Università degli Studi di Ferrara

DOCTORAL COURSE IN
"Environmental Sustainability and Well-being"

CYCLE- XXXV

COORDINATOR Prof.ssa Paola Spinozzi

Thesis Title

Dealing with Tourism: Development, Sustainability, and Commodification The Case of Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh

Scientific/Disciplinary Sector (SDS) SPS/010

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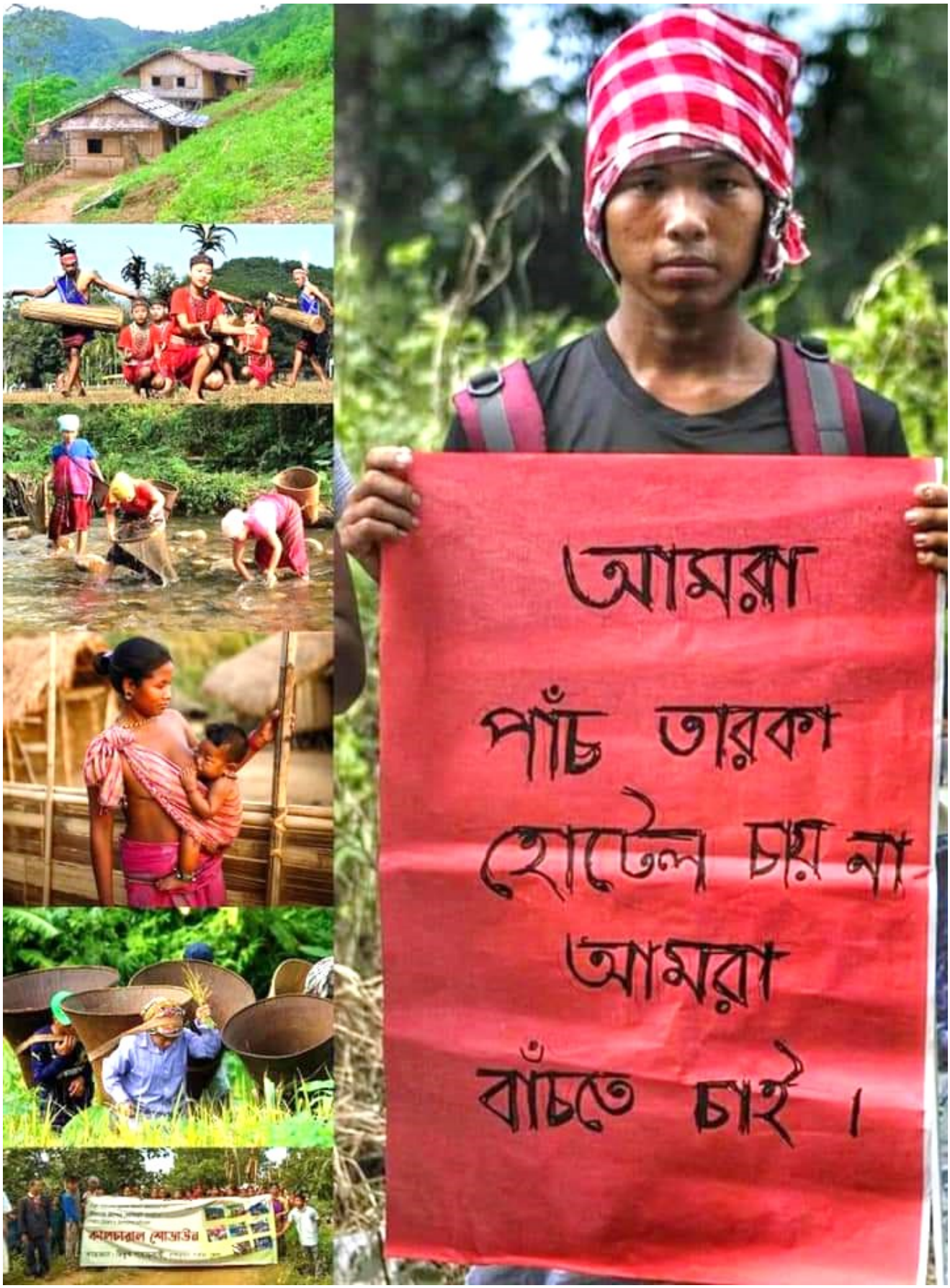
Academic Years 2020/2023



An Indigenous Voice of Resistance- '*We don't want five-star hotels, we want to live'*

(*English*)

Dealing with Tourism: Development, Sustainability, and Commodification The Case of Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh

Abstract

S M Sadat al Sajib

The thesis deals with the fundamental concern of politics of willingness to pay attention to enable local development and sustainability through tourism in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh. Based on the inadequate economic parameters about its success, tourism is often propagated as a prospective and alternative channel to alleviate poverty and inequality in the South Asian countries, Bangladesh in particular, intersecting the SDGs-2030 agenda prescribed by the UN. It rather inflames some critical issues regarding the notion of governmentality, unequal power relations, and disproportionate access to resources surrounding tourism development that breeds a new socio-economic reality for the underprivileged indigenous communities in CHT, Bangladesh. However, there is a serious dearth of ethnographic research on the indifference to cultural differences and local practices for development and sustainability, and the neoliberalization of nature and culture as consequential outcomes of tourism. Therefore, this thesis develops an interpretation of how eco-cultural practices in tourism as a tool rather than a barrier are fundamental to achieving community well-being and sustainability goals, and an understanding of the politics of negligence as well as representation by the state and its actors. However, this thesis is an ethnographic account based on nine months of ethnographic field research carried out in the multi-ethnic settings of three locations, namely Ruiluipara in Sajek, Munlaipara in Ruma, and Kaprupara in Lama in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh between 2021 and 2022. Besides, the thesis has critically dealt with some theoretical puzzles to grasp the ground reality: how the indigenous people perceive the notion of sustainability and development; how the notion of 'eco-governmentality' generates a false dream of sustainability; why and how tourism is endorsed as a development choice; and how 'Bengali tourist gaze' constructs a 'superior' 'Bengali-ness' over a 'inferior' indigenous 'otherness' through the politics of representation.

I have framed the findings mainly through the views of the three main actors (the state and its agencies, tourists and tour operators, and the indigenous locals) involved in the tourism in CHT. In the state perspective, it is found two latent agenda for tourism development in CHT. The first is to distract the mindset of the long-standing historical struggle of indigenous communities for their self-autonomy and identity recognition. The second intention is to initiate a neoliberal capitalist economy through tourism development. Privatization of indigenous jhumlands, nationalization of

forests, and disturbance of wildlife habitats due to the neoliberal tourism economy now pose challenges to the sustainability and community well-being of the CHT.

From indigenous point of view, tourism is perceived as a new form of exploitation and the reinstallation of colonial legacy. It is evident that land grabbing for tourist spots, controlling indigenous people's access to resources, and reintroducing the traditional livelihoods and culture for the tourism promotions remarginalize the indigenous communities. Tourism as an alternative livelihood thus develops a socio-cultural relationship between tourism corporates and indigenous communities for economic gain that forces natives to negotiate the customary behaviors as tourism demands. It is found that tourism leads to drastic changes in the aesthetic contents of indigenous culture in which indigenous people become active agents as touristic performers due to the increased demands of the tourists in the commercial settings that speed up the commodification of community and culture in CHT. The empirical data suggests that the CHT's native dwellers meet a disproportionate segment of tourism advantages as the tourism industry is predominantly controlled and promoted by the public and private actors where indigenous locals are passive touristic entertainers.

Through the tourist perspective, the thesis elucidates the tourists' state of mind regarding the construction of *Pahari* indigenous communities as 'exotic others'. The research findings imply that commodification in tourism steadily not only breaks the cultural fabrics, where the real ritualistic ceremonies are transformed into touristic performances, and the entire society in CHT becomes a 'stage' to the locals, but also leads to the changes in everyday lives of indigenous people where they are economically forced to pretend to be 'touristic indigenous others'. Against the background, the thesis brings the question on board: Does tourism as an alternative development venture prescribed by the state and its actors establish sustainability or manufacture a new form of governmentality in the name of community well-being? Does the commoditization of ethnicity, culture, and nature through the representation by the state, media and tourists contribute to the remarginalization or revitalization? The thesis addresses these questions with an intensive investigation of facts, figures, and reality amidst the everyday experience of the indigenous people of the CHT. In conclusion, an economically sophisticated, socio-politically relevant, and eco-culturally balanced tourism is proposed for a holistic development and sustainability, although the question is raised whether this development is sensitive to the culture and rights of the concerned community and the environment of the CHT that would lead to the further research regarding tourism development in the context of indigenous setting around the world.

Keywords: Tourism, development, sustainability, commodification, Representation, Culture and Nature, and Indigenous communities of CHT.

(*Italian*)

Trattare con il turismo: Sviluppo, sostenibilità e mercificazione Il Caso di Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh

Abstract della tesi

S M Sadat al Sajib

La tesi discute il tema fondamentale della relazione tra sviluppo locale, comunità indigene e sostenibilità attraverso l'analisi del turismo nei Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) del Bangladesh. Sulla base dei parametri economici, il turismo viene spesso propagato come un canale prospettico e alternativo per alleviare la povertà e la disuguaglianza nei paesi dell'Asia meridionale, in particolare il Bangladesh, nel solco dell'agenda SDGs-2030 stabilita dalle Nazioni Unite. A proposito, l'indagine si è fondata sulla messa a fuoco di talune questioni critiche riguardanti la nozione di governamentalità, i rapporti di potere diseguali e l'accesso sproporzionato alle risorse che alimentano lo sviluppo del turismo a sua volta generatore di una nuova possibile realtà socio-economica per le comunità indigene svantaggiate nello specifico contesto d'indagine. Sulla base di questo orizzonte di ricerca, si è riscontrato un deficit di studio apprfondito sulle politiche dello sviluppo adottate, sul paradosso della sostenibilità e sulla neoliberalizzazione della natura e della cultura quali risultati consequenziali di tali politiche. Pertanto, la tesi affronta queste problematiche mediante l'analisi dei rapporti asimmetrici e delle relative interazioni tra tre attori fondamentali: le comunità indigene, i turisti e gli agenti turistici, e lo stato e i suoi attori dello sviluppo.

La tesi è l'esito articolato di un caso studio condotto con la metodologia etnografica realizzata nell'arco di nove mesi, tra il 2021 e il 2022 sul campo in tre differenti ambienti multietnici, vale a dire Ruiluipara a Sajek, Munlaipara a Ruma e Kaprupara a Lama nei Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Il lavoro di tesi ha affrontato criticamente alcuni enigmi teorici per cogliere la realtà in discussione in riferimento agli obiettivi: 1) come le popolazioni indigene percepiscono la nozione di sostenibilità e sviluppo; 2) come la nozione di "eco-governamentalità" genera una falsa idea di sostenibilità; 3) perché e come il turismo è approvato come una scelta di sviluppo socio-economico; 4) come l'egemone 'sguardo turistico bengalese' costruisce una 'superiorità' 'bengalese' su una 'alterità' indigena 'inferiore' attraverso una precisa volontà politica della rappresentanza all'interno delle dinamiche di decision making..

Al fine di delineare il quadro delle problematiche sono state rilevate le opinioni dei tre citati attori principali direttamente e indirettamente coinvolti nelle politiche di promozione del turismo in CHT. Nella prospettiva statale, si trovano due programmi latenti per lo sviluppo del turismo in CHT. Il primo è quello di distrarre la mentalità della lunga lotta storica delle comunità indigene per la loro auto-autonomia e il riconoscimento dell'identità. La seconda intenzione è quella di avviare un'economia capitalista neoliberista attraverso lo sviluppo del turismo. La privatizzazione dei jhumland indigeni, la nazionalizzazione delle foreste e il disturbo degli habitat della fauna selvatica

a causa dell'economia turistica neoliberista pongono ora sfide alla sostenibilità e al benessere della comunità del CHT.

Dal punto di vista indigeno, il turismo è percepito come una nuova forma di sfruttamento e di reinstallazione dell'eredità coloniale. È evidente che l'accaparramento dei luoghi turistici, il controllo dell'accesso delle popolazioni indigene alle risorse e la reintroduzione dei mezzi di sussistenza e della cultura tradizionali per la promozione turistica re-emarginano le comunità indigene. Il turismo come mezzo di sostentamento alternativo determina, conseguentemente, una relazione socio-culturale tra le imprese turistiche e le comunità indigene improntata esclusivamente su una logica estrattivista e di sfruttamento che costringe i nativi a negoziare i comportamenti tradizionali all'interno di una visione economicista del turismo. Si èconstatato che il turismo porta a drastici cambiamenti nei contenuti estetici della cultura indigena per cui le comunità indigene risultano essere chiamati ad essere agenti attivi nel campo estetico-artistico a causa delle crescenti richieste di una esotismo turistico che accelerano la mercificazione della comunità e della cultura in CHT. I dati empirici suggeriscono che gli abitanti nativi del CHT soddisfano un segmento sproporzionato all'interno della catena di valoro turistica poiché l'industria del turismo è prevalentemente controllata e promossa da attori pubblici e privati in cui i locali indigeni, viceversa, diventano agenti passivi.

Inoltre, la tesi focalizza l'atteggiamento dei turisti riguardo alla costruzione delle comunità indigene *Pahari* come 'altri esotici'. I risultati della ricerca implicano che la mercificazione nel turismo non solo rompe costantemente i tessuti culturali, dove le vere cerimonie rituali si trasformano in spettacoli turistici, e l'intera società in CHT diventa un nero 'palcoscenico', ma porta anche ai cambiamenti nella vita quotidiana degli indigeni dove sono economicamente costretti a fingere di essere 'altri indigeni turistici'. Sullo sfondo, la tesi si pone un ulteriore domanda: il turismo come impresa di sviluppo alternativa prescritta dallo stato e dai suoi attori stabilisce la sostenibilità o produce una nuova forma di governamentalità in nome del benessere della comunità? La mercificazione dell'etnia, della cultura e della natura attraverso la rappresentazione da parte dello stato, dei media e dei turisti contribuisce alla re-emarginazione o a una dinamica di inclusione? La tesi affronta queste domande con un'intensa indagine di dati e testimonianze relative all'esperienza quotidiana delle popolazioni indigene del CHT. In conclusione, un turismo economicamente sofisticato, socio-politicamente rilevante ed eco-culturalmente equilibrato è proposto per uno sviluppo olistico e diretto a una reale sostenibilità, anche se ci si chiede se questo sviluppo sia sensibile alla cultura e ai diritti della comunità interessata e all'ambiente della CHT che porterebbe a ulteriori ricerche sul turismo sviluppo nel contesto dell'ambiente indigeno in tutto il mondo.

Parole chiave: Turismo, sviluppo, sostenibilità, mercificazione, rappresentanza, cultura e natura e comunità indigene di CHT.

Acknowledgement

It is a matter of great privilege for me to acknowledge that the Doctoral Study has fully been funded by the Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR) and the University of Ferrara, Italy. First of all, I would like to thank to my Almighty, who made all things possible. I would like to express my humble gratitude to the beloved Coordinator Professor Paola Spinozzi and her team, PhD Programme in Environmental Sustainability and Well-being, who provided me this great opportunity to meet global scholarly and beautiful minds and to extend my academic achievements. I must owe a debt of gratefulness to my dear Supervisor Professor Alfredo Alietti, a very friendly personality. I would like to express my warm gratitude to the professors and scholars who delivered and presented their thought-provoking works during interdisciplinary teaching activities, and their observations, suggestions and criticisms on my work at various stages of the doctoral studies enabled me to shed light on both the construction of ideas regarding the broader framework of sustainability and the organization of arguments. I am profoundly indebted to Professor Ellen Bal, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, to accept me for mobility programme, and to reconstruct my thinking about the methodological and conceptual framework. I would like to convey thankfulness to my mentor Professor Nasir Uddin who gave me an unconditional and limitless support and guidance to finish my fieldwork in Bangladesh. My special thanks to my dream scholar Professor Willem van Schendel, an expert in Bangladesh Studies at the University of Amsterdam, who gave me his valuable time and reflected my thoughts on the indigenous people of CHT. During my doctoral studies at the University of Ferrara, I would like to thank the officials of IUSS to whom I disturbed a lot to address my administrative issues.

My utmost overwhelming debt of gratefulness goes to the three main actors of my field research- the indigenous people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, tourists, and the officials of the public and private agencies. I am deeply pleased to pay my respects to a good number of informants who devoted their tremendous supports, camaraderie, and information with good impression during my field visit. They also facilitated my acceptance into the research area and sustained me throughout the fieldwork. I owe an everlasting debt to them. I must show my love to my students as research assistants (particularly Abdul Mannan, Sain Marma, Rony Marma, and Jimy Chakma) for their efforts in supporting my fieldwork. Finally, I am indebted to University of Chittagong, and my department of anthropology for granting me the four years of study leave to accomplish my doctoral study. I am also grateful to all of my teachers, fellows, students, and friends in Italy and Bangladesh. Last but not least, I owe to my family for their encouragement and love, specially my only son.

S M Sadat al Sajib, Ferrara, June 2023

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my beloved parents and my only son

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List of Acronyms

Acronyms	Elaborations
CHT	Chittagong Hill Tracts
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UN	United Nations
HDRC	Hill District Regional Council
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
NTFP	Non-Timber Forest Products
BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
FD	Forest Department
BFD	Bangladesh Forest Department
RF	Reserved Forest
PF	Protected Forest
CHTDB	Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
VCF	Village Common Forest
DC	District Commissioner
LGC	Local Government Council
HDC	Hill District Council
CHTRC	Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council
MoCHTA	Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs
UNO	*Upazila Nirbahi* Officer (Sub-district Executive Officer)
USF	Unclassified State Forest
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
PCJSS	*Parbatya Chattogram Jana Sanghati Samiti* (Chittagong Hill Tracts Peoples Solidarity Association)
NGO	Non-Government Organization
UPDF	United Peoples' Democratic Front
SID-CHT	Strengthening Inclusive Development in the Chittagong Hill Tracts
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
NTP	National Tourism Policy
MoCAT	Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism
BPC	Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation
BTB	Bangladesh Tourism Board
NTO	National Tourism Organization
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
WB	World Bank
WTO	World Tourism Organization
WTTC	World Travel & Tourism Council
COAS	Cottage Owners Association of Sajek
ICIMOD	International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development

CNG	Compressed Natural Gas (Locally known as CNG scooter)
BHDC	Bandarban Hill District Council
NID	National Identity Document/Card
UNCSD	UN Conference on Sustainable Development
UNEP	United Nations Environmental Programme
ADB	Asian Development Bank
TDP	Tourism Development Plan
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan
ECA	Ecologically Critical Areas
BGB	Border Guard Bangladesh
VDP	Village Defense Police
FGD	Focused Group Discussion
MoEFCC	Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
NEP	National Environment Policy
JFM	Joint Forest Management Plan
BFIDC	Bangladesh Forest Industries Development Corporation
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
CHTDF	Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Facility

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Part-I: Introduction

Chapter- One

Tourism in the Chittagong Hill Tracts: An Introduction

1.1 Context and Contour

This thesis is an ethnographic exploration, based on nine months of ethnographic field study carried out in the multi-ethnic settings of different locations in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh between 2021 and 2022, of tourism development and its impacts on the sustainability, and the politics surrounding representation and commodification of identity, culture and nature. This study develops an interpretation of the asymmetric involvements and unpleasant interactions between the indigenous communities, tourists, and development actors. A focal contention of this thesis unearths that tourism as a money-making machine constructs a new form of capitalistic reality that develops a new socio-cultural and eco-political practice and breaks down social fabrics in which local feelings, struggles, and changes are secondary issues.

The thesis is concerned with the intelligent marriage of the nexus of culture, nature, and their commercial use under the brand of tourism in the case of indigenous people in CHT. I will discuss the research context on what basis I made the arguments. I have framed arguments mainly through the views of the three main actors (the state and its agencies, tourists and tour operators, and the indigenous locals) involved in the tourism in CHT. In the state perspective, I will provide an understanding of how the government of Bangladesh and its organs produce discourses on the false dream of local development and sustainability. The state of Bangladesh encountered a long-armed bloody conflict against the indigenous troops of CHT that continued for more or less two decades and apparently ended in 1997, followed by the 'CHT Accord'. It was considered as "the cornerstone of a new period of peaceful coexistence between the inhabitants of the indigenous people and the Bengalis" (Uddin, 2013, p. 4). Since the accord (popularly known as the 'Peace Accord'), the state believes that tourism development has been a trump card that has turned conflicting situations into an alternative avenue for integration, connectivity and sustainability. Thus, it is important to understand how tourism as development venture has been working for peace building and conflict management in CHT. In fact, the state has two latent agenda (Ahmed, 2017; Khan, 2015) for tourism development in CHT. The first is to distract the mindset of the long-standing historical struggle of indigenous communities for their self-autonomy and identity recognition. Tourism has been used for the desensitization of conflict and become a network for conflict management. It has currently been triggered a probable means for the peace development and sustainability. The second

intention is to initiate a neoliberal capitalist economy through tourism development. Tourism considered a powerful tool to create a new means of livelihoods and community well-being that produced a new socio-economic reality for indigenous communities. But it also raised important questions about the power dynamics, market relations and environmental governance in the context of tourism development. Moreover, tourism developed state discourses that disseminated the notion of tourism as a blessing for sustainability, a channel for peaceful co-existence and a fundamental pillar of local development in CHT. These discourses have largely been based on some economic indicators that has entirely missed out the ground reality of the CHT. The mindsets of the state and its actors attempted to converse ethnic communities from ethno-ecological survival into corporate 'touristic ethnicity' (Wood, 1998; Ahmed, 2017). Since colonial period, the primary extraction of capital has been secured by dismantling indigenous terrains and looting the ecological reserves for the benefit of the state and its privileged corporates (Adnan, 2004; Mohsin, 2000; Ávila-García *et al*., 2012). In the post-colonial Bangladesh, the state has significantly taken part in changing the customary and local governance institutions, and enacted new legal practices to promote new tourism models for local development, which legitimized and normalized mainly the presence of national and regional corporate elites. Privatization of indigenous jhumlands by leasing them to Bengali traders for tourism and timber business, nationalization of forests by declaring them reserve and protected forests for tourism expansion, and disturbance of wildlife habitats due to the tourism and development projects now pose challenges to the sustainability and community well-being of the CHT. Furthermore, the state and its public and private actors have nowadays remodeled and romanticized the cultural difference of indigenous people in the national tourism policy through the representation and commodification of culture accentuating the connection between the cultural revitalization and neoliberal touristification.

From indigenous point of view, tourism is perceived as a new form of exploitation and the reinstallation of colonial legacy. Land grabbing for tourist spots, controlling indigenous people's access to resources, and reintroducing the traditional livelihoods and culture for the tourism promotions remarginalized ethnic communities of CHT. Tourism as an alternative livelihood thus develops a socio-cultural relationship between tourism corporates and indigenous communities for economic gain that forces natives to negotiate the customary behaviors as tourism demands. It was found that tourism has led to drastic changes in the aesthetic contents of indigenous culture in which indigenous people became active agents as touristic performers due to the increased demands of the tourists in the commercial settings that speeded up the commodification of

community and culture in CHT. Neoliberal tourism as a 'business for fun' (Cohen, 1988) forces a neocolonial movement through a corporate mechanism of the commodification of indigenous culture and its transfiguration into an 'entertainment machine' (Lloyd and Clark, 2001). The study revealed the everyday forms of representation that encompass the commodification of people and places, the self-adopted mechanism of indigenous people, media portrayals, the construction of tourist gaze and discontent of *pahari* ethnic people in CHT. It also stressed the mechanisms through which cultural uniqueness and indigenous identities are reconstructed, deployed, commodified, and commercialized as exchangeable objects for tourist consumption.

Through the tourist perspective, I would like to elucidate the tourists' state of mind regarding the construction of *Pahari* indigenous communities as 'exotic others'. The visualization of indigenous people on the (social) media constructs a 'Bengali tourist gaze' which helps to understand tourist's narratives and perceptions on the people and places. Tourism reproduces a discourse of 'Bengali-ness' nationality by Bengali tourist gaze. I would also like to understand how 'Bengali tourist gaze' has contributed to construct a 'superior' 'Bengali-ness' over a 'inferior' indigenous 'otherness' in the tourism consumption. It has been observed that tourists seek only what they wish to grasp for their recreation, consumption and manipulation where history of indigenous struggles seems a 'black spot' (Ahmed, 2017).

Against the background, the thesis brings the question on board: Why and how has CHT deliberately become a tourism business hub? Has tourism as an alternative development venture prescribed by the state and its actors established sustainability or manufactured a new form of governmentality in the name of community well-being? Has the commoditization of ethnicity, culture, and nature through the representation by the state, media and tourists contributed to the remarginalization or revitalization? These are the questions, the research addressed with intensive investigation of facts, figures, and reality amidst the everyday experience of the indigenous people of the CHT. In conclusion, an eco-culturally balanced tourism was suggested for a holistic development and sustainability, although the question is raised, whether this development is sensitive to the culture and rights of the concerned community and the environment of the CHT that would lead to the further research regarding tourism development in the context of indigenous setting around the world?

1.2 The Chittagong Hill Tracts and its Overview

The Chittagong Hill Tracts is positioned in the south-eastern locality of Bangladesh, along with neighboring India and Myanmar, covering 13,274 sq km, including three hill districts namely Rangamati, Khagrachari, and Bandarban, and is nearby one-tenth of the entire Bangladesh (Sajib, 2021). Rangamati is the largest district with an area of 6,089 sq km. The Bandarban and Khagrachari districts cover 4,502 and 2,590 sq km respectively. There are 25 *upazila*s (sub-districts) and 111 unions in three hill districts (Roy, 2000b; ANZDEC, March 2011). Khagrachari shares borders with the Indian state of Tripura on the North and West, Rangamati shares its borders with the Indian Mizoram on the East, and Bandarban shares its border with Myanmar on the South and South-East (Ahmed, 2017, p. 13). From the Mughal to the early British period, this location was named as *Karpas Mahal* (cotton zone) surrounded by the borders of the Tripura, Arakan, and Lushai Hills (Ahmed, 2017). In 1860, the name 'Chittagong Hill Tracts' was fixed when the British annexed this region and added it to the Greater Chittagong Division due to its closeness to the plainland of Chittagong, and the British enlarged their colonial power towards the eastern and southern sides to ease the collection of *Karpas* (cotton) and the administrative actions as well (Roy, 2000).

It is known for its beautiful topography, resourceful ecological diversity and variety of forestland, mainly *Jhum* (swidden cultivation) concentration. In addition to hunting and gathering traditions in forest areas, shifting (*jhum*) cultivation has given a unique characteristics to the economy, society and material culture of the Chittagong Hill Tracts and has also shaped the customary governance system and forest management practices of the indigenous communities in CHT compared to other regions of the country (Adnan, 2011). Around 80% of its area is mountains and hills covered with forests and lakes. The total forest area of Bangladesh is 17.49%, where more than 27% of that forest is located in CHT (Datta, 2015, p. 20). The major parts of the Hill Tracts is surrounded by the mountainous territory, with a mass of sharp slopes. The region is predominantly a tropical topography with variety of trees and about one-fourth of the area is 'reserved forestlands' (Roy, 2000). Although the unclassified forestlands have been used for jhum cultivation, commercial tree plantation and native habitation and Bengali settlements, the entire CHT is now engulfed for tourism development. The ecosystem, wildlife, and biodiversity of this area are very wealthy, though the entire natural landscape has shrunken abruptly due to timber logging and major land grabs for the tourism industry after the 'peace accord'. These environmental changes have disrupted the everyday life of the indigenous locals and their subsistence patterns including hunting, gathering, farming, fishing, and other daily survival practices. The major river valleys, for example

Karnaphuli, Sangu, Matamuhri, Kassalong and Chengi and their several streams, are covered by the hill arrays and the unusual plainlands of the territory. Mountains, Tahjindong (1,280 meters, established a Bengali name as Bijoy), Mowdok Mual (1,052 m), and Keokradong (1,230 m), are the three topmost peaks situated in Bandarban, as well as Raikhiang Lake, the highest lake in Bangladesh (ANZDEC, March 2011, p. 9). These hills and lakes are widely branded as very attractive tourist spots duo to their picturesque location.

1.2.1 Ethnicity in CHT: A Flower with Different Petals

The Chittagong Hill Tracts is inhabited by 11 indigenous minority groups, namely Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Tanchangya, Chak, Mro, Bawn, Lushai, Khyang, and Khumi, locally known as *Pahari*, *Jumma*, *Adivasi* or *Upojathi* (hill people, shifting cultivators, indigenous people or 'tribal' people), but constitutionally labelled them as 'small ethnic groups'. The Chakma (46%), Marma (29%), and Tripura (13%) communities are the largest local natives in numbers among them (see Figure-2). These indigenous groups are distinct from the majority Bengali people of Bangladesh in respect of race, language, culture, heritage, religion, politics, economy, and history; rather they are closely linked to those of the hill people of Assam of India and upper Myanmar (ANZDEC, March 2011, p.5).

Figure-1: Indigenous communities in CHT Source: toursntripsbd.com/

These indigenous minorities are "politically independent, economically self-sufficient, culturally distinctive and socially egalitarian in nature" (Uddin, 2008b, pp. 33-53). Historical evidence reveals that the indigenous people of the CHT were the earliest group who migrated to the CHT from the border regions such as Arakan of Myanmar and the Tripura of India (Schendel, 1992; Uddin, 2013).

It was evident that during the fourteenth century, the communities, recognized as the *Kukis*, of CHT migrated from Myanmar to this southeastern region for the first time (Ahmed, 2017; Chowdhury, 2016). Besides, the indigenous *paharis*, belong to the Tibeto-Burman lineage, and typical Mongolian race (Roy, 1996). Their appearance is mostly close to south-east Asian origin, and their culture and traditions are identical to those of their neighboring Indian states of Tripura and Mizoram, and south-western Myanmar. Although several South Asian-based scholars (Ahamed, 2014; Dewan, 1990; Schendel, 1992; Tripura, 1992) proclaimed that indigenous locals have been living in the CHT since time immemorial, the early colonial narratives implied that "most of the groups inhabiting the CHT migrated to the area during the last four hundred years, either from the Arkan (Burma) or the North-east Indian states of Tripura or Assam" (Lewin, 1869; Hutchinson, 1906; cited in Ahamed, 2014, p. 17).

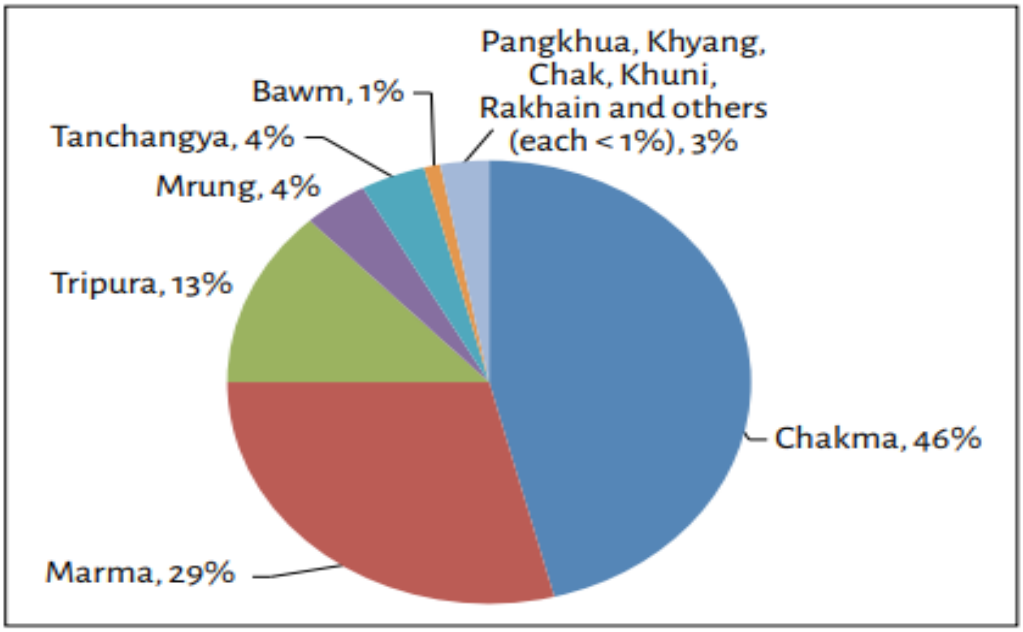


Table-1: Proportion of ethnic groups in CHT. Source: Ahammad and Stacey, 2016.

It is noteworthy that though these *Jumma* natives have a shared history and practice similar modes of livelihood, for example *jhum* cultivation, they, however, are different from one another in the context of rituals, festivals, dialects, and communal and kinship configurations in some measure. In terms of belief systems, the Chakma, Marma and Tanchangya communities are Buddhists. The Tripura community is Hindu, though a considerable figure have nowadays altered their religion into Christianity. The Mrus practice their own religion 'Crama' and some of them are animists, but few Mrus have converted to Buddhism and Christianity. The Bawm, Pankhua and Lushai communities predominantly are Christians (ANZDEC, March 2011). As these ethnic *paharis* customarily practiced *jhum* cultivation (shifting cultivation) as their means of subsistence through the distribution of their

shared hills and forestlands, they have adopted the term 'Jumma' as a collective identity which resembles a flower with different petals.

The current indigenous configuration of the CHT has declined markedly compared to the last century. (see Table-2) In 1872, the CHT inhabitants were exclusively indigenous locals (98%). In contrast, the Bengali people (2%) reported a tiny marginal population. Moreover, in 1991 census, it showed that the population of *Pahari* ethnic locals dropped significantly to almost half (51%). On the contrary, the portion of Bengali people increased radically to half (49%) of the total population of CHT in 1991 (Adnan, 2004; ANZDEC, March 2011; Rasul, 2007). It is obvious that the indigenous population have extremely changed during the period of post-colonial Bangladesh. According to 2011s census, the total local inhabitants of CHT were counted as about 1.6 million people, of them 53% were indigenous *pahari*s and 47% were Bengali people (BBS, 2011). Now, it is unofficially estimated that the population of Bengali outnumbers the indigenous communities. According to the latest census-2022, the eleven indigenous *pahari*s are 920,217 in total out of 1,842,815 in population, and the largest portion of the population is the Bengali (Muslim and Hindu) community (BBS, 2022).

Year	Jumma	%	Bengali	%	Total
1872	61,957	98	1,097	2	63,054
1901	116,000	93	8,762	7	124,762
1951	261,538	91	26,150	9	287,688
1981	441,776	59	304,873	41	746,649
1991	501,144	51	473,301	49	974,445
2011	845,541	53	752,690	47	1,598,231
2022	**920,217**	**49.94**	**922,598**	**50.06**	**1,842,815**

Table-2: Population of Indigenous and Bengali communities in CHT. Source: Adopted in Partha, 2016, p. 5; BBS, 2022.

In Table-3, it shows the locations of *Pahari* natives living in different *upazilas* (sub-districts) of the three hill districts, while the largest communities such as Chakma, Marma, and Tripura live in almost the entire CHT. It is significant that no smaller ethnic groups currently live in Khagrachari. Most of the land of this region have been evicted by the state and its security forces. The countryside of this

region was considered as a conflicting zone. However, the CHT is full of cultural and natural diversity where inter and intra-communal communications are praiseworthy.

UPAZILA	Bengali	IP GROUPS	Chakamas	Marmas	Tripuras	SMALLER IP GROUPS	Mro	Tanchangya	Bawm	Pangkhua	Chak	Khyang	Khumi	Lushai
KHAGRACHHARI			**1**	**2**	**3**		**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**
Dighinala	√		√	√	√		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Khagrachhari Sadar	√		√	√	√		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lakshmichhari	√		√	√	√		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mahalchhari	√		√	√	√		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Manikchhari	√		√	√	√		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Matiranga	√		√	√	√		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Panchhari	√		√	√	√		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ramgarh	√		√	√	√		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
RANGAMATI	**12**		**3**	**7**	**11**		**8**	**10**	**1**	**9**	**2**	**4**	**5**	**6**
Baghaichhari	√		√	√	√		-	-	-	√	-	-	-	√
Barkal	√		√	√	√		-	-	-	√	-	-	-	-
Belaichhari	√		√	√	√		-	√	√	√	-	√	-	-
Juraichhari	√		√	√	√		-	√		√	-	-	-	-
Kaptai	√		√	√	√		-	√	-	√	-	√	-	-
Kawakhali	√		√	√	√		-	√	-	-	-	-	-	-
Langadu	√		√	√	-		-	-	-	√	-	-	-	-
Naniarchar	√		√	√	√		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rajasthali	√		√	√	√		-	√	-	√	-	√	-	-
Rangamati Sadar	√		√	√	√		-	√	-	√	√	-	√	√
BANDARBAN	**1**		**2**	**3**	**4**		**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**
Alikadam	√		√	√	√		√	√	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bandarban Sadar	√		√	√	√		√	√	√	-	√	√	-	√
Lama	√		√	√	√		√	√	-	-	-	√	-	-
Naikhongchhari	√		√	√	-		√	√	-	-	√	-	-	-
Rowangchhari	√		√	√	√		√	√	√	-	-	√	√	-
Ruma	√		√	√	√		√	√	√	√	-	√	√	√
Thanchi	√		√	√	√		√	√	√	-	-	-	√	-

Table-3: Positions of Ethnic groups in CHT. Source: HDRC, 2009; ANZDEC, March 2011, p. 24.

Although indigenous *pahari*s have their own languages, they use the Bengali language as a lingua franca for their everyday communications. Despite the paucity of documentation or literature on the categorization of languages, it is accepted from oral history that the languages of most indigenous groups were derived from the larger 'Sino-Tibetan' linguistic lineage. Sino-Tibetan languages in the Chittagong hills belong to the Burmic division (Mru, Khumi, Lushai, Pangkhua, Bawm, Chak, Khyeng, Marma) and the Baric division (Tripura) (Halim, *et al*., n.d.; quoted in ANZDEC, March 2011, p. 8). However, the Bengali, Chakma and Tanchangya languages originated from the Indo-Aryan linguistic group in the Indo-European family (Schendel, Mey and Dewan, 2001, p. 301).

Pahari natives make their houses of wood, sun grass, and bamboo along with wooden stairs, though some who are economically solvent build houses of 'modern' architecture. Besides, the indigenous paharis mostly have their own form of traditional clothes which they weave with simple technology with dazzling colours and they also avail it for sale to tourists.

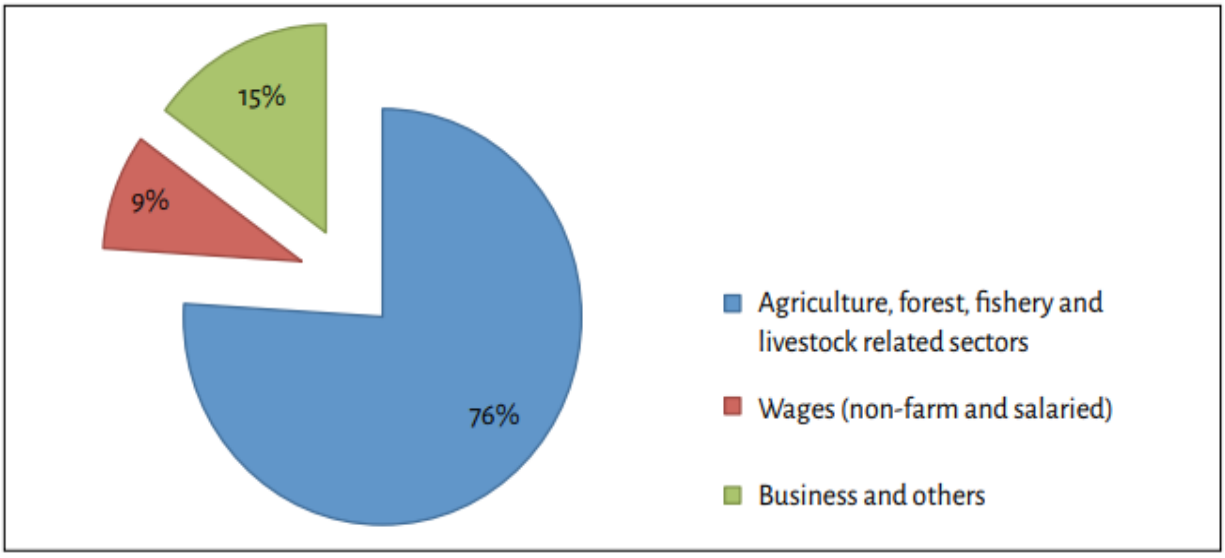


Table-4: Occupations of Indigenous people in CHT. Source: UNDP, 2009; Ahammad and Stacey, 2016, p. 195.

The main occupations of these hill inhabitants are *jhum* cultivation, hunting and gathering, plantations, animal husbandry, wage labours, and small business enterprises. They produce most of their subsistence from *jhum*, wet rice and vegetable in particular, along with the tropical fruit plantations, and horticulture. They commercially harvest turmeric, peanuts, mangos, and other fruits. However, the major change is in the growth of paid job as labours due to the rapid increase of jhumland evictions.

Peoples	Swidden	Hunting, Trapping & Gathering	Fishing	Weaving	Wine-Making	Animal Rearing
Bawm	√	√	√	√	X	√
Chak	√	√	√	√	√	√
Chakma	√	√	√	√	√	√
Khumi	√	√	√	√	√	√
Khyang	√	√	√	X	X	√
Lushai	√	√	√	√	X	√
Marma	√	√	√	X	√	√
Mru	√	√	√	√	√	√
Pankhua	√	√	√	√	X	√
Tanchangya	√	√	√	√	√	√
Tripura	√	√	√	√	√	√

Table-5: Major occupations of Indigenous people in CHT. Source: Roy, 1996, p. 100.

The traditional process of Jhum cultivation (swidden or shifting cultivation based on the 'slash-and-burn'), is significant as it is fundamental to the native way of life and the basis of the *pahari* culture

in the CHT. In this agrarian method, small trees and bushes on the mountainous slope are usually slashed and dried up in winter between January and February. Then the fields are set on fire and all the dry ones are burnt in April. In the next monsoon, a variety of paddy seeds and different vegetables are cultivated in the same *jhum* field.


Figure-2: *Jhum* Cultivation Source: agefotostock.com

Indigenous *jhum* cultivators do not use any chemical fertilizers or pesticides except the burnt dust of the plant as traditionally produced natural manures. *Jhum* farmers dig holes and then put seeds in those holes to grow in the land but do not plow the lands. Among the indigenous Jummas, it is believed that plowing the motherland with a spade is a sin (Roy, 1996). They perform certain rituals along with the worship of nature gods and sacrifice pigs or chickens for fruitful crops. During harvest time, different communities celebrate different harvesting festivals for new crops. For example, Marma community names it 'Kokshawi'; Lushai terms it 'Thlaithar'; Khyang calls this festival as 'Henei'; Chak terms 'Anaibuk Poi', and Khumi calls it as 'Avang Ja' (Suman and Chawdhury, January 2020). They rejoice these festivals with local wine during the feast. As Datta (2015, p. 92) explained that "this act of eating together and sharing is a way of celebrating the foods produced, and emphasizing the nature as a symbol of collectiveness". Through these cultural practices, indigenous people develop a strong relationship with the nature, animals and humans that creates an eco-cultural sustainability. However, economic pressures, particularly the impact of tourism, have almost put an end to this belief. Due to the growing influence of tourism, many *Pahari* ethnic people nowadays transform their traditional livelihoods into non-agrarian enterprises, though a major part of poor ethnic groups (Chak, Pankhua, Khumi, khyang, Mru, and riverine dwellers of Chakma, Marma, Tanchangya and Tripura) who live outside the *Sadar* (like the city centers) still depend on *jhum* farming for their subsistence. *Jhum* (swidden or shifting) cultivation is traditionally

interconnected to other livelihoods, for instance, animal domestication, hunting and gathering, forestry, fishing, trapping, weaving, wine making, and collecting medicinal herbs (see Figure-6). Thus, it is obvious that the social, economic, ecological, political, and cultural practices of indigenous communities are inextricably surrounded by the jhum or swidden or shifting cultivation.

1.2.2 Natural Resource Management in CHT

The ecological landscape of the Chittagong Hill Tracts topographically encompass massive hills, deep forests, mixed uplands, jhumlands, rivers, canals, lakes, waterfalls, and wildlife. Forest resources supply directly to the subsistence of Pahari natives in CHT. Wood, bamboo, rattan, timber, fuelwood, vegetables, seasonal fruits and a variety of grasses are the main resources for the daily income. However, the degradation of forest resources due to economic pressures continues to affect the primary source of revenue support for the forest-dependent indigenous *pahari*s in CHT. More than 60% of forest products including NTFP (Non-Timber Forest Products) are used at the household level and the remaining 40% are sold at local markets to generate cash income (Kar and Jacobson, 2012; Misbahuzzaman and Smith-Hall, 2015; quoted in Ahammad and Stacey, 2016, p. 205). The forests of the CHT is still the largest reserves of bamboo and wood, which are a prospective channel for forest-based commercial interests. For example, crafting handicrafts, baskets by bamboo, wooden souvenirs and other raw resources are contributing to develop an informal economy. Forestlands in CHT comprise nearly 43% of entire forest areas in Bangladesh (BFD, 2015; Ahammad and Stacey, 2016, p. 206). The total forest area managed under the Bangladesh Forest Department in CHT is 483,000 ha, with 86,000 ha designated as plantation land (BFD, 2015; Ahammad and Stacey, 2016, p. 206). Deep forest merely contains almost 72,000 ha that is only 15%–20% of the overall forestlands in CHT. The leftover area is mostly diversified natural and implanted forests and mono-culture forests for corporate purposes. The main tropical areas are categorized as 'hill forests.' Amongst the commercial plantation, Teak and *Gamar* (rubber) are the major plants in both public and private forestry. Horticulture has recently developed due to the scarcity of natural resources and the control of access to resources by the Forest Department (FD) and tourism development authority, instead of large scale *jhum* cultivation and subsistence gathering from forests. One-fourth of the CHT forestlands has been declared as 'Reserved Forests' (RF) category by the FD after the national forest policy-1979 and 1994 was enacted (Halim *et al*, 17th June 2015; Halim and Roy, 2006, p. 4). One more classification of the state-controlled forests in CHT is 'Protected Area' for planted forests. There are two types of RF in CHT larger and smaller forests, in

which “the smaller RFs together cover only 15,018 acres (24 square miles), while the four largest ones – namely Reingkhyong RF, Kassalong RF, Sangu RF and Matamuhri RFs” (Webb and Roberts, 1976, p. 2; cited in Halim *et al*, 17th June 2015, p. 6).

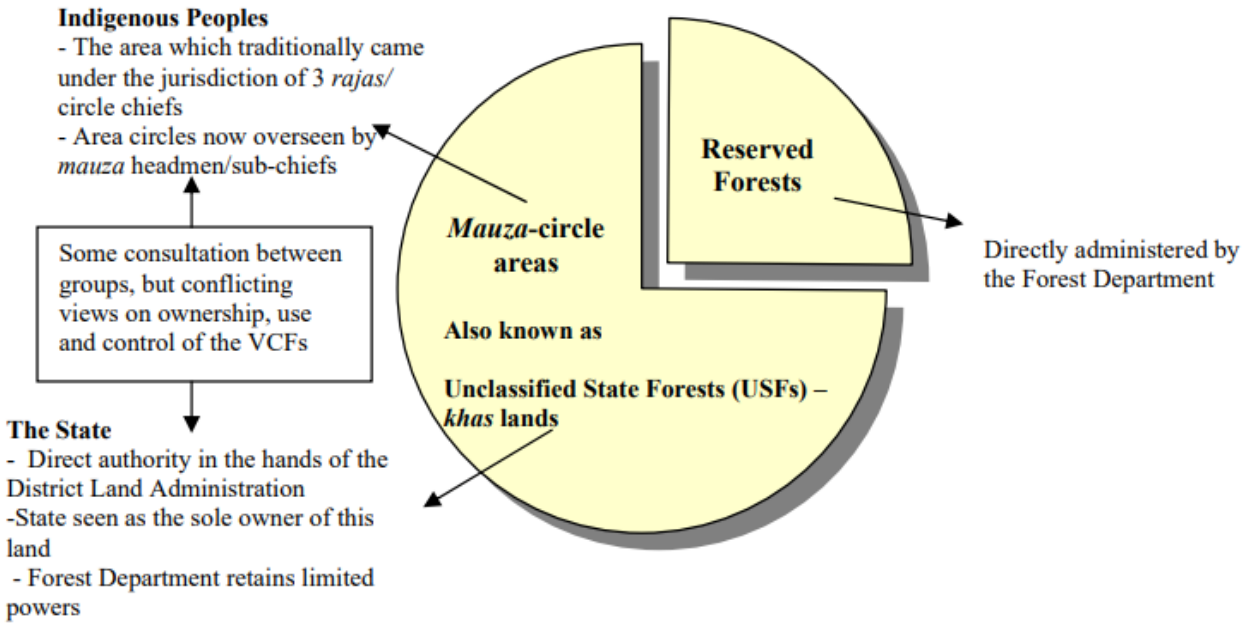


Table-6: Forestland Managements of CHT Source: Halim and Roy, 2006, p. 8.

However, the state and its forest authorities have initiated very few attempts at natural resource conservation to protect from deforestation and endangered biodiversity in this territory. Instead, the FD promoted commercial timber plantation by leasing large tracts of forestlands. They only declared certain forests as reserve and protected forests, to facilitate social forestry, teak and other profitable plantations, and determined forest management boundaries. The FD declared two protected areas during 1980–90 which are ‘Pablakhali Wildlife Sanctuary’ (42,087 ha) and ‘Kaptai National Park’ (5464 ha) (BFD, 2015; quoted in Ahammad and Stacey, 2016, p. 216). Between the 1970s and early 2000, the FD also executed plantation plans and policies to reinstall ruined overall ecosystems of CHT (Khan *et al*., 2007; Ahammad and Stacey, 2016). However, these forest management programs resulting in large-scale teak and gamar (rubber) plantations lead to a weakened state of the land structure, causing soil erosion and hill slides, and the permanent collapse of natural waterfalls and drinking water shortages (Hossain, 2003; Ahammad and Stacey, 2016). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the CHTDB (Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board) also commenced rubber-fruit-based programs for a new farming practice with conservation on 6986 ha of land to resolve *jhum* cultivation practices (GoB and FAO, 2013; Ahammad and Stacey, 2016). However, these monoculture policies weakened traditional indigenous resource management

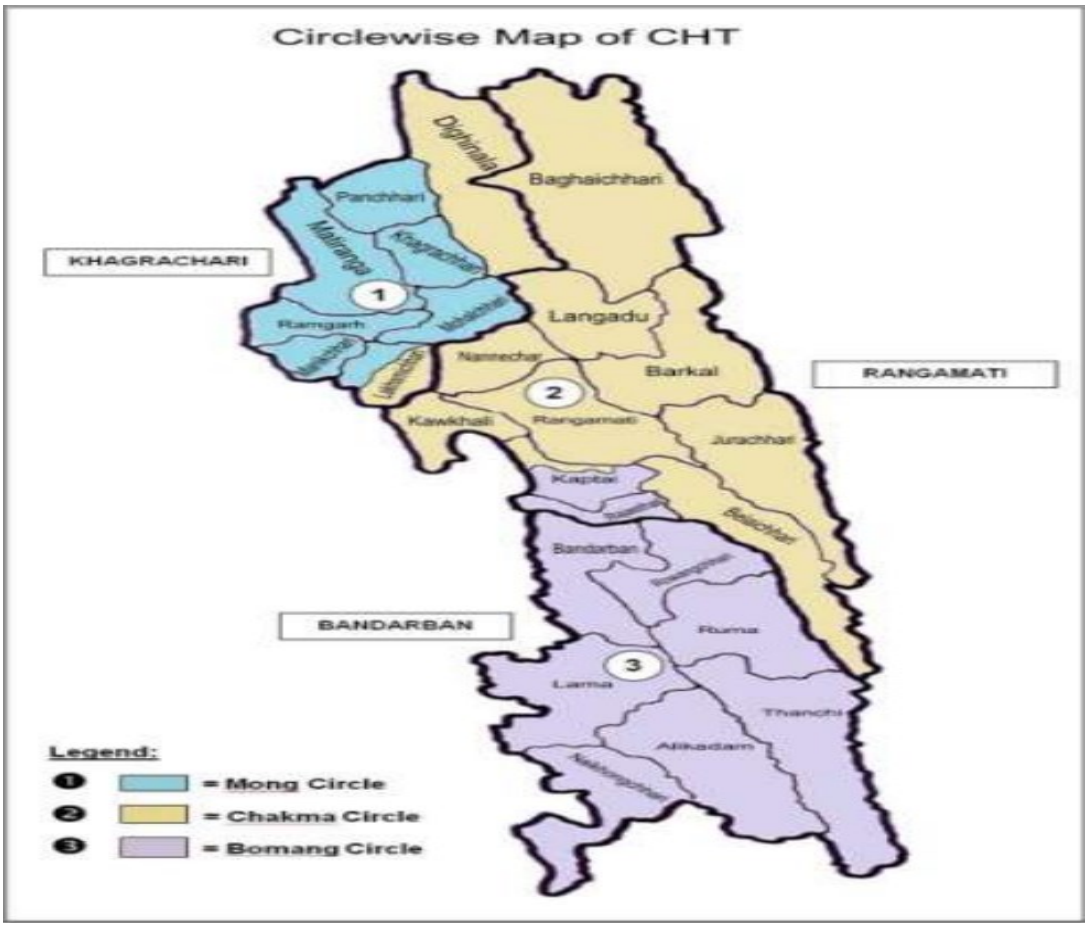
practices caused by intensifying commercial tree plantation rather than reinstating the lost ecosystem as these plants were not suited in this natural setting (Islam et al., 2007; Ahammad and Stacey, 2016). Moreover, an insignificant area of natural deep forests dispersed in CHT are nevertheless reserves of worthy plants and watersheds that have not been significantly well identified in the recent national forest policies, for instance, in the National Forest Policy- 2018. Indigenous *pahari*s take care of these natural forest resources as shared resources for nourishing environmental sustainability, particularly shielding watersheds for their water security. They also consider it a sacred responsibility to protect the motherland. Since the colonial times, this category of natural forest was defined as a 'Village Common Forest' (VCF) (see Table-6). 'Community Forests' are now available in 112 patches across CHT (Ahammad and Stacey, 2016, p. 216). The leader of the *mauza* (greater village) called 'headmen', appointed by District Commissioner (DC) and recommended by the chief circle (king), regulates the verbal or written guidelines on the usage and maintenance of these forests with the help of *Karbari* (head of the smaller village). In the Table-7, we can have an overview of the history of natural resources management in CHT, prepared by G. Rasul (2007, p. 153-163)

Political administrative era	*Major policy changes*	*Implication*		
		Livelihood of local people	*Ecology*	*Management of forest resource*
Colonial era (1760–1947)	Nationalization of land and forests Establishment of reserve forest Land and forest laws formalized Community property regime to state property regime Commercial extraction of timber Introduction of private ownership and provision of land leases for settled agriculture	State as the absolute owner, community rights curtailed Availability of CPR land and forests decreased Increased monetization	Monoculture of teak Loss of biodiversity Pressure on forest resources increased	Responsibility for management shifted from indigenous people to FD; local responsibility for forest conservation disappeared Traditional management practices broke down Community resources became 'open access' resources due to ineffective control by government Conflict started between FD and indigenous people Multi-purpose trees replaced with teak monoculture in some areas Forest resources started depleting
Post-colonial era, Pakistan period (1947–1970)	Encouraged immigration of lowland people Abolished special status of CHT Hydroelectric project Improved road networks Industrial use of forest products	CPR land and forest further reduced Access to forest resources further curtailed through protected forests and industrial use Increased monetization Both subsistence and commercial production	Population pressure increased Vast areas submerged under water Large number of people displaced; some rehabilitated in RF Created pressure on land resources Ecological disturbance	Number of jhumia increased and shortened jhum cycle Jhum expanded to RF Encroachment on RFs Increased extraction of forest products for industrial purposes Degradation of forest resources Conflict between FD and people further increased
Bangladesh period (1971 onwards)	Planned settlement to CHT Afforestation programme in CPR area Privatization of CPR for rubber plantation, private tree farming and other uses	CPR land and forests further reduced Livelihood options further reduced due to insurgency and armed conflict Increased dependency on extraction of NTFPs for subsistence Limited wage earning Increased monetization	Further pressure on land and forest resources Reduction of biological resources due to indiscriminate extraction of NTFPs for subsistence Increased soil erosion	Conflict between FD and tribal people reached an extreme stage Ineffective government Control; most part of CHT became 'open access' resources Increased illegal felling Most of CHT denuded

Table-7: History of Forest Management in CHT. Source: Rasul, 2007, p. 157.

1.2.3 Customary and Local Administration

Here, I will depict three layers of administration in CHT, how the local customary, government-based administration and development-induced administration work together and in some cases confront each other in the context of tourism development despite having mutual mistrust. The traditional administrative structure is three revenue circles: the Chakma circle, the Bohmong circle and the Mong circle in the three district of CHT (see Map-1).



Map-1: Areas of three circles of the CHT. Source: Barua, 2007; ANZDEC, March 2011, P. 19)

Circle Chiefs are the head of traditional administration typically represents a revenue circle, customarily recognized them as Kings. During the British period, the kings were incorporated in the administration in order to smoothen the tax collection and to adopt the practices of customary judicial system. The circles are split into supplementary units of local administration, which are recognized as *Mouza* and *Para*. *Mouzas* are encompassed with several villages. The Mouza leader is called as the 'Headman', while, head of the village or *para* is termed the '*Karbari*' (see Table-8). *Para* is viewed as the smallest unit of this traditional system. The second administrative organ is local governance. It is same as the rest of Bangladesh. The third governance is based on the development under the ministry of CHT Affairs. It has three bodies such as regional council, district council and CHT development board.

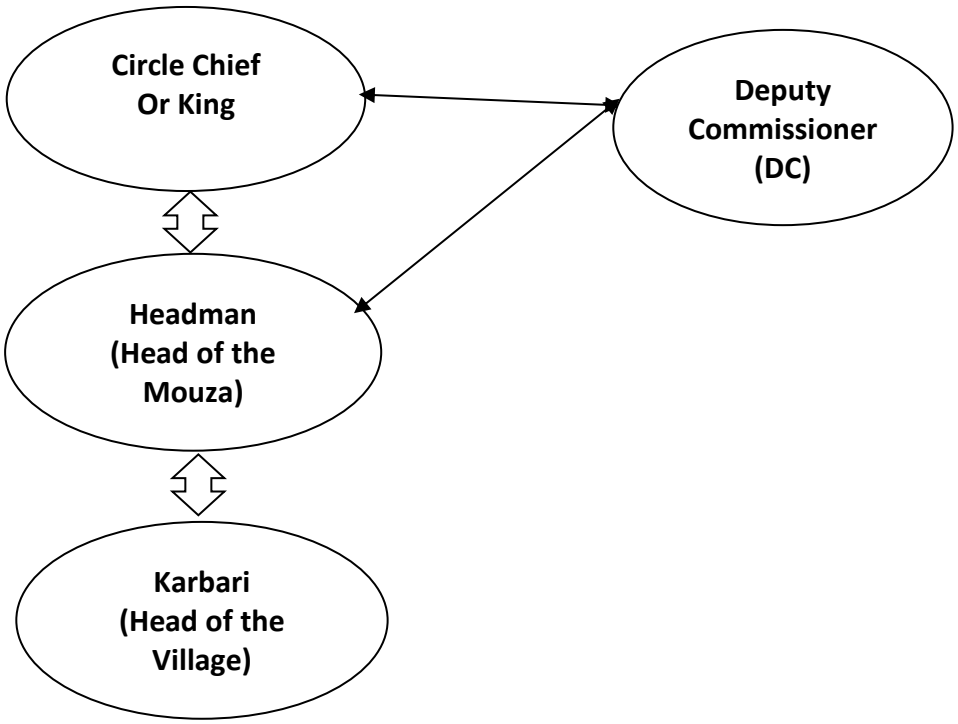


Table-8: Customary Administrative Structure. Source: Prepared by Author

The circle king is hereditarily positioned and the headmen are fixed by the District Commissioner (DC), recommended by the king. In addition, the circle chiefs appoint the *Karbari* (a village caretaker) with the proposal of headmen. It is well established that this indigenous administrative practice is still conducted with the spontaneous participation of its indigenous followers. Through this customary administration, lands and forests are distributed among native locals for jhum cultivation as it is the fundamental subsistence practice of *Pahari jumma*s. For example, *Pahari* ethnic communities celebrate the 'Raj Punnah' festival which is the largest collective tax paying ceremony. On that day circle chief collect revenue from his followers led by the headmen. According to the CHT manual 1900, the British colonial ruler introduced a special administrative governing system in the greater CHT region, which is now ornamentally practiced throughout the CHT. Nowadays, the local administrative structure controlled by the central government is powerful where customary system is just a supporting body. Headmen are obliged and liable to collect tax as a gift for the king and handover with royal submission in front of the king, and then some portion to the DC in accordance with the Manual. The existence of such a dual governance characterize this locality a distinctive position in Bangladesh. Apart from the customary administration, a DC is appointed by the central government and works as a supreme administration leader who take care of the entire district in all respects. Under the local governance system, each district is divided into several numbers of '*Thanas*' (Police Stations) and each *Thana* consecutively

comprises with numerous 'Union *Porishad*s (council)', and each 'Union *Parishad*' contains some 'Wards'. The restructurings in local governance during 1980s divided the district administration into sub-districts, locally called '*Upazila*s', which maintain governmental resources' distribution to the Union *Parishad*s (Roy, 1996). In 1989, the government of Bangladesh formed three 'Local Government Councils (LGCs)' for the three hill districts in accordance with the 'Hill District Local Government Council Act 1989' (Roy, November 2012; Roy, 1996). After the 'peace accord', the LGCs are today recognized as 'Hill District Councils (HDC)' and, fundamentally, characterize the functional local governance configurations for the CHT region as it was assured in the 'CHT accord'. The peace accord also introduced another administrative form named 'Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council (CHTRC)' in order to supervise and synchronize the local governments' undertakings following the national government's regulation. In addition to the local and regional administrative formation, a distinct ministry was established at the national administration in agreement with the peace accord, that is entitled the 'Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs (MoCHTA). Along with the administration of the security forces, military in particular, three administrative compositions are visible and simultaneously work together in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

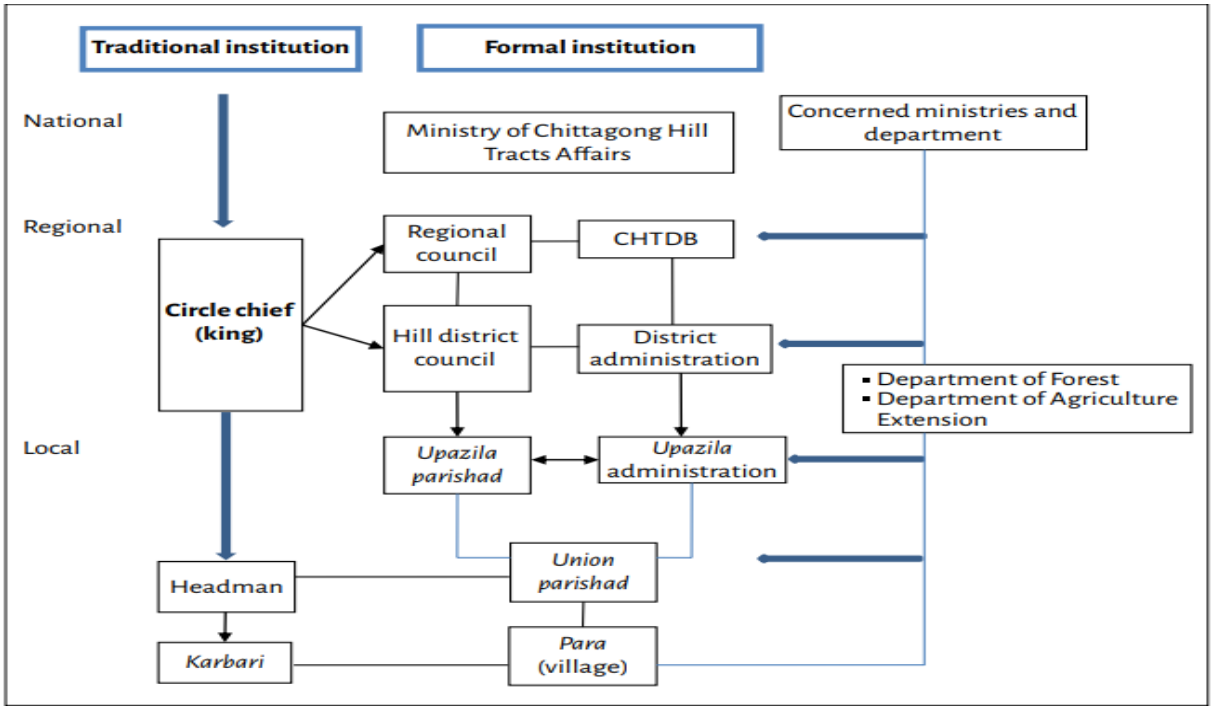


Table-9: Combined administrative formation in CHT. Source: GoB and FAO, 2013; Ahammad and Stacey, 2016, p. 201.

Apart from those three layers, an additional structure is also visible, called a '*Pourashava*' or 'Municipality', which is mainly a urban-centric setting. It exists in the *Sadar* (city) areas to facilitate the city-based civic services. For instance, two municipalities are available in Bandarban *Sadar.* A

mayor act for a '*Pourashava*' elected by both Bengali and indigenous locals of *Sadar*. All these administrative organs function in alliance with one another. Nevertheless, the DC acts as a 'chief operating officer' of a district, though it differs in the hill districts in terms of development actions. At sub-district stage, an *Upazila Nirbahi* Officer (UNO) enacts a same function as the DC at the district level. Finally, MoCHTA centrally works and coordinates the affairs of Chittagong Hill Tracts for the overall development of the localities.

1.3 History of CHT: Struggle, Identity, and Development

The Chittagong Hill Tracts has long been characterized by the post-colonial scholars as a territory of struggle for existence, identity, and self-determination of 'pahari' ethnic minorities (see Adnan, 2004; Dewan, 1990; Mohsin, 1997; Schendel, 1992; Uddin, 2008a). The incorporation into the state governmentalization, the process of nation-state building, and its politics of nationalism destabilized the environment and the fate of the people of the CHT since the British colonial period. In post-colonial Bangladesh, access to this territory was circumscribed by the state and this region was classified as a 'war zone' until the 'CHT Accord' in 1997, where hardly a handful of development policies were carried out to facilitate the process of militarization in order to ultimately control the land (Gerharz, 2002). It was propagated that amidst the three districts of the CHT, Rangamati is the political decision-making zone, Khagrachari is the battlefield, and Bandarban is the hideout of the indigenous armed troops. Uddin (2010, p. 284), however, argued that "due to the intrusion of the British (1860), Pakistan (1947) and Bangladesh (1971), the Pahari people have gradually been marginalized in the context of social, economic and political positioning in the state". The CHT-based scholarly works of literature (for example, Adnan, 2004; Ahamed, 2014; Ahmed, 2017; Barua, 2001; Dewan, 1990; Gerharz, 2002; Mohsin, 1997; Nasreen, 2017; Schendel, 1992; Shelley, 1992; Tripura, 1992; Uddin, 2008a) together with my field experience, I have narrated the historical trajectory of the CHT during the consecutive regimes of colonial and post-colonial administrations which represented the *Pahari* indigenous struggle for survival, territorial freedom and identity recognition. This chronological synopsis is significant to understand the mechanism of remarginalization, the politics of representation, the gradual process of exploitation, and finally the latent agenda of tourism promotion through contemporary development plans and policies in CHT.

1.3.1 Pre-colonial (Mughal) Period (before 1760)

Before the British colonial control of this region, the indigenous *pahari*s were economically and politically independent and autonomous under customary chiefdoms (Bessaignet, 1958; Brauns and

Loffler, 1990; Levi-Strauss, 1951; Lewin, 2004[1870]; Schendel, 1992; Uddin, 2010). They follow three-tier kingdom administrative system- King (Chief of circle)-Headmen (tax collectors)-Karbari (village caretaker). They practice it from ancient time to till now, although this governing system is now more ornamental than before. The CHT was not part of the greater Chittagong division, but Bengali people from Chittagong had conduct with the indigenous *pahari*s for trading, but it was very limited interaction. The Chakma raja (king) sought permission from the Mughal kingdom to trade with Bengalis, instead of providing 'karpas' as a tribute to the Mughal (Nasreen, 2017). During that time, Bengalis termed them as *joomea, jummo* and *moigga* (Uddin and Gerharz, 2017), because *pahari*s were used to *jhum* cultivation, though these terms are derogative in a sense. It was evident from historical documents that during the 1400s, *Kuki*s as the first 'tribes' came to this territory from the Arakan, who later divided into several 'tribal' groups (Ahmed, 2017; Chowdhury, 2016). The present region of CHT were borderless in terms of free and spontaneous movement throughout the three borders what it is now connected with northeast India and southern Myanmar (Ahmed, 2017; Chowdhury, 2016). From the Mughal to the early British period, this location was named as *Karpas Mahal* (cotton zone) surrounded by the borders of the Tripura, Arakan, and Lushai Hills (Schendel, Mey, and Dewan, 2001; Ahmed, 2017). Schendel (1992) claims that "the Chittagong Hill Tracts as a unit is a colonial administrative invention" (Dewan, 2013; cited in Ahmed, 2017, p. 42). The Mughal kingdom used this territory only for economic purpose which was under the Arakan and Portuguese influence until 1666 AD (Ahmed, 2017, p. 42; Schendel, 2009). However, although the Mughal royal administration had never directly taken over this area, they aimed to boost their influence over this boundary by fostering farming in this range, and by increasing exchange *karpas* by trade with the local natives. The encounter between the Mughal and East India company in 'Polashi War' in 1757 was a key point to change the history of Indian sub-continent which established around a 200 years of British colonial exploitation (Ahmed, 2017, Uddin, 2010). After the downfall of Mughal regime, the British colonialists expanded their colonial power in the region, and thereafter the fate of the indigenous *pahari*s began to change in their economic, social and political freedom of self-determination. Before the British colonial period the natural resources were the shared wealth of the *pahari* naïve communities. The entitlements and distributions of forest resources and lands for jhum cultivation and settlement were established on the basis of customary land tenure system as a collective sense of belonging. Roy (1996, pp. 25–28) pointed out that "individual rights included the right to collect fuelwood, fodder, timber and non-timber forest products; a particular jhum;

sufficient land for a home; and the right to hunt, fish and graze cattle on common lands" (cited in Rasul, 2007, p. 155).

1.3.2 British Colonial Period (1760-1947)

The Chittagong Hill Tracts have been officially appropriated by the British colonial government from the East India company of British which annexed to the greater Chittagong division in 1860, but the seeds of colonization had, in fact, originated during the period of East India Company between 1757 and 1860 (Roy, 2000). After the battle of 'Polashi', the British East India Company occupied province of Bengal in 1760, and thereafter captured the Hill Tracts (HT) and connected it with the Bengal (Uddin, 2010). They noticed that this region was naturally resourceful for varieties of raw materials such as cotton and valuable trees. The East India Company initiated the process of militarization in the Hill Tracts for the first time to expand their colonial power in the 1770s, and by 1777 defeated the Chakma king (Chakroborty, 1977; Roy, 2000). The indigenous *pahari*s gradually lost their independence and they were bound to obey the rules of the colonial administrators in the social, economic, and political life. The entire CHT region was first only a tax zone, and later became a direct British governing area. Chowdhury (2016) contends that "the Company's objective for collecting revenue and separating communities based on particular aspects of identity was not merely economic exploitation, but also to establish their legitimacy in the region" (cited in Ahmed, 2017, p. 44). After the militarization of this territory, the colonial administrators increased tributes and employed Bengali mediators to collect tributes. Bengali mediators had collected 5-10 times more taxes from the natives than what they were supposed to hand over to the colonial administrators. As a result of this discontent, the indigenous locals led by the Chakma king confronted an armed battle (Bertocci, 1989, p. 146; Nasreen, 2017, p. 72). This resistance lasted for a decade and the colonial ruler enforced a restriction to detach from the plains for daily necessities (Uddin, 2010; Levene, 1999; Serajuddin, 1984). Finally, considering the loss of the communities and the oppression of the military, the Chakma king was unable to deny to agree to a reciprocal pact with the central colonial lord in 1787, in exchange for which the indigenous natives agreed to pay 20 *maund*[1] of karpas as tax to the colonialists, indigenous locals had the right to trade with the Bengalis in return for paying taxes to the British (Uddin, 2010). The colonial administrators, eventually, named this area as *Karpas Mahal* (cotton area). As a result, the indigenous traditional economy was changed from the subsistence production to the cash exchange for more tax collection that developed a

[1]. *Maund* is a local measurement unit, one *maund* is equal to 40 kg (see Uddin, 2010).

market monetary system (Mohsin, 2000, p. 28; Nasreen, 2017, p. 72). These changes led to Bengali traders as influential intermediaries and the indigenous *pahari*s were trapped in debt (Adnan, 2004, p. 20; Nasreen, 2017, p. 72). However, according to historians (Schendel, 1992; Shelley, 1992), the *Karpas Mahal* was identified as a first identity of this landscape, and it was widely identified by the colonial administrators, Bengalis and the other parts of the British colonial territory although the natives were recognized as 'joomea' (Uddin, 2010). The specification of this region as *Karpas Mahal* continued until 1860, after which the British split the hilly areas from the greater Chittagong Division and established a single district termed 'Chittagong Hill Tracts' (CHT) within the province of Bengal and assigned an administrator in the post of 'superintendent', later 'Deputy Commissioner' (DC). The British colonialists introduced three circles namely, the Chakma, Bohmong, and Mong Circles, and appointed indigenous kings (circle chiefs) to ease the process of tax collection, which was controlled and supervised by the superintendent (Arens, 1997). As collectors of tributes, the kings took revenue from the headmen (chief of the larger village called *Mauza*) and handed it over to the superintendent. Furthermore, the well-known 'The CHT Manual 1900' was introduced by the British in May 1900 and this hill area formally recognized as the CHT (Uddin, 2010). According to this 'CHT Manual', it was freed as an 'excluded area' in order to uphold the indigenous customary system. However, there is a number of literature written by colonial administrators on the Chittagong Hill Tracts and its people (for example, Hutchinson, 1909; Lewin, 1870) that referred to some pejorative terms which constructed a new identity of indigenous locals. These terms, coined by the British colonial administrators, were used in official documents or in any dealings with Paharis, a colonial legacy that continued in post-colonial Bangladesh. Schendel (1995, p. 128) revealed that "nineteenth century British writers on the hill people described them as 'primitive', 'savages' and 'wild hill tribes', terms that continued to be encountered frequently in contemporary writings in Bangladesh" (cited in Uddin, 2010, p. 286). The British Captain Lewin as a first 'Superintendent' of the CHT wrote a book on the indigenous *paharis* titled 'The Wild Race in South Eastern India' in 1870. In his book, T. H. Lewin portrayed a new and romantic designation to the ethnic people of CHT as a 'wild race' which became an 'ideal' type of human being with colonial fantasy (Lewin, 1870; Tripura 1992; Uddin, 2010). He labelled the indigenous locals as 'hill-men', which is now widely referred to by the Bengali majorities as well as the natives themselves. Hence, the constructed identity for the ethnic minorities of CHT by a British colonial administrator is still used by the present state of Bangladesh to categorize the *pahari*s as an exotic group of people in tourism development policies.

However, the British announced the entire natural resources and forestlands in CHT as colonial properties and the indigenous people lived in CHT as if they are 'homeless at their own home' (Uddin, 2008a; Arens, 1997). Between 1757 and 1947, the colonial government changed in many economic and political practices, particularly in the mode of subsistence and production. The British first promoted massive plow agriculture. They considered that 'jhum cultivation' or 'jhumming' was unfavorable to the ecosystem, primitive form of cultivation, a waste of resources, and was very time-consuming cultivation (Arens, 1997; Nasreen, 2017) in which people were unable to produce as many crops as the people of the plains. Chakma king R.D. Roy (1994, p. 5) claimed that "jhumming leads not to the causation of erosion but to the prevention of erosion" (quoted in Arens, 1997, p. 1818). But the implicit agenda was to multiply the revenue and reduce dependence on the circle kings so that the direct links with indigenous farmers would be established and it enabled to collect taxes more than before. With the help of Bengali intruders, the colonial British imposed an immense agricultural system and smoothened the trade with agricultural production. As a result, the indigenous subsistence economy turned into the market economy through the cash flows. This economic change led to the development of social inequality and unequal power relations between local communities as well as inter-communal groups. For example, most of the Chakma and Marma communities living on the river banks were, eventually, able to produce and benefit more than the people living on the hillsides and were largely based on *jhum* cultivation, such as the Bawm, Mru, Khyang and Pangkhua communities. The effect of massive agronomy caused to "increase of population in the valleys, growth of commercial and urban centers, circulation of money and the growth of commodity production" (Dewan, 1990, Ch 4; cited in Arens, 1997, p. 1811). Besides, to limit *jhum* cultivation the colonial administrator announced more than 70% of the forestlands of CHT as 'reserved forest', therefore this declaration led to deprive the *Pahari jumma*s from cultivating *jhum* on their ancestral lands which were distributed by the headmen and approved by the kings. Hence, the ultimate loss of the customary judicial practice of the *Pahari* natives was established by the legislative manifestation as a result of the CHT Manual 1900 (Nasreen, 2017). Moreover, the colonial administration redeclared the CHT region as a 'Totally Excluded Area' in 1935 (Roy, 2000; Chowdhury, 2016; Ahmed, 2017). Although this detachment policy protected the unique socio-economic tradition and natural diversity of the CHT, it led to resentment and mutual mistrust between outsider Bengalis and *Paharis* in terms of trading. Throughout British colonial régime, the CHT was "first regarded as a non-regulated area, then as an excluded area, and then as a totally excluded area" (Ahmed, 2017, p. 46).

The British colonial administration initiated various strategies to introduce 'scientific forest management'. In this regard, the entire CHT resources was declared as national assets in 1871 (Rasul, 2007). Apart from the private ownership for settlement and farming, the rest of this area was occupied by the colonial government as *khas* land (land in government ownership). As a result of the declaration of 'reserved forests' and the nationalization of forestlands, customary rights of *Pahari* natives, for example, the hunting and gathering traditions, fishing, and jhum cultivation, were totally undermined. It was provided a status as an 'Unclassified State Forest' (USF) (Rasul, 2007). The Forest Department of the British government was responsible and had the ultimate power to control the reserved forests. On the other hand, DC, representative of central colonial administration, was the supreme governor of the CHT who could administer and lease the *khas* lands and USFs. Therefore, the indigenous practice of conservation was severely endangered and the customary land distribution system was mostly abolished. The colonial government also pushed to extract the forest resources and induced outsider Bengali agents to trade in timber. The colonial administration undertook the replacement of multiuse plants with profitable teak plantations, which challenged the subsistence of native communities who relied deeply on multiuse plants and vegetation for food, fuelwood, and medicines (Rasul, 2007). Tobacco farming was supported in parallel by the administration in 1871-1885, which seriously affected natural resources (Rasul, 2007). Besides, deforestation for teak and tobacco plantations led to a severe effect on the local ecosystem during the monsoon season. To compensate for the loss of forest resources, the British government enacted the Forest Act 1927, which endorsed the Forest Department to expand reserve and protected areas, and impose monitoring and penalizing actions for any illegal trade (Rasul, 2007).

1.3.3 Post-colonial Pakistan Period (1947-1971)

After 190 years of British colonial control, in 1947 the Indian subcontinent was divided into two countries on the basis of 'two-nation' model. Based on Hindu-Muslim majority adversarial positions, India and Pakistan became independent countries without considering the other cultural and religious sentiments. However, indigenous inhabitants of the south-eastern CHT wanted to join the northeast Indian territory due to the identical culture and lifestyle with the Tripura, Mizoram, and Assam state of India, and some parts of them desired to unite with the southern Burma (Myanmar) as their ancestral roots were in Burma. Upholding this spirit, on the independence day on 15th August 1947, the Chakma and other small ethnic groups lifted up the Indian flag at Rangamati, and

along with few other ethnic groups, the Marma upraised the Burmese flag at Bandarban (Nasreen, 2017). During partition, the CHT and its surrounding area, which was supposed to be part of India, was adjusted and exchanged with "the Sikh-predominant Ferozepur and Zira subdivisions in the Punjab" (Mey, 1984, p. 98; cited in Arens, 1997, p. 1812). Although the natives of CHT strongly protested not to merge with Pakistan the CHT, the CHT and its people were added to the newly emerged country of Pakistan. In order to deescalate the unrest across the country, the newly formed government introduced several policies in the name of pro-people governance and development undermining the religious, cultural and ethnic rights of minorities which was the ultimate strategy of the central Pakistan state. This approach severely affected the customary subsistence practices of the CHT natives in particular, as they showed disloyalty to the new state of Pakistan by hoisting the Indian flag during the partition (Mey, 1984; Nasreen, 2017). Besides, the CHT was considered as a 'project area' due to its resourceful landscape and economic prospect (Gerharz, 2000, p. 27; Nasreen, 2017). However, between 1947-1964, the CHT Manual was modified repeatedly by different regimes of the government of Pakistan to lessen the 'totally excluded status'. This special position, introduced by the British colonials, was eventually obliterated by the military controlled government in 1964 (Arens, 1997, p. 1812). During the military regime that largely dominated by West Pakistan, this territory and its natives had continuously witnessed the usual migration from surrounding areas, immense shifting of state-funded poor Bengali settlers from the different parts of East Pakistan, military insurgency initiatives, and military-backed Bengali invasions. Furthermore, in this regime, the recognition of the CHT transformed from 'excluded area' into 'tribal area' through the Constitutional Act of 1962 (Nasreen, 2017, p. 74), and the term 'hill-men', coined by the British, officially became 'tribal people'. Uddin (2010, p. 288) argued that "'tribal' people was used in the sense of people who were 'primitive' in lifestyle, animist in religion, swidden cultivators in livelihood, 'nude', 'illiterate', 'uncivilised' and 'wild'". He also added that the declaration of 'tribal area' was "the state's politics of marginalisation that designated the Pahari as 'tribal' to indicate the people of a lower category and inferior in comparison to others in Pakistan" (Uddin, 2010, p. 288).

In the 1950s the life of the indigenous *paharis* in CHT underwent drastic changes due to the exploitative nature of governmental economic plans and policies. By abolishing the special status of the CHT, the Pakistan government promoted outsider Bengali traders, foreign aid organizations, and leasing companies to assimilate the CHT natives into the 'mainstream' that, in fact, accelerated the economic and political exploitation, and eventually launched industrial development projects in CHT. The government constructed the 'Karnaphuli paper mill' at Karnaphuli riverbank in 1953

funded by foreign aid agencies, together with a loan of $ 4.2 million from the World Bank (Arens, 1997, p. 1812). The paper mill required massive amounts of bamboo and soft wood that is still supplied from the CHT. Although it was recruited around ten thousand employees, the major portions of these jobs were appointed by the Bengalis, while very few numbers of indigenous *paharis* were hired in subordinate categories. Besides, the government built a 'Karnaphuli Rayon mill' in 1966 funded by external aid financing of Rs 1.3 million, with a similar consideration in terms of work opportunities for the indigenous locals (Arens, 1997, p. 1812). The massive destruction occurred in CHT when the government constructed the 'Kaptai dam' and 'hydroelectric project' with the help of USAID. Together with 21,853 hectares of cultivable land, 1,036 sq km were flooded as a result of the lake generated by the Kaptai dam (Arens, 1997, p. 1812; Dewan, 1990). This flood affected hundreds of thousands of indigenous people, including the Chakma *Raja* (king) palace, who became homeless and displaced without receiving any recompense, and eventually many migrated to India. The government also betrayed the indigenous *paharis* as the government promised to supply free electricity to all inhabitants of CHT, quite the reverse, the electricity was only facilitated to some pro-government elites which was less than one percent of the CHT dwellers untill the 1970s (EPW Report, 1978, p. 726; Nasreen, 2017, p. 74). In 1964, upon the suggestions of a Canadian company 'Forestal', the government introduced a significant number of market-based development projects such as horticulture, rubber, tobacco, and teak plantation in replace of *jhum* cultivation as this jhum farming was considered as less productive practices and threats to hill environment (Nasreen, 2017).

In the context of forest resource management, post-colonial Pakistan also adopted the same detrimental policies for extracting timber and other profitable resources that led to increased deforestation. A significant number of migrant Bengali dealers worked as suppliers of forest resources to mills, though many of the poorer *paharis* were contracted for the bamboo and wood compilation from the deep forests. Pahari natives served for Bengali traders and were paid for storing and carrying bamboo and wood to the adjacent rivers. These raw materials were received near the mills at Karnaphuli River points (Rasul, 2007). However, the central government also declared a substantial number of forestlands as 'protected areas' where jhum farming, and the bamboo and timber collection were controlled by DC officials. As the majority of indigenous people depend on forest resources and *jhum* cultivation, many of them were forced to enter the reserved forests for their subsistence. The paharis who became dependent on reserved forests became mostly marginalized and helpless due to displacement, deprivation, and dearth of livelihood

support. Through these forest policies, customary land distribution practices of indigenous communities eventually faced challenges, and the lives of Pahari locals were also met with endless threats of land grabbing by the Forest department. Besides, the government policy for the settlement of plainland Bengalis put further pressure on the hills and fortified the migration to the CHT to enlarge the composition of the Bengali population. Consequently, a decade after partition, the Bengali population multiplied five times than the Pahari locals in CHT, that was from 26,000 in 1951 to 119,000 in 1961 (Rasul, 2007, p. 158). Thus, the Bengali communities gradually became a major portion of the total population and established Bengali hegemony over the natives, and contributed to growing tensions surrounding the resource usage with the Pahari indigenous minorities of the CHT.

1.3.4 Post-colonial Bangladesh Period (1971-Present)

After nine months of bloody war between East and West Pakistan, Bangladesh became independent in 1971 as a new country in the spirit of Bengali nationalism. The unitary formation of nation-state building developed tension among indigenous communities, and a representative group of the *Pahari* natives represented their demands for recognition of distinct ethnic identity as 'Indigenous', self-autonomy, and reinstallation of the CHT Manual 1900 to the prime minister Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the father of the nation, in 1972 (Arens, 1997). A deep sense of Bengali nationalism instigated the new state to disregard the special categorization of cultural difference of the CHT. There were no fundamental changes in recognizing the ethnic minorities from the government side. Thereafter, the Pahari ethnic minorities formed a regional political party, the *Parbatya Chattogram Jana Sanghati Samiti* (PCJSS, in English 'Chittagong Hill Tracts Peoples Solidarity Association') along with its armed wing, the *Shanti Bahini*, to press their demands. After the brutal assassination of the Father of the Nation by the military in 1975, the political situation changed drastically and successive military-backed governments were formed which gradually worsened the situation in Chittagong Hill Tracts. During president Zia's regime, the military government fundamentally changed the constitution by replacing 'Bengali nationalism' with 'Bangladeshi nationalism' in which Pahari indigenous communities had no place. Between 1976 and 1983, the government reinforced the process of militarization in the name of securitization in CHT (Arens, 1997). Ahamed (Ahamed, 2014, p. 20) delineated that "these changes not only violated hill people's traditional rights and alienated them from their resources but also eroded the civil rights of the country". Since 1977, the relationship between the *Pahari* natives and the government has

gradually deteriorated because of resettlement of Bengali settlers with ration and land allotment, militarization in the CHT, and restriction of jhum cultivation and access to forest resources (Ahamed, 2014). These rehabilitation projects have also had a profound impact on the total ecosystem of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, "leading to deforestation, over-cultivation, inadequate use of fertilizers, hill-cutting, landslides and soil erosion, and the contamination of rivers, lakes and other aquifers" (Halim et al., p. 47-110; quoted in ANZDEC, March 2011, p. 10). The government started shifting the Bengali poor from plainlands to the CHT mainly to change the composition of the population to smoothen the process of militarization. During Zia's tenure, over 400,000 landless Bengalis were settled in the CHT and allotted arable and khas (state-owned land) lands of this area (Arens, 1997, p. 1813). What the state considered as *khas* lands is largely the indigenous *pahari*'s customarily distributed *jhum* lands and forestlands which *pahari*s hold as communal resources. The resettlement projects were validated with the underlying reason that the total territory of CHT represents around 10% of the landscape of the country and has only 1% of the state's total population (Huq, 2000; cited in Ahamed, 2014, p. 21). Several critics opined that the factual objective was to 'colonise' this region by changing the demographic configuration of the CHT (Ahamed, 2014; Dewan, 1990; Mohsin, 1997).

However, the leading goal of the militarization in the CHT was represented as the responses to the sudden assaults against the *Shanti Bahini* by counter-insurgency actions. These military armed responses were carried out in the name of local security and state sovereignty, and maintained a 'peaceful' coexistence between the Bengalis and *Pahari* natives. It was believed that the militarization additionally served to "'win the hearts and minds' of the natives by so-called 'friendship programs', for instance, income generating projects, construction of schools and temples, health care" (Arens, 1997, p. 1814; The CHT Commission, 1991). Moreover, Zia's tenure received a huge amount of foreign aid and loans to change the economic and political landscape of the CHT in the name of development. The government strongly asserted that the major crises in CHT were poverty, lack of infrastructural development, inadequate education, health hazards, and water security, in a nutshell, the underdevelopment, which required special attention to the CHT and its people (Arens, 1997). Considering these issues, the government established a development authority called 'Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board' (CHTDB) to implement wide-ranging development projects and programs that were believed to resolve the CHT crises. It meant that crises should be resolved through development policies, which actually undermined the cultural and ethnic rights of Pahari natives. As Arens (1997, p. 1811) argued that "development aid to Bangladesh

has, both directly and indirectly, not only added to continuing militarization of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and human rights violations, but also to a systematic destruction of the mode of production, way of life and culture of the Jumma people". The leading development policies of the CHTDB were limited to the "building road, telecommunications, electrification and resettlement of the Jumma people in 'model' villages or 'cluster' villages" (Arens, 1997, p. 1814) which ultimately facilitated the military movement and rapid actions against the indigenous armed troops. These developments have not eventually brought about any changes in the economic and political lives of the *Pahari jummas*. Rather, it has given rise to multifaceted tensions, conflicts and deprivation among the indigenous locals in CHT. For example, the beginning of the cash crop mode of production pushed the Pahari locals towards the market system. As the market was mostly controlled by the Bengali traders, the *paharis* were deprived of a fair price for their *jhum* produce. As a result, market deprivation emerged from economic tension among the indigenous *paharis*. During president Ershad's regime from 1983-1991, the government declared that the local administration would be devolved to 'elected' members of the Hill District Council (HDC) and was implemented accordingly, but the Pahari natives largely denied this HDC formation due to the support and legalization of the Bengali resettlement program, and the HDCs have not ensured any legislative securities for the rights and recognition of Pahari natives (Arens, 1997).

In the postcolonial Bangladesh, the *pahari* natives experienced a crisis of recognition through the 'politics of nationalism' (Mohsin, 1997). In this politics of representation, the state discovered a pristine recognition of the indigenous locals as *upajati* (meaning like 'sub-nation') to categorize them as an inferior race. The word *upajati* is typically applied as equal to 'tribal' that Bengalis often name them *upajati* as opposite to *jatee* (nation) or as part of nation but not a perfect nation, denoting that the indigenous communities are 'incomplete, or subhuman and half-wild or a sub-nation' (Uddin, 2010, p. 290). Uddin (2010, p. 290) also argued that "the invention of upajatee reflects the state's policy of building a homogenous nation-state for only Bengalis, who are seen as occupying a superior position whilst the Pahari belong to a lower grade". This pejorative representation of identity has been endorsed and popularized in recent times by the (social) media, reporters, political thinkers, political leaders, development actors, experts, NGOs, government officials, researchers and lastly Bengali tourists. After independence, few academicians accelerated this issue in their scholarly works. For example, Uddin (2010, pp. 283-294) quoted the writing of a government official named Abdus Sattar, in which Sattar's well-cited book, *In the Sylvan Shadows* first published in 1971, categorized the Pahari natives as "wild tribes, crude, primitive and

aboriginal'; their culture was 'exotic culture'; '…they take meat of all animals'; and '[the Khumi]…are aggressive…and ferocious race'". Besides, in contemporary scholarly writings, the Bangladeshi scholars has spontaneously classified the indigenous *paharis* as 'tribal', 'aboriginals' and 'hill-tribes' (Ahsan, 1995; Ali, 1993; Chowdhury, 2006; Shelley, 1992; quoted in Uddin, 2010, pp. 283-294). However, the ethnic minorities of the CHT have adopted to denote their identity as *Paharis* to distinguish them from other indigenous communities of the plainlands. Besides, the PCJSS recommended a term for the collective recognition as 'Jumma' for *Pahari* ethnic communities on the basis of their shared practice of *jhum* cultivation as their fundamental subsistence. In fact, the construction of identity categorization implies a fundamental product of the politics of nationalism and cultural difference through state policies of marginalization of indigenous people of the CHT. Changes the terms from 'hill men' to 'tribal' to *upajati* (sub-nation) to 'small ethnic minorities' in representing *Pahari* natives reproduced the colonial and postcolonial legacy, the unequal power relations, and the exoticization by the development policies in CHT (Ching, 2019; Uddin, 2010).

The 'CHT Accord', popularly recognized as the 'peace accord', was officially signed on 2nd December 1997 between the then government and the PCJSS that apparently ended the bloody conflict (Amnesty International, 2013, p. 17). In this accord, the government promised to form a new administrative system which was supposed to ensure to construct a self-governance with priority given to the indigenous locals of the CHT. It was the fundamental demand of *paharis* at the time of numerous meetings with government representatives and finally, both sides agreed to endorse the 'peace accord' accordingly. A two-layer of local governance was set up, such as Hill District Council (HDC) and CHT Regional Council (CHTRC) along with the customary administrative practice, followed by a distinct ministerial body titled 'Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs' (MoCHTA) according to the accord. However, the relationship between the state and the indigenous communities have gradually worsened due to the denial of recognition and rightful participation of the indigenous communities in the decision-making process, and continued to be burdened with a silent sense of suspicion. Although several points of the 'peace accord' were met, some crucial prerequisites still were not fulfilled. Furthermore, a breakup in the *Pahari* regional party thwarted the circumstances and dwindled their bartering strength. Resisting the 'peace accord', a group of indigenous folks developed a separate group called the 'United Peoples' Democratic Front' (UPDF) and blamed the PCJSS leaders who traded off the '*Pahari* struggle for regional autonomy' to the state (Uddin and Gerhaz, 2017). As a result, the peace accord was not fully implemented due to the indifference of the state as well as the deviance of the indigenous *Paharis* to the movement for self-

determination. However, the state endorsed an Act-2010 in 2011 upholding that 'there are no indigenous people in Bangladesh, only minorities', and naming them 'small ethnic groups' (Uddin, 2016, p. 323; quoted in Ching, 2019, p. 127). The government has deliberately tabooed the word 'indigenous' and advised development actors not to denote it for the *pahari* ethnic minorities of the CHT. Therefore, the demand for recognition as 'indigenous' led to 'a counter-hegemonic discourse' (Ching, 2019, p. 128).

The Government reasserted its promise to completely fulfill the 'Peace Accord' by introducing a new five years project 'Strengthening Inclusive Development in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (SID-CHT)' funded by UNDP in alliance with USAID and Danida (UNDP, 9th July, 2017). The MoCHTA as an implementing actor undertakes, in general, leadership and accountability for the plans and accomplishments and is responsible for the outcomes. UNDP acts as a logistic supporter along with the development agenda of the CHTDF. Since 2003, the CHTDF has been working on major development projects with a broader framework in the inaccessible zone of the CHT in collaboration with European Union, USA, Canada, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Australia, Japan, and CARE (UNDP, 9th July, 2017). The calculated amount for the SID-CHT project was "US$ 31,629,363 out of which about USD 19.6 million is being funded by Denmark (USD 8.55 mil) trough Danida, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Development Fund (USD 1.55 mil), USAID (USD 3.49 mil), UNDP (USD 1 mil) and the Government of Bangladesh (USD 5 mil)" (UNDP, 9th July, 2017). However, such large-scale development plans and projects have never addressed the aspirations and needs of the indigenous people. Without considering the foremost crises, for instance, land disputes, recognition of identity, lack of indigenous own form of development, and restrictions of customary eco-cultural sustainability practices of the pahari indigenous communities, establishing sustainable development and sustainability goals would be a fantasy for the CHT and its people.

1.4 Tourism Economy in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is full of cultural and natural diversity, for example, hills, canals, rivers, waterfalls, sea beaches, and also cultural heritages and archaeological locations. It is home to three UNESCO heritage sites such as the ancient mosque of Bagerhat, the remains of the Buddhist monastery at Paharpur and the Sundarbans of Khulna, the world's largest mangrove forest (Sayeda *et al*., 2020, p. 4). Although Bangladesh has rich resources to develop tourism destinations, the industry is yet to flourish to its international standards. In the financial year 2018, tourism directly contributed to GDP

(Gross Domestic Product) of Bangladesh which made up a 2.2%, while the global contribution represented 10.4%, and South Asia constituted 3.6% (WTTC, 2018; Sayeda *et al*., 2020, p. 4). Besides, 1.363 billion international tourists were welcomed to the global destinations, whereas Bangladesh entertained only 1.026 million tourists in 2017 (The World Bank, 2019; Sayeda *et al*., 2020, p. 4). Although statistical data imply that the prospect of tourism as an avenue for supplementing economic progress and contributing to the creation of employment and business entrepreneurship indicates a significant venture, tourism development in Bangladesh is still evolving very slowly by a global benchmark. Since independence from 1971 to 1990, there was no specific national tourism policy in Bangladesh. With the support of UNDP and UNWTO, the state formulated a strategic master plan for tourism promotion in 1990. In 1992, government developed a tourism policy with the tourists' demands, and restructured and named it as 'National Tourism Policy' (NTP) in 2009 (Hassan and Kokkranikal, 2018, pp. 1-9). The Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism (MoCAT), Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC), and Bangladesh Tourism Board (BTB) are the main public actors in Bangladesh which jointly work as the National Tourism Organization (NTO) for executing the plans and policies of tourism development. In the FY1997-FY2002, it stated that BPC is responsible to launch wide-ranging plans for upholding Bangladesh as a target for tourist visitation and encourage Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) for the infrastructural development to promote tourism (Sayeda *et al*., 2020, p. 10). In the next fiscal year, the state highlighted few phases to accelerate tourism industry where a considerable number of protected and reserved areas and environmentally sensitive zones were classified to foster biodiversity conservation and eco-tourism (General Economics Division, 2011; Sayeda *et al*., 2020, p. 10). Furthermore, the government had intense interest to reinforce private venture in tourism business to boost sustainable tourism in the CHT, and Cox's Bazar in particular. Despite having huge potential and plentiful natural resources to build up a versatile tourism industry, the state has not been successful in most cases, as revealed in national and global statistical data. Although Bangladesh has no substantial improvement to attract international tourists, domestic tourism has recently contributed significantly to the national economy. Growth in GDP per capita from US$ 781.15 in 2010 to US$ 1698.26 in 2018 indicates an exponential curve in domestic tourism economy (WB, 2020; Rahman *et al.*, 2020, p. 289). Moreover, over the last 20 years, the contribution of tourism industry to the GDP of Bangladesh was eye-catching which increased noticeably from 1.9 to 13.2 billion US$, though it declined to 11.92% in 2019 due to the covid 19 pandemic (Knoema, 2019). The figures touched an unparallel peak of 62.4 % in December 2017 and a steepest decline of -44.3 % in December 2020 (see Table-10) (CEIC, 2020).

In addition, the tourism industry has made up 8.07% of overall job opportunities, as stated by the BBS's Tourism Satellite Account 2020, which was showed in the statistics of the financial year of 2018-19 (Byron and Hasan, 28th November 2021).

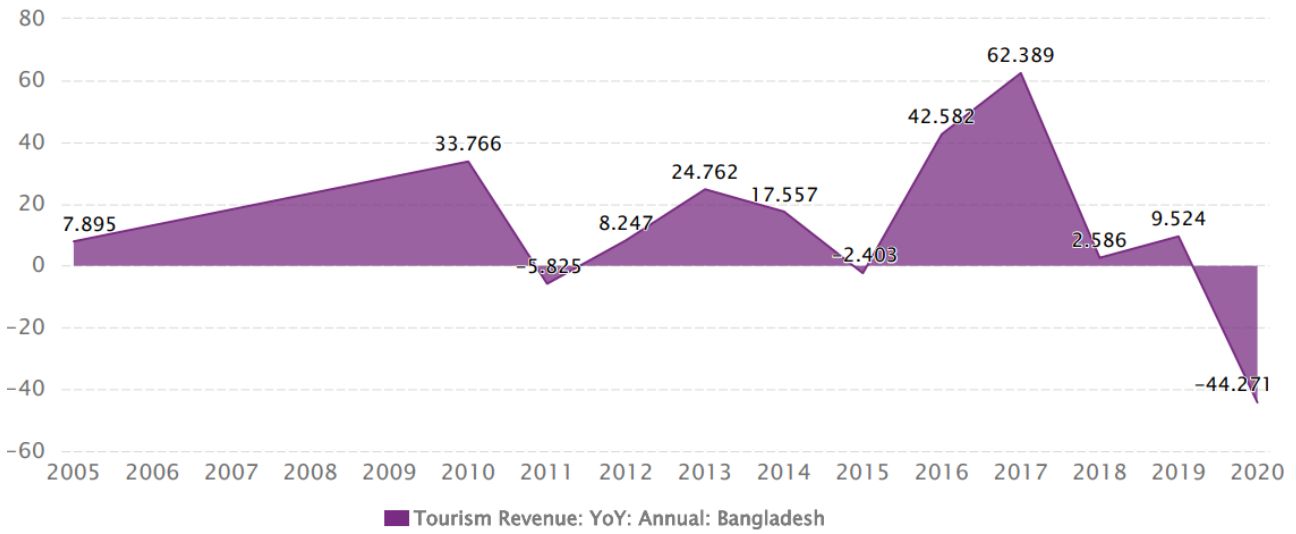


Table-10: Tourism Revenue Growth (2005-2020) Source: ceicdata.com

However, tourism industry of Bangladesh has immeasurably experienced a drastic loss of Tk26,490 crore (€2.78 billion) in 2021 caused by the irresistible Covid 19 pandemic, informed in a recent WTTC statement (Bhuiyan, 13th June 2021). The WTTC's report of 2021 anticipated that the state's tourism industry met a GDP of Tk 53,960 crore (€5.35 billion) in 2020, whereas it was estimated Tk80,450 crore (€8.78) in 2019 (Bhuiyan, 13th June 2021). Henceforth, around half million job holders dependent on the tourism business have lost their employments in 2021 during the covid catastrophe. In 2019, the tourism sector offered 1.86 million employments, and 1.45 million jobs in 2020 with a slight dip in the job market when Covid 19 first hit Bangladesh in early 2020.

Table-11: The loss of Tourism contribution during Covid 19 pandemic. Source: WTTC (quoted in Bhuiyan, 13th June 2021)

Prior to the 'Peace Accord', tourism in the Chittagong Hill Tracts was very limited and in its infancy due to bloody clashes between the military and native troops, as a result, tourists only visited a few 'safe' spots around the *Sadar* (city) area. However, the number of tourist visits have markedly enlarged particularly just after the accord which actually made the Chittagong Hill Tracts a new potential tourist destination and, conversely, it also developed a new struggle for the existence of the indigenous locals. The government does not have any official records or sufficient statistical data on tourist arrivals and tourism income from tourism businesses in Chittagong Hill Tracts. How the development of tourism has accelerated in the last 20 years after the peace accord can be easily estimated by the fact that the development of hotels, motels, resorts, homestay services, restaurants, tourist spots, tourist transportation, tour operators, and infrastructural changes have significantly crafted the CHT as a main attractive destination to the domestic tourists. For example, between 2000 and 2010, 58 hotels and 47 restaurants were built in Bandarban (BBS, 2011), and in Sajek, how developing the tourism industry can be figured out from the number of resorts enlisted 83 in 2020 where in 2016 it was only 6, according to Cottage Owners Association of Sajek (COAS) (Ali, 14th June 2021), which were flourished after the construction of 70km of road from Khagrachari *Sadar* to Ruilui Para. According to Sajek Resort Owner Association, around 7000 tourists visit Sajek every day in winter season. Though these 120 cottages in Sajek can offer accommodation to approximately 4,000-5000 tourists (Kalerkantho, 24th December 2022). After peace accord,

government encouraged private venture launching new style of modern restaurants, hotels and resorts along with military-invested luxury resorts. The indigenous communities also offer a homestay or homestead hospitality as it is highly sought for tourists to experience the indigenous lifestyle. However, the rising hospitality services and opportunities in CHT are determined by the neo-liberal market economy, which is based on natural and cultural diversity rather than well-planned policies of local and national governance. Although NTP 2010 emphasized on setting up 'community tourism' and 'community homestead' through local communities with logistic support of private enterprise and regional administration (MoCAT, 2010), it is unspecified "who shall prepare and execute a regional tourism policy or plan for CHT, and how such a plan shall be operationalized and integrated into the national plan" (Chakma and Chakma, 2016; quoted in Rahman, 2020, p. 279). The state introduced a "Strategic Framework for Sustainable Development in the CHT", which also recognized the need for local involvement in community-based and ecotourism development (Rahman, 2020, p. 280). This agenda reflected that

> A comprehensive tourism master plan including development of new destinations and trails, as well as product and service development is required to help tap the potential of tourism in the CHT, including in the Kaptai lake area. Specific measures are required to engage local people in planning and developing tourism in order to create ownership and ensure that the benefits of tourism are accrued locally (Tripura, 2016, p. 136; cited in Rahman, 2020, p. 280).

Development activities funded and implemented by the national and local governments, international, national and local organizations directly and indirectly promote tourism development in CHT. The government has introduced numerous policies and projects to improve socioeconomic condition in the CHT to develop the livelihoods of the indigenous communities of the CHT, particularly after the peace accord. For example, CHTRD project, supported by ADB, has been developing local infrastructure; income generating schemes and livestock facilities. These efforts are supporting the socioeconomic stability which become effective tools for expanding tourism development. Besides, there are national and international NGOs working in the CHT for inclusive and sustainable development. National NGOs, for instance Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC: credit, primary education), *ASHA* (especially microcredit), *Manusher Jonno* Foundation (MJF: human rights, primary education), *Podokkhep* (especially micro-credit), Community Development Center (CODEC: human development), Bangladesh *Nari Progati Sangha* (BNPS: women's rights), Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD: environment and indigenous rights), and international organizations, particularly, the United Nations Development

Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and ADB, work with the local agencies as partner actors (Roy, November 2012, pp. 1-37). So far it is noticeable that the ADB is the leading funding agency participating in development actions that visibly pursue tourism promotion through indigenous people's spontaneous involvement. However, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) recently works for enabling poor rural people to overcome poverty. The government and its national and international actors approved and implemented several projects in CHT. Here, I have mentioned a few projects which help to promote the tourism industry to a great extent.

Motive	Implementing Actors	Target Groups	Grant Amount	Project Area	Year
Integrated sustainable hill farming technology project for indigenous women	Organization Assistance for the Livelihood of the Origin (ALO)	Chakma, Tripura and Marma	US$15,000	Three districts of Chittagong Hill Tracts	2008
Mainstreaming education through mother tongue and cultural heritage	Organization Centre for Indigenous Peoples Research and Development (CIPRAD)	Garo, Chakma, and Marma	US$16,000	Forested area of Modhupur (Tangail District) and border area Nalitabari (Sherpur District) between Bangladesh and India (Meghalaya), and Bandarban, CHT.	2008
Livelihood Security of Jumia	Organization Community	Communities of Paindu and Ruma Sadar	US$26,900	Bandarban Hill District	2007

(swidden people) bringing diversification in cultivation	Advancement Forum (CAF)	Union under Ruama Upazila in the Bandarban Hill District,			
socio-economic development of Chittagong Hill Tracts and confidence building among communities towards a sustainable peace	European Commission, UNDP / Ministry of Chittagong Hills Tracts Affairs	Indigenous Communities	€42 million	Three districts of Chittagong Hill Tracts	2009
Planning to develop about 36,000 kilometers of rural roads	The Local Government Engineering Department (LGED)	Areas of Indigenous communities living in remote areas	US $26 billion	Rural Hill Areas of CHT	by 2025
Strengthening Inclusive Development in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (SID-CHT)	MoCHTA, SAARC, UNDP, USAID and Danida	Indigenous communities	US$ 31,629,363	Three districts of Chittagong Hill Tracts	since 2003
Sustainable Rural	ADB, MoCHTA, and LGED	Construction of Roads, bridges and culverts in	First Phase $60 million	Three districts of Chittagong Hill Tracts	Ongoing projects

Infrastructure Improvement		rural Indigenous areas	Second Phase $96 million		

Table-12: Projects implemented in CHT. Source: Roy, November, 2012; European Commission, 2011; ADB, June, 2011; UNDP, 2017[2].

Despite having various development actions, the poverty in CHT is much more higher than in the rest of the country because of the local political conflicts and lack of sustainable governance of local administration as it is observed by the UNDP study.

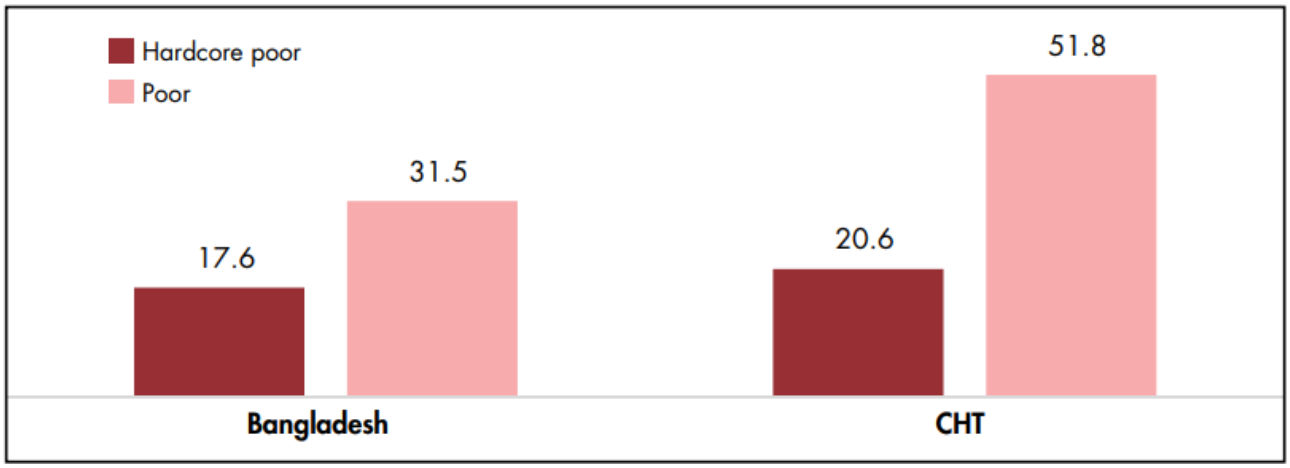


Table-13: Poverty in Bangladesh and CHT Source: CHTDF and UNDP, 2014; GoB and FAO, 2013, quoted in Rasul, May 2015.

The government tries to give priority to the indigenous locals for the inclusive and participatory development through the mainstream development pursuits. The MOCHTA and ICIMOD organized a workshop on "Destination Management Plan" in 2017 where the government declared a plan to brand the CHT as a 'business hub' and to develop an international standard tourist zone (Ahmed, 2017). Moreover, the MoCHTA is more concerned in promoting cultural heritage for tourism. The tourism developments carried out by the state and its actors are mostly a shared action amongst the MOCHTA, the MoCAT and military agency, though MoCAT officially transferred the tourism management to the CHTRC and HDCs in 2014 (Ahmed, 2017). Furthermore, the army-led construction projects, for example, Sajek Valley, a 70km road construction from Khagrachari Sadar to Sajek, the 5-star Marriott Hotel and Amusement Park at Nilgiri in Bandarban are in fact noticeable

[2] https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/development-cht-over-31-million-us-dollars (Accessed on 10th September, 2023)

works to accelerate tourism in which valley, resort, hotel and parks employ 300-400 locals directly and another 1000 indirectly in rural hilly areas in CHT. The government and its Forest Department along with Army Welfare Trust also built Eco-parks, Heritage park, Nilgiri resort, Chimbuk resort and other tourist spots built in CHT which created a new avenue to develop small and medium enterprises, entrepreneurs, employments, multi-purpose cooperative business, and capacity building for income generation. In 2008, VIATOR, later handed over to HEED, Bangladesh introduced an intensive handicrafts training programme in Bandarban, including all eleven indigenous communities, funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) (Hoque, 2020, p. 117). The goal of this training was to support handicraft workers of rural indigenous minorities and build a capacity for their tourism-centric weaving enterprises and a sustainable livelihood prospect through the indigenous materials and artifacts (VIATOR Bangladesh Ltd., 2010; Hoque, 2020). Moreover, due to the seasonal jhum cultivation, income from tourism through weaving, making basketry, and crafting cultural antiques contribute to the family expenses which uplift the women's position both in the family and in the community. Thus, indigenous locals are able to represent their cultural heritage through handicrafts, Basketry, and Liquor making. Interestingly enough, women earn more than men in terms of number of involvement in touristic enterprises. In addition, women are able to handle familial crises through touristic income and save their earnings for the future more than men as it was evident in this study. Hoque (2020, p. 205) reported that

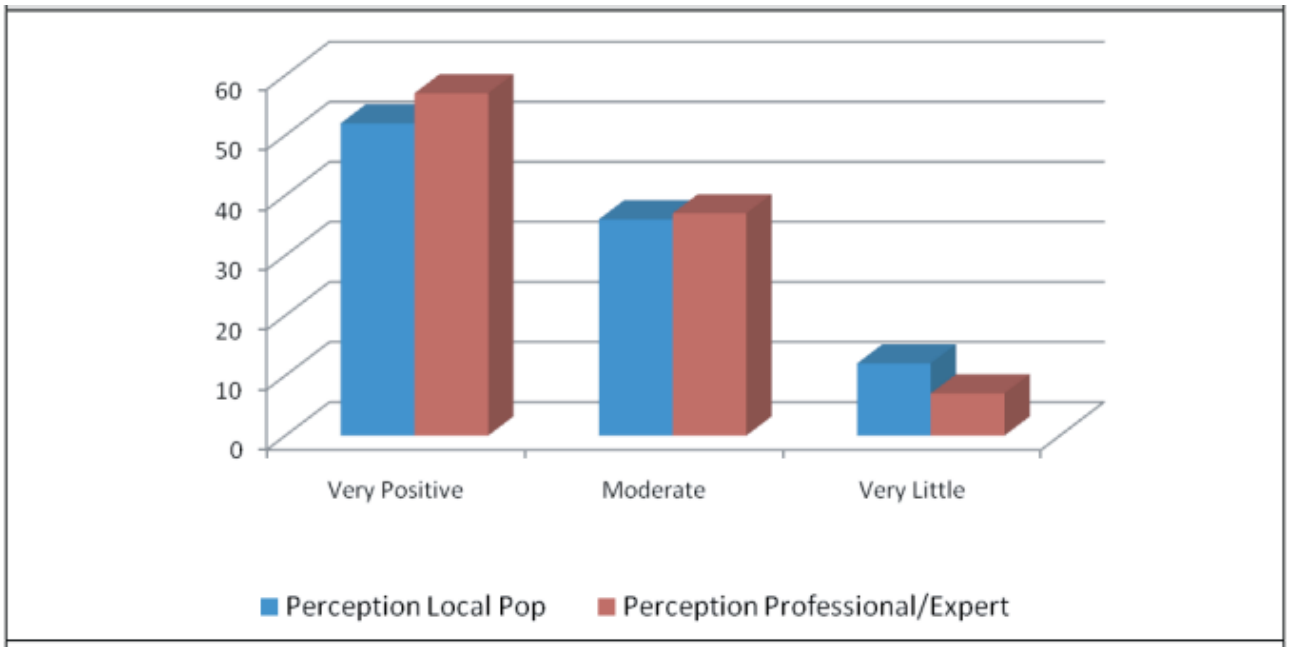
> public and private policies created a high level of cooperation among the community members in terms of community-based handicrafts business, communal management and sharing, and mutual transaction and understanding, and ethno-centric employment centering on the state and NGO-facilitated tourism involvement.

It also developed intracommunal bondage as well as their sociopolitical empowerment, which helps leadership development and a sense of shared responsibility and cooperative attitude towards each other on a monetary purpose (Hoque, 2020, p. 207).

The local government promotes cultural and religious ceremony to keep cultural heritage authentic by providing financial and technical support and ensuring security at major events of the indigenous communities. For example, the traditional Raj Punnyah Festivals, supported by CHTDF in the Bohmong Circle and the Mong Circle are organized by the indigenous locals to pay annual tributes to their respective honorable *Raja* (king) in a decorative manner, as I elaborated in Chapter Five. With the patronage of the government, indigenous communities celebrate their cultural

festivals, which promote cultural exchange with non-indigenous tourists, and also build confidence in social cohesion and peace building in the CHT. Another example is that MoCHTA and the CHTDF have jointly organized the '5th Cultural Diversity Festival 2011' during December 2011 (CHTDF and UNDP, April 2012). The main purposes of this event were to share and uphold uniqueness of cultural diversity of CHT towards wider Bengali tourists. CHTDF and UNDP (April 2012, p. 38) stated that a platform for better understanding of the CHT and its socioeconomic situation and demographics was created through the celebrations and interactions of the CHT entrepreneurs and Bengali people. Moreover, the government built a 'Tribal Cultural Museum' at Rangamati in the Chittagong Hill Tracts in 1978 managed by the 'Tribal Cultural Institute'[3]. It preserves fundamental cultural artifacts of all the indigenous communities exhibiting their customary, sociocultural and historical ritualistic objects which are of great significance to tourists, so that people from different cultural backgrounds are able to experience a cultural exchange.

However, according to the data of MoCHTA, the overall jobless number in CHT is about 0.2 million. It is projected that tourism will create nearly 40% of the employment opportunity for the indigenous natives (Mowla, 2013). 'Tourism Vision 2020' declared by the state has targeted 1.3 million tourist's arrival in CHT in 2020, and tourism industry will add 5% GDP to the national economy (Mowla, 2013). Tourism has potential positive outcome to the rural livelihood of the community as it was shown in the Table-14.



[3]. http://bdtrek.blogspot.com/2013/12/tribal-museum-rangamati-bangladesh.html (Accessed on 27th September, 2023)

Table-14: Perception on Tourism Impact. Source: Mowla, 2013.

Tourism in CHT encompasses multisectoral factors where indigenous locals are engaged in different levels, for instance, farming and non-farming sectors. Ahamed (2022, p. 56) depicted that

> "locals who are involved in tourism as commodity sellers, tourist guides, home stay services providers, hotel or restaurant employees, and producers, stated that they had an average annual income of around BDT 55000 from tourism last year against the entire household average annual net income of BDT 135000 from all sources. The average annual earing of a tourist guide is BDT 50000, a home stay owner can earn around 65000 annually, a handicrafts seller can make an annual average profit of BDT 25000, and sellers of other products can earn an average of BDT 17000 annually from tourism sectors (see Table- 15).

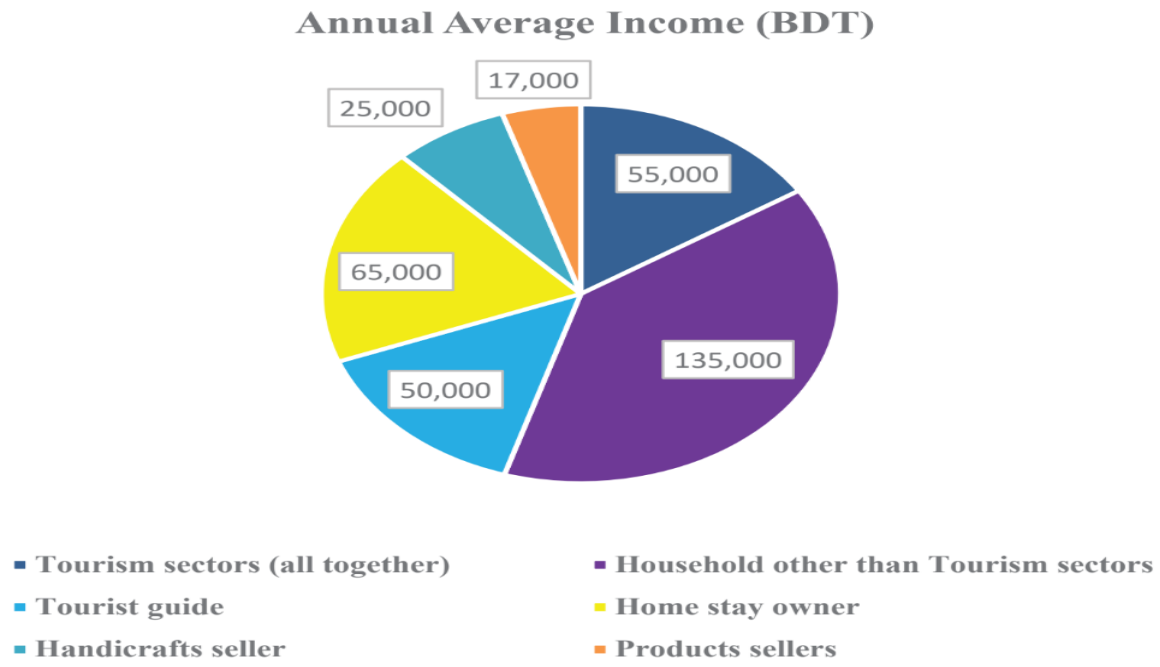


Table-15: Income sectors in tourism Source: Ahamed, 2022, p. 57

Furthermore, it was revealed in ICIMOD report of 'Tourism Destination Management' that tourism in CHT has at present driven a most important economic force, and in Bandarban, in particular, over Tk 1 billion per year are spent by tourists (ICIMOD, 2017) that implies Bandarban as a most desired place for tourists followed by Sajek valley. The report has basically focused on the tourism of Bandarban and aimed several largescale goals, for instance, to rise the tourists' number to visit Bandarban by 10% per year; to enhance the everyday expenses per local tourist between Tk 1,550 and Tk 2,500; to escalate the proportion of overnight stay in any Bandarban tourist spots from 37% to 45%; to contribute to the local economy more than 70% of visitor's expenses; to promote

indigenously produced handicrafts and wooden antiques from Tk 200 to Tk 500 per tourist; and to guarantee more than 80% of employments in tourism for the indigenous locals (ICIMOD, 2017, p. vii). However, government initiatives and policies have not met the aspirations of the locals and have not ensured sustainable and pro-poor tourism development in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, rather these have created tensions amidst the indigenous communities due to the eviction of jhumlands of *Pahari* locals for the tourism resorts, hotels and spots in the three hill districts of CHT.

1.5 Resistance to Tourism Development in CHT

The Government announced 2016 as a tourism year, and in 2017 the MoCAT emphasized to create "a business hub for South and Southeast Asia using utmost potential of huge resources of the hilly region" (The Independent, 2017; quoted in Ahmed, 2017, p. 131). The ministry has also shown its intention to develop a world-class tourism destination, although tourism in the Chittagong Hill Tracts currently only entertains to domestic tourists. The militarization in the name of security has caused creating an unrest environment which force to restrict to the foreign tourists to visit the CHT. Nevertheless, in order to boost up the tourism economy with foreign earnings, the MoCAT has singled out 15 new naturally diverse and ecologically sensitive tourist sites in the CHT to facilitate the expansion of the tourism industry and the visit of international tourists (Ahmed, 2017, p. 132). Due to the ignorance of *pahari* locals in the planning and decision making process of tourism development policy in CHT, *Pahari* regional political parties have raised their voice against this decision of location selection by the state and its actors. The MOCHTA, as it was formed in accordance with the 'peace accord' and its responsibility is to prioritize the betterment of the CHT and its people, in reality is more concerned in fostering tourism in the CHT, and is jointly working with the MoCAT. Indigenous protestors and public intellectuals have repeatedly made resistance to tourism development and pressed their worries over the jhumland grabbing and eviction from their ancestral homeland through tourism. The state and its public and private actors are endlessly enlarging the tourism spots on indigenous lands without discussing with the Pahari indigenous minorities, and rather deliberately showing reluctance about the displacement. More than 1700 acres of lands were occupied by the military and military-backed leasing companies for tourist spots and luxury hotels which evicted more than 700 *pahari* families from 26 villages as the *Pahari* political parties claimed (Chakma and Chakma, 2015; quoted in Ahmed, 2017, p. 135). Apart from encroachment of forestlands by the FD, there are many cases of evictions of jhumland and ancestral land for tourism development across the CHT. In this context, activists, political parties and tribal

communities organized joint resistance several times, but could not create a strong force to compel the government to accept their demands. For example, Ahmed (2017, p. 128) represented a case of land grabbing that Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority (BEZA) has announced the construction of 'Alutila Special Tourism Zone' on 700 acres of land in Khagrachhari district. Though the state identified these lands as *khas* (state's owned land), around 518 pahari families, who were largely Tripura community, resided on that lands. These families mostly depended on *jhum* cultivation in these lands for their subsistence. Moreover, this special tourist zone has encroached upon the land of schools, temples and shops owned by indigenous *paharis*. However, in October 2016, a scheme, a conspiracy by state-backed actors to build a special tourism zone at Khagrachari was scrapped in the face of agitation by *pahari* political parties, activists and local Tripura communities. Furthermore, other well-known examples are the establishment of a tourist spot popularly known as Sajek Valley in Ruilui para (village) by evicting 65 *pahari* indigenous families from two villages through the military forces; In Ruma, Bawm residents were evicted and *Aninda* tourist site was set up; In Bandarban *Sadar*, Dola Mru Para (Jiban Nagar), Kapru Para (Nilgiris), Chimbuk Sixteen Mile, Y Junction (Twelve Mile) and the development of various tourist spots occupying 600 acres of land in Keokrodong Hills are particularly noteworthy (Chakma and Chakma, August 2016). Moreover, the government and its private actors set up several Eco-parks in *pahari* indigenous territories, for instance, Alutila Eco-park of Khagrachari, and Chimbuk Eco-park of Bandarban. The government has at present taken up about 2270 hectares land for Chimbuk Eco-park and similarly acquired 2250 hectares land for developing a Sangu-Matamuhari or Sangu Wildlife Sanctuary in Bandarban (Chakma and Chakma, August 2016). These eco-parks are connected with the ethno-ecological setting of Pahari indigenous minorities. The latent purpose to set up eco-park in customarily owned indigenous territories is to develop nature-based or ecotourism in the name of biodiversity and forest conservation. However, Mru communities together with other Pahari ethnic locals living in Bandarban protested and organized a human chain at Shahbagh, Dhaka in March, 2021 against "the construction of a five-star hotel and tourist spot in Chimbuk Hill area by R&R Holdings Limited, a concern of Sikder Group" (Das, 9th November 2020). They organized a unique protest through cultural showdown, and played a *ploong* flute (a traditional musical instrument) as a language of resistance against the eviction of Mru families from their inherited homelands (see Figure-15). The Sikder Group has tried to seize around 400 hectares of hill land in the Mru inhabited areas for the sake of building a luxury hotel and developing a tourist spot. A Mru *Karbari* (village chief of Kaprupara) claimed that if the blueprint is executed, it will force nearly 11,000 Mru shifting farmers

to be displaced from their cultivable *jhum* land (Das, 9th November 2020). He also narrated the intention of creating a water block by occupying their sacred land of temple and more importantly the water source.

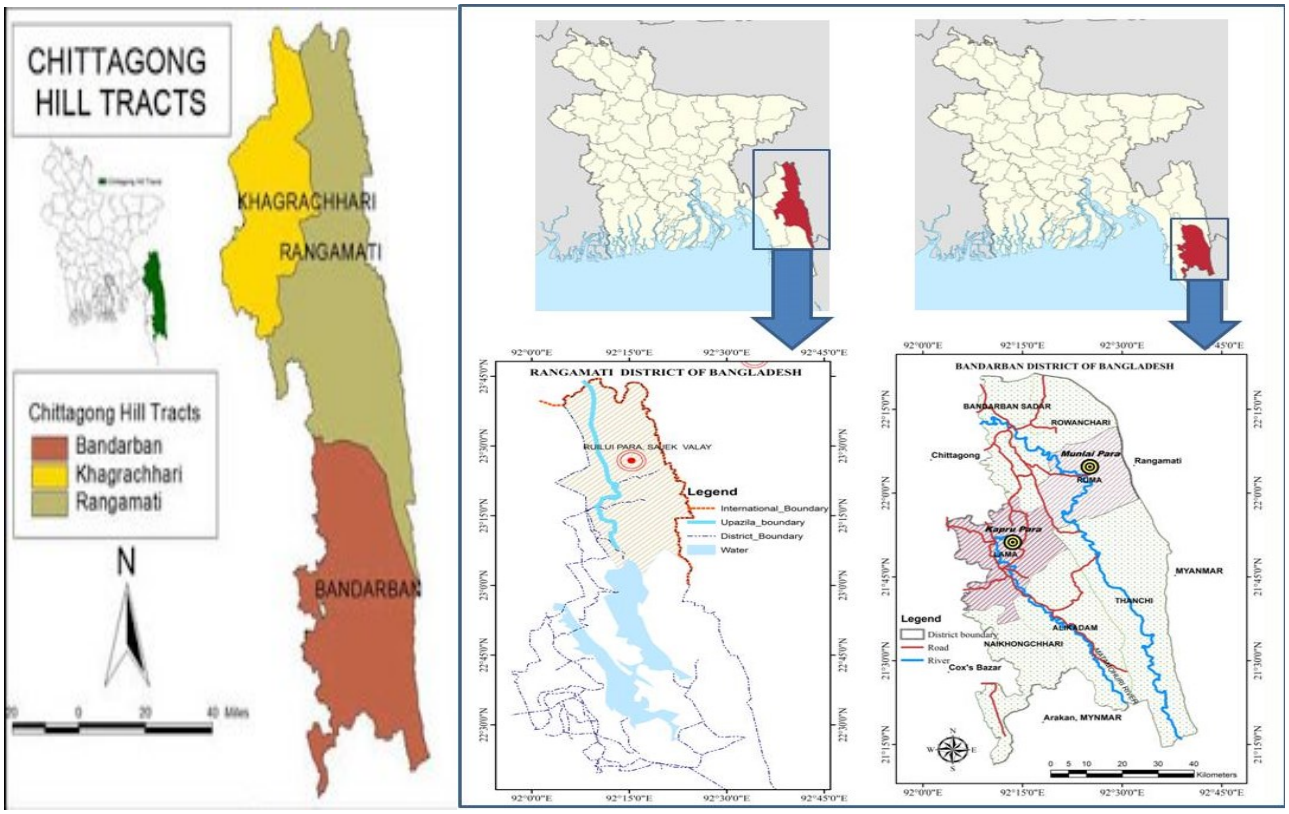
Figure-3: A Cultural Showdown against the construction of five-star hotel for tourists. Source: (Lasker, 02nd March 2021)

In November, the Mru community also arranged another human chain and demonstration at Cheragi Hill in Chittagong City. Rather than vocalizing slogans, the beat of drums and sound of indigenous *ploong* flute echoed throughout the hills, perhaps resonating the pain of the Mru's hearts for their land—an element of their identity—they are about to lose (Abrar, 19th November 2020). An indigenous Mru protestor angrily asserted in the rally that "It would be far better an option if you (the government) kill us all rather than driving us away from our homes, thereby taking away our sources of livelihood and life" (Abrar, 19th November 2020). According to informants of the study, although there is no hope to stop this continuous land eviction for tourism development, and the interventions of public enterprise and private leasing groups, *Pahari* indigenous people rather intend to be involved in the decision-making process through rightful participation, and foster their own form of tourism development with the combination eco-cultural diversity of CHT.

1.6 Research Sites

Based on nine months of ethnographic field study, I carried out in the multi-ethnic settings of different locations of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh between 2021 and 2022. For the fieldwork, I have selected three sites with multi-ethnic setting which have socio-political and touristic significance. I have mainly three *para*s (villages) such as Ruilui para (Sajek), Munlai para,

and Kapru para (Chimbuk) in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, although I have visited most of the tourist spots in Khagrachari and Bandarban district of the CHT along with adjacent indigenous villages. I spent four months in Ruilui para, three months in Munlai para, and two months in Kapru para. I have detailed in various chapters (chapter three, four and five) the settings in which, why, and how I conducted the field research. I have briefly introduced the research areas below-



Map-2: The Three Hill Districts of Chittagong Hill Tracts. Three Study Sites in CHT
Source: (Acharjee, 3rd August, 2019)

Ruilui Para

Ruilui para is located in Sajek union (union is a small unit of local governance) under Baghaichari *upazila* (sub-district) of Rangamati district. Sajek consists of 123 *para*s (villages) in Sajek union. The total population of indigenous communities is around 50000 (Dhar, 8th July 2020).

Map-3: Google Map of Sajek Valley, Ruilui para(Study area-1) Source: Google Map

Sajek is one of the tourist attractions of the CHT. Sajek Valley is known as the 'Queen of Hills and Roof' of Rangamati. Sajek Valley is situated on the northern border of the Indian state of Mizoram, and the state of Tripura in India to the north of Sajek. Ali (14th June 2021) stated that Sajek Valley that once witnessed insurgencies now showcases Bangladesh's cultural diversity engaging people of different ethnicities in developing tourism in the area for their economic benefit and social uplifting. Sajek is the largest union in Bangladesh; Its area is 702 square miles. Sajek is composed of the two neighborhoods Ruilui para and Kanglak para. However, most of the main tourism is centered on Ruilui para. Established in 1885, the height of Ruilui para is about 1720 feet above sea level. Kanglak Para is situated on Kanglak Hill at an altitude of 1800 feet (Elahi, 14th October, 2019). Sajek is predominantly inhabited by Lushai, Pankhua and Tripura indigenous communities. In terms of geographical location, it is located in Rangamati district, but for the convenience of communication, tourists traveling to Sajek go to Sajek via Khagrachari. The easiest way to reach Sajek is by CNG, Jeep or motorbike from Khagrachari town.

Munlai Para

Munlai Para, cleanest village in Bangladesh, is located at Ruma *upazila*, in Bandarban hill district of CHT. Munlai is inhabited by the Bawm indigenous community. There are 54 households in Munlai

where most of the Bawm people involved in jhum cultivation. The Bandarban Hill District Council (BHDC) of Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tract Affairs (MoCHTA), Base Camp Bangladesh Ltd. and community members of Munlai Para constructed a 'Munlai Community Tourism' development which is the first community-based tourism enterprise[4].

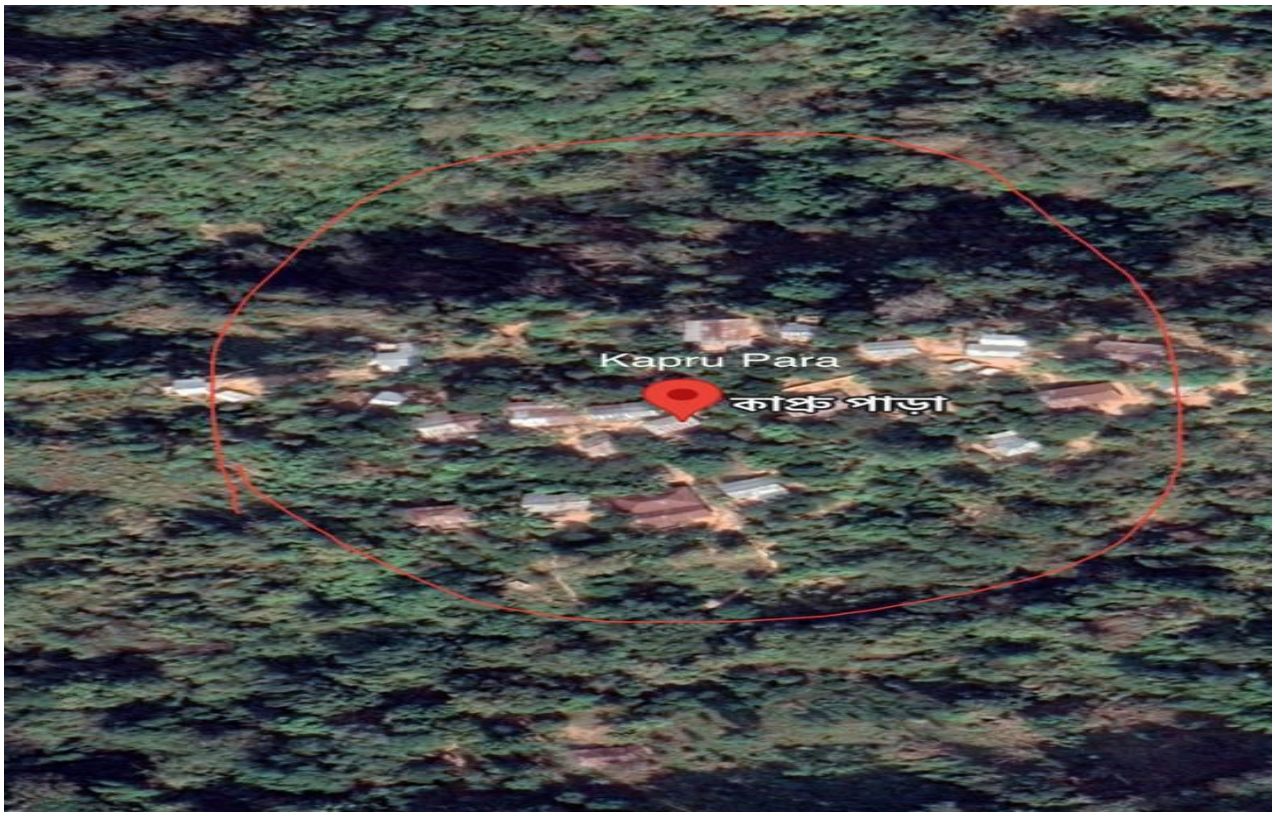
Map-4: Google Map of Munlai Para (Study area-2) Source: Google Map

The Munlai Community Tourism is exclusively based on the way of life of the Bawm community and the natural diversity neighboring Munlai Para. The Bawm families serve the homestay hospitality with indigenous gastronomic services. Besides, thrilling events (for instance, hiking kayaking, zip lines, tree top activities), mementoes, and handcrafts, tourists enjoy a unforgettable experience from Munlai para.

Kapru Para

Kapru para is located in Lama *upazila*, Bandarban. It is 45 km away from Bandarban town. Kapru para comprises with more than 20 families. In this study site, Mru community is predominantly inhabited who mostly follow 'Crama' religion, and Theravada Buddhism, and some of them converted into Christianity.

[4]. https://munlai.com.bd/munlai.html (Accessed on 20th May 2023)



Map-5: Google Map of Kapru Para (Study area-3) Source: Google Map

The main subsistence of Mru community is jhum cultivation. They also practice hunting and gathering tradition. Rice, vegetables, turmeric, ginger, and cotton are the main jhum productions. They also produce seasonal fruits through horticulture near their settlements. This para is a passage of the wild elephant movement from Bangladesh to Myanmar. Kapru para is surrounded with Chimbuk, Nilgiri, and some other tourist spots.

1.7 Research Question and Objectives

The thesis is basically to problematize the discourse of tourism as a channel for development and sustainability. This thesis is concerned with the intelligent marriage of the nexus of culture, nature, and their commercial use under the brand of tourism in the case of the indigenous people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

a. Research Question

This thesis mainly aims to answer to the question that- "how does tourism reproduce the politics of development and the sustainability paradox, which accelerates the process of commodification of identity, culture, and nature through representational politics of the state and its actors, media, and

tourists, and contributes to the new identity construction and remarginalization of the indigenous communities of CHT?"

b. Specific Objectives

- To find out the multifaceted impact of tourism and the challenges of sustainability.
- To examine how the state represents tourism as an alternative development venture, and how indigenous *pahari*s view it as a development trap.
- To understand the latent objectives of the state and its development actors.
- To investigate how tourism manufactures a new form of governmentality to control over natives and nature.
- To reveal how asymmetrical power relations between the state and its organs and indigenous communities create a new space of conflict in CHT.
- To portray how 'Bengali tourist gaze' promotes tourism and produces an 'authentic and unique otherness or primitiveness' against indigenous people and their culture.
- To understand why and how indigenous people are desired to be self-commodified.
- Finally, attention is paid to how culture and nature are commodified in the process of crafting a 'uniqueness' of CHT that materializes the public and private policies of tourism development.

1.8 Research Design

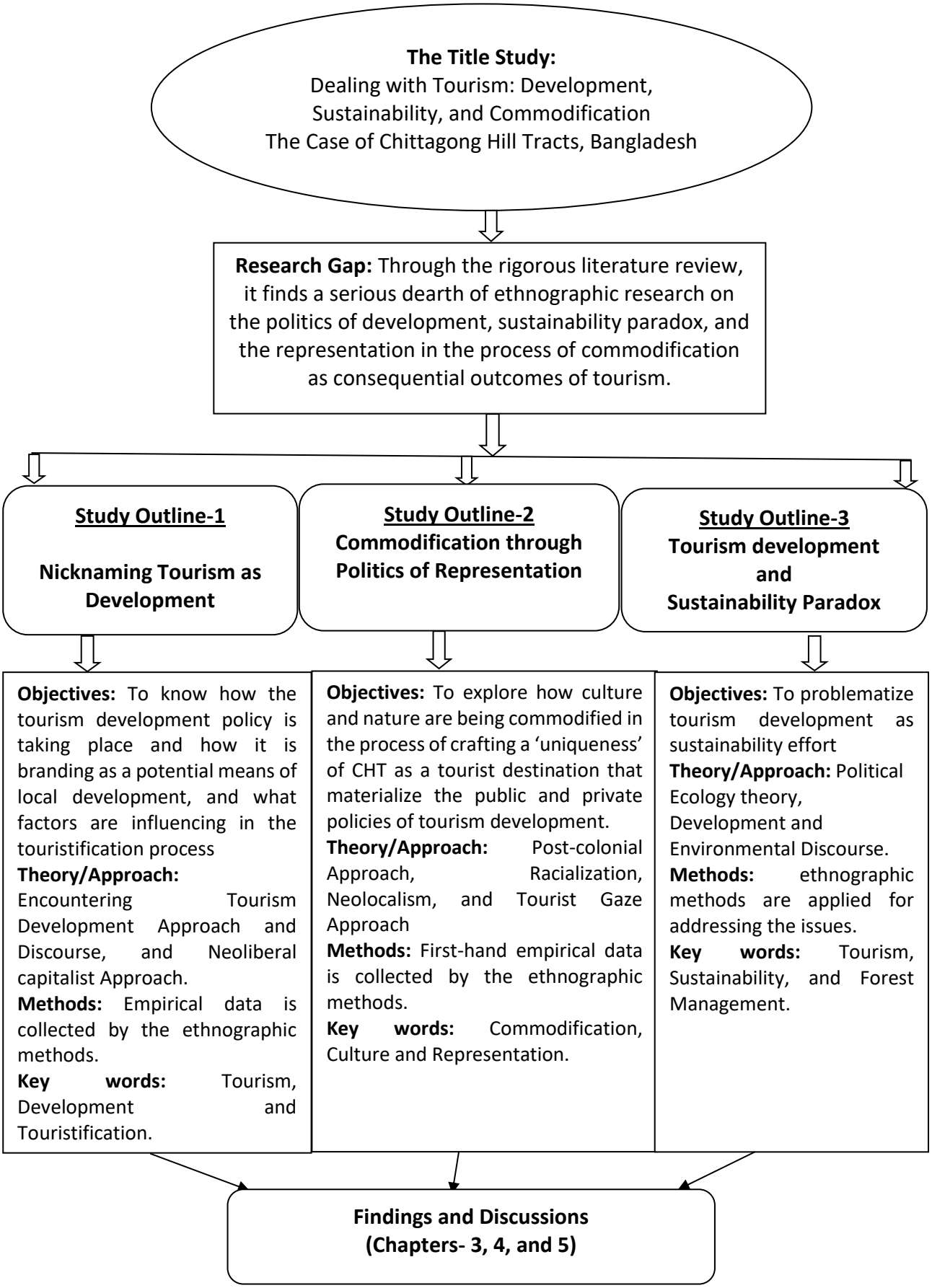


Table-16: Research design Source: Prepared by researcher

1.9 Challenges Met in the Study

During my field visits and empirical data collection at various sites in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, I encountered several challenges. I began my first field visit in mid-March 2021 to Ruilui para neighborhood in Sajek. Due to the covid pandemic, the time to enter Sajek was very difficult. I contacted a military officer to get permission to go to Sajek. He asked me to take the concern from the Prime Minister's office which was very difficult for me to handle. Unfortunately, I was unable to visit Sajek between March and May 2021 because of severe restrictions of lockdown in Sajek. However, I collected data from many government officials, army personnel, indigenous political leaders, activists, and tour operators in Khagrachari *Sadar* during the pandemic situation that places were relatively less restricted. For the same reason I could not also enter Munlai Para and Kapru Para in Bandarban till June 2021. I tried to go to Kapru para once in May, but was stopped by the army at the Chimbuk military check-post. Finally, I was allowed to complete my field visits in both Ruilui Para, Sajek and Munlai Para and Kapru Para from June 2021.

Secondly, I met a common difficulty about security issues several times while traveling to Sajek in Khagrachari, and Munlai and Kapru para in Bandarban, as the CHT is represented as a conflict-prone area and some of the indigenous political groups are considered as the 'terrorists' troops by the state and its security forces. In the middle of the journey from Khagrachari Sadar to Sajek, or Bandarban *Sadar* to Kapru para and Munlai para, there are few military check-posts where security forces control the people traveling these areas. While tourists and locals can easily pass checking by showing NID (National ID Card), researchers, especially those working on indigenous communities, face many steps and interviews to enable access to remote sites in the CHT. I have encountered this situation during most of my field trips to CHT.

Thirdly, Thirdly, hotels and resorts in Sajek were very expensive and it was difficult to get a room because the hotels were limited compared to the number of tourists, which I could not afford, I stayed in a Bengali owned hotel for three nights, then I managed a room for a long stay in an indigenous Luhsai house. The food was also high-priced as all restaurants were mostly based on the tourists' demands. On the other hand, I felt very comfortable with the hospitality of Munlai Para to complete my data collection task. Food and accommodation were easily managed at the indigenous homestay services as they were relatively less expensive than hotels in Bandarban *Sadar*. Besides, I faced housing problem in Kapru para. The Mru people were unable to provide me a room to stay at night due to the strict restriction by the military on welcoming any tourist or any Bengali into their home. I was bound to frequent movement from Chimbuk to Kapru para every day.

Fourthly, since tourists were one of my target groups to collect data directly from them, but they were available to spend less than an hour which was insufficient for interviews and focused group discussions (FGDs). Although I interviewed post-tourists on an online basis who had already visited many places in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, it was rare to find them at convenient times.

Fifth, I was very disturbed interviewing government officials and military personnel because of their protocol and official procedures that took a long time to finalize the appointments to interview in their office. When I asked about why indigenous paharis were neglected of participating in the decision-making process and why indigenous own forms of development were devalued, I was not allowed to go through such questions and was often stopped when they thought the questions were about criticisms of tourism development plans and policies in CHT.

Sixth, as Tucker (1999) suggested selecting some 'observation posts' in terms of monitoring the movements and attitudes of tourists, I choose to set up a few observation posts at major tourist spots, indigenous markets, street vendor points, and festivals, where I was identified as an outsider Bengali tourist to the indigenous people, conversely, I was recognized as a local tour guide to tourists. It was, in fact, confused about my positioning in the field.

Seventh, I met an insider-outsider complexity which puzzled my placing a researcher as Bengali outsider. In ethnographic study, researchers wonder about the outsider-insider standpoint and they can be biased even though he or she is an outsider or insider, as Chavez (2008, p. 475; quoted in Dlamini, 2017, p. 20) delineated that

> For an outsider, the danger is the imposition of the researcher's values, beliefs, and perceptions on the lives of participants, which may result in a positivistic representation and interpretation. For an insider bias may be overly positive or negligent if the knowledge, culture, and experience she/he shares with participants manifests as a rose-colored observational lens or blindness to the ordinary.

As a Bengali, I was certainly recognized by the indigenous locals when I approached to build a rapport after being with them for a long time, and my identity was at first questionable as the relationship between the Bengalis and Pahari locals was mostly antagonistic due to the hegemonic attitudes of outsider and insider Bengalis towards Pahari natives throughout the CHT.

Finally, since this research argues how and why the discourses of 'otherness' and 'exoticness' are constructed through the representation of the Bengali tourists about indigenous people and their culture, and the construction of the 'Bengali tourist gaze' is predominantly produced a superiority-inferiority positionality and a binary opposite to fabricate the 'mainstream' value, I

reflect it critically to be an objective and value-free point of view. Therefore, During the field research and my writing thesis as well, I was carefully, time and again, reflexive on my own predetermined notions and impressions about indigenous norms, values, and beliefs. Last but not least, I have always kept in mind that the manufacture of 'othering' or exoticization of natives is not a normative approach and cultural defense. Rather it is purposively and politically constructed through the distorted representation of the state and its public and private actors in order to promote tourism development in CHT which led me to think about the rhetoric of development and the multiple meanings of discourse.

1.10 Chapterization of Thesis

The thesis consists of six chapters out of which three chapters are based on three articles on tourism, development, sustainability, and commodification of people and places in the context of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. On the basis of empirical findings, these three articles are mainly addressed by research questions and most of the objectives of this thesis. This thesis is largely organized into four parts. The Part-I comprising the Chapter One presents a comprehensive background and context of the study, and local setting of the research area. More importantly, this chapter also concentrates on the historical trajectories of the CHT and its people which is significant to understand the mechanism of remarginalization, the politics of representation, the gradual process of exploitation, and finally the latent agenda of promoting tourism through contemporary development plans and policies in CHT. The Part-II exclusively contains the Chapter Two, published in the 'European Journal of Cultural Management and Policy' by Frontiers, which provides an insight into global, national, and local politics surrounding tourism, conservation, and sustainability. Through the rigorous and systematic literature review, this chapter intends to problematize the mechanism of tourism policies for nature conservation or conservation policies for tourism development that overlooks the local eco-cultural management practice for sustainability. Along with the environmental discourses, an eco-cultural critique on sustainability was presented in this chapter. In Part-III, there are three chapters (3, 4, and 5) encompassing three articles based on the major findings of the empirical study which not only reveal the construction of three field sites and fieldwork in the multi-ethnic setting, the application of the ethnographic methodology, and the linkage of theoretical understanding of this research but also delineate, in-depth, how the arguments are constructed and the ethnographic data is assembled and scrutinized. The Chapter Three, published in the 'Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change' by Routledge, seeks to understand

how culture and nature are commercialized in the process of crafting a 'uniqueness' of CHT that materialize the public and private policies of tourism development, and how tourism is branded by the development actors as a potential means of local development. The Chapter Four provides some first-hand narratives of indigenous people of the CHT which serve as a baseline for understanding how the top-down notion of tourism development policy produced a sustainability paradox. It also represents the challenges originated by the neo-liberalization of natural and cultural resources by national actors and regional political elites in CHT which increasingly affects the sustainability of the region as a whole. Moreover, with a critical anthropological perspective, it deconstructs the two contested discourses on tourism- development as blessing for sustainability and development as blaming for exploitation. In the Chapter Five, I focus on the everyday forms of representation that encompass the commodification of people and places, the self-adopted mechanism of indigenous people, media portrayals, the construction of tourist gaze and discontent of *pahari* ethnic people in CHT. The chapter also offers an interpretation of the mechanism through which cultural uniqueness and indigenous identities are reconstructed, deployed, commodified, and commercialized as exchangeable objects for tourist consumption. Finally, the Part- IV wraps up with the concluding Chapter Six, which reevaluates the research question and objectives of the thesis, and proposes a possible pathway for a deeper understanding of eco-cultural balanced tourism development and the sustainable well-being of indigenous communities in Chittagong Hill Tracts.

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Part-II: Paper-1

Based on Literature Review

eNCATC
EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF CULTURAL MANAGEMENT AND POLICY

TYPE Original Research
PUBLISHED 28 December 2022
DOI 10.3389/ejcmp.2022.11094

OPEN ACCESS

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RECEIVED 08 August 2022
ACCEPTED 02 December 2022
PUBLISHED 28 December 2022

CITATION
Sajib SMS, Nicolli F and Alietti A (2022), Problematizing tourism for conservation: An eco-cultural critique on sustainability.
Eur. J. Cult. Manag. Polic. 12:11094.
doi: 10.3389/ejcmp.2022.11094

Problematizing tourism for conservation: An eco-cultural critique on sustainability

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Nature conservation has often been depicted as an effective policy measure to redress the ongoing environmental problems across the globe. The need to ensure sustainability for people's secured subsistence has rendered nature conservation an indispensable scheme in the tourism development policy. It is evident that during the last couple of decades, the notion of "conservation" has become less established whilst tourism development has been prioritised as a profit making venture by both the national and international agencies. Numerous solutions have been prescribed by international organisations adopting tourism as an "immense potentiality" which mostly represented a sustainability effort for the local development and environment. South Asia in general and Bangladesh, in particular, are no different, since policy for nature conservation has been misplaced and misread to reach sustainability goals, as it has always been connected with the tourism development agenda. From a systematic literature review, it was found that the use of natural resources by local people was exemplified as a threat to sustainability where the relations between conservation and tourism became a policy issue. The paper intends to problematise the mechanism of tourism policies for nature conservation or conservation policies for tourism development that overlooks the local eco-cultural management practice for sustainability. Along with the environmental discourses, an eco-cultural critique on sustainability was employed.

KEYWORDS

tourism, conservation, sustainability, eco-cultural critique, problematization

Introduction

From time immemorial, nature has been transformed into a resource for the livelihoods of human-beings. The growing transformation of nature for needs and development has generally overlooked "the fundamental principles of environment that is widely responsible for the environmental cost" (Duffy, 2013, 605-626). Crises, for instance global warming, climate change, food scarcity and increasing levels of poverty, in South Asia have been presented as grounds for environmental ruin. It is now evident that these challenges have gradually been increasing as a result of human-led actions. The use of resources for the local subsistence in developing countries who are only dependent on the local ecology has often put pressure on the remaining natural resources

(Adams, 2004). This has made it necessary to employ various approaches and interventions from a number of global and local interest groups and alliances from regional and international conservation authorities at different levels. Redressing human-made environmental challenges through biodiversity conservation is now reckoned as a prime global concern (Takacs, 1996). Over the last few years in South Asia, conservation goals have been redesigned in order to improve human wellbeing in general, which is collectively pronounced to be "development." The term "conservation" is currently a leading term in the global environmental discourse that increasingly impacts tourism development as a policy issue. The contextualisation of natural resource for human use, the effects of its degradation and the methods proposed by conservancy groups to counteract this have a profound effect not only on the ecology but also on the livelihoods and wellbeing of local communities in poverty-stricken countries of South Asia (Wood, 1996; Dubey, 2007; Banik et al., 2008). Nevertheless, applications of the solutions of the degraded environmental issue are problematic for resource conservation. Perhaps, this context has facilitated conservation to take "a relevant public policy issue where concern for other environmental issues has been subject to the 'issue-attention cycle'" (Kusmanoff et al., 2017, 160-165; Hannigan, 2006, 39).

During the last couple of decades, the global development and conservation actors have paid attention on trying to come together to promote tourism as one of the major policies to approach the dual challenges of retaining sustainability and sponsoring community wellbeing in the resourceful ecological zone (Liu, 2003; Hall, 2011). Ensuring sustainability for people's secured subsistence rendered nature conservation an indispensable scheme in the tourism development policy. It is evident that during the last couple of decades, the notion of "conservation" has become less established whilst tourism development has been prioritised as a profit-making venture by both the national and international agencies. Numerous solutions have been prescribed by the international organisations adopting tourism as an 'immense potentiality' which mostly represented by a sustainability effort for the local development and environment. South Asia in general and Bangladesh, in particular, are no different since policy for nature conservation has been misplaced and misread to reach sustainability goals, as it has always been connected with the tourism development agenda. It is conventionally asserted that the use of natural resources by local people was exemplified as a threat to sustainability where the relations between conservation and tourism became a policy issue. The plan and process are commonly taken for granted as a solution to the conservation and development questions since they demand financing from the global actors where counteracting opinions and aspirations are almost absent. Additionally, tourism became a potential contributor to the issues that are significantly driving the environmental loss, for instance, overexploitation, change in habitat, climate change, pollution and extra-terrestrial species (Hall, 2010, 253-266; GFANC, 1997). The corporate actors appreciate that it is essential to evaluate how nature-based tourism validates its importance to connect the people with nature in an ecosystem. Thus, tourism became a favorable market-led mechanism in conservation practices. In the policy and practice of conservancy agencies, [eco]tourism is viewed as "one of the supportive frontiers of biodiversity for utilization of the bio-ecological resources of an area" (Bashar, 2018, 1-10). On the other hand, the politics of conservation treating tourism as an another possible action to discourage local communities from uninterrupted access to natural resources weakens the local capacity and position. This paper attempted to problematise the normative tourism policy for conservation or *vice versa* through an eco-cultural critique as the indigenous people in South Asia in particular are dependent on the natural resources of their surroundings, nurture forestlands as the part of their lives, and connect their non-material aspects such as customs, rituals, traditions and social actions with the hill ecological system. Soini and Dessein (2016) proposed a framework of "culture as sustainability," and in this study we suggest an eco-cultural perspective for connecting tourism with culture and sustainability. We delineated the intertwined relations between tourism and conservation and the challenges of cultural sustainability. Tourism policies, which are disseminated by development actors to establish sustainability, help to understand the neo-liberal practice that construct subjective discourses to devalue the local wisdom and capacity about environmental resource management with a nature-culture nexus.

Research methodology

The research methodology is based on the critical and systematic literature review of a broader framework of sustainability discourses in the context of tourism and conservation practices in a cultural setting. A substantial number of scientific articles, books, national and international policies, reports, speeches and international meeting protocols were reviewed and reevaluated by a systematic analysis on tourism and its politics. As sustainability discourses deconstruct a culture-specific way of development, culture becomes instrumental in raising questions about the politics of tourism when conservation policy devalues the eco-cultural practice of natural resource management that reflect a sense of local identity (Soini and Dessein, 2016). We introduced local "cultural practices" as a methodological tool to analyze the potentials and problems of tourism through conservation policy and to understand the sustainability paradox. An eco-cultural critique was theoretically applied to the issues concerning the concepts and notions of tourism and conservation.

Culture as a channel for sustainability

Notions of "tourism sustainability" and "sustainable tourism development" became vague and contested terms since the word "sustainability" was first pronounced in Brundtland's report (Soini and Dessein, 2016, 1-12). Culture and sustainability have different meanings and contextual connotations. How culture influences sustainability is still an unexplored issue. Understanding how culture can be a channel for promoting sustainability rather than a hurdle is crucial to the development of "cultural sustainability." Few studies have conceptualised the concepts together as "cultural sustainability" to evaluate it as part of social sustainability (Chiu, 2004; Cuthill, 2009; Vallace et al., 2011; Soini and Dessein, 2016). It is instrumental to incorporate 'culture' in sustainability discourse, as most of the sustainable development goals are embedded with culture-induced human actions and behaviours. In fact, sustainability is not only a process, system or strategy, but a state of mind of the people who are within it. According to post-modern critiques, as culture is viewed as prerequisite for local development, culture-embedded experiences and aspirations of locals need to be accounted for environmental or social sustainability (Vallace et al., 2011). This leads to an eco-culturally resourceful and sustainable society. For instance, eco-cultural sustainability was initiated in the 'Tourism National Policy-2010' to strengthen the local economy for national contribution in Bangladesh (MoCAT, 2010) "while also ensuring and enhancing traditional cultural values and protecting the integrity of the natural environment" (Pickel-Chevalier and Ketut, 2016; cited in Nogués-Pedregal et al., 2017, 88-108). However, Hof and Blazquez-Salom (2015, 770-796; cited in Bianchi, 2018, 88-102) challenged the state's tourism policy that signified that the nature-culture based tourism model has progressively been restructured towards sustainability through better planning and projects. Rather, the mechanism of tourism development constitutes a "sustainability fix" masking the interest of capital by eco-culture friendly tourism and thereby the intensified use of scarce natural resources (Bianchi, 2018, 88-102). In principle, "nature-culture basis tourism allows neoliberalism to turn the very crises it has created into new sources of accumulation that conceals the contradictions between economic growth and environmental sustainability" (Duffy, 2015, 529-543; Büscher et al., 2012). One of the core justifications for nature-culture based tourism is that nature and culture can be conserved or saved because of their "market value," and hence they can be commodified (Büscher et al., 2012, 4-30; cited in Duffy, 2015, 529-543). For instance, when tourism is well established, cultural values and customs are in danger, because of market competition. It grows an individuality which is not the local communal behavior for South Asian indigenous communities. Collectivisation is broken up and class divisions increase as is evident in the empirical study of South Asian scholars (Shiva, 1993; Shiva, 1997; Dubey, 2007; Rasul and Manandhar, 2009; Ahmed, 2017; Hettiarachchi, 2019; Rahman, 2019). The development of unplanned tourism in South Asia has had an impact on the sense of belongingness attached to the places, and the reciprocal relations between nature and indigenous communities (Sajib, 2022, 273-285). Tourism is mostly a driving force of transformation that sometimes engenders in local cultural wellbeing, and the commodification of culture and nature contributes to vanish the real cultural behaviours of indigenous communities (cited in Sajib, 2022, 273-285; Bunten, 2008; King and Stewart, 1996; Kirtsoglou and Theodossopoulos, 2004). For instance, Escobar (2008, 169) illustrates that "such development policies and resource management tendencies of economic gain not only create challenges for the local people and their traditional knowledge of management but wreak havoc on local practices and have serious negative consequences for local sustainable food sources, sustainable development and environmental practices, and local ecosystems" (cited in Datta, 2015). Several scholars from Bangladesh (Chakma, 2008; Ahmed, 2017; Roy, 2020) showed how public and private agencies validate state forest conservation policies over indigenous communities. National and regional agencies sensitise that the resource use patterns of indigenous people in Bangladesh affect the sustainability of livelihoods as well as environmental degradation. Thus, tourism became the best alternative solution to distract from the people's dependency on forest resources and for local development.

Branding tourism for conservation

Nowadays, tourism is defined as a "developmentalizable" entity and it becomes the largest global industry based on its contribution to global GDP, the increase of employment rate, and the offerings of its profitable services (Cole, 2008; Dalcher, 2017). Biodiversity-enriched countries, for instance, are coming across a very fast tourism development: "23 of them record over 100 percent growth in the last 10 years, and more than 50 percent of these receive over 1 million international tourists per year; 13 percent of biodiversity hotspot countries receive over 5 million international tourists per year" (Christ et al., 2003, vi; UNEP and CI, 2003). Through the tourism, the conservation of nature is mostly reckoned as a sustainable practice for the global and local actors in the context of mitigating global environmental loss and improving local livelihoods. Moreover, shaping "environment," "nature," "wilderness" or "biodiversity" as a "common good" and placing a value on "natural capital" has come to be gradually more noticeable in global political debates since the 1980s (Streimikiene et al., 2021; Costanza et al., 1997, 253-260; Van Koppen, 2000, 300-318). There is a long-lasting argument about how to associate nature conservation with poverty reduction and tourism development in local communities (Adams et al., 2004,

1146-1149; Scuttari et al., 2021; Wells and McShane, 2004, 513-519). The community conservation policies and actions are frequently shaped as "win–win" prospects with environmental and socio-economic gains (Chaigneau and Brown, 2016, 36). Conservation and tourism development are mostly slowed down by contested notions of sustainability in a local community (Streimikiene et al., 2021; Keep, 2008, 311-321). However, the notion of tourism sustainability is by no means refuted, as if its significance is spontaneous or recognizable, although the idea of sustainable tourism is adopted with blurred meaning (Hunter, 1997; Ponton and Asero, 2018). In fact, sustainable tourism now "represents an unstable paradigm, its meaning contested between interested social actors such as the tourist companies, advertisers, environmental pressure groups, local communities and, last but not least, consumers" (Ponton and Asero, 2018, 45-62). In an increasing number of cases, it is observed that tourism provides an insufficient supply of capital for conservation and supports local communities as well as an economic stimulation to take care of natural resource (Scuttari et al., 2021; Streimikiene et al., 2021). The connection between tourism and biodiversity is not always optimistic, especially while tourism development takes place with a lack of proper management structures and policies in order to foster nature conservation and distribute visible profits to local communities. Conservation and tourism sometimes do not succeed while the local concerns and their inherent capabilities and experiences for the sustainable prospect are not considered as valuable (Bologna and Spierenburg, 2015, 119-138). It is believed that "biodiversity conservation associated with community and nature-based tourism stimulates many other nature-friendly businesses" (Donlan, 2005, 913-914).

Critiques of the development models prescribed by international donors stated that foreign aid and structural adjustment schemes to stimulate tourism and development have mostly not succeeded in dealing with environmental crises (Shiva, 1993; Oliver-Smith, 2010). The concept of the tourism development overlooks the necessity of nature conservation, whereas economic development is given urgent importance. Generally, the two notions of "sustainability" and "development" have, to some extent, conflicting connotations: 'Sustainability' indicates stability and coexistence, but "development" denotes progress and transformation (Robinson and Picard, 2006; Giddens, 2009). Therefore, environmentalists are captivated by the "sustainability" approach, whereas public and private enterprises emphasise "development," typically indicating GDP growth (Giddens, 2009). It is evident that conservation and development with tourism are not only unsuccessful in their plans and actions but also not characteristically relevant and have, in fact, sustained poverty in many cases (Harrison, 2008, 851-868). However, another paradigmatic shift in development currently focuses on nature-friendly pro-local tourism strategies. The shift along with "nature" demanding to "repay its way" and for local people to be deliberately engaged in conservation policies has directed to materialise "ecotourism" as an added liable practice of nature-friendly tourism in South Asia. It endorses biodiversity conservation and also generates economic value for local people living in poverty. In the seventh assembly of the UNCSD in 1999, UNEP stressed that "the involvement of local communities in tourism development and operation appears to be one important condition for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity" (Christ et al., 2003, 4). Commitments of global and governmental actors in accordance with the CBD guidelines have been endorsed to strengthen the movement on "Sustainable Tourism in Vulnerable Ecosystems by creating tourism and biodiversity more cooperative to each other, involving local or indigenous communities, and developing infrastructure and resolving land disputes" (UNEP and CI, 2003, 27). They are critically important for the sustainability of tourism, "influencing not only tourism development itself but also controlling other forms of development that might be detrimental to the economic sustainability of tourism in the short or long term" (Mowforth and Munt 2015, 1-476; Fennel, 2008, 9; Christ et al., 2003).

There is a long-standing debate on whether tourism is a stable means of conservation or not, whether it takes care of the plants and animals in their natural habitats, whether it is likely to bring together conservation with the expansion of corporate values and income, and whether tourism can decrease regional migration and other concerns that locals are currently encountering. One specific issue is that tourism is overvalued and can serve as a further means for developing social, economic or environmental scenarios but it cannot be the best one. Adams (2003, 108), for instance, claims that "on the one hand, if it can be shown even on economic grounds the case for conservation makes sense, all to the good. On the other hand, it might not often be so good if conservation-economists suddenly asking the rules to be changed back so that the game can be replayed on stronger grounds." Assessing the effects of tourism on nature and culture, however, is notably multifaceted and contested. Tourism is portrayed as benign to some extent, and often as the "only potential" or the only sustainable substitute for a nature-protective and resource-inclusive development approach in South Asia. In practice, it often appears that tourism is branded as an economic "ladder" in the discourse of those who highlight the issue of the sustainability of any conservation policy. On the contrary, there is an argument that extreme dependency on measurable values of nature conservation through tourism is a "slippery slope" (Adams, 2003, 108). However, alternative tourism (such as community-based tourism, nature-based tourism, pro-poor tourism, responsible tourism, ecotourism and sustainable tourism) for instance, is largely believed to mutually develop the livelihoods of local people and environmental sustainability. It is proposed that "returns to nature encourage people to disinvest in other means of livelihood, particularly livestock and cultivation, thereby

reducing the 'degrading' effects of these forms of land-use while sustaining incomes" (Powell, 1998, 121). However, if the earnings from tourism remain marginal, and even without culture-specific needs connecting to livelihoods and means of earnings, it is implausible that local people will perceive nature as an alternative way of living. In fact, such beliefs might eventually lead to the "individualizing and profit-maximizing ideology of neoliberalism" (Sullivan, 2006, 105-135). Following Sullivan (2006), Fletcher (2011, 443-461) depicts with a neo-liberal critique that "sustainable tourism practices are accessible mainly for a 'transnational capitalist class' and serve to sustain capitalism more broadly" (cited in Hanna et al., 2015).

Discourses conducted in the public domain have a strong impact on how local people are involved in policy issues, and adjustments surrounded by the conservation and sustainable tourism discourse also have effects for public commitment in conservation policy. How conservation is valued, measured and meant to policy makers and local people as well, is often influenced by the tourism policy discourses with which it interacts (Gustafsson, 2013, 39–54; Coffey, 2015, 1-20). Public environmental policy for conservation, for example, sustainability and ecotourism, is usually a liability of governments as signatories to the CBD-1992, even though it is largely assigned to local governments or local authorities that may have separate priorities and goals (CBD, 1992). This makes tourism policy for conservation characteristically political in nature. It is important to conservation NGOs as well; few of them have visible involvement in conservation plans and actions, but the majority are engaged in conservation advocacy. However, the manifestations of nature and culture is a form of the political approaches along with tourism and conservation policy. Therefore, it is taken for granted that tourism will protect nature, produce profit or support people, supply basic materials, and promote an aesthetic or moral way of thinking about nature conservation. Though particular attention is currently devoted to local wisdom in conservation discussions, specifically in article 8j of the CBD, this is not enough and "mostly misleading that ground reality is hardly valued in its own languages or it is defunctionalized to support the western conservation policy" (Shiva, 1997, 1-148). For example, Escobar (1998, 53-82) doubted that "biodiversity does not exist in an absolute sense. Rather, it anchors a discourse that articulates a new relation between nature and society in global contexts of science, cultures, and economies." However, the development, through conservation and sustainable tourism, is never problematised, albeit critics have increasingly drawn attention to the impracticality of balancing the preconditions of economy and environment in the current policy structures (Escobar, 1999, 1-30).

South Asian context

South Asia consists of five regions: 1) India 2) southern islands of Sri Lanka and the Maldives 3) northern mountain area from Kashmir to Nepal and Bhutan 4) the east, Bangladesh 5) the west, Pakistan and Afghanistan (Hettiarachchi, 2019, 2). The world's best marine resources (coral reefs of Maldives), seashores (Cox's Bazar) and mangrove zones (Sundarbans) are situated in the territory. Rasul and Manandhar (2009, 187–207) asserted that "its centuries old civilizations, rich and unique cultural and biological diversity, diverse and vast array of geographic features, attractive oceans and beaches, mangrove forests, mountain ranges including the great Himalayas, the Karakorum and the HinduKush mountains and, above all, very hospitable people, make the region a very attractive place for intra-regional as well as international tourists." Ohmae (1995) termed the territory a "natural economic zone." For example, with the Annapurna Tourism Development Project and the Bhakthipur Conservation Project in Nepal, it initiated an effective tourism model, tendering its unique nature and heritage conservation, community benefit, and sustainable funding features (Hettiarachchi, 2019, 4). Through its 'Tourism Earth Lung' initiative, Sri Lanka developed its conservative position towards becoming a decarbonised tourism destination by 2018 (Hettiarachchi, 2019, 5).

Tourism became an area of cooperative interest for SAARC in the late 1980s (Rasul and Manandhar, 2009, 187–207; Timothy, 2003; Dubey, 2007). With the backing of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), it designed a comprehensive Tourism Development Plan (TDP) to develop tourism. The major goals of the TDP are: "to promote eco-tourism in order to reduce poverty, and to facilitate private sector investment in tourism" (Rasul and Manandhar, 2009, 187–207). Nevertheless, tourism has not contributed to the wellbeing of locals or nature conservation as expected in South Asia. Poverty remains a major problem, often affecting marginalised rural populations that depend on some of the most biodiverse landscapes for their livelihoods (Regional Report, 2018, 210-291). The challenges facing nature conservation are, therefore, rapid economic growth and rising consumption, as well as poverty and marginalisation. In addition, tourism has a particular impact on the underprivileged indigenous locals in South Asia. Hill and forest areas are widely accepted places for tourism, but these places are especially vulnerable because local wisdom relating to natural resource management is ignored. For instance, tourism gradually instigates dislocation, heightens living expenses, prevents access to resources, creates socio-cultural disorder, and ultimately marginalises local people. The highly environment-sensitive countries in South Asia, such as the Maldives, Nepal and Bhutan, developed the nature-based tourism industry. A crucial issue is that if these countries are successfully developing tourism to generate an income source for local people and are mitigating these needs with natural resources, why are people in these countries poverty-stricken even now?

Natural resources in Bangladesh have significantly contributed to the national economy in the context of livestock, agriculture, forestry, fishery and nature-based

tourism. Bashar (2018, 1-10) reported that "the largest mangrove forest, the Sundarbans, provides livelihood and employment for half a million households and more than 60 million people depend on aquatic resources every day, and 60 percent of the country's protein requirement is met through fish consumption." However, its natural resources are vulnerable due to a transformation from local subsistence to a national cash economy. Forest land-grabbing in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) for tourism development is a good example of this. The development and promotion of tourism has not been responsive enough to the potential implications for the natural and cultural heritage of Bangladesh. Bangladesh is currently pursuing new schemes under the national environmental policies in order to balance sustainable resource use. Moreover, Bangladesh has signed conservation-related "Multilateral Environmental Agreements, including the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)and the obligations of CBD Bangladesh has made 1st National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) in 2006 and 2nd NBSAP (2016–2021) in 2015 to steer biodiversity conservation endeavors" (Faisal, 2018). It has also framed guidelines, policies and legal charters connected to biodiversity and tourism. These are: National Conservation Strategy (2016–2031), Bangladesh Biodiversity Act 2017, National Tourism Policy 2010, The Tourism Vision 2020, National Forest Policy 2016 and Ecologically Critical Areas (ECA) Rules 2017 (Faisal, 2018). The National Sustainable Development Strategy and the Seventh Five-Year Plan of the country have unambiguously highlighted the biodiversity conservation concerns posed by nature-based tourism (Faisal, 2018; Rasul and Manandhar, 2009, 187–207). Many biodiversity-rich areas have been made into Botanical Gardens, Safari Parks, Eco-Parks, Fish Sanctuaries, Wildlife Sanctuaries and National Parks to promote conservation and the sustainable use of resources for economy (Faisal, 2018). In Bangladesh, alarming threats to biodiversity include "rapid and unplanned urbanization, conversion of forests and wetlands into tourism spot, unsustainable use and over exploitation of natural resources in tourism destination, uncontrolled tourism" (Faisal, 2018) in the landscape of environmentally sensitive, ecologically valuable and biologically diverse protected areas (e.g., in CHT, Cox's Bazar and St. Martin Island) (Sajib et al., 2022, 89-103). It is evident that this conservation-through-tourism policy has not only contributed to environmental loss, but has fuelled socio-environmental crisis, in which locals have become double victims as they have been widely represented as solely responsible for local environmental damage (Sajib et al., 2022, 89-103).

Blaming the victims

There is a growing tendency to generalise and blame local people for socio-environmental crises in all spheres due to their visible interactions with environmental resources (Sajib et al., 2022, 273-285). Local people are deliberately characterised as a threat to biodiversity, as a challenge to be controlled, rather than as local actors to be involved and measured. Local people, for instance, the indigenous communities of CHT in Bangladesh, in the context of identity recognition are redefined in terms of ownership and participation. Locals should be involved in conservation plans and policies as influential actors who are able to perceive and value the economic significance of nature and who can hence conserve it for their own interest. This viewpoint is often overlooked and underestimated in the current projections of measuring and interacting with nature. It furthermore displaces local communities, which are disregarded as stakeholders as meticulously characterised by market-induced actors. Thus, locals become less able to perform the significant role of being valuable "eco-cultural subjects" (Goldman, 2007) as designed by conservation benefits. It has been suggested that indigenous people serve as "para-biologists" and can save the wildlife by employing their traditional knowledge, and support conservation efforts by conducting their own observations and measurements (Escobar, 1998). Nevertheless, local communities are often excluded from the dialogue about conservation and development policy. It appears that local culture and knowledge are not considered to have any value added power, and are characterised as a barrier to conservation and development. As stated by Brown (2002, 6) "the conservation-orientated literature traditionally viewed local community welfare and development as directly conflicting with the objectives and practice of biodiversity conservation." There is no attention paid to local livelihoods in poorly protected regions and the indigenous people of CHT, for instance, are often forced to leave their land in the name of conservation. Locals are persuaded that "fortress conservation" or the "fences and fines" policy is the best way to protect biodiversity (Salafsky and Wollenberg, 2000, 1421-1438). For example, the indigenous people in CHT have lived in a certain area for a long period of time but have been obliged to depart their locality because it has been closed off by the government as an extremely restricted zone that is in danger and needs immediate action. It would seem that since poverty and conservation are considered to be different policy areas, the connection between locals and their locality is neglected. Action against these oversights new policy is installed with the target "to increase benefits from alternative livelihood activities as a way to reduce the threat to conservation from local people" (Berkes, 2007, 15188-15193). One of the most powerful and convincing strategies is the application of a buffer zone near to a core zone, with the consequence that the core zone meets high-level safeguards so as to conserve the ecosystem (Ramus and Montiel, 2005, 377-414). To ensure conservation entrance into this zone is restricted, and to provide economic alternatives, such as tourism, local people can access the buffer zone for their subsistence. Nevertheless, the ground reality of access to resources for subsistence contests this discourse. One of the

flaws of this model is that it is not clearly associated with changing the behaviour of local people, since they are not responsive to the value of nature conservation (Salafsky and Wollenberg, 2000). However, both the environment and local culture is impacted by tourism since they are often projected as commodities for tourists; for example, following the introduction of tourism in CHT, Mowfurth and Munt (2015, 1-476) described the "zooification" of indigenous culture. The ethnic groups in South Asia and other indigenous communities around the world have been subjected to "zooification." People and their cultures are projected as "untouched" or even "primitive" describing to originality which is a trading spot for tourism agencies (Mowforth & Munt, 2015). With the discourse of "living in harmony with nature" (Ulloa, 2005), the tourism market has succeeded in allowing tourists to ignore the poverty of indigenous people. The tourism business advertises culture as a commodity to tempt tourists to experience another world, for example, as an "exotic," "sensualised" and "naturalised" "other." Indigenous cultures and people characterise the way to sustainability through "living in harmony with nature" (Ulloa, 2005). In indigenous terrains of South Asia, nature conservation policy, with tourism as the preferred method, has habitually been formed on totalitarian approaches, which on the whole has not contributed to producing long-lasting livelihoods for locals, creating a sense of marginalisation and inequality, which is hardly ever an effective ground for nature conservation plan and policy (Timothy, 2003; Rasul and Manandhar, 2009). Therefore, it could be argued that tourism has failed to connect the distance between nature and culture and has reproduced the "othering" of nature, presenting nature as separate from society.

Conclusion

This study made an attempt not only to provide an eco-cultural critique of contemporary approaches to conservation within the tourism and development framework, but also to problematise the market-induced policy discourses on sustainability, where environmental values were explicitly measured in economic solutions. In this paper, conservation has been problematised as a policy issue signifying a dominant connection between nature and culture, and constituting a linkage of actors through which tourism and conservation are articulated and negotiated. This study suggested that conservation and tourism policies are not as impartial as they are designed to be, and the challenges need to be identified in respect to applying these policy structures to sustain conservation and development. Conservation and tourism are aimed at money-making projects for seeing and using nature. Regardless of its uncertainty, the formulation of a nexus between nature and culture represents an alternative policy context for tourism and conservation. Categorising natural diversity as an environmentally distinct phenomenon and problematising the conceptualisations, views, principles and politics of various policy actors, the paper contributed to identifying the drawbacks of orthodox conservation policy. Many critics (Philipp, et al., 2022; Fennel, 2008; Sullivan, 2006; Wells, 1995, 319-333) argued that approaches towards interconnected "conservation and tourism policies tend to misplace the 'conservation' vision, with misreading over whether conservation or tourism is the way or the end." The relationship between conservation and tourism has more commonly been revealed to be biased in support of the policy actors, and in contrast to the local communities. Moreover, cultural issues of sustainability in tourism development are connected to the impact of local community wellbeing. The contribution of tourism to the nature-culture nexus still needs to be reviewed through empirical and theoretical observation. Finally, it can be argued that eco-cultural behaviour, rituals and practices are customarily influential in redressing the challenges of the three pillars of sustainability which lead to sustainable development if properly addressed by the culturally embedded tourism policy.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Acknowledgments

This paper was presented in an International conference on "Kaleidoscope of Sustainability" in 2021, organised by Coordinator of the PhD programme in Environmental Sustainability and Wellbeing, University of Ferrara, Italy. All authors acknowledge the Coordinator and conference committee that encouraged them to publish the article. The corresponding author would especially like to thank his Supervisor and co-supervisors.

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Part-III: Paper-2, 3, and 4

Based on Empirical Data

JOURNAL OF TOURISM AND CULTURAL CHANGE
2022, VOL. 20, NOS. 1–2, 273–285
https://doi.org/10.1080/14766825.2021.1966022

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Nicknaming tourism as development: commercialization of culture and nature in CHT, Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Tourism in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) has nowadays been sensitized a prospective channel for the local development that generates a new socio-economic reality. It also provokes some critical issues regarding commercial use and its profit-making venture. This paper aims to understand how culture and nature are commercialized in the process of crafting a 'uniqueness' of CHT that materialize the public and private policies of tourism development, and how tourism is branded by the development actors as a potential means of local development. The study found that the tourism expansion has increasingly been nicknamed as development and impelled indigenous participation to the economic benefits, in which process culture and nature became saleable products. A considerable number of locals and tourists as informants were sampled and interviewed between November 2019 and early February 2020. This study adopted by qualitative methods, tried to explore the local perceptions of tourism development and its outcomes. The study contributed to the development of balanced tourism and its sustainable outcomes, and a deeper understanding of culture-specific ways.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 1 May 2020
Accepted 4 August 2021

KEYWORDS
Tourism; development; culture; nature; commercialization and CHT

Introduction

Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) is nowadays the most flourishing tourism location in Bangladesh because of its enriched natural terrain and multi-cultural coexistence of ethnic communities that entice the people to pay a visit to CHT as their tourist destination. The fashionable representation of this tourist spot in social media and the several tourist agencies in their advertisements signify the CHT as a 'paradise'. These associated actors of tourism marketing and advertising materially highlight the natural beauty of the environment and cultural 'uniqueness'. The picturesque nature and multiculturalism of the CHT fascinate the tourists to obtain an 'authentic' and 'unique' cultural and natural experience. Multiplicity of culture and natural diversity are currently both regarded as potential components in tourism development. Tourism business backs not only the local subsistence but also overall the national economy, mostly after the 'peace accord'.[1] The 'peace accord' has significantly been viewed as 'the cornerstone of a new

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period of peaceful coexistence between the ethnic minorities and the mainstream population Bengalis' (Uddin, 2013, p. 4). After the accord, It was desirable to incorporate the local perception with a coordinated manner for the regional development and nature conservation in which public and private agents, entrepreneurs and locals come together to promote the well-being of local people 'in order to build sustainable relationships with the people and environment' (Fennell & Eagles, 1990, pp. 23–34). However, tourism in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) becomes a prospective channel for local development that generates a new economic reality. It also provokes some critical issues regarding commercial use and its profit-making venture. It is undeniable that the 'potential of tourism as a development vector' (Barrado-Timón & Hidalgo-Giralt, 2019, pp. 1–36) is now visible and measurable in the CHT. This visibility can easily be comprehended by numerous measurable economic outcomes, in which in reality construct a statist hegemony that 'has spread the notion of tourism as a technocratic and neutral phenomenon, a socially non-problematic activity, and a minor issue' (Novy & Colomb, 2016, p. 4). After the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, the governments have gradually expanded their focus on the environmental reserves and the ethnic diversity for promoting tourism development (See, BPC, 2004; ICIMOD, 2017; MoCAT, 2010) primarily by the public and private agencies with capitalistic attention to the local ecology and the *Pahari* livelihoods in CHT (Ahmed, 2017). Besides, the unconstrained participation of the statist's enforced agencies in tourism development in CHT, for instance,

> Nilgiri resort at Bandarban (Army), Lake Paradise at Kaptai, Rangamati (Navy), Jibtoly resort at Kaptai, Rangamati (Army), Agottor at Baghaichari, Rangamati (BGB), Heritage Park at Chengi Bridge, Khagrachari (Ansar and VDP), in developing, promoting, managing and controlling local tourism puts aside the Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC) and the related ministry, and local administration as well. (Khan, 2015)

However, the spontaneous development of tourism and increased participation of *Pahari* ethnic communities in state and non-state induced tourism projects established an acceptance that tourism sustains the capabilities to generate financial benefits for local people of the CHT. This paper, therefore, aims to understand how culture and nature are commercialized in the process of crafting a 'uniqueness' of CHT that materialize the public and private policies of tourism development. It also explores how tourism is branded by the state and non-state actors as a potential means of local development.

Study area and methodology

The area of this study was in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, situated in the south-east location of Bangladesh, neighboring India and Myanmar with three highly hill districts namely Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban. It encompasses 13,274 sq kms. along with about 1.7 million inhabitants (BBS, 2013). It is inhabited by 11 ethnic minority groups, namely Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Tanchangya, Chak, Mro, Bawn, Lushai, Khyang, and Kumi (BBS, 2013), locally known as *Pahari, Adivasi* or *Upojathi* (hill people, indigenous people or tribal people), but officially termed them as 'small ethnic groups'. These ethnic minority communities are 'politically independent, economically self-sufficient, culturally distinctive and socially egalitarian in nature' (Uddin, 2010, pp. 283–294). Around 80% of its area is mountains and hills covered with forests and lakes[2].

This study adopted by qualitative approach tried to explore the local's and thetourist's perceptions of tourism development and its outcomes. In this study, a total of 50 locals and 50 tourists as informants were sampled and interviewed between November 2019 and early February 2020. In this short period of intensive fieldwork, the data were mainly gathered through ethnographic methods. Besides, secondary sources, including development reports, tourism brochures, tourism projects, newspaper articles, speeches, meeting protocols, workshop and conference proceedings have been analyzed. Five Key Informants were selected from the stakeholders (host and guest) based on their position, place and perceptivity. Out of these five KIs, three individuals were *Pahari* ethnic minorities from three districts, one was from development agencies and the rest was selected from tourists. The informants were belonged to different categories, for example, owners of the restaurants, hotels and resorts, tourist agencies, headman[3], *karbari*[4], indigenous local leaders, small traders and vendors. The fieldwork was accomplished in the winter season, because CHT becomes full of tourists in this particular period. The sample consists of locals who are spontaneously engaged in tourism business and also people who have no direct connection to tourism. Intensive observation during some ethnic *pahari* festivals was employed as 'a balancing technique as this is mostly conducive for the understanding of non-verbal communication' (Ritchie, 2003, pp. 24–46). The in-depth interviewing method for locals was applied to understand the locals' own notion of development associated with tourism, and their perceptions towards tourists, as well as tourism's socio-economic impacts. For tourists, the interviews comprised with some queries to expose 'tourists' gaze'[5] towards locals, for instance, their reasons for visiting CHT and enjoying the cultural festivals and natural beauty, and their views and mindsets on the local culture, people and nature.

Literature review

A number of studies (see, for example, Adnan & Dastidar, 2011; Barua, 2001; Chakma, 2008; Gerharz, 2002, 2015; Levene, 1999; Mohsin, 1997; Nasreen & Togawa, 2002; Rasul, 2003, 2007; Schendel, 1992; Uddin, 2010, 2013) have met the critical analysis of the CHT history, peace and conflict issues, exploitation, indigenous rights, livelihoods, forests, shifting cultivation, and the politics of development in the pre and post-accord state, whereas these texts, however, did not concentrate on the contextualization of the unequal and asymmetrical power relation in development, and commercial use of culture and nature in the context of tourism. Considering this fact, a good number of studies (for instance, Ahmed, 2017; Anderson, 2000; Chakma, 2016; Greenwood, 1989; Kirtsoglou & Theodossopoulos, 2004; Rahman, 2019; Urry, 1990, 1995, 2002) on tourism were reviewed to encompass the matters for the socio-economic well-being of ethnic minorities and to portray tourism as a tool for the commercialization of culture and nature, and also for local development. The texts on the tourism are mostly skeptical about the interaction between the ethnic people and the tourists. It is well documented that unequal power relation appears where the tourists are almost free to move around the natural landscapes and local ethnic people are restricted to use the natural resources for their livelihoods (Eadington & Smith, 1992). However, Greenwood delineated that 'though tourism is mostly a driving force of transformation that sometimes engenders creative responses in local cultures' (1989, p. 184), and the commercialization of culture

and nature, however, 'robs people of the very meanings by which they organise their lives' (1989, p. 179). Although a number of scholars (for example, Swain, 1989; Urry, 1995) view tourism development as a 'necessary evil', many (Boissevain, 1996; Macleod, 1999; Tilley, 1997) contend that tourism facilitates the local communities to make them lively and to retain the ethnic norms and values. Urry also argued that the 'tourist gaze' undervalues the local cultural experiences, and tourism's local services are also transformed into 'the production and consumption of a particular social experience' (1995, p. 131). Sometimes, 'ethnic tourism' that mostly highlights 'the marketing of tourist attractions based on an indigenous population's way of life' (Swain, 1989, pp. 85–104), can closely be connected to cultural existence itself.

The ethnic minorities of CHT have often been crafted as a 'unique other' by the process of colonialism and the post-colonial nation-state building (Gerharz, 2015; Uddin & Gerharz, 2017). Colonialism in past and neo-colonialism at present in both cases, the 'Otherness' has been manipulated in the identity formation as a part of the political construction of ethnic minorities of the CHT (Uddin & Gerharz, 2017). The state and non-state actors developed 'an exoticized status that implied national recognition, but always on the basis of a stereotypical, commodified and visual representation of their customs' (Anderson, 2000, pp. 194–195). Moreover, the spontaneous contribution of ethnic communities in tourism industry is 'denied to the agents who are still viewed by the state as too "primitive" and thus incapable of full participation in the modern world' (Anderson, 2000, pp. 241–242). Therefore, in this paper, the over-optimistic and unquestioning popular perception about tourism as an effective tool for the local development of ethnic minorities have been challenged. The indigenous culture in general is 'used for tourist consumption and tourists desire to enjoy "otherness" and to find "authentic" experiences' (Kirtsoglou & Theodossopoulos, 2004; Selwyn, 1996, pp. 2–7). So, tourism development policy 'bypasses the indigenous people whose resources are thus being managed by more skilful and better-equipped public and private entrepreneurs' (Kirtsoglou & Theodossopoulos, 2004, p. 138). Moreover, there is a tension between political and economic purposes of the tourism business that mainly emerges from a denial of own ethnic entrepreneurs, and hence state-backed access of Bengali corporate groups. Thus, the process of touristification helps to understand the soft mechanism of domination to the ethnic minorities in which process tourism has always been nicknamed as a blessing for local development.

Tourism in CHT: crafting a 'uniqueness'

The CHT, surrounded by deep forests and spotted with waterfalls, is only a distinctive hill region in Bangladesh. Along with the infrastructural development, many parks, restaurants, hotels, luxurious resorts and recreation points, have been built in the CHT to create a unique tourist destination with cultural and natural diversity. In addition to the landscape tourism, cultural celebrations of ethnic communities such as *Baishabi*, *Bizu*, *Sangraing* and several sacred celebrations, for example, *Parobarona* and *Kathin Chibardan* at Buddhist temple, ethnic community Mro's religious festival *Go Hoyta* have also crafted a 'uniqueness' for tourist's attraction. The various Buddhist temples, such as *Kyang*, and *Bhihar*s like *Rajvihar* and the *Ujanipara Bhihar* are the most visited place for tourists. Numerous lakes, for example, Kaptai Lake, Prantik Lake, and Kyachlong Lake surrounded

by the hills, has recently become a charming tourist destination because of its waterfalls and natural views. *Shuvolong* traveling from Rangamati by boat on the *Sangu* river is now breathtaking journey for tourists. One of the mesmerizing locations, today, to tourists is Sajek Valley. It is located on the northern side of Rangamati, close to the Tripura-Mizoram frontier of India. It is about 2000 ft high from the sea level.[6] In Sajek union, it is mainly inhabited by Lushai, Pankua and Tripura communities. The most charming scenarios of this tourist location are sunset, hills bounded by clouds and the forest environment.

The *Pahari* ethnic cuisines occupy tourists' mind to experience local food as a 'primitive' dish. Even tourists expend a substantial amount of money on the indigenous cuisines. Hotels, motels, and restaurants serve diverse 'old-fashioned' food items to attract the visitors. Many tourist agencies advertise their services with ethnic food items to make an impression to the tourists in the social media. It was found that an ethnic community's restaurant branded their food in the billboard by saying that *my food culture is my brand; it's a symbol of my identity*. Tourists desire to experiment *Pahari* dishes, for instance, *nappi*, bamboo chiken, bamboo *biriani*, *bash kurul, bini* rice, *kakon* rice and *chutki* rice, rice *gorang*, duck *gorang*, fish *gorang* and chicken *gorang*, egg *hebang* and *kebang*, fish *hebang* and *kebang*, *godaiya* fish, pickle, crab, *moura*, *cardamom*, *panchporan, bada harang* (made of egg and banana), *tulju* (a kind of tobacco), *pinnaigula* (like cherry), *shilajut* bamboo cup tea and bamboo coffee, etc. Moreover, tourists also have special demands for the handicrafts, for example *fatua, thami*, shawl, *jammi, sari,* muffler, *punjabi* and *lungi*, crafted by the pahari ethnic folks. Tourists usually buy these crafted clothes as a momento of ethnic culture.

However, in search of 'authentic' experiences, nowadays, CHT as a 'unique' tourist destination stimulates people to be distanced for a while from the everyday hectic urban life. The pursuit for 'uniqueness', exploring authentic *Pahari* ethnic culture, cuisine and art rather than sightseeing some popular tourist locations, is the recent excitement for traveling to CHT. Furthermore, a tendency developing recently in CHT is to make the 'second home', for instance 'Bungalow' and *Khamarbari,* for relaxation, and the 'rise of this touristic class' (Gravari-Barbas & Guinand, 2017) to spend few days with authentic nature and culture. Trip suites are advertised by manipulating attractive pictures of the CHT's nature and natives. Tourist agencies from the Bengali 'mainstream' and some economically and politically motivated local elites represent these images of *Pahari* ethnic people and culture to make profit and keep control over resources. The tourists come with an imagination about the natural and cultural 'uniqueness' of CHT. This imagination has long been created by public and private agencies in their manifests. The ethnic hosts stage their way of life that tourists experience as symbols of authenticity. If a location and its residents is more than usually coloured and romanticised, then this place 'encourages outsiders to fantasize about the destination and its inhabitants as exotic things to be experienced, and this ultimately could be deleterious to the reality and integrity of the local culture' (Chakma, 2016, p. 34; Bunten, 2008, pp. 380–395). Locals are 'positionally unable to affect how images of authenticity are constructed and marketed' (Silver, 1993, p. 316). In this respect, indigenous rituals, cuisine, music, dancing, handicraft, and also indigenous folks being themselves for tourists are materially perceived as 'touristic capitals' which are regarded an exchangeable commodity.

Touristification in CHT: neoliberalizing local resource

Touristification is a 'process of relatively spontaneous, unplanned massive development of tourism in a cultural and ecological space, which leads to the transformation of this space into a tourism commodity itself' (Del Romero Renau, 2018, pp. 104–120). The notion of touristification became a soft strategy to minimize the long-armed bloody conflict between the state security forces and the local ethnic troops that continued for around two decades which was formally come to an end after the 'CHT Accord' in 1997, which is popularly known as 'peace accord'. This Process of touristification facilitated to create and validate the acceptance of tourism development initiatives in CHT. These initiatives including diverse development policies combined with the tourism promotion by the public and private actors are considered as the new mechanisms of peacebuilding and conflict management between the ethnic minorities and the mainstream Bengalis. Touristification in CHT, therefore, validates two approaches (Ahmed, 2017). Firstly, the peacebuilding and conflict management approach was the foremost priority to the public and private agencies in order to mitigate the bloody conflict. The second approach is to create a neoliberal capitalist economy with less consideration of cultural and natural diversity. Moreover, the sense of touristification has also been materialized in the nature conservation policy which has mainly two grounds (Khan, 2015). The first justification is to manipulate the enriched natural landscape as a tourism resource. It legitimates the neoliberalization of nature by the public and private agents through the conservation program. Development actors suggest that 'it needs more governance, more money, and a bit more stakeholder and community participation. They intend to overlook the fact that it supports the domination over natural resources by humans for economic benefit' (Khan, 2015). It is needless to say that these policies validate the commercial use of nature in a sustainable manner and commodification of natural resources under the brand of tourism. Secondly, it controls the use and access to resources for the local subsistence. Not only have natural beauty and resource become visible market products, but the growing demand for cultural 'uniqueness' of CHT has also steadily transformed into a commercial product to the tourists. As a result, the touristification process became a soft tool of neoliberal statist policies that promotes the CHT as a potential tourism destination.

Social media is nowadays undoubtedly a most applicable and influential digital space to promote the tourism in CHT that provides information about travelling to have more adventurous and 'authentic' trip. Tourists search for original and traditional ethnic taste. Experiencing *Pahari* ethnic cuisines in local restaurants and shopping in local markets are now mostly patronized and advertised by private corporate groups in social media and other possible platforms. Touristification has often been imposed from the national level disregarded own notion of development of ethnic minorities in the groundwork and operation levels of tourism policies and projects. The development agency has also contributed as an influential determinant in promoting private interventions in the context of touristification in CHT. It was found that tourist expenses have been a leading force to create an unequal market relation which significantly changed the ethnic community's livelihoods. The increasingly competitive market has made the livings of the ethnic communities a new socio-economic reality in which they are gradually being marginalized. The challenges that ethnic minorities face included namely, commercialization of civic facilities, dislocation from homeland or increasing involvement of

the security forces and private entrepreneurs in the touristification process, are yet predominant issues, but are entirely overlooked by the private entrepreneurs, that indeed affect the local capacity to adapt with the newly changing economy. It is apparent that tourists have a economic power and their expenditures create a competitive neoliberal market relation, thus the local people who are not directly involved in the tourism sector struggle with the highly capitalist economy. The *Pahari* ethnic livelihoods are certainly 'overpowered by the unquestionable access of the strongly contrasting and external economic and cultural influences' (King & Stewart, 1996, p. 298) that accelerates touristification in CHT.

Branding tourism as development vector

The CHT has gradually transformed into a most important national and international tourist destination in Bangladesh by the statist's mega projects that mainly focused on the infrastructural changes and the communication system. Various plans and policies for the tourism development have recently been undertaken that concentrated on the beauty and diversity of the nature and culture. However, tourism, in general, 'parallels other forms of development wherein outside organizations gain control of a community's basic natural resources leaving the indigenous people almost totally dependent upon those organizations for their livelihoods' (King & Stewart, 1996, p. 298). But, the same development vector does not always work when it is applied to a socio-culturally diversified communities (Chakma, 2016). It needs a culturally appropriate and participatory approach. Tourism development practice in three districts of CHT continues mostly unequal that largely discounts the local ethnic communities. The NTP (National Tourism Policy) revealed several policies, for instance, *The Tourism Vision 2020* by Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC, 2004; Chakma, 2016; Ishtiaque, 2013), *National Tourism Policy 2010* by Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism (MoCAT, 2010), which were mainly focused on the sustainable management of environmental reserves in order to gain economic benefits by creating a tourism business hub (Ahmed, 2017). In addition, a number of largescale goals have jointly been fixed by the MOCHTA and ICIMOD for the period of 2017–2027, for instance,

> to increase the number of visitors to CHT by 10% per annum, to increase the daily expenditure per domestic visitor from Tk 1,550 to Tk 2,500 in CHT overall, to increase the percentage of visitors staying in CHT for 2–3 nights from 37% to 45% and those staying 4–7 nights from 37% to 40%, to retain at least 70% of tourist expenditure in the local economy, to increase tourist expenditure on local produce and handicrafts from Tk 200 to Tk 500 per visitor and to ensure that at least 80% of those employed in tourism is from the local population. (ICIMOD, 2017, p. vii)

The ministries and associated institutions expressed their mission and vision in different ways to work for the massive infrastructural development. In order to draw attention to the international tourists, they have newly spotted several tourist destinations in the CHT. The involvement and the local perception of the ethnic communities have largely been overlooked and rather controlled in these tourism plannings and implementations. The *Pahari* ethnic minorities have continuously shown their discontents on these statist's development schemes. This development tendency undermines the local capacity and sense of belongingness. Roy (2020) delineated that the state-sponsored 'development'

in CHT, for instance, 'the roads (another name for natural resource plunder), buildings (architectural monstrosities that are aesthetically and health-wise unsuitable for the CHT), and tourism spots (spot the garish, unnatural, coloured walls and roofs), none of these personify the hill tracts' history, traditions, culture, and ecology. It's simply a kind of cultural and ecological rape being perpetrated against a region and its peoples'.

Considering the CHT, in the statist tourism policies, it is precisely stated that the mode of socio-economic livelihoods, rituals, cultural and religious festivals, local cuisines, natural landscapes, temples of *pahari* ethnic communities as a 'touristic capital' could be a potential saleable object to tourists which can contribute to the national and local economic development. Besides, the tourism plans sensitized the 'colorful and primitive' nature of *Pahari* ethnic cultures to attract the national and international tourists. The NTP also intended to engage the ethnic communities in 'Community Tourism' (Chakma, 2016), where tourists can enjoy community services, for instance 'homestay (food & lodge) hospitality', and experience the *Pahari* ethnic cultures and festivals. But, the ground reality is different. In Sajek, security forces discourage the local communities to welcome the tourists offering these packages. Because they built expensive and luxurious hotels and motels. One of the Lushai informants expressed angrily that

> they grabbed our ancestral land and land is our life. When tourists have started coming to see the natural beauty and enjoy our hospitality, we expected to see it as supporting and alternative channel for our subsistence. But, security soldiers come to our house to check and compel us not to welcome and entertain the tourists.

In order to get fully benefited from the tourism business, they keep under control all the tourism facilities in the name of security. As a result, the tourist's security in CHT validates the control of people and place, and thus, smoothens the commercialization of culture and nature. It manifests the 'colonial mindset among the development actors. This mindset has gradually deployed the tourism industry as a soft approval to control over the cultural and natural resources of CHT in order to maximize the economic benefits. The romanticized picture of development bypassed local's perception on the real development. This approach predominates in the tourism policies, which emphasizes the performance of ethnic cultural and religious celebrations as tourist's demands. It could, therefore, be argued that the policy's objectives have gradually been nicknamed the tourism as development.

Commercializing the culture and nature

The CHT is an unique location of scenic settings with natural and cultural diversity, which certainly are measured as resources for the tourism industry. The noticeable reciprocal intimacy of tourism experience, for instance, overnight stays in *Pahari* ethnic houses or participation in cultural festivals, is facilitated by *Pahari* ethnic hosts. However, the negligence of cultural codes of behavior is simultaneously met with enormous tolerance. During *Boishabi* festivals (new year celebration), for example, it is frequent to observe that tourists irritate the *Pahari* ethnic girls who take part in the water throwing events as a part of *Boishabi* celebrations. The humiliation to the host is usually expressed by their laughter. It is notable that the '*pahari* dance' of ethnic minorities in CHT is the most appealing to tourists characterized by the social media and tourist agencies, that

crafts various brochures and images branded 'a tribal dancing girl', 'tribal life in CHT' (Nasreen & Togawa, 2002) or 'tribal cuisine with primitive taste' to entice possibly more tourists to CHT. People who come to visit want to enter the courtyard of the ethnic communities and take selfies. One of the *Pahari* ethnic informants expressed angrily that 'we are more or less like the animals in a safari park to the tourists'. Besides, due to the massive tourism development, a number of female informants articulated, some tourists started coming to CHT with levish desires, for example, *Pahari* ethnic girls were targeted as a sex commodity.

In CHT, among the widely mentioned cases of the commercialization of culture are Punkua and Lushai dancing and home-stay offerings. There are home-stay services formed in resident-cum restaurant format with tourist-guide arrangement in the Nafakum fountain of Bandarban and the Sajek union of Khagrachari-Rangamati. If the visitors intend to experience an ethnic Lushai dancing, they can enjoy it with pay in advance. The only means of lodging and fooding for tourists within the limited budget at such remote location is the home-stay package in the mountains. Numerous Lushai, Tripura and Pungkua households have temporarily been transformed into touristic bungalows that craft a 'unique' experience for tourists. As a paradise of natural diversity for tourists, Sajek is such a quiet place where tourists visit for their relaxation and refreshment from the chaotic urban life. A tourist informant in Sajek stated that

> we stayed in a wood-bamboo made household. The household has two segments which is jointly shared with host and guest. One portion is for the hosts and the other part is for tourists. We were welcome for three nights, four days as guests. For four days of food and lodge, we had to pay 12,000 taka for 8 persons in total.

The living space previously they named 'house' has been commercialized for tourist hospitality in the tourism market. Their house became a competitive market product for economic feedback and a symbol of socio-cultural representation as well. One of the Lushai informants asserted that 'the purpose of our home-stay service is not for our subsistence. But, in that purposes, we preserve our tradition with our own ways. Tourists desire to experience our rituals, music and dance in a home-made manner'. Tourists are, in fact, interested in staying in the *Pahari* ethnic homes not only for their entertainment, but also in experiencing the *Pahari* cultures and experimenting the *Pahari* 'primitive' cuisines with their ethnocentric mindset. In fact, the whole culture is being packaged according to tourist's desires. The package itself is symbolized for tourist consumption with colorful and romantic visual representation such as traditional dresses, dances, songs, greetings and services in the local tongue. The performance of their particular dancing is presumed as visual consumption and also displayed by agents in a deeply hegemonic gaze. Therefore, the tourists would perhaps turn into a relevant viewers and consumers not only to a *Pahari* ethnic portrayal but also possibly to distorted *Pahari* narratives and representations. Thus, the exhibition of Lushai and Pankua dancing subsists today as a 'contested practice between the lived and the aesthetic' (Clifford, 1988, p. 247). It makes sense that cultural exchanges between locals and tourists, on the basis of hospitality, have now been substituted predominantly by economic interactions for the earnings. In this form of exchange, locals accept the 'tourist gaze' (Urry, 1990, 2002), that develops the sense of commercialization of the ethnic culture. The tension with this perspective is that these local-tourist relations are certainly pushed to the unequal

market competition. In this context, Alexis Bunten (2008, pp. 380–395) asked that 'Is it sharing culture or selling out?'

However, the development of unplanned tourism in CHT has had an impact on the sense of belongingness attached with the places and reciprocal relations with the nature of the *Pahari* ethnic communities. The exploratory and very frequent visits of tourists, accompanied by their consumption power, converted the local's culture and nature into saleable objects. What were once places and environments for the everyday interaction to meet their livelihoods now value as market commodities. The commercialization of nature indicates 'a change in the meaning of their environment from a source of direct sustenance with a use value to a commodity with an exchange value' (King & Stewart, 1996, p. 296). It signifies a transformation in the connection between the *Pahari* ethnic people and their adjacent nature, from life-supporting deeds with their terrain to service-oriented activities for visitors. Thus, the commercialization of culture and nature not only altered their perception on their cultural and natural resources, but also their own notion of everyday life.

Conclusion

The spirit of tourism development in CHT is purposive and relatively biased which has less succeeded to guarantee the socio-economic well-being of the *Pahari* ethnic minorities. It has largely been centered on the economic gains for the public and private corporate actors and the control over the people and resources. Tourism neither improves the ethnic tensions generated by indigenous identity politics nor does it comply with the potential for regional development that guarantees the sustainable and sophiscated utilization of cultural values and environmental reserves. It is observed that branding tourism as development is largely based on the opportunities of the local communities that generated jobs, works and engagements in tourism business. It has miscarried to counterbalance the increasing ethnic inequalities in CHT which directs ethnic minorities and their cultures to be commercialized into the tourism development paradox. However, hegemonic mentality of some politically motivated locals, particularly Bengali, on the cultural and natural resources leads to the lack of spontaneous participation of *Pahari* ethnic people in tourism and permits the management of tourist facilities and services by non-*pahari* ethnic operators.

It has also been found an alternative narrative that *Pahari* ethnic people have recurrently expressed that their direct participation needs to be increased in order to develop a sustainable form of tourism. They are keen to promote themselves as the 'Other' that may, at least, be a safeguard for not to be disappeared their cultural uniqueness and authenticity, but not to be categorized as 'exotic and primitive agents' (Kirtsoglou & Theodossopoulos, 2004). Their reasoning connects not only to measurable benefits estimated by the involvement in tourism development, but more significant aspect they presume that the commercialization may lead to mistreat the cultural and natural diversity by the touristic corporate groups. The *Pahari* ethnic minorities communities take the tourism into consideration as a prospect to change their fortune and to empower them in the socio-economic position. It also helps to reintroduce their cultural 'authenticity' and 'uniqueness' to the tourists to identify themselves within the multicultural coexistence. Finally, it can be opined that the tourism development in the CHT may

seem beneficial for the local ethnic minorities at a first glance, but it raises the contested issues of who is beneficiary, and who and what is truly compensating for that benefit.

Notes

1. Nearly two decades of bloody conflict between the state security forces and the indigenous local troops, was formally come to an end after the 'CHT Accord' in 1997, but it is popularly known as 'peace accord'.
2. https://www.forestpeoples.org/en/region/bangladesh/publication/2010/urgent-action-cultureenvironment-and-biodiversity-endangered-chi (Retrieved 23th December, 2020).
3. A local leader, customarily works for a very small unit of the revenue circle called *Mouza*.
4. A customary administrative leader, generally serves for a village.
5. According to John Urry, the notion of the 'tourist gaze' implies that tourists exercise the power towards local inhabitants with the approach they gaze them, which is linked to the anticipations of 'authentic' performance and presentation of locals (see, Urry, 1990, 2002).
6. https://www.thedailystar.net/lifestyle/reader%E2%80%99s-chit/sajekvalley%E2%80%93where-hills-touch-the-sky-1314646 (Retrieved 15th November, 2020).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Chapter- Four

Encountering Tourism:

Politics of Development and Sustainability Paradox in CHT, Bangladesh

Abstract

This study brings an ethnographic account of how tourism initiatives, in the name of development, are becoming a potential threat to the nature and livelihoods of the indigenous people of Chittagong Hill Tracts. Privatization of indigenous jhumlands, nationalization of forests, and disturbance of wildlife habitats due to tourism development now pose challenges to the sustainability of the CHT. Besides, tourism develops states' discourses that disseminate the notion of tourism as a blessing for sustainability, a channel for peaceful co-existence, and a fundamental pillar of local development. These discourses are largely based on some economic indicators that entirely miss the ground reality. The study found that tourism leads to radical changes in the aesthetic contents of the ethnoecological settings in which local people and places become consumable objects due to the increased demands of tourists. With a critical anthropological perspective, it deconstructs the two contested discourses on tourism development as blessing for sustainability, and as blaming for resource exploitation. Applying an ethnographic methodology, this study provides some first-hand narratives of victims in the CHT which serve as a baseline for understanding how the top-down notion of tourism development policy produces a sustainability paradox.

Keywords: Tourism, Development, Sustainability, Forest Management, Indigenous Communities, and CHT.

4.1 Introduction

The Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh and its natives and nature have nowadays been experiencing a new reality due to the conflicting forest management and contested development policies that have materialized tourism as an alternative livelihood and represented it as a probable mechanism of local development and sustainability. Touristification in CHT has two purposeful agenda (Sajib, 2021, p. 278; Ahmed, 2017). The first objective is to distract the long-standing historical struggle of indigenous communities for their self-autonomy and identity recognition. The second purpose is to initiate a neoliberal capitalist economy through forest conservation and tourism development policy which has accelerated the controls of resources. These mindsets attempted to converse ethnic communities from ethno-ecological survival into corporate 'touristic ethnicity' (Ahmed, 2017; Wood, 1998). Since colonial period, the primary extraction of capital was secured by dismantling indigenous terrains and looting the ecological reserves for the benefit of the state and its privileged corporates (Adnan, 2004; Mohsin, 2000; Ávila-García *et al*., 2012). In the

post-colonial Bangladesh, the state has significantly taken part in changing the customary and local governance institutions, and enacted new legal practices to promote new tourism models for local development, which legitimized and normalized mainly the presence of national and regional corporate elites. Privatization of indigenous jhumlands by leasing them to Bengali traders for tourism and timber business, nationalization of forests by declaring them reserve and protected forests for tourism expansion, and disturbance of wildlife habitats due to the tourism and development projects now pose challenges to the sustainability and community well-being of the CHT. This study provided evident with empirical data on those challenges originated by the neo-liberalization of natural and cultural resources by national actors and regional political elites in CHT which increasingly affects the sustainability of the region as a whole.

After two decades of armed conflict between the state and the local ethnic groups ended in 1997 with a 'Peace Accord', the consecutive governments along with private actors have gradually fostered, rather trespassed, their intentions to manipulate the ethno-ecological resources and the unique cultural landscapes for tourism promotion, combining it with other development projects, regardless to assessments of local ecosystem and the livelihood patterns of the ethnic communities in CHT. In the light of the peace accord, in the 'First Schedule' of the Three Hill District Councils Act, amended in 1998, section 28 included 'local tourism' in the functions of the councils (Chakma and Chakma, August 2016). Besides, in Section 9 of Clause 'D' of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord, there is a provision for the government to allocate additional funds on a priority basis for the implementation of more projects for the development of Chittagong Hill Tracts and to encourage the development of tourism for local and foreign tourists while considering the environment in the region (Chakma, August 2016). But, the national governments has predominantly bypassed the regional and customary institutions to develop a local tourism. It has been observed that what is national in the context of Bangladesh as a whole is local in the case of Chittagong Hill Tracts. Moreover, the state's forest conservation policy for tourism has failed to preserve the natural resources, rather unplanned tourism development has acted as a soft destroyer against traditional resource management practices of indigenous communities. Adnan and Dastidar (2011, p. 130) argued that "in the neo-colonial Bangladeshi state representation of land-management policies, not only have traditional land-based practices been identified as 'anti-development' but also Indigenous traditional experiences have been recognized as 'anti-national' ideas" (quoted in Datta, 2015, p. 18). However, on the one hand, the state has broadly disregarded the rightful inclusion and participation of indigenous people in tourism development policies, on the other hand, they have been

represented to tourists as touristic objects of 'authentic' primitive culture. Hence, it is important to understand how the intertwined relations of these tourism and forest policies have impacted the livelihoods of *Pahari* ethnic minorities and the ecosystems of the CHT. The state's push for sustainability through tourism has gradually destroyed the harmony of the earlier nature-based way of life of indigenous communities. The neo-liberal capitalist mentality has fabricated an intra-community competition and led to a transformation from collectivity to individuality. As a result, tensions between larger ethnic groups (Chakma, Marma communities) and smaller ethnic groups have developed by increasing class division and forming a new hierarchy in the touristic involvement.

The empirical study found that tourism as sustainability effort is a kind of backfired mechanism (Homsy and Hart, 2019) and highly ambitious and illusive dream. The state's claim is that tourism has brought a socio-economic change in the livelihoods of local communities. Tourism developed state's discourses that disseminated the notion of tourism as a blessing for sustainability, a channel for peaceful co-existence and a fundamental pillar of local development in CHT. This mindset has largely been based on few economic parameters that has entirely missed out the ground reality of the CHT. Moreover, tourism has led to drastic changes in the aesthetic contents of ethno-ecological setting in which local people and places became consumable objects due to the increased demands of tourists in the commercial settings of CHT. This research is mainly based on the empirical study about the interactions between the three main actors of the tourism: the *Pahari* ethnic communities, Bengali entrepreneurs, and the public and its agencies. The study problematized the normative narratives of tourism development that portray actors' state of mind towards sustainability. With a critical anthropological perspective, it examined the two contested discourses on tourism- development as blessing for sustainability and development as blaming for exploitation. Development actors have been struggling to redress the conflicting situation of the CHT that involves various forms of conflict of interests. This study provided some first-hand narratives of indigenous people in the CHT which served as a baseline for understanding how the top-down notion of tourism development policy produced a sustainability paradox.

4.2 Study Area and Methodology

The Chittagong Hill Tracts, located in the south-eastern corner of Bangladesh, along with neighboring India and Myanmar, covering 13,274 sq km, encompassing three hill districts namely Rangamati, Khagrachari, and Bandarban, was the study area (Sajib, 2021, p. 274). The total forest

area of Bangladesh is 17.49%, where more than 27% of that forest is located in CHT (Datta, 2015, p. 20). As of the 2022 census, the population was 1,842,815 of which 920,217 belonged to the *Pahari* ethnic minority and the rest belonged to the Bengali (Muslim and Hindu) community (BBS, 2022). Eleven[1] indigenous communities, are locally known as *Pahari*, *Adivasi* or *Upojathi* (hill people, indigenous people or tribal people), but constitutionally labelled them as 'small ethnic groups' (Sajib, 2021, p. 274). It is known for its beautiful topography, resourceful ecological diversity and variety of forestland, mainly *Jhum* (swidden cultivation) concentration. In addition to hunting and gathering traditions in forest areas, shifting (*jhum*) cultivation has given a unique characteristics to the economy, society and material culture of the Chittagong Hill Tracts and has also shaped the customary land laws and forest management practices of the ethnic communities in CHT compared to other regions of the country (Adnan, 2011).

In this study, the terms indigenous people, *jumma*, *paharis*, *adibasi*, ethnic *Pahari*, locals, natives, and ethnic minorities were interchangeably employed to denote their collective identity as opposed to the 'mainstream' Bengali people. To categorize the *Pahari* ethnic people as 'indigenous' became problematic due to the exploitative political nature of the state against their identity recognition in which they were socio-politically constructed as 'intruders' of northern India by the state's 'agency' (Appadurai, 1990). Although more than 50% of the population is Bengalis according to the census of 2022, *paharis* ethnic minorities are regarded as indigenous locals, natives, or inhabitants of the CHT because of their social, economic, and cultural distinction from Bengalis. In this study, I considered the informants as 'co-researchers' rather than viewing them as 'objects' of research. I was intensively a participant observer to "study with people as opposed to studying them" (Ingold, 2017, p. 21; quoted in Ahmed, 2017, p. 17). The co-researchers and I worked as a group of mutual explorers. When I asked questions to informants about an issue, they rediscovered how and why they were treated in a mechanism of establishing a development ideology of public and private actors. However, while conducting fieldwork, I experienced a dual identity as a tourist participant and an observer, albeit with a reflexive mindset.

The methodological approach was ethnographic and interpretative, so as to understand the politics of development and sustainability paradox from an emic (Kottak, 2006, p. 47) point of view. The field research was mainly conducted in the Ruiluipara in Sajek, Khagrachari; Munlaipara in Ruma, Bandarban; and Kaprupara in Lama, Bandarban. Two field trips were carried out between

[1]. Eleven ethnic minorities in CHT namely, Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Tanchangya, Chak, Mro, Bawm, Lushai, Khyang, Pankhua and Kumi.

March and September 2021, and in May and November 2022. In this field study, in-depth and intensive interviews, FGDs (Focused Group Discussions), and some case studies were conducted from informants and key informants in which 116 pahari ethnic people, 40 Bengalis and 44 officials of state and non-state agencies were selected as samples. Here, I have hardly gathered the tourist's perceptions and experiences, rather I have mainly emphasized the views of Indigenous *Paharis* and development actors. Amidst the informants, circle chiefs, Headman, *Karbari*, leaders of local political groups, environmental and *Jhum* activists, forest and district commissioner's officials, Bengali business groups, and indigenous people from different ethnic groups were carefully chosen based on their direct and indirect engagement and participation in tourism development. For instance, informants who are leading stakeholders in tourism activities and those who are fairly non-participants were selected to gather the perceptions and experiences of indigenous people.

4.3 Sustainability as a 'False Dream': Problematizing Tourism

It is important to understand the state governmentality and the mindsets of development actors about natives and nature in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, and the mechanisms of its legitimation and normalization in order to construct development discourses. Here, the study has critically dealt with some theoretical puzzles to grasp the ground reality: how public actors are showing themselves as 'saver', but acting as 'grabber' using tourism with forest management policy; how the indigenous people perceive the notion of sustainability and development; how 'eco-governmentality' generates a false dream of sustainability? This study portrayed a critical reflection of recent textual and theoretical viewpoints (for example, Adnan and Dastidar, 2011; Ahmed, 2017; Ahamed, 2014; Ávila-García *et al*, 2012; Chakma, 2016; Datta, 2015; Gain, 2000; Homsy and Hart, 2019; Ishtiaque, 2013; Nasreen and Togawa, 2002; Rasul, 2003, 2007; Rahman, 2019; Tucker, 1999; Uddin, 2013) on the politics of tourism and development and its ill-defined applications that helped to problematize discourses associated with the paradox of sustainability. In this study, sustainability has not typically been denoted to the three pillars approaches, but 'eco-cultural' (Coronado, 2014) and eco-political aspects were significantly incorporated. Furthermore, I have revealed that 'sustainability efforts have backfired' (Homsy and Hart, 2019) because public and private actors have devalued indigenous expertise and capacities. The dearth of greater indigenous involvement in tourism development and the failure of development actors to comprehend the indigenous own forms of sustainability practice constructed a sustainability paradox that crafted a false dream for local communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. A significant number of texts (Homsy and Hart, 2019; Bulkeley, 2010; Homsy,

Liu and Warner, 2019) suggested that a real sustainability action demands a shared approach that combines top-down and bottom-up wisdom for the 'co-management' (Rahman, 2019) of cultural and natural resources for tourism development which enables the "development of local solutions to fit local problems, creating space for dialogue and increased accountability" (Homsy and Hart, 2019, p. 4; Nagendra and Ostrom, 2012, p. 104–133).

Here, I sought to understand the everyday forms of struggle for subsistence in living with tourism, and critique the state's 'developmental' efforts for sustainability. This study attempted to problematize the normative tourism policy for sustainability through 'encountering development' (Escobar, 1995). Besides, this study revealed the local response to the neoliberal and neocolonial tourism policies particularly how indigenous people of CHT perceive tourism as a process of neo-colonization of the state. These tourism policies, that are disseminated to establish sustainability, help to understand the neocolonial and neo-liberal practices of public and private actors in which actors construct subjective discourses to devalue the indigenous wisdom and capacity about eco-cultural resource management. These discourses veil the unequal power exercise and money-making venture of politically elite actors, that are supported by the nation-state mechanisms and agencies. I was concerned about whether the socio-politically 'constructed discourse' (Foucault, 1972[1969]) associated with tourism and sustainability have been manipulating the perceptions and experiences of the indigenous people in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. To understand the state governmentality on the natives and nature, and its politics of development and sustainability, mechanism of tourism development is the most prolific issue in the context of CHT. The neo-liberalization of tourism venture and everyday forms of the governmentality created an asymmetric market relations between the locals and state-backed traders which leads to a local resistance in a collective voice with sometimes national pro-indigenous activists that contested the perceptions of sustainability and community well-being. This neo-liberal practice, another mode of capitalist 'accumulation' termed by Marx, validates and normalizes the process of "commodification and privatization of resource and the forceful expulsion" of indigenous people (Harvey, 2003, p. 155; quoted in Ávila-García *et al*, 2012). It has also made a conversion in the indigenous livelihoods "from life-supporting deeds with their terrain to service-oriented activities as commodity" (Sajib, 2021, p. 282). Besides, it engenders a mutual mistrust between the Bengali traders and indigenous people that devalues the indigenous eco-cultural practices to enable the commercial performances of tourism. This tension mainly stems from a real shortage of competent indigenous entrepreneurs, and thus reliance on outsiders (Gerharz, 2002, p. 19–36). Therefore, tourism acts as a soft

mechanism of neo-liberalization of communal resources regardless of the legal embargo of the CHT 'peace accord'.

The political history of CHT substantiates that "sustainability is neither always possible nor even always appropriate in the context of tourism" (Butler, 1999, p.8; cited in Egresi, 2016, 275). However, tourism is reckoned as a soft 'anti-politics machine' (Ferguson, 1990) to distract from long-standing local resistance to development rights, and establish peaceful co-existence between indigenous and Bengali communities through cultural exchange in the touristic practices. Pursuing the process of peace building and conflict management, tourism has gradually been installed into the development planning for socio-political sustainability. Hence, the fundamental query raises that why and how tourism is endorsed as a development choice? Without resolving the historical and political problems of CHT, economic development is not a possible solution to incorporate tourism as a channel for establishing sustainability goals. However, South Asian scholars, particularly from Bangladesh, (Ahmed, 2017; Chakma *et al.*, 2019; Khan, 2015; Rahman, 2019) have critically characterized tourism as a neocolonial, neoliberal capitalist and imperialist practice of the state and its agencies that caused a 'blight' rather than a 'blessing' for indigenous locals (Hall and Brown, 2008). As a matter of fact, it compels us to understand the mechanism of changes in local subsistence in CHT where tourism materializes as an influential force for local development and sustainability. Although tourism has productively been nicknamed as an alternative way of development to mainstream the local communities of CHT, the problem is that it has a tendency to substantiate the economic priority rather than socio-environmental sustainability (de Kadt, 1992; Burns, 2004; Sajib, 2021). It was also observed that the forest conservation through tourism is not separate from development politics, as it encompasses multiple economic and political interests to control over natives and nature, which parallelly perceives 'triple win' benefits –conserving nature, sustaining community well-being and boosting national economy (Duffy, 2015). However, Escobar (2008, p. 169) argued that "such development policies and resource management tendencies of economic gain not only create challenges for the local people and their traditional knowledge of management but wreak havoc on local practices and have serious negative consequences for local sustainable food sources, sustainable development and environmental practices, and local ecosystems" (cited in Datta, 2015, also quoted in Sajib et al., 2022, p. 3). The Forest Department and its actors legitimized the forest conservation policies to protect ecosystems and find alternative economic opportunities to improve the livelihoods of the indigenous people in CHT (Adnan, 2004; Datta, 2015). Hence, tourism has been represented as an alternative solution to divert the Pahari

local's reliance on natural resource, and harnessed as a channel for local economic sustainability. As a result, forest conservation policy has often been represented as a potential action to ensure sustainability and materialize the tourism expansion in CHT. After the 'peace accord', the idea of 'conservation' has failed to achieve its goals, rather tourism development was given priority as a means of commercial benefits to the public and private agencies. In ground reality, policy for sustainability with forest conservation has been misled by the actors as it was mostly linked to the tourism plans and policies (Sajib et al., 2022, p. 2). The indigenous paharis were characterized as danger to environmental sustainability due to their uninterrupted and excessive use of forest resources where conservation policy emphasizes the aesthetic substances of nature to promote tourism. Therefore, in the name of forest conservation the 'pure forest' zones are manipulated as an appealing to develop a so-called ecotourism or nature-based tourism that is always prescribed as the local sustainability effort by the public and private actors.

4.4 Economic Sustainability: A Development Paradox

After the independence, the 'Bangladesh Tourism Corporation' was formed in 1973 and 'Bangladesh Tourism Board' was established as a national tourism organization through the enactment of the Bangladesh Tourism Board Act-2010 in the National Parliament. The National Tourism Policy of 1992 was recently updated in 2010 for well-planned and balanced development of the tourism industry (Chakma and Chakma, August 2016). The government has inaugurated a 10-year tourism master plan, for instance, 'National Tourism Policy-2010' by Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, 'The Tourism Vision 2020' by Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC), 'Visit Bangladesh-2016' by National Tourism Organization (NTO) (MoCAT, 2010; Siddiqi, Jan 2020). As the goals and objectives of the National Tourism Policy, it was mentioned in Section 2 of the second chapter that,

> "Development of the tourism industry as one of the main sectors in the development of Bangladesh, as well as job creation, socio-economic development by involving local government institutions and local communities, protecting the balance of the environment and biodiversity. The main objective of this policy is to achieve sustainable tourism development through conservation of diversity" (Chakma and Chakma, August 2016).

According to this master plan, the government set up 2,200 modern and attractive tourist centers in the country. Needless to say, most of the diverse and unique natural and cultural resources exist in the indigenous areas, thus it was taken for granted that the tourism became an alternative economic blessing for the indigenous people. In addition, In the 'Seventh Five Year Plan and

Development Vision for CHT', it was asserted that the CHT is an emerging economic zone for the tourism industry with its rich forest, biodiversity and rich cultural diversity (MoCHTA and ICIMOD, 2015). But it has some regional challenges, for instance, resource conflicts between indigenous and Bengalis, unsustainable use of land, degradation of natural resources by locals, poor market access, poor physical and socioeconomic infrastructure, limited non-farm employment opportunities. It also emphasized that government committed to create more inclusive and equitable society, participatory development for sustainability, bridging the gap between hills and plains. The CHT can be a new geo-political and economic gateway of Bangladesh to the East (MoCHTA and ICIMOD, 2015). Ministry of road and transportation has also declared to build three rail stations for three hill districts and one airport in the CHT (Amadershomoy, June 2020). The question arises, why government and private institutions are more interested in development projects in CHT than in other rural areas of the country. Instead of developing the agricultural industry, why should the tourism industry be developed without ensuring the safety of human life and property? Why did the government suddenly build special tourism in CHT in the state plan without verifying the industrial potential of the area? To find answers to these questions, we need to understand the state politics of development and sustainability efforts.

Several driving forces substantiate the development of the neo-liberal tourism economy that hinder local economic sustainability in CHT.

4.4.1 Development for 'Peace'

After the 'peace accord' of CHT, development, particularly tourism development, became a predominant mechanism for sustaining the peacebuilding and mitigating the decades-long bloody armed conflict between the state and indigenous communities. Government circulates 'peace accord' as a pioneer for peaceful coexistence between indigenous and Bengali communities which helps in establishing sustainability in CHT; hence tourism is a channel for a win-win situation for both. To expand the neo-liberal market economy, one of the tactics of counterinsurgency is to publicize 'pacification', for instance, 'winning the mind and heart of the enemy' through development projects by the security forces (Arens, 1997; Marma, March 2019). All the 'splendid projects' built by the public and private actors over the CHT are nothing but a development trap and a false dream of sustainability. To build bridge-culvert-roads in the remote areas, and schools and temples is to win the mind and heart of the people. Designing development projects on a community basis, for instance community-based tourism, and participation in tourism activities by ethnic categorization is aimed at ethnically dividing and ruling indigenous communities. This categorization

is an imperceptible ‘symbolic violence’ that legitimizes dominance of one community over another (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Ahmed, 2017). Therefore, peace-development-sustainability, is replaced by competition-exploitation-marginalization. Defining ‘peace’ depends on how indigenous locals are treated by public-private actors and tourists, and how the hosts and guests interact with each other. Tourists want to view only what they imagine before their visit to indigenous communities. For example, they desire to experience an ‘authentic’ culture and ‘primitiveness’ which crafts *Pahari*s as a ‘touristic indigeneity’ that enforces the neo-liberal tourism economy. An indigenous informant angrily expressed that “the state wants to sell us as products of tourism. So that we are gradually becoming a spectacular and attractive ‘other’ species like zoo animals, not humans”.

Tourism development reinforces the mainstream's "othering" vision through the socio-economic marginalization of locals and the empowerment of the Bengalis by facilitating entrepreneurial opportunities. Bringing *Paharis* into the ‘mainstream development’ means turning the material lying in the corner of the remote hill tracts into the product for the national market (Marma, March 2019). As a result of tourism, everything is sold in the hills from culture to sex. So the objective of this market system is systematic marginalization (Muhammad, 1999). Tourism is the only way to develop Chittagong Hill Tracts? Every year during summer, the overflowing fruits rot on the streets of Khagrachari for the lack of only one cold storage facility. The poor farmer does not get the price of the crop. A key informant, a wild natural trekker, depicted that “there is no development happening for the indigenous people in a remote area. The government is laying out new roads but it does not have any relation to the community's betterment. The roads are for timber business (legal and illegal), stone mining (illegal), and the tourism expansion”. Roy (2020) portrayed that ‘development’ in CHT, for example,

> “the roads (another name for natural resource plunder), buildings (architectural monstrosities that are aesthetically and health-wise unsuitable for the CHT), and tourism spots (spot the garish, unnatural, coloured walls and roofs), none of these personify the hill tracts’ history, traditions, culture, and ecology. It’s simply a kind of cultural and ecological rape being perpetrated against a region and its peoples” (cited in Sajib, 2021, p. 279-280).

Haque (March 2020) critiqued the imbalanced tourism development that “Chittagong Hill Tracts, on the one hand, are becoming a major tourist attraction in Bangladesh and on the other hand, parties with business interests and power are usurping natural resources further destabilizing the relationship between the hill people and the surrounding forests”. The government and its public

and private actors, who developed a soft process of legitimization, constructed a development paradox in a manner that has widely branded tourism as sustainability effort. As a result, the state has used tourism as a tool to economically solve the 'political problem' of CHT as an 'economic problem'.

4.4.2 Forest management and land grabbing

The CHT has not been safe from commercial exploitation since the British colonial period (Ahmed, 2017). The Forest Department has mostly been serving in the corporate interests of private leasing actors. State and its forest management authorities sometimes "use false reports about the areas to be acquired and/or bypass due processes of state acquisition in order to take over Pahari lands in the CHT" (Adnan and Dastidar, 2011, p. xix; quoted in Ahmed, 2017, p. 114). Many deep forests, for instance, Sajek and Chimbuk, as reserved and protected areas declared by the Forest Department, has become a profit-making hub for tourism entrepreneurs and timber traders as opposed to conserving the environment and its sustainability. Conservation has turned into neo-liberal consumption since policy for conservation was misplaced and misread by state and non-state actors to reach sustainability goals, and it has always been connected with the tourism development agenda (Sajib *et al*., 2022). In addition, indigenous people have always been represented as a threat to environmental sustainability due to the exploitative nature of their livelihood dependence on natural resources (Rasul, 2007, Sajib *et al*., 2022). Khan (June 2015) reported that "Forest Department acquired 84,542 acres, and declared them reserved and protected forests, and also leased thousands of acres to non- indigenous people to set up rubber plantations. Indigenous families has evicted from their ancestral lands". For example, the Mru, Lushai, and some parts of other *Pahari* ethnic groups located in various tourist destinations are development victims and development refugees. They have no choice for their livelihoods but to be products of the neo-liberal tourism economy that replaced their subsistence economy. In CHT, the lands are called *Rajdhani*[2] and 'Reserves', administered by the Forest Department. According to the regulation of Chittagong Hill Tracts, no non-resident can purchase land from CHT. But it actually doesn't stop at just selling. The lands have already changed hands a few times. A key informant from Lushai community in Sajek shared an incident that "a local headman of Pankhua community announced to sell a piece of land for tk 3 million in Konglak, Sajek. A local Bengali trader bargained for only 1.5 million but the headman asked him to increase it. Later someone from Dhaka came and saw the

[2]. *Rajdhani*s are *Khas* and recorded lands under the Raja. *Khas* land means state-owned land.

place and bought it for 15 million. The Pankhua headman fainted after hearing about this huge amount of money. When the Bengali trader informed the owner about the water shortage, the owner said that if necessary, I will bring distilled water from Dhaka by helicopter". In Sajek, Pankhua and Tripura communities were forced to leave even from places where the army has built the roads and tourist spots. Those who were evicted did not receive any compensation. Therefore, how we can measure the contribution of tourism to economic sustainability which has not guaranteed a secure living for the indigenous locals, let alone changing the quality of life.

4.4.3 Excessive involvement of law enforced agencies and Bengalis

The excessive involvement of the security forces in tourism development in CHT, for instance, "Nilgiri resort at Bandarban (Army), Lake Paradise at Kaptai, Rangamati (Navy), Jibtoly resort at Kaptai, Rangamati (Army), Agottor at Baghaichari, Rangamati (BGB), Heritage Park at Chengi Bridge, Khagrachari (Ansar and VDP), in developing, promoting, managing and controlling local tourism puts aside the Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC) and the related ministry, and local administration as well" (Khan, June 2015; quoted in Sajib, 2021, p. 274). Besides, Bengali presence in tourism activities created a contested atmosphere as the local minorities and the Bengalis are 'two antagonistic categories' (Siraj and Bal, 2017). So, there is a tension between political and economic purposes of the tourism business that mainly emerges from a denial of own ethnic entrepreneurs, and hence state-backed access of Bengali corporate groups. Through permanent and state-sponsored Bengali (settler Bengali), population composition was increased which marginalized the indigenous communities. Bengalization process has become smooth. As a result of tourism, the very frequent visit of Bengali tourists has created a kind of invisible, but permanent and multi-layered dominance. The state's security forces and state-induced agencies have taken for granted for ultimate control, conflict management and whole area occupation through tourism development. The more Bengali people from plain-land as tourists become visible, the more dominance get normalized through the tourism development. Tourism was nicknamed as the development vector for the locals on the one hand (Sajib, 2021), indigenous people have deliberately been criminalized and victimized in the name of security concerns for tourists on the other hand (Ahmed, 2017). It has been observed that tourists feel safe and comfortable while staying in CHT. Surveillance and care of tourists by the security forces, the army in particular, has created a 'peaceful' wonderland for tourists, and Bengali entrepreneurs for business as well. Ahmed (2017, p. 81) questioned that "if the military feels that this is a dangerous area why is the state promoting it as a 'paradise' for

tourists?" During my field visit in CHT, when I was experiencing ethnic traditional event at night, suddenly some soldiers came to me and checked my belongings and suggested me to take hotel and leave this place because of security reasons. Soldiers gave me permission to stay there only for that night.

There are many army check-posts and tourist information booths to control tourist's movement. All the tourists who are entering any spot in Khagrachari and Bandarban are obliged to do registration. Besides the registration booth, there is an army canteen, where biriyani, cold drinks, and packet snacks are available to buy. Local indigenous residents are not allowed to settle any shop there. There is a restriction to enter Remekri, Bandarban. The rule is after 15:00 hours no boat will be allowed to leave Thanchi Boat dock and enter Remekri. The local bus from Bandarban almost took 5 hours to reach Thanchi, then counting all the registration formalities the tourist teams cannot make it possible to leave Thanchi boat dock by 15:00 hour. But there is a solution provided by Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) Thanchi camp. If the tourist team hires BGB enlisted boat then they will be allowed to leave the Thanchi Boat dock and enter Remekri after 15:00 hour and in surplus, there will be no restriction over life jackets too. Otherwise, each tourist has to rent a life jacket which will cost 50tk per day. They build up a system where tourists must have to take their services, like in Bogalake, a natural lake located at the mouth of a dead volcano in Ruma, local guides must enlist their clients to the military cottages first. After military cottages are out of reservation then local guides could put them into the local residents' cottages or any indigenous home-stay services.

4.4.4 Tension between market and subsistence economy

Sustainability effort in CHT is problematic, as unfamiliar market mechanism to indigenous locals and the extreme level of cash flow in the rural market by Bengali traders lead to a shift from sustainable to profitable behavior. As tourism is one of the most sophisticated and perfect creations of capitalist practices (Nogués-Pedregal, 2017, p. 88-108), the intertwined relation between 'sustainability and profitability' (Casagrandi and Rinaldi, 2002) engenders a doubt about the existence of *Pahari* community's subsistence economy and self-reliant well-being. State and its development actors circulate that in the subsistence mode of production, people cannot think about the far-reaching future life. People do not think of saving and production-investment approach to earn more money. This non-capitalist livelihood is the major obstacle in the overall economic development of the indigenous people. Besides, people have low per capita income due to small scale production and they also have no saving power. Lack of skilled and technical knowledge people is bound to hinder

economic development. Thus, the development of a market-oriented economy rather than a nature-dependent, land- and forest-dependent, and above all small-scale productive subsistence economy is undoubtedly essential for the economic development of indigenous communities as are the narratives of government officials and private development actors in this study. Besides, the complex mechanism of market economy made it easier for Bengali businessmen to exploit the indigenous communities who were accustomed to a simple subsistence economy. In the process of developing market economy created an intense competition between *Pahari* ethnic communities and Bengali traders. Lack of capital, inexperience in the market business, the predominance of Bengali traders and the insular behavior of the administration made it impossible for the *Pahari* ethnic traders to survive in competition with the Bengali traders. Currently, the tourism business in CHT is mostly under the control of security forces and non-local Bengali traders. They have monopoly control over all types of wholesale and retail trade, from the moneylender to transportation business. For example, Getting a bank loan is also a difficult task for *Pahari* ethnic people. Allegations are also heard from indigenous respondents that some banks have secret instructions not to provide bank loans to *Pahari*s. If an *adivasi* needs a loan, he has no choice but to borrow money from Bengali moneylenders by mortgaging his land. Therefore, the *Paharis* are not interested to be entrepreneur in tourism enterprise. An indigenous informant expressed that "I applied for a loan to set up a business, but the bank rejected my request without proper reason. Then I was forced to borrow money from a Bengali for a month and assured him to return his money soon. After three weeks he was forcing me for his money, otherwise, he wanted my last means of living, the only cultivable land". Indigenous people who are not directly involved in tourism activities struggle with the new market economy. It is an alternative livelihood practice for very few indigenous locals. New people who are not *adivasis* (indigenous) are constantly joining this market business. Many of the new entrants tend to prioritize profit rather than traditional concerns. One of the Bengali restaurant owners uttered that "we offer a variety of pahari menus as it is very much in demand in tourist's choice list. Tourists think that they are experiencing primitive food, but it is almost like a Bengali dishes. We just use the image of pahari cooking and serving style. It is very profitable way to fool tourists". However, tourists have purchasing power which create a competitive market relation between Pahari ethnic producers and Bengali retailers. A cloth business informant narrated that "about 80% of the products sold in the textile market are imported. It mainly comes from North Bengal. Although tourists think that the products sold here are locally produced". Tourism entrepreneurs, particularly Bengali traders, use indigenous image for their sale

of tourism related product. In this way, the indigenous people become famous for their indigenous style of clothing, they are also sold as commodities.

Most of the indigenous-owned tourism facilities or properties that I have been able to visit on field site are owned by the Chakma communities and are also shared with various corporate individuals or private entrepreneurs. One of the informants stated that "a Chakma is involved as one of the partners in the newly developed *Bargi* Lake Valley and a company called Hatim Group has invested the entire amount behind it. The company which again operates the timber business through leasing rubber plantations towards Sualok in Bandarban. This company has taken advantage for easy access to natural resources by tourism related enterprises". A key informant, an indigenous restaurant owner and entrepreneur, worried that "if *paharis* does not come forward in this tourism business or initiative, then multinational capital and big patrons will undoubtedly take that place. If this happens then those who have small capital will not be able to stand anymore". Local people's concern is about the mechanism of tourism development which gradually expands whether the local people want it or not. But how will that happen? Whether to take the local people along or enter as a big investment of multinational companies, it totally depends on the state politics of development. One of the main goals of these companies is to earn and increase profit in any way. Whether the social fabrics, such as norms, values, tradition, overall culture is destroyed, is not their concern.

4.4.5 Taking culture as a barrier vs using culture as a touristic capital

Another significant driving force is 'culture'. State and its agencies construct a discourse that traditional way of life of indigenous people is a barrier to improving their community's well-being and economic sustainability. Their traditional mindset and cultural practice do not allow them to adapt to new development paths, for instance, participation in tourism development can be an alternative and profitable means of livelihood for the Pahari people that they do not take it as an opportunity. But, opportunity for whom? Who is creating this alternative way for whom? Why indigenous people resist against tourism development? To understand the development paradox by tourism impacts, the changes in cultural performance as a neo-liberal practice need to be explored. Indigenous people in Bangladesh are constitutionally recognized as 'small ethnic groups', popularly spoken as '*upajathi*' (subnation) not '*adivasi*' (indigenous), but state use their 'indigeneity' as 'primitivity' for the tourism promotion. For example, in the National Tourism Policy-2010, it emphasized the importance of handicrafts, souvenirs and the performance of indigenous culture

(MoCAT, 2010). State and its associated private actors feel that indigenous cultural practices are not befitting to achieve sustainability goals on the one hand, while on the other hand, they often act 'indigenous culture' as a touristic capital to attract tourists. Every year, folk art fair in CHT is observed and exhibited for the preservation of indigenous culture. It is an arrangement of state representation in order to have an entertaining experience as a salable commodity to tourists. Market orientation is the last word of this exhibition practice. In this neo-liberal tourism economy, tourist experiences and cultural performances construct a space for interaction between host and guest that accelerates culture to be commodified. Public and private actors intend to view indigenous people not only as a tourism promoter but also a 'touristic ethnicity' (Ahmed, 2017; Wood, 1998) as an eco-cultural capital.

4.4.6 Undermining the customary institutions

The customary institutions of CHT consist of three circles, namely the Chakma, Bhonong, and Mong Circle. Each circle has three descending steps with its institutional leader- *Raja* (king)(Circle Chief)-Headman (head of the *Mouza*)-*Karbari* (Head of the village), and is selected by inheritance and community. This customary governance is superseded by the politized system of the state "as a campaign of force, oppression, and weakening of community stability and self-sufficiency" (Datta, 2015, p. 103). Except circle chief *Raja*, headmen and *Karbari*s are appointed by the District Commissioner following the recommendation of the *Raja*. As a result, headman and *Karbari* are only accountable to the state authorities, not to the communities (Thapa and Rasul, 2006). This shift undermines customary institutions that allows Bengali traders easy and free access to the natural resources and enables to create a profit-making venture for outsiders, and thus resources become neo-liberal market commodities for tourism and timber business.

4.4.7 Absence of rightful participation

It is expected that any kind of developments along with tourism promotion has to be addressed as stated by the CHTRC Act of 1998 and HDC Acts of 1989 (Chakma, August 2016). The rightful participation of the CHTRC and HDCs, and indigenous locals in the development policymaking and implementation is fundamental for sustainability in CHT. The absence of knowledge and experience of indigenous participants and the state-backed intrusion of Bengali private entrepreneurs often resulted the 'institutionalized violence' (Weigert, 2008) of the 'right to development' in CHT (Chakma, August 2016). Moreover, there is no minimal participation of marginalized indigenous

people in the formulation of tourism policies and plans. As per Article 82 of the Constitution, the 'Minority Cultural Institutions Act 2010' was enacted. Section 9 (d) of this Act calls for the development of cultural tourism (Chakma and Chakma, August 2016). This act reads as though the living culture of indigenous peoples is only for the development of museums, stage entertainment and tourism industries. Hence, the state politics of inclusion of indigenous people for their cultural performance in tourism activities is to manufacture them into a neo-liberal tourism commodity. It is merely a mechanism of selling the cultural practices of indigenous communities, not sharing them to tourists as cultural preservation.

4.5 Environmental Sustainability at Risk: The Other Side of 'Paradise'

Traditional resource management practices of indigenous communities are closely interwoven with the eco-cultural performance of their subsistence in which they believe that conserving the resource is a sacred duty of the *Pahari* ethnic natives of CHT. To understand the disturbance of environmental sustainability, we need to emphasize how these practices are impacted by the state's forest management and tourism development policies. Through these policies, the customary land ownership of indigenous communities has turned into public assets which are termed as 'wastelands' (Datta, 2015; Adnan, 2004). These so-called wastelands have been leasing for the tourism spots and other profit-oriented business. The forest department and its agencies are the main grabber of these 'wastelands' in the CHT by the declaration of reserve forest, protected forest and unclassified forest (Ahmed, 2017; Adnan and Dastidar, 2011; Datta, 2015; Rasul, 2007). Rasul (2007, p. 7) reported that the government declared about 50000 ha of additional forest land as reserve forest, and 42000 ha of unclassified state forest land was leased out to private entrepreneurs for rubber plantation, horticulture and tourism. However, the 'National Environment Policy-2018' (section 3.14) emphasized banning or restricting tourism if the environmental balance of popular tourist areas reaches critical condition; and avoiding or restricting tourism to biodiversity-rich and environmentally sensitive areas (MoEFCC, 2018, p.43). Although environmental conservation is taken into account in this policy, the disruption of environmental sustainability and the threat to the ecologically-based livelihoods of local indigenous people caused by tourism development are neglected, because the state and its interest groups are mostly benefited from the leasing and conservation policy. These forest conservation policies have not only weakened the eco-cultural subsistence of the *Pahari* ethnic people, but have also created a panic about displacement and a mistrust between indigenous communities and the state actors. Moreover, indigenous locals

demonstrated resistance several times with cultural showdown against tourism development in which they have often been evicted without any compensation, and also against the state's 'social forestry policy-2004' due to the fear of further control by the 'unclassified state forests' (Rasul, 2007). Recently, few locals sell their customary lands or work together with outsider Bengali tourism entrepreneurs and timber traders to earn cash for their survival in the competitive neo-liberal market economy, who were previously concerned to restrict non-indigenous people's access to natural resources.

This study revealed several socio-environmental issues that endanger environmental sustainability in CHT, such as-

4.5.1 Privatization of Resources

Privatization of resources through leasing for timber business and grabbing lands for tourism spots created tensions between the indigenous people and the state. Conservation of aesthetic natural diversity serving for tourism development offered an appeal of greenery paradise to middle or upper class tourists along with adventurous and recreational experiences in the deep forests even though the indigenous locals struggle with the shortage of natural resources for their subsistence in CHT. The environmental discourse adopted by public actors promotes to restrict some forestlands for conservation as protected and reserve areas, literally are used for tourism resorts, which categorizes the indigenous locals as environmental destroyers. It helps to normalize the mechanism of neo-liberalization of forest resources, and mandates the regulation of certain forest management protocols (for example, *National Environment Policy-2018* by Government, *Joint Forest Management Plan* (JFM) by Public and Private Partnership, *Forest Management Project* by Bangladesh Forest Industries Development Corporation [BFIDC]) for environmental protection which actually 'legitimizes the displacement and land eviction of adjacent indigenous communities' (Adnan, 2004, 2011; Datta, 2015; Ahmed, 2017). Ávila-García *et al.* (2012, p. 51-67) delineated that "tourist paradises have sprung up in places of high biodiversity, offering exclusivity to their owners and clients while violating agrarian rights, creating social conflict, and destroying ecosystem". It is undeniable that the worsening of natural resources causes the weakening of tourism returns. It was found that these forest conservation policies, indeed, serve neo-liberal economic interests for capitalist actors rather than environmental sustainability goals for natives and nature. As a result, the state-backed political and corporate elites became new landowners and leading savers of natural resources through the privatization of forest resources that forced the *Pahari Jumma* natives

to be homeless at their homelands. Many indigenous families were forcefully evicted from their territories and alternatively offered a means to be involved in tourism activities as compensation. As stated by Fletcher (2011), the market logic categorized the 'communal assets as waste reserves' that normalized the process of privatization. The state discourse devalues the customary land sharing system, and rationalizes the normative action of privatization, as "saving the land was merely a means to another end that is called 'accumulation by dispossession'" (Avila-García et al., 2012, pp. 51-67). Thus, the paradoxical view of land 'ownership' and resource 'saver' legitimized and normalized their 'rational' existence in the state-termed 'wastelands' of CHT. Indigenous *Paharis,* on the other hand, were pushed to choose tourism as an alternative means of their livelihood, since the forests, previously they customarily owned for their living, became public property for tourism and other developments. Therefore, the 'eco-ethnological poor' is remarginalized and finally commodified by the 'eco-political rich' through the privatization and neo-liberalization of the resources (Ávila-García *et al.,* 2012).

4.5.2 Blaming Shifting Cultivation

Shifting cultivation, locally denoted as *jhum,* is a community-based agricultural practice of Pahari indigenous communities, and the recognition of their identity and culture has also been formed through this practice in CHT. The colonial and post-colonial discourses have considered *jhum* cultivation as a waste of resources because it is processed in a slush-and-burn method over a long period of time (Adnan, 2004, 2011; Mohsin, 2000; Rasul, 2007; Schendel 1992). In contrast, the shared identity *Jhumma* recognized "*jhum* as a way of life, based on the notion of customary ownership and reciprocal exchange in harmony with their ecology" (Ahamed, 2014, p. 57; Gain, 2000; Dewan 1990; Mohsin, 1997; Roy, 1997). After the 'peace accord', the environmentalists and the forest department developed a discourse of legitimizing forest conservation policies to control the access of indigenous folks of CHT, which were viewed as the root of environmental tragedies due to their traditional practices of shifting cultivation that apparently put the deep forests, hills and wildlife in danger (Ahmed, 2017; Datta, 2015). This traditional cultivation was represented as "a 'primitive' form of agricultural practice; most unprofitable; destructive to environment by causing soil erosion; loss of topsoil; loss of soil fertility; landslides and deforestation" (Tripura *et.al*, 2003, p. 60; cited in Haque, 2015). As opposed to this discourse, Nasreen and Togawa (2002, p. 97–112) argued that "the worsening ecological imbalance in the environment of CHT in last three decades is deeply rooted in so-called 'development' programs", for instance, tourism development. Instead of

enacting a sustainable forest policy against this environmental loss caused by typical development initiatives in CHT, development actors offer tourism as an instrumental force to mitigate natural imbalances and bridge the gap between 'socio-economic interests with market logic' (Fletcher, 2011, pp. 448-452; Bianchi, 2018, p. 88-102). Blaming jhum cultivation is to legitimize the forest and land grabbing for tourism. The state and its agencies emphasize tourism, timber plantation, and social forestry as alternative channels of livelihood instead of *Jhum* cultivation, and legitimize the eviction of indigenous people because their farming systems are destructive to environmental sustainability. However, indigenous informants claimed that it is an eco-cultural and environment-friendly practice and is properly maintained with its ecological cycle. It was observed that the increasing failure of environmental sustainability are not only attributable to customary agrarian practices but also to unplanned tourism development and forest management policies (Rasul, 2007). It was found that due to the inappropriate eco-political hoax in plans and policies, neither tourism development nor jhum cultivation has fully supported the subsistence of indigenous minorities, as both livelihood sectors are seasonal and incapable to improve the well-being of indigenous people and to hold environmental sustainability in CHT.

4.5.3 Resource Scarcity

It was anticipated by the informants that every year about one million people come to experience the natural 'paradise' and the 'authentic' cultural diversity in CHT. This huge number of tourists make a pressure on the nature and natives, and has already created socio-environmental crisis. Indigenous locals are now experiencing a resources scarcity (food, water and land scarcity), for instance, starvation of Lushai, Pankhua and Tripura communities in Sajek. Increasing pressures on cultivable land over the past few decades have forced jhum cultivators to reduce the fallow period from around 10 to 20 years to a mere 3 to 5 years on average today, which has drastically affected soil fertility and jhum productivity (Hossain, May 2022). State's resettlement projects, commercial tree plantation projects, social forestry policy, forest conservation, and finally tourism development policies have largely resulted in shortage of cultivable lands. Besides, due to cut down the forests for tourism resorts and timber business, traditional food collection practices, for instance, hunting and gathering method, of indigenous people have almost lost. The overdependence on tourism has led them into perpetual food insecurity (Rasel, 2018, p. 88). However, it was observed during my fieldwork that a large number of jhum lands was forcefully occupied by a rubber plantation company through the fire in Lama, Bandarban in May 2022. The cultivated crops and fruits were destroyed to

evacuate the lands for the rubber production. During the relief donation program by private organizations, a *Jhum* farmer in Lama denied receiving food relief from a private timber company and raised his voice in anger that "it is better to die of starvation than to take relief from those greedy companies who ruined our jhumlands by setting the fire. Their empathy is hilarious".

The indigenous locals increasingly encounter water scarcity, particularly during the winter season, due to the demand for water at hotels or resorts for tourists. Besides, the existing sources of water are mostly unhygienic, as the hotels and resorts dump waste into the canals. Therefore, the contaminated water often spreads water-borne diseases in CHT (Shachi, July 2022). A key informant, indigenous activist, revealed that "hotel and resort owners are trying to build dams on rivers to ensure water demand in the hill tracts. As a result of this plan, two-thirds of the *pahari* ethnic minorities will be deprived of access to water". In fact, resort owners purchase drinking water at a high rate from water suppliers in Sajek who are mostly Bengalis. Informants stated that water has to purchase from Dighinala by spending 30 tk for every 20 liters. Those who cannot afford water, they have to walk 3-4 km in search of fresh water. However, there is no guarantee that clean water is available. Consequently, class division increased in those villages based on this water crisis. Especially, the crisis starts and becomes extreme when winter comes. It appears that even if the upper classes manage this crisis somehow, the rest have to live in severe crisis. Women who go to fetch water are the most harassed by Bengali suppliers. The amount of water has decreased to such an extent that it is not even possible to irrigate crops. Now the competition in the villages is about who will irrigate first. Due to the difference between the achievers and the non-achievers, the village is no longer in a harmonious state. Shoilapropat is the only water resource for locals of Ruma, Bandarban, but it is now place of amusement for tourists. As a result, local women face difficulties in collecting water as well as maintaining their privacy. Thus, sustainability gradually decreases, and on the other hand environmental conflict increases for resources.

4.5.4 Landslides

The main cause of landslides in the Chittagong Hill Tracts is random felling of hills for construction of roads, culverts and tourist resorts as key informants stated. Without any soil assessment, and in violation of environmental laws, public and private actors cut down hills and trees for tourism development. For example, the army built a 70-km road from Khagrachari town to Sajek, which encroached on jhumlands and homes of indigenous paharis. Between the years 2000 and 2018, a number of catastrophic landslides killed over 725 people in the CHT (Ahmed, 2021, p. 1707-1720;

Sultana, 2020). In 2017 massive hill slides caused death of 150 in Sajek and Bandarban (Barua, March 2020). One of the indigenous informants expressed that "we are living in danger, our life is no safe. Every year hill slides down due to heavy rainfall. It never happened 20 years before. Now people are dying by hillsides. We do not want state's form of tourism development if it takes our lives and homes". Van Schendel et al. (2001, quoted in Rasul, 2007, p. 7) illustrated that "where protective vegetation had been removed, the soil was exposed to the monsoon rains and eroded rapidly resulting in landslides and the sedimentation of streams, rivers and the reservoir". However, the teak is massively planted by the timber traders by leasing the jhumlands. Many environmentalists (see Nath *et al*, 2005) suggested that it damages the soil strength and fertility, and naturally shaky for soil. Teak and pine trees are used for the furniture and wooden tourist cottage, particularly in Sajek.

4.5.5 Deforestation

From the British colonial period to the present, deforestation has taken place and was legalized for revenue collection for the state, and income generation for the timber traders by means of "the nationalization of forests, weakening traditional institutions and alienating indigenous people from traditional forest management" (Rasul, 2007, p. 8). The expansion of reserved and protected forests, the Bengali settler issue, the leasing of jhumland for rubber plantations and especially tourism development have not only accelerated deforestation and resource depletion, but have also revived conflicts between indigenous *jhummas* and state and non-state actors. UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) reported in 2021 that from 2000 to 2015, 90 percent of Bangladesh's total deforestation occurred in CHT. According to the Forest Department, in 2021, five thousand grabbers including state's agencies encroached 16,644 ha of forest lands for commercial purposes, mostly for tourism expansion (Mahmud and Chakma, March 2022). A key informant, an indigenous activist, asserted that *jhumma* locals protested and organized several cultural showdowns as resistance to tourism development. They portrayed this top-down development as a slow and soft violence of rights to livelihood, for instance, instead of blaming the uninterrupted and indiscriminate forest grabbing, they were victimized as leading actors of deforestation.

4.5.6 Pollutions

Increasing tourist pressure has created an ecological imbalance in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Due to an inadequate sewage system, raw waste is dumped directly into watercourses leading to

waterlogging and swamping. Blaikie and Brookfield (1987, p. 10) portrayed this context as 'one person's profit is another person's toxic dump' (cited in Mostafanezhad *et al*, 2016, p. 4). Consequently, safe drinking water is now an alarming issue in CHT. Indigenous locals fear of water scarcity. An informant (an officer of UNICEF) uttered that "during my travels across the CHT, I have hardly discovered a sanitary latrine that was not near to water streams. It is a hazard to water and air due to mostly exposed closets." In addition, informants from national and international organizations expressed a concern that plastic waste is more harmful to the environment than human waste because plastic is non-biodegradable. They also stressed the awareness of the behavior of tourists towards the natives and nature. A key informant worried that "even 20 years ago there was no plastic in Boga Lake, Bandarban. Now it is full of polythene, plastic, and packets of chips thrown away by tourists." It was found that the majority of the informants were not satisfied with the prevailing garbage management practice applied by the CHTDB. However, sound pollution is a very disturbing issue for the indigenous people. Most of the informants expressed annoyance that "tourists play loud music on the soundboxes while traveling in tourist boats and cars. We feel disturbed during sleep. If someone is sick, he gets sicker, it's very irritating." Locals are not habituated to heavy metal music as they naturally prefer to live in a peaceful and harmonious environment.

4.5.7 Wildlife Disturbance

According to key informants from environmentalists, wildlife is displaced due to the careless movement of tourists. The deep forests of the Chittagong Hill Tracts provide a safe and smooth route for elephants to walk from Bandarban in Bangladesh to the forests of southern Myanmar. This migration track is seriously disturbed by the incessant and adventurous entry of tourists and timber traders into the forest. There are around 200 local wild elephants in CHT (Talha, April 2021). Tourism development has not only endangered the wildlife but also threatened the habitats of the indigenous people. A key informant, headman of Ruiluipara, narrated that

> "30 years before, Sajek was full of wild animals and birds, and local people would not go out after dusk. The environment was eco-friendly and rich in food. The deep forest has rapidly lost its wilderness. Now people and animals struggle with the movement of unwanted outsiders (tourists and wood businessmen). Wild animals moved near to the border India. We rarely see deer, wild chickens, monkeys, snakes, and birds".

If forest conservation policies ensure the free and unhindered roaming of wild animals and keep their tracks smooth, then no policy or set-up is required for their breeding and growth, and this can promote wildlife tourism or ecotourism to some extent according to most of the informants.

How indigenous communities feel to be "solastagia'- a kind of eco-grief experienced by a community when it feels that its environmental umbilical cord has been severed" (Morshed, May 2021) if their source of livelihood rapped by the destructive tourism development. This has created an 'eco-colonialism' (Ávila-García *et al*, 2012), as occurred, for instance, with the Lushai communities in Sajek and Mru communities in Bandarban in CHT. However, indigenous gatherers and hunters enable to be 'para-biologists' (Hance, September 2017), to protect the wildlife using their indigenous knowledge. Shahriar Caesar Rahman (2017) ('future for nature' award winning conservationist) boldly suggested that "empowering the native communities to take action is the most effective means towards achieving the conservation of their unique ecosystem and culture". Therefore, the wisdom of indigenous people and traditional forest management could be a parallel tool for conservation and sustainable tourism along with the state's policies that would be a sustainable win-win approach if both actors are respectful of each other.

4.6 Conclusion

The study sought to understand the paradox of development, community well-being and sustainability through the mechanism of tourism's policies, including forest management policies for tourism by public and private actors. It also explored how eco-cultural practices as a tool rather than a barrier led to achieving sustainability goals. It was found that locals were hampered in performing eco-cultural practices with the state's top-down development approach that undermined traditional institutions. Lack of inclusive participation in decision-making and tourism management hindered becoming self-dependent which was crucial to community well-being and sustainability. Nevertheless, few politically-supported local elites worked together and negotiated with the state and its actors, as a result, most indigenous people were unable to communicate with development actors for their own desired development. It was observed that few *Pahari* ethnic locals, particularly Chakma and Marma communities, were economically advantaged and politically empowered, to some extent, compromising their self-identity, but the indigenous majority became remarginalized by the state's mechanism of tourism development with the support of these minority elites. As a result, what is often done with tourism in CHT is not a balanced development, but it is a discriminatory and purposeful sustainability effort.

Tourism-induced development through, for instance, wholesale declaration of jhumland of *Paharis* as reserve forest, leasing of thousands of acres of land to non-locals, land grabbing and acquisition for resorts, afforestation through social forestry policy, the establishment of land ports, and construction of connectivity roads by massive cutting of hills and forests, have not been established in favor of a holistic eco-culture-friendly and pro-indigenous development. The question is, whether this development is sensitive to the culture and rights of the concerned community and the environment of the CHT? Chakma (October 2020) argued that the 'wind of sustainability' can never be flowed to locals where self-governance is implausible, where security of life and property is uncertain, where culture and nature are endangered. It has appeared that tourism in the Chittagong Hill Tracts could not mitigate the long ethnic conflicts of self-determination and recognition of indigeneity nor could it meet the state's assurance of supporting livelihoods as an alternative means and conserving the nature which was never conducive to achieving sustainability goals. Rather, those promises have, in many cases, alarmingly come under severe opposition to tourism projects. For example, the eviction of indigenous communities from their ancestral lands is a contentious premise of development ethics. Tourism, indeed, not only eroded their subsistence resources, but also eco-cultural practices. Moreover, the denial of inclusion and prioritization of *Pahari* desires in tourism development policies means that public and private actors overlooked the local capacities and wisdom, which challenged overall socio-economic and eco-cultural sustainability. Therefore, sustainability efforts through tourism to address the increasing political and economic disparities of indigenous people have not been successful. However, the recognition of the indigenous practices of forest management could be a potential way to reach the sustainability in all domains. Datta (2015, p.141) also delineated that "traditional cultivation culture needs to be institutionally recognized to ensure self-dependency and sustainability". The indigenous *paharis* have not only the capacity to develop a self-supporting economy and take care of natural resources, but are also capable of creating a shared economy that could contribute to the community well-being and empowerment, and supplement the national economy as a whole. Furthermore, establishing dialogue and mutual trust between the state and indigenous communities can avoid indigenous communities' resistance to tourism development. The tourism development is bound to be sustainable if the tourism policies ensure respect for the rights of indigenous people and the protection of nature, based on their spontaneous and inclusive participation.

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Chapter- Five

We are a 'Community', not a 'Commodity': Tourism and Politics of Representation in CHT, Bangladesh

Abstract

This study deals with the contention of community and commodity, and the commercial use of culture and identity under the brand of tourism in the case of Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh. Tourism as a 'business for pleasure' leads to a neoliberal movement through the corporate mechanism of the commodification of indigenous culture and its transfiguration into a 'fun machine'. In this movement, cultural uniqueness and ethnic identity of indigenous communities in CHT are reconstructed, represented, commodified, and commercialized as exchangeable objects for tourist consumption. This ethnographic research delineates multiple narratives and voices from diverse actors around tourism that construct a hegemonic discourse of Bengali tourist gaze through the manufacture of the indigenous 'other' as a 'touristic ethnicity'. Based on anthropological methodology, the study portrays the multilayered and everyday forms of representational politics that transform a 'community' as a sense of belongingness, into a 'commodity' as an object of economic gain.

Keywords: Tourism, Representation, Commodification, Tourist Gaze, and Indigenous Communities.

5.1 Introduction

During my fieldwork in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), I witnessed an experience where a tourist couple encountered a 'pahari' family in front of an indigenous village courtyard while the tourists were photographing an indigenous old woman smoking 'hookah' adorned with traditional jewelry. The family members of the elderly came and asked them indignantly that "we respect our elders and you should value our privacy; we are not a commodity, but a community". This is the ground reality that the indigenous paharis of CHT confront a sense of commodification in their everyday lives through touristic representation. This study is concerned about the nexus of community and commodity, and the commercial use of culture and identity under the brand of tourism in the case of indigenous people in CHT, Bangladesh. Here, I explored the contributions and representational politics of various tourism promotional actors such as tourists, tourist agencies, indigenous communities, the state and the media, who have accelerated the process of commodification through tourism. The study emphasized the everyday forms of representation that encompass the commodification of people and places, the self-adopted mechanism of indigenous people, media portrayals, the construction of tourist gaze and discontent of *pahari* ethnic people in CHT. It also stressed the mechanism through which cultural uniqueness and indigenous identities are

reconstructed, deployed, commodified, and commercialized as exchangeable objects for tourist consumption. Comaroff and Comaroff (2009, p. 140) contended that "there is an ongoing worldwide reconfiguration of 'ethnic minorities' into 'ethno-preneurial' actors" (cited in Rivera, 2012, p. 64). It has been observed that the commodification of culture has nowadays remodeled and romanticized the cultural difference of indigenous people accentuating the connection between the cultural revitalization and neoliberal touristification. Tourism creates a market where tourists are buyers and consumers, and sellers are the indigenous communities and the products are 'culture' and 'identity'. Tourists visit CHT, where they consume and adopt various features of the local indigenous culture, for example, festivals, food, clothing, and other socio-cultural practices, through their purchasing power. It was found that tourists expressed several reasons for choosing the Chittagong Hill Tracts as a tourist destination, for example, enjoying natural diversity, exploring *Pahari* ethnic cultural practices, and experiencing adventurous events are influential to make pleasurable and memorable trips. Besides, online reviews of post-tourists, for instance, on Facebook, Instagram, or travel websites, also persuade many people to visit Chittagong Hill Tracts.

However, M. K. Gandhi uttered that "no culture can live if it attempts to be exclusive" (Prabhu 1958, p. 20; cited in Dlamini, 2017, p. 1). For instance, when tourism is well established, cultural values and customs are in danger, because of market competition. It grows an individuality which is not the local communal behavior of indigenous communities. Collectivization is broken up and class divisions increase as are evident in the empirical studies of South Asian scholars (Ahmed 2017; Chakma, 2016; Dubey 2007; Hettiarachchi 2019; Rahman 2019; Rasul and Manandhar 2009; Sajib, Nicolli and Alietti, 2022). They contended that not only the subsistence, but also the indigenous cultural practices become changes where tourism erodes many cultural code of conduct and religious gravity. Tourism as an alternative livelihood thus develops a socio-cultural relationship between tourism corporates and indigenous communities for economic gain that forces natives to negotiate the customary behaviors as tourism demands. It was found that tourism has led to drastic changes in the aesthetic contents of indigenous culture in which indigenous people became active agents as touristic performers due to the increased demands of the tourists in the commercial settings that speeded up the commodification of community and culture in CHT. Nevertheless, although *Pahari* ethnic communities are not constitutionally recognized as 'indigenous', their culture and identity are staged and marketed by the state and the private actors in tourism promotion due to the distinctiveness in their cultural practices observed with communal collectivity, economic self-sufficiency based on jhum cultivation, political freedom governed by customary law,

and social democratic system led by kingship. For example, in '5th Annual Cultural Diversity Festival' jointly organized by MoCHTA and the CHTDF titled with 'Unity in Diversity', the main purpose was to share and sensitize the richness of 'pahari' ethnic tradition and culture of CHT to the 'mainstream' Bengali people (UNDP and CHTDF, 2012). It has promoted cultural diversity to enhance tourism potential by collaborating with ethnic entrepreneurs and Bengali corporates. Despite the festival celebrated cultural diversity, *Pahari* ethnic people were acknowledged as 'other' ethnic groups, not as 'indigenous'. What exactly this promotional celebration for tourism promises to enhance in cultural 'unity in diversity'? It is always projected a colonial mentality by the tourists, travel agencies and public actors in their advertisement in (social) media that "the *pahari* communities are very naïve, welcoming and attached with nature". In fact, this representation constructs an 'otherness' of natives. Neoliberal tourism as a 'business for fun' (Cohen, 1988) forces a neocolonial movement through a corporate mechanism of the commodification of indigenous culture and its transfiguration into an 'entertainment machine' (Lloyd and Clark, 2001; quoted in Barrado-Timón and Hidalgo-Giralt, 2019). In this study, I did not intend to depict the economic impact of tourism or the material exchange of tourism as a 'development vector' (Barrado-Timón and Hidalgo-Giralt, 2019), rather I delineated multiple narratives and voices from diverse actors around tourism that constructed a hegemonic discourse in the manufacture of the indigenous 'other' as a 'touristic ethnicity' (Wood, 1998, pp. 218-241; quoted in Ahmed, 2017). Based on theoretical connotations and empirical research in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, I portrayed the multilayered representational politics and commodification of indigenous culture that transforms a 'community' as a sense of belongingness, into a 'commodity' as an object of economic gain.

5.2 Study Area and Methodology: Ways of being in the Field

Chittagong Hill Tracts is the largest mountainous area of Bangladesh where eleven indigenous communities living with their distinct way of life along with the substantial numbers of 'mainstream' Bengalis, a few kilometers away from the Chittagong city. It is a foremost popular tourist location in Bangladesh, exclusively due to its natural and cultural diversity, which pulls a large number of tourists, mainly from the metropolitan cities of Bangladesh, as well as planned tour operators. It is located in a hilly natural scenic beauty but a hazardous tourist track, infrastructurally underdeveloped, and underprivileged touristic setup. Its native dwellers entertain a disproportionate segment of tourism advantages as the tourism industry is predominantly controlled and promoted by the public and private actors where indigenous locals are passive

touristic entertainers. The Chittagong Hill Tracts is positioned in the south-eastern part of Bangladesh, and its south-east boarder is surrounded by India and Myanmar. It covers 13,274 sq km, and consists of Rangamati, Khagrachari, and Bandarban, hill districts. According to 2022 census, the eleven indigenous *pahari*s are 920,217 in total out of 1,842,815 in population, and the largest portion of the population is the Bengali (Muslim and Hindu) community (BBS, 2022). Eleven[3] indigenous communities are locally identified as *Pahari*, *Jumma*, *Adivasi* or *Upojathi* (hill people, shifting cultivators, indigenous or tribal people), but they are officially recognized as 'ethnic minorities'. Although it is constitutionally termed as a 'small ethnic group', I have often used the term 'Indigenous' people, to introduce the cultural differences to a wider readership, with due respect to constitutional recognition.

However, based on the ethnographic exploration, I have selected multi-sited locations for the empirical research mainly Ruilui para, Sajek in Khagrachari, Munlai para, Ruma, and Kapru para, Lama in Bandarban, although all indigenous communities and most of the tourist spots in CHT were taken into consideration for a holistic understanding of tourism and its impacts. In this empirical study, a qualitative research design was made in accordance with the sites and sample selection. I did several field visits in different times from March to September 2021, and in May and November 2022. In this study, 76 indigenous *pahari*s, 54 tourists, 13 tour operators, 3 tourist guides and 14 officials of public and private actors of tourism were taken as samples. For tourists, a random was employed due to their mobility status. Here, who are tourists and who are hosts is sometimes problematic in a sense that Bengali locals also host tourists with indigenous flavors, but in this study, hosts refer only to *Pahari* ethnic communities of CHT. In some cases, tourists who live in a hill district and travel to other hill districts for pleasure trips behave like locals. The travel agencies were conducted purposively considering their perceptivity and experience of advertising tourism offers and packages, for instance, regarding the creation of promotional materials and webpages. For this study, in total 57 tourists and bloggers' posts and reviews, and 13 travel websites were evaluated on the tourism experiences as a whole, for example, on the cuisine experiences in *Pahari* ethnic restaurants as well as homestay hospitalities, and the cultural tour experiences. I also analyzed several critiques, writings, and opinions of activists, bloggers and tourism experts published in newspapers and other platforms. These posts and brochures of tour operators, bloggers, individual promoters and post-tourists on social media were scrutinized applying a semiotic method to unveil

[3]. Eleven ethnic minorities are in CHT namely, Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Tanchangya, Chak, Mru, Bawm, Lushai, Khyang, Pankhua and Khumi.

the representations of constructed values where brochures or posts as "'sites of meaning' embody social and class differences" (Dlamini, 2017, p. 103). Besides, snowball sampling was used for the informants of officials and corporates. However, attempts were made to attain 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1973) with an explanation of the different layers of meanings associated with various the discontents of the indigenous people in the context of tourism. I have mostly relied on the anthropological methods, particularly, participant observation, in-depth interviews, Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) and case study. Apart from these key techniques, I also examined photographic, textual, and audio-visual representations of indigenous people and their culture by tourists, travel agencies, and states' actors in tourism advertisements and promotion. These subjective representations of indigenous 'others' through such texts, photographs, or videos persuade people to construct an imagination about CHT and its people. In these representations, 'backwardness' or 'exoticness' is "used as a visual marker of specific, but contradictory, local characteristics that portrays variously for primitivity, underdevelopment, indecency and indigeneity" (Schendel, 2002, pp. 342-374). For this analysis, I employed 'netnography', a web-based methodology used basically on the online communities, suggested by Robert Kozinets (Kozinets, 2002, pp. 61-72) to assemble samples from the Facebook and Instagram tagged with Sajek Valley, Ruilui para, Munlai para, Kewkradong, Nafa-khum, Thanchi-Remakri and Alutila, where tourists and travel operators posted a romanticized and partly modified and distorted form of pictures and videos. Thus, in this study, netnography suggested a unique methodology that unveiled "tourists' subjective travel experiences and post-visit narratives provided on the online platforms" (Mkono, 2011, pp. 253-270).

Figure-4: Munlai para, Ruma (Study area) Source: munlai.com.bd/

Figure-5: Rului para, Sajek (Study area) Source: Google Image

Figure-6: Kapru Para, Chimbuk (Study area) Source: travelmate.com

I would like to narrate the construction of fieldwork how I built a rapport with the informants, selected key informants, and positioned myself in the field sites. The positioning in the empirical research was in an 'insider-outsider' dilemma with my identity whether I am an outsider researcher, tourist 'other' or inside-out local as a Bengali being at home. I have also encountered four positions in 'doing fieldwork'- race, religion, politics and culture, although I was concerned about my value-free position and 'political correctness' while at the field sites as well as in my reflexive writing. Redfoot (1984, pp. 299-301; cited in Cohen, 1988, p. 276) categorized "anthropologists as 'third-order tourists', who reject the artifices in their own culture and seek an

alternative reality in ‘quest for authenticity’.” Moreover, I was always asked by the security forces whether I would write something ‘problematic’ about *Pahari* ethnic ‘terrorists’ (as ‘natives’ who are involved in the politics of self-autonomy are often criminalized as ‘national terrorists’ by security forces), and the indigenous people provided data whether I would write about their struggle, and they sensed my research as a space of resistance to the state, not tourism. I have been gradually distinguished by the natives from ‘outsider’ tourists due to my respect and knowledge of indigenous culture and language that developed an 'insider' position in the study area. For example, when tourists meet locals in a street vendor and natives use local slang words to laugh at tourists, my experience allowed me to understand the insider-outsider interactions. Day by day, my identity became transformed from a ‘outsider’ tourist or city-based Bengali to ‘insider’ Bengali local. Finally, I identified myself as a researcher rather than a tourist ‘other’. Moreover, I tried to find some ‘observation posts’ (Tucker, 1999; Crick, 1992) to observe tourists’ participation in cultural practices of natives, and tourist behaviors and interactions with indigenous folks as it is useful technique to study of tourism ethnography. For instance, cultural gatherings, street shops or festival’s spots were used as ‘observation posts’ to understand non-verbal reciprocity.

The in-depth interviews and FGDs were also constructive in my study to unearth the informant’s experiences, ways of viewing, behaving, judging and sensing (Dlamini, 2017; Schostak 2006). These methods helped me to understand how the ‘Bengali tourist gaze’ was developed in tourist communications, and how the tourists, travel agencies as well as indigenous locals themselves mutually circulated a myth of ‘exotic otherness’ in terms of native homestead hospitality as an authentic experience. For example, tourists are offered several experiences of cultural ‘others’ such as everyday tasks with natives, weaving cloths, traditional dancing, indigenous food and local wine tasting. Besides, indigenous cuisine’s marketing by local restaurants, tourist guides or operators had been normalized and justified as the ‘pahari’ brand with a corporate sense, not a cultural significance. Thus, the promotional actions ‘tells a story’ about welcoming tourists (Dlamini, 2017, p. 116). This promotional issue was also pertinent to me because it resolved a question on how the state adopts ‘inclusive’ tourism policies and constructs a ‘backwardness’ as a politics of representation within a racially and culturally marginalized and politically controlled setting where indigenous people and their culture are exhibited for tourists.

5.3 Constructing ‘Other’ as ‘Commodity’: A Theoretical Linkage

Here, it proposes a theoretical reflection on the politics of representation by the state, tourists and media about indigenous people and their culture in the context of tourism. I will not explore tourism development and its economic outcomes here rather illustrate the politics of tourism in terms of representation and commodification. The study problematizes the materialization of the indigenous culture in tourism promotion by the state-induced actors who have the hegemonic 'voice' with political and financial power, whereas the indigenous people are passively deployed by the actors for the economic benefits and enthusiastically commodified by the tourists as 'touristic ethnicity' (Wood, 1998, 218-241; quoted in Ahmed, 2017, p. 12). In the viewpoint of politics of representations, where several derogative terms are possibly expressed, it needs to question the undeniable distortions of indigenous way of life due to be falsely 'staged' (Dlamini, 2017) in "the interaction between 'ex-primitives' and postmodern colonizers, the tourists" (MacCannell, 1992; Burns, 2008, p. 72). Nunez (1989, p. 271) stated that "guests and more often their hosts are always 'on stage' when they meet in face-to-face encounters. The host 'rehearses a friendly smile' and 'assesses the mood of the guest'"(cited in Burns, 2008, p. 70). MacCannell (1992, p. 1) also argued that "tourism is not just an aggregate of merely commercial activities; it is also an ideological framing of history, nature, and tradition; a framing that has the power to reshape culture and nature to its own needs" (cited in Burns, 2008, p. 64). Hence, this study examines the discourses by considering several paradoxical issues of relevance to the politics of tourism and its diverse relationships with representation, commodification and resistance to tourism. I would like to elucidate the politics of representation against the construction of *Pahari* indigenous communities as 'other'. In this regard, the notion of post-coloniality helps to understand the Bengali hegemony on the indigenous 'others' in terms of viewing them as touristic performers, and considering as 'entertainment machine'. Besides, this study could unfold the local response to the market-driven tourism policy particularly how indigenous people perceive tourism as a process of neo-colonization of the state. Moreover, socio-linguistic discourses were examined to comprehend the "increasing impact of tourism and its recognition as a socio-political practice, the marketization of public discourse and the growing impact of the media" (Przeclawski, 1993; cited in Maci et al., 2018, pp. 1-5). This study also scrutinized few semiotic discourses for categorizing the purposes of the language pictured in tourism promotion and advertisement. Furthermore, 'tourist gaze' proposed by Urry (1990, 2002) could support to unearth the 'hows and the whys' (Moufakkir, 2011, pp. 73–89; Monterrubio, 2019, pp. 18-28) of views and experiences of tourists, and mindsets of state and its actors. I would also like to understand how 'Bengali tourist gaze' has established a 'superior' 'Bengali-ness' over a

'inferior' indigenous 'otherness'. Finally, how festivals, local traditions, rituals, and way of behavior of indigenous communities in CHT can crafts neolocal tourism is theoretically relevant to examine the neolocalism.

5.3.1 Post-coloniality and Tourism

Since 1860 the people of Chittagong Hill Tracts have severely experienced a hostile colonial and postcolonial governance which gave them a status as a 'exclude area' restricting access from 'mainstream' Bengali people that deliberately locked the indigenous communities from outsider's intrusions and framed an easy process to collect revenues, and indigenous *Pahari*s, for the first time, discovered themselves as 'other' from the colonizers 'we' (Schendel 1992; Adnan and Dastidar, 2011; Ahmed, 2017; Uddin, 2010). In view of the colonial history of the CHT and its distressful connection with indigenous communities, this study deconstructed postcolonial discourses to understand the state's form of tourism politics and tourist's colonial mindset against indigenous people of CHT. Postcolonial discourses construct a colonial state of mind in tourism campaign and manifest subjective expertise to substantiate socio-political hegemonic voice over indigenous minorities who are economically poor, socially disadvantaged, politically vulnerable and culturally subjugated. Considering postcolonial binary composition 'we' vs 'other' in tourism politics, Said (1979, p. 199) views "representations not just as a way of seeing but as also impacting on the way 'we' act on 'them'" (cited in Chakma, 2016, p. 5). This cultural hegemony is a colonial notion transmitted to postcolonial Bengali tourists and business elites (Tripura, 2015; Ahmed, 2017). The deliberate falsified and commodified image of the 'exotic others' manufactured by postcolonial state of Bangladesh and its actors contributes to constructing a bias knowledge that shapes tourism policies and promotions in CHT. For instance, it was evident in the 'National Tourism Policy-2010' (MoCAT, 2010), where indigenous cultural artifacts, festivals and handicrafts were encouraged to be deployed in tourism marketing along with the natural diversity of CHT. Moreover, the postcolonial representations staged by tourists in social media and advertised by tourist operators in their webpages often include *Pahari* ethnic peoples' physique and their decorative appearances as a primitive sense, which can be claimed that it was manifested under postcolonial ideologies (Coronado, 2014; Hall and Tucker 2004). Therefore, the colonialist ideologies persist to develop the post-colonial touristic discourses. These discourses reproduce neo-colonial and neo-liberal capitalist hegemony (Coronado, 2014, pp. 11-28). It can be analogized that colonization forms hegemony by physical force, while tourism constructs hegemony by economic force (MacCannell, 1999). For

example, as a result of tourism, a form of invisible dominance is shaped due to the repeated visits of Bengali tourists. This opportunity has taken by the state and its agencies through tourism development for ultimate control of the whole region as the CHT is treated as a 'conflict-prone' area. Frequent visits of tourists and state intervention have resulted a multi-layered dominance. Thus, tourism has served as an 'anti-politics machine' (Ferguson, 1995) for the state to smoothen the militarization in CHT along with the national bureaucracy and weaken the customary administrative bodies. The more Bengali people from plain-land as tourists become visible, the more 'positional dominance' (Yasmin, 2014, p. 129; quoted in Ahmed, 2017, p. 30) get normalized through the tourism development. The increased presence of Bengali tourists also helped to normalize Bengalization and make a feature of its peaceful and favorable outsiders (Ahmed, 2017).

5.3.2 Racialization and Representation of 'Other'

The representation of racial differences is a central factor in tourism in the context of Indigenous people in CHT, in which process people become an authentic 'others'. Bengalis are seen as a 'mainstream' and any racial intermixture makes one 'non-Bengali others'. Here, Omi and Winant's notion of 'racial formation' (2014,[1986]) is pertinent to understand the socio-political struggle of indigenous people who have newly been tagged with tourism development. They contended that it develops through the social, economic and political hegemony that regulates the racial connotations. The process of racialization is formed, transformed, and reformed (Omi and Winant, 2014, p. 109) with the corporate interests in tourism business that perhaps appears a long-lasting feature in CHT. To understand the notion of racialization, Padovan and Alietti (2019, pp. 172-196) signify a "process by which different groups or clusters of people are discriminated in some way because of their natural characters – skin colour, gender, age – or of cultural features that are naturalized and crystallized – religion, language, dressing". Hooks (2009, p. 367; cited in Ahmed, 2017, p. 11) contends that "when race and ethnicity become commodified as resources for pleasure, the culture of specific groups, as well as the bodies of individuals can be seen as constituting an alternative playground where members of dominating races, genders, sexual practices affirm their power-over in intimate relations with the Other". Thus, this study unmasks the postmodern manufacture of racial ethnicity, the changing and kaleidoscopic meaning of race, and the politics of categorization and representation in influencing racial formation. Although race is a situational and socio-politically constructed issue, It became a relevant issue to romanticize tourism fascination in the context of CHT. Nowadays, tourist agencies also use the culture and physic of the indigenous

people in their advertisement and offerings, for instance, enjoying indigenous festivals, dancing and singing, staying their homestead and entertaining indigenous cuisines and so on. In this perspective, it is important to explain that how and why race is a political device for the sensitization and exploitation of a particular group of people. In his book *The Wild Race in South Eastern India* (1870), the colonial administrator T. H. Lewin portrayed a romantic designation to the ethnic people of CHT as a 'wild race' which became an 'ideal' type of human being with colonial fantasy (Lewin, 1870; Tripura 1992; quoted in Uddin, 2010, p. 283–294). Moreover, Duncan McDuie-Ra's work (2015) on racism in India could be conducive to understand how racism exists in the everyday interactions between *pahari* ethnic people and, state organs, and the tourists with the sense of Bengali-ness. He argued that "everyday forms of racism are more experiential rather than an objectively identifiable situation" (Jilangamba, May, 2012; cited in McDuie-Ra, 2015, p. 2).

In this study, the politics of racialization against 'indigenous culture and physic' in the crafting of public policies of tourism in CHT. The ideas of racial difference in Bangladesh have always been to a certain extent entangled with the ideas about cultural difference. However, since the independence in 1971, it has been observed a shift from the biological 'race' to cultural 'other' as the politics of state discourses that deal with 'difference' (Uddin, 2010; Cornell and Hartmann, 2007). A relationship of discomfort develops when the difference between the visitor and the visited occurs with physical appearance, for instance mongoloid face, or partial 'nudity'. This difference has often confronted with severe discontents between the state and the indigenous communities (Roy, 2012). The Governmental officials use the word '*upajati*' (meaning 'sub-nation' and parallel to 'tribe') and refuse the term '*adibashi'* (equal to indigenous). Indigenous people are constitutionally categorize as "backward section of citizens" (articles 28 and 29) which is associated with the racialized connotations of 'backwardness' and 'primitiveness', conveying with downgrading connotations and ill-mannered views (Roy, 2012, pp.1-37; 2009, pp.9-10). In any legal procedures and development policy, governmental officials prefer "a variety of terms, including indigenous, aboriginal, *adivashi,* ethnic minority, hill-people, and *upajati*" (Roy, 2012, pp.1-37). A total of 58 (11 in CHT) indigenous communities are officially referred to as 'small ethnic minorities' instead of '*upajati*'. This official term was newly developed after critical response from indigenous activists. However, the term '*Jumma'* and '*Pahari*' (hill people) are largely tolerable to the indigenous inhabitants reflecting their collective identity of the traditional agrarian system '*Jhum* cultivation' in the hill tracts. To the Bengali tourists, *Pahari*s are characterized as 'son of nature' or sometimes 'wild', which have conflicting connotations with 'civilized or modern'. The politics of adoption the

phrase *upajati* was connected with the nation-building process, that were conjugated with homogenization of 'one nation' the Bengali-ness (Mohsin, 1997; Schendel, 1992; Uddin and Gerhaz, 2017). The state denied to recognize them as 'indigenous people', and stated that "these people are as Bengali as the other citizens and are able to enjoy the fundamental rights and are protected by the law and order of the state" (Roy, 2009, pp. 9-10; Schendel, 2011). In addition, the derogatory categorization of the *Pahari* indigenous folks as "forest destroyers, *jhum* cultivators, wild people, forest dwellers and *pahari* came to be defined as being 'non-Bengali', underdeveloped and environmentally destructive humans" (Rasul, 2007; Roy, 2012; Datta, 2015; Ahmed, 2017). To tourists, the hunting-gathering tradition of these communities in the CHT is often represented by the offensive terms '*jonglee'* (literally meaning forest dwellers with animal) and '*moigga'* (means a group of people who are regarded as 'primitive' in their behavior, 'ferocious' by nature, 'uncivilized' in appearance, and *jonglee* by home location) (Uddin and Gerhaz, 2017, p. 208–226). However, until today the indigenous people of Bangladesh continue to suffer from the same historical stereotyping and discrimination as 'other subhuman being' (Uddin, 2020; Roy, 2009). These stereotypes are reinforced directly and indirectly through the tourism policy and sensitized to tourists to experience cultural difference. Meanwhile the ethnic communities of CHT are passively categorized as a part of wilderness, numerous local tour operators represent the colonial fantasy of the natives of CHT "as a prototype of the 'animal'" (Mbembe, 2001; Salazar, 2013). It mostly coincides with the image of indigenous communities lived as 'one with nature', thus acting on prehistoric views of 'primitivity', spreading a certain fabrication of indigeneity. To tourists, the delightful tradition of a *Raz-Punnah* (a tax giving ceremony), clothed with colorful *Thami* (native dress) and decorated indigenous traditional ornaments, tempts the romanticized representation of a postmodern 'noble savage' (Salazar, 2013; Ahmed, 2017).

Categorizing *Pahari* ethnic folks as 'exotic ', 'weird', 'primitive', and 'colorful' in the context of their clothing, food culture, dialect, and physical appearance allows Bengali tourists to view them as culturally and ethnically inferior. Representation of the 'different' and the 'other' is a kind of sponsorship and often appeal in tourism marketing (Hall, 1997; Ahmed, 2017). How Bengali political elites manufacture the 'otherness' is the 'power of representation' (Said, 1979; Hall, 1997; Ahmed, 2017). The indigenous festivals and religious ceremonies are exemplified consumable touristic objects in tourism advertising, and tour operators' offers on their webpages or social media that suit well with the beauty of natural setting. However, ironically, the state rejects to provide status *Pahari* ethnic minorities as 'indigenous' for their collective identity, but their indigeneity is employed in

tourism development to attract tourists to experience the cultural 'exotism'. Salazar (2013, p. 669-697) expresses that "the sheer force of enacted tourism imaginaries can quickly dispossess people of their history, identity and culture" (cited in Ahmed, 2017, p. 32). Therefore, this empirical study has contested the existing practices and discourses constructed by the state and tourist agencies in Bangladesh in which images and ideas are often exploited deliberately in tourism promotion to represent "peoples and places as bounded and unchanging" (Salazar, 2013, pp. 669-697).

5.3.3 Socio-linguistic Discourse of Tourism

Through socio-linguistic discourses and semiotics, tourism development stages the cultural artifacts as an apparatus to boost up the national economy rather than the local socio-economic development. Through romanticized images, adventurous documentaries, and fabricated features in media, "the language of tourism attempts to seduce millions of tourists, and convert them from potential into actual clients, and subsequently to control their attitudes and behavior" (Dann, 1996, p. 2; quoted in Maci et al., 2018, pp. 1-5). For instance, CHT-based tourist agencies conduct the cultural performances and the wild adventurous activities using a language of fallacy and fantasy about the primitiveness and wilderness of *Pahari* indigenous people that in fact construct a language of hegemony. In fact, how tourists talk down to locals and locals talk up to tourists is not only tourism is a temporary pleasure-based service industry but also because of differences in perceived status (Cohen, 1983; Dann, 1996, pp. 16-17; Rázusová, 2009). For instance, before visiting CHT, the tourists show boundless interests, and express abundant oral, textual and photographic portrayals of the desirable tourist spots in the Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, which later develop into the 'truth markers' of these destinations (MacCannell, 1999; Rázusová, 2009). The queen of cloud- *Sajek Valley*, Mountaineering on the hilltop- *Chimbok* and *Tajingdong*, Golden Buddhist Temple, Hanging Bridge, and the thrilling journey by *Chander Gari* (open-rooftop jeep) through the hill forest in CHT are lavishly exemplified by written and verbal narratives in the tour webpages, tourist magazines, documentaries, and social media. When tourists see the 'original' nature with live experience, their view of genuineness breaks down in respect to their previously unseen experiences. Tourism language discourse develops sense of 'authenticity' by means of some rich jargons with cultural terms (MacCannell, 1999; Dann 1996; Rázusová, 2009). For instance, when tourists or tour operators sensitize the destinations, they use particular sensational adjectives- "untouched by civilization, remote and unspoiled, colorful, picturesque, quaint, fascinating, almost unknown, newly discovered" (Cohen, 1988; Dann 1996, p. 16; cited in Rázusová, 2009, p. 200). These verbal

phrases promote the representation of uniqueness, authenticity, and exoticness of the indigenous culture proposed tourist destination. Moreover, tourists' impression posted on the social media is not only a response to the packages facilitated by the tourist agencies or by the indigenous locals but also a reproduction of the existing discourses after the live experience. For example, 'Alutila Guha' (locally called '*Mathai Hakor*') in Khagrachari district of CHT can be given as an example of a thrilling lived experience, going through a cave of a hill to visitors is not only to an breathtaking experience but also a real touristic adventurous event. Tourists set their gaze through the social media, blogs or tour operator's websites, which, significantly, construct the substance of their authentic understanding about the natives, nature, and culture. However, tourism attempts to craft "tourist attractiveness often contradicts the real past and present of the visited areas and their inhabitants" (Dann, 1996, pp. 25-26; Rázusová, 2009, p. 200). Therefore, the tension develops in changes between the offered exciting experience and the reality. Furthermore, language used in commodifying culture and nature is simplified by the notions, for instance 'natural park' 'safari park', 'reserved area' 'protected zone', 'extinct wildlife', 'deep forest' and 'intact nature' which manufactures the state's linguistic discourse (Nash, 1982; King and Stewart, 1996). Regions allocated as parks, reserved or protected zones of CHT in the name of conservation turn into touristic objects in the promotion of tourism development. In this respect, "natural parks are contrived settings often staged as authentic representations of untainted, raw nature" (Botkin, 1990, pp. 193-197; cited in King and Stewart, 1996, p. 297). Tourism as a power of representation "names things, pictures others, and helps to recreate identities by means of labels, brands, or declarations" (Nogue´s-Pedregal, 2012, p. 9). However, socio-linguistic representation in tourism promotion is not merely a query of semiotic importance. Rather, this study problematized the particular linguistic narratives and discourses constructed by the tourism stakeholders about the natural diversity and the everyday lives of indigenous people in CHT.

5.3.4 Construction of 'Bengali Tourist Gaze'

This theoretical context analyzed the construction of the Bengali tourist gaze that is developed and validated in the tourism marketing, where 'indigenous-ness' is featured as a tourism advertisement object, and in which way tourists perceive the people and place of CHT. It also explored how 'backwardness' or 'primitiveness' becomes a modern and romantic desire through retribalizing *Pahari* ethnic people and their culture. It is also important to understand the local gaze towards Bengali tourists for their economic power and dominant presence. Indigenous people are controlled

through the 'tourist gaze' and the presence in the absence of tourists. The visualization of *Pahari* ethnic people in social media constructs a Bengali 'tourist gaze' which helps to understand tourist's narratives and perceptions on the people and places. It is notable that Urry and Larsen (2011, pp. 14-15) developed a notion of the 'tourist gaze' following Foucault's (1975) 'medical gaze' offered that "the gaze is more than just about tourists' visual experiences, and hence expands beyond the visual to rethink the concept as performative, embodied practices, highlighting how each gaze depends upon practices and material relations as upon discourses and signs" (Pomering, 2013, pp. 691-693). The notion of cultural and racial 'difference' of CHT is predominantly deployed by tourist agencies in their tourism campaign to fascinate the tourists through a kaleidoscopic representation of natives, nature, and culture, thereby offering a colorful and thrilling experience. In this way, the tour operators normalize and propagate the gaze, marketing their 'brands', and making interests to their envisioned clients, the tourists. Besides, the state and its actors promote the notion of 'intact and natural' natives in national tourism policy to tempt tourists to gaze at the *Pahari* indigenous folks as if people were on showcase. Moreover, the tourists, powerful and civilized, come to view natives, powerless and primitive (Bruner, 1991, p. 240; Tucker, 1999). In my field visit, I observed that tourists were taking selfie with an indigenous folk as if they found a live 'primitive' human being. An indigenous activist angrily articulated that "the tourists from city visit here for their recreational trip with colorful and romantic eyes and become excited when they meet us as if they saw 'Neanderthals'" (see also Ahmed, August 9, 2015). Post-tourists, in fact, make leading story on social media about their experience after returning home that leads to craft the dominant gaze. In CHT, tourists observe only what they wish to grasp for their recreation, consumption and manipulation where history of indigenous rights seems a black spot (Ahmed, 2017). For example, in an indigenous cultural festival in Dhaka organized by a public organization, a Bengali was giving a speech and frequently mentioning the term '*upajati*' for the indigenous communities. An indigenous man immediately protested not to utter that term (Alam, 2015, p. 127). This confrontation demonstrated the antagonistic juxtaposition between the Bengali 'superior' and indigenous 'inferior' and how the Bengali gazes the indigenous minorities.

In tourism, photographing and video-making is nowadays not just a ceremonial or habitual practice for tourists but also a groundwork for constructing the tourist gaze on indigenous people and their adjacent nature. As Markwell (1997, p. 131; cited in Li, 2015, p. 1) depicts it that "to be a tourist is to be a photographer". In most cases, tourists create scenes of photographing 'authentic' indigenous locals (for example, Mru, khumi, or others) with the almost 'naked' bodies.

Consequently, The hill people feel insulted and uncomfortable with such inhumane treatment. As Van Schendel (2002, p. 367) claimed that "in these photographs Mru or others' nakedness served as a marker of a number of contradictory cultural traits: closeness to nature, authenticity, primitivity, wildness, indecency, and underdevelopment". However, the 'mutual gaze' (Maoz, 2006) recognizes double-sided feature of the host-guest interactions. Hosts also have substantially proactive roles that affect the guests' mind. The 'local gaze' is significant to comprehend the ground reality of the powerless indigenous locals in CHT and how they respond to the dominant voices of tourists and other tourism stakeholders. In postcolonial Bangladesh, the relations between indigenous communities and 'mainstream' Bengalis are mostly 'antagonistic' (Bal and Siraj, 2017) and contested in political sense of belongings. Despite the fact of mutual mistrust, in terms of economic outcomes from tourism, it was observed during the fieldwork that locals perform mostly in accordance with "tourists' views and behaviors, in some cases, tourists act according to locals' perceptions, attitudes and behaviors" (Monterrubio, 2019, pp. 18-28). In the context of local gaze, 'tourist' in most cases is identified as 'a city-based Bengali' "based on ethnic, racial, or class distinctions, rather than forms of travel" (Frohlick, 2003, pp. 525-542; Hepburn, 2002). It can lastly be depicted that tourism materializes an anti-politics representation of the recognition of indigenous people as 'exotic or primitive others' in the context of CHT.

5.3.5 Neo-local Tourism: Resistance to Homogenization

Nowadays, neolocalism became a way of resistance to the politics of homogenization, mass tourism, and globalization of people and places (Wright and Eaton, 2018) that challenged to the rootlessness. Shortridge (1996, p. 10) argued that "a deliberate seeking out of regional lore and local attachment by residents (new and old) as a delayed reaction to the destruction of traditional bonds to community and family" (cited in Ingram et al., 2020). In the context of CHT, neolocalism can be a prospective proposition for branding indigenous culture and promoting cultural heritage through tourism, and potential livelihood enhancement for locals. On the other hand, it is provocative that neolocal tourism turned into a counterproductive mechanism for commodifying culture and nature, and remarginalizing indigenous locals by which 'backwardness' or 'primitiveness' is possibly revitalized in tourism marketing. The ethnic people of CHT practice customary administrative system which is predominantly appropriated by the national governance. Neolocal tourism can be a potential site for re-establishing local governance so that indigenous locals are able to participate and contribute to the decision-making process of sustainable tourism with their community spirit

that enables the weakening of corporate interests and state hegemony. Neolocalism also promotes the local interests that leads to 'sell local' experience. For example, In the Chittagong Hill Tracts, ethnic locals provide homestay services with meals and overnight stays, and they sometimes arrange a song-and-dance party to entertain visitors. Tourists enjoy local hospitality. Ingram (2020, pp. 35-49) ascertain the significance of souvenir collection by tourists as a token of remembrance of their travels as "material objects identifying place". Thus, neolocal tourism is a pro-local mechanism both for participation in and resistance to the 'mainstream' Bengali culture.

A substantial number of studies (Galvez et al., 2017, pp. 604-612; cited in Ingram et al., 2020) signifies that "locally sourced food and drink have the potential to not only initiate a multiplier effect in an area, they can also contribute to the distinctiveness and 'authenticity' travelers seek while enhancing the triple bottom line of sustainability". The food culture of the locals is used to romanticize the place as an 'authentic and unique' culture that influences local cultural legacies. Higgins-Debiolles (2010, pp. 116-129; cited in Ingram et al., 2020) delineated that "commodification of local products can be understood as the consumption of place and the consumption of identity". Moreover, local artifacts, from cuisines to ceremonies, become self-commodified by the indigenous locals just to safeguard the originality and sustainability of the place. According to Holtkamp et al. (2016, 66-78; cited in Ingram et al., 2020), neolocal tourism incorporates three factors: "use of local names, and images in labelling and marketing; environmental sustainability; and social and community engagement". Sequentially, these issues contribute to constructing a sense of 'identity and place', and create self-reliance capacity of local communities through the sustainable practice of neolocalism. Cavaliere identifies (2017, p. 49; cited in Ingram et al., 2020) "food-based activities are rooted in multiple types of socio-cultural traditions, practices and performatives". For example, festivals of indigenous people provide a space to reconnect the local sense of belongingness which supports to develop a neolocal and sustainable tourism. Here, '*Boishabi*' is a foremost example to understand the importance of neolocal tourism in CHT through community-led festivals. As Timothy and Ron (2013, pp. 275-290; cited in Ingram et al., 2020) contend that "local gastronomies have developed in different ways in different places, making foods a significant component of place uniqueness, and subsequently, of the sense of place and sense of togetherness it fosters among community members". The revitalization of restaurant and resort naming, and the imaging of 'native with natives' in tourism promotion, where *Pahari* ethnic names are newly used, develop distinct and live features of *Jhumland* in CHT that resist homogenization. Therefore, we can take the

suggestion of Lichrou et al. (2008, p. 27-39; cited in Ingram et al., 2020, p. 39) to develop a neolocal tourism that

> "the marketing of tourism destinations should instead be framed through the lens of distinctive narratives, which promotes the idea that the needs of local stakeholders, preserving natural resources, and maintaining cultural distinctiveness must all be taken into consideration when developing and applying a destination's brand".

5.4 Festivals in CHT: Portraying as 'Touristic Capitals'

Here, I will portray several festivals of indigenous communities with some case studies which help to understand the construction of cultural events as 'touristic capitals' in CHT. It will also present how these festivals as a cultural space contribute to the socio-cultural sustainability. These festivals have exemplified "not only joy, communion, participation in Dionysian life, but also a cooperation with the natural order" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 203; cited in Zifkos, 2015, pp. 6-19). The case of Chittagong Hill Tracts is an ideal example where tourism and these festivals are very well connected. Recently these festivals are newly rebranded by the tour operators and state as 'commodities' in which tourists' appeal was reflected. The major festivals are now well organized distinct events, which are purposely staged to gain corporate interests that appropriate community acceptance for branding culture by some politically elite indigenous representatives. For example, numerous indigenous-based *Utsab Udjapan* Committees (festival celebration organizations) patronized by district administration and some TV channels organize festivals where indigenous people from different ethnic groups participate in the different events to represent their cultural richness. This sometimes leads to frustration among the indigenous people due to corporate representations of culture and heritage that do not reflect the true cultural gravity. The following cases will provide a picture of distinctive features of indigenous culture that have made a tourists' interest.

Case Study-1: 'Boishabi'- A New Year Celebration

Indigenous locals welcome the New Year by saying *'Kattol paghog bijhu a jhok*' means 'jackfruit will ripen and Chaitra Sankranti will come'. According to indigenous myth, at the beginning of the month of Chaitra (last month of Bengali year), a bird called *Biju* comes. The Chakma community calls this bird *Biju Peik* (Biju Bird). The melodious call of this bird brings the message of the arrival of Biju or *Chaitra Sankranti* festival (Barua, 13th April, 2019). This new year festival is called as 'Biju' by Chakma, 'Sangrai' by Marma and 'Boisu' by Tripura but it is popularly known as 'Boishabi' in the entire hill district. With the last two days of the year and the first day of the new year, the New Year

festival 'Boishabi' is celebrated for a total of three days in Bandarban, Rangamati and Khagrachari districts of CHT. 'Boishabi' is composed of the initial letters of the three festivals of different communities. The hill communities organize various traditional sports and colorful cultural programs in various towns of Chittagong Hill Tracts for a week to wish to the Bengali New Year. Except for the Lushai and Pangkhua communities, due to their different beliefs, most ethnic communities celebrate this festival under the name 'Boishabi', although each community has a different name to welcome a New Year. As Uddin (15th April, 2013) claimed that although 'Boishabi' is called the New Year festival of all hill indigenous communities, it is a *khichuri* (hotchpotch) term given by the Bengalis and media. The Bengali-invented *khichuri* term includes a kind of hegemony politics, the representations of unequal power relations among the communities themselves, a cultural imposition, and the brutal categorization of Bengali-created boundaries of demographic majority versus minority. I will explain this further in the next section.

Figure-7: Flower floating event Source: bdnews24.com

However, *Phul Biju*, *Mul Biju* and *Gojjapojjya*, these three phases of *Biju* are organized by Chakma. People come to the river bank with flowers in their hands in the early morning. Flowers of various colors float on green banana leaves in the river. This traditional event is to wipe away the gloom of the old year and welcome the new year. Although *Phul Biju* is primarily a festival of the Chakmas, it becomes universal with the participation of all. People decorate their homes with flowers. In *Phul*

Biju, A special mixed vegetable 'Panchan' is cooked at home to entertain the guests. In addition to cooking, various types of pita, piesh, fish and meat are also prepared for the guests. As a tradition of the festival, *binni* rice, *khai*, *nadu*, *semai* is also served to the visiting guests along with hill wine. Besides, *Goriya* dance is one of the attractions of the *Boisu* of Tripura, an agrarian-based ethnic community. *Goriya* dance was intimately associated with the agrarian life of Tripura since ancient times. Therefore, prayers are offered in the *Goriya* dance to protect the crops from disease attacks so that farming based on Jhum is prosperous. Due to the tireless work of cows and buffaloes, they produce various products including crops, so they bathe the cows and buffaloes and put garlands of fresh flowers on their necks. This dance is performed in a total of 22 steps (Mollik, 14th April, 2019). For example, planting rice in *jhum*, catching fish, walking hand in hand, praying to gods and goddesses. Participants in *Goriya* dance are called *Kherebai*. According to tradition, the participant has to participate in the *Goriya* dance three times in a row. If a *Kherebai* cannot participate three times in a row, he has to perform Puja of *Garaya Dev*. When the *Kherebai* enters the courtyard of a house, his team announces the arrival of the Goriya team by making certain signal sounds. After that, the performance of *Goriya* starts. The first day of the New Year is celebrated by the Chakma as *Gojjapojjya Biju*. Everyone goes to the local Buddhist monastery and engages in religious practice, and finally, participates in special prayers to spend the coming days happily. Moreover, *Sangrai* is celebrated by the Marma community on the first day of the new year.

Figure-8: Water throwing ceremony Source: bdnews24.com

The main attraction of Marma community on this day is *Joltsav* (water throwing ceremony). As this event is very enjoyable, a lot of tourists gather at the festival site. In Marma language, it is called *Ri-*

long-poe. They participate in the competition of splashing water on each other. Mru people organize a 'Flute Dance' ceremony to welcome the New Year. This 'Boishabi' festival passes with a new hope to "lead a more pious, harmonious and meaningful existence contained by nature. This feeling of well-being is for all living beings, including plants and animals and the environment. Such novel gestures in such simple and artistic forms are rare in our so-called civilized urban cultures" (Osman, 12th May, 2015). Tourists like to enjoy dancing and singing with indigenous people in this festival, specially the folk song 'ubogit' is extremely popular to tourists. A tourist informant stated that "on the first night of New Year, I was on the River Sangu Bridge with my friends. Some indigenous girls approached us and exchanged New Year greetings, and suddenly threw water at us. We wholeheartedly accepted their ritual and enjoyed it." Therefore, it has been observed that 'Boishabi' unites all indigenous groups, and celebrates harmony with cultural heterogeneity.

Figure-9: Mru performing dance with 'Ploong'. Source: Himalica Tourism Pilot Project (ICIMOD, 2017)

Case Study-2: Raj Punnah- A Celebration of Jhum Tax Collection

Three districts of Chittagong Hill Tracts are covered by three circles, such as Rangamati Chakma Circle, Bandarban Bomang Circle, and Khagrachari Mang Circle. During the colonial period, the British divided into these three circles to ease tax collection, although the celebration was conventionally held in one circle, by the Chakma Raja, from pre-British times (Adnan, 2011; Schendel, 1992). Basically the *Raj Punnah* festival is held around the ceremony of collecting the annual royal taxes to the king (circle chief) from headmen (head of a mouza), and *karbaris* (head of a village). A three-day cultural fair of 11 indigenous communities of the CHT are gathered around this

conventional ceremony in each district of CHT. According to the tradition of 200 years, the king organizes this fair every year to collect tax (revenue) from his subordinates (Daily Janakantha, 21st December, 2017). The kings have been arranging this *Raj Punnah* since 1875 to assemble *Jhum* taxes (Banglapedia, 18th June, 2021). This celebration has been significantly enriched over the last 145 years by incorporating the diverse cultural characteristics of the indigenous people living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The *Raj Punnah* festival is popularly known as 'Paingjara Powe' to the local indigenous communities. Although supposed to be held every year, these days this festival is held intermittently due to the unpredictable political circumstances. The king, escorted by decorative guards and attired in customary royal yellow dress, proceeds to the stage of *Raj Punnah* ceremony. The indigenous youths show respect and welcome the king in their traditional way, showering him with flowers and presenting traditional cultural performances. On the first day of celebration, Raja (the king) assembles *jhum* taxes and customary token of loyalty from the headmen of 375 mouzas and about 1,000 karbaris of the CHT (Barua, 19 December, 2015).

Figure-10: Headmen are offering gifts to their king. Source: thedailystar.net/

The indigenous *jhum* cultivators hand over yearly *jhum* taxes to their representatives, the karbaris, and finally, the headmen present these taxes to their respective circle kings on the festival day. 42% of the tax collection in *Raj Punnah* is offered to the king, 27% to the headman and 21% to the national government (*Jago News*, 28th October, 2015). Moreover, the headmen and the karbaris humbly offer a bottle of wine, pigs, goats, cocks, and some vegetables as presents for the king and show their loyalty. The king gives rewards the indigenous locals who did contribution in the social welfare. Indigenous communities exhibit their traditional cuisines and perform their cultural dances

and songs in front of the king and other distinguished guests. Besides, many people (both indigenous and Bengali) build temporary shops and stalls to introduce *Pahari* products to tourists. Along with the fair, this *Raj Punnah* festival brings together indigenous locals, local Bengalis and tourists to observe this celebration with enthusiasm.

Case Study-3: Chiyashod Poi- Cow Sacrificing Festival of Mru Community

The biggest festival of the Mru community is *Chiyashod Poi* (cow sacrificing festival) which draws attractions to tourists to enjoy an 'exotic' religious ceremony. The Mru people mostly follow 'Krama' religion, a newly emerged belief system called 'Manley' by the Mru community, although some of them accept Buddhism and Christianity as true religions due to Krama having no written script of holy books. Narrated orally in the Mru mythology, the sacred text was sent by their gods to their ancestors in written form on banana leaf scripts (Priobangla, 13th August, 2019). An envoy was conveyed to give these scripts for the Mrus, and was given some clothes to the Mru women to be dressed. In his itinerary, the conveyor paused his journey to bathe at a river bank. When he returned, he discovered that a cow swallowed up those banana leaves and nothing remained of the divine book. Besides, the cow split and destroyed the clothes. That is why, the Mrus have no prescribed religion and the women dress up only the lower part of the body. As a result of this act, Mrus sacrifice a cow ritualistically in every year as a punishment.

Figure-11: Playing 'Ploong' in 'Cow killing' Festival Source: wikipedia.org/

On the day of the festival, Mru people perform in a dancing ceremony and play their traditional musical instrument '*Ploong*' till whole night and keep it on the following day. After dancing and playing *Ploong* at whole night, a cow is slayed in the morning with traditional hunting weapons such

as spear. A healthy cow is fastened inside a bamboo case where the Mru people gather around the cow. Playing *Ploong* around the cow continues, when they start spearing the cow with a sharp hunting spike untill blood streams from its body and dies. Then the cow's tongue is detached from the body as it had chewed those banana leaves. The cow blood is believed as blessed and sacred, and it is well-kept in a bamboo jar. The religious leader distributes the blood to villagers and the Mru folks drink it. The cow meat is disseminated to the people. Some meat is cooked and served to the community folks present.

Figure-12: A Mru is spearing a cow as a custom of the festival Source: Wikipedia.org/

During the ceremony, a special prayer is offered to their ancestors, family and neighbors to live in peace. Rice, local wine and other foods are shared by themselves in the feast. Tourists are allowed to participate in the ceremony. Therefore, the festival is considered a prime religious obligation among all the ceremonials obeyed by the Mru people.

Case Study-4: Probarona Purnima and Kathin Chibar Dan- Festivals of Indigenous Buddhists

'Wagwai Poe' (in Marma's term of festival) or *Probarona Purnima* (full moon night), the main religious and social festival of the Buddhist Marma community in CHT, is celebrated with great enthusiasm and religious dedication. *Probarona Purnima* comes at the end of three months of rains retreat from *Ashari* (first month of Rainy season) *Purnima* to *Asshini* (first month of Autumn) *Purnima*. On the occasion of 'Wagwai Poe', a festive atmosphere is created in the Cangs (prayer place) of Buddhists from morning. In the morning, Buddhist men and women of different ages wear new clothes and bring special food to Cang for the Buddhist monks and all join together to pray. On this day, by flying *fanush* (sky lamps) with lighting lanterns in the sky, performing special prayers,

lighting lamps for god blessing, and carrying out various rituals including chariot procession, one takes a vow to free oneself from sins and proceeds to the next day's new journey. Every year on the full moon night, the Buddhist Marma community observes this festival. Marma villages are greatly flooded with joy around the festival. Buddhist devotees pay respect to Buddha on *Probarona Purnima* and offer candle lights and lanterns to the sky. Firing the *fanush* is a mark and remembrance of Buddha's absolute prophecy. The entire Chittagong Hill Tracts becomes buzzing with the procession of hundreds of people, including tourists, around the hoisting of different colored lanterns and the bursting of colorful fireworks. A tourist informant asserted that

> "all kinds of rituals of *Probarona Purnima* are not understandable to common people but one after another beautiful bright lanterns in the full moon night catch everyone's attention. It really creates a thrilling feeling when you light the fire under the paper lantern and see it flying towards the sky. And this is why we have this increased interest in lanterns."

Figure-13: Flying *Fanush* with fire for god blessing Source: Facebook (Collected by Researcher)

In fact, after *Probarona Purnima*, the biggest religious festival of Buddhists 'Kathin Chibar Dan' (robe offering) starts in Chittagong Hill Tracts. The wind of the festival blows in the hill tracts. The people of indigenous communities sell their *jhum* crops and spend the money for the festival. Massive preparations are taken at the *Vihar* (temple).

Figure-14: A *Rathajathra* (chariot procession) to *Katin Chibar Dan* Ceremony at Rajban Vihar
Source: thedailystar.net

The surroundings of the *Vihar* erupt with the speech and recitation of holy book by monks, and cultural ceremonies as the festival represents the several cultural arrangements fundamental to Theravada Buddhism, following a *Rathajathra* (chariot procession) escorted by an elephant statue dressed with *Chibar* (ceremonial dress) to make offerings to Buddhist monks. Raja Devasish Roy (king of Chakma Circle) expresses that "every year we hold this *Kathin Chibar Dan* with religious fervor and festivity to preserve our tradition and customs" (Dipen, 21st November, 2018). On the day of festival, *Pahari* ethnic people experience the rituals together with cultural activities and accomplish various worshipful performances. The ceremony starts in the morning, for example, local folks congregate at the *Vihar*, oath to accept the 'Five Precepts'[4]. Then, the disciples offer food to the monks, and the devotees eat the remaining food that the monks leftover. An envoy for the worshipers guides the rituals and proclaims the *Kathin Chibar Dan* (ceremonial dress offering). Finally, the festival ends with the distribution of the accumulated food, previously offered by the devotees, among the relatives and all the attendant devotees which later becomes the 'blessings of god' through the prayer of the monks.

[4]. Five Precepts are "abstain from killing living beings, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and intoxication". See at: https://buddho.org/buddhism-and-morality-the-five-precepts/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMI6aju-c2H_gIVtpBoCR1FHQnzEAAYASAAEgKh7fD_BwE (Accessed on 15th March 2023)

Case Study-5: Festivals around 'Jhum' Cultivation

Jhum is a special type of farming method on hill slopes. This word 'Jhum' is derived from the word 'Jhumia' (jhum farmers) and Jumma (hill people) in Chakma language. It is also called shifting cultivation or Sweden cultivation (by slash and burn method). Almost 90 percent of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, made up of the three districts of Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban, are jhum cultivators. Jhum crops include various types of paddy, pumpkin, beans, cucumber, bitter gourd, dal, sesame, maize, ginger, barley, cotton, turmeric, mountain potato etc. No chemical fertilizers, pesticides or modern irrigation are used after sowing. Jhum harvesting season is from July to December. The plants are harvested for preparation of jhum in January-February. Around March-April, dry plants are burnt and seeds of various crops, particularly paddy are sown. The seeds of jhum crops are different than those of plains. indigenous women are mostly skilled in harvesting Jumma ripe paddy. New crop harvesting festival starts in September to December in the hills. Jhum is cultivated in the bulk of the unclassified forest land of the three hill districts of 5,480 square kilometers. About 43 thousand families in three districts are dependent on jhum cultivation. Among them, there are about 22,000 Jhumia families in Khagrachari, about 10,000 in Rangamati and about 13,000 in Bandarban (Mukul, 4th November, 2018).

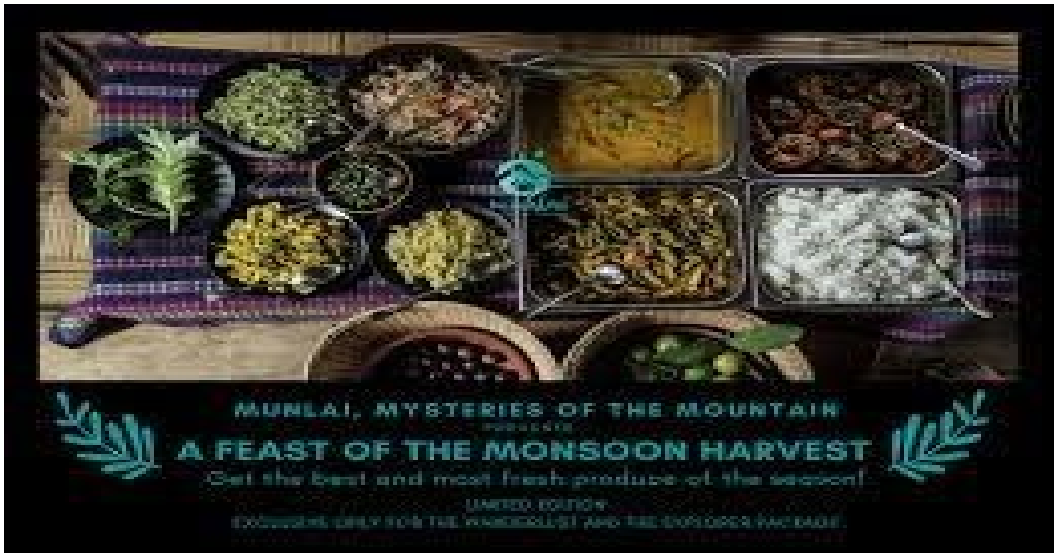

Figure-15: Foods for Harvesting Festival Source: munlai.com.bd/

Indigenous communities sacrifice animals, for instance pigs, *pahari* cock, both during the sowing and harvesting period as a custom of paying tribute to nature god. Different ethnic groups perform different method of worships to different types of gods for a bountiful yielding. Every Jhumma family organize a feast and prepare a special food by sacrificing a pig or a cow to celebrate the eating of new crops, and invite their relatives and neighbors, which is popularly called as

'Nobanno Utsab', although different communities use separate names of this festival. For example, Marma community names it 'Kokshawi'; Lushai terms it 'Thlaithar'; Khyang calls this festival as 'Henei'; Chak terms 'Anaibuk Poi', and Khumi calls it as 'Avang Ja'. They celebrate this festival with local wine during the feast. As Datta (2015, p. 92) explained that "this act of eating together and sharing is a way of celebrating the foods produced, and emphasizing the nature as a symbol of collectiveness". Through these cultural practices, indigenous people develop a strong relationship with the nature, animals and humans that creates a cultural environmental sustainability. Therefore, tourists have romantic interests to visit indigenous jhum house and participate this festival in order to explore a new 'authentic', 'primitive', and 'colorful' 'other' cultural practices.

5.5 'From Yucky! to Yummy!': Tourists' Experiences on 'Pahari' Cuisine

Considering culinary hospitality of indigenous and Bengali locals, this section analyzes how 'eating indigenousness' (Yeh, 2007; Mkono, 2011), as an 'uncommon', 'authentic' 'natural', and 'exotic' cuisine, is appealed, practiced, guzzled, and gazed in the context of tourist experience of 'pahari' ethnic foods in CHT. Understanding postcolonial and neo-local representations, I have explored the tourist gaze and 'eatertainment' (Mkono, 2011) on the indigenous 'other's cuisine as an ethnic marker and a cultural difference between entertainers and entertained. I have also portrayed a politics of Bengali restaurant entrepreneurs to construct an 'otherness' that become a touristic capital in their commercial services. According to the key informants, in CHT, most restaurants are owned, controlled and occupied by Bengali business elites and some of them are Chittagong or Dhaka city-based owners, who hire indigenous *paharis* to capitalize their 'indigenousness' in order to maximize the profits. They are less experienced to operate culinary business with cultural sensitivity. Besides, the naming of restaurants and resorts closely reflects to the *Pahari* natives and nature, for instance, wild café, Bamboo Shoot Eco Food Court, Heritage Dine, Mu hung Kha, Marma Rikhyai Restaurant, which are sensitized with 'primitivity' and 'wilderness'. In order to encourage consuming 'pahari' foods, restaurants in CHT are decorated with different types of bamboo to give a wider impression of the 'wild' environment. At a Marma restaurant in Bandarban, an item of indigenous cuisine is added to the order so that the tourists can taste and learn about its authenticity. For example, in Rikhyai restaurant led by Bengalis, native food items are kept as special dishes, and those items are described first when stating the food menu. Besides, ethnic cuisine is often served and decorated with banana leaves to attract tourists. Restaurant owners mostly use cards with the name of the restaurant for advertising. Some restaurants put up banners with colorful

food pictures at tourist spots so that tourists can experience their culinary hospitality. Most of the tourists visit restaurants in Bandarban through tourist guides. Travel guides largely serve as an advertising channel for most restaurants and resorts as they have an agreement. It, in fact, constructs a discourse on how indigenous 'other' cuisines are constantly stigmatized as 'primitive' set menus. Edensor (2001, p. 70) argued that "it invokes the reproduction of stereotypes of primitivism and exoticism that are the legacy of the colonial project" (quoted in Mkono, 2011, p. 253-270). Molz (2007, pp. 77-93; quoted in Mkono, 2011, p. 253-270) also emphasizes that "who is feeding whom, who is eating, and the emergent power relations".

Figure-16: Bandarban Local Food Festival. Source: Himalica Tourism Pilot Project (ICIMOD, 2017)

Promoting local cuisines is a symbol of 'local defense' from homogenization in the name of showing local standards for 'authenticity' (Winter, 2003, pp.23-32; Peng et al., 2020). Danhi (2003, p. 4-5; Cevdet et al., 2016) specifies six issues to shape a local "gastronomic identity as geography, history, ethnic diversity, culinary etiquettes, common tastes and local receipts". Indigenous cuisines of CHT nowadays become an influential ethnic marker of 'uniqueness' and self-representation of indigenous identity. However, city-based tourists from plainland express the food experience as appealing, thrilling, lively, and primitive cuisine. Food-loving tourists who seek a novel experience in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, want to taste indigenous cuisine where they experience a blend of 'primitive' dishes with 'modern' ones, served by indigenous people in the homestay hospitality and Bengali-owned restaurants as well. In the context of tourist's desire for local food, Molz (2007, pp. 77-93; quoted in Mkono, 2011, p. 253-270) depicted that "many people, branded as 'foodies', travel to eat, but more interesting, many also eat to travel by consuming foreign foods at home". Tourists, having indigenous cuisines, for instance, *nappi*, *pachon,* which are considered as 'novel', 'untried',

'unfamiliar' or 'unusual' items, show a "symbolic distinction of his/her status with both a physical and intellectual openness to difference, an adventurous curiosity, willingness to risk, and a desire to consume contrast" (Molz, 2007, p. 85; cited in Mkono, 2011, p. 253-270). Tourist feedbacks, 'from yucky! to yummy!' (Molz, 2007), represents a characteristic behavior in reviewing *pahari* foods from disgusting to desirable. Reviews of different categories (based on class, age, and religious intensity) of tourists in Facebook concerning indigenous 'other' cuisine and 'eatertainment' reveal a particular form of mindset and response on social media that requires some netnographic analysis. For example, the two notions of 'neophilia' and 'neophobia' (Mkono, 2011, p. 253-270; Wilk, 2009) are useful to understand tourists' attitudes towards consuming 'pahari' dishes. Neophiliac tourists, who desire to entertain everything as an unique, thrilling and new experience, and persuade others to try new flavor, are always adventurous in nature to take *Pahari* food with original taste. A group of tourist informants narrated that

> "we took homestay services for 3 days in a Lushai family. We were welcomed with garland. They served bamboo chicken, *nappi*, *pachpuron,* and at night they offered cardamom liquor (*pahari* wine). When a friend tasted local wine for the first time, the strong smell made her feel like vomiting. He was not brave enough to take it. We cheered him, come on dear!, it's a *pahari* special. However, we enjoyed our stay with 'exotic' cuisines."

Figure-17: Welcoming tourists with garland. Source: munlai.com.bd/

These neophiliac tourists can be denoted as 'experimental gastronomic tourists' (Hjalager, 2004, pp. 195-201; Mkono, 2011, p. 253-270). Moreover, some reviews encompass mixed reactions due to the mixed combinations of Bengali-*Pahari* ingredients. For instance, a 'foodie' tourist couple expressed their experience with a restaurant service in Khagrachari that

> "the restaurant offered many unfamiliar and strange dishes in its buffet system. They presented fish, duck, and chicken BBQ in a traditional way. The best dishes, such as 'duck gorang', 'fish gorang', 'fish hebang', 'egg hebang', and 'chicken gorang', with 'rice gorang' were served on the banana leaves, though some of them are like Bengali dishes, just different in name and taste. *Bada harang* was amazing as dessert. We experimented with most of them except pig and frog fries as we are Muslims. The bamboo chicken *biriani* was the best all the time. Ah! It was truly a yummy experience. We will take this opportunity when we visit again".

Figure-18: Serving 'pahari' cuisine in a homestead hospitality Source: munlai.com.bd/

Some tourists become ambassadors of 'food localization' (Egresi and Buluç, 2016, p. 232) as they are frequent visitors, they know which local cuisines are famous among the tourists, hence they contribute to advertising these foods in metropolitan restaurants as an indigenous brand. While it helps to promote cultural diversity, it represents an attitude that crafts the 'exoticization' of cultural differences. Tourists who are hesitant or less interested in consuming 'pahari' foods available in their own cities and even restaurants in CHT often prefer to taste that 'peculiar' cuisines at homestay services as it maintains enough privacy. Moreover, in the case of religious prohibition, many 'neophobic' tourists do not accept certain foods when they feel that the foods are not cooked in a

proper way, and sometimes they distinguish a few dishes, such as frog, pig or rabbit, as religious taboo. For instance, Muslim tourists seek *halal* cuisines with *halal* ingredients in indigenous restaurants. Some tourists ask restaurant managers or waiters whether the chickens or beefs used in the foods were slaughtered by Muslims or non-Muslims. Many people feel a little hesitant or embarrassed when eating meat slaughtered by non-Muslims. Due to religious sentiments, many travel bloggers also do not write on social media about their reactions to tasting 'tabooed food' made from pigs, frogs or snails as well as 'pahari' alcohol, but they experience it. Nevertheless, most of the tourists are not bothered with how the foods were cooked or what cooking condiments were mixed, they are just excited to eat 'pahari food' to experience it as a 'primitive recipe'. It has been observed that in three districts of Chittagong Hill Tracts, a variety of 'authentic and unique' recipes as indigenous brands have become a favorite and much-demanded cuisine among tourists, particularly in the indigenous festivals. For example, bamboo chicken, bamboo chicken biryani, bamboo cup tea, beanie rice, bash-korol, *panchphodan* or different types of indigenously prepared pita are very popular items among tourists. In many restaurants, these dishes are prepared right in front of them, which makes them happy. Those who have never tried bamboo chicken are cheered to taste it after hearing it from post-tourists through social media. Hence, the exotic 'other' cuisine becomes appealing as it represents a 'cultural capital', and carries deep-rooted cultural values and symbols (Mkono, 2011; Molz, 2007; Gyimóthy and Mykletun, 2009). However, there is a change of taste of the indigenous food items when it cooks for commercial purposes (Mohiuddin and Sajib, 2021, p. 152). These foodstuffs are not unique to any particular *Pahari* community but are shared as an indigenous brand of food, albeit with different names. For instance, Marma terms a semi-cooked dish as *Appreng* where Tripura names it as *Rozak* (Mohiuddin and Sajib, 2021, p. 152).

Figure-19: Tourists experiencing *pahari* Cuisines Source: munlai.com.bd/

In general, the post-tourist sequence of events posted on Facebook or Instagram suggest a subjective view of the tourists' food experiences. When tourists enjoy taking 'exotic' cuisines at an indigenous restaurant, they go on Facebook Live to show the list of *pahari* food they have ordered; show the interior decoration of the restaurant; upload pictures of recipes sitting in the restaurant; upload pictures of cooking process inside the restaurant. A post-tourist narrated in his Facebook post as a feedback that

> "If you have a fantasy of having original primitive food, just visit CHT to experience it with a wild scenic view. If you are adventurous, then Munlai para, Boga lake and Thanchi-Remakri are the best places to have both gastronomic and wild experiences for you. We stuck into *Moura*, Fish *kebang*, *godaiya* fish, egg *kebang*, fish *hebang*, egg *hebang*, crab, *nappi*, frog leg fry, deer meat, bamboo chicken, *bada harang*, *tulju* (a kind of tobacco), bamboo cup tea etc. Although not all of them are yummy, it seems like an unfamiliar taste, but if you are a thrill-seeking traveler, it is edible with fancy experiments. If you are an alcoholic, enjoy cardamom liquor, be careful, it's a high-content *mal*. In particular, it is a great journey with wild things!"

However, indigenous food terminology is constantly changed and rather forced to change through the hegemonic Bengali language and culture in the gastronomic representations. For example, *Bini* rice, *Kakan* rice, *Chutki* rice, *Kebang*, *Hebang*, *Gorang*, *Nappi*, *Pachphodan*, *Sabereng huro*, chicken laksu or horbo, Bamboo chicken, Bamboo cup tea, *Bada harang*, *tulju* (a kind of tobacco), *Bashkorul* (bamboo shoot) are mostly the names of the favorite dishes common among the various indigenous

locals in CHT. These are even not recognized as usual 'food' by the Bengali ‘modern’ metropolitan tourists. These foods are not available in bazaar, institutions, terminals, Bengali hotel-restaurants everywhere in CHT. Furthermore, it is worrying for indigenous gastronomy that overlooking the ethnic tension of food extinction and the loss of their native food terms, 'Bengali food' is taking over the lexicon of indigenous food languages one after another. For example, the mouth-watering recipe ‘Bamboo chicken’ is a famous and familiar dish as an ethnic ‘exotic’ cuisine among tourists, but it has an indigenous name called ‘*Huro Chumo*’ (Chakma term).

Figure-20: ‘*Pahari’* Cuisines (Bamboo Chicken, *Bashkorol* and *Chora Shamuk*) Source: Facebook (Our Khagrachari).

Restaurant managements manipulate these *Pahari* foods to allure tourists with modern naming and culinary combinations to maintain the ‘exotic’ with the ‘civilized’ cuisines. As Edensor (2001, pp. 59–81; Mkono, 2011, p. 253-270) depicted that “tourism suppliers themselves understand that although they want to titillate tourists with unexpected forms of ‘difference’ in the Other, they should do so without completely alienating tourists”. The insertion of Bengali foods, which are represented as an indigenous culinary experience, is thus a profitable and strategic practice in balancing them. This practice, as a whole, resounds like “the hegemonic (im)balance of power between (former) colonizers and (former) colonies” (Mkono, 2011, p. 253-270). The indigenous-owned restaurants, as a result, represent as an ideal instance for questioning indigenous ‘other’ cuisine, assessing the representational politics of ‘other’er in culinary hospitality, and also distinguishing which are originally ‘exotic’ and which are ‘mixed’ cuisines. Therefore, precisely authenticating “who the Other is, who the Otherer is, and what this Other is Other from” is problematic (Mkono, 2011, p. 253-270).

5.6 Community as Commodity: Multidimensional Representation

In this section, I would like to describe about the multidimensional representations of the *Pahari* people and their culture and identity for tourism promotion. It elucidates how indigenous communities become touristic commodities through the desires of tourists and the economic interests of tourist corporate actors. It also illustrates the indigenous mechanism of 'self-commodification' and 'self-exoticization' in order to develop an alternative subsistence means by compromising their position against the monopolistic intervention of public and private actors in tourism development. Besides, the construction of (social) media representations of 'otherness' is significant for understanding the politics and mental states of tourists, tour operators and the state.

5.6.1 Natives as 'Touristic Indigeneity'

In the neoliberal tourism policies developed by the state and its corporate actors in CHT, the tendency indicates a gradual development towards the commodification of culture-nature and its transformation from a 'small ethnic minorities' to an 'recreational engine'. Besides, tourist operators, as well as tourists, promote this trend to commodify the 'paharis' as 'touristic indigeneity'. In addition to natural beauty, indigenous material features, for instance, religious sites, cuisine, clothing, *jhum* cultivation, or cultural and religious performance, and non-material beings such as, stories, musical tools, songs, customs, festivals, ceremonies, ethno-ecological arrangements, and 'exotic' cultural behaviors are the main commodified objects to tourists in CHT. The natural wilderness of CHT renders an adventurous journey for tourists, for instance, going inside the *Alutila* with fire sticks; mountaineering *Tajingdong*, *Dimpahar, Kayaking in Sangu river,* or *Kewkaradong*; boating in *Nafakhum,* whilst 'culture' seems to be just an incentive in their travels. Tourism hospitality offered by stakeholders enables "the production and consumption of a particular social experience" (Urry, 1995, p. 131, cited in Kirtsoglou and Theodossopoulos, 2004, p. 136). Cultural tourists habitually seek to explore the new experience with 'authentic', and 'untouched locals' of 'primitive' settings in CHT, whilst tourists think of these communities as remnants of lost 'primitive' people. Tourists' fancy is to view them as "a lifeless object as if time has been frozen in the pre -modern era" (Coronado, 2014, pp. 11-28). These settings epitomize a "'staged authenticity' that are false backs - fronts in the guise of backs - in which authenticity is objectified by the tourist" (MacCannell, 1973, pp. 589-603; Cohen, 1988, pp. 371-386; cited in King and Stewart, 1996, pp. 293-305). Branding as a 'touristic indigeneity' by tourists' manifestation crafts a 'tourist trap' (Cohen, 1988) as the indigenous people, in most cases, behave according to

the wishes of the tourists. For example, tourists often ask if hill girls (prostitutes) are available at the hotels. Most indigenous informants expressed resentment at the tourist's desire in various areas that “we are not a commodity, we are community; we have our own norms and values”.

Figure-21: Trying to learn weaving from natives in homestay hospitality. Source: munlai.com.bd/

It is noticeable that commodification in tourism steadily not only breaks the cultural fabrics, where the real meaning of ritualistic ceremonies is transformed into touristic performances and the entire society in CHT becomes a ‘stage’ to the locals, but also leads to the changes in usual everyday lives of indigenous people where they are economically forced to pretend to be ‘touristic indigenous others’. Greenwood (1977, p. 135; cited in Cohen, 1988, pp. 371-386) claimed that when rituals, festivals, or any cultural activities are staged for commercial purpose, the meaning tends to fade away. In addition, as the tourist offers and packages are often introduced by outsider touristic agencies and entrepreneurs sensitizing the natural uniqueness and cultural life as ‘unfamiliar’ and ‘prehistoric’, this leads to the transition from indigenous cultural capitals to touristic capitals. In fact, indigenous locals become cultural sacred performers to touristic entertainers. The styles, colors or materials of cultural artifacts and crafts are also adjusted with the tourists desire (Cohen, 1988, pp. 371-386). In Figure-21, we see a tourist girl is trying to learn indigenous weaving method. It is often visible that ‘modern’ urban tourists are always fascinated to experience the lifestyle of the indigenous people what and how they make, cook or perform as if tourists have immediately discovered ‘primitive’ or ‘cave dwellers’ and feel like wandering around the prehistoric landscape.

Annoyance from the increasing tourists' presence is such that *pahari* people do not feel comfortable even staying safely at home. An indigenous informant narrated that

> We see tourists roam around our houses and start teasing us to see our way of life. We, *pahari* people, are nature-loving, cool, and naive by nature. But after tourism, it is no longer possible. Once upon a time, young women used to bathe together in lakes and waterfalls. There is a lot of crowd around the lake these days. We feel more or less in a 'human zoo'.

Another discontent of tourism in the everyday experience of *pahari* people is the 'selfie mania' of tourists. Visitors intend to take selfies with the *pahari*s regardless of their state of mind. On a high mountain road, a *pahari* woman naturally carries a child in her front lap and a heavy load on her back. When tourists see that they become excited and pass the comments. Tourists become amazed and often treat it as a humanly impossible task. They wish to take a selfie to create an instant memory, even though indigenous women feel uncomfortable taking a picture as they are busy with their everyday work. (See Figure-22)

Figure-22: Tourists were gazing a 'pahari' woman Source: Collected by Researcher

An indigenous activist questioned that

> such representations are often seen in the tourist spots of Chittagong Hill Tracts. Isn't that underestimating the indigenous folks? Many developed countries have laws or policies on photography but not in our country. In those countries, those who take pictures without someone's permission are marked as harassment (ipnews, 13th December, 2020).

Tourists are reluctant to seek permission during their visit to indigenous villages, as if everything is open to them. This creates a tension of privacy among the natives. In most cases, tourists request ethnic women selling native woven cloths at tourist spots to wear their unique native clothes and pose for snapshots with tourists. Some indigenous vendors indulge their desire to be photographed while tourists buy clothing or souvenirs as tokens of remembrance. However, tourists do not consider the indigenous locals as separate from nature as the locals are closely connected to the forest for their livelihood and are fully engaged in a unique agrarian system- the *jhum* cultivation. Tour operators also represent the natives as 'son of nature' in their brochures. The mode of representations constructs a 'touristic ethnicity' (Wood, 1998, pp. 218-241), and an antagonistic position between the 'superior' of the 'civilized' tourist and the 'inferior' of the 'other' indigenous people. A key informant, when asked about their portrayal in tourism advertising by tourist agencies and the media, expressed outrage that "we are uncivilized, so what! We are happy with our living, We only need to live our lives with our own communal practices".

Figure-23: Kayaking tourists in Sangu river Source: Source: tbsnews.net/

However, boating, kayaking and trekking are now fashionable and recreational events to tourists in Bandarban. Decades ago, in the very beginning, with limited facilities, some adventurous tourists came with a group of friends to enjoy these thrilling deep forest events. Nowadays, tourist agencies organize these thrill-seeking trips with adequate logistic support (for instance, ropes and life jackets) and skilled tourist guides. As a result, indigenous *para*s (villages) in Ruma, Thanchi-Remakri, and Nafakhum become full of tourists. Tourists who visit these spots desire to experience

them again and again, and consider these places as 'paradise' on the Planet. The indigenous *para*s host in their homestay hospitality a large number of tourists during the winter, on Eid days (Muslim religious celebrations), and public holidays. Tourists take hardship to explore the gift of nature with indigenous 'exotic' way of life. From Remakri to Nafakhum, it is a 3-4 hours walking journey. Tourists stay at Remarki village for their following journey to Nafakhum. The indigenous Mru locals in Remakri charge about 200 tk (2 euros) for accommodation and 150-200 tk (1.5 euros) per tourist for local food at their homestay services. An environmental activist and nature-loving tourist (Haque, 27th September, 2020) reviewed his experience in a national newspaper that

> "In the monsoon, a group of friends and I did what we then considered a grand adventure – started trekking from Ruma in Bandarban, and in six days, ended up at Thanchi, another hill township in the same district. In six days, we traversed hills, forests and streams. The sound of the mesmerising waterfall at Jadiphai still murmurs in our ears. Even after 10 years, we cannot forget the first sight of Baktlai Waterfall which is much higher than Niagara Falls, though not comparable to the latter in terms of water flow. We had stayed a day longer just to visit this waterfall. And also, we enjoyed the company and distinct lifestyle of communities living deep in the hills as we stayed in their bamboo houses at night."

Figure-24: Exploring the wilderness in Bandarban, CHT. Source: tbsnews.net/

Thus, it is evident that indigenous people, identity and relations in tourism and their surrounding environment increasingly developed a discursive channel to construct a 'touristic indigeneity' for tourism promotion in CHT. Touristic commodification materialized the characteristics of the reconstruction and consumption of indigeneity (Wood, 1998, pp. 218-241).

5.6.2 Feeling Community, Playing Commodity: A 'Self-adopted' Strategy

Here, I have revealed a 'self-adopted' strategy of indigenous people to fabricate themselves as a 'self-other' that materializes an indigenous capital in order to gain cultural and economic benefits in their touristic services in CHT. Considering the penetration of non-indigenous Bengalis (locals and outsiders) into the neoliberal tourism economy, the ethnocentric and idiosyncratic mechanisms of indigenous communities develop a discourse of 'otherness as a saleable object' to convey their sense of belongingness to tourists. Indigenous communities are economically forced to negotiate their touristic identity as a 'self-exotic' due to the cash flow and encroachment of tourism development. The increasing prices of everyday expenses depend on the touristic demands. Thus, it is difficult to avoid being involved in tourism activities as *jhum* farming nowadays supports less in their subsistence. Indigenous locales perceive self-representation as a potential avenue for political-economic emancipation and cultural assimilation. Moreover, the indigenous self-involvement is the new prospect of representing themselves to be 'mainstream' in tourism services as the state's representation of ethnic *pahari*s of CHT is a kind of politically motivated remarginalization process. Therefore, 'self-exoticization' or 'self-commodified' touristic identity is a byproduct of the states' politics of marginalization. Bunten (2008, pp. 380-395) argued that "the practices of constructing a commodified persona involve representation of cultural uniformity as a simplifying trope, self-exoticizing as the Other". Greenwood also questions that "can culture be considered a commodity?" (1989, p. 172). It is significant to analyze indigenous mechanism of how the hosts experience, represent, encounter and treat guests in order to construct the 'self-exoticized' natives themselves as 'touristic commodities'. The racial and cultural difference between hosts and guests develops itself into a 'commodity' that is stereotyped by tour operators, the state and tourists. Hall (1989, p. 16; quoted in Bunten, 2008, pp. 380-395) asserted that in fact "only when one knows the Other does one know oneself". Advertisements by travel agencies postulate a primal image of the indigenous folks by prepackaged racial categorization and false representation, which is subsequently materialized during the travel to the Chittagong Hill Tracts. However, Wilson and Ypeij (2012, p. 5–16) claimed that "the commodification and staged authenticity may not always mean the loss of meaning or the destruction of culture. They may also lead to a renovation or revival of ethnic identities". Besides, It is observed that the relationship between indigenous locals and tourists is not so much conflicting but cooperative although tourists have economic power and state-backed private support to create an invisible hegemony of tourists.

During my fieldwork, I observed that an indigenous restaurant, in its menu-list, quoted (in Bengali)- "our cuisines are our identity; it's our brand" to express a 'self-identity' that develops 'self-othering' or 'self-exoticization' (Mkono, 2011; Bunten, 2008). It represents that 'othered', constructed by tourists and tourism actors, sometimes, enables them to be a 'self-otherer' for both their cultural recognition and economic interests. For example, indigenous *paharis*, who are 'cultural insiders', determine for the tourists' experience which food items can be authentic 'pahari' dishes with their original naming and which are mixed with Pahari-Bengali ingredients, where they deliberately represent their cuisines as a mechanism to have a self-exoticized and self-commodified status so as to authenticate touristic categorization. Apart from indigenous restaurants or indigenous homestay hospitality, Bengali-owned restaurants, as 'cultural outsiders', contribute to engaging in the mechanism of 'exoticization'. In addition, there are a few Dhaka-based indigenous restaurants in Dhaka operated by 'Pahari' ethnic communities, for example, *Hebaang*, *CHT Express*, *Sabereng*, and *Jummo Kitchen* (Haider, 16th February, 2021). They serve 'unique and authentic' indigenous foods with *Pahari* cooking style. It is a kind of stereotype of 'self-exoticization'. However, key informants stated that an integrated indigenous women's group called 'SAVANGEE' took an initiative during the coronavirus pandemic. They created Facebook groups and advertise their own indigenous foods. A platform was created where everyone orders their products. They arrange home delivery of the products for their customers. Not only food but also a variety of products including clothes and rattan items are available for their distant tourists.

Four ventures fascinate the tourist in quest of the 'authentic' and 'exotic' other. For example, the indigenous hawkers in tourist spots, often under control by the security forces, particularly the military, sell unique indigenously produced clothes and antiques which convey their ethnic culture and identity that, in fact, represent the 'self-exoticization' for their economic success. A significant number of tourist informants perceived that the quality of indigenous products is the best due to its 'authentic' and aesthetic composition in antiques, clothes, ornaments, and other showpieces. However, an informant (trader of indigenous clothes) asserted that "most of the fabrics come from northern Bengal, but tourists think it is local products. The products are locally designed with indigenous fashion." In Sajek, tourists often dress up in the traditional costumes of the Lushai community to experience the fantasy of being 'exotic' folks, and frame some couple photos as if they are in a romantic and colorful lost world. For instance, 'King Lushai is trying to woo his queen with hibiscus flowers (*Jaba*)' was the caption of a tourist in his Facebook (see Figure-25).

লুসাই রাজা জবা ফুল দিয়ে রানীকে পটানোর চেষ্টা করছে

Figure-25: Experiencing to wear Lushai costumes Source: Facebook, collected by researcher

Secondly, indigenous restaurants serving 'pahari' cuisines stage unfamiliar food to tourists as an authentic and exotic 'self-representation'. This ethnic hospitality is viewed positively to accentuate cultural 'uniqueness' through which an indigenous 'otherness' is constructed. Thirdly, homestay hospitality is a unique and authentic service in the indigenous communities. In Sajek and Remakri, in particular, tourists take this opportunity to stay overnight and rejoice in ethnic foods and indigenous folk music. A key indigenous informant narrated that

> “there was a cultural practice that is more likely homestay or paying guest framework; when a passerby crossed a *para* (village), he/she would bring some rice with him/her. When the sun set, the passerby would offer his/her rice to a local family in *para* in exchange for shelter with food and stay at night. Such gestures from the receiver and provider come into a mutual bond between those two families. We have already lost such tradition. It is our duty to uphold this practice and tourism gives us an opportunity to continue it”.

Figure-26: Homestay hospitality in indigenous communities. Source: munlai.com.bd/

During my field visit to Bandarban, an indigenous local offered me to stay in his house at a reasonable rent and affirmed that "you can have a thrilling experience to touch the clouds from my house. We will also offer you our 'pahari' dishes and we will organize a traditional music event for you at night". My research assistant was very excited with his touristic mindset to experience their 'primitive' food and event. When we reached his house at the top of the hill, we saw there was a billboard in front of his house and it stated that 'Our culture is our identity, our nature is our life'. I was curious about how this motto was used for the attraction to tourists. At night, my host narrated that

> "10 years before, we had some ancestral forestland to cultivate and gather food according to our customary law, but now all have been taken over by tourism which is mostly controlled by public and private leasing agencies. Tourism is seasonal but prices remain high, it supports only for 3-4 months. The rest of the year we struggle in the new market economy to make ends meet."

Lastly, paid cultural performers organize some events for the enjoyment of tourists on an individual basis or during overnight stays at festivals. For example, tourists intend to experience flying *fanush* during the *Probarona Purnima* festival. The Marma natives facilitate it for tourists. Moreover, along with the indigenous entertainment hospitalities, indigenous entrepreneurs have taken initiatives to facilitate swimming, trekking, kayaking, meditation, yoga, and other exercise programs for tourists tuning in the natural diversity in Bogalake, Nafakhum and Sajek. They also assist adventurous tourists in making campfires out at night. All these enterprises participate directly and indirectly in constructing a 'self-exotic' authenticity in order to entertain tourists, although "most natives are

positionally unable to affect how images of authenticity are constructed and marketed" (Silver, 1993, p.316; quoted in Doorne et al., 2003, pp. 1-11). Most indigenous informants asserted that this involvement to be 'self-commodified' ethnicity stimulates a 'self-developed' empowerment and cultural sustainability.

It was found that indigenous people are not apathetic to being 'self-exoticized' and 'self-commodified' as a moneymaking avenue. They are, in fact, concerned with equitable inclusion in the control and decision-making process of tourism promotion. Although for long decades *Pahari* ethnic communities have been struggling for their 'exoticized' or particularly 'indigenous' status, they now intend to represent themselves in tourism that "can be consumed and commodified, but not to be represented as such by exogenous agents" (Odermatt, 1996, p. 106; cited in Kirtsoglou and Theodossopoulos, 2004, pp. 135-157). Nevertheless, the state and its non-indigenous actors control the entire tourism development due to the lack of touristic setup. The indigenous *pahari*s view tourism as a prospective channel to rejuvenate their distinctive culture and reintroduce their ethnic identity developing a language of resistance to homogenization, but in favor of a transcultural dialogue. Therefore they aspire to stage their culture to be commodified for their own gains, and eliminate the cultural brokers who are "taking it away without giving anything back" (Kirtsoglou and Theodossopoulos, 2004, pp. 135-157) to the indigenous *pahari*s of CHT. In fact, the ground reality is that ethnic *pahari*s are gradually transformed into strangers as security forces and Bengali outsiders become regular owners of tourist locations. The ethnic *pahari*s sometimes reflect the mechanism of commodification of some traditional celebrations and locations as worthy, and of religious festivals and places as intolerable, where tourists show their careless attitudes. Thus, indigenous communities not only engage in specific tourism promotion for their own community wellbeing and cultural sustainability but consider it as a part of their cultural entitlement.

5.6.3 Visual Representation in (Social) Media

Currently, (social) media has a strong influence in constructing 'otherness' and 'primitiveness' and commercializing the cultural diversity of the Chittagong Hill Tracts through visual representation. The media has increasingly crafted colorful and romanticized fantasies of indigenous *pahari*s that overvalue cultural practices, and represent them in a frenzy that instigates an appeal to tourists to view and consume cultural differences, often sidelining their long histories of struggle for self-determination and against discrimination. Tourist advertisements by tour operators or post-tourists themselves, on social media in particular, spread an impression that traps people through semiotic

constructions of tourist destinations, and acts as "souvenirs or representations off the site" (Culler, 1988, p. 159; Dlamini, 2017, p. 75). Besides, the notion of 'media gaze' (Urry and Larsen, 2011; Ahmed, 2017) has manufactured a 'Bengali tourist gaze' on indigenous festivals, accompanied by tourist agencies, by representing a fabricated image of 'exoticness' and by portraying marks of a 'primitive' way of life. Ahmed (23rd March, 2017) analyzed a case of 'media gaze' about a commercial TV advertisement to understand how media and social media were gazing to indigenous people of CHT. For example, in an advertisement of telecom company, indigenous people and places have exotically been represented and gazed through a Bengali socio-economically hegemonic glass. The effects of this politics of exhibition go beyond just the scenes it creates for commercial viewers. It also promotes to "celebration of indigenous cultural festivals, beauty contests, food festivals, promotion of ethnic tourism – all sponsored by big corporations, the military, and the state tourism board" (Ahmed, 23rd March, 2017) while the CHT becomes a place of negligence and negative stereotyping that predominates everywhere. For instance, when city-based Bengali tourists take an offer of homestay service for some days in the village of indigenous communities, they seek assurance to *Pahari* indigenous family whether they do not offer pigs, frogs or turtle during their stay. Moreover, indigenous girls are sexually gazed by tourists for their '(half)nudity' which is their natural dress code and cultural freedom as well (Schendel, 2002, pp. 341-374). Ahmed (23rd March, 2017) also exemplified a *Parbatyo Lokoj Mela* (Folk Fair of Hills) advertisement of Channel-I, a private TV channel of Bangladesh, which markets tourism with an indigenous girl and the mountainous beauty of the CHT, where both are portrayed as 'exoticness' for tourist fascinations. This representation of the 'wilderness' is categorically connected to the matters of unequal power relations between gazers and gazed. Sensitizing these advertisements of indigenous festivals to Bengali urban tourists increasingly accelerates the process of commodification of the indigenous way of life. An indigenous activist (Marma, 22nd April, 2013) gave a critical reflection on media representation that

> "Channel-I organizes a grand event with thousands of mountain artists to promote tourism and promote the mountain region to the outside world. But why? So why are some people so enthusiastic to develop the tourism industry in our mountains? Who are they? What made them responsible to improve our culture? There is nothing but make millions of taka by creating programs. In the name of showing our culture, they create each event. They promote a part of our culture - Marma *Sangrai*, water festival and festival related events.

That is, they highlight the external parts of the festival such as dance with hand-fan, pitcher dances, water games etc. are shown."

He also narrated an experience of how Bengalis approach them that

> "I stayed outside the Chittagong Hill Tracts for ten years. I was the only Marma in our office. Once I went to another department for work. The official there got to know me and said, *Well you are Marma. Your main festival is 'Sangrai', right? At that time you play water sports, right? I saw it on TV.* To Bengali tourists, Marma community mean backward, uneducated *pahari*s who love festivals, playing with water during the Sangrai festival. The majority of people in Bangladesh have the same idea about us. But they don't know our long history of struggle. Our history of exploitation, deprivation, and genocide by the state."

Portraying Sajek as the 'Daughter of the Hills', 'Cloud Girl' and 'Queen of Hill' in a famous TV programme, the anchor pointed out a 70 km scenic road that was built in Sajek under the tireless efforts and supervision of the Bangladesh Army to promote tourism. He then touted about 'Sajek Resort' and 'Runmoy Resort' run by the army for providing excellent accommodation and food for the tourists visiting Sajek. It was also branded that travelers can stay in local ethnic houses with low budget. What was missing in this representation was the history of the eviction of the lands of the Lushai, Pankhua and Tripura communities due to the construction of this beautiful road. However, the corporate social responsibility of the media and private companies is a secondary issue, the major considerations are expanding the market, marketing the commodification, and enhancing the festivals' images to consumers (tourists). When the indigenous culture is about to disappear due to the cultural influence of the Bengali majority, the Sangrai *panikhela* (water-throwing ceremony) comes to tourists due to the media. Marma girls, drenched in water at water-throwing ceremonies, only come on TV through the media, where the other cultural practices of the Marma community is not prioritized.

Tourists have a great fascination for framing their experiences through photographs and videos as memories of a lost world where they realize they have just discovered the 'authentic' 'ex-primitive' humans even in the modern world. Indigenous *pahari*s often feel uncomfortable when tourists photograph them without taking their permission as if tourists have absolute acceptance to intervene in their privacy. Tourists sometimes make an effort to fit the indigenous folks, particularly girls, as an 'authentic' photogenic 'exotic others' by making them up with traditional clothes and ornaments before shooting them. Besides, wearing indigenous costumes is an additional enthrallment to tourists, but often mocked by photographing and posting them on Facebook. For

example, a tourist couple captioned with humiliated words like “it was said it’s a king's costume. We wore it all. After taking pictures, we saw that everyone looked like a ‘thief’” (see Figure-27).

Figure-27: Tourists with Lushai King’s Costumes; Pretending tourists’ couples as a Lushai King’s Family. Source: Facebook (collected by researcher)

Moreover, not only Bengali tourists represent the ‘nakedness’ of the Mru as a mark of ‘primitiveness’, but also other indigenous communities (for instance, Chakma and Marma) who perceive as ‘advance’ communities in comparison with other minor ethnic groups. Schendel (2002, pp. 341-374) epitomized a case of nudity of Mru community in CHT that

> “A Marma student taking photographs of a Mru mother and her child added the caption that Mru women always go around bare-breasted and that they have no shame. And yet, the Mru woman dressed only in a short black skirt and the Mru man with flowers and coins in his long hair have become instantly recognizable to people throughout Bangladesh as the stereotype of the ‘primitive tribal’. the nudity of Mru people is an emblem of their noble freedom, naturalness, vitality and exotic beauty.”

A tourist informant experienced a *Chiyashod Poi* (cow sacrificing) festival of Mru community and uttered that “they are still far away from civilization and their religious practice of ‘cow killing’ are wild and savage, I mean, it’s not justifiable, but it seems an authentic, exotic, and joyful celebration with ‘Ploong’ music and dancing. They are still confined to the ancient ages of the human race.” The media, tourist agencies and state tourism development authorities often use images of Khumi, Mru or Lushai in particular because of their exceptional music, musical instruments, ceremonial dress

and dance to lure tourists. Schendel (2002, pp. 341-374) also delineated that “packaged in racial terms (‘almond eyes’, ‘picturesque race’, ‘good figures’) and clearly gendered, female nudity was touted to male tourists”. Young tourists are mostly fascinated to enjoy the *pahari* girls’ dance, for example, in ‘Boishabi’ (new year) celebrations. Besides, tourism brochures symptomatically cover the pictures of *pahari* girls under the title ‘*pahari* dance of Marma girls in Sangrai festival’, or ‘water-throwing ceremony of *Pahari* damsel’. Therefore, The way the Bengali-made ‘*kichuri*’ (distorted) term of ‘Boishabi’ (Uddin, 15th April, 2013) is promoted in the country's newspapers and (social)media is quite titillating and overwhelming. The culture of the indigenous *pahari*s is represented fragmented and distorted on the one hand through the unmeritorious coverage of the news media by cheering their festivals; On the other hand, the invisible politics of 'exclusion' and 'inclusion' among indigenous communities are encouraged through this representation. There is a great change in the form, flavor, taste, presentation and management of the festivals of the indigenous *pahari*s. Now there is more show-off and lavishness more than cultural and religious significance of festivals. As a result of the reckless promotion of the media and urban-centric corporate culture, the *pahari* people's New Year festival is not just a seasonal culture to be celebrated in their own cultural pureness, it is now a means of entertainment for the urban middle class of Bengali tourists. Although few indigenous activists opined that naming ‘Boishabi’ is a local political decision of the indigenous elites, Uddin (15th April, 2013) questions whether it is significant to distort the name of a traditional practice with the word 'Boishabi' to build cultural sustainability. The colorful representation of the ‘Boishabi’ (New Year celebrations) of the *pahari*s provides a taste of ‘primitiveness’ in the eyes of tourists that indeed construct a ‘Bengali tourist gaze’ upon the indigenous people and their cultural practices through the ‘media gaze’. As a result, the cultural identity of the *pahari*s is no longer an intact ethnic marker, but a commodified object. Corporate companies are now the sponsors of various festivals in the hills. Apart from the fragmented view of Bengali nationalism, Bengali tourist gaze, and media's romanticized representation, the *paharis*’ pageantry also loses its originality due to the corporate interventions.

Numerous travel agencies, such as Bangladesh Eco Adventure, Bangladesh Adventure Club, *Nijhoom* Tours, Travel Mate, Travel CHT, Chittagong Tourist Gang, Travel Tracker, *Avijatrik*, Lake *Bilash* Campaign Zone, Lonely Planet, *Baundule* LRT group, and so forth, offer ‘package’ tour with accommodation and food at indigenous house. For instance, ‘Travel CHT’ captioned in their travel webpage that “you are actually looking for traditional food and dress for traveling in Chittagong Hill Tracts! we try to provide this service. Our goal is to introduce the Tradition of Chittagong Hill Tracts”

(Travel CHT, 15th November, 2020). Another tour operator named 'Travel Mate' offered that "Want To See The Tribal Life Closely? The tribal life is very simple but different and colorful in some cases. If you want to see the tribal lifestyle, you can make a tour plan with Travel Mate" (Travel Mate, 28th April, 2019). A well-known travel agent *Avijatrik* posted various catchy offers for climbing hilltop and experiencing *Pahari* homestay hospitality, for example "Keokradong Hikking Tour- Stay with Tribal Communities in a wooden house", and "Keokradong Hikking Tour promotes adventure, tribal heritage, cultural immersion, and environmental awareness" (Avijatrik, undated). Furthermore, several tour operators suggest some tips for tourists, for example,

> "it is always great to show respect to the local people and their culture. Local clothing, food habits, behaviors, language and many customs may not be similar with yours" or "In many areas of Bandarban many ethnic peoples still wear their short traditional dress. Visitors should seek permission from them to take pictures and to publish anywhere. The photographs of someone taking bath in rivers or streams are better not be disclosed without permission" (Suman and Chawdhury, January, 2020, pp. 4-95).

Figure-28: Tourists with Lushai costumes in Sajek. Source: Facebook (collected by researcher)

In the Facebook page of 'Travel Tracker' (a tourist agency), a tourist expressed about a remembrance that "memory is a way of holding to the things you love, the things you never want to lose. Life brings tears, smiles and memories. The tears dry, the smiles fade, but the memories last forever. My memory is a photograph taken by my heart to make our special moment last forever" (Travel Tracker, 13th August, 2022). In addition to experience cultural practices, such as celebrating 'Boishabi' festival with ethnic *paharis*, participating in *Fanush* flying events, or wearing indigenous costumes, tourists enjoy adventurous events, for example trekking, kayaking or boating, with the logistic support of travel agencies. For example, in Munlai para, community tourism was developed supported by the Bandarban Hill District Council and designed by BASECAMP ltd. They provide all

facitilies to tourists to experience a genuine 'community tourism' with natural adventure. The BASECAMP set their motto as "we want to create a holistic, sustainable & inclusive tourism model that benefits both the locals and the travelers alike"[5].

A post-tourist reviewed his trips in Nafa-khum, Bandarban, captioning with 'Beauty with boldness' that

> "In the rainy season it was overflows !! it was big ! lots of water moving round in the dry season also! it was the source of life in Remakri reagion during all season! I have been there more than 13 times. You have to go through *tindu boro pathor* area with a boat and a guide which will cost 3500tk for boat and 2000tk for guide to visit Nafakum! You have to take permission from Police and BGB for going there" (Tripadvisor, August, 2020).

Another post-tourists' Review posted with the title 'A place of Tranquility' that "The 2 hours trekking takes a lot to cross, jungles, long grass fields, slippery water channels. The air is so fresh and smooth, it smells like peace. The silence, the music of the environment will take you to other world" (Tripadvisor, May, 2018). These memories posted by post-tourists in social media construct "a sense of proximity, connection, and co-presence to feel less alone and make others feel less alone" (Gibbs et al., 2015, p. 266; Conti and Lexhagen, 2020). Thus, such representation of the natives and nature by tourists on social media, travel agencies on websites, and corporates in the media accelerates the mechanism of the commodification of people and places.

5.6.4 What is Pleasure to You is Pain to Us: the Host-Guest Encounter

Building on Shanta's (30th May, 2021) argument about discontent between locals and tourists in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, I focused on host-guest interactions where hosts' pain is rationalized and normalized for guests' pleasure in the context of tourism promotion. As she delineated that "I have been seeing for quite some time how much objection and bitterness they have towards tourists on social media. From their several opinions and expressions, we know that they consider the local tourist spot as a curse for themselves". It was found that while walking around wearing tree leaves, a tourist took some funny pictures and posted them along with smiley emojis on social media with a caption "when met them after visiting the fountain" (see Figure-29). This led to protests from the indigenous community on the same social media site. A native protested by writing a status on Facebook that

[5]. https://munlai.com.bd/ (Accessed on 30th May 2023)

"the way of life of the tribals of CHT has been presented in a distorted and contrived fashion which is disrespectful to us. Most of the Bengalis in the city think that the indigenous folks of CHT mean '*Ulongo jonglee*' (bare barbaric). They come to the mountains to waste and leave with a dirty, and eventually post on Facebook with a deformed representation of the local people. The indigenous communities of Chittagong Hill Tracts have no such traditional dress. No natives of Chittagong Hill Tracts wear vines and leaves. Is it not the behavior of extremist Bengalis to insult the way of life of ethnic *paharis*" (Shanta, 30 May, 2021)?

Figure-29: A Tourist was pretending to be a '*jonglee*' in the 'primitive' world Source: Facebook (Our Khagrachari)

It is clear from this statement that the main problem is observed in the case of tourists especially Bengali tourists who think that indigenous peoples in their own country are 'outsiders', relatively 'primitive' and 'backward' people. Edward Said (1978) showed how the notions of the colonies persisted after they left, and how these work even in the post-colonial era, whether consciously or unconsciously (Shanta, 30th May, 2021). Tourists who denigrate indigenous 'others' in the guise of laughter, fun or jokes may not know or have never tried to know that the tourist destinations that are built for their entertainment, from which the national economy is gradually boosted, have a history of sacrifice, discrimination, and displacement of the indigenous locals. It may also be irrelevant to know about these discontents in the neo-liberal tourism economy, although the lifestyle of the *pahari* people and their settlements is the main attraction of the emerging tourism economy. The market for everyday needs including fish and meat is upward. The spending power of tourists forces the locals to shorten their food lists. The business third party takes the opportunity

well. Since the control of tourism is mainly in the hands of other nationalities and those who look for happiness there are also people of other nationalities. Thus, there is a lack of respect for the local culture. Most of the construction workers brought from outside the CHT to build various structures (roads, hotels or resorts) have little idea about the *pahari* culture, customs and practices. They assume an exotic fetishism due to the physical appearance of the natives. As a result, indigenous women in particular are subjected to various forms of sexual violence by Bengali workers, and tourists in particular. According to informants, local indigenous women used to bathe in the lake, but now there is no way to go there, instead of being harassed in various ways, they have stopped going there because they are annoyed. Besides, tourists often throw chocolates to the indigenous children on the way to Sajek, as if it is a very funny thing for the tourists. In addition, many tourists often intend to leave their own marks while traveling to different places, such as spraying different signs on the rocks of the fountain, putting stickers, picnicking on top of the mountain, and leaving dirt.

Figure-30: Luxury hotels for tourists, and dilapidated houses of locals. Source: Facebook (Our Khagrachari)

Taking pictures and videos of the *machang* (native houses), mocking their poorness, and later posting them on Facebook with an expression "how do they live in these houses", can be seen as a reflection of tourist experiences. However, tourists are interested in listening to the lifestyle, songs and stories of the *pahari* dwellers as these are 'uncivilized' and 'primitive' forms of livelihoods to tourists. At night, tourists sometimes meet *pahari*s with campfires for gossiping. Furthermore, a large dead tree or a century-old tree is an object of worship or a totem for indigenous locals. For

example, There is a beautiful natural pond called '*Debota Pukur*' on the hilltop in Khagrachari. As attractive to tourists as it is to pilgrims, it is a holy place of Tripura community. They believe that when someone go there, his or her heart's desire is fulfilled. According to the informants of local Tripura, the water in this hilltop pond never recedes and the water does not need to be purified. Hence, the local name *Matai Pukur* or *Debota Pukur* means 'divine pond' is considered as blessing of god. There are two big stones beside that pond. These stones are the places of worship and symbol of god of Tripura. Tourists climb 1481 stairs to visit there, and photograph and make videos in various poses on these two stones while wearing shoes. One of the Tripura informants expressed with sorrow that "it is certainly a blow to our place of faith and worship, which is never desirable." He lamented that "the whole village is now like a zoo, what are we doing as natives, all the tourists are staring at us all the time, we are nothing but an exhibition object now."

However, one of the oppressive issues for the indigenous *pahari*s is land eviction. Sajek, Nilgiris, BogaLake, known as *Megher Desh* (Land of Cloud), are very obvious examples of the displacement. First, let's talk about Nilgiri, where was inhabited by the Mru community. Their settlement was in Kapru Para (village). Later its name was changed to 'Nilgiri'. The locals were evicted and it was made a five star hotel. It was difficult for them to accept the naming of the Nilgiris as a 'sexy' or commercial name after the eviction. They were provided with so-called 'advanced', 'improved' accommodation in exchange for eviction, but not once is it asked whether they wanted this 'advanced' accommodation. An indigenous informant uttered annoyingly that "what is the easiest and most effective way to destroy nature, which is our only means of subsistence, is to build a five-star hotel in our jhumlands, where the urban elite tourists will come and look out of the window of the air-conditioned room and pronounce in pure English, 'wow, superb! How beautiful!". Second is the Sajek tourist spot, the land of clouds. The Lushai and Pankhua lived high up in the hills. After constructing Sajek as a tourist spot, they moved further in deep forest. Tourists often go deep into the forest while walking and then start asking them offensive questions such as "do they eat snakes and frogs, and show me, do you eat leaves?" Little is thought of how much these embarrass them. This is followed by the nightly commotion, barbeque parties, singing, which is again done outside the prescribed boundaries in the deep forest.

Figure-31: A *Pahari* husband is carrying his wife and taking her to the hospital. Source: Facebook (Our Khagrachari)

Moreover, it was found that Sajek has no public facilities, such as hospitals and schools. People struggle to get hospital services and have to go to Sadar (city center) of Khagrachari for hospitalization (see Figure-31) where tourists enjoy their pleasure trip with full facilities in 3-star hotels in Sajek. Furthermore, in the name of local development, 60 acres of land were acquired in the Nilgiris from where 200 Mru and Marma families were displaced, 65 Tripura families were displaced due to the acquisition of 600 acres in Jibannagar Sepru Para in Thanchi, 202 Mru families were displaced due to the acquisition of 500 acres of land in Kewkraudong (Dimpahar) (Shanta, 30th May, 2021). As Parvez (24th January, 2019) suggested that the expansion of trade around nature and culture requires the full involvement of local people in tourism planning to allay their doubts and a joint dialogue between the state and indigenous communities.

5.7 Conclusion

The prime objective of the commodification of *Pahari* ethnic culture accentuated the economic interests that were possibly driven by multifaced representations of different actors where the cultural identity of indigenous people became a 'touristic identity', and tourism as an alternative livelihood prescribed by the state and its actors accelerated the politics of remarginalization. Paradoxically, through the reconstruction and representation, the cultural images and feelings as homogeneous, static, and stereotypical, are recycled and promoted as celebrated 'exotic others'. Salazar (2013, pp. 669-696) articulated that "dominant imaginaries and discourses do not reflect the actual situation on the ground and often silence the voice of the powerless". As a result, the cost of

cultural meaning due to the distorted representation of culture through commodification is “as a serious problem as the unequal distribution of wealth that results from tourist development” (Greenwood, 1989, pp. 169-185). However, in the name of strengthening economic and cultural sustainability, the inclusion of *pahari* communities in the state's tourism policy has recently become central to tourism promotion. What was eventually observed is that indigenous locals became economic victims of corporate encroachment, and political objects of remarginalization due to the unplanned intervention of public actors whereas cultural extinction is a non-problematic and absurd issue. Moreover, the community's contribution to sharing culture symbolized a decidedly sensitive view of shared response and solidarity. Some selected natives who were state-backed beneficiaries from national and regional politics were involved in policymaking and management that gained a kind of acceptance to be self-commodified (Bianchi, 2003, pp.13-32; Taylor, 1995). The imposed and prescriptive policies represent a holistic notion of empowerment, which is believed that sustainability can be reached through the mechanism of commodification of people and places. However, the control and management of tourism are facilitated by non-natives due to the shortage of touristic setup and locational infrastructure in CHT. Thus, indigenous locals become a passive performers. Although natives are, to some extent, enthusiastic to represent themselves as cultural ‘others’ which are possibly experienced with commodified objects, they do not want to “be represented as such by exogenous agents” (Odermatt, 1996, p. 106; Kirtsoglou and Theodossopoulos, 2004, pp. 135-157). The reflection of major informants is that their expectations were not only about economic returns through engagement in touristic activities, but also they believed that control and ownership of commodification could be protected from where “ethnicity is manipulated” (Tice, 1995, p. 8; Kirtsoglou and Theodossopoulos, 2004, pp. 135-157) that would enable their idiosyncratic position. Pahari natives have faith in their own forms of commodification to empower their communal collectivity and connectivity that eventually accelerates sustainability and community well-being as opined by many key informants. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to utter that indigenous people and their culture are supposed to be ‘decommodified’, but the ground reality is that the commodification of culture is deeply rooted in the neo-liberal tourism economy where economic gain is the ultimate desire, and “there is no one-size-fits-all solution to the many types of problems faced by tourism” (Belicia and Islam, 2018, p. 10).

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Part-IV: Conclusion

Chapter- Six

Discussion and Conclusion:

Deconstructing the Present; Rethinking the Future

6.1 Discussion and Reflection

Here, I would like to portray a reflection on the research question and objectives. I will present my understanding on the basis of whole findings. Throughout the thesis, I have deconstructed the present scenario of tourism development and the politics of normative sustainability efforts. I have also suggested a possible point of departure to rethink about the future planning of holistic community well-being of the indigenous people of CHT. The thesis has mainly problematized how tourism newly reproduces the politics of development and the sustainability paradox, which furthers the commodification of people and places through representational politics, and contributes to the new identity formation and remarginalization of the indigenous communities of CHT. Based on the rigorous and systematic literature review (in chapter-2), I developed an eco-cultural critique on the sustainability and questioned the global and local discourses on the conservation policy through tourism in which the nature conservation was less established whilst tourism development was prioritized as a profit making venture by both the national and international agencies. This study made an attempt not only to provide an eco-cultural critique of contemporary approaches to conservation within the tourism and development framework, but also to problematize the market-induced policy discourses on sustainability, where environmental values were explicitly measured in economic solutions. In this chapter, conservation has been problematized as a policy issue signifying a dominant connection between nature and culture, and constituting a linkage of actors through which tourism and conservation are articulated and negotiated. This study suggested that conservation and tourism policies are not as impartial as they are designed to be, and the challenges need to be identified in respect to applying these policy structures to sustain conservation and development. In the chapter-3, 4 and 5, I have elaborately represented the findings of the empirical research in the multi-sited and multi-ethnic setting in CHT.

In chapter-3, to find out the multifaceted impact of tourism, I have portrayed how the prescriptive objectives of the state and its actors represent tourism as an alternative development venture, and how indigenous *pahari*s view it as a development trap. It was found that the spirit of tourism development in CHT is purposive and relatively biased which has less succeeded to guarantee the socio-economic well-being of the indigenous minorities. It has largely been centered

on the economic gains for the public and private corporate actors and the control over the people and resources. Tourism neither improves the ethnic tensions generated by indigenous identity politics nor does it comply with the potential for regional development that guarantees the sustainable and sophisticated utilization of cultural values and environmental reserves. Rather, tourism enforces to develop the categorization of 'exoticization' or 'otherness' which promotes the commodification of ethnicity and constructs a new 'identity'. In this neo-liberal tourism economy, tourist experiences and cultural practices of natives construct a space for interaction between host and guest that accelerates culture to be commodified. Public and private actors intend to view indigenous people not only as a tourism promoter but also a 'touristic ethnicity' (Wood, 1998). It was observed that branding tourism as development is largely based on the few opportunities of the local communities that generated jobs, works and engagements in tourism business. It has miscarried to counterbalance the increasing ethnic inequalities in CHT which directs ethnic minorities and their cultures to be commercialized into the tourism development paradox. Moreover, hegemonic mentality of some politically motivated locals, particularly Bengali, on the cultural and natural resources led to the lack of spontaneous participation of *Pahari* indigenous people in tourism and permits the management of tourist facilities and services by non-pahari ethnic operators. However, it was also found an alternative narrative that indigenous locals have recurrently expressed that their direct participation needs to be increased in order to develop a sustainable form of tourism. They are keen to promote themselves as the 'Other' that may, at least, be a safeguard for not to be disappeared their cultural uniqueness and authenticity, but not to be categorized as 'exotic and primitive agents'. Their reasoning connects not only to measurable benefits estimated by the involvement in tourism development, but more significant aspect they presume that the commercialization may lead to mistreat the cultural and natural diversity by the touristic corporate groups. The natives believe that it in turn helps to reintroduce their cultural 'authenticity' and 'uniqueness' to the tourists thereby boosting up their identity within the multicultural coexistence. However, all the 'splendid projects' built by the public and private actors over the CHT are nothing but a development trap and a false dream of sustainability. To build bridge-culvert-roads in the remote areas, and schools and temples is to win the mind and heart of the people. Designing development projects on a community basis, for instance community-based tourism, and participation in tourism activities by ethnic categorization is aimed at ethnically dividing and ruling indigenous communities. This categorization is an imperceptible 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) that legitimizes dominance of one community over

another. Therefore, peace-development-sustainability, has been replaced by competition-exploitation-marginalization. Tourism development reinforces the mainstream's 'othering' vision through the socio-economic marginalization of locals and the empowerment of the Bengalis by facilitating entrepreneurial opportunities. Bringing *Paharis* into the 'mainstream development' means turning the material lying in the corner of the remote hill tracts into the product for the national market. So the objective of this market system is systematic marginalization. The Chittagong Hill Tracts, on the one hand, is becoming a major tourist attraction in Bangladesh and on the other hand, parties with business interests and power are usurping natural resources further destabilizing the relationship between the hill people and the surrounding forests. The government and its public and private actors, who developed a soft process of legitimization, constructed a development paradox in a manner that has widely branded tourism as sustainability effort. As a result, the state has used tourism as a tool to economically solve the 'political problem' of CHT as an 'economic problem'. Thus, tourism manufactures a new form of governmentality to control over natives and nature.

In chapter-4, the empirical study found that tourism as sustainability effort is a kind of backfired mechanism and highly ambitious and illusive dream. Sustainability effort in CHT is problematic, as unfamiliar market mechanism to indigenous locals and the extreme level of cash flow in the rural market by Bengali traders lead to a shift from sustainable to profitable behavior. As tourism is one of the most sophisticated and perfect creations of capitalist practices, the intertwined relation between 'sustainability and profitability' engenders a doubt about the existence of *Pahari* community's subsistence economy and self-reliant well-being. Many deep forests, for instance, Sajek and Chimbuk, as reserved and protected areas declared by the Forest Department, has become a profit-making hub for tourism entrepreneurs and timber traders as opposed to conserving the environment and its sustainability. Conservation has turned into neo-liberal consumption since policy for conservation has been misplaced and misread by state and non-state actors to reach sustainability goals, and it has always been connected with the tourism development agenda. Although environmental conservation is taken into account in the national environmental policies, the disruption of environmental sustainability and the threat to the ecologically-based livelihoods of local indigenous people caused by tourism development are neglected, because the state and its interest groups are mostly benefited from the leasing and conservation policy. These forest conservation policies have not only weakened the eco-cultural subsistence of the *Pahari* ethnic people, but have also created a panic about displacement and a

mistrust between indigenous communities and the state actors. Besides, privatization of resources through leasing for timber business and grabbing lands for tourism spots created tensions between the indigenous people and the state. Conservation of aesthetic natural diversity serving for tourism development offered an appeal of greenery paradise to middle or upper class tourists along with adventurous and recreational experiences in the deep forests even though the indigenous locals struggle with the shortage of natural resources for their subsistence in CHT. The environmental discourse adopted by public actors promotes to restrict some forestlands for conservation as protected and reserve areas, literally are used for tourism resorts, which categorizes the indigenous locals as environmental destroyers. Indigenous people have always been represented as a threat to environmental sustainability due to the exploitative nature of their livelihood dependence on natural resources. However, Bengali presence in tourism activities created a contested atmosphere as the local minorities and the Bengalis are 'two antagonistic categories' (Siraj and Bal, 2017). So, there is a tension between political and economic purposes of the tourism business that mainly emerges from a denial of own ethnic entrepreneurs, and hence state-backed access of Bengali corporate groups. Therefore, how we can measure the contribution of tourism to economic sustainability which has not guaranteed a secure living for the indigenous locals, let alone changing the quality of life. The rightful participation of the CHTRC and HDCs, and indigenous locals in the development policymaking and implementation is fundamental for sustainability in CHT. The absence of knowledge and experience of indigenous participants and the state-backed intrusion of Bengali private entrepreneurs often resulted the 'institutionalized violence' (Weigert, 2008) of the right to development in CHT. Hence, the state politics of inclusion of indigenous people for their cultural performance in tourism activities is to manufacture them into a neo-liberal tourism commodity. It is merely a mechanism of selling the cultural practices of indigenous communities, not sharing them to tourists as cultural preservation. It was found that these forest conservation policies, indeed, serve neo-liberal economic interests for capitalist actors rather than environmental sustainability goals for natives and nature. As a result, the state-backed political and corporate elites became new landowners and leading savers of natural resources through the privatization of forest resources that forced the *Pahari Jumma* natives to be homeless at their homelands. Many indigenous families were forcefully evicted from their territories and alternatively offered a means to be involved in tourism activities as compensation. Thus, the paradoxical view of land 'ownership' and resource 'saver' legitimized and normalized their 'rational' existence in the state-termed 'wastelands' of CHT. Indigenous *Paharis,* on the other hand, were pushed to choose tourism as an

alternative means of their livelihood, since the forests, previously they customarily owned for their living, became public property for tourism and other developments. Therefore, the 'eco-ethnological poor' has been remarginalized and finally commodified by the 'eco-political rich' through the privatization and neo-liberalization of the resources. After the 'peace accord', the environmentalists and the forest department developed a discourse of legitimizing forest conservation policies to control the access of indigenous folks of CHT, which were viewed as the root of environmental tragedies due to their traditional practices of shifting cultivation that apparently put the deep forests, hills and wildlife in danger. This traditional cultivation has been represented as a 'primitive' form of agricultural practice. As opposed to this discourse, it was found that the worsening ecological imbalance in the environment of CHT in last three decades is deeply rooted in so-called 'development' programs, for instance, tourism development. Instead of enacting a sustainable forest policy against this environmental loss caused by typical development initiatives in CHT, development actors offer tourism as an instrumental force to mitigate natural imbalances and bridge the gap between socio-economic interests with market logic. It was observed that the increasing failure of environmental sustainability are not only attributable to customary agrarian practices but also to unplanned tourism development and forest management policies. It was found that due to the inappropriate eco-political hoax in plans and policies, neither tourism development nor jhum cultivation has fully supported the subsistence of indigenous minorities, as both livelihood sectors are seasonal and incapable to improve the well-being of indigenous people and to hold environmental sustainability in CHT. Furthermore, deforestation has taken place and has been legalized for revenue collection for the state, and income generation for the timber traders by means of the nationalization of forests, weakening traditional institutions and alienating indigenous people from traditional forest management. The expansion of reserved and protected forests, the Bengali settler issue, the leasing of jhumland for rubber plantations and especially tourism development have not only accelerated deforestation and resource depletion, but have also revived conflicts between indigenous *jhummas* and state and non-state actors. *jhumma* locals protested and organized several cultural showdowns as resistance to tourism development. They portrayed this top-down development as a slow and soft violence of rights to livelihood, for instance, instead of blaming the uninterrupted and indiscriminate forest grabbing, they have been victimized as leading actors of deforestation. Thus, sustainability gradually decreases, and environmental conflict increases for resources. This asymmetrical power relations between the stakeholders create a new space of conflict in CHT. Tourism-induced development through, for instance, wholesale declaration

of jhumland of *Paharis* as reserve forest, leasing of thousands of acres of land to non-locals, land grabbing and acquisition for resorts, afforestation through social forestry policy, the establishment of land ports, and construction of connectivity roads by massive cutting of hills and forests, have not been established in favor of a holistic eco-culture-friendly and pro-indigenous development. It has appeared that tourism in the Chittagong Hill Tracts could not mitigate the long ethnic conflicts of self-determination and recognition of indigeneity nor could it meet the state's assurance of supporting livelihoods as an alternative means and conserving the nature which was never conducive to achieving sustainability goals. The indigenous *paharis* have not only the capacity to develop a self-supporting economy and take care of natural resources, but are also capable of creating a shared economy that could contribute to the community well-being and empowerment, and supplement the national economy as a whole. Therefore, the wisdom of indigenous people and traditional forest management could be a parallel tool for conservation and sustainable tourism along with the state's policies that would be a sustainable win-win approach if both actors are respectful of each other.

In chapter-5, The study revealed the everyday forms of representation that encompass the commodification of people and places, the self-adopted mechanism of indigenous people, media portrayals, the construction of tourist gaze and discontent of *pahari* ethnic people in CHT. It also stressed the mechanism through which cultural uniqueness and indigenous identities are reconstructed, deployed, commodified, and commercialized as exchangeable objects for tourist consumption. It has been observed that the commodification of culture has nowadays remodeled and romanticized the cultural difference of indigenous people accentuating the connection between the cultural revitalization and neoliberal touristification. Tourism as an alternative livelihood thus develops a socio-cultural relationship between tourism corporates and indigenous communities for economic gain that forces natives to negotiate the customary behaviors as tourism demands. It was found that tourism has led to drastic changes in the aesthetic contents of indigenous culture in which indigenous people became active agents as touristic performers due to the increased demands of the tourists in the commercial settings that speeded up the commodification of community and culture in CHT. Nevertheless, although *Pahari* ethnic communities are not constitutionally recognized as 'indigenous', their culture and identity are staged and marketed by the state and the private actors in tourism promotion due to the cultural and communal distinctiveness. Neoliberal tourism as a 'business for fun' forces a neocolonial movement through a corporate mechanism of the commodification of indigenous culture and its transfiguration into an

‘entertainment machine’ (Lloyd and Clark, 2001). Through the multilayered representational politics and commodification of indigenous culture transform a ‘community’ as a sense of belongingness, into a ‘commodity’ as a means of economic gain. The deliberate falsified and commodified image of the ‘exotic others’ manufactured by postcolonial state of Bangladesh and its actors contributes to constructing a bias knowledge that shapes tourism policies and promotions in CHT. Moreover, the postcolonial representations staged by tourists in social media and advertised by tourist operators in their webpages often include *Pahari* ethnic peoples’ physique and their decorative appearances as a primitive sense, which is manifested under postcolonial ideologies. The notion of cultural and racial ‘difference’ of CHT is predominantly deployed by tourist agencies in their tourism campaign to fascinate the tourists through a kaleidoscopic representation of natives, nature, and culture, thereby offering a colorful and thrilling experience. In this way, the tour operators normalize and propagate the gaze, marketing their ‘brands’, and making interests to their envisioned clients, the tourists. Besides, the state and its actors promote the notion of ‘intact and natural’ natives in national tourism policy to tempt tourists to gaze at the *Pahari* indigenous folks as if people were on showcase. However, in the name of strengthening economic and cultural sustainability, the inclusion of *pahari* communities in the state's tourism policy has recently become central to tourism promotion. What was eventually observed is that indigenous locals became economic victims of corporate encroachment, and political objects of remarginalization due to the unplanned intervention of public actors whereas cultural extinction has been a non-problematic and absurd issue. The imposed and prescriptive policies represent a holistic notion of empowerment, which is believed that sustainability can be reached through the mechanism of commodification of people and places. However, the control and management of tourism are facilitated by non-natives due to the shortage of touristic setup and locational infrastructure in CHT. Thus, indigenous locals become a passive performers. Although natives are, to some extent, enthusiastic to represent themselves as cultural ‘others’ which are possibly experienced with commodified objects, they do not want to “be represented as such by exogenous agents” (Odermatt, 1996, p. 106). The reflection of major informants is that their expectations were not only about economic returns through engagement in touristic activities, but also they believed that control and ownership of commodification could be protected from where “ethnicity is manipulated” (Tice, 1995, p. 8). Pahari natives have faith in their own forms of commodification to empower their communal collectivity and connectivity that eventually accelerates sustainability and community well-being as opined by many informants.

6.2 Contribution of the Study

Although a good number of literature has meanwhile come out about the political history, identity politics, discrimination, land grabbing, forest management, and development in CHT, and tourism as a burning issue was briefly confined to newspaper-based writings or opinions, there is a serious dearth of ethnographic research and comprehensive understanding of the politics of development, sustainability paradox, and commodification through representation as consequential outcomes of tourism development. This thesis has opened up an window to provide a 'food for thought' for further research on how tourism is reckoned as a sustainable practice for mitigating environmental loss and improving local livelihoods or how it contributes to becoming potential threats to the people and places in any natural setting. The thesis also provides an insight on how 'culture' is instrumental to be incorporated in development and sustainability discourse, as most of the sustainable development goals are embedded with culture-induced human actions and behaviors. The notion of 'Sustainable Tourism Development' as suggested by WTO is new politics of neo-liberalization of nature in a sustainable way. In fact, no tourism category, for instance, community-based, ecotourism, pro-poor, indigenous, responsible or sustainable tourism, is perfect and one-size-fits-all solution to the many types of problems faced by mass tourism, each has its own politics and solution for only economic gains. One of the core justifications of these tourism categories is that ethnicity, culture, and nature can be conserved or saved because of their 'market value', and hence they can be commodified.

The thesis involves some pragmatic, academic, and rights issues and hence enables to draw attention to scholars, academics, policy makers and rights bodies at national, regional and global scales. Firstly, the lives and livelihood of indigenous people living in the CHT largely depend on the natural settings and eco-system of the CHT as ecological niche. The ethnographic details of how tourism initiatives in the name of development are becoming a latent pressure on the environment and lifestyle of the indigenous communities of the CHT have come up in this study. Secondly, academic outputs on the CHT focus merely on the cultural specificity of indigenous people, their political and economic organizations, and the operations of their everyday life, but how tourism development intervention could massively hamper their life-setting and survival strategies are missing in the scholarship on the CHT which have been covered up by the present study. Thirdly, policy makers have been struggling to redress the conflicting situation of the CHT which involves various forms of conflict of interests. But this thesis provided some first-hand narratives of

indigenous people in the CHT which could work as bases line of understanding how top-down idea of development project like tourism industry could bring what A. G. Frank (1978) termed "development of under-development". It will help to understand how much the state policy reflects the aspirations of the indigenous people, and what the gaps are between the policy and practice in tourism development and conservation process on the hill lands. Fourthly, this thesis also provides some very meaningful suggestions for the rights bodies at home and abroad who work for the rights and entitlements of indigenous people across the world. Apart from academic contributions, the research deserves receiving deep attentions of policy makers, development activists, international donor agencies, various bodies of the United Nations (including UNDP, ILO, and UNICEF which work in the CHT) and indigenous people themselves for the better understanding of the problems and potentials of tourism for development. Finally, it therefore helps meticulously the state's concerned department and other associated stakeholders to frame tourism development models which are socially relevant and culturally specific.

6.3 Conclusion

A common denial of the silent voice of indigenous victims concerning the mushrooming of unplanned tourism development by the public and private agents, security forces in particular, rationalized by the government in the name of national security, and the selling tourism as a channel for local sustainability and communal well-being granted an ideal acceptance of the 'win-win' model of tourism in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. This model, however, constructed a consumer class whilst community became commodity. As a result, deconstruction of intersection between community and consumption is important, because the commodification of culture and nature is deeply rooted in the neo-liberal tourism economy where economic gain is the ultimate desire. Nevertheless, tourism is supposed to take care of local eco-citizens. Evicting hundreds of indigenous families, and building five-star hotels in the jhumlands of Chittagong Hill Tracts should not be the ethos of tourism. The current development in the tourism sector in CHT failed to improve the mass local indigenous communities' livelihood. Motorized roads, the furnished resorts with air-conditioning, highly modern and luxury hotels are the example of the tourism development which have no relation with local culture. If the special context of the indigenous people, their distinct ethnic identity and eco-cultural practice, especially their rights to forests and natural resources are not protected and respected in the case of these industrial enterprises, then the tourism industry is bound to appear as an extreme threat to the hill ecology and habitat existence of the indigenous

communities in CHT. This thesis suggested that the spontaneous and inclusive participation of the real stakeholders the *Pahari* natives in tourism policy, rightful engagement in their own form of tourism promotion, eco-cultural practices, neo-localism in tourism development, and the improvement of tourists' mentality are connected to the impact of local community wellbeing and sustainability. Therefore, eco-cultural behavior, rituals and practices are customarily influential in redressing the challenges of the three pillars of sustainability which lead to sustainable development if properly addressed by the culturally embedded tourism policy. Besides, establishing dialogue and mutual trust between the state and indigenous communities can avoid indigenous resistance to tourism development and consequently boost the potentiality of the sustainable maintenance of tourism in CHT. Finally, it can be opined that the tourism development in the CHT may seem beneficial for the local ethnic minorities at a first glance, but it raises the contested issues of who is beneficiary, and who and what is truly compensating for that benefit (Sajib, 2021).

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Appendix-A

A Brief Checklist for Fieldwork

Tourism Development (For Chapter-3)

A complete description of tourism of CHT, what business and market has developed, who is involved in this business.
What are the initiatives of public and private organizations in potential tourism related businesses?
What developments have been done or doing so far? List them, for example- infrastructural development, community services, tourist services etc….

What the **Economic benefits** are they enjoying? Their opinion. What kinds of economic gains you observed?

Is tourism development **consistent with improving community well-being** or does it simply increase **corporate fortunes** at the expense of community well-being?

Tourism as a Development or Trap? What do you think?
What do indigenous people actually perceive on the tourism development? Do they accept it willingly or they are economically forced to receive it?

Do state and non-state actors think that the tourism development policy is for improving economic condition of poor indigenous people? Is it really working?

What changes have come in the lives of tribals in the creation of new markets, what is their position in the competitive market?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of tourism, how are the social and economic changes affecting the overall development of tribals?

Do local people think that Tourism is the **blessing for improving their livings** or **creating new problems**, if so what are these?

Are indigenous people treating as a 'problem' or 'backward' for development?

Why has government introduced development and nature conservation for tourism in CHT?

Are all development projects related to tourism promotion? [this question for Public and private agency]
Why are state and non-state actors so interested in these developments compared to development of any other rural areas? [this question for Public and private agency]

If the tourists are attracted by the indigenous culture, why indigenous people are not directly involved in the statist's tourism development policy and decision making process?

Is tourism an alternative means of development or is it a new strategy to control the indigenous people, why?

Whether alignment is taking place, if so what factors are at work. What is the role of tourism in alternative development?

What about the non-indigenous people (Bengali people and businessman)? How they get benefited from the tourism and how are involved in it?

Do the all tourism developments focus on the **tourist's desires**?

What changes occur in the local economy?

What Changes of CHT do you see as result of Tourism development? For example- Social, cultural, economic and political life.

How tourism activities affect their traditional way of life?

What are the problems facing native people those who are not directly in the tourism activities.

Involvement of the security forces in development and tourism projects.

Bengali Presence in Tourism participation/involvement in tourism development

Which ethnic groups are powerful in the context of tourism business? Why?

Tourism and Sustainability (For Chapter-4)

How constructing roads, cutting hills impact on the nature? Describe it. Example- landslides.

How forestland use for tourism threatens the livelihood of forest-dependent people?

How Acquisition of land by state and non-state agency, for example- Forest Department and declaring them reserved and protected forests; are impacting the indigenous people's life?

How tourism creates instability and insecurity to local people for their livelihoods?

In the name of **Tourists security**, how public forces are controlling the everyday life of the indigenous people in the tourist places? **Some case study**

How tourism development is responsible to restrict access to resources, land and territory?

How Tourism distract indigenous people from **shifting cultivation, traditional income sources**

Is Tourism **restoring Connectivity or Marginalization**?

Do they **(indigenous people and state agency**) think that tourism development helps to minimize the historical conflicts and promote peace?

Do **they (indigenous people and state agency**) think that tourism for **conflict management** is an integral strategy to legitimize the adoption of development?

How the presence of tourists hamper hunting and gathering activities for their subsistence.

Does tourism create an environment for reasonable co-existence of indigenous and non-indigenous communities?

What kind of tourism culture can be effective for the sustainability (Social, economic, environmental, cultural and political)? What do they think? I mean, what they are thinking for sustainable development by tourism? Or it is making instability and creating socio-environmental crisis?

Do they think that **nature-culture combination** where indigenous experiences, practices, ideas and knowledge can help to create an eco-cultural tourism?

How **culture** can act as a **resource** to promote **sustainability**, rather than a **barrier**?

How indigenous communities can be a parallel influential actors in order to save the forest resources and wildlife by their traditional knowledge and support in conducting their own duties?

How Indigenous peoples' sense of ownership, attachment to place and co-dependency on the environment, all are affected by the tourism?

What are the **qualitative indicators to determine the happiness and well-being** of indigenous community?

Commodification and Representation (For Chapter-5)

What exactly tourism activities help to **enhance in cultural practices**?
How tourism is related to cultural survival itself. What do they think?
What tourists think about indigenous people and culture before visiting CHT and what they now view to Indigenous people after visiting CHT? **Narratives** of images of peoples. (Mainstream people, I mean those who are now tourists, considered indigenous people as ***jongly, moga, Pahari, snake-frog eating folks***, etc…… something like non-human being.)
What is the expectation from tourists as well?
What is the advertisement strategy of indigenous people and tourist operators for attracting tourists?

How **nature is represented** to promote tourism? I mean **local and regional narratives about nature** of CHT.

What kind of Ethnic customs, heritage sites, traditional dance, music, dress, rituals, environmental adaptations, and unfamiliar social norms are attraction factors to tourists?

How indigenous people also represent their culture to the tourist attraction?

What are the **tourist's attitudes, behaviour towards customs, norms, rituals and nature as well?**

How tourists face social value conflict? Tourist behavour in restricted place, For example-religious place, festivals, rituals and ceremony (marriage or death)

How indigenous people are working by participation in tourism – not only as 'cultural objects' but also as tourism producers' in their own way?

For tourists, it is a thrilling 'Dreamtime", as if they go back to the primitive past, what tourists think?

Do indigenous people show their culture and tradition only for their benefits/earnings or preservation from extinction? Or both? Or another reason?

Does the development of tourism normally help the preservation of a cultural tradition or otherwise destroy it?

Is there **any fake cultural/ethnic representation** towards tourists to make authentic culture/tradition?

Please tell a story about Homestead/home-staying services of indigenous people.
Are there any rituals for nature conservation?
What is the **tourist's view** on the tourism development? Do tourists think that local people should be **main stakeholders** for **responsible and sustainable** tourism promotion or public and private agency is enough for **their satisfaction** or both are needed for it?

The tourist's view, how to take the food habits of the tribals, clothing?

Whether traditional practices are presented in serving food to tourists. How do tourists enjoy the hall?

What are the rules and regulations for tourists? If any.

What are the Factors influencing ethnic food Choice?

How indigenous Cuisine is represented as an Identity Marker?

What factors does a tourist consider when eating in the mountains? details

What kind of food are served in the tribals' own festivals? Make a list.

What activities do hotel-restaurant owners conduct online to attract tourists to indigenous food items? make a list

How do they run campaigns on Facebook? Write the details.

Resistance against Tourism Development

How tourism contribute to the land grabbing, displacement, eviction of indigenous families from their ancestral lands? Some case studies please

Voice of the Victims (host community) is active or absent? Are They ignored? Or indigenous people are unresponsive?

What are the Tensions/Conflicts between Host and Guest (tourist and indigenous people)

Are indigenous people being empowered by the tourism development? (Social, economic, political and cultural empowerment. Purchasing power, Self-respect gaining power, culturally identity power, self-governance power etc…)

Write analytically your observation and experience in the report.