of Southeast Asia and South Asia, deforestation as an environmental problem has been a key rationale for social forestry programs in Bangladesh (Asaduzzaman 1989). The dominant accounts of deforestation in Bangladesh also follow conventional and institutional (e.g., UN, World Bank, ADB) explanations that link deforestation with the rate of population growth and destructive forest clearing by 'uncaring farmers,' who are primarily the rural poor and shifting cultivators (GOBD 1993: vii-viii; but compare, Gadgil and Guha 1993; Guha 2000; Peluso 1992; Rangan 1995, 1997; Rasul 2007; Shiva 1987). In this section, I challenge these dominant institutional and conventional narratives of deforestation in order to support my contention that social forestry in the Matamuhuri Reserve is largely matter of control of the Reserve and conflicts between the Forest Department and the army. I hold that deforestation is a spatially and ecologically differentiated process that varies across time, contingent upon the political economy of a particular place and the regime of governmentality. I also show that deforestation in the Reserve is connected to both institutional management

practices well as political processes of insurgency and counter-insurgency, involving three distinct processes: management policies and practices, encroachment, and illegal logging. Although these processes overlap and are concurrent with each other, they are differentiated by the agents involved and their roles in specific forms of deforestation.

Turning first to the management policies and practices in the Reserve, the general management policies of Matamuhuri Reserve were from the outset geared toward gradual conversion of heterogeneous forest, coinciding with industrial plantation of high yielding local timber species and teak, through clear felling, commercial exploitation of forest resources, and policing. In 1960, the Reserve was also coupled with forest industries – namely the Forest Industry Development Corporation (FIDC), and the Karnaphuli paper mill – for the commercial exploitation of timber and bamboo. In 1967, as a twenty-year working plan came into the effect, the working plan divided the Reserve into 30 blocks and 55 compartments, and re-arranged them into four working circles for hardwood timber, softwood timber, bamboo and overlapping bamboo. In doing so, the working plan proposed to convert 27,107 acres of timber forest cover area (including the plantation before the working plan) into a plantation of: a) high yielding hardwood timber for a maximum of 60 years, and b) softwood timber species for a maximum of 30 years. Considering the cost of timber extraction and the difficulties of timber transportation, the plan constricted the annual timber extraction program to high timber quality forest (i.e. the matured trees of the principal species) in the area of the annual plantation programs through FIDC. For the pure bamboo forest, the plan set the conservation period to 4 years before commercial extraction.

However, the working plan remained incomplete until 1995, when the Forest Department ceased regular timber extraction and annual plantation programs as a result of increased illegal



logging (but continued to extract bamboo under a provisional plan). Meanwhile, the Forest Department converted only 13,908 acres of timber forest cover into hardwood timber forest through clear felling and taungya forestry in the most accessible parts of the Reserve (on both banks of the river up to fourteen miles from the northern boundary), about half proposed by 1985 in the working plan. Although the Forest Department had reasonably regulated the annual extraction of bamboo<sup>110</sup> and other minor forest products little coordination existed between FIDC and the local Forest Department. In fact, as many forest villagers told me, for the most part the FIDC operated an unchecked timber extraction program through private contractors from the most accessible part of the Reserve because of difficulties moving the timber logs along the river, uneven high hills and steep slopes. Thus, the high mature forest cover of the principal species disappeared due to unsustainable logging by FIDC. At the same time, industrial plantation programs wasted a large quantity of timber in the plantation areas through taungya forestry.<sup>111</sup>

The encroachment on the Reserve by the hill peoples was not a typical phenomenon of forest encroachment by agrarian rural communities or big businesses that are prevalent in the plain lands districts of Bangladesh; it was an outcome of the insurgency, counter-insurgency development, and the Matamuhuri war. The encroachment began as early as 1972 when Shanti Bahini, the guerrilla force of the JSS, took shelter in the Reserve to train and prepare for armed insurgency. The Matamuhuri Reserve, along with the Sangu Reserve, provided the Shanti Bahini with shelter within a large inaccessible terrain as well as routes to the southern parts of CHT

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<sup>110</sup> The bamboo was generally sold to private purchasers or the contractors of the Karnaphuli paper mill through permits.

<sup>111</sup> These facts can be constructed to support generalized meta- narratives by environmental critics who cite state demand for commercial timber and revenue as key to the deforestation of South Asia across time and space. However, these generalizations risk over-simplifying the complex processes of deforestation by ignoring specific local ecologies.

(through the Sangu and Matamuhuri rivers' networks). The Shanti Bahini are said to have used the Reserve as a base for guerrilla operations in the south of CHT, controlling deep interior parts of the Reserve until 1984, when the Matamuhuri war drove them and their supporters from the Reserve. By most accounts of forest villagers, the effect of the insurgency on deforestation in the Reserve was limited in scope and space. According to Mingsey Murucha, an ex-insurgent member whom I interviewed, the Shanti Bahini had a number of strategic villages in the Reserve, mainly between Chiampra Mouza and Kurukpata, for concealing supplies of essential goods and spying on military movements. In the insurgency supported villages, the households could not have numbered more than 250, comprising about 1500 Chakma, Tripura and Tanchangya. In part, this was also because of the cultural logic of jhum cultivation practices related to the concept of the 'best land.' According to the forest villagers, the best land refers to bamboo forest in relatively high hills with large flat tops that logically forces a long fallow period of jhum cycle to allow regeneration of bamboo forest and other vegetation.

The current encroachment on the Reserve, specifically the Murucha settlement, emerged following the Matamuhuri war along with the militarization of the Reserve. As part of the army's counter-insurgency strategy, Murucha villagers were provided with firearms and training to form a paramilitary force known as the Mro Bahini. Given that the Murucha had been part of Shanti Bahini and that it was common knowledge among hill people that the army was acting against their interest, the sudden alliance between the army and Murucha was surprising (see Chapter IV). A popular explanation of the alliance points to the social and political conflict between the Murucha and Shanti Bahini (CHT Commission 1991, 2000). The JSS leaders generally deny this, blaming instead the army and its "colonial policy of divide and rule." My interviews of local leaders of the Mro Bahini and the JSS, government and forest officials, and Bengali elites,

revealed that the Murucha are generally considered a “simple, primitive and backward community” because of their “exotic” ways of life. In the context of war and insurgency, this discourse of the ‘Murucha’s primitiveness’ seems to have shaped the army’s attitudes and rationalities: they considered the Murucha a favourable but inferior ally whom they could control, while overseeing vast unfamiliar and difficult terrain of the Reserve “for security and sovereignty of the nation,” which was the army’s pledged duty.

As such, in the mid-1980s, the Murucha settlement, jhum cultivation, and military operations not only began to alter the tree and bamboo forest cover in the interior part of the Reserve but also brought illegal logging to the Reserve. Molla Nasir Mia, a forest guard, explains:

Before the Matamuhuri war, the army had only one temporary camp in Jalanlipara but following the Matamuhuri war, the army built four camps. The first was Poamuri camp in 1985 next to the border area and the last was Kaliachara in 1991 which shifted the temporary camp from Jalanlipara forest village and is called Jalanlipara camp by the army. In the area of the camps, the army needed to clear the trees and jungle for security, so the army asked Bengali contractors to clear fell the trees and take them free of royalty.

“The army must have needed it and I do not see anything wrong in it,” I naively told Mia to encourage him to openly speak his mind and further explain his thoughts.

Sir, you are a Bengali, I am Bengali too and I think you know there is a wise saying in the country areas, ‘do not let the [angel of death] know your home, once he knows your home he will always be there.’ Bengali are [the angel of death] for forest. Once the Bengalis started clearing the forest in the army camps, they became less fearful about the Forest Department. . . Moreover, there were plenty of burned trees as the [Marma and Murucha] did jhum. [So] . . . in the name of forest clearing for the army, the burned trees, the third class non-timber trees, the illegal logging was going on. And our Forest Department did nothing to stop it.

Yet, Mia carefully avoided mentioning the Forest Department staff’s role and their alleged corruption in the deforestation process through illegal logging. I witnessed illegal logging during my fieldwork in the Reserve, and it could have occurred only with the active

cooperation or tacit compliance of the Forest Department since transportation of timber and other Reserve products depended solely on the Matamuhuri River controlled by the Matamuhuri Range Office.

This form of illegal logging continued until 1996 and was concentrated in the interior part of the Reserve; it gradually increased, likely through the availability of labour of Rohingya refugees and the demand for firewood for tobacco cultivation in Lama and Alikadam Upazilas (including the Reserve).

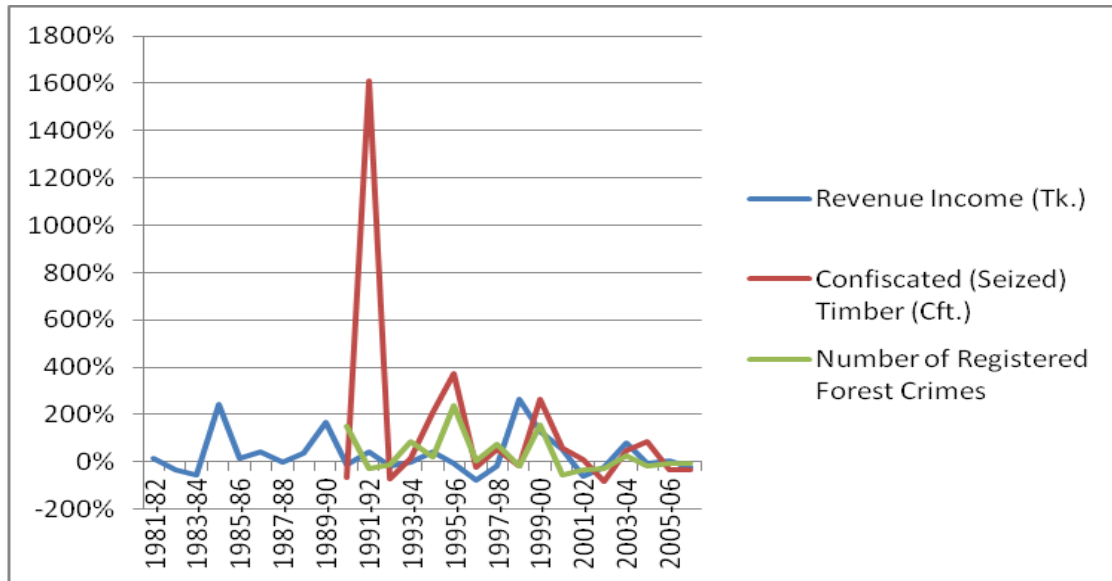
However, in 1996 the intensity of illegal logging increased dramatically, involving thousands of Bengali and Rohingya labourers. This fact can be gleaned from Table 5.1 below, which shows that the number of forest crimes increased in 1995-96 to almost four times from the number previous years, and so did the amount of seized timber. Figure 5.1 helps to visualize this scenario, showing that revenue growth occurred in sudden bursts for one or two years followed by a few years of decline, and there were some parallels in the growth and decline of revenue, seized timber and forest crimes. Ananta Tripura, a villager of Rizaroa, described the scene of illegal logging as “a festival like a soccer game competition.” When I asked what he meant, he had trouble elaborating his metaphor but repeatedly emphasised the scene of men and women watching the cutting and the spectacular sights and sounds of felling the giant trees. The metaphor may not fit within the contexts of the larger political economy, but it does reveal the social feeling of the hill peoples about illegal logging and also reminds us of the classes of agents with their particular roles (e.g., the players, managers, referees, etc.).

Table 5.1: Revenue, Amount of Confiscated (Seized) Timber, and Number of Forest Crimes in Matamuhuri Forest Range by the Fiscal Year from 1979-80 to 2006-07

Years	Revenue Income (Tk.)	Confiscated (Seized) Timber (Cft.)	Number of Registered Forest Crimes
1979-80	51,022.0	Nil	Nil
1980-81	442,578.0	Nil	Nil
1981-82	502,425.0	Nil	Nil
1982-83	322,285.0	Nil	Nil
1983-84	137,693.0	Nil	Nil
1984-85	474,141.0	Nil	Nil
1985-86	554,197.0	Nil	Nil
1986-87	784,305.0	Nil	Nil
1987-88	755,756.0	Nil	Nil
1988-89	1,026,750.0	Nil	Nil
1989-90	2,738,791.0	202	4
1990-91	2,440,930.0	71	10
1991-92	3,430,372.0	1,214	7
1992-93	2,870,622.0	331	6
1993-94	2,892,556.0	381	11
1994-95	4,068,120.0	1,174	13
1995-96	3,802,155.0	5,576	44
1996-97	895,268.0	4,227	46
1997-98	713,756.0	6,425	81
1998-99	2,588,839.0	5,339	68
1999-00	5,972,723.0	19,489	173
2000-01	9,296,492.0	30,361	79
2001-02	3,582,202.0	32,889	51
2002-03	2,681,260.0	6,497	37
2003-04	4,830,564.0	9,701	47
2004-05	4,626,400.0	17,957	38
2005-06	4,706,715.0	11,606	36
2006-07	3,506,478.0	7,846	33

Data: Collected from Matamuhuri Forest Range Office.

Figure 5.1: Annual Increase in Revenue, Seized Timber and Forest Crimes



Data: Collected from Matamuhuri Forest Range Office.

Illegal logging was a frequent talking point during my fieldwork in the Reserve, and I heard stories of several individual fragmented momentary experiences from the forest villagers which, while informative and insightful, are brief and thin in narrative. Nevertheless, it became clear to me from these accounts that mass illegal logging continued until 2000 when the entire planted forest of 13,908 acres was completely felled. As a result, with the exception of the most remote and inaccessible areas, the tree cover of the Matamuhuri Reserve was lost almost completely, though the bamboo forest remained unharmed for the most part. In hindsight, I can still recall my utter surprise during my first visit to the Reserve, and I wrote in my field diary:

Traveling with forest officers by a boat to Meringchar, ten kilometers to the south from the [Matamuhuri Forest] Range office, I could not help but notice only a few patches of new plantation and a few bamboo forests on low hills here and there whereas masses of hills on both banks of the Matamuhuri River are completely denuded. When approaching the village 30 feet up in the valley from the river bank, I also saw hundreds of dried large tree stumps all around the village. And I was too surprised, and looking at the faces of forest employees I was literally afraid; and I could not ask anyone why a reserved forest was without trees.

Thus, in an effort to understand illegal logging, I asked all the forest villagers I interviewed the question how and by whom did it happen. The forest villagers generally blamed Bengali timber businesses of Chittagong and Cox's Bazar districts as well as Bengali and Rohingya wood cutters. The villagers also hinted at corruption among the Forest Department's officers and staff. Nevertheless, when I reminded them of the army, the police, or the executive officer and the magistrate of the Upazila (i.e., UNO) and asked why these people did not prevent it, the villagers commonly expressed their helplessness and tended to avoid the question; they felt they could only explain what they had seen, known and thought of themselves, not the ways and whys of other people's actions or failures to act. Interestingly, they also believed the government knows or should know "everything."

I further interviewed a number of JSS leaders, local indigenous elders, and the Range Officer, all of whom offered two different types of explanations for the phenomenon. The Range Officer in particular pointed to the fundamentals of market principles and the state's policy, and argued:

There is no prime or single cause [to the illegal logging] but there are many causes. First of all, I must say, there was a clear lack of forethought from the part of the government. We had 5,651 hectares of planted forest of valuable timber trees, and many of them completed the rotation of harvesting period. Yet, the Forest Department could not begin harvesting the forest because of the moratorium on timber harvest declared [by the government] in 1988. This had created a huge gap in the timber supply against the increased demand of timbers in markets in the country, and as a result the timber price went very high. ...I think the opportunists had taken advantage of the market demand and price hike, and unfortunately the political turmoil in the CHT did work in their favor.

For the Ranger, the list of "the opportunists" was long and included not only the local "corrupt" officers and staff of the Forest Department and timber businesses but also local political elites

and the entire administrative machinery of the government. The Ranger did not explicitly discuss the army's role but conceded a strong link existed among the local timber businesses, the Bengali political elites, and the army in CHT. I think the connection between market demand for timber, corruption among a few powerful persons, and illegal logging is more a theoretical than empirical statement. It is also insufficient because it does not explain why illegal logging happened only at this historical juncture, when demand for timber in Bangladesh has always been high.

The local JSS leaders I interviewed, however, had a different argument but without definite proof. They unambiguously believed that the mass illegal logging was a “state orchestrated event” in anticipation of the signing of the Peace Treaty of 1997 and its ramifications. I first found the argument too farfetched to be acceptable, and I pressed the JSS leaders to explain why anyone should believe their account. However, most JSS leaders could not provide any answer; I realized I might have silenced them. Meanwhile, I found letters between the Forest Department and the local chapter of the JSS that suggested organized resistance to the illegal logging. These letters were in piles of old office records in the Matamuhuri Range Office which were momentarily held in the Range Office and were scheduled to be burned (see Photo 1.10).<sup>112</sup> Following this, I further interviewed Ongsanu Marma, who was the convenor of the local JSS chapter and leader of the anti-illegal logging campaign. Ongsanu did not offer any additional insight beyond his own life story and how he became involved in the anti-illegal logging campaign. A detailed elaboration is beyond my scope here, but his activism against illegal logging arose from ‘social citizenship’, not his political position, party ideology or environmentalism. He considered “the forest as a resource

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<sup>112</sup> In the pile of old office records I also found the plantation journal of 1952-60, the villagers contact form, the map of block divisions of the Reserve, and the working plan, all of which helped shape much of the argument of this chapter.



belonging to the state” and thought he should help the Forest Department to stop illegal logging.

In 1998, after several petitions to the Forest Department, he obtained its consent to campaign against illegal logging at a time when most timber in the Reserve had been cut down.

Accordingly, Ongsanu started his campaign by seizing illegally extracted timbers. He argued, “I did so because I thought timber should be sold through regular auction by the Forest Department, and in turn, the state would get its revenue income [of millions] and the country would be more developed.” Another aspect of Marma’s stories that led me to seriously reconsider the JSS argument was his narrative about social sentiments during the Peace Treaty:<sup>113</sup>

Suddenly everything got changed around here as everyone became sure of the Peace Treaty. We [the hill peoples] were not sure what was going to happen after the Peace Treaty but we felt happy as Bengalis were telling us we, the hill peoples, would become independent, and they seemed very afraid. I cannot tell you how good I felt on those days but then before the Treaty was to be signed, thousands of Bengali and Rohingya came into Alikadam and started cutting trees in the Reserve days and nights. I think they [timber merchants] may have thought ‘if the Treaty gets signed, the hill tracts would be for the hill peoples and that is why they might think let’s get the forest and trees out as soon as possible.’

To further consider the possibilities that the JSS argument represented reality, I made queries about the other Reserved Forests of CHT during my fieldwork. I found that illegal logging was not unique to Matamuhuri Reserve; it occurred across the Reserved Forests of the CHT.

What does this mean? In my view, these events are consistent with the history of conflicts between Bengalis and the hill peoples. Whenever Bengalis and/or the state have come under anticipated threat or actual physical attack by the hill peoples, whether by insurgents or

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<sup>113</sup> I have long been familiar with Bengali social sentiments toward the hill peoples and the anti- Peace treaty protest movement led by the then opposition, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and its allies, the right wing conservative alliance. In 2001, during my MA fieldwork research in Rangamati, a Baurua woman also told me, “the CHT is now the Chakma country, and Rangamati is its capital.” She did so to sympathize with me as “non-tribal, and non-indigenous” to the CHT, like the Baurua, when she found me struggling to access library resources at the Tribal Cultural Institute overseen by a Chakma person. I could not connect the sentiment with the politics of resources and control in general and illegal logging in particular until I empathetically listened to Ongsanu.

commoners, the immediate reaction of Bengalis and /or the state have been an economic blockade of the hill peoples. Bengalis could do this as they had monopoly control over markets and businesses. Considering the general Bengali reaction to the Peace Treaty, which included anxiety and the probable loss of economic control over resources, I wish to argue that illegal logging was a political and economic backlash by Bengalis in response to the Peace Treaty.<sup>114</sup>

Nonetheless, as shown in Table 5.1, illegal logging has remained a constant problem in the Matamuhuri Reserve; on average, from 2003 to 2006, there were 35 criminal cases a year. While living in villages in the Reserve, I also saw approximately 200 woodcutters carrying axes and hand saws every week, passing the villages of forest villagers to the interior of the Reserve, where hill peoples' villages and forests are controlled by the army. Some woodcutters I interviewed told me that only about 40 percent tree cover existed in the border areas past the Poamuri army camp, the most remote army camp in the Reserve close to the Myanmar border.

#### **5.4 Forest Villagers: Communities and Economy**

This section describes recent changes in the communities and economy of taungya cultivators and associated 'forest village system' which existed until recently in the Matamuhuri Reserve. This will illustrate the differential effects of counter-insurgency on the forest villager communities, namely the Marma and Murucha forest villagers, and their relations to forest resources and power. The section further demonstrates that there was growing ethnic, economic and social differentiation among and within the hill peoples groups. I argue that the most significant factor contributing to this differentiation was penetration of market forces in the

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<sup>114</sup> This is my view as a Bengali, and it was also expressed by some of my Bengali informants, including timber merchants and political elites in Alikadam, who wished to remain anonymous.

economy of the forest villagers. The penetration of market was in part facilitated by counter-insurgency.

Until the Matamuhuri war, the forest villagers of the Matamuhuri Reserve had lived mainly in Rizaroa, Jananipara, and Buchipara villages composed of members of the Marma, the Murucha and the Tripura ethnic groups. Among these villages, Rizaroa is the oldest and was inhabited by both the Marma and Murucha, separated by a residential settlement (i.e., hamlet) with a Karbari (i.e., village headman). On the other hand, Jananipara (located two kilometers southwest of Rizaroa inside the Reserve) was inhabited by Murucha and Tripura, and they too had their own Karbari while living in separate hamlets. Between Rizaroa and Jananipara, Buchipara was a single community village of the Murucha, also with its own Karbari. The population of forest villagers was then no less than 800 (113 households), of which the Murucha were 450 (63 households), the Marma 204 (31 households), and the Tripura 107 (9 households).<sup>115</sup>

By all of the forest villagers' accounts, the first group of the hill peoples to inhabit these forest villages in the Reserve were Uffo Marama's parents, his extended families, and co-villagers of thirteen Marma families. They first settled in Nayapara in 1950, but moved into Rizaroa in 1952 as the Forest Department began industrial forest plantation, and were joined by another group of eighty Murucha families. Uffo Marma claimed that he had brought the Murucha families from Sonachari village of Chaimpra Mouza and also maintained that he had been the first Forest headman, which some forest villagers disputed. Nevertheless, he was the Forest headman until 1998 when he handed the position down to his grandson Ukko Marma, the sitting Forest headman.

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<sup>115</sup> The numbers are based on the register of the forest villagers of Matamuhuri Reserve.

Although the Marma forest villagers have continued to live in Rizaroa, the Murucha forest villagers over the years have often changed villages or the sites of their villages and have regularly deserted forest villages either as groups or individual families. When I arrived in the Reserve in 2007, the Murucha forest villagers were living in five forest villages including Rizaroa, Buchipara and Jalanipara. The other villages of the Murucha forest villagers are Kiwaypara and Meringdom. The village of Kiwaypara was recently formed by the Murucha forest villagers of Rizaroa after the Forest Department had stopped organizing taungya forestry for plantation. Meringdom is a different story, however; it is an old village site of Murucha forest villagers, which they had occupied twice in the past and abandoned. Lately, a group of Marma have been living in it after coming into the Reserve in 1989 from the area of Lama Upazila, where they were displaced by state-sponsored Bengali settlement. The Murucha settlement in Meringdom appeared in 2004 as a group of Murucha forest villagers of Jalanipara moved in there as part of social forestry program, without pushing out the Marma who were already living there.

Currently, legally recognized forest villagers comprise about 149 households with 1,150 people and are mainly the old forest villagers of the Marma and the Murucha and their heirs. The Tripura forest villagers, excepting the families of Ananta Tripura and Bahadur Tripura, were forcibly displaced from the Reserve during the Matamuhuri war.<sup>116</sup> The village of Rizaroa has remained a densely inhabited multiethnic village of forest villagers and is also inhabited by a significant number of Bengalis (who do not consider themselves forest villagers, nor are they considered so by the Forest Department). Combined, Rizaroa has about 1,000 people in 109 households, of which the Marma forest villagers have emerged as the dominant group consisting

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<sup>116</sup> The family of Ananta Tripura has since lived in Rizaroa along with the Murucha forest villagers where his family has three households. Bir Tripura had lived in Jalanipara where he died, but is survived by his wife and three sons. The family now lives in Meringdom with the Murucha forest villagers.

of 73 households. The other villagers of Rizaroa include 9 Murucha households, 3 Tripura households and 19 Bengali households. Buchipara, Kiwaypara, and Janipara are single ethnic villages of the Murucha forest villagers, and each village has about 20 households and 100 people. Meringdom has more than 300 people and 60 households including 162 people in 32 Marma households (who are also not considered forest villagers).

In each of the forest villages, the Murucha villagers have their own Karbari or village headman as part of conventional practice. This is also true for the Marma forest villagers of Rizaroa and the Marma of Meringdom. The Tripura forest villagers living in Rizaroa and Meringdom are under the Murucha Karbari of their villages. This conventional practice reveals that a single ethnic village under a village Karbari is the norm for the hill peoples' village settlements; also, if and when there is a large multiethnic village, the villagers are separated by ethnicity, hamlet or residential location, and village Karbari. Thus, the position of Karbari appears as the signature marker of the community and a common feature of villages (or settlements) of the hill peoples, whether they are living in forest villages or the Mouzas. Importantly, all Karbaris customarily claim and maintain a territory of land whose boundaries are traditionally negotiated and fluid. This cultural practice of internal territorialization has been a key to the common property regime in CHT for centuries.

The control of the forest villages was and to a lesser degree still is under the control of the Forest Department. However, in terms of civil administration, the forest villagers (and also the other villagers in the Reserve) are subject to civil and criminal jurisdictions of the national government and the local government of Alikadam Union Council.<sup>117</sup> The traditional administration of the chiefs and Mouza headmen has no role in the Reserve, and the land and

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<sup>117</sup> For the purpose of local government, Alikadam Upazila is divided into two Union Councils (Alikadam and Choykhyong) each consisting of three Mouzas, but the Alikadam Union also includes the area of the Reserve.

revenue laws applicable to the Mouzas do not apply. As part of the local government of Alikadam Union, the Reserve has recently been divided into three wards, each represented by a council member generally elected for a 5 year term. Nevertheless, the Union Council and its members play a limited role in governing the population in the Reserve because of the restrictions imposed by forest rules and the associated property regime. The major activities of the Union Council are related to the distribution of relief, public health campaigns, and occasionally minor civil and criminal offences.

At the village level, the forest villagers are customarily governed by village Karbaris and the Forest headman. However, unlike the traditional Mouza administration, the relationship between forest villagers and their Karbari, and also between the Karbaris and Forest headman, are not legal, formal, or hierarchical but rather of mutual interdependence based on convention and customs. The Karbari is conventionally selected by the villagers themselves. On the other hand, the Forest headman is the main agent of the Forest administration and is chosen by the Forest Department. The main responsibilities of the Forest headman include mobilization of forest villagers for forest work required by the Forest Department, and distribution of land grants and wages to the villagers in exchange for their labour.

Since the late 1980s, the economy and the forest villagers' communities have significantly transformed through the gradual penetration of an exchange economy in place of a subsistence economy. In part, the penetration of market forces in the economy resulted from increased Bengali migration, administrative development in the locality of Alikadam Upazila, and encroachment on the Reserve. This has created substantial differences between the Marma and Murucha forest villagers in terms of livelihood strategies and use of land and forest resources. Using the household census of the Marma of Rizaroa and the Murucha of Meringdom,

I present a generalized statistical summary of differences between the Marma and the Murucha forest villagers in terms of their dependence on traditional occupations and livelihood strategies in Tables 5.2 and 5.3. These suggest that the Marma forest villagers engage in a range of diverse economic activities, with about 40 percent at minimum holding three occupations: the majority depend primarily on farming or daily labour – at times both – in combination with jhum cultivation, small business, sharecropping, services and so forth. They also appear to be increasingly giving up traditional occupations, particularly hunting, weaving, and making liquor. In other words, with the development of Alikadam Upazila as a rural town, the economic activities of the Marma forest villagers have become a town-village relationship that is characteristic of capitalist exchange, at least empirically. In complete contrast, the Murucha forest villagers continue to engage in jhum cultivation, wage labour and bamboo cutting, while continuing their traditional activities of fishing, hunting, weaving and so on.

Table 5.2: Dependence on Traditional Occupation by Ethnicity and Percentage

Name of Occupation	Name of Ethnicity and Percentage	
	Marma (100% =73 Households)	Murucha (100%= 27 Households)
Collecting Fuel Wood	97	100
Collecting Vegetables	97	100
Fishing	79	92
Hunting Animals	19	75
Making Baskets	67	93
Making Liquor	7	79
Weaving Cloth	42	93

Data: Fieldwork Household Census (conducted in November 2007 and January 2008).

Table 5.3: Livelihood Strategies by Ethnicity and Percentage

Name of Strategies	The Ranking of Strategies by Ethnicity and Percentage							
	Marma				Murucha			
	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	Row %	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	Row %
Jhum	10	29	14	53	18	15	63	96
Farming	40	4	1	45	11	Nil	Nil	11
Sharecropping	8	11	5	24	Nil	Nil	4	4
Wage Labour	31	14	8	52	30	44	7	81
Bamboo Cutting	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	33	30	7	70
Rent from Land	1	8	1	10	Nil	4	Nil	4
Small Business	4	8	8	20	4	4	4	12
Service	3	3	1	7	4	Nil	Nil	4
Dependent	3	Nil	Nil	3	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Column % (Number of Households)	100 (73)	77	38		100 (27)	97	85	

Data: Fieldwork Household Census (conducted on November 2007 and January 2008).

As shown in Table 5.3 above, one economic difference between the livelihood strategies of Marma and Murucha forest villagers is differential access to the bamboo forest. As mentioned, the bamboo forests of the Reserve are located in the interior part of the Reserve where the villages are predominantly inhabited by the Murucha communities. Although bamboo forests are annually sold by the Forest Department to businesses in blocks, the Murucha villager communities are said to have exercised some control over access to the bamboo forest, and they collect cash rent from the businesses and individuals seeking access to the forest irrespective of their ethnic background. Under these circumstances, the Murucha forest villagers seem to enjoy



a better deal or access to the bamboo forest than the Marma forest villagers. It is important to note that cutting bamboo has been a widely practiced common strategy of the forest villagers as an alternative to wage labour for a very long time.

Forest villagers generally work in bamboo cutting for cash advanced from small businesses that are working as sub-contractors for big businesses (who individually or collectively purchase the right over bamboo to be extracted from the Reserve in a given year). A man can typically cut and collect 150-200 bamboo canes a day or up to 1500 in a week, earning no less than Tk. 1500 in a week. This is double the money one could earn from wage labour at the rate of Tk. 100 – Tk. 120 per day as of 2008 (in that same year US\$ 1.00 was equivalent to about tk. 65.00).

Nevertheless, central to the economic difference between the Marma and Murucha is the customary possession of cultivable plough lands in the Reserve.<sup>118</sup> According to Enkko Murucha, a Forest Karbari, a forest villager could take possession of 2 acres, the Karbari 3 acres and the Forest headman 4 acres. The household census reveals, however, that 55 percent of the Marma forest villagers occupy about 130 acres of land, and this excludes 40 acres of land recently taken by the Forest Department through the social forestry plantation program. The average size of an agricultural farm of the Marma forest villagers is 3 acres (a minimum 0.40 acres and maximum 12 acres). Interestingly, 13 households or 18 percent of the Marma also have land in the adjoining Mouzas. In comparison to the Marma, 55 percent of the Murucha of Meringdom have access to a total of 22 acres of valley land in the Reserve and only 11 percent have agricultural farms of more than 1 acre. It is noteworthy that the Reserve has approximately 300 acres of cultivable plough lands, three quarters of which is around and between the forest

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<sup>118</sup> The usufruct rights conceded to the forest villagers seem slightly different from the Reserved Forests of plains land districts, in particular the Khasia forest villagers of Sylhet district, who are granted leasehold rights according to section 28 of the 1927 Forest Act.

villages of Rizaroa and Meringdom, the remaining one-quarter being sparsely spread across the Reserve beyond the village of Meringdom. Until recently, the land was mainly used to cultivate local tobacco and pulses for household consumption, and the method of cultivation was hoeing seeds or young plants following the burning of the grasses.

To conclude this section, I would argue that concentration of land among the few Marma forest villagers in general and the land dispossession of the Muruch forest villagers in particular involves many factors, including the frequent desertion of the Murucha forest villagers from the Reserve. However, the most significant factors contributing to the process are: 1) access regimes regulated by the Forest headmen, and 2) the intensive use of valley land through ploughing and Bengali sharecropping. The intensive use of valley lands began in the late 1980s following the Matamuhuri war and subsequent settlement of the Murucha in the Reserve, which led the Marma forest villagers to depend increasingly on the valley lands for their livelihood. These phenomena are related to the gradual penetration of the market and tobacco cultivation that led to increased demands for land for cash crops.

## **5.5 Practices of Social Forestry: Programs, Opportunities and Stakes**

This section examines the practices of social forestry in Matamuhuri Reserve and illustrates programs, participation, opportunities and stakes of social forestry. I demonstrate that the practices and programs of social forestry have remained a form of state intervention, reinforcing the authoritative role of the Forest Department and the state's commercial and revenue interests. I begin with a brief review the development of social forestry in the country and the way it has been practiced in the plains land of Bangladesh to signify similarities and differences in modalities and practices of social forestry between the plains land districts and CHT. I further

show how social forestry programs were approached differently by different ethnic groups and communities (particularly ‘forest villagers’ and ‘other villagers’ of the Reserve), according to their stakes and opportunities.

In Bangladesh, social forestry refers to tree growing programs of the Forest Department such as woodlot block, agro forestry, strip plantation, homestead plantation and protection of sal (*shorea robusta*) forest for the production of timber and fuel wood; these programs have been undertaken through participation among communities, groups, or individuals who take on increased responsibilities in the management and protection of the forest in exchange for usufruct rights to the forest produce and a share of the income (Asaduzzaman 1989; Khan et al. 2005).<sup>119</sup> The main forms of social forestry are woodlot block, agro forestry and strip plantation. Woodlot block and agro-forestry comprise growing trees and agricultural crops either on the same land or in close proximity and are carried out solely in degraded or encroached government forest land. Conversely, strip plantation takes place on public lands, such as embankments, canals, railways, roads and highways, and on other marginal lands belonging to private individuals, the community or the public. The marginalized public or community land includes institutional complexes of local government, educational institutions, or others.

An authoritative review on social forestry in Bangladesh published jointly by the Forest Department and University of Chittagong suggests that social forestry emerged in the early 1980s as a sequel of Asian Development Bank (ADB) and World Bank (WB) funded projects beginning with ADB assisted Community Forestry projects (Khan, et al. 2005). Other scholars view the 1970s local initiative, the Betagi-Pamora project of the Forest Department and local

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<sup>119</sup> The information on the involvement of Non-governmental organization in social forestry in the country is limited; however, there are good numbers of NGOs engage in social forestry programs but majority of them are involved with programs for homestead plantation (see Khan et al. 2005).

community organizations, as the start of social forestry in the country (Quddus, et al. 1993). Both accounts trace the discourse to a recent international agenda of national development linking population growth and deforestation. In so doing, as demonstrated in Chapter II, these accounts ignore taungya forestry, a precursor to social forestry, which coexisted with scientific forestry across South and Southeast Asia. Importantly, they ignore any attempt to explain the Forestry Extension Service, which is a direct predecessor to contemporary social forestry practices and until recently existed in much of South and Southeast Asia including Bangladesh (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995). The Forestry Extension Service in Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) began in the early 1960s as a state-financed program to distribute seeds and tree samplings to the rural population free of charge. It grew substantially in the mid-1970s and continued until 1985 through new tree plantation programs in homestead and community forests in marginal public land in plains land Bangladesh (Choudhury 1982). In fact, the ADB-assisted the Community Forestry project that is considered by some as the forerunner of social forestry in Bangladesh; this was an alternative scheme of the Forestry Extension Service Project (1980-81 to 84-85). The Forestry Extension Service Project was funded by the government and operated alongside with the ADB-assisted Community Forestry project (FD 1981a).

Nevertheless, by the early 1990s, social forestry emerged as a dominant strategy of forest management and rural development in Bangladesh with the increased interest of ADB, WB and other multi-national donors. The Forestry Master Plan – a twenty-year plan for forestry development in Bangladesh – that emerged during this period was a major policy shift in social forestry policy. The plan was completed in 1993 with financial assistance from the ADB; one outcome was the government endorsement of the Forest Policy of 1994 and this policy was, by any account, the most populist and environmentalist forest policy in Bangladesh to date (GOBD

1993a). In accordance with the new policies, the Forest Department designed the FSP (Forestry Sector Project), which was the largest social forestry project in Bangladesh, implemented across the country. As part of the ADB loan agreement for the FSP, the government passed the Forest Amendment Act 2000 that included provisional rules of social forestry. The new law amended the Forest Act of 1927, and section 28A set ‘social forestry’ rules that defined acts constituting social forestry, classes of social forestry, and minimum requirements for governing activities of social forestry.<sup>120</sup> It also included amendments and provisions that criminalized various actions perceived as harmful to social forestry. The provisional rules (the draft Social Forestry Rules 2000) comprised detailed social forestry programs and were passed in 2004 amid protests by indigenous groups and environmental critics (Gain 2000:187-22).

The social forestry project of Matamuhuri Reserve has two programs: horticulture resettlement and woodlot plantation. Both programs ran concurrently for 4 years from 2002 to 2006. Under the horticulture resettlement program, the Forest Department resettled a total of 124 forest villager families that included 54 Marma, 67 Murucha and 3 Tripura families. Forest headman and Karbari selected the families from ‘bona fide’ forest villagers and their own relatives. Each family received a three-room house with a metal roof, 5 acres of upland in a block in the Reserve, and about Tk. 10,000 for both living and a horticultural grant. The program further provided a community center and pond for the resettled villagers in Rizaroa and Meringdom. The community center is a one-storied concrete building with a hall, offices, and toilet, and came equipped with furniture, a color television, video cassette device (VCD) player, power generator, and water tank. Upon arriving in Rizaroa, I found that resettled families both in

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<sup>120</sup> In its original version, section 28 of the Forest Act of 1927 set provisions for “Village Forests” that may be constituted in Reserved Forests with village communities as well as some of the provisional rules that may govern Village Forests and the communities including the benefits. The benefits included but were not limited to rights to timber, or other forest produce and pastures in the Villages Forests (MOA 1984).

Rizaroa and Meringdom were deeply concerned about a formal land and benefit agreement for the resettlement and were in conflict with the Forest Department over it. Most of the resettled families, excepting some Marma, failed to raise horticulture gardens and were thus using the land grant for jhum cultivation. They also considered the program a “*lokbholana*” or a deceptive act by the Forest Department to encourage forest villagers into the woodlot program. When I inquired at the Forest Department about the horticultural resettlement, the Director of Social Forestry of Forest Department denied any deception towards the forest villagers. It became clear to me that the resettlement was a ‘strategic’ move the Forest Department, partly because it was an integral part of the CHT component of FSP and also because there was funding from ADB for the resettlement scheme. As the Director of Social Forestry stated:

After the failed negotiation between ADB, Forest Department and tribal leaders in Dhaka, we revised the CHT component of FSP as it was designed for USF land. In fact, it was not the revision of the project plan so to speak; we just put a slash after USF land and added reserved forests where it was needed to make the plan work for the reserved forests of CHT as well. I think that was the reason for the horticultural resettlement in Matamuhuri Reserve.

I further understood through my conversation with the Director of Social Forestry that besides the USF of CHT from the 1980s to the 1990s, the Forest Department had tried horticultural resettlement once before, in the Reserve of Chittagong in the late 1970s, but had discontinued the policy. I also found a copy of the project titled “Further Extension of Social Forestry in the Chittagong Hill Tracts” – a follow up project of FSP that was to begin immediately, which confirmed the Forest Department’s policy on resettlement. Funded by the government, this social forestry extension project was intended to implement woodlot plantation in the Reserved Forests of CHT and ‘private land’ through the participation of communities, individuals and businesses. Therefore, it is no surprise that the horticulture program of

Matamuhuri Reserve remains in limbo and the Forest Department has not yet negotiated with the resettled forest villagers. In fact, the horticulture program cannot qualify as a social forestry program as defined by Section 28 A (2) of the Forest Act of 1927, unless there is a land agreement between the Forest Department and the resettled forest villagers.

In contrast, the woodlot plantation program operated slightly better, with the participants receiving a Participant Benefit Sharing Agreement (PBSA), a formal group agreement with the Forest Department for participation of the communities. Under the program, the Forest Department raised 915 hectares of softwood plantation, mainly on low hills and slopes on the river banks, which was to be harvested within 30 years but no less than 10 years, depending on the authority of the Forest Department. The plantation included some old industrial species such as teak, gamar, and chikrasi, but was predominantly fast-growing species of akasmoni, hybrid, minjeeum, koroï, neem and rain trees, which are completely new and exotic to CHT.

Table 5.4: Participation in Woodlot Plantation Scheme by Years, Ethnicity and Gender

Ethnicity/Year	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	Total by ethnicity	% Ethnicity	% Female by ethnicity
	Female (Male)	Female (Male)	Female (Male)	Female (Male)			
Bengali	0 (56)	12(92)	11(73)	14(28)	286	31.3	13
Barua	0(0)	0(0)	0(2)	0(0)	2	0.2	0
Murucha	4(110)	41(44)	2(6)	71(33)	311	34.0	38
Marma	9 (67)	21 (7)	40(34)	8(34)	220	24.0	35
Chama	0(0)	2(15)	2(14)	2(11)	46	5.0	13
Tanchangya	0(0)	2(9)	2(12)	0(1)	26	2.8	15
Tripura	0(4)	3(2)	2(0)	0(13)	24	2.6	21
Column Total	13(237)	81(169)	59(141)	95(120)	915	100	
% Female of the Total							27

Data: Matamuhuri Forest Range Office Record (Collected in November 2007).

Based on the conventional policy of one participant per plantation hectare, the woodlot program has 915 participants, of whom 27 percent are female. Table 5.4 above shows the

participants by the year of participation, ethnicity and gender. A significant detail not presented in the Table is participants from the Reserve. I counted these from the participant lists and estimate that over 50 percent are from communities living outside the Reserve in Mouzas who are predominately Bengali, but include some Chakma, Marma and Tanchangya. The Range Office and local political elites selected most of the participants, even though the law required the Forest Department to involve NGOs and citizens who would form a local body in the selection process. Bengalis and other participants living outside the Reserve in particular were selected by representatives of Union Councils, as well as by political party and community leaders; they included a large number of local government representatives, businessmen, and rich Bengali farmers. This clearly undermined both the policy prescription and the law that set out preferential selection of landless and other poor people. When I questioned the Range Officer about this, he defended the inclusion of Bengalis based on the grounds that they constituted stakeholders because they lived adjacent to the Reserve. He further justified political elite participation in the selection process, arguing that they represented an “advanced group of individuals” in leadership and were indispensable for motivation and mobilization of the participants. The Forest headman, however, claimed differently. He maintained that there was anticipation that the Bengali community would become violent, and that the Bengali community of Nyapara, in particular, had threatened to blockade the movement of forest employees and forest villagers to and from the Reserve and Alikadam Bazaar. I would argue that other forces such as the army and local governments also played a role. In part, this was mainly because the Bengali community in Alikadam is an important demographic and highly mobilized interest group, and it is highly unlikely the government authorities would overlook their involvement in any development program in the Upazila.



In the Reserve, however, the Forest Department had a coercive policy for participant selection. Those who were part of the horticultural resettlement program became participants of the woodlot program by default, whereas other forest villagers, generally men in the vicinity of the woodlot plantation, were forced to join the program because they feared eviction from the Reserve.

Significantly, I found that participation of communities in the woodlot program was subject to bureaucratic formalities and somewhat precarious. Plantation work was contracted out to Forest headman, Karbaris, and Bengali contractors, who forced the participants into compulsory labour that included three working days without wages for forest plantation; the Murucha were coerced more strongly than others in the communities. The Forest headman and Karbaris I interviewed considered labour without wages a “conventional” practice of work among forest villagers. More problematically, despite the critical importance of the woodlot plantation for social forestry programs, the participants were haphazardly grouped into so-called ‘beneficiary groups’ as more of a formality than anything else, to monitor and protect the plantation. Participants in a specific year were conveniently formed into groups of about 25 individuals as their names appeared on the participant list irrespective of gender or ethnicity, and the PABS assigned residents specific blocks to protect and care for the woodlot plantation. According to the PABS, groups are collectively responsible for their block plantations and adjacent lands to provide care and prevent damage, fire, thievery and so forth; 80 percent of the plantation must be protected for entitlement to share in the income from the harvest. Ironically, most groups were not active, with the exception of Bengali participants whose groups are represented by Bengali elites and the Forest headmen. For example, upon interviewing 37 participants that included men and women of Rizaroa and Meringdom, I found 80 percent of the

interviewees vaguely remembered their groups' responsibilities for protecting the plantation but had forgotten their groups, the location of plantation blocks, or both. The remaining 20 percent were more knowledgeable, but had never met nor taken any action to protect the plantation excepting some occasional individual' efforts.

This apparent failure of the groups was the result of the structure of the Forest Department. Historically and to the present, professional experts and bureaucrats have managed the Forest Department with semi-professional forest officers and untrained forest guards in the Ranges. Beyond overseeing the regular annual plantation, the main activities in the Ranges have involved policing the forest at check stations on roads and waterways. Until recently, the Forest Department had no experience in operating grassroots development projects. Clearly, the Range Office of the Forest Department is not an appropriate agency for a social forestry program. The Foresters and Forest Guards are chiefly Bengali, do not speak the hill peoples' languages, and have a highly pejorative disposition toward the hill peoples. In fact, communicative relations are rare and only occur between forest villagers and the Forest Department unless mediated by the Forest headmen and at times Karbaris. The following is from my fieldwork notes, a brief recollection of one of the Forest Department's meetings with the participants of the woodlot program for the 2006 distribution of a PBSA document that I witnessed and participated in:

A large gathering of participants of the hill peoples belonging to the Tripura, the Murucha, the Maram, the Chakma and the Tanchangya came from several villages to attend the meeting in the community center in Meringdom. Most of the villagers, mainly women and children, sat on the floor with the remainder either using a few available plastic chairs or standing. I sat with the other forest officers in decorative chairs, and we were separated from the villagers by a large table. The Range Officer, the Assistant Conservator of Forest (ACF), and Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) all gave lengthy speeches in the standard Bengali language. They attempted to explain the 'social goods and economic benefits' of the new social forestry program while repeatedly invoking fear of individual punishment and threat of collective economic loss if it failed. Throughout their speeches, both the ACF and DFO called jhum cultivation 'the enemy of forest' and urged the participating hill peoples to abandon the practice 'to protect the land, soil and

forest of the Reserve.’ Since the Bengali language was unfamiliar to the participants, when Ukko Marma, the Forest headman, had the opportunity to deliver his speech, he summarily translated the earlier speeches into the Marma language. The Forest headman spoke in three languages during his short speech: Bengali, local Bengali, and his native Marma language. In the end, several PBSA documents were handed down to the participants in groups, and photos were taken. All except the forest villagers and low ranking forest staff had snacks and tea in Meringdom followed by a lavish dinner at the Range Office. In hindsight, I consider the meeting an organized public ceremony completely disconnected from the audience in both language and communication, let alone the purposes for which the meeting had occurred.

In sum, social forestry introduced a new legal regime into part of the Reserve. It is meant to govern the land and forest, and it neither denies nor admits customary rights (or any right) of the forest villagers or other villagers to the land and forest in the Reserve in any form beyond the 45 percent income from woodlot harvests. This share of income is further contingent upon the Forest Department’s authority and a number of stringent conditions of Social Forestry Rules of 2004 and the Forest (Amendment) Act of 2000. There are two significant aspects of the Forest (Amendment) Act of 2000: 1) it criminalized many non-forest activities in the area of the social forestry program and the Reserved Forests with a provision that individuals be tried by a special magistrate; and, 2) it further empowered the Divisional Forest Officers (DFOs) with *legal impunity* of custodial power to try forest crimes (GOBD 2004).

The effects of social forestry in the Matamuhuri Reserve have been the successful eradication of jhum lands around villages of forest villagers and jhum cultivation in the vicinity of the woodlot plantation. In turn, one third of the forest villagers of Kiwaypara and one villager of Rizaroa left their villages to move deeper into the interior part of the Reserve. They did so in spite of receiving land and benefits under the resettlement program. Their lands and houses were occupied by Marma newcomers who pay rent, which is a new development in social relations in the rural setting of CHT. As I have shown in Table 5.3, a significant outcome of the woodlot plantation is an uneven effect on the livelihood strategies of the forest villagers. The Murucha

forest villagers are becoming increasingly dependent on contract labourers for bamboo cutting leading to unsustainable logging of bamboo forest. At the same time, the majority of the Marma forest villagers are turning to wage labour. Interestingly, the value of the plough land in the Reserve has also increased fourfold to Tk. 100,000 per acre because of lack of jhum land in the vicinity of social forestry, in turn setting off conflicts over Reserve lands (mainly plough lands in the Reserve). During my fieldwork in the Reserve I explored several of these conflicts, three of which were among the Marma, two between the Murucha and the Marma, and one among Bengalis, the Murucha and the Marma. Given that forest villagers have customary usufruct rights over the plough lands in the Reserve that they have subverted in practice for exchange, sale, and transfer of the lands, the land conflicts are mainly negotiated by Forest headmen and at times the army. Many of these cases signal emerging patterns of land conflicts, and are generally hidden from the civil society of CHT; my local research assistant, Hla Marma, told me that his brother was murdered over a land conflict among kin members, and that it did not result in criminal charges.

Still, I anticipate that the most detrimental effect of social forestry in the Reserve will be ecological, relating to plantation techniques and technologies. The woodlot plantation programs was primarily conducted on the banks of the Matamuhuri River in the northern boundary and around villages of the forest villagers which had already transformed by deforestation and cash crop cultivation with fertilizers and pesticides (see Photo 5.4 in Chapter V). In particular, the planting of new exotic species was undertaken on flat plains and hill slopes or flat low hills, and old industrial species on moderate high hills. Unlike the old taungya system, the plantation method used techniques that cut and cleared jungles, and at times bamboo forest in the plantation areas, without burning the vegetation and using fertilizers of urea, triple super

phosphate (T.S.P), and magnesium phosphate (M.P.).<sup>121</sup> This completely wiped out the bamboo forest as bamboos failed to regenerate with the new plantation. The forest villagers also complained of unusual crop failures in plough lands around the plantation because the land was too dry. Additionally, vegetables (most importantly, ground potatoes<sup>122</sup>) commonly found in jungles became scarce. In sum, it is too early to evaluate with certainty the impacts of social forestry on the economy and ecology of forest villager communities, but we can conclude that it has pushed the Murucha forest villagers to their limits of survival. Many Murucha hoped that since they are part of the army's militia, the army would eventually help them by limiting the further expansion of social forestry in the Reserve.

## 5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have dealt with recent social and ecological changes in the Matamuhuri Reserved Forest caused by the insurgency and counter-insurgency. Importantly, I have examined the practice of social forestry in the Reserve and how it has changed the old forest villagers' system. I have shown that notwithstanding the global discourse of social or community forestry as "participatory management" of forest resources, the practice of social forestry in Matamuhuri Reserve is yet another form of state intervention and domination by the Forest Department. The laws regarding social forestry (namely the Forest Amendment Act of 2000 and the Social Forestry Rules of 2004) are coercive and the discourse of social forestry misplaces the concreteness of 'social' onto a policing agenda of the forest, which has been uncritically derived from the notion that deforestation is caused by 'environmentally uncaring' poor or indigenous

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<sup>121</sup> According to the plantation journals of Matamuhuri Forest Range, there were 1500 kilograms of urea, 750 kilograms of triple super phosphate and 375 kilograms magnesium phosphate used for a 50 hectare block plantation, i.e., 12 grams urea, 6 grams triple super phosphate and 3 grams magnesium phosphate per tree.

<sup>122</sup> A 'ground potato' is a type of wild potato naturally found in CHT.

peoples. Ironically, the social forestry program by design and practice has no environmental program or conservation agenda. In fact, social forestry in the Matamuhuri Reserve created a commercial timber and/or fuel woods production zone. I submit that, while social forestry can meet the demand for timber and fuels and increase revenues for the Forest Department, it will prove to be social and ecological disaster for the hill peoples in the Reserve, particularly the Murucha.

Given the example of the Matamuhuri Reserve, a pertinent question is whether other Reserved Forests of CHT have been altered in comparable ways. More importantly, if they are similar, what future does social forestry hold for the hill peoples living in the Reserved Forests of CHT? In response to the first question, other Reserved Forests of CHT (namely, Kassalong, Renikhyong and Sangu Reserves) are indeed much like the Matamuhuri Reserve and are occupied by the army and the hill peoples. However, the extent to which Kassalong and Renikhyong Reserves have been changed by the army, hill peoples' settlements, and illegal logging, is as yet unknown. Local timber businessmen of Chokoria Upazila of Cox's Bazar district conceded that during the post-Peace Treaty period, the Sangu Reserve was also logged illegally. It bears repeating that Sangu Reserve has not been under the formal management of the Forest Department since British rule and had been without policing by the Forest Department until the 1980s. It was transferred to the Bandarban Forest division from Chittagong Forest division in the late 1980s, and thus placed under a Range Office, but has remained without planned management because of difficult terrain and inaccessibility. It is likely that the Sangu Reserve will remain inaccessible. It is also highly unlikely that the Forest Department will achieve successful campaigns for social forestry programs in Kassalong and Renikhyong Reserves, as the hill peoples' political groups in the northern part of CHT are highly politically

mobilized. This means social forestry programs could remain confined to Matamuhuri Reserve, although they may extend to new Reserved Forests of CHT created in Mouzas during the war and insurgency, although they are disputed by the hill peoples. However, a more likely prospect for social forestry programs will be conflicts among three models of the programs in USF (or Mouzas): 1) a community based social forestry in cooperation with the Forest Department as envisioned by Social Forestry (Amendment) Rules 2010; 2) corporate and business led social forestry; 3) village common forest or VCF, an indigenous movement for common property resource management. I will consider this third possibility in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER VI

### “Saving the Village Common Forests”: The Politics of Indigenous Movement

[A] commitment to native, traditional, and agro-ecological techniques found in intellectual currents in social science and development activism is often missing among indigenous peoples’ organizations: in its place is a commitment to reforming, adapting, and managing modernization.

– Bebbington (1996).

#### 6.1 Introduction

The title of this chapter is from a documentary, “Saving the Village Common Forests in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.” Taungya, a local non-governmental organization (NGO) of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), produced the documentary in 2004 to promote village common forests (hereafter, VCFs) as an example of indigenous culture and customary forest management practice. I watched the English version<sup>123</sup> of the documentary first in mid-July, 2008 at the Head Office of Taungya in Rangamati while I participated in a day-long training and workshop session for Taungya’s staff during my fieldwork with Taungya (see Photo 6.1 below). The workshop was the formal beginning of the project, “Consolidating Community Rights over Natural Resources for Conservation of Environment and Sustainable Development.” The workshop was entirely a hill peoples’ event. Nikhilesh Chakma, a forestry studies graduate and the project coordinator, moderated the workshop; the trainee staff included both men and women and all were members of hill peoples’ communities. Among the resource persons were Moni Shopon Dewan, ex-deputy minister of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs, and Parash Kisha, a medical physician and the general secretary of Taungya. The founding chairperson of Taungya, Raja Devasish Roy, the sitting

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<sup>123</sup> The documentary is also available in the Bengali and Chakma languages. The hill people themselves produced the script, music, photography, video, and narration in the documentary and it is the only one that I am aware of in the Bengali and Chakma languages. In the English version, the narrators are the Chakma chief, Devasish Roy, and Jessica Skinner, whose nationality I could not ascertain.



Chakma chief, was also listed as a resource person; however, he could not be present at the workshop as he had become an Assistant Advisor to the Chief Advisor of a military-backed civil interim government of the country.

The documentary begins with a scene portraying the life of rural villages of hill peoples and then moves to selected presentations of historical narratives of CHT and the birth of village common forests. Below I offer a small excerpt from the documentary to give you a sense of its tone and content.

Devasish Roy: At one time, the greater part of the Chittagong Hill Tracts region was covered with dense tropical and subtropical forests, creeper and jungle. The indigenous people used to cultivate swidden or jhum on a rotational basis. Traditionally, large trees were never cut down. And, the same land was not cultivated for before a fallow period of at least 15 or 20 years. The land was abundant and the population was small. There was no need to distinguish between swidden land and forest. Any patch of the forest [could be] cut, burned, dried and cultivated through swidden method for rice, cotton, vegetable and fruits. Once left fallow, the swidden plot regenerated into a forest again. Gradually the situation changed. The population, number of settlements, markets and towns grew. During the 1870s, the British colonial government converted [the] first tract of natural forest into a mono plantation of teak by importing saplings and seeds from nearby Burma. The large forest and plantation was re-designated as a reserved forest and given over to the new Department of Forest for management and protection. And, even today, a quarter of the hill tracts are classified as reserved forest and administered by the Forest Department. However, these reserved forests did not remain protected. As the human population grew, the natural vegetation and wildlife began to diminish, many species of animal and birds went extinct. [...] The need for special measures to retain forest cover was now felt even more acutely.

Jessica Skinner: The scarcity of land and natural forest produce had actually begun to be felt even before the British colonial government left in 1947. Elders met to devise new ways of protecting their natural resources. The reserve [i.e. VCF] was an innovation based upon their traditional resource management pattern to retain forest cover around the settlement for long term use. This gave birth to the village common forests of today which are not allowed to be cultivated for swidden or otherwise by the communities themselves on the strength of sanction and religious taboos.



Photo 6.1: Training workshop for Taungya's staff in Taungya's Office, Rangamati.

In its most common usage, village common forests (VCFs) refer to small patches of common land in Unclassed State Forest (USF). Generally, VCFs hold some forest cover and are part of USF land which has not been settled by individuals, businesses or state agencies; the forests are managed traditionally by headmen and at times by Karbari for everyday use as fuels or other household necessities. Currently, there exist over a hundred VCFs, mostly in the territory of the Chakma chief's circle, covering the entire Rangamati district and part of Khagrachhari district. However, until recently, the existence of VCFs had been little known beyond CHT; they first became public knowledge briefly in the 1998 Rangamati Declaration (Gain 2002:187-222), and then later in 2001 when an elaborated account of VCFs was co-authored by Raja Roy, the Chakma chief (Roy and Halim, 2001). In fact, the leadership and indigenous activism of Raja Roy played an instrumental role in bringing awareness of VCFs not only to the wider public but also to urban indigenous activists of the hill peoples. Asish Chakma, a member of Taungya, explains this as he described to me his own surprise on discovering the VCFs:

Khairul: How and when did you come to know VCFs?

Asish: Rajababu (Raja Devasish Roy) told me in early 1998.

Khairul: What did Raja Roy tell you and why?

Asish: I was the founding member of Taungya and Rajababu was my boss. So he told me to visit Beganachari village in Barkal Upazila and talked to a local Union Council's Chairman for assistance for video recording a VCF and village elders. I did not know what a VCF was. Rajababu explained it with few words and told me to see it with my own eyes. So I went to Shuvolong and met the local Chairman and then to Beganachari. We [taped] the VCF in Beganachari and interviewed the village elders in their seventies. The elders called the VCF reserved or rajdhani, and they said they had had it for a long time: 'parents or grandparents must have kept it in the way it is now; we take bamboo and at times trees when one needs them.' They knew it was not a government reserved forest, and I was very shocked that I did not know much of our own people and culture!

Khairul: Could you tell a bit more about why you taped the VCF and interviewed elders?

Asish: Oh yes! I do not know for sure but I think a Danish ambassador came to CHT after the Peace Treaty. Rajababu must have talked to him about VCFs. I believe the video tape was meant for the ambassador.

Khairul: Do you know how Raja Roy came to know about VCFs?

Asish: No, I do not know. But I think he must have known everything in his area, should he not? You know there is a standing order [of the Deputy Commissioner] of the 1960s and Rajababu knew it, and the [political] environment has not been conducive for him to work until now.

Since 2003, Taungya has undertaken several programs and strategies to protect the VCFs, including reforming their traditional management. The project of "Consolidating Community Rights over Natural Resources for Conservation of Environment and Sustainable Development" (hereafter, the second VCF project) was the second phase and continuation of an earlier project titled "A Pilot Project on the Protection of Village Common Forest in the Chittagong Hill Tracts: A Project on Watershed Management" (hereafter, the pilot project). The pilot project was completed in 2005 and the second VCF project was planned for completion in December 2010. Both projects are funded by the Human Rights and Good Governance Program Support Unit of the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), Dhaka.

A social current that connects Taungya, the VCF projects, and the documentary is an indigenous movement of the hill peoples led by the Chakma chief and Chakma elites of CHT. In this chapter, I describe the creation of Taungya, its VCF projects, and the way Taungya has mobilized grassroots actors such as women, rural peasants, and jhum cultivators of the hill peoples for the “alternative development” of forest resource management through the VCF projects. I argue that the VCF projects have been motivated by a number of overlapping political, ideological and theoretical agendas. Clearly, the political objectives are to defend customary control over the remaining common land in USF against market and state forces. The ideological agendas are intended to reform the management, customary rights and practices of VCFs towards a village council of men and women for the conservation of VCFs as well as the well-being of rural village communities. This approach to VCFs is also couched in terms of theoretical or conceptual understandings of hill peoples’ indigeneity, their cultural differences with Bengalis and the state, and to some degree their social and political autonomy (Roy 2002; 1994).

This account of Taungya’s VCF movement relates to several current themes in political ecology, namely indigeneity, NGOs, and alternative development (Brosius et al.2008; Dwivedi 1998; Escobar 1995; Routledge 1993; Rangan 2004; Tsing et al. 1999). In engaging the debate concerning these themes, I agree with other scholars about the danger of romantic, idealized and reified representations of traditional or indigenous communities and knowledge (Agrawal, A 1995; Agrawal and Gibson 1999; Li 1996, 2000; Mccay 2001; Sinha et al. 1997; Tsing 1999) and the potential legal and political consequences of the racialization of resources, spaces and governance (Vandergeest 2003). Following Li, I consider communities or indigenous communities not as alternatives to market, state, or growth-oriented development, but rather as part of such development (Li 2001; 2002). I also acknowledge, as Li convincingly argues, that at

the heart of the indigenous movement for identity and customary or collective rights over lands and resources is a liberal notion of protecting vulnerable ethnic groups from capitalist dispossession. She suggests that this liberal notion of protectionism upheld by the leaders of the indigenous movement is hardly different from the paternalistic protectionism of the colonial state and can still be found when indigenous people are governed by members of their own group or NGOs (Li 2010). However, as the case of the VCF movement will illustrate, I argue that there are clear analytical differences between indigenous activists' resistance to dispossession and states' agendas of "managing dispossession" (Li, 2010), an important difference is in their approaches to conservation and development.

In what follows, first I discuss the context and conjunctures of Taungya. In particular, I examine the emergence of indigenous movements and non-governmental organizations in CHT as civil society actors that articulate ethnicity, politics and forest resource management for alternative development. Second, I examine the origins of VCFs in order to trouble the idea of VCFs as an indigenous or traditional entity and show how such entities are in fact produced at the intersection of competing politics and resource conflicts. Third, I discuss Taungya's pilot VCF project, explore the project intervention (its agendas, rationalities and programs) and look at the ways the project was implemented and the compromise that emerged. Finally, I consider the effect and limits of the VCF project and the movement. In sum, this chapter offers an example of an indigenous movement of the hill peoples and illustrates how hill peoples' indigeneity is articulated with an environmental issue of forest conservation. This indigenous movement is a South Asian case that resonates more with those of Southeast Asian indigenous movements that are brilliantly described by Li (2000) and Tsing (1999b) (but compare Baviskar 1997, 2001; Karlsson and Subba 2006; Guha 2000; Rangan 2004; Shah 2007; Shiva, 1989; Shiva

and Bandyopadhyay 1992). It will show that the indigenous identity of the hill peoples is more of an “articulation” by elites (Li 2000), and the issue in the articulation of VCFs and indigeneity is more about power and the exercise of customary rights over the land and forest resources than a desire to live as “indigenous” and unchanged traditional rural communities. Nevertheless, a potential outcome of the indigenous movement and its opposition to state forestry is the expansion of political forests at the expense of remaining jhum land; in effect it risks further dispossession (see and compare Walker 2001).

## **6.2 Taungya and an Indigenous Movement of the Hill peoples**

Currently, there exist several networks of indigenous movements of the hill peoples, one of which is Taungya, which is led and dominated by the traditional and political elites of the Chakma. Taungya was first established in 1995 by Raja Roy, the sitting Chakma chief, as a proto-political organization called, “The Committee for the Protection of Indigenous Culture”. At that time Raja Roy was rising in prominence as a leader of an indigenous movement of the country. In 1996, the Committee changed its name to Taungya to claim to represent the indigenous culture of jhum cultivators and their relations to forests, assuming that taungya cultivation is an indigenous tradition. In 1998, it registered as a non-governmental organization (NGO) with the Department of Social Welfare and afterwards with the NGO Affairs Bureau in 2001 (Taungya n. d.).

The foundation of Taungya as a specific organization of hill peoples’ indigenous movements and later as an NGO is concurrent and connected to many recent changes in the political process in CHT in relation to complex national and international conjunctures. Events at the national level were: the emergence of indigenous movements of the hill peoples and their

position concerning culture, resources and territory; the hill peoples' movement against land and forest policies in general and the social forestry program in particular; and the opening up of the economy of CHT to NGOs following the Peace Treaty of 1997 after the long isolation of the region due to insurgency and counterinsurgency. The international conjunctures included the United Nations and multinational banks' discourses on indigenous rights and "sustainable" development.

The indigenous movements of the hill peoples began in 1993 with the first International Year of the Indigenous People (see also, Chowdhury 2008). At this momentous time, the specific national agenda that mobilized indigenous groups, environmental NGOs, and indigenous elites and activists was the Forestry Sector Master Plan. Financed by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the Master Plan was completed in 1993, producing twenty-one special reports and a Five Year Action Plan called the Forestry Sector Project (1996-2001). Importantly, the plan formulated policies, strategies and action plans for a period of twenty years (1993-2012) according to the global discourse of sustainable resource management supported by the United Nations and other transnational organizations (e.g. World Bank, ADB, IUCN). By March 1993, the executive summary of the master plan and a draft of a new national forest policy based on the master plan were available to the public and civil society organizations (GOBD 1993a).<sup>124</sup> Significant aspects of the master plan proposals and the new forest policy included aggressive forest plantation programs in partnership with communities, NGOs, and private business; these programs would bring 20 percent of the country's land under forest cover, from an existing 17 percent. Of this 17 percent "forest land",

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<sup>124</sup>The financial assistance was conditional on the government adopting a new forest policy as well as amending the Forest Act of 1927, the age old British forest rule, in order to institutionalise "social forestry rules" in law. In 2000, the government passed the Forest Amendment Act 2000 that included provisional rules of social forestry (see Chapter V).

little less than two-thirds was without any tree cover and was completely deforested. It is worth mentioning here that the existing forest areas excluding the Sundarbans, Chittagong and Cox's Bazar were inhabited by the country's indigenous peoples. The master plan declared these forest areas to be "Ecologically Stressed Zones" (GOBD 1993b); this included Unclassed State Forests (USF) of CHT which for the most part had already been alienated from common land and given to individuals, businesses and the Forest Department by the 1980s (see Chapter IV).

Critical to the emergence of hill peoples' indigenous movements (as well as other indigenous movements in Bangladesh) was the role of NGOs, especially the Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD). Interestingly, SEHD was formed in the early part of 1993 by a journalist of a Dhaka-based English weekly magazine to promote indigenous issues and environmental justice in Bangladesh. In particular, SEHD organized a national seminar on "Forest and Forest Peoples" in 1994, aiming to articulate indigenous agendas including the opposition against the new forest policies. In 1996, this concern was followed up by an international seminar entitled "Property, Property Rights and Politics and Economics of Life" attended by the prominent subaltern scholar, Professor Gayatri Spivak, along with many other scholars and activists.<sup>125</sup> More significantly, on December 18-20, 1997 (just weeks after the Peace Treaty) SEHD, the Bangladesh Indigenous and Hill People Association for Advancement, Dhaka (BIHPAA) and Minority Rights Group International, London (MRG) organized a national roundtable conference called the "Adivasi Question of Bangladesh". This conference resulted in the formation of the National Adivasi Co-ordination Committee (NACC), the first national network of the indigenous groups of the country, headed by Raja Roy.

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<sup>125</sup> This seminar was organised by SEHD along with three leading NGOs of Bangladesh; for seminar proceedings, see Ali (1997).



The issue that seems to have prompted Raja Roy into joining the indigenous movements were local concerns that arose in early 1992, when the government had begun the legal process of the reservation of forest land in USF that was being taken by the Forest Department for forest plantation and resettlement programs during the counterinsurgency war (see Chapter IV). To protest this government policy, Raja Roy wrote a letter to the Ministry of Environment and Forest (MOEF) in 1992, expressing concerns about the reservation. In September 1993, he followed it with another letter in which he critiqued the forest plantation programs and made both legal and political arguments against them.<sup>126</sup> This reservation of USF land seems to have been the moment of awakening for the Chakma chief, when he found the connection between forests and land alienation of hill peoples whom he later discovered as “indigenous” (Roy 1994).

Raja Roy’s participation in the indigenous movement also relates to the tradition of political activism and rebellion of the Chakma chiefs since the Mughal period, as well as the political dynamics of the insurgency and war in CHT. In the early years of the insurgency, Raja Roy was inaugurated as chief of the Chakma circle at the age of eighteen in 1977, replacing his father Raja Tridiv Roy. Raja Tridiv Roy had settled in Pakistan because of his pro-Pakistan role during Bangladesh’s war of liberation after Bangladesh achieved independence. It is worth repeating that the inauguration of Raja Roy as the Chakma chief was followed by a period of intense insurgency, accusations of genocide of the hill peoples, Bengali settlement, and counterinsurgency development throughout the 1980s. Besides regional autonomy, the political programs of the insurgency also aimed to replace the traditional administration system in the region with a representative democratic government (see Chapter IV).<sup>127</sup> The situation meant a

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<sup>126</sup> Roy shared copies of these letters with me during our meeting in June 2007.

<sup>127</sup> It is important to note that the JSS gave up its opposition to the hill chiefs during the negotiation of peace talks during the late 1980s. The Peace Treaty further recognized the chiefs’ role in the administration of CHT as advisors to the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs as well as to the Regional Council.

huge loss of family land and income for the new Chakma chief at a time when the future of the chiefs' positions remained uncertain. Nonetheless, Raja Roy continued pursuing higher education in Bangladesh and later in the United Kingdom until 1985 graduating in law; and in 1988, he joined the Bangladesh Supreme Court as a barrister.

The Peace Treaty of 1997 marked the most important event in the history of CHT since it became part of Bangladesh. The Peace Treaty broke down decades of isolation of the region and led to an end of the de-facto military regime while opening avenues for development programs as well as local government administrations and civil political activism. In particular, it significantly changed the scope, organization, and agendas of the indigenous movements of the hill peoples. The process that contributed the most to these changes was the opening of the economy of CHT to NGOs and a new development regime of transnational aid agencies, namely, the CHT Consortium (UNDP n. d.). Led by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the CHT Consortium made the NGOs the primary locus of the development process and institutional practice. This resulted in the unprecedented growth of local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in CHT, varying in sizes, structures, and skills.<sup>128</sup> The process also led to the growth of specific types of local NGOs concerning the indigenous movements of the hill peoples and, in some other instances, the process led to the transformation of indigenous organizations into NGOs, as in the case of Taungya. In turn, several local and national networks of indigenous movements emerged, including the NACC as mentioned earlier.

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<sup>128</sup> Besides national and transnational NGOs, more than a hundred local NGOs currently exist in the region. That number is based upon official records of NGOs in the three districts of CHT that I collected through the Deputy Commissioner (DC) Office of Rangamati District in July 2008. My statement about the growth of the NGOs as unprecedented is based on consideration of the period during which these local NGOs emerged and also the population size of the region. For example, in Alikadam Upazila, there are seventeen NGOs for 40,000 people, about half of whom live inside the Matamuhuri Reserve Forest (see Chapter V).

Until 2000, the NACC (National Adivasi Co-ordination Committee) led the indigenous movement of Bangladesh (including hill peoples) for political recognition and rights over forest resources and land. Until then, the indigenous movement of the hill peoples was mostly represented by the Chakma chief and participation among the hill peoples was limited to urban student activists. This movement was also primarily centred in Dhaka, the capital city, where the main program was a day-long celebration of World Indigenous Day which included a colourful rally in the streets of Dhaka, seminars, and discussions with national and international dignitaries. In 2002, some members left the NACC to form the Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples Forum (BIPF), with the guerrilla leader of the JSS, J. B. Larma, as its president. The participation of the JSS in the indigenous movements of the country changed the field of forces: BIPF became *the* national network of indigenous movements advancing a common agenda of gaining constitutional recognition for the indigenous groups; in turn, the NACC lost its national position and its agenda converged with the work of Taungya. In 2006, another network within the overall indigenous movement, Bangladesh Adivasi Odhikar Andolon (BAOA), was formed by left-leaning Bengali academics and public intellectuals who have long been associated with the indigenous peoples through RDC (Research and Development Collective), an advocacy NGO.

Taungya's differences with the BAOA and BPIF lay partly in organizational structure, ideology and agenda. The BAOA is mainly a Dhaka-based national civil society organization advocating for indigenous peoples' political and cultural rights. An intrinsic ideology of the BAOA movement is South Asian Marxism and an orientalist historiography.<sup>129</sup> This ideology

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<sup>129</sup> I was present in the meeting when the BAOA was formed in 2006 and my views on the BAOA are built on my familiarity with the movement leaders and critical position on the left movement in Bangladesh. In part my critical view is shared by young indigenous activists of CHT (see Khisa, D. 2008).

considers the indigenous peoples of South Asia to be pre-Aryan original inhabitants of South Asia from whom Bengalis, the dominant group of Bangladesh (and West Bengal and Tripura of India), are descended as a “mixed race.” The BAOA movement mainly targets progressive sections of the Bengali political classes to advance indigenous peoples’ causes while framing indigenous issues in terms of the protection of secularism and social justice in the country, both of which are core ideological components of Bengali nationalism. However, a concern is that the leaders of BAOA hold a paternalistic view of indigenous communities and they appear to consider themselves ‘organic intellectuals’ best suited to lead and represent indigenous peoples.

The indigenous movement of the BIPF represents the special interests of different indigenous networks, groups and NGOs; within these networks, the hill peoples are represented by the JSS (the former insurgency movement). The main objective of the JSS in joining the overall indigenous movement is to mobilize the support of both national and internal NGOs, civil society activists and the other indigenous groups for full implementation of the Peace Treaty. The party views BIPF as a political platform for “peaceful political action” in its struggle for “self determination” and democratic governance in CHT. However, J.B. Larma insisted in an interview with me that “the party has not completely given away the option to return to armed resistance and guerrilla war, if the government does not implement the treaty fully.” Significantly, the JSS still holds an ethno-nationalist political position and views the hill peoples as a “Jumma nation”; it thus aims for the recognition of the hill peoples as a “Jumma nation” with a constitutional guarantee which the Peace Treaty denied them.

Taungya’s indigenous movement and its ascent to fame largely hinges upon the political activism of the Chakma chief Raja Roy and the ways he embraced social and ecological issues, articulating alternative strategies of resource use and development. Since 1994, Raja Roy has

attended and presented papers at a number of conferences worldwide, including the Asian Development Bank's and World Bank's reviews on indigenous policies, while sitting regularly in sessions of the Working Groups on Indigenous Population (WGIP) at the United Nations.<sup>130</sup> Importantly, he has more than twenty publications, mainly written in English, including book chapters, journal and newspaper articles, reports and short notes.<sup>131</sup> Key themes throughout his writings are land, forests, traditional administration and customary rights. These are what Li calls "a capacity to present cultural identity and local knowledge in forms intelligible to outsiders"; Li argues this capacity is an important condition for the cultural and political work of articulation of indigenous identity (Li 2000:169). I would argue that this capacity is critical not only for the articulation of indigenous identity but also for the articulation of an alternative indigenous agenda of development and indigenous movements.

### **6.3 The Origins of VCFs: Indigenous Invention vs. State Regulation**

The claim that VCF was invented in the second quarter of the twentieth century by "indigenous elders" based on indigenous custom is questionable and partial at best. Relying primarily on my fieldwork with VCF communities, interviews with Taungya's VCF staff, and the contexts of the existing VCF localities, I argue that even as an idea the VCF is first and foremost an invention of state regulation as opposed to indigenous elders (compare Agrawal, A 2005). The practice of VCFs seems to have begun following the construction of the Kaptai dam in 1962 and was shaped by the strategic positioning of the insurgency movement and counterinsurgency development in its local settings. To support my argument, first I examine the meanings of the local names of

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<sup>130</sup> This statement is in part based on my interview with Raja Roy in June 2007 and also on reading publications and conference papers supplied by Raja Roy during the interview.

<sup>131</sup> This statement is based on the lists of publications and conference papers supplied by Raja Roy during my interview with him in June 2007.

VCFs and I then go on to examine the textual origins of the VCFs. Finally, I provide a contextual analysis of the existing VCF localities based on the inventory report of VCFs prepared by Taungya.

Village common forests (VCFs) are a neologism, known locally among the Chakma as *service bon*, or at times, *rajdhani*. *Service bon* is a hybrid term of the English word *service* and Bengali word *bon*, meaning forests. *Service bon* literally means forests for service. The name derives from the practice of privileges for headmen, the service holders of the traditional administration who were allowed by the Regulation of 1900 to keep certain areas of USF as forest common lands in their Mouzas according to their positions without paying tax for it to the government. On this consideration, *service bon* is a forest area in USF under headmen or at times under Karbaris for their service to the government and are not taxable. The term *rajdhani* is a Bengali word meaning the capital city. The appropriation of the term *rajdhani* to refer to “common forest” underscores, first of all, the centrality of this resource to the community, and importantly, the position and power of headmen or Karbaris who control it. Both local names signify a place of resource whose meaning depends upon the traditional authorities’ control of the resource. Since the positions of traditional administration were only invented by the British in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and crystallized through the Regulation of 1900, they cannot be reduced to being simply “sovereign indigenous elders” outside of the state’s power and legal sanction.

The textual origins of the VCFs, or the appearance of them in written language, can be identified with precision to the amendment of rule 41 of the Regulation of 1900 in 1939; the rule was intended to empower the Deputy Commissioner of CHT to regulate and control jhum cultivation and the migration of jhum cultivators from one Mouza to another. The rule also

included provisions to empower headmen to keep some areas of common USF land as a Mouza reserve of bamboo, timber and other forest products. The contexts and rationalities of rule 41A require further research, but the detailed provisions of the rule and the Deputy Commissioner's *Annual Report* of 1939-40 suggest that the provisions were meant as a regulatory instrument aimed to encourage headmen to take care of the future domestic needs of the hill peoples of their Mouza (GOB 1941: 11). The provision reads:

41A. The Headman is responsible for the conservation of the resources of his mouza. For this purpose any headman may-

- a) prohibit the removal of bamboos, timber and other forest produce by residents of his mouza other than for their domestic purposes or by non residents for any purposes;
- b) exclude any area or areas in his mouza from the jhuming area with a view to keeping such area as a mouza reserve of bamboos, timber and other forest produce;
- c) prevent newcomers from cutting jhums in his mouza, if in his opinion their doing so [is] likely to result in a scarcity for jhum for his own tenants in future years; and
- d) prevent any person from grazing cattle in his mouza when such grazing is harmful to his jhuming area (GOBD n. d.).

A subsequent text to this rule was a 1965 executive order of the Deputy Commissioner under rule 7 of the Regulation of 1900. In part, the order clarifies the status of VCFs in the past, while providing specific directives to all headmen to maintain village common forest in their Mouza.

It has come to my notice that due to the indiscriminate felling of trees and cutting of bamboos all over the Unclassed State Forest of this district there are hardly any timber and bamboos resources available in the mouzas for meeting the domestic need of the mouza people. In the past it was the practice to maintain a small reserve in most of the mouzas under the control of mouza headmen for meeting the requirements of the mouza people for their own use. But since this practice has given up the people are facing extreme hardship in finding these materials for construction of their houses and for meeting other domestic needs. It is, therefore, found expedient to keep certain areas in each mouza as Reserve so that mouza people may not have any difficulty in getting these forest produce readily available from the mouza reserve according to the needs with the permission of the Headmen concerned. [...] It is, therefore, ordered that in each mouza there shall be maintained a mouza reserve by headmen/karbaries concerned to be

administered by the mouza headmen. No timber or bamboos or other forest produce from this shall be allowed for the purpose of sale. The area of the reserve should be approximately 100 acres per mouza whether in one block or more. It may be convenient to have a number of blocks contiguous to bigger paras whose administration may be delegated by the Headmen to the local Karbaries. [...] It will be responsibility of the headmen not only to protect these reserves from any illegal felling but also to plant up the area with suitable species (Reprinted in Taungya 2002:22).

This order was issued following the havoc caused by the Kaptai dam and its aftermath in the displacement and resettlement of the hill peoples. As shown in Chapter III, one of the government policies of resettlement was jhum control or the gradual elimination of jhum cultivation in favor of horticulture plantation. This policy of jhum control had a different agenda of improvement than the conservation of VCFs solely for the needs of the hill peoples and their traditional practices. A comprehensive reading of the Deputy Commissioner's Order makes this point and the last sentence of the statement clearly illuminates it. Still, Taungya reproduces these texts out of context in order to use them as evidence that VCF are an indigenous invention. Taungya further argues that these texts are in effect the colonial state's recognition of prior indigenous customs. The problem with this argument is not only that it is purely theoretical, as I show below, but also that it says little or nothing about the field of forces that led to the practices of VCFs other than the sovereign wills of "indigenous elders" based on indigenous customs.

As I began to read VCF files in Taungya's Office, especially the inventory report of the existing VCFs, I found the claim of VCFs as "indigenous invention by elders" even less credible. The inventory was conducted by indigenous staff of Taungya through key informant discussion (KID)<sup>132</sup> and surveys of forest sites with the participation of local village communities, with financial assistance from the International Center for Integrated Mountain Development

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<sup>132</sup> Taungya's reports claimed that it also used focus group discussion (FGD) in addition to key informant discussion (KID) and surveys. It seemed to me the term focus group discussion (FGD) is misunderstood in its objectives and strategies; in Taungya's usage, informal or formal group discussion is referred to as "focus group discussion."



(ICIMOD). The inventory report is a rich documentation of local knowledge of VCFs in CHT. It contains details of the VCFs' administrative contexts (i.e. Upazila, Union, and Mouza), land area, species, the year of preservation, communities, population, local social and cultural institutions, distances from administrative centers, maps, and more. According to the inventory report, there are about one hundred and twenty seven (127) VCFs in CHT; most of them are in Rangamati district of the region, with as many as five (5) in Khagrachhari district and eight (8) in Bandarban district. However, the inventory could only report details of eighty eight (88) VCFs including the five in Khagrachhari district but none of the Bandarban district. In terms of traditional administrative divisions of the region, all the VCFs fall within the boundary of the Chakma chief's circle. Considering civil administrative units, the VCFs of Rangamati district are located only in four Upazilas out of the district's ten Upazilas. Of these, more than half (47) are located in Barkal Upazila, almost a quarter (20) in Langadu Upazila, about one eighth (10) in Naniarchar Upazila and as many as five (5) in Rangamati Sadar Upazila. The VCF of Khagrachhari district belongs to Dighinala Upazila, one of the district's seven Upazilas (see Table 6.1 below). Most importantly, all the VCFs are reported as being inhabited by members of the Chakma community, as I found in Beganachari and Nahbhanga during the fieldwork.

The ethnic dimension and spatial distribution of the VCFs raise more questions than answers to the claim of VCFs as indigenous custom. In particular, the prevalence of VCFs among only the Chakma seemed puzzling at first. This is partly because the Chakma have been the group representing the settled agrarian community and economically better off among the hill peoples since the British occupation (Hutchinson, 1909; Ishaq, 1971). Currently, the Chakma are the group with the least number of jhum cultivators, only 18 percent<sup>133</sup> (Tripura, P. and A.

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<sup>133</sup> The incidences of jhum cultivation among the other hill peoples groups are: the Murucha, 90 percent; the Pankho, the Lushai, and the Khumi, 80 percent; the Bawm, 70 percent; the Tripura, 53 percent; the Tanchangya, the Khyang

Harun, 2003:79). Moreover, the Chakma have had higher literacy rates, education and political mobilization compared to other groups of the hill peoples since 1965 (Bertocci 1996). Kisha, the general secretary of Taungya, holds that the Chakma are increasingly becoming an urban community and the majority of the urban Chakma have given up their traditional lifestyle and culture to “follow Bengali urban middle classes.”<sup>134</sup>

Interestingly, the prevalence of VCFs among the Chakma in the territory of the Chakma chief’s circle soon became a guiding question of my inquiry that led to the unknitting of several threads of the materiality of VCFs practices. On reflection, I gathered that what differentiated the Chakma and the Chakma chief’s circle from other groups in CHT was the scale, intensity and high participation of the Chakma in the insurgency. Thus, I interviewed Asish Chakma, a founding member of Taungya, to explore the role of the insurgency movement in the practice of VCFs. Asish had worked with Taungya from 1998 to 2005 in various capacities, beginning as a grassroots activist and later becoming a field supervisor of the pilot project. He was also a key agent for the survey of the VCFs of Barkal, Langadu, and Rangamati Sadar Upazilas for the VCFs inventory report.

My interview with Asish was not as informative as I had wished. He began repeating Taungya’s popular narratives with his intimate knowledge of the VCFs and personal stories of how he had helped the inventory report. He also carefully avoided answering my question of why there are more VCFs among the Chakma in some Upazilas than among the other groups and Upazilas. Eventually, Asish did open up to the question to speak his mind. In answer to the question, he surmised three reasons: First, there were relatively sufficient common jhum lands in

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and the Chak, 50 percent; and the Marma, 30 percent (Tripura, P and A. Harun, 2003:79; percentage numbers are averaged and rounded).

<sup>134</sup> Interview with me, July 4-6, 2008.

the areas. Second, the villages were more permanent. Finally, during the insurgency movement, there was a strict ban imposed by the JSS, the insurgent political party, against cutting down the jungle area. On the point of the JSS, he further confirmed that during the insurgency the JSS had set up an alternative to the traditional administrative system in villages in order to control jhum cultivation and other economic activities. “They used the jungle for hiding out and keeping the arms and ammunition safe and protected from the army. Perhaps, it was from the time of the insurgency that the social values of keeping VCFs emerged.” Naturally, I asked a follow up question about the role of traditional values and ideas about the care of forests and environment. Asish replied: “Yes, I think there may be some thinking of environment, if not all about the forests or conservation. Indigenous people do think about streams and water and do know that streams need shadow and jungle otherwise they would dry out. There are VCFs in and around streams, and I think that could be another reason too.”

I find Asish’s theory to be the most plausible explanation of the conjuncture and agencies shaping the practice of VCFs, taking into consideration the counter- insurgency development which alienated much of USF common lands for Bengali resettlement, expansion of forest plantation, and businesses (see Chapter IV). For example, let us consider the locations of VCFs in Rangamati and Khagrachhari districts. In Rangamati district, the territories of all the four Upazilas with VCFs (Rangamati Sadar, Naniarchar, Langadu and Barkal) fall in between the Kassalong and Renikhyong Reserved Forests and are located along the Karnaphuli River and its tributaries of Kassalong and Maini, and in part submerged by the Kaptai Lake (see Appendix A: Map 7). Therefore, apart from some thousands of acres of fringe land in the valleys regulated by the Kaptai dam water regime, much of the cultivable land areas in these localities are composed of ranges of low and high hills. Dighinala Upazila of Khagrachhari district, on the other hand, is

located in the northwest part of the region and includes a large part of Kassalong Reserved Forest (see Appendix A: Map 2). Although Dighinala Upazila includes plough lands in valleys and low hill valleys, more than half of its cultivable areas are also formed by low and high hills without valleys (ADB 2001a: 85-92). Of all these Upazilas, Barkal Upazila to the east and Dighinala Upazila to the north of CHT were considered to be frontier base camps of the insurgents bordering the Indian states of Mizoram and Tripura respectively, and were connected by the Karnaphuli River and its tributaries. They had also been major sites of insurgency and counter-insurgency violence and alleged genocide. The effects of violence in terms of displacement and dispossession of the hill peoples in these Upazilas are yet to be ascertained. However, according to the records of refugees returning following the Peace Treaty, 65,000 hill peoples had taken refuge in India during the insurgency and they all were from the Rangamati and Khagrachhari districts of the region. The overwhelming majority of the returning refugees were Chakma while the remaining refugees were Tripura and Marma. An important note to this account of refugees is that it excludes the people who briefly took refuge in India but were made to return to CHT, and also people who were internally displaced. Regarding the counter-insurgency development discussed in Chapter IV, the entire region of CHT had gone through strategic deployment of Bengali settlement, forest extension, and militarization. The details need not to be repeated here, but the example of Barkal Upazila suffices to make the point. Population statistics and forest plantation records indicate that unlike the other Upazilas, Barkal had only a small number of Bengali settlements and was saved entirely from forest extension; this partly explains the predominance of VCFs in the Upazila compared with the other Upazilas (ADB 2001b: Annex 3; CHT South Forest Division n. d.).

Table 6.1: VCFs by Upazila (Sub-district) and the Year of Preservation

Year	Upazilas (Sub-district)					Total
	Rangamati	Naniarchar	Langadu	Barkal	Dhighbhinala	
1936-1940	Nil	Nil	1	Nil	Nil	1
1941-1945	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	1	1
1946-1950	Nil	Nil	1	1	Nil	2
1951-1955	Nil	1	Nil	Nil	Nil	1
1956-1960	Nil	1	Nil	5	Nil	6
1961-1965	1	2	2	27	Nil	32
1966-1970	3	5	1	9	1	19
1971-1975	1	Nil	Nil	2	Nil	3
1976-1980	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	1	1
1981-1985	Nil	Nil	1	Nil	1	2
1986-1990	Nil	Nil	2	1	Nil	3
1991-1995	Nil	Nil	2	Nil	1	3
1996-2000	Nil	Nil	5	1	Nil	6
2001-2005	Nil	Nil	3		Nil	3
Year Undocumented	1	1	2	1	Nil	5
Total	6	10	20	47	5	88

Data: Taungya files examined in June and July of 2008.

Nevertheless, to check the reality and materiality of VCFs in practice on the ground, a research assistant visited the Beganachari VCF community in Barkal Upazila with Taungya's staff members (I could not go in person as I was sick with fever). The Beganachari VCF is the best known VCF as it has been showcased by Taungya on many occasions, including the documentary. During the two-day visit in Beganachari village, the research assistant also met some villagers of the Nabhangya VCF community in Beganachari who came there to join the "indigenous sports" organized by Taungya. The research assistant formally interviewed four men and two women representing both Beganachari and Nabhangya villages; both villages were inhabited by a single ethnic community, the Chakma. Interestingly, he also found that the Beganachari VCF has only partly existed for the last three decades and that the Nabhangya VCF was only created in 2002 as a result of Taungya's campaign, "Saving the Village Common Forest." Kumar Chakma, a member of the Nabhangya VCF community, told the research assistant:

In 2002 when Taungya came to Benganachari, I was visiting relatives here, I asked the members of Taungya what our village had to do to have a service bon, and how many villagers had to agree. Taungya said there was no limit of villagers. I went back to Nabhangya, and called other villagers to talk about Taungya's project. We found a taroom (jungle) in a common Mouza land (USF) in the area of our village. We called all villagers who would want to join the management of the taroom. Not all were interested, but fourteen families, and then with the help of Taungya we made it a new service bon.

However, the above statement is not meant to undermine the existence of VCF for some times, but rather to point to the effect of Taungya's VCF campaign as seen in the Table 6.1 that shows that as many as three VCFs were created between 2001 and 2005. The Table further shows that more than one third of the 88 VCFs that were surveyed by Taungya came into their existence from 1961 to 1965 and about a quarter of them between 1966 and 1970. Both the timing and the location of the appearance of these VCFs are of critical significance; the appearances of these

VCFs coincide with the aftermath of Kaptai dam, and they are all located in the areas which are in part submerged by the Kaptai dam (see Appendix A: Map 7).

Nevertheless, the most difficult question in my inquiry on VCF origins was whether or not the state regulation of VCFs has some basis in previously existing indigenous customs of the hill peoples. As Hall (1990) reminds us, cultural practices (broadly defined) always come from something; they always have their own history: “like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power” (Hall 1990: 225).<sup>135</sup> In my conversations with Raja Roy, the Chakma chief boldly defended Taungya’s claim of indigenous invention of VCFs; he further argued that the laws regarding VCFs and the Deputy Commissioner’s Order do not undermine the claim:

I would not deny that the laws existed and they still are in effect. But there is no single evidence of any government initiative regarding VCFs or to make VCFs an effective institution of forest conservation. Instead, since the Pakistan period and more so during Bangladesh, thousands of acres of common Mouza lands (USFs) have been taken away for forest plantation programs of the Forest Department, Bengali settlement, and other purposes of the government. It is us, I mean our rural communities, who have kept these VCFs as it is a traditional practice. Now suppose, if our communities did not keep VCFs, how then have they come to exist? If you think they knew the laws and followed them, it is up to you to believe it but I cannot agree with you. I think it would be a more appropriate question, if the rural VCF communities do know the laws regarding VCFs. In fact, many Bengali academics or lawyers do not understand, or perhaps, do not want to understand the Regulation of 1900, the laws of Chittagong Hill Tracts. In the context of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, laws followed customs and traditions, and not the other way round.<sup>136</sup>

I think the Chakma Chief’s argument about the laws and customs is not merely provocative but also holds some merit because of the Regulation of 1900 in general and the entire edifice of the

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<sup>135</sup> In fact, Hall refers to cultural identity, but I see his point as equally valid with respect to cultural practices (compare Li 2000: 152)

<sup>136</sup> As I found out after my conversation with Roy, the argument is not new. Since his very first published article, the argument has reappeared frequently (Roy, D. 1994; 2002).

traditional administration in CHT in particular (see Chapter II). This is not surprising if one follows Henry Maine's theory of the origin of laws which holds that in modern societies many laws are originated in customs and traditions (Maine 1861). As a matter of fact, my interviews with the Murucha forest villagers as well as with the Tripura community of Golden River suggested that both communities had the tradition of "community forests." The forests were generally kept near settlement areas for immediate needs of bamboo and other forest products. However, as the communities moved out for new settlements after some time, the forests were cut down and burned for jhum cultivation.

In sum, I conclude that the origins of the VCFs among hill peoples cannot be attributed to the sovereign will of indigenous elders. Rather, VCFs are an invention of state policy discourses of jhum control. Nevertheless, it may have some basis in indigenous customs of some hill peoples' groups. However, the prevalence of VCFs among the Chakma in specific locales is due to the strategic positioning of the localities from the standpoint of the insurgency movement and counter-insurgency development.

#### **6.4 The Pilot VCF Project: A New Discourse of Political Forests**

The pilot project was a two-year project that began in 2003. The key concept that informed the project's rationales, objectives, programs and agenda is the "protection" of VCFs and their biodiversity. The project plan argues that:

Given the fast pace of deforestation in Bangladesh, and especially in CHT, the protection and preservation of VCFs is crucial for the livelihood, environment, and cultural and religious needs of VCF communities. VCFs meet the demands of timber and bamboo needs of VCF dependent communities, they are repositories of food, biodiversity and indigenous medicinal herbs and plants, and are related to religious and cultural ceremonies of many indigenous peoples. Likewise, the management of VCFs provides an important role to rural communities in environmentally sound watershed management, which is extremely necessary to combat deforestation, harmful monoculture plantation,



environmental degradation and resource scarcity. Thus, better protected VCFs would in turn lead to: (i) maintenance of forest cover;( ii) maintenance of biodiversity; protection of headwater streams; (iii) maintenance of herbaria; and (iv) preservation of cultural and religious tradition of indigenous communities related to forests (Taungya 2002:13-14).

The project plan to protect the VCF was predicated on analyses of a number of interrelated social, political and environmental problems in CHT and on recommendations published in the article, “Valuing ‘Village Commons’ in Forestry: A Case from the Chittagong Hill Tracts” (Roy and Halim 2001). The Chakma chief, Raja Roy, co-authored the article with Dr. Sadeka Halim, a Bengali academic turned indigenous activist. The authors describe what they regard as the major challenges to the VCFs. The first challenge, they argue, is the trend of deforestation in the country, especially in the CHT. The authors maintain that deforestation in the CHT is an historical phenomenon caused by state forest and land policies that began with the British and have resulted in alienation of the hill peoples. The situation was exacerbated by industrial development in the 1960s and population growth in the region resulting from state sponsored and voluntary Bengali settlement during the 1970s and 1980s. The second and important challenge is the absence of land tenure in the VCFs. As VCFs are formed from parts of USF land (that have not been alienated from hill peoples by market or state), the state only recognizes usufruct rights of the communities over the VCFs land, retaining ownership and control for the state. Thus, legal access to the VCF lands remains wide–open for state acquisition or market forces dominated by Bengali businesses and individuals as well as affluent urban members of indigenous communities. Roy and Halim (2001) further argue that the absence of land tenure over VCFs has had a severe impact on the remaining VCFs and requires protection not only from external processes of state, market and Bengali business, but also from indigenous affluent and urban members of hill peoples’ communities. They conclude that “indigenous forest management perspectives on [forest land tenure] have differed radically from the conventional

industrial-capitalist concepts influenced by colonial legislative regimes . . . [and] need to be accounted for and acknowledged to ensure sustainability of the VCFs” (Roy and Halim 2001:28). Nevertheless, they concede that various regimes of local customary management also present a major problem for the sustainability of the VCFs as they are mostly governed by Mouza headmen or Karbaris (village headmen), lacking uniform rules or any rule, depending on the particular power relations between VCF communities and the traditional elites (Roy and Halim 2001). In general, they suggest four measures as ways toward “a meaningful dialogue” among the state, NGOs, and indigenous leadership for the protection of VCFs and indigenous rights in CHT:

- (i) to recorded (sic) the VCFs as the joint and common property of the concerned VCF communities;
- (ii) to redistribute state-appropriated common forest lands to indigenous communities conditional upon their sustainable use as forests;
- (iii) to involve the indigenous peoples and other forest-dependent communities in the joint management of state-managed forests and to share the resources of such forests in an equitable and practical manner; and
- (iv) to recognize the indigenous knowledge, innovation and practices related to forestry and environment protection and utilise them with prior and informed consent of the peoples and communities concerned (Roy and Halim, 2001: 30).

These recommendations inform Taungya’s political agendas with respect to land and forest.

Taungya’s pilot project turns these recommendations into a technical problem of “protection and preservation” of the VCFs. In so doing, the pilot project took the local VCFs communities as its primary targets of intervention where it could maximize the effects of achieving its goals, and the state and its bureaucracy were secondary targets for liaison and advocacy for collective rights over the VCF land. Figure 1 and Figure 2 reproduced here from the appendix of the pilot project plan clearly demonstrate these priorities and illustrate a local practice of development

planning.<sup>137</sup> The pilot project selected twelve VCFs covering three Upazilas (sub districts) of Rangamati district, namely Barkal, Langadu, and Rangamati Sadar. At the community level, the project planner proposed a policy of “limited intervention” in the spirit of a “bottom up” approach to community development and the plan had two main programs: a) reforming the existing unstructured or semi-structured local management of VCFs, and b) raising community awareness about VCFs in relation to biodiversity, environment, and watershed protection. Additionally, three VCFs including the Beganachari VCF received small grants for elementary education, safe drinking water, sports items and sanitation programs.

Several ideologies and development agendas informed the pilot project’s programs, including (but not limited to) participation by women in the management of the VCFs, equitable distribution of the VCFs resources, sustainable management of the VCFs, and good governance of local communities. These agendas met the donor policy expectations, which are aligned with the contemporary neoliberal discourse of community and environmental development. What is new, however, is the way that Taungya translated the discourse of community and environmental development to shape the practice of management of common property forest management on the ground. Under the reform program, eleven VCFs were brought under a management committee with one third of women participants elected by the respective VCF villagers for a two-year period; the community of Noapara VCF, facing a shortage of cultivable lands, had to open its VCF area for jhum cultivation and opted out of the project. The committee was given sole responsibilities for: i) safeguarding the VCF land and resources from jhum cultivation, fire, hunting and thieves; ii) regulating the community use of VCF through a policy of equal access to all villagers; iii) determining the harvesting period of bamboo on a sustainable basis, and the

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<sup>137</sup> Some words and phrases are partly edited for clarity in both figures’ presentation

sale of the harvest; and iv) distribution of income from the VCFs. Accordingly, each of the VCF communities set new rules for community members' usage and access rights over VCF resources, including the harvesting schedule, sale of VCFs, and distribution of the income from VCFs. In the Beganachari VCF, the following are the provisional rules agreed by the villagers:

- i. Every household of the village community should join the VCF community paying Tk. 5.00 every month to be considered a member of the VCF;
- ii. No person other than the member's household will be allowed to access rights over the VCF land and forest produce;
- iii. The member household will be allowed to collect fuel, fodder and vegetables other than bamboo roots from the VCF, but hunting, trapping and any form of cultivation will be prohibited;
- iv. Each member household that needs bamboo for personal use or household repairs should purchase bamboo for Tk. 3.00 each by the permission of the committee;
- v. Harvesting and sales period for bamboo will be 5 years, timber trees will be preserved; and,
- vi. In the case of a newcomer to the village community, she/he cannot be a member of the VCF community; if she/he resides in the village for a minimum of two years and is willing to live in the village permanently, the committee will decide his/her membership if she/he wishes to join the VCF community.

The rules of Beganachari appear to be typical of the way that VCFs are re-organized as the collective property of resource users or what can be called a form of "community forestry." From my reading of the pilot project's files and reports, I gather that the rules do not vary greatly from one VCF to another; the differences are only in the amount of membership fees and the prices of bamboo for community usage. In some cases, however, there are no strict restrictions on occasional hunting, as only a few individuals still practice hunting in the communities.<sup>138</sup>

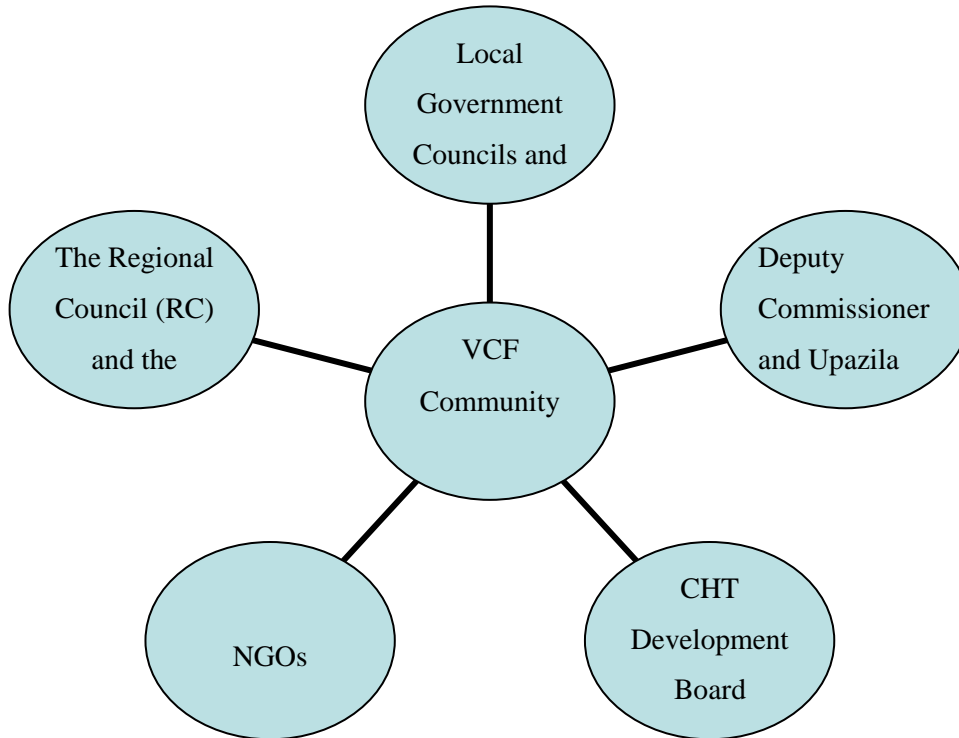
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<sup>138</sup> I gathered this information about hunting from Taungya's VCF files and village-level meeting resolutions.

Figure 6.1: Logical Framework of the [VCF Pilot] Project

Goals/Expected outcome	Inputs	Means of Verification	Assumptions
Goal -1 To Preserve and Protect the Village Common Forest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Database</li> <li>• Research</li> <li>• Skill Training</li> <li>• Advocacy and Liaison               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) Land Tenure</li> <li>(b) Sales of VCFs Forest Produce</li> <li>(c) Welfare Extension Service</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FGD Analysis</li> <li>• KID analysis</li> <li>• Review Reports</li> <li>• Monitoring Reports</li> <li>• Evaluation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consent of VCF Community</li> <li>• Legal Sanction</li> </ul>
Goal -2 Strengthening Organizational and Livelihood Security of VCF Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training Workshop</li> <li>• Experience sharing</li> <li>• Water and sanitation</li> <li>• Income Generating Assistance</li> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Advocacy and Liaison</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review Reports</li> <li>• Monitoring Reports</li> <li>• Evaluation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consent of VCF Community</li> <li>• Absorption Capacity of VCF Community</li> <li>• Existing and Potential Leadership skill</li> </ul>
Goal- 3 Awareness Raising on Sustainable Watershed Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Advocacy and Liaison on               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) Environment</li> <li>(b) Biodiversity</li> <li>(c) Sustainable Resource Management Techniques</li> </ul> </li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Absorption Capacity of VCF Community</li> <li>• Cooperation of Rural Communities</li> </ul>

Figure 6.2: Liaison and Advocacy Network of VCF Communities



To supervise and assist the activities of the committees in their respective Upazilas (sub-districts), Taungya hired and trained three VCF community members in the position of “Community Organizer” from each Upazila. The major responsibilities of the Community Organizers were to guide the management committees and VCF village communities through the following: participatory assessments of community resources (schools, clubs, agricultural activities) and VCF resources (flora and fauna); problem analysis; preparation of development proposals; budget funding; and use of the income from community memberships and the VCF.

Over the project period, the members of the management committees were brought to Rangamati to join a series of workshops and seminars designed to address the question of indigenous land rights and forests, which opened up an opportunity for the VCF communities to meet and speak directly to state functionaries, headmen, and indigenous activists. Meanwhile, the communities were visited by Taungya's members for similar kinds of training and community meeting. The assumption that underlies the action of Community Organizers and the training of members of the VCF committees and communities is that hill people villagers need to be reminded of their customs and traditions because these have been either lost or increasingly ignored due to the insurgency and war as well as resulting economic, political and social crises. There was also a hope that the training would make the functionaries and resource users in VCF village communities into collective environmental subjects who would plan, reach consensus, and think of the village population in their relation to the natural resources to be managed. Further, these actions created a new network of VCF communities, the Chittagong Hill Tracts Association of Mouza Reserve, to coordinate these VCF communities at the regional level of CHT for legal and political recognition of VCFs as the collective property of village communities.

In sum, the pilot project brought about a new form of commercial community forestry in CHT through mobilization of a large group of men and women of the hill peoples in the project villages into corporate bodies of resource users. In turn, the project has begun a new process of the making of political forests in CHT that risks not only the exclusion of the hill peoples' access to forest resources in Mouzas but also risks the racialization of forest resources.<sup>139</sup> Given that all eleven VCF communities that were part of the pilot project are mainly remote communities of jhum cultivating peasants, the important questions are what these changes have meant for hill

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<sup>139</sup> By the term racialization, I mean the process of ethnicization of resources by an ethnic group, resulting in the exclusion of other ethnic groups (see Vandergeest 2003 for further explication of racialization of resources).

peoples' customary rights to jhum land and how the project communities responded. To explore these questions and the implications of the VCF movement, I turn to the next section.

## **6.5 Implications of VCF**

Though it is too early to comprehensively evaluate Taungya's intervention in VCFs, the articulation of indigeneity and forest conservation raises a serious concern about the possible effect of VCFs on hill peoples in general and jhum cultivation in particular. Certainly, there has been increased interest in VCFs. In 2008, a VCF community of Taungya's pilot project received the Prime Minister Award for an outstanding forest conservation effort. Currently, in addition to Taungya, a number of national and international NGOs are running VCF projects for biodiversity conservation and rural development in CHT.<sup>140</sup> Though the plans, projects and programs of these national and international interventions were beyond the scope of my research, these new interventions seem to have not only appropriated but also exacerbated Taungya's problematic popular narratives of VCFs. For example, Friends of the Earth International's webpage on its VCF projects reads:

Village Common Forest (VCF) is an ancient system of forest use and management practiced by tribal communities living in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in South-east of Bangladesh. The communities are highly dependent on the forests in the remaining VCFs, which provide wood and bamboos for constructing houses, and are an abundant source of food and medicine (Friends of the Earth International n. d.).

Notice that there is now a suggestion that VCF is an "ancient" practice and that the hill peoples are "highly dependent" on it, when in fact VCF does not exist in most rural communities of CHT. Importantly, there is evidence that there exist long-drawn-out conflicts over VCF land, including conflicts between conservation and jhum cultivation in all the project villages. The

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<sup>140</sup> These NGOs are Proshikha, the Arannayk Foundation, and Friends of the Earth International.



evidence also points to the fact that the pilot project has not only further exacerbated such conflicts; it also appears to have coerced hill people into giving up their common land and at times private land for the expansion of VCFs. For example, let us consider the following local stories of three VCFs of the pilot project that I have constructed from the final report of the pilot project and the office reports of the Community Organizers.

The first is the Duluchari VCF. This VCF is one of the primary project areas of the pilot project. The community of Duluchari VCF consists of a village with 74 households, mainly jhum cultivating peasant families, and a Buddhist monastery. The land of the VCF was reported to be between 120 and 500 acres in different office reports of Taungya. The final report of the pilot project put the land area at about 200 acres at the outset; however, in describing details about the current management of VCF the report contradicted itself, saying that the size of the VCF was approximately 120 acres. Most interestingly, it further suggests that the land area was initially “half of the present size” of 120 acres and that the additional land came in 1991 from the villagers’ donation of their privately-owned registered and unregistered land to the Buddhist Monastery in the village, which is part of the VCF.

Secondly, the Madyachar VCF, another primary project area of the pilot project. The VCF, according to the final report, was established in 1956 and was about 200 acres. In 2003, when it came under the project, the land area was 100 acres and was claimed by nine villages of about 500 households. The reports of the Community Mobilizers suggest that the land area of the VCF grew to 500 acres in 2004 after the jhum harvest of that year. The major problems of the management of the VCF, as noted in the final report, were: a) no clear demarcation of the boundary; b) conflicts about the number of villages having claims over the VCF; c) conflicts

over jhum land and VCF land; d) conflicts over claims to private land in VCF; and e) fire from jhum.

Finally, the Bagchari VCF. This VCF was reported to have been formed jointly by Bagchari and Rangdakaba villages in 1965. In 2001, Rangdakaba villagers wanted the VCF for jhum cultivation but Bagchari villagers denied them. Thus, the VCF was divided between the villages, and Rangdakaba villagers did jhum on their part. In 2003, when the villagers of Bagchari joined the pilot project, they formally complained to the Chakma chief against the local headmen for giving Rangdakaba more than the half of their share in the VCF. The intervention of the Chakma chief helped Bagchari villagers to recover their share of the land. Interestingly, the Bagchari community also expressed their desire to increase their area of the VCF because they claimed Rangdakaba had formed a new VCF that was bigger in area than Bagchari's.

These stories no doubt are partial; however, they provide anecdotal evidence of the possible risk of VCFs on jhum cultivation in the project area. Clearly, the VCFs under the pilot project shrunk the existing jhum land even if they did not completely eliminate jhum cultivation in the project area. The extent to which this has affected the livelihood of the project communities, I cannot ascertain; however, the VCF rules against jhum cultivation, with fines in all the project communities, imply that there is high demand for jhum land in all project communities. It is also likely that recent interest in conservation of VCF among the Chakma is a sign of Chakmas' increased dependence on other sources of income than jhum cultivation. Whatever the case may be, conservation of VCF is clearly an irony for the overall indigenous movement of the hill peoples. First of all, if the VCF movement becomes successful, it will further marginalize the remaining jhum land or jhum cultivation, something the state has tried and failed to do so since the British. The loss of jhum cultivation would mean the loss of the

rural way life of the hill peoples, and for some hill peoples it would certainly cause poverty or the loss of entitlement to livelihood security, particularly marginal jhum cultivating peasants among the Chakma. Significantly, there are hardly enough USF common lands for the entire rural hill peoples groups to have VCFs of their own. Given that VCFs exist mainly among the Chakma villages in the Chakma chief's territory, the problem is clearly the conceptual justification of indigenous identity of the hill peoples which the VCFs try to articulate in the first place. In sum, the practice of VCF risks not only class differentiation among the project communities in terms of their access to USF common and VCF resources, but also a new indigenous identity.

## **6.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have explored the particular indigenous movement of the hill peoples led by Chakma elites, and their support for the conservation of the VCF in terms of cultural understandings of indigenous identities, forest, and customary practices of forest management in CHT. I have shown that notwithstanding the claim that VCF is an indigenous tradition, VCFs are not only a recent invention of the state; they also mostly exist in Chakma villages in the territory of the Chakma chief and have largely been shaped by the insurgency as well as counterinsurgency development. I also demonstrate that hill peoples' interest in conservation of VCF arises in part as a means to re-claim customary land rights and has several political and development agendas, including the reform of traditional management of VCF in favour of decentralization of power and gender equity.

However, in spite of the differences in the degree of control and the nature of punishment, there are striking similarities between the VCF rules and the Forest Department's

social forestry program in terms of criminalization and disciplining of jhum cultivation and access to forest resources. In sum, I argue that conservation of VCF presents a greater risk not only to the rural communities of CHT but also to the indigenous movements of the hill peoples.

## CHAPTER VII

### Conclusion

For Bangladesh, the legitimacy to govern [the Chittagong Hill Tracts] is not a question because CHT has been a part of Bangladesh since its birth, a part of Pakistan from its birth and even before.

—Major General (Retired) M. Ibrahim (1991).

This dissertation has set out to examine and understand forests and forest relations in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), one of the most forested regions in Bangladesh. My interest in the forests of CHT was stimulated by the insurgency and war that took place in CHT between 1975 and 1997 as well as by the counter-insurgency development strategy of forest plantation and resettlement programs of the 1980s and 1990s. At the time I started my research, I understood that forests and forest relations were fundamental not only to the state and society in CHT but also to the political and ethnic conflicts in this region. Although there had been an increased interest in the issue of the insurgency movement and ethnic conflicts in CHT since the mid 1980s (Schendel et al. 2000), there remained a clear gap of research on the political ecology of forests in relation to the insurgency, war and ethnic conflict. My dissertation addresses this gap.

Central to this dissertation are two theoretical assumptions that I have built on Foucault's ideas of discourse, power and knowledge and also Vandergeest and Peluso's theory of territorialization and political forests (Foucault 1991; Sivaramakrishnan 1999; Vandergeest and Peluso 1995; 2001). The first assumption is that discourses of forests are central for the intelligibility as well as materiality of forests and forest relations. The second assumption is that a forest, as a category, idea or a matter, is a political phenomenon; therefore, forest relations are not only social and ecological relations; they are at the same time political relations of power.

The overall concern of this dissertation has been to examine the effects of discourses of forests on hill peoples' society, life and livelihoods; in particular, how these discourses have constituted forests and forest relations in the social and ecological context of CHT and how they have changed hill peoples' agrarian relations and relations of power. Broadly, the chapters of this dissertation have been organized around the political regimes of Britain, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, and then around social movements in CHT, in a historical sequence that represents the origins and changes in discourses of forests in CHT. Each chapter has represented a specific conjuncture of state formation, ruling class elites, and development discourse in South Asia as well as CHT. Less significantly, the chapters also relate to specific ethnographic field sites of my fieldwork in CHT.

As such, this dissertation is neither about the state in CHT nor about the history of the hill peoples or the forests *per se*. Instead, it offers a genealogical account of forests and participatory or social forestry of CHT and the ways that these discourses have constituted forest and agrarian relations as well as relations of power from the time of British rule to the present. Genealogy, as a specific form of "history" or what Foucault called "history of the present", has several advantages. It helps the analysis of ideas, events or discourses by focusing on "their most unique characteristics, their most acute manifestations" rather than attempting to describe a continuous history or an analysis of causes and effects (Foucault, 1984:88). Significantly, genealogy helps us to analyse ideas, events or discourses not only in terms of how they emerge in particular moments or conjunctures, but also in terms of how they change or get articulated differently while they shape and are shaped by different fields of forces in each specific conjuncture.

In Chapter One, I began with an account of ethnographic encounters in my field sites, while situating the contexts and themes of this study. These descriptions followed a theoretical

exploration of discourses of political ecology, examining the relationships among discourses, state, and power. The chapter also described my fieldwork methodology and ethics, ending with an overview and summaries of the chapters to follow.

My exploration of discourses of forests began in Chapter Two, dealing with the conjuncture of colonialism and British rule in CHT. In this chapter, I tracked the events and discourses leading to the making of political forests and the institutionalization of colonial forestry in CHT in the late nineteenth century. Key events that led to the making of forests in CHT of colonial Bengal were the Forest Act of 1865 and the subsequent Bengal Forest rule of 1871. The Act not only legitimized the discourse of sovereign claims and rights over forest resources in British India but also formalized forest administration across British India; in effect, the Act extended the colonial state's rights not only to life and things such as trees, jungle, bush and animals, but also to the land and territory which had previously been either frontier or of marginal interest to the state. The making of forests in CHT involved several processes, particularly jhum revenue settlement, internal territorialization of civil administration, and territorialized control of forests, and was also associated with discourses on customary rights of hill peoples. These processes resulted in two different categories of forest which together comprised the entire land area of CHT: one category was Reserved Forests (RF) based on the absolute state property regime and territorial control under the Department of Forest; the other was Unclassed State Forests (USF) under the civil administration of the Deputy Commissioner. For the most part, the USF remained as forest commons of hill peoples for jhum cultivation as well as for their domestic needs of bamboo, fuel or timber. This juxtaposition of forests and jhum in the USF emerged through conflict and compromise between civil and forest officials, partly as a mechanism of control of the Reserved Forests. The result has been that the hill peoples were

denied private ownership of land, with only user rights, and this was the seed of the land conflicts which emerged during post colonial states.

In Chapters Three and Four, I examined changes in territorial control of forests as well as agrarian relations in CHT, in the context of the postcolonial states of Pakistan and Bangladesh respectively. In Chapter Three, I explored industrial development and its uneven effects on forests, landscapes, and hill peoples. Here I also recounted the industrial displacement, dispossession and resettlement of hill peoples, particularly the Chakma. In Chapter Four, I dealt with counterinsurgency developments and the expansion of Reserved Forests in USF, relating these to the discourse of “optimum land use” that emerged as part of industrial development. This chapter further gave details about the spatial and ecological contexts of the insurgency movement, explaining the ethnic dimension of the insurgency in general, and Chakma predominance in the movement in particular.

In Chapter Five, I examined counter-insurgency effects on Reserved Forests and the contemporary strategy of political forests that went under the label of the social forestry program for maintaining the territorial control of the Reserved Forests. In particular, I examined social and ecological changes in Matamuhuri Reserve; I paid particular attention to deforestation processes in Matamuhuri Reserve, providing ethnographic arguments for deforestation’s links to scientific forestry and counterinsurgency. Significantly, this chapter further illustrated how the new social forestry program differed from the practice of the forest villager system, one of the earliest forms of participatory forestry that had existed in CHT until recently.

Finally, in Chapter Six, I focused on an indigenous movement of hill peoples and the movement’s strategy of protecting village common forests (VFCs) for alternative development. The chapter gave evidence of how discourses of indigenous identity are now articulated by



indigenous elites of hill peoples to assert customary control over land and forests, and how indigenous discourses have promoted the invention and expansion of political forests, resulting in social exclusions, conflicts and corporatization of forest resources. Given the existence of VCFs only among the communities of the Chakma, I have also noted the issue of how one ethnic group seems to be redefining hill peoples' indigeneity itself.

Throughout the chapters, there ran several underlying themes: opposition to jhum cultivation; development; and social forestry. Although these themes overlapped with each other, they took distinct forms in relation to the discourse of political forests at each conjuncture of a particular historical development. For example, as seen in Chapter Two, at the birth of political forests in the late nineteenth century during British rule in CHT, the opposition to jhum cultivation was one of the main rationalities for territorial control of forest reservation and for the associated state property regime of forest resources. In turn, on the one hand, there was a concerted development effort by the British to introduce plough cultivation among hill peoples on USF land; on the other hand, there was an invention of taungya forestry and forest villagers system for the improvement of plantation in the Reserved Forests. I have argued that notwithstanding its limitations, the practice of taungya forestry was one of the earliest forms of participatory forestry and had existed in CHT until recently as part of scientific forestry and the control of the Reserved Forests. Similarly, in Chapters Three and Four, I have shown that industrialization and counterinsurgency introduced a new regime of development in CHT based on resettlement of jhum cultivators with horticulture cultivation. This approach to horticulture began as an experiment with a new form of territorial control of political forests and social forestry during Pakistan rule. However, it became a dominant model of development and social forestry during the insurgency as part of counterinsurgency efforts; these efforts forcedly

resettled insurgents and the insurgency supporters as forest labourers, while expanding territorial control of political forests in USF at the expense of alienating a million acres of common jhum land from hill peoples. As shown in Chapter Five, resettlement of jhum cultivators with horticulture cultivation remained one of the fundamental rationalities of development in CHT, including the contemporary discourse of social forestry, though it differed in terms of structures and programs. Ironically, the indigenous model of alternative development and social forestry showed striking similarities with the state model of social forestry in terms of the opposition to jhum cultivation.

Another underlying theme of this dissertation is environmental change in CHT. Notwithstanding colonial and contemporary discourses of jhum cultivation that frame it as an environmentally destructive practice, environmental changes in CHT have been mainly rooted in the policies and practices of forest resource extraction and development by the state. For example, since British rule, the forests in USF (representing three-fourths of the land area of CHT) have been under the civil administration, and the Deputy Commissioner(s) as well as the chiefs and headmen of traditional administrations hold authority over the extraction of forest resources from the USF through a system of permits; however, the extraction of forest resources from the USF has rarely been regulated in practice. In fact, during British rule, the unregulated extraction of forest resources from the USF was seen as effective control of the Reserved Forests (see Chapter II). As discussed in Chapters Three and Four, critical forces behind environmental change in the USF were industrialization (particularly the Kaptai hydro-electric power plant) and later counterinsurgency strategies of Bengali settlement and industrial land settlement with Bengali businesses. Against the narrow criticism of jhum cultivation, I have suggested a complex pattern of environmental changes in the Reserved Forests of CHT. The case of Matamuhuri

Reserved Forest (in Chapter Five) reveals that a major factor of environmental change in the Reserved Forests was the practice of forest plantation. As part of scientific forestry and the working plan regime, forest plantation involved transformation of heterogeneous forest species with selected industrial timber species and was carried out by taungya forestry. However, key forces of environmental change in the Reserved Forests were encroachment on the Reserves by the hill peoples' communities and by the military as part of counterinsurgency. I have suggested that the militarization of Matamuhuri Reserve was of critical importance for the introduction of social forestry in the Reserve, associated with exotic species and uses of fertilizers.

In addition, this dissertation has addressed broader questions of the ethics of environmental development and political power. In particular, I share with Peter Penz the concerns about environmental justice and continued dispossession and marginalization of hill peoples through development. Penz, a leading scholar of environmental ethics, interprets environmental justice in terms of human rights to lands and to the environment; he offers an ethical analysis of development practices in CHT in terms of their declared objectives and rationales that make claims about environmental protection, poverty alleviation, national unity and so on. Penz argues that the policy rationales of development in CHT do not survive close scrutiny nor do they have moral or ethical justification, and thus he holds that hill peoples have the moral right to self-determination and secession (Penz 1993). Certainly, my own identity as a Bengali and a citizen of Bangladesh left me with a dilemma in terms of a moral analysis of hill peoples' rights to "secede"; however, my research with the insurgency movement found that the political programs of the insurgency have never included statehood or secession but rather a "regional autonomy" and political recognition of the hill peoples as a "jumma nation" (Chowdhury 2002; also Chapter IV). Importantly, it is my contention that environmental

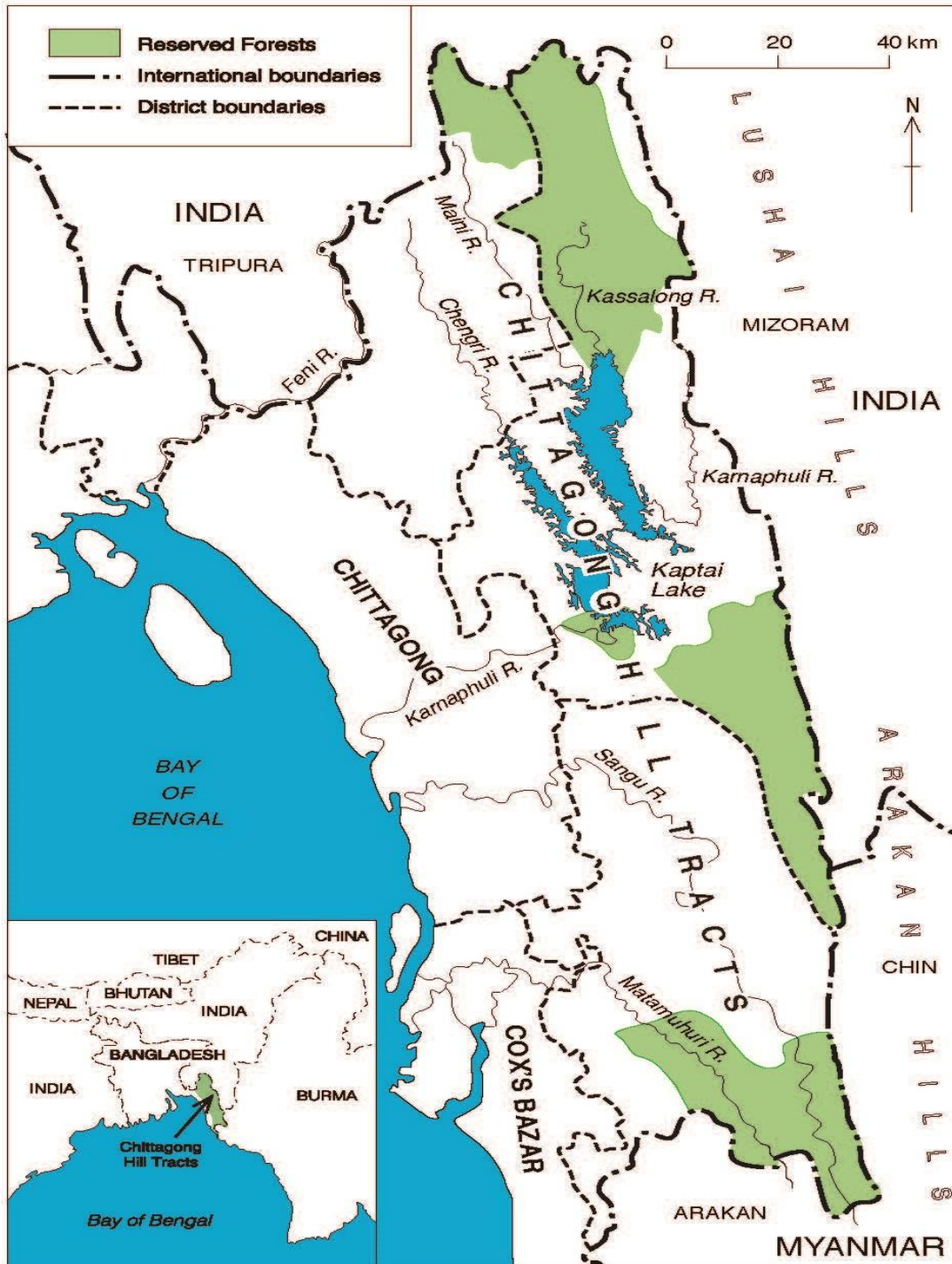
problems are not simply problems of ethics, identities or ideology but complex phenomena of political ecology and power (Li 2002); problems of environment exist across political societies and political economies (Harvey 1996). Pace Penz, as I have discussed in Chapter 1, the state is one locus of power and is more of a mythic abstraction of institutions than a unified actor in a society (Foucault 1991). Therefore, a more pertinent ethical question about environmental problems and the ethnic conflict in CHT is not about the state per se but about the power, forms of government, and arts of government, or what Foucault called governmental rationalities; that is, how to be governed, by whom, to what extent, and so on (Foucault 1991).

In sum, I have suggested that the ethnic conflicts in CHT are rooted in the discourse of political forests which assume a contradiction between forests and jhum cultivation, resulting in the displacement and dispossession of hill peoples, particularly the Chakma; however, my discussion in this dissertation implies that the persistence of the conflict is primarily due to continued dispossession and marginalization of hill peoples through counter-insurgency development, especially “social forestry.” Although the scope of government institutions and governments in CHT has been greatly transformed by the counter-insurgency and most recently by the Peace Treaty, the land conflict is yet to be resolved; violence, therefore, in the form of murderous conflict between Bengalis and hill peoples, or between the factions of the JSS or hill peoples and security forces, has remained a signature feature of the everyday lives of the hill peoples.

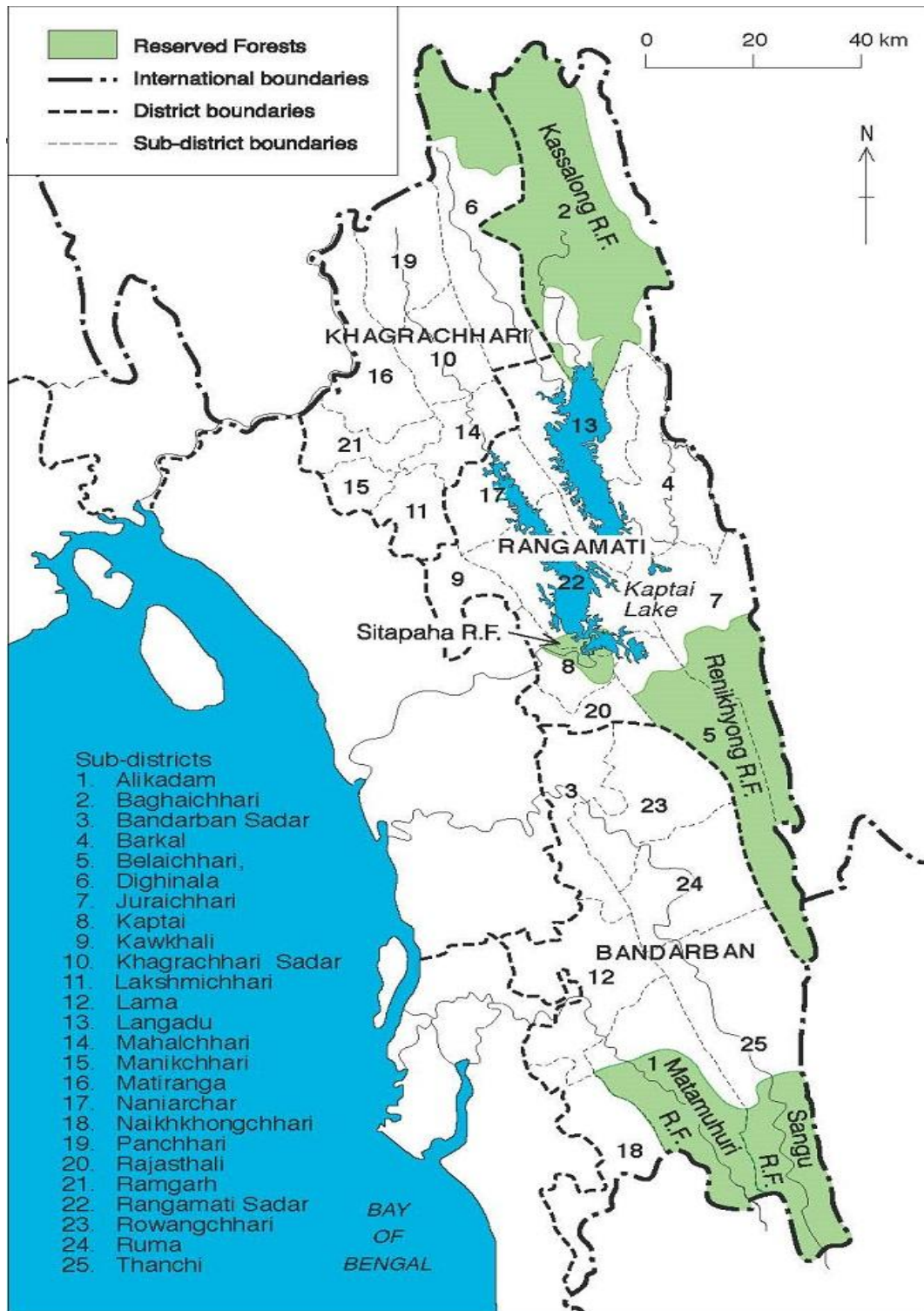
To conclude, let me return to the statement in the epigraph to this conclusion. The epigraph represents a key statement of state discourse and its rationality, that is, Bangladesh’s rights to govern the CHT is a sovereign right of the state and is based on its colonial inheritance of rights over CHT. However, this dissertation has clearly demonstrated that the Bangladesh

state and its institutions have never attempted to legitimate the rule of the state over hill peoples; nor has there been any intention, on the part of the state and its institutions, to govern the hill peoples' population for their improvement or welfare.

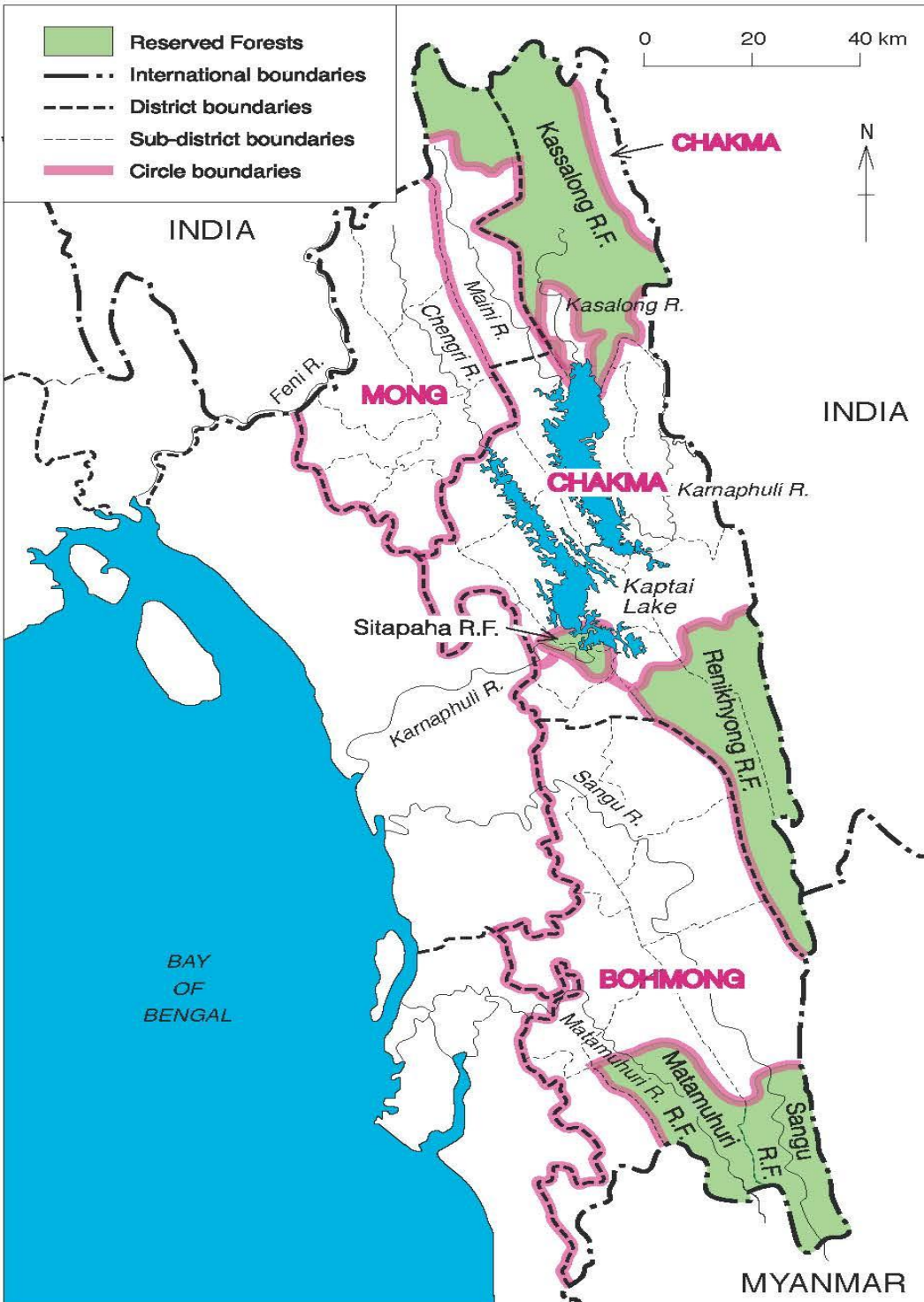
## Appendix A: Maps of Chittagong Hill Tracts



Map 1: Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh, in relation to South Asia and Southeast Asia (Source: Hutchinson 1909; Sopher 1963; BBS 1986).

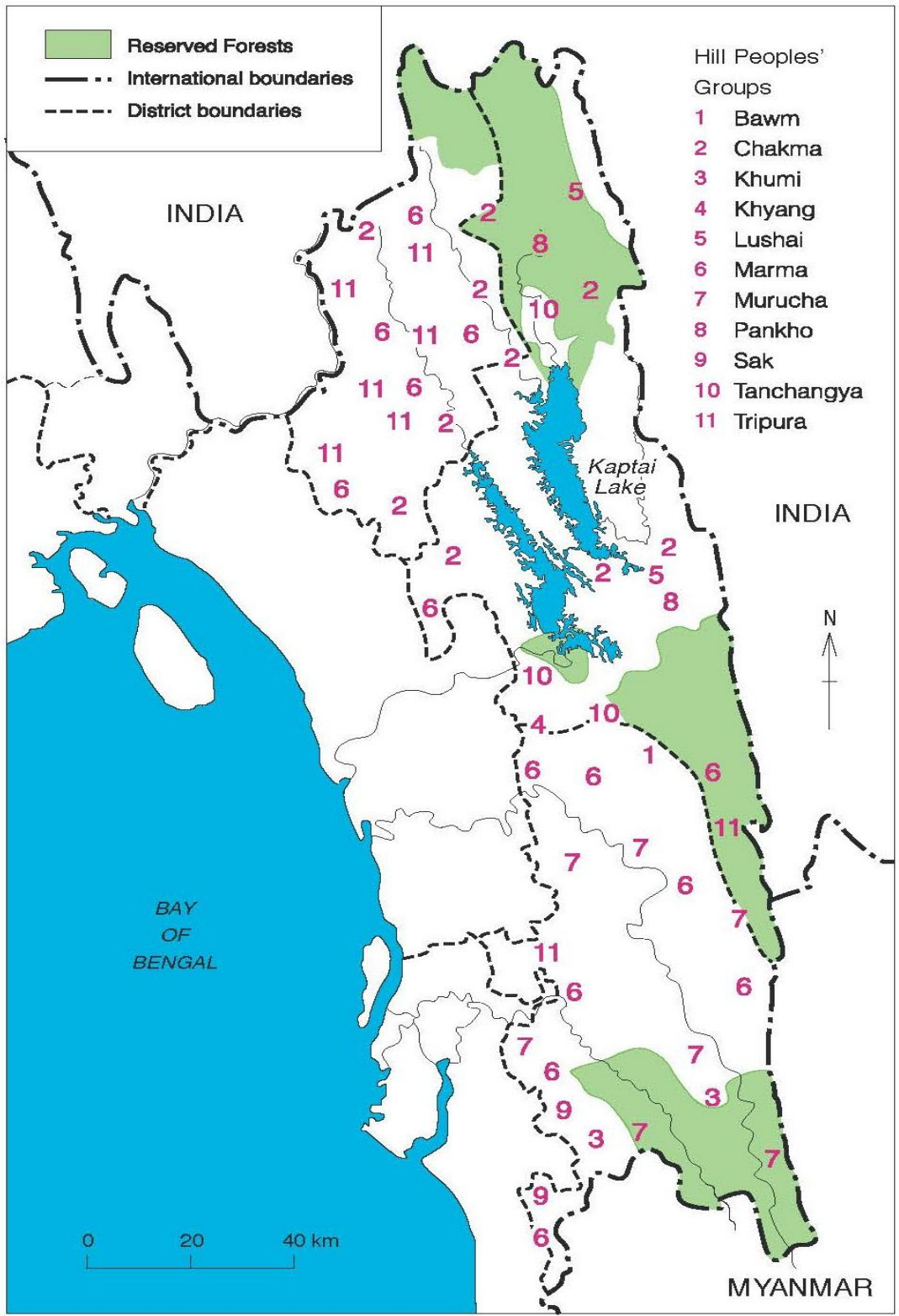


Map 2: Reserved Forests, Districts, and Sub-district boundaries in CHT (Source: BBS 1986).

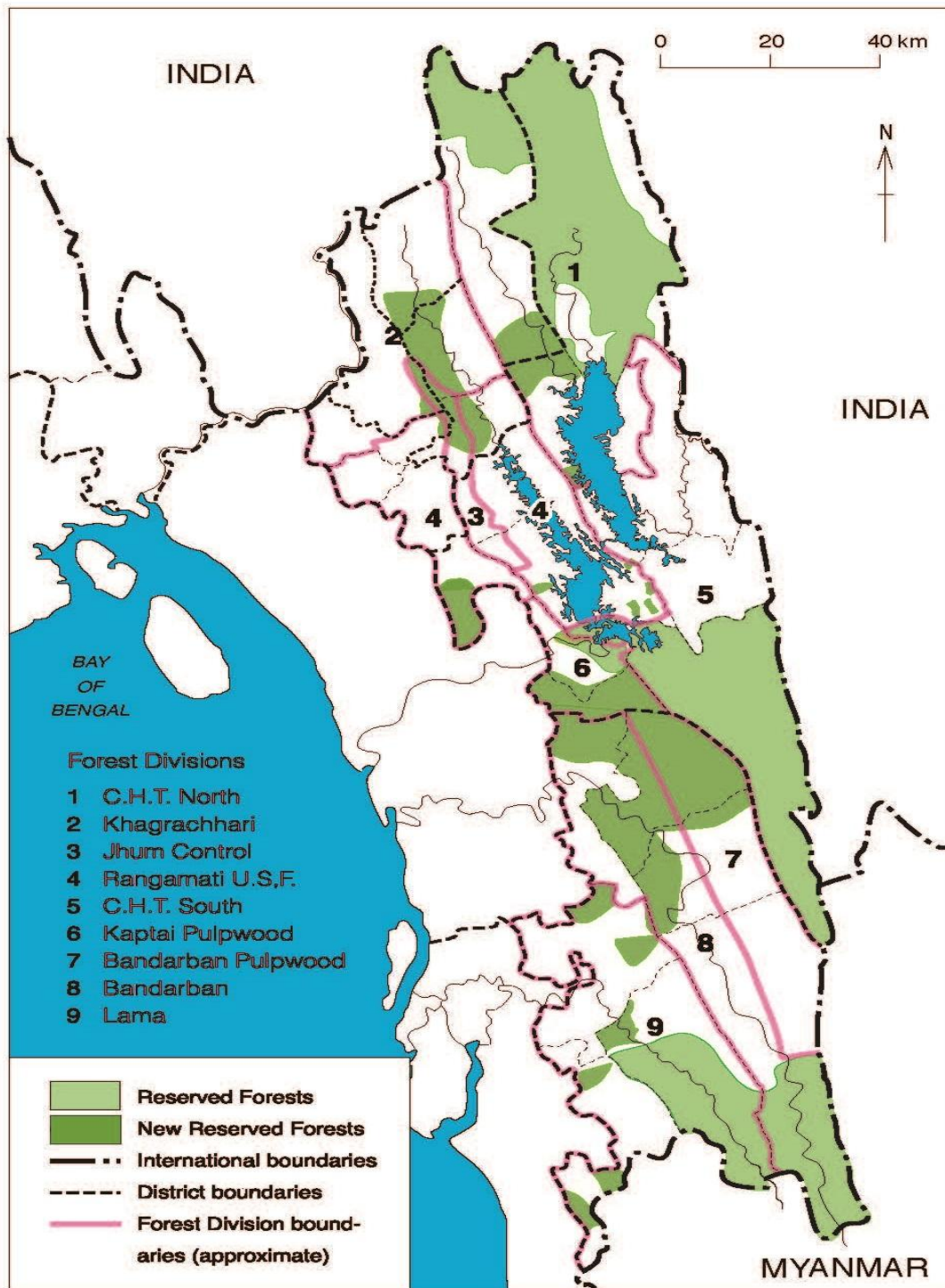


Map 3: Territories of Chiefs' Circles (Source: BBS 1986).

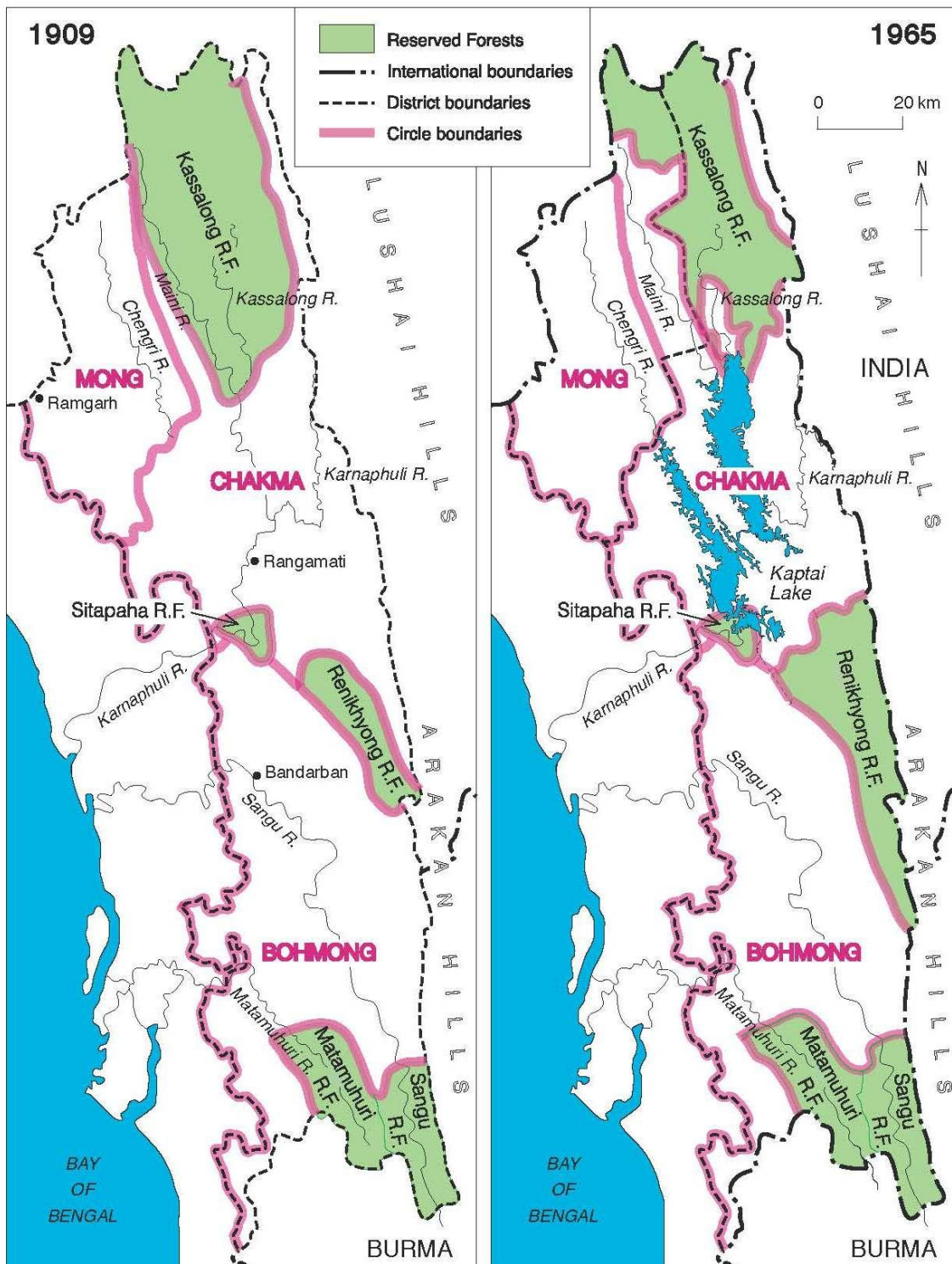




Map 4: Distribution of Hill Peoples in CHT (Source: BBS 1992a; 1992b; 1992c).



Map 5: Forest Divisions of CHT with Old and New Reserved Forests  
 (Source: Fieldwork Maps collected from Rangamati Forest Circle and cross-check with data collected from the Forest Divisions of CHT, but compare CHTDB n. d. b).



Map 6: Impact of Kaptai Dam (Source: Hutchinson 1909; Sopher 1963; BBS 1986).



Map 7: Sub-district with the Majority of VCFs (Source: GOBD 2002a; 2002b; 2002c; 2002d).

## Appendix B: Alternative Names of the Hill People Groups Used by the Groups Themselves

	Chakma	Marma	Tripura	Mro	Tanchangya	Chak	Khyang	Khumi	Bawm	Pankho	Lushai
Ckakma	Chagma	Mogh	Tibiri	Murang	Tanchangya	Chak	Khyang	Khumi	Kuki	Pankho	Lushai
Marma	Chama	Marma	Murang	Mro	Doinynak	Chak	Khyang	Khumi	Bawm	Pankho	Lushai
Tripura	Chama	Mukhuo	Brung	Mro	Chakma	Sak	Khyang	Khumi	Bawm	Pankho	Lushai
Mro	Doinyak	Maran	Murun	Murucha	Tanchangya Doinynak	Chag- ma	Khyang	Khumi	Bawm	Pankho	Langke
Tanchangya	Chama	Marma	Tripura	Murung	Tanchangya	Chak	Khyang	Khumi	Bawm	Pankho	Mizo
Chak	Chakma	Mraing		Murung	Doinynak	Achak	Khyang	Khomui	Langge	Pankho	Lushai
Khyang	Sak	Uya	Lun	Mra	Sak	Chak	Heyu	Khumi	Langy	Pankho	Lushai
Khumi	Chwa	Kramo	Mroing	Lihu	Chwa	Chak	Khyang	Khumi	Laiye	Panko	Lushai
Bawm	Chakma	Mran	Buey	Murung	Tanchangya	Sak	Kyang	Khumi	Bawm	Pankho	Mizo
Pankho	Chakma	Mran	Bhay	Miriya	Tangtangna	Chak	Khyang	Khaileng	Bawm	Pankhua	Lushai
Lushai	Akam	Mran	Tuikuk	Mriya	Takam	Chak	Khyang	Khumi	Bawmzo	Pankhua	Lushai

Source: Fieldwork (collected mainly from rural communities of hill peoples' groups; but compare ADB 2001b).

## Appendix C: Population of Chittagong Hill Tracts, with Rural and Urban Distribution, by Census Years

Table 1: Bengali and Hill People Population of the Chittagong Hill Tracts from 1872 to 2011

Year	Total	Bengali	Hill Peoples
1872	63,054	1%	99%
1881	101,497	Nil	Nil
1891	107,286	Nil	Nil
1901	124,726	7%	93%
1911	153,830	8%	92%
1921	173,243	Nil	Nil
1931	212,922	11%	89%
1941	247,253	6%	94%
1951	287,688	9%	91%
1961	385,079	13%	87%
1974	508,199	19%	79%
1981	745,000	39%	61%
1991	974,445	49%	51%
2001	133,1966	55%	45%
2011	1,598,231	47%	53%

Source: Adnana 2004: 57; Chakma, G. 2012:7-13; BBS n. d. a; n. d. b; n. d. c; 2007:25 and 167.

Note: The 1872, 1901, 1974, 1981 and 1991 census figures are taken from Adnan (2004). The 2001 and 2011 Census figures are reproduced from BBS (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics) sources cited above. The other census figures are from Chakma, G. (2012).

Table 2: Distribution of Rural and Urban Population of CHT by Ethnicity in 1991 and 2011

Year/Ethnicity	1991			2011		
	% Rural	% Urban	% of Total CHT Population	% Rural	% Urban	% of Total CHT Population
Bengali	52	48	49	57	43	47
Hill Peoples	80	20	51	82	18	53

(BBS n. d. a; n. d. b; n. d. c; 1992a: xi, 150; 1992b: xi, 102; 1992c: xi, 137)

Table 3: Ethnic Composition of Rural and Urban CHT in 1991 and 2011

Year/Locality	1991			2011		
	% Bengali	% Hill Peoples	% of Total CHT Population	% Bengali	% Hill Peoples	% of Total CHT Population
Rural	38	62	67	38	62	70
Urban	69	31	33	68	32	30

(BBS n. d. a; n. d. b; n. d. c; 1992a: xi, 150; 1992b: xi, 102; 1992c: xi, 137)

## Appendix D: Forest Villagers Form

(Reproduced from a torn-apart document found in Matamuhuri Forest Range Office)

Bangladesh Form No: 1685

Form of Agreement of Forest Jagir Villages

Articles of agreement made and entered into this 22th day of August 1985 between the President of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh hereinafter referred to as the party of the first part and Chu Aung son of Mongchao here in after referred to as the party of the second part.

Whereas the party of the second part desire to render service in the Forest Department [illegible] lieu of the privilege of being granted for cultivation service land at ..... in the part of Matamuhuri Reserve Forest situated in Alikadam Thana in the Bandarban district within the following boundaries:

North ... ..

East... ..

South... ..

West... ..

- I. The Party of the second part shall be allowed to cultivate land in the area specified above free of rent as service *jagir* only so [illegible] performs the duties and observes the conditions hereinafter prescribed.
  
- II. The land shall be held as service *jagir* and shall not be alienable and shall be liable to resumption. When the service of the guarantee or his successor shall no longer be required or when such a course is otherwise found necessary by the Forest Authorities, Government shall have the right to dispense with the services of the guarantee or of his successor and to resume the grant at any time it pleases.



III. The Party of the second part shall cultivate only such part or parts of his service *jagir* within the above specified area as the Forest Officer in charge of the Division hereafter termed the Forest Officer shall permit.

IV. The Party of the second part himself with his dependents shall whenever called upon to do so by the Forest Officer perform such work or works as may be ordered by the Forest Officer to be done for the preservation, protection and improvement of the Government Reserved Forest to the following extent:-

Up to [blank] days` work without remuneration

Up to [blank] days` work for a daily wage of paisa

Provided that

- i) The Party of the second part shall not be called on to perform Government work to the detriment of proper cultivation of the land referred to in clause III of this agreement.
- ii) a day of work shall mean 6 hours` work
- iii) in village [sic] which perform regeneration work the Forest Officer may fix the number of days work to be considered as equivalent to one acre of plantation created or tended.
- iv) The party of the second part shall not engage to work for any employer other than the Forest Department until his full amount of work his [sic] performed except with the permission of the Forest Officer.

V. If the party of the second part becomes headman he will be assigned a large amount of land as his service *jagir* than his fellow tenants and shall be responsible for mustering them and seeing to their proper working.

(For other than hill forests)

VI. The party of the second part and his dependent will be permitted-

- a) To cut, collect [illegible] free of charge for their own use but not for sale, gift or [illegible] the parts of the Reserved Forest adjacent to the village site bamboos, creepers, edible roots and fruits and fuels and poles not exceeding 3 feet in girth of all kinds of trees except those of classes A, B, C, D and E of the current schedule.

OR

(For hill forests)

To cut, collect and remove free of charge for their own use but not for sale, gift or barter from the part of the Reserved Forest adjacent to the village site bamboos, creepers, edible roots and fruits and dead fallen wood not exceeding 3 feet in girth for fuel.

- b) To obtain free of charge of [sic] their own use but not for sale, gift or barter permits for removal of marked *trees* of such of the above mentioned species as the Forest Officer may consider that they require for their buildings or for the manufacture of agricultural implements.
- c) To graze free of charge within the portion of the Reserved Forest adjacent to the village site such cattle as the Forest Officer may consider necessary for cultivation of their land.

VII. The party of the second part and his dependents shall not be permitted to do any of the following acts:-

(For other than hill forests)

- a) Cut, lop or damage in any way any tree growth other than that permitted under clause VI (a) above

OR

(For hill forests)

Cut, lop or damage in any way any standing tree growth without the written permission of the Forest Officer

- (b) Kindle or carry fire in part of the Reserved Forest
- (c) Graze cattle in any part of the Reserved Forest [illegible] by order of the Forest Officer

VIII In the event of the party of the second part and his dependents being ejected by the Forest Officer from the Village for breach of this agreement any buildings he or they may have erected within the village may be disposed of by the Forest Officer at his discretion within fifteen days' of his or their ejection and the person or persons shall not be entitled or receive [sic] any compensation on account of such disposal.

- IX The party of the second part shall dismiss any dependent or servant whose presence is not approved and such dependent or servant shall leave the Reserved Forest forthwith. And, he shall not harbour on his premises any person who has been ordered to be removed from the location in the reserved forest.
- X The party of the second part hereby engages to report the commission on any forest offence to the Forest Officer-in-charge of the division and to make every [illegible] to put out any fire that may occur or approach the Reserved Forest without being specifically called upon to do so.
- XI The Forest Officer shall have power at any time to declare this agreement terminated if in his opinion the party of the second part fails to comply with all or any of the [illegible] clauses of this agreement and in the event of this agreement [illegible] thus declared terminated any standing crop shown by the party of the second part shall be disposed of by the Forest Officer for the benefit of the guarantee.
- XII In the event of any dispute arising between the Forest Officer and / or any part thereof or with reference to any matter [illegible] the party of the second part as to the construction [illegible] of relating thereto such dispute shall be refer to the Conservator of Forest, Bangladesh whose decision thereon shall be the final [illegible] between the said parties.
- XIII The cost of any stamp duty due in respect to this instrument shall be borne by Government.

Signature or mark of the party of the second part

Dated the 20<sup>th</sup> day of August 1985

Signature of first witness

Signature of second witness

Signature of Divisional Forest Officer on behalf of the President of Peoples Republic of Bangladesh

# Appendix E: A Copy of the Letter of Permission for Fieldwork in Lama Forest Division, Chittagong Hill Tracts with English Translation

(English Translation)

The People's Republic of Bangladesh Government  
Forest Department  
Office of the Chief Conservator of Forest  
Bon Bhabon, Agargao, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka 1207  
Letter No. Dev. 11/Miscellaneous/2007

To

Divisional Forest Officer  
Lama Forest Division, Lama

Subject: Regarding the Permission for PhD Research and Data Collection in the Forest Areas of the Chittagong Hill Tracts

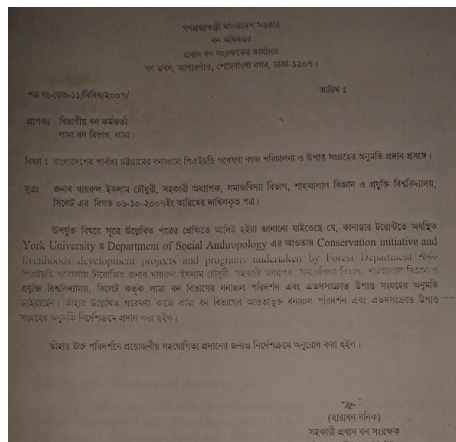
Reference: the Application of Mr. Khairul Islam Chowdhury, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Shah Jalal University of Science and Technology, Sylhet, dated on October 6, 2007.

On the above subject and reference, this is to inform you that Mr. Khairul Islam Chowdhury, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Shah Jalal University of Science and Technology, Sylhet, has been doing PhD research under the Department of Anthropology, York University, Toronto, Canada, on the Conservation Initiative and Livelihood Programs of the Forest Department, and has applied for the permission to visit the forests of Lama Forest Division for research work and data collection. On the topic concerned, he [Mr. Chowdhury] is given permission to visit the forests of Lama Forest Division for research work and data collection. Henceforth, he has been given permission to visit the forests in Lama Forest Division in order to collect data. Therefore, as instructed, you are requested to provide assistance during his visit.

S/d

(Haradhan Bonik)

Assistant Chief Conservator of Forests  
Development and Planning



## Glossary

<i>Adda</i>	an informal public space used to hang out in a group, involving extended group conversation usually concerned with politics or other intellectual topics
<i>Ansar</i>	a para-military organization of Village Guards in Bangladesh
<i>Boisuk</i>	New Year's celebration of the Tripura
<i>Capas Mahal</i>	cotton estate
<i>Challes</i>	bamboo raft
<i>Dewan</i>	pre-colonial village headman among the Chakma
<i>Jhum</i>	slash-and- burn cultivation
<i>Joutha Khamar</i>	collective farming
<i>Karbari</i>	village headman
<i>Khas land</i>	government land
<i>Khas Mehals</i>	government estate
<i>Mouza</i>	collection of villages as a revenue unit
<i>Mro Bahini</i>	a para-military organization of Village Guards in CHT (comprised of the Murucha)
<i>Muktijoddha</i>	freedom fighters of Bangladesh's Liberation War
<i>Nowabad</i>	new cultivation
<i>Pahari</i>	inhabitants of hills (hill peoples of the CHT)
<i>Panchayats</i>	village councils
<i>Pattas</i>	land records
<i>Puja</i>	worship of gods and goddesses
<i>Raja</i>	hill chief of Chittagong Hill Tracts

<i>Rajdhani</i>	capital city
<i>Razakars</i>	a Bengali militia organization created by the Pakistani Occupying army in East Pakistan (Bangladesh) in 1971
<i>Rowaza</i>	pre-colonial village headman among the Marma
<i>Rupee</i>	Pakistani currency
<i>Shanti Bahini</i>	guerrilla organization of the JSS
<i>Shashan</i>	place of cremation
<i>Taka</i>	Bangaldeshi currency
<i>Taluk</i>	pre-colonial and early colonial land revenue unit
<i>Taungya</i>	technique of forest plantation with jhum (slash-and burn) cultivation
<i>Thana</i>	police station
<i>Upazila</i>	sub-district
<i>Upojati</i>	Bengali synonym for so-called “tribes”, meaning “sub-nation”
<i>Zamindar</i>	landlord with large land holdings

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