COMMUNITY, MARKET INTERMEDIARIES, AND THE STATE
Survival-cum-Upward Mobility Strategies of Indigenous Villagers in
the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh

A cumulative dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of PhD in International Development Studies

by
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Bochum, 21 July 2023

Institute of Development Research and Development Policy (IEE)
Ruhr University Bochum
DETAILS OF THE ORAL DEFENCE

Community, Market Intermediaries, and the State:
Survival-cum-Upward Mobility Strategies of Indigenous Villagers in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh

PhD Thesis

submitted at the Institute of Development Research and Development Policy, Ruhr University Bochum to obtain the degree of PhD in International Development Studies

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The defence took place on 15 September 2023 in Bochum

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<td>BDT</td>
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<td>Interlinked Market</td>
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<td>MOCHTA</td>
<td>Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental Organisation</td>
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<td>PCJSS</td>
<td>Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti</td>
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<tr>
<td>PDB</td>
<td>Power Development Board</td>
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<td>TAN</td>
<td>Transnational Activist Network</td>
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I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to my supervisors Prof Dr Eva Gerharz and Prof Dr Shapan Adnan for their continuous support and guidance throughout my PhD journey.

I am indebted to Bread for the World (BfdW) for providing me with financial and technical support which gave me this invaluable opportunity to pursue my PhD studies in Germany. The scholarship from BfdW would not have been possible without the collaboration of my former organisation, Kapaeeng Foundation. I am indebted to all my colleagues at Kapaeeng. I am also grateful to my teachers at the Centre for Human Rights Education, Curtin University, Mary Anne Kenny, Dr Caroline Fleay, and Dr Lynda Blanchard for providing references and support during the process of PhD application.

I heartfully thank the members of the IEE, including Prof Dr Wilhelm Löwenstein, Dr Gabriele Bäcker, Dipl.-Ök. Britta Nicklas, Dr Christina Seeger, Dr Raffael Beier, Dr Anne Siebert and Dr Elkhan Richard Sadik-Zada for the administrative and technical support during my stay in Bochum.

I offer special thanks to my friends and colleagues Anja Julia Habersang, Anurug Chakma, Biswaranjan Tripura, Corinna Land, Fiza Lee-Winter, Hari Purna Tripura, Katrin Renschler, Maruf Kordt-Lutfur, Mohammed Ali Zaidi, Nancy Nduta Wanja, Norina Fischer, Parboti Roy, Raya Das, Reinhhilde Sotiria König, Rigan Chakma, Shaden Sabouni, Thivitha Himmen, UK Mong Marma, and Zena Mouawad, among others, for fruitful discussions, suggestions, and moral support.

I am thankful to Abanti Harun, Advocate Dinonath Tanchangya, Barrister Raja Devasish Roy Wangza, Dr Hosna Shewly, Dr Khairul Chowdhury, Dr Nadiruzzaman, Dr Shishir Swapan Chakma, Falguni Tripura, Hana Shams Ahmed, Hiran Mitra Chakma, Nitol Chakma, Manjuni Chakma, Pallab Chakma, Prashanta Tripura, Prof Hasan Safie, Prof Mong Shanoo Chowdhury, Rabindranath Soren, Sanjeeb Drong, Satej Chakma, and Tisel Chakma, among many others, for providing me with different forms of support and advice during the course of the research.
I am indebted to the Tanchangya villagers of Meyachara who welcomed me to the community and offered this rare opportunity to conduct research among them. My gratitude also to various other research partners (e.g. government officials, traders, political activists, NGO workers, and academics) whom I consulted as a part of this research.

Finally, I thank all my family members for their unconditional love, patience, and continued support that propelled me forward.
ABSTRACT

This study examines the survival-cum-upward mobility strategies of indigenous Hill villagers in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region of Bangladesh during the post-CHT Accord (1997) period, focusing on the case of the Tanchangya villagers of Meyachara. These situated strategies are understood as a repertoire of actions towards a ‘good life’. The struggle for a ‘good life’ here is multifaceted, aimed at creating wider spaces in economic, social, and political spheres. This ethnographic research project examines three social contexts that are crucial for the contemporary indigenous villagers of this region. The first social context involves intracommunity relations within the immediate social world of the Tanchangya villagers. The analysis here is rooted in the struggles of Meyachara’s peasant families for secure livelihoods and the role of village-based relations in this regard. Their agricultural reproduction aims for secure ‘subsistence’ while remaining open to diverse opportunities for augmenting family resources. Tanchangya peasants exhibit calculated risk-taking behaviour in making their livelihood decisions. The analysis reveals that despite the growing dominance of market exchanges, village-based practices of reciprocity and redistribution continue to offer protection during crises and exploitation by external actors. The second context focuses on the processes of negotiations between Meyachara’s peasant families with Bengali trader-moneylenders in dadan loan contracts. On the one hand, the analysis sheds light on the mechanisms of control imposed by Bengali trader-moneylenders which creates ‘dependence’ of Tanchangya villagers on these trader-moneylenders. On the other hand, the analysis investigates the flexible and dynamic strategies employed by Tanchangya peasants to obtain fair prices for their agricultural produce. The third social context examines the situated strategies employed by Tanchangya villagers when encountering various manifestations of the state. The interactions with different manifestations of the state lead peasants to formulate diverse strategies, which encompass engaging, avoiding and resisting local state actors. Thus, this research demonstrates how a section of the Hill Peoples is persisting in its struggle despite being marginalised as a result of the nation-state-building processes.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Introduction
This study explores the life struggles of the indigenous Hill villagers of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT or Hill Tracts) of Bangladesh. Situated in the southeast corner of Bangladesh, sharing international borders with India and Myanmar, the CHT possesses some unique features that have interested geographers, anthropologists, sociologists, and political scientists for over a century. The geography of this region, comprising hilly terrains, forested areas, and river systems with hundreds of chara (seasonal streams), is very different compared to the plain, deltaic regions that make up much of the landmass of Bangladesh. Currently, the CHT comprises three districts—Bandarban, Khagrachari, and Rangamati.

The CHT is the home to 11 distinct groups of indigenous peoples who differ markedly from the dominant Bengali majority of the country with respect to ethnicity, customs, belief, language, and material culture. These ethnic groups, taken together, are known as the Pahari (Hill Peoples), Pahari Adivasi (Hill Indigenous Peoples), or Jumma Peoples. According to a local categorisation based on the geographic and agro-ecological locations of their habitations, these groups have been identified as khyong sa (streamside or river-valley people) and taung sa (ridgetop or mountain people) (Sopher, 1964: 109). In this research, I focus on a village community among the Tanchangya, an ethnic group belonging to the khyong sa category, although some of their villages are also found on hill or mountain tops. The Tanchangya constitutes the fifth largest group in terms of population among the Hill Peoples living in the CHT (Banglapedia, n.d.). They are concentrated in the Rangamati and Bandarban districts of the CHT. However, small sections also live in Chittagong and Cox’s Bazar districts in the coastal plains of Bangladesh, as well as in parts of Burma and India (Debnath, 2008).

As I will elaborate later in this chapter, the economy of the Hill Peoples was once primarily subsistence-oriented, while their political systems were largely autonomous. However, colonial British and post-colonial Pakistani and Bangladeshi

1 Bawm, Chak, Chakma, Khyang, Khumi, Lushai, Marma, Mro, Pangkhoa, Tanchangya, and Tripura. However, the Assamese, Gurkha, and Santal communities, who migrated to the CHT during the British period, also claim the ‘indigenous’ status (Roy, 2009: 11).

state policies have sought to transform the economic, social, and political spheres of the Hill Peoples. The Hill Peoples have responded to such attempts in various forms, including forming a collective political resistance since the early 1970s. Nevertheless, nation-state-building processes have continuously pushed these indigenous peoples to the margins, greatly limiting their autonomy in the economic, social, and political aspects of their lives.

Having been born and raised within an ethnic group (Chakma) among the Hill Peoples, my personal experiences and identity have been shaped by the historical processes mentioned above. Consequently, the process of marginalisation of the Hill Peoples, as well as their struggles to survive and overcome such marginalised positions have long been my areas of interest. This interest has motivated me to become an activist and actively work on a wide range of issues affecting indigenous peoples of the CHT and the plains of Bangladesh since the early 2000s. It has also led me to change my academic discipline (from business to social sciences) and write my Master’s dissertation on the history of the political self-determination of the Hill Peoples (see Chakma, 2013). However, my interest in conducting this specific research developed while working as a human rights activist based in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, following my MA studies. During this time, I came to the realisation that although my work focused on safeguarding and advancing the rights of indigenous peoples in Bangladesh, I possessed limited knowledge about how ordinary indigenous peoples, many of whom live in rural areas, sustain their everyday life struggles. This realisation fuelled my personal motivation to undertake this PhD research to enable me to deepen my knowledge of the situated strategies of the rural Hill Peoples.

1.2 Objective and scope of the study
This study identifies and examines the situated strategies of survival and upward mobility of the Hill Peoples. Such strategies are aimed at creating wider spaces in the economic, social, and political dimensions of their lives. The research focuses on three social contexts that are critical for the contemporary Hill Peoples: i) their immediate social environment or social world, ii) their interactions with Bengali market intermediaries, and iii) their encounters with local state actors. This research is centred around Meyachara, an ethnic Tanchangya village, which is the fieldwork site of this study. As a geographical unit and a social space, Meyachara serves as a foreground for

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3 The term ‘situated strategies’ is used interchangeably with terms such as ‘strategies’, ‘strategic acts’, ‘survival strategies’, and ‘survival-cum-upward mobility strategies’.
4 Pseudonyms are used throughout for the names of research participants and for the village.
investigating the everyday life struggles of Tanchangya villagers. As a narrative of place, the description encompasses the geographical and ecological features that constitute the physicality of the village and its surroundings—hills, forested areas, streams, fields, gardens, homes, shops, roads, schools, temples, cremation grounds, marketplaces, army camps, and government offices.

Even more so, this dissertation is a narrative of the human beings who live in close contact with these surroundings. These villagers and their discourses and actions towards survival as well as improvement of the quality of life are at the core of the analysis of this dissertation. The village families, though connected through kinship relations, and membership of the village and the samaj⁵, are far from homogenous. While the majority of villagers are peasants, primarily engaged in farming culantro (eryngium foetidum), a green aromatic herb, as well as a range of vegetables and fruits, others identify themselves as shopkeepers, autorickshaw drivers, agents of market intermediaries, government employees, NGO workers, public representatives, and political activists. Given the unequal distribution of economic, cultural, and social capital, their internal relations are characterised by hierarchical and power differences. At the same time, these villagers have systems and practices of self-help, reciprocity, and redistribution that foster internal harmony and solidary among them. Alongside kinship, these systems and practices facilitate the formation of smaller nodes of relationships between members—as neighbours, friends, brokers, patrons, and clients within the larger web of relations among the community members.

Beyond the geographical-social spaces of Meyachara, the villagers’ relations extend to actors living ‘outside’ their immediate social world. These include friends and relatives living in distant places, members of neighbouring villages, traders, non-governmental organisation (NGO) workers, political activists, and local state functionaries. The relations between the villagers and the market and local state actors, in particular, are characterised by substantial power differences, involving routine negotiations over access to resources. Such relations embody ambivalence, resulting from a complex interplay of domination and resistance, as well as the interdependence between actors. Intra-community relations are important in understanding the strategies of individual families and their connections with other villagers in the management of and sharing various ‘local’ resources (e.g., land and labour). However, the spaces of encounter between the villagers and outside actors—particularly market intermediaries

⁵ A samaj is a local self-organisation centred around the membership of people to a local Buddhist temple (see Chapter Four).
and local state actors—demand special attention for two reasons. First, the financial capital required for agricultural-social reproduction as well as the marketing of agricultural produce of the villagers in national markets are negotiated through credit and product markets controlled by Bengali market intermediaries. Secondly, the access to ‘external’ resources required for the improvement of the quality of life (e.g. in the areas of education, communication, and electricity) rests largely on the villagers’ encounters and negotiations with local state actors. Thus, this research engages with the notion of ‘translocality’, which is used to encapsulate social relations that ‘extend beyond the village community’ (Tenhunen, 2011: 416). This notion is useful in addressing ‘the interrelations among and between different levels of society that are constituted through negotiation of knowledge and meaning’ and in unravelling ‘the myriad connections, coalitions, formal and informal networks and power constellations’ (Gerharz, 2012: 130, 33). Far from providing a totalising description of a local geographic-social space, this research is concerned with the analysis of the translocal dimensions of everyday life struggles of the Tanchangya villagers of Meyachara. Although the unit of analysis is Meyachara, the analysis is inextricably linked to human actors, systems, and institutions beyond the geographic-social spaces of this village, and thus extends to the broader economic, social, and political contexts of the CHT and Bangladesh.

The analysis of the survival strategies of Tanchangya villagers of Meyachara has been presented in the form of a ‘cumulative dissertation’, consisting of four academic papers—three of which are journal articles (Chapter Three, Chapter Five, and Chapter Six) and one is a chapter in an edited volume (Chapter Four, co-authored with Eva Gerharz). Analysing social phenomena in the form of journal articles and book chapters is a delicate job, requiring careful balancing between what and how the author(s) intend to write and what and how the supervisors, peers, editors, and anonymous reviewers suggest, within the limited space provided. The papers that constitute Chapters Three to Chapter Six focus on specific social and economic themes, each with distinct research questions and conceptual frameworks. They were planned, organised, and presented largely independent of each other. The original plans and structures of the papers were adjusted and revised in terms of quality throughout the review and editing process, which involved close interactions with supervisors, colleagues, editors, and anonymous reviewers. Therefore, each of these four chapter can be read as a standalone piece of work. Although they are logically connected through the overarching theme of the research (situated strategies of the Tanchangya villagers), the links and connections
between Chapters 3–6 have not always been made explicit. Therefore, the objective of the current chapter and the following one (Chapter Two: Methodology) is to provide the missing links that bind the entire dissertation together.

The background of the research is set by an analysis of the political history of the CHT, within which the contemporary struggles of Meyachara’s Tanchangya villagers are embedded. The concept of ‘survival strategy’ is used to establish the rationale of the study in the context of the CHT. The layout of this chapter is as follows. The next section offers an analysis of the colonial and post-colonial state policies that gradually marginalised the Hill Peoples of the CHT in the economic, social, and political spheres of life, and examines how these peoples responded to these policy and structural changes. These historical processes of marginalisation have shaped the participation of the present day Tanchangya villagers in exploitative market systems and their diverse encounters and negotiations with local state actors. After describing the political history of how the Hill Peoples were gradually pushed to the margins, the subsequent section elaborates on the concept of ‘survival strategy’ and puts forward several propositions concerning the application of this concept. These suggest that the situated strategies employed by marginalised groups should be delineated by highlighting their multi-dimensionality, actor-centrism, and relationality. Moreover, people often employ various strategies not merely for survival, but also for their upward mobility. The third section describes the rationale of this research by underscoring the gaps in studying the Hill Peoples’ situated strategies in the existing literature on the CHT. It demonstrates that although historical processes of nation-state building have turned the question of survival into a central concern for the contemporary Hill Peoples, studies on their strategies of survival and upward mobility remain limited. The scholarship on the situated strategies of the Hill Peoples has remained largely fragmented and focused on political or economic dimensions, often overlooking the deep interconnectedness and interrelation between these dimensions. It is further argued that due to the lack of an ethnographic approach, many scholarly works on the situated strategies of ordinary Hill Peoples fail to delve into the messy and complex realities that shape them. The final sections of this chapter outline the questions explored in this research and the structure of the dissertation.

1.3 Historical process of marginalisation of the Hill Peoples
Living in close contact with the CHT’s geographical and agroecological surroundings for generations, the Hill Peoples have developed livelihoods, material cultures, customs,
and beliefs that are suited to local conditions. Once *jum* cultivation— which involves slashing, burning, and clearing of vegetation and shifting of farms every year— was the primary mode of production for the Hill Peoples (Lewin, 1869: 13; Sopher, 1964: 197). However, *jum* is not simply a mode of production. For the Hill Peoples, it was a way of life ‘that encompassed their social and cultural values and went beyond the narrow mores of economic values. The entire process of jhum cultivation and its harvesting was based on the conceptions of communal ownership, exchange and sharing’ (Mohsin, 2002: 82). Land was a common property among *jum* cultivators and the yearly allocation of land for farming was managed by the community (Mey, 1984: 76; Mohsin, 2002: 82). Therefore, the economies of the Hill Peoples, largely centred on *jum* cultivation and extraction of forest resources, were subsistence-oriented and based on the norms of reciprocal and redistributive practices within the community, where exchanges of cash and engagement with markets were very limited (Shelley, 1992: 81). Due to such unique features involved with *jum* cultivation compared to plough cultivation practised in the plains, colonial administrator and ethnographer Thomas Lewin (1869: 11) portrayed a romantic picture of the lives of the *jum* cultivators:

…the hill man works in the shade of the jungle that he is cutting; he is on a lofty eminence, where every breeze reaches and refreshes him; his spirits are enlivened and his labor lightened by the beautiful prospect stretching out before him: while the rich and varied scenery of the forest stirs his mind above a monotone. He is surrounded by his comrades; the scent of the wild thyme and the buzzing of the forest bee are about him; the young men and maidens sing to their work, and the laugh and joke goes round as they sit down to their mid-day meal under the shade of some great mossy forest tree.

1.3.1 British era

During pre-colonial times, the Hill Peoples of the CHT were mainly organised through kinship groups and were ‘governed’ by customary chiefs (Mey, 1984: 90, 1996; van Schendel et al., 2000: 25). Although they had connections with neighbouring kingdoms and empires through trade routes, they remained largely free from direct outside rule (Ahsan and Chakma, 1989: 959–60; Roy, 2000; van Schendel, 1992). The Mughal emperors attempted to forcefully bring the CHT under their control. Although these attempts were resisted by the Hill Peoples, they were forced to enter into treaties with the Mughal emperors. In 1713, the Chakma Raja, Fateh Khan, entered into a treaty that granted him permission from the Mughal emperors to allow Bengali merchants to trade with the Hill Peoples in exchange for cotton in the form of a tribute. Subsequently, the

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6 ‘Shifting’, ‘swidden’, or ‘slash-and-burn’ agriculture, locally known by various terms, predominantly as *jum* (also spelt as ‘*jhum*’ in English discourses).
British East India Company’s attempts to control the CHT also faced resistance from the Hill Peoples, culminating in a peace treaty in 1787. This treaty granted the Hill Peoples the right to trade in exchange for cotton as tribute (which was changed to cash in 1789). Nevertheless, the CHT remained largely autonomous and in relative isolation until the British colonials annexed this region in 1860 (Roy, 2000: 38–42).

The British colonial government took all necessary measures to administer their South Asian colonies according to their visions and to make them profitable. These measures were based on the presumptions of modernity, in which Europe and its peoples were considered the most ‘civilised’ compared to the rest of the world (Woldeyes, 2021: 4). To ensure the efficacy of their rule, the British administrators adopted the policy of identifying, classifying, and mapping the local populations of South Asia, using an evolutionary scale, where groups such as the Hill People were labelled as ‘primitive’ and ‘backward’, while others were considered as relatively ‘developed’ (Vandekerckhove, 2009: 528). Such categorisations resulted in the formulation of exclusivist policies targeting various indigenous-inhabited areas of South Asia.

The gradual policies and actions of the colonial government towards the CHT and its dwellers brought about dramatic shifts in the relative autonomy of governance and economy of the Hill Peoples. One major colonial intervention was to make the CHT a separate district comprising three circles and several hundred mauzas7 (Mohsin, 2002: 29–32; Roy, 2000: 42). Local chiefs, headmen, and karbaris8 were appointed to oversee the governance and revenue collection within their respective circles, mauzas, and paras (villages), while a British official was put in charge of the entire district (initially a superintendent and later deputy commissioner) (Arens, 1997: 1811). Van Schendel (1992: 111) referred to this mechanism as ‘enclavement’, where the Hill Peoples were denied their access to state power and were directly subordinated to British officials.

Second, the British government imposed restrictions on people’s access to forests through the passage of the Indian Forest Reserve Act 1865 (Mohsin, 2002: 90). This significantly affected the rights and access of the Hill Peoples to forested areas for jum cultivation as well as extraction of various resources from the forests, which were the two major pillars of their economy. Further restrictions were imposed in 1875, when large tracts of lands in the CHT were declared as ‘reserved’ forests where ‘jhum

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7 Mauza is a revenue collection unit comprising of several villages or para.
8 Karbari denotes a ‘village manager’ who is responsible for dealing with a number of affairs related to the village or para.
cultivation and any kind of use of forest produce were totally prohibited’ (Mohsin, 2002: 91; Mey, 2006: 259–60).

Third, although the British officials at times romanticised the Hill Peoples as ‘noble savages’, they generally viewed the Hill Peoples and their primary source of living, jum cultivation, as ‘primitive’ (Jhala, 2023; Mey, 2006: 259; Mohsin, 2002: 81–87; Tripura & Harun, 2003: 21). Therefore, with the aim of increasing revenues from agriculture and enhance state control over relatively ‘mobile’ jum cultivators, the British strongly discouraged jum cultivation and actively promoted plough cultivation since the 1860s (Adnan, 2004: 38; Dewan, 1990: 153–54; Mey, 1996: 80; Mohsin, 2002: 81–87; Sopher, 1964: 107–8). Measures to promote plough cultivation technology among the Hill Peoples included state-issued interest-free loans and the introduction of private land rights (Adnan, 2004: 38–40; Mey, 1996: 79–83; Mohsin, 2002: 88). Initially, these attempts failed due to the reluctance of the jum cultivators, but eventually plough technology was adopted by a section of the river-valley groups since overpopulation in some valley areas had already created pressure to adopt relatively intensive farming technologies (Mey, 1984: 76–78). This transition into plough cultivation was facilitated by elites from valley communities who brought Bengali sharecroppers from the plains into the CHT (Sopher, 1963: 344). The spread of plough cultivation also led to an influx of Bengali craftsmen and traders into the CHT (Sopher, 1964: 108).

Fourth, plough agriculture also triggered the growth of a class of exploitative Bengali traders and moneylenders (mahajans) into the CHT, influencing the British government to undertake policies to control moneylending and the entry of outsiders (non-Hill Peoples). Bengali traders and moneylenders had been able to monopolise major financial transactions of the CHT soon after the British annexation (Mey, 1984: 20, 79; Shahabuddin, 2018: 234). They issued loans at exorbitant rates, sometimes amounting to as high as 600% (Mey, 1984: 79). The exploitative nature and trickeries used by Bengali moneylenders are reflected in Lewin’s candid account (Lewin, 1869: 25–26):

In these hills…the crafty Bengallee mahajuns of the plains have wrested the law from its original intent, and turned it into an engine wherewith to reduce the people to a condition of slavery. In an ill-fated hour the hill man borrows a few rupees from some mahajun; … He can neither read nor write; consequently the bond in which the transaction is recorded, usually binds him to pay some enormous amount of interest, of which he is totally ignorant. Time goes on, the money becomes due, and is generally paid. In the latter case the mahajun says, “Go my son, I destroy the bond, the debt is cancelled;” here he will tear up some paper before the hill man, but most certainly not the bond. The debtor goes away satisfied to his home, leaving the mahajun chuckling in his sleeve at his successful villany. After a short interval the mahajun repairs to the Civil
Court, and, with an injured aspect, lays a suit for the recovery of the original debt, interest, and costs of suit, according to his bond. Formerly, when the summons to the hill man to appear in the suit was issued through a Bengalee peon, the mahajun would simply bribe the summons-bearer, who would report the summons as duly served, without going near the pseudo debtor’s house. Should the mahajun not be successful in this, he will lie in wait at the river-side, and when his man comes down on the day fixed for the hearing of the case, he will seize upon him, “Ai! bapre! great is my misfortune, you have been summoned, my friend, quite by mistake; I have no case against you; you know, we made all square between us when last we met. I am afflicted for your trouble, but come with me, you must eat and drink at my expense as some small return for all this needless bother”. So off goes the befuddled hill man, and never appears in his case, when, according to law, a decree in default is given against him. In another case, supposing the hill man to have paid part of his debt and to owe the remainder, the mahajun will then meet him outside the Court, make a compromise with him, and agree to withdraw the case. The man goes away, while the mahajun, on his part, does not withdraw the case, but takes a decree in full, ex parte, in default of the debtor’s attendance… Numberless are the tricks to which the crafty Bengalee resorts, and gradually he accumulates over his victim’s head an amount of legally authorised debt, which the wretched creature can never hope to pay off. He then becomes the bond-slave of the mahajun; for him he toils, for his profit he clears a joom, raises cotton, or hews out a boat, and even death does not release him, for the load descends upon the shoulders of his son.

In this context, British policies regarding moneylending included attempts to control the rate of interest against the loans issued, registration of such transactions, and issuing loans by the colonial government to the Hill Peoples (Government of Bangladesh, 1971: 171–73).

Finally, the intent of the British government to ‘protect’ the Hill Peoples from ‘crafty’ Bengalis also led them to enact laws such as the CHT Regulation of 1900, to establish a separate administration for the CHT independent of the administrative structure of the Bengal (Mohsin, 2002: 32; Shahabuddin, 2018). The law also included provisions that restricted the movement, residence, and land ownership of the outsiders or non-Hill Peoples in the CHT (Mohsin, 2002: 33). As a part of this colonial nation-formation, the CHT was declared a ‘Backward Tract’ in 1920, which was later changed to ‘Totally Excluded Area’ in 1935 (ibid.: 34). As the responsibility to administer the CHT was placed under the Governor-General-in-Council through these amendments, the political links of this region with the neighbouring province of Bengal was formally disconnected (ibid.: 34). This exclusivist policy was partially continued even in the early years of the post-British era until measures for change were undertaken by the post-colonial rulers (Bal and Siraj, 2017: 673; Roy, 2000: 46).

These paternalistic policies of the British colonial government had far-reaching consequences on the lives of the Hill Peoples of the CHT. First, the introduction of plough cultivation, coupled with private land rights, widened the existing economic, social, and political differences between and among various Hill Peoples. Since plough
could be easily introduced to the river-valley groups due to the nature of the land, it was mainly a section of these groups (Chakma and Marma) that benefited from it, while the mountain or ridge-top groups (e.g. Bawm, Khumi, and Mro), whose lands were not suitable for plough cultivation, continued with *jum* cultivation (Adnan, 2004: 21; Dewan, 1990: 156; Mohsin, 2002: 85). Those who were successful in acquiring plough land on lease from the government and generating surplus emerged as an affluent class, while those who did not succeed continued with *jum* cultivation or turned into landless peasants or wage workers (Dewan, 1990: 151–52; Mohsin, 2002: 85). Thus, the introduction of plough cultivation significantly contributed to the formation of hierarchically organised economic and social classes among the Hill Peoples in the region (Mohsin, 2003: 85). With the introduction of private land tenure, the traditional community-based land rights and management systems were jeopardised, as now such land was cleared and prepared entirely by a single family and the government gave the family proprietary rights for that land (Dewan, 1990: 155; Mey, 1984: 78). As a result, although the practices of mutual help and reciprocity in the organisation of labour continued to exist, they were partially substituted with individualised transactions (Mey, 1984: 78–79). All in all, the introduction of plough cultivation initiated a major shift in the systems and practices related to property ownership and management as well as production relations.

This turning point was also marked by the initiation of a process of transformation of identities for a section of the Hill Peoples. It was when a section of the Hill Peoples started to become *khetkulye* from *jumbola* or *jumia*9. Locally, the term ‘*khetkulye*’ is used by the Tanchangya to denote someone who is primarily reliant on *kheti* or *khetikhola* (meaning cultivation, referring to settled, lowland farming). On the other hand, a ‘*jumbola*’ or ‘*jumia*’ is someone who relies on *jum* cultivation. The change involved a continuous process of experimentation with choices of crops and farming methods (see Chapter Three). This process of agrarian transformation remains ongoing, as many village communities in the CHT continue to mix different types of crops and farming methods.

Second, the introduction of plough cultivation triggered the growth of market transactions and the dependence of indigenous peoples on markets controlled by Bengalis. As plough cultivation started to yield surplus, the Hill Peoples faced an awkward situation as they did not have suitable market mechanisms to profitably

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9 See also Tripura (2013) for a discussion on this term.
dispose off their agricultural products. Therefore, Bengali middlemen took this opportunity and flourished by trading surplus agricultural products of the Hill peoples (Shelley, 1992: 66). Although historical evidence indicates that bazaars existed before the introduction of plough cultivation (Lewin, 1869: 5–7), the surplus agricultural products triggered the emergence of weekly or bi-weekly bazaars or marketplaces along the riverbanks of the CHT which were under the domination of the Bengali businessmen (Mey; 1996: 116; Shelley, 1992: 66). These developments created an environment where engagement with the market economy became increasingly compulsive for the Hill Peoples. Bengali traders also started to issue dadan\textsuperscript{10} loans to the Hill Peoples linked to repayment with their standing crops (Mey, 1996: 116). As a private property regime began to emerge through a partial breakup of the traditional land rights systems, it facilitated greater acceptance of many aspects of the ‘Bengali credit systems’, such as ‘speculation with land or the harvest and/or subletting and mortgaging…’ (Mey, 1984: 79). The measures of the British colonial government to control informal moneylending mentioned above had little effect (ibid.), but rather increased during the 1920–30s (Government of Bangladesh, 1971: 171–73). Since then Bengali traders have been in ‘absolute control of all monetary and credit transactions in the hills, very much to their profit’ (Mey, 1984: 79). Thus, instead of ‘protecting’ the Hill Peoples from ‘crafty’ Bengalis, British policies rather strengthened the positions of the Bengali traders and moneylenders in the hill economies, while pushing them to the margins of the economy. Mohsin (2002: 92–93) summarised the socio-economic impacts of modernist policies of the British on the Hill Peoples:

The British economic policies in the CHT were thus guided by their own economic interests. Little consideration was given to the social and cultural values of the Hill people. By the end of the twentieth century, the alienation of the Hill people from their sources of production i.e. land and forest was total. They had lost control over the ownership as well as management of these resources. The attempt to turn them into plough cultivators further exacerbated their economic plight for it made them dependent not only upon the state but also upon the Bengalis, neither of whom was sympathetic towards them.

Third, the British policies of isolating the CHT from the administrative structure of the province of Bengal had consequences on the political relationships of the Hill Peoples with the ‘mainstream’ populations as well as post-colonial nation-states dominated by the latter. The exclusionary British policies left the Hill Peoples

\textsuperscript{10} Dadan is a loan issued by traders against the standing crop of the cultivator. See Chapter Three and Chapter Five for further elaboration.
somewhat unprepared for the post-colonial state systems in which they were later incorporated (ibid.: 34). Moreover, as a result of these exclusionary policies, the Hill Peoples and the dwellers of the plains became politically and economically separated, which eventually contributed to the gradual development of antagonistic ethnic identities (Bal and Siraj, 2017: 673; van Schendel, 1992: 96). The legacy of the classificatory schemes of the British colonials continued through the reproduction of dichotomies between peoples and places—such as Hill Peoples vs. Muslim Bengalis, indigenous vs. non-indigenous, and CHT vs. Bangladesh—that remain meaningful to date (Tripura, 1992; Uddin and Gerharz, 2017). Thus, British policies had far-reaching consequences on the economic, social, and political dimensions of the lives of the Hill Peoples, which continued to affect them even during the post-colonial era.

1.3.2 Pakistani era

The colonial era ended in 1947 through the partition of the South Asian subcontinent. Following Muhammad Ali Jinnah’s ‘two-nation theory’ and corresponding policies of the Indian National Congress, the subcontinent was divided into the states of India and Pakistan based on religious identities. The Muslim-inhabited areas were expected to constitute Pakistan, while the non-Muslim areas of the subcontinent were to fall under Indian territory. Although the CHT was predominantly inhabited by non-Muslims, it was awarded to Pakistan through the ‘Radcliffe Award’ in 1947 (S. Chakma, 1986).

This award went against several lobbying attempts of the CHT’s customary indigenous chiefs and an emerging political leadership either to annex the CHT to India11, or to form separate monarchies (Ahsan and Chakma, 1989: 963; S. Chakma, 1986; Mohsin, 2002: 35). When a section of the Hill Peoples resisted by hoisting Indian and Burmese flags, the Pakistani state suppressed this resistance through deploying the military (Mohsin, 2002: 37). Thus, the Pakistani post-colonial era began with violent domination.

For the CHT, the Pakistani (1947–71) era can be characterised as an era of the politics of nationalism as well as the politics of development. The birth of Pakistan was based on the political vision of the Pakistani state leaders towards the construction of a nation-state comprising of a homogenous category—the Muslims. The name ‘Pakistan’ literally means ‘land of the pure’ (‘pak’ means pure and ‘stan’ means land), signifying the Muslims, such that the rest did not constitute the pure (ibid.: 38). Therefore, in this

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11 Except a customary chief who wanted annexation with Burma (Chakma, 1985).
nationalist politics based on the Muslim identity, the concerns of the non-Muslim populations were not given priority in the national agenda. The policies under the Pakistani nation-state furthered the processes of ethnicisation and othering, constituting non-Muslim ethnic groups like the Hill Peoples as the ‘Others’. On top of this, the resistance of indigenous leadership against the forcible integration of the CHT into the Pakistani nation-state was labelled as ‘tribalism’, which reinforced a dichotomy between ‘static’ indigenous groups as opposed to the ‘dynamic’ nation-state (Mey, 1984: 101). This was reflected in the statement of a ruling Muslim League leader: ‘If necessary we shall tame the tribals like elephants’ (Nipun, 1985: 61, cited in Mohsin, 2002: 37). Consequently, the politics of Pakistani nationalism led to changes of existing British-formulated policies concerning the administration of the CHT, ultimately benefiting the mainstream communities. Although the first constitution of Pakistan of 1956 retained the ‘Excluded Area’ status of the CHT, an amendment to the constitution in 1962 changed it to a ‘Tribal Area’, while the 1963 constitution removed the status of the CHT as a specially regulated area (S.S. Islam, 2003: 139; Shelley, 1992: 30; Roy, 2000: 46). Provisions of the CHT Regulation of 1900 that restricted the entry and residence of outsiders (Rule 34 and 51) were also amended (S.S. Islam, 2003: 39–40; Mohsin 2002: 46). These policy changes lifted the previous barriers to entry and settlement in the CHT and ‘opened up’ the CHT for outsiders. Thus, certain policies of the Pakistani rulers towards the CHT were significantly different from those of the British rulers. While British policies largely focused on keeping the CHT and its dwellers in relative isolation, the Pakistani rulers facilitated administrative and legal integration of the ‘tribal lands’ into their national territory (Chakma, 1998; Mohsin, 2002; Bal and Siraj, 2017: 673).

The politics of nationalism during the Pakistani era was shaped by developmentalist and modernist ideals. This developmentalism during the Pakistani era was based on classical modernist approaches where the state is considered the main driver for national development (Gerharz, 2017b: 140), rather than the local communities. Building upon the colonial legacy towards the Hill Peoples, Pakistani policymakers and their foreign advisors deemed the economy of the CHT as ‘backward’ and jum cultivation as obsolete, which they believed could ‘no longer be tolerated’ (CHT Commission, 1991: 62; Webb, 1966: 3232, cited in Mey, 1984: 104). Consequently, the focus of the Pakistani government was on exploiting the natural resources of the CHT under the guise of ‘development in the national interest’, without considering the impact of these projects on the Hill Peoples and the environment (Adnan, 2004: 23). Accordingly, they
felt the need to design development programmes to bring the economies of the Hill Peoples into the ‘national mainstream’ (CHT Commission, 1991: 62). Several large-scale industrial projects assisted by foreign funds were implemented in the CHT since 1953, primarily benefiting outsiders (Adnan, 2007b: 8; Arens, 1997: 1812; Mohsin, 2002: 103–6). Among these projects, the Karnaphuli Hydroelectric project, implemented between 1959 and 1963, had devastating and far-reaching consequences for the indigenous peoples. The Kaptai reservoir created as a part of this project inundated approximately 400 square miles of the CHT, including 40 per cent of the total arable land of the region (Mohsin, 2002: 102). As a consequence, about 100,000 indigenous peoples were displaced, most of whom did not receive any compensation, and a large section of whom were forced to seek refuge in neighbouring states of India and/or return to jum cultivation (Jhala, 2023; S.S. Islam, 2003: 140).

The reservoir made land suited to plough cultivation scarce and created further pressure on jum cultivation with the following effects—shortened shifting/rotation cycles (from 10–15 years to 3–4 years), depletion of soil fertility due to over-usage of the plots for shifting cultivation, and decreased yields (Jhala, 2023; Mohsin, 2002: 104; Mey, 1984: 112; Parveen and Faisal, 2002). The rehabilitation projects implemented for the dam-affected communities based on the logic of ‘optimum land use’ were not in favour of jum cultivation but aimed at replacing it with commercial horticulture and fruit production, furthering the dependence of the Hill Peoples on profit-seeking Bengali middlemen and trader-moneylenders (Mey, 1984: 102–7). The irreparable damage caused by the development projects of the Pakistani era on the Hill Peoples’ economies continued to be felt to date. These devastating development interventions, coupled with the loss of protective mechanisms, have left a deep imprint on the collective memory of the Hill Peoples, who continue to express their memories of displacement and hardship through various means, including biographies, songs, poems, and paintings (e.g. B. Chakma, 2018: 87; S. Chakma, 2018). Despite the significant impacts of these development interventions, a new kind of political and cultural consciousness began to emerge among the Hill Peoples from the 1960s, which was reflected in their increased pursuit of academic education and mobilisation for a political movement that became prominent in the early years of Bangladeshi era (Tripura, forthcoming).

**1.3.3 Bangladeshi era**
The 24-year Pakistani rule was generally an era of cultural domination, economic exploitation, and political suppression of the citizens of East Pakistan (present-day Bangladesh) by political, military, and business elites from West Pakistan (present-day Pakistan). Consequently, several cultural and nationalist movements grew over these years, largely centred on the ‘Bengali’ identity, which eventually culminated in the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971. Even though people from different ethnic groups of the country participated in this nine-month war, the dominant discourse surrounding this war focuses exclusively on the Bengalis while disregarding the contributions of the non-Bengali groups of the country. The majority of the Hill Peoples either provided support for the war or remained indifferent (Adnan, 2004: 25; Shelley, 1992: 33). Nevertheless, they have been generally branded as pro-Pakistanis or anti-liberation war due to the support given by Chakma chief Raja Tridiv Roy to the Pakistan army (Mohsin, 2002: 55–56).

The politics of Bengali nationalism continued to manifest itself in attempts by the Bengali elites to constitute a nation-state based on a homogenous ethnic category—Bengali.12 The country was named ‘Bangladesh’—the land of Bengalis, while the first constitution of the country, adopted in 1972, designated all citizens of the country as ‘Bengali’. In this surge of nationalist sentiments centring on the Bengali identity, the demands of the CHT’s indigenous political leadership, led by Manabendra Narayan (MN) Larma, for increased protection of the rights and identities of the Hill Peoples through explicit recognition in the national constitution, faced categorical rejection from the Bengali leaders. The Bengali leadership labelled the Hill Peoples as secessionists and suggested the CHT’s indigenous leaders abandon their ethnic identities and become Bengalis instead (Adnan, 2004: 26; Ahsan and Chakma, 1989: 967; Mohsin, 2002: 58; van Schendel, 2001: 114). This assimilationist approach to accommodation of minorities compelled the leaders of the Hill Peoples to form a political movement under the leadership of the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS, meaning the CHT United Peoples Party), a multi-ethnic political party, in 1972. This political party contributed to the construction of the ‘Jumma’ nationalism, based on a collective identity for all Hill Peoples, emphasising their cultural commonalities, while emphasising their cultural distinctiveness from Bengalis (van Schendel, 1992: 121). The outright rejections of the demands of the leadership of the Hill Peoples, as well as gradual militarisation of the CHT by the Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (the first prime

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12 See van Schendel (2001) for a discussion on Bengali nationalism.
minister of the country) government from 1972 resulted in the loss of faith among the leaders of the PCJSS in political negotiations following a constitutional process. This led to the formation of a military wing of the PCJSS, known as the Shanti Bahini (SB), in early 1973 (Adnan 2004: 27; Shelley 1992: 111).

The situation in the CHT became critical after Sheikh Mujib and his family were assassinated, and the ruling Awami League government ousted through a military coup d’état in 1975 (Adnan, 2007b: 12). This new regime, led by Khondokar Mushtaque Ahmed, banned the PCJSS and forced its leaders to go underground, further closing off the avenues of peaceful negotiations by the Hill Peoples (Adnan, 2007b: 12; Mohsin, 2002: 67). Following several coups after Sheikh Mujib’s assassination (Mohsin, 2002: 67), Ziaur Rahman, a military strongman, took over the power of the country. The regime under Ziaur Rahman launched a full-scale counter-insurgency against the Hill Peoples in late 1976 by activating the provisions of ‘Aid of Civil Power’ in the CHT (Adnan, 2007b: 12; Shelley, 1992: 133). Since then the military has been in de-facto control of all major public affairs concerning the CHT, despite the presence of the civil bureaucracy and elected public representatives. The CHT Commission (1991: 47), an international body that monitors the human rights situations in the CHT, stated in its seminal report *Life is Not Ours*: ‘The CHT is a military occupied area. The military dominates all spheres of life. Commanders told the Commission that military control of civil authorities was necessary for efficiency and security.’ Virtually all major state policies undertaken concerning the CHT have been connected to military-led counter-insurgency measures. Although in this politics of security, the PCJSS insurgents were the main target, the counter-insurgency measures as well as the armed conflicts between the state forces and the insurgents had far-reaching consequences on civilians, particularly the Hill Peoples residing in the rural parts of the CHT.

Another major counter-insurgency measure, implemented between 1979 and 1986, was the settlement of approximately 400,000 Bengali settlers (also referred to as ‘political migrants’) from the plains through a massive transmigration programme (Adnan and Dastidar, 2011).14 Virtually all of these people were Muslim Bengali peasants (Adnan, 2007b: 14). Displacement and poverty served as the key push factors for the in-migration of many such settlers (Siraj and Bal, 2017).

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13 Ziaur Rahman later assumed the presidency of the country in 1977.
14 The demographic composition of the Bengali settlers, however, changed later. The proportion of state-sponsored political migrants has declined, while the proportion of self-propelled Bengali migrants from the neighbouring districts increased (Adnan and Dastidar, 2011: 29).
The pro-Bengali nationalist discourse used the logic of citizenship entitlement in order to support the right of Bengalis to settle in the CHT (Siraj and Bal, 2017: 403). Meanwhile, two amendments to Rule 34 of the CHT Regulation in 1971 and 1979 (prior to the first phase of the transmigration programme) removed all the major legal barriers to land settlement and leases for outsiders (also referred to as ‘non-residents’). These amendments facilitated the legalisation of land leases and settlement given to the Bengali migrants to the CHT, as well as the forced redistribution of land belonging to the Hill Peoples to the Bengali settlers by the civil and military administration (Adnan, 2004: 40–43; Adnan and Dastidar, 2011: 41–42). This strategy of ‘demographic engineering’ was implemented to use these Bengali settlers as ‘human shields’ to combat ongoing resistance in the CHT as well as to change the demographic composition of the region by increasing the proportion of Bengalis in the total population (Adnan, 2007b: 13). These Bengalis altered the demographic composition in the CHT by drastically reducing the share of the local Hill Peoples from nearly 81% (1974 estimate) to 51% (1991 estimate) of the total population (Adnan, 2004: 57). This demographic engineering programme involved forcible eviction of the Hill Peoples from their homes and villages, redistribution of their lands to Bengali settlers and non-residents, and regrouping of the Hill Peoples into so-called ‘model’ or ‘cluster’ villages (similar to the ‘strategic hamlets’ formed during the Vietnam War) under military surveillance to disrupt the supply lines of the insurgents (Adnan, 2004: 50–51; 2007b: 13; Arens, 1997: 1814; CHT Commission, 1991: 58–60).

My research partners informed me that Meyachara and the surrounding villages of the Ghagara-Wagga area, inhabited by Chakma, Marma, and Tanchangya villagers, were also due to be included as part of the transmigration programme. However, this area was spared because of the pragmatic and proactive role of some local Tanchangya leaders. They convinced the deputy commissioner of the district that the hilly terrain of this area was unsuitable for the inhabitants of the plains. The non-implementation of the Bengali transmigration programme partially helped the Hill villagers of this area avoid the violence involving Bengali settlers that occurred during the 1980s and 1990s. Ordinary Hill Peoples of various parts of the CHT faced numerous violent attacks, including the burning down of villages, arbitrary arrests, torture, rape, and mass killings perpetrated by the military and Bengali settlers (B. Chakma, 2010; CHT Commission, 1991; Mohsin, 2002). As a result of these attacks, around 100,000 Hill People were

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15 It is notable that these political migrants were settled predominantly in the relatively flat plains of the CHT.
evicted from their homes, of which around 55,000 sought refuge in neighbouring Indian states (Adnan, 2007b: 14). While the inundation caused by the Kaptai reservoir as well as population growth had made land in the CHT already scarce, this state-sponsored population transfer programme exacerbated the tremendous pressure on the existing land which also fuelled inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts. The numerous incidents of violence and injustice experienced by the Hill Peoples have been regarded as acts amounting to genocidal processes (B. Chakma, 2010; Levene, 1999; Mey, 1984).

Although the experiences of violence were relatively less severe for the Hill Peoples living in areas where the population transfer programme was not directly implemented, virtually every community in the CHT was somehow affected by the violence of this period. For instance, the villagers of Meyachara had to accommodate some Tanchangya families from Kawkhali in the village who had been forcefully displaced during the Kawkhali Massacre in 1980. Additionally, although the villagers of Meyachara and neighbouring villages of the Ghagara-Wagga area did not have to relocate to cluster villages, many of their homes, especially those located in the forested interiors, were forcibly moved by state forces to areas where enhanced state surveillance was possible (e.g. next to a tarmac road). Furthermore, the Hill villagers of this area experienced intermittent violence and routine harassment from the state forces as well as the insurgents, as they were sometimes suspected by both of the conflicting parties of being accomplices of their respective opponents (see also Chapter Six).

The third counter-insurgency strategy employed by the Bangladesh government involved a range of economic measures. The military regime under Ziaur Rahman, which contributed significantly to creating the violent environment in the CHT, regarded the armed insurgency of the PCJSS as a problem rooted in underdevelopment. It characterised the CHT as ‘a backward area without basic infrastructure for development and an organised market system, and had a primitive mode of cultivation’ (Adnan, 2007b: 12–13; Shelley, 1992: 129). Local state actors shared a similar perspective towards the Hill Peoples and their livelihoods. An army officer, explaining to the CHT Commission (1991: 65), stated: ‘We want to give a permanent address and livelihood to the [Hill] people ... They are clinging to certain things due to which they remain backward. You cannot preserve them in the stone age, you have to bring them out. It is also our job.’ Ironically, the government’s strategy of depriving the Hill Peoples of their traditional modes of production, while connecting them to national markets, ultimately led to the gradual erosion of their economic independence (CHT Commission, 1991: 78; Gerharz, 2017b: 142). As a part of this strategy, efforts were
made to replace *jum* cultivation with modern agro-industrial technology (Levene, 1999: 351). The economic policies of the Bangladesh government followed comparable modernist and developmentalist approaches seen in previous eras (British and Pakistan). However, more than ever before, these economic strategies were now aimed at rapidly increasing state control in the region and strengthening the socio-economic positions of the Bengali political migrants.

The ‘development’ programmes of the CHT Development Board (CHTDB), formed in 1976, played a key role in implementing various economic strategies of the state aimed at countering-insurgency. The CHTDB, led by high-level army officials until recently, implemented a number of projects (e.g. Upland Settlement Project) to transform ‘traditional’ agriculture in the CHT. These projects included the ‘rehabilitation’ of *jum* cultivators and the promotion of cash crops, rubber, horticultural crops, and fruit cultivation (Adnan 2004; CHT Commission 1991, 62–64). The CHTDB also played a major role in expanding road networks and connecting the strategically important locations in the CHT with foreign funding, primarily to facilitate greater mobility of the military (Arens, 1997: 58). Moreover, the CHTDB implemented over a hundred schemes to develop bazaars across the CHT, which directly benefited Bengali traders. With their existing skills and experience in trade, they could monopolise these bazaars, create cartels and manipulate product prices (Mohsin, 2002: 129). Consequently, bazaars began to operate even in the remote interior of the CHT and were connected to urban centres. Although the market participation of the Hill Peoples gradually increased, as in earlier periods, ‘the bazaars and transportation networks of the region [continued to be] … controlled by Bengali business interests, who … manipulated the terms and conditions of market transactions in order to exploit the Hill peoples’ (Adnan, 2004: 134). Thus, the Hill Peoples continued to lose their economic autonomy due to state policies and their participation in markets dominated by the ethnic ‘Others’. The CHT Commission (1991: 60) summarised this marginalised position of the Hill Peoples in the economic sphere: ‘Hill people are being drawn into a market economy over which they have no control. They rely on the returns from wage-labour or from selling crops for cash. The cash flow is determined by factors from the wider national economy…’

### 1.3.4 Post-CHT Accord period

The PCJSS’s armed insurgency came to an end with its signing of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (‘Peace’) Accord with the National Committee formed by the Awami League
government on December 2, 1997. This accord was the result of a series of 26 dialogues between the PCJSS and various military and elected
governments since 1985 (Larma, 2003: 5). The preamble of the accord mentions the commitment to uphold human rights and accelerate development in the region. The key components of the accord include the formation of a semi-autonomous regional governance structure, comprising of the
Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council (CHTRC) and three Hill District Councils (HDC), the creation of the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs (MOCHTA), the resolution of occupied lands through the CHT Land Dispute Resolution Commission (CHTLDRC), the dismantling of all temporary military-paramilitary camps, the recognition of the CHT as a ‘tribal-inhabited’ region, the acknowledgement of the customary laws of the Hill Peoples, and the rehabilitation of refugees and internally displaced persons. According to the accord, some major subject areas affecting the economic spheres of the local populations, including land management, tourism, environmental preservation, moneylending, industries, trade, and jum cultivation, were supposed to be transferred to these regional bodies from the central state. The councils of this local autonomous governance structure were intended to be led by representatives of the Hill Peoples as well as the permanent Bengali residents of the region (United Nations Peacemaker, n.d.). With these promising provisions, the signing of the accord instilled hope among the Hill Peoples that their marginalised position resulting from the nation-building processes of the preceding period would begin to be changed for the better.

However, after more than 25 years since it was signed, most of the significant provisions of the accord remain unimplemented by the government, resulting in frustration and tensions among the Hill Peoples. Since 1997, several governments that have taken office have lacked the political will to implement the accord (Jamil and Panday, 2008: 480). Larma (2003: 9), the signatory of the accord on behalf of the PCJSS, attributes the non-implementation of the peace accord to the ‘idiosyncratic mindset of the Bengali Muslim ruling elite, intelligentsia and bureaucrats deeply affected by a chauvinistic mentality...’ However, it is not only the central state but also the local state actors—such as the military and Bengali settlers—who have played a critical role in creating hindrances to the implementation of the accord (Larma, 2003;

16 After several consecutive military regimes, parliamentary democracy in Bangladesh was restored in 1991.
17 Permanent Bengali residents imply the Bengali population with permanent address in the CHT.
18 The boundaries between the military and the settlers are sometimes blurred (see Uddin and Gerharz, 2017: 218).
Panday and Jamil, 2009). Consequently, the failure to fully implement the accord has prevented the restoration of peace in the region and the establishment of agreed economic and political self-determination for the local populations.

While many of the government’s promises made through the provisions of the accord have remained substantially unfulfilled, the post-accord period has witnessed several developments that have further complicated the political and economic situation in the region. The political situation, in particular, has become highly complex. The Hill Peoples believe that the military may have played a direct or indirect role in destroying the political unity among the Hill Peoples (Rahman, 2011: 187). However, multiple internal and external factors may have contributed to the breakdown of political solidarity among the Hill Peoples which became evident soon after the CHT accord was signed. It was first manifested through the break away splinter group from the PCJSS which called itself the United People’s Democratic Front (UPDF) in 1998. This new party promised to continue the struggle for ‘full autonomy’, viewing the accord as a ‘sell-out’ of the Hill Peoples’ struggle for autonomy by the PCJSS (Jamil and Panday, 2008: 471; Wilkinson, 2015: 185). Conversely, the PCJSS labelled the UPDF a ‘terrorist’ organisation (Rahman, 2011: 187). With continuing divisions primarily centred around support for or opposition to the accord, the Hill Peoples’ political leadership experienced further fragmentations and the emergence of more splinter groups.

Currently, there are around half a dozen political factions actively operating in the region. Whether they align with the pro-accord or anti-accord stance, most of these groups generally claim to represent the political interests of the Hill Peoples (Wilkinson, 2015: 185). However, what complicates the situation most is the occurrence of violent armed conflicts among these groups, which began with the establishment of the UPDF (Panday and Jamil, 2009: 1062). These violent conflicts have been frequent in different parts of the region, despite the continuing presence of the state’s security forces. Ordinary Hill Peoples have been severely impacted by these violent conflicts, while certain factions within these groups have been accused of extorting money from civilians on a regular basis (Wilkinson, 2015: 185–86). Additionally, in 2001, the Somo Odhikar Andolon (Movement for Equal Rights), a platform representing Bengali interests, was formed. It has been described as ‘a conglomerate of extreme communal forces’ (Chowdhury, 2010: 68, cited in Wilkinson, 2015: 185). While the fear of imminent violence during encounters with state forces remains an ongoing concern (see
Chapter Six), the emergence of new violent actors has had serious consequences on the personal safety of different Hill communities.¹⁹

In the economic sphere, many trends of marginalisation that emerged in the earlier periods continued to persist during the post-accord period. In order to cope with the rapid expansion and influence of market economies, the Hill Peoples have increasingly shifted towards market-oriented cash crop production and engaged in individualised cash transactions. Consequently, the earlier trend of moving away from *jum* cultivation and becoming dependent on a mix of different farming and production methods—e.g. *jum*, plough, horticulture, fruits cultivation, and cash crop—has become a more evident feature of contemporary agriculture in the CHT (Adnan, 2004; Tripura and Harun, 2003; Misbahuzzaman, 2016: 1488–89). However, as in the pre-accord period, Bengali traders continue to dominate major market transactions and the physical sites of the market-places. Facilitated by the increased presence and domination of the state, profit-seeking Bengali traders and moneylenders are now found to operate even in the remote interior of the CHT. While micro-credit lending by NGOs has become a common practice after 1997, Bengali traders and moneylenders remain a significant source of loans for rural Hill Peoples (Adnan, 2004: 136). In exchange for the loans issued, Bengali traders and moneylenders continue to extract surplus from indigenous growers, through exorbitant interest rates as well as *dadan* contracts (ibid.: 135–36), which interlink product and credit markets.

In summary, the autonomy of the Hill Peoples has significantly declined in the economic and political spheres as a result of colonial rule and the post-colonial ‘nation-state-building’ processes. They have been pushed to the margins in various spheres of their lives. State policies have transformed their largely subsistence-oriented, community-centred, and reciprocity-based economies into individual family-centred and market exchange-based economies. Product and credit markets are currently dominated by their ethnic ‘Others’, greatly limiting their access. Additionally, the very physical safety of the Hill Peoples is at risk at present due to the acts of violent state and non-state actors. Consequently, the ordinary Hill Peoples face major concerns regarding their economic and political survival, as well as the improvement of their quality of life.

¹⁹ The experiences of Tanchangya villagers in Meyachara and surrounding villages regarding violence from inter-group conflicts and communal attacks during the post-accord period have been limited compared to that of many other areas of the CHT. The villagers attribute this relative peacefulness to the absence of Bengali settlers in the area, strong solidarity among community members, and a general reluctance among the villagers to engage with local political parties. See also Chapter Two.
1.4 Strategies for survival-cum-upward mobility

Amidst the challenges that are determining Hill Peoples’ contemporary lives, survival and upward mobility have become crucial concerns for them. The concept of family ‘survival strategy’ was used first by Duque and Pastrana in their 1973 study on poor neighbourhoods in Santiago, Chile (Duque and Pastrana, 1973, cited in Redclift, 1986: 218). Since then ‘survival strategy’ has been used in a wide range of themes and contexts, including flood and riverbank erosion (Karim, 2014), famine (Sunartomo et al., 2023), unemployment (Mallick and Roy, 2022), rural-urban migration (Mabasa et al., 2021), cross-border migration and structural violence (Hölscher, 2016), gender-based violence (Sorsa et al., 2023), and COVID-19 pandemic (Susanti et al., 2022).

In the literature, the term ‘survival’ in the phrase ‘survival strategy’ has commonly been associated with negative experiences of people, such as shock, stress, adversity, or vulnerability. Actors who experience such distress situations often belong to a relatively lower or marginalised socio-economic-political positions, such as the ‘urban poor’, ‘rural women’, and ‘victims of violence’. Alobo Loison (2017) coined the term ‘vulnerability context’ to refer to the external environment where people which poses a threat to their survival. This context encompasses various elements, including ‘trends (social, economic, demographic, resource, governance trends, etc.), shocks (economic, human, livestock or crop health shocks); natural hazards (e.g. floods or earthquakes), conflicts (national or international wars etc.) and seasonality (seasonal fluctuations in prices, production, health, employment opportunities etc.)’ (Alobo Loison, 2017: 47).

The second half of the phrase, ‘strategy’, represents ‘a process, a continuous search for solutions’, which involves ‘a chain of reasoning, decisions and selections’ (Tykkyläinen, 1999: 136). Such a process may require accessing and utilising a range of resources, capabilities, and networks, or different types of capital.20 Thus, in the context of this dissertation, the notion of ‘survival strategy’ can be understood as:

…the science and art of orchestrating individual and common resources to achieve welfare goals of individuals, families and communities. It is a process of thinking, an approach to action, and a method of moving individually and collectively to a desired direction. It involves choice and sequence, staging and timing, and a combination of roles and action (ibid.: 135)

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20 The notion of capital has been borrowed from the ‘sustainable livelihood framework’ (see Chambers and Conway, 1991; DFID, 1999; Scoones, 1998). The concepts of ‘livelihood’ and ‘livelihood strategies’ used in this framework are often associated with the notion of ‘survival’ in the scholarship.
While I do not propose this definition to be universally applied, it provides support to the analysis of the Meyachara community where I conducted my research. Additionally, I put forward the following propositions to sketch out how some aspects of this concept will be employed to critically examine the situated strategies employed by the Tanchangya villagers. First, survival strategies must be understood from a multidimensional perspective. In much of the concerned literature, the focus remains on the economic distress or poverty experienced by people and the strategies that they employ to overcome such situations (e.g., Edin and Lein, 1997; Fontaine and Schlumbohm, 2000; Meert et al., 2005; Ngom, 2021: 358; Sharaunga and Mudhara, 2021; Susanti et al., 2022). However, the economic dimension of life itself consists of multiple elements and dimensions. For example, Meert et al. (2005: 83) argue that the three modes of economic integration (reciprocity, redistribution, and market exchange), differentiated by Polanyi (2001/1944), can overlap within one common economic strategy.

Moreover, with the advancements in understanding the notion of poverty, it is no more understood as a singular concept but a multidimensional one that involves the ‘deterioration of economic, social and cultural capital’ (Fontaine and Schlumbohm, 2000: 12). Indeed, poverty is ‘a correlated adversity that cuts across multiple dimensions (material, social, bodily, psychological) and institutions (schools, neighborhoods, prisons)’ (Desmond and Western, 2018: 308). While poverty and related economic adversities faced by people are highlighted the scholarship on survival strategies has paid limited attention to extra-economic (i.e., political, social, and cultural) dimensions of life. For instance, in their review, Deckard and Auyero (2022: 374) demonstrate that the issue of personal safety, arising from state and interpersonal violence, is largely missing in the literature on the survival strategies used by the urban poor in the Americas. However, studies on survival strategies must be seen from multiple viewpoints, particularly in contexts (such as that of the Hill Peoples) where different dimensions of people’s lives intersect or overlap considerably. As indicated in the previous section, for the Hill Peoples, the political dimension is inseparably and critically linked to the economic dimension of their lives. Therefore, focusing on just one dimension of life can barely capture the complexity of their life struggles. Thus, the strategies of the Tanchangya villagers have been explored in this research from a multidimensional viewpoint.
The second proposition is to understand the concept of survival strategy in conjunction with the notion of ‘upward mobility’. Just as poverty can have multiple meanings, survival is essentially a social construct shaped by the perceptions of people, which cannot be limited solely to physical existence or material aspects of life (Fontaine and Schlumbohm, 2000: 10). It is often not possible to draw a clear boundary line that indicates whether the actors being studied are focused solely on mere survival or on upward mobility. In fact, ‘except for extreme circumstances (concentration camps, for example), people always do more than merely survive’ (Deckard and Auyero, 2022: 376). In different contexts, the strategies employed by people can aim at both survival and going beyond. Deckard and Auyero (2022: 375) note this double objective when they refer to ‘the various strategies poor people adopt to not only stay afloat but also improve their lives (to subsist and to get ahead).’ Whether an act is targeted towards survival or not is indeed an empirical question. However, it is important to note that the same strategies can be used by people either ‘to survive or make life even better’ (Sunartomo et al., 2023: 599). This proposition is particularly relevant to studies such as the present one where actors are not homogenous. Due to unequal resources, capabilities, and networks, different Tanchangya families of Meyachara face adversity in diverse ways. Nevertheless, the strategies that they employ often draw upon a largely common localised pool of resources, capabilities, and social networks. Therefore, in the present study, the situated strategies used by the Tanchangya villagers are aimed at survival and/or upward mobility.

My third proposition is to place individual actors at the centre of analysis while examining their situated strategies. This ‘actor-oriented approach’ (Long, 2001, 2012; Bosman, 2004) is crucial in emphasising the agency of social actors, which is understood as a combination of certain ‘knowledgeability’ (the ability to interpret and internalise human experiences and desires) and ‘capability’ (necessary skills, access to resources and engagement in organising practices) (Giddens, 1984; Long, 2001: 49). Thus, instead of identifying people suffering from adversities as passive victims, this approach highlights individual actors as agents who possess ‘the capacity to process social experience and to devise ways of coping with life, even under the most extreme forms of coercion’ (Long, 2001: 16). This approach assumes that subordinated groups are never completely devoid of the power to negotiate against the superordinate groups:

21 Here ‘upward mobility’ is understood as the movement of social actors from a lower socio-economic-political position to a higher one. See Fields (2006), Legewie (2021), and Zhai and Gao (2021) for discussions on upward mobility.
‘… all forms of dependence offer some resources whereby those who are subordinate can influence the activities of their superiors’ (Giddens, 1984: 16).

However, while highlighting actors and their agency in this approach, the following points need to be noted. First, although centred on individual agency, the actor-oriented approach does not view actors as isolated entities, separate from one another. Instead, it stresses the fact that the acts of making changes to a pre-existing condition are ‘embodied in social relations and can only be effective through them’ (Long, 2001: 17). Second, this approach does not only consider individuals but also collectives, such as women’s groups, peasants, or villagers, as social actors (Gerharz, 2018: 2; Long, 2001: 56–57). However, rather than treating them as homogenised, singular entities, it suggests using the collectives exclusively for analytical purposes (Gerharz, 2018: 2). Third, this approach holds that actors from one social world have the possibility to encounter other actors from different social worlds in interfaces where they bring along different rationalities, specific knowledge pools, values, and interests (Gerharz, 2018). Building on this approach, the Tanchangya villagers in this study are viewed as active agents, rather than mere victims of violence, economic exploitation, or submissive participants in developmental interventions. While they are not viewed as homogenous entities, the social world of Tanchangya villagers is largely constituted by their shared environment, interpersonal relations, local institutions, discourses, knowledge, memories, intentions, and social actions. Beyond their life-world, the Tanchangya villagers encounter power and negotiate resources with various actors coming from different social worlds in various social interfaces. In the analysis below, I highlight two such interfaces, involving market and state actors.

Building on the third proposition, my fourth proposition is to view the situated strategies of people from the perspective of relationality. Although these strategies primarily involve the actions of individual actors, the role of other social actors is often critical in their implementation. In fact, individual actions are often subject to, or result from, negotiations and interactions with other actors. Scholars highlight the very important role of social networks, comprising friends, kin, neighbours, friends, patrons, and brokers, in supporting individuals facing various forms of distress and adversity (see Lubbers et al., 2020: 17). Diverse social relationship networks function as nets of reciprocal exchange, mutual aid, and solidarity, supporting individuals in meeting their basic needs, solving everyday problems, and even providing protection from interpersonal and state violence (Deckard and Auyero, 2022: 374; Ngom, 2021: 359; Sunartomo et al., 2023: 600; Susanti et al., 2022; Tykkyläinen, 1999: 134). Building on
this line of thought, I give paramount importance to the role of social relations in understanding the situated strategies of the Tanchangya villagers.

A final proposition that I put forward is that the strategies of people are often not singular but diverse. Various studies have shown that in the face of adversity, people use the strategy of diversification (Sunartomo et al., 2023: 599; Fontaine and Schlumbohm, 2000; Alobo Loison, 2017: 23; Meert et al, 2005: 82; Ngom, 2021: 359). For example, economic distress or the aspiration for accumulation can drive individuals to pursue multiple occupations rather than relying solely on one (e.g. agriculture or craft production) (Fontaine and Schlumbohm, 2000). In the economic sphere, diversification can involve engaging in multiple activities at a given point in time or adopting a diversified portfolio of activities over time (Alobo Loison, 2017: 28). The strategy of diversification also applies to other dimensions of life. For example, in the context of ensuring security in everyday life, von Boemcken et al. (2016: 7) argue that people’s strategies involve a ‘highly diverse and heterogeneous spectrum of shared imaginations and everyday practices… when responding to the existential contingencies of life’.

While adversities impose limits, people’s creative imaginations and innovative abilities can result in a wide range of possible responses. As Fontaine and Schlumbohm (2000: 16) contend: ‘[W]e will never capture the diversity of the choices and actions of individuals and families in their struggle to survive, as the range of responses is infinite.’ Significantly, these strategies can often involve dealing with power and domination, in which case survival-cum-upward mobility strategies may entail popular mobilisation or everyday political acts that are often isolated, dispersed, and covert in nature (Adas, 1986; Kerkvliet, 2005; Scott, 1985) or they may involve shifting between these two forms of actions depending on the circumstances (Adnan, 2007a; Lilja et al., 2017). Such strategies can subsume expression of dissent against superordinate actors, while also involving compliance and avoidance in the face of domination (Adas, 1986; Camp, 2004; Kerkvliet, 2009). Therefore, I propose to consider not a single but a range of interconnected acts within the repertoire of survival-cum-upward mobility employed by social actors (Tilly, 1993; Johansson and Vinthagen, 2016).

1.5 Rationale of the study

In the context of continued marginalisation resulting from the gradual proliferation of the market economies and increased state domination, the question of survival and the goal of creating greater spaces in different spheres of life depend upon the situated strategies that the Hill Peoples employ in relation to market and state actors. Therefore,
one would expect the existing scholarship on the CHT to pay adequate attention to their strategies of survival and upward mobility. The post-accord (1997) period is indeed characterised by relatively greater engagement of civil society actors and academics with the issues facing the CHT’s populations compared to the pre-accord period. This development has resulted in a growing body of literature on the CHT, consisting of books, research papers, dissertations, and op-eds analysing various problems faced by the CHT populations. It has occurred despite continued state surveillance and control, particularly on observers from the West. However, scholarly attention to the situated strategies used by the Hill Peoples has been limited thus far. A review of the existing literature on the CHT reveals that the strategies employed by the Hill Peoples for their survival and overcoming their marginalised positions have been primarily analysed in two discrete dimensions—political and economic.

1.5.1 Political dimension
The political dimension of the survival-cum-upward mobility strategies centres on the relationship between the state and the Hill Peoples. Collective activism and political movement of the Hill Peoples have remained major issues of concern in analysing the political dimension of these strategies. For example, Bhumitra Chakma (2018), an indigenous scholar from the CHT, highlights the collective and organised acts of the Hill Peoples since the 1960s, which include the formation of political organisations, the promotion of group identity through cultural activities, and connections with transnational activist networks and movements. In the analysis of the organised political acts of the Hill Peoples, the politics of identity has taken centre stage. Van Schendel (1992: 127) underscores the appropriation of the ‘Jumma’ identity by the PCJSS since the 1970s as an ‘ethnic strategy’ to counter the domination of the state and Bengali culture by seeking distance from the dominant culture and the state representing it. He claims that this strategy is primarily aimed at achieving ‘autonomism’. The organised acts of the Hill Peoples centring on identity are neither static nor frozen. With the emergence of the notion ‘indigenous people’ in Bangladesh since the early 1990s, coupled with wide spaces for democratic participation as a result of the official end of the insurgency in 1997, the Hill Peoples have become actively engaged in political activism around the ‘indigenous’ identity (B. Chakma and N. Chakma, forthcoming; Gerharz, 2014b). This development has been particularly manifested in their prominent

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22 van Schendel borrows the notion ‘ethnic strategy’ from A.D. Smith (1981).
role in the formation of the Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples Forum (BIPF), a solidarity organisation representing all indigenous peoples of Bangladesh, greater engagement in the national civil society sphere, strengthened connections with transnational activist networks and participation in United Nations (UN) processes on indigenous peoples (Chowdhury, 2008; Gerharz, 2014a; Uddin, 2019). This situation of the Hill Peoples can be related to the case of indigenous peoples in Indonesia where the ‘indigenous’ identity is used as a defensive response against marginalisation faced by these communities (Li, 2010: 385).

In contrast to participation in organised political activism, Ala Uddin (2012, 2016) highlights the strategy of non-participation or ‘reluctance’ of the taung sa or ridge-top groups (e.g. Bawm, Mro, and Pankhoa) in collective political acts in order to avoid confrontations with the state. He argues that while the river-valley groups (e.g. Chakma, Marma, and Tanchangya) have been at the forefront of organised political activism in the region, the ridge-top groups have chosen to ‘isolate’ themselves from the broader political processes and preserve their ‘traditional life ways’ to safeguard their cultures. However, his portrayal of the ridge-top groups as weak, passive, and isolationist, who remain in a relatively static state, is problematic. Moreover, his over-generalised claim is only partially justifiable, as many members of ridge-top groups have actively engaged in diverse forms of political and social activism for decades.23

Nevertheless, the issue of non-participation leads us to some interesting insights. First, the engagement of the Hill Peoples with organised political activism has not been equal but rather fragmented, partial and somewhat messy. The issue of unequal participation in organised political acts is particularly useful in understanding the distinction between ‘activists’ and ‘ordinary people’. Although drawing boundaries regarding most organised political acts is challenging, as people take part and contribute in various ways, attempting to distinguish ‘activists’ from ‘ordinary people’ can be useful for analytical purposes. In social and political collective actions, ‘activists’ mediate between different knowledge systems and transform ideas and concepts used in one knowledge system so they fit into the socio-cultural framework of another system (Gerharz, 2014a). Secondly, the matter of non-participation points to the fact that not everybody has the possibility or ‘luxury’ to engage in organised or overt political activism, nor do such acts take place every day. As Scott (1985: xv) reminds us: ‘most subordinate classes throughout history have rarely been afforded the luxury of open,

23 This claim is based on my observation and interaction with various political, social, and environmental activists belonging to the Bawm, Chak, Khumi, Pankhoa, and Mro peoples over the past two decades.
organized, political activity.’ Therefore, we must pay greater attention to micro-
political, and typically covert everyday strategies employed by ordinary people in
dealing with the power and domination of superordinate groups and classes.

In addition to organised political acts, Bhumitra Chakma (2018) touches briefly
upon the employment of less organised, non-confrontational, and evasive strategies by
the Hill Peoples. These include ‘self-surveillance’, which involves remaining vigilant in
order to avoid imminent state and communal violence. He also explains migration to
urban centres to escape violence as a strategy. Nasreen (2017), writing about ordinary
Hill women, also highlights both organised and everyday resistance and negotiation.
She underscores the participation of ordinary Hill women in the political struggles of
their social groups, whose contributions have been only poorly recognised in popular
and academic discourses. She also provides accounts of Hill women’s everyday
strategies, which include feigned ignorance, pretension, and ‘self-surveillance’ in
dealing with everyday fear and imminent violence. Additionally, she discusses their
‘non-cooperation’ with the army in withholding important information about Hill
political activists. It is essential to take account of both organised and everyday acts
since under certain circumstances, the same actors can employ both strategies while
dealing with domination (Adnan, 2007a; Lilja et al., 2017). We must recognise the
multidimensional, relational, diverse, and dynamic nature of the situated strategies
employed by people to navigate and resist repressive structures and systems.

It is essential to take account of both organised and everyday acts since under certain
circumstances, the same actors can employ both strategies while dealing with
domination (Adnan, 2007a; Lilja et al., 2017). However, scholarly attention to the
everyday political acts of ordinary the Hill Peoples in the CHT is still meagre. This gap
in the scholarly literature on the Hill Peoples’ everyday politics has left much potential
for exploring the politics of survival used by its populations ‘from below’. By
reconstructing the everyday politics of Tanchangya villagers, I aim to fill this gap and
make a meaningful contribution to their strategies of survival and/or upward mobility.

In the current context, it is impossible to imagine the political dimension of life
without the role of the state. In much of the existing academic literature on the political
struggles in the CHT, the state is primarily viewed as a monolithic entity—typically
depicted as a source of domination and violence. Therefore, both organised and
everyday acts of the Hill Peoples are viewed as attempts to resist or avoid the
domination of the state. In recent years, however, there has been a shift in how the
Bangladeshi state is perceived, moving beyond conventional views. For instance,
building on the emerging scholarship of the ‘anthropology of the state’ (e.g. Das and Poole, 2004; Gupta, 1995; Sharma and Gupta, 2006), scholarly attention has been shifting towards viewing the Bangladeshi state in the CHT not as a monolithic and standalone entity, but as a translocal institution which operates in multiple forms at the local level (Uddin and Gerharz, 2017).

While acknowledging the importance of this shift in viewing the state from its margins, I highlight the fact that such manifestations of the state at the local level are not only multiple but can also be divergent. On the one hand, the state, as a translocal entity, operates as an agent of repression and violence. On the other hand, it can be also seen as a provider of resources necessary for improving the quality of life of ordinary people. The distinct encounters with the diverse manifestations of the state also influence the strategies employed by the Hill Peoples, which can no longer be limited to resistance and avoidance but can also include strategic engagement. In the discussion below, I argue that the need of survival as well as the pursuit of the vision of a ‘good life’ involve creating greater spaces in the political, social, and economic spheres, and work as driving forces behind the strategies employed by the Hill villagers. This requires examining the relationship between the local state actors and Tanchangya villagers, grounded in theoretical developments centred on the concepts of ‘marginality’, ‘everyday’, and ‘informality’ in the study of the state (Berenschot and van Klinken, 2018; Berenschot et al., 2018; Das, 2004; Das and Poole, 2004; Gupta, 1995; Sharma and Gupta, 2006).

1.5.2 Economic dimension

The economic dimension of the situated strategies of the Hill families primarily involves their decisions and acts for securing of decent livelihoods. These encompass a range of economic activities, such as various forms of agriculture, usage of new technologies (e.g., fertilizer), extraction of forest resources (e.g., bamboo), wage work, small-scale entrepreneurship, fishing, and salaried jobs (Chowdhury, 2014: 170–77; Swapan et al., 2010: 11). Since these economic strategies are employed within the broader historical context of the CHT, the forces and factors influencing these decisions have received some scholarly attention. For instance, Badiuzzaman and Murshed (2015) argue that the trauma of past violence and the anticipation of future conflicts shape the economic decision-making of the Hill Peoples during the post-accord era. Studies have also examined how state-implemented projects have affected the livelihoods of indigenous communities. A study by Nath and Inou (2008, 2009) on communities under
the Upland Settlement Project, implemented by the CHTDB in the 1980s to rehabilitate *jum* cultivators, is one such example. Using the sustainable livelihood framework, their study shows that diversification of income sources, including timber extraction and foraging in the forest, along with a combination of agriculture and wage labour, became necessary for familial survival since *jum* cultivation alone was no longer economically viable for the families affected by this project. A study by Ahammad et al. (2020) also applied the same framework to examine land usage and found a similar trend of diversifying income sources and adopting a mix of farming methods among the Hill families they studied. This trend of mixing different agricultural technologies and combining farming with off-farm income-generating activities is, of course, nothing new. A number of earlier studies have highlighted the declining trend of ‘traditional’ *jum* cultivation, which, pursued alone, was increasingly becoming a non-viable source of livelihood for Hill families (e.g. Adnan, 2004; Khisa, 1995; Tripura and Harun, 2003).

1.5.3 A multi-dimensional approach

Although the political and economic strategies employed by the Hill Peoples have often been analysed separately, it is important to recognise that these are actions carried out by the same actors. Besides, the broader economic, social, and political conditions that shape people’s decisions and acts can hardly be separated, as they are intricately interconnected and interdependent. As Adnan (2004: 13) explains, poverty\(^{24}\) in the CHT is ‘the outcome of complex causal processes mediated by the market, state and other economic institutions’ which requires incorporating ‘the relationships of power and exploitation, manifested in various forms of ethnic domination and discrimination’ in the analysis. Given the complex historical background of the CHT, examining political and economic strategies in isolation is not analytically adequate. An analysis of the economic strategies of the Hill Peoples must consider the political and social context that shapes economic relations and strategies. Similarly, when analysing the political struggles of the Hill Peoples, it is necessary to take their economic conditions into consideration. Therefore, I adopt a multidimensional approach, analysing the various forms of survival-cum-upward mobility strategies employed by the villagers of Meyachara in an integrated manner.

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\(^{24}\) The rate of poverty incidence among the Hill Peoples of the CHT is higher than the corresponding rates in other regions of Bangladesh (see Sohel et al., 2022: 2).
A crucial factor why many studies in the context of the CHT, particularly those focusing on the economic dimension, fail to provide a ‘holistic’ picture of the Hill Peoples’ survival-cum-upward mobility strategies is the lack of ethnographic perspectives. Such a perspective is essential for understanding social phenomena and everyday realities of social actors from the ‘inside’. Consequently, many existing studies are limited to providing overviews of the strategies employed, without delving deeper into the complex interconnections between the situation of the Hill Peoples and the social relations that underlie these strategies. While these studies may provide answers to ‘what’ (e.g. ‘What cause? and ‘What strategy?’), they fall short in providing insights into ‘why’ (e.g. ‘Why has something happened?’) and ‘how’ questions (e.g., ‘How is a particular decision made?’ and ‘How are X and Y connected?’). As a result, such studies barely offer ‘thick descriptions’ of the social world and the broader context comprising complex power relations among individuals, ethnic groups, social forces, and institutions that shape the decisions and acts of ordinary people.

1.6 Research questions
Following from the propositions above on exploring the survival-cum-upward mobility strategies of the Tanchangya villagers, I address pertinent research questions focused on the multiple dimensions of their lives. In terms of the political dimension, the everyday lived experiences of the villagers, their routine encounters and perceptions of the translocal Bangladeshi state take centre stage. With regard to the ways in which the Tanchangya villagers experience the state in the CHT, I address the following questions: What is it like to live on the margins of the state? How do Tanchangya villagers imagine and reconstruct the state in their everyday discourses? How do they encounter and interact with local state actors? What strategies do the villagers employ while encountering different state actors? And what role do the local intermediary actors play in this regard?

For understanding the economic dimension of situated strategies employed by the Tanchangya villagers, various issues related to their livelihood, subsistence, market engagement, and upward mobility emerge as major concerns. Since the Hill Peoples have been entangled in compulsive market relations as a result of state policies, their strategies revolve around their interactions with market processes, actors, and institutions. For instance, their transition from subsistence-oriented jhum cultivation to increasingly market-oriented agricultural production needs to be interpreted in terms of the debates on how self-provisioning communities interact with the penetration and
domination of market economies. Analysis of the strategies of Meyachara’s villagers regarding their livelihood and interactions with market actors is closely linked to the question of agrarian transformation in the CHT. However, there is limited attention to understanding how and why this transition has been taking place.

Based on these considerations I explore the following questions in this dissertation: How do the Hill villagers select new crops? What are the challenges and dilemmas associated with agricultural innovation and the adoption of new technologies? How are the risks and uncertainties encountered after shifting to new regimes of production and market engagement? In the Indonesian context, Tania Li (2014) has shown that switching to a new form of agricultural technology (e.g. from jum to tree crops like cocoa and coffee) can dramatically alter the existing internal relations within farming communities, including the use of capitalists from inside. Therefore, the question for the Hill Peoples is how have their internal labour and class relations have been transformed after transitioning from community-based jum cultivation to individual family-oriented cultivation (e.g. wet-rice and cash crop farming). In the context of the CHT, ethnic and cultural differences between the various communities often overshadow the everyday negotiations that they have to conduct in economic, social and cultural spheres. Hence, the discussions below also investigates how ethnicity and class differences shape the struggles of contemporary Hill villagers.

1.7 Structure of the dissertation
In order to address the issues and questions above, this ‘cumulative dissertation’ has been structured as follows. Chapter Two describes the methodological framework that guides this research. It begins by explaining the rationale for adopting an ethnographic approach and outlines the main methods used in the research. It then provides an overview of the various textual materials utilised in this research as sources of social scientific concepts and secondary data. The third section delves into several methodological considerations that shape this research and explains the choice of the primary data collection methods. Finally, it outlines the significance of reciprocity between myself (as the researcher) and the members of the study village for the processes of data protection and analysis.

The analysis presented in Chapter Three is grounded in three critical aspects of the situated strategies of the Tanchangya villagers of Meyachara. First, it investigates how Tanchangya peasant families deal with the question of familial subsistence, which is associated with the risks of innovations in crop selection, farming methods, and off-
farm income-generating activities. Secondly, it describes the reciprocative and redistributive practices observed among the villagers, involving the sharing of food, labour, and other resources. These practices are closely connected to their struggle for subsistence and the means of coping with extraordinary life-cycle events in the context of rapid monetisation of interpersonal relations. Finally, this chapter highlights the role of mutual help and community solidarity of the Tanchangya villagers in their interactions with Bengali market intermediaries.

Chapter Four expands the discussion of the Tanchangya villagers’ reciprocative and redistributive practices that were introduced in Chapter Three. The discussion specifically focuses on the role of the samaj, a local self-organisation, in facilitating and mediating redistributive practices in various social activities such as life-cycle rituals and religious ceremonies. It also explores how the samaj contributes to the maintenance of the moral order within the community. This chapter shows that these reciprocative and redistributive practices foster a sense of shared belonging among the members of the Meyachara Samaj.

In order to further analyse the relationship between Tanchangya villagers and market intermediaries (presented in Chapter Three), Chapter Five focuses on the special case of dadan contracts pertaining to the culantro crop, which is based on the interlocking of product and credit market relations. The discussion delves into the intricate landscape of everyday political strategies employed by Tanchangya peasants in response to the economic and socio-political mechanisms of surveillance and control put in place by Bengali trader-moneylenders to continue extracting surplus from them.

While Chapters 3–5 focus primarily on internal dynamics among the Tanchangya villagers and their relationship with market actors, Chapter Six shifts the focus to the relationship between them and the local state actors. Drawing upon theoretical developments on the topics of marginality, everyday dynamics, and informality in studying the state, the chapter stresses two key points. First, it demonstrates that Tanchangya villagers encounter various different manifestations of the agencies of the state apparatus, leading them to perceive it as a translocal entity with divergent embodiments. Second, the multiple manifestations of the state prompt the villagers to develop flexible and situated strategies, adapted to the particular agency of the state that they encounter. These strategies are employed to navigate peace and ‘development’ processes with local state actors.
CHAPTER TWO

Methodology

2.1 Introduction
This chapter specifies the methodological framework that has guided the research for this study. Exploring the lived experiences and situated strategies of the Tanchangya villagers of Meyachara required an ‘appropriate’ methodology for data collection and analysis. The choice of an appropriate methodology is of paramount importance because it serves as ‘the philosophical framework within which the research is conducted or the foundation upon which the research is based’ (Brown, 2006: 12).

Learning about delicate, micro-political issues such as the strategies employed by the Tanchangya villagers requires immersing oneself in their lives. In this regard, no methodological approach is likely to be as effective as ethnography, which allows the researcher to view the lives of the Hill Peoples from the inside. Ethnography is primarily done through fieldwork, with the researcher living with the community being researched in order to gain first-hand experience of their living environment, relations, rituals, and languages (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007: 64–65). Ethnographic research takes place in an everyday setting where the researcher observes and engages with the everyday lives of research partners (Atkinson et al., 2001: 4–5).

The principal method used in this research was a six-month period of ethnographic fieldwork centred on the Meyachara village of the CHT. The methodological considerations in this ethnographic fieldwork pertained to the site, my positionality as a researcher, and the relationship between the villagers of Meyachara and myself. These considerations shaped my relationship-building with them, as well as the collection and analysis of the primary data. The methods employed during the fieldwork included participatory observation, informal conversation, and in-depth interviews.

The second method used in this research was the collection and analysis of a wide variety of secondary materials, comprising mainly of texts, that I consulted throughout the study. The textual sources equipped me with the relevant social scientific concepts and ideas necessary to make sense of the social phenomena studied. Other textual materials provided me with data from existing studies that were for comparing and cross-checking the primary data generated from the ethnographic fieldwork. The third method of this research involved my constant reflection and reasoning, an iterative
process inextricably linked with the first two methods. Critical reflection on the knowledge and information gleaned from my engagement with the secondary materials and the village community has been important in making decisions at every stage of this research.

The discussion begins by explaining the nature of the textual materials that have been used in this research, particularly highlighting the connection between the social scientific concepts obtained from the textual sources and my ethnographic fieldwork. It then sketches out the modality of the ethnographic study I conducted in Meyachara, inclusive of the methodological considerations that governed the primary data collection methods I used during the fieldwork. The final section outlines the significance of reciprocity in this research, inclusive of how I attempted to create safe spaces for myself and the village community, and how I protected and analysed the collected data.

2.2 Textual materials
The secondary sources that I consulted as a part of this research include relevant books, journal articles, monographs, conference papers, research reports, newspaper reports, government publications (e.g. reports and correspondence), NGO publications (e.g. project reports), activist publications (e.g. leaflets), and little magazines. These secondary sources contained a wide array of concepts and debates that I engaged with, including survival strategies, the state, ethnicity, market economy, moral economy, agrarian change, subsistence, reciprocity, gift-giving, everyday politics, informality, the *samaj*, *dadan*, and interlocked market relations. While the theoretical sources helped me to engage with wider academic debates related to these concepts, my focus remained on the materials specific to the context of the CHT. However, as mentioned in Chapter One, secondary sources concerning the CHT were of limited utility, since these have paid inadequate attention to the Hill Peoples’ strategies of survival-cum-upward mobility, the central focus of this research.

Since the CHT’s specific context demands particular focus on ethnic dynamics, I tried to collect and study virtually every textual source on the Tanchangya that I could find. This includes materials produced both by members of this ethnic group as well as others. My review of the textual and other available sources specific to the Tanchangya reveals that very little has been written on this ethnic group. Therefore, their history and contemporary life struggles have remained largely in oral forms. The most common forms of textual materials that I collected and studied on the Tanchangya were books, little magazines, and articles. Additionally, I have observed and analysed various
‘contents’ (e.g., texts, videos, pictures, and music) shared on social media, particularly Facebook and YouTube, about the Tanchangya. While these social media contents do not constitute the solid ‘data’ for this research as such, they have served as important sources for preliminary ideas on various issues facing the Tanchangya. Therefore, the analysis of Tanchangya villagers’ situated strategies presented in this study relies primarily on the ethnographic data collected in the field, while secondary materials provide a contextual basis and create a connection with wider debates.

My engagement with the textual materials began during the preparatory phase of my PhD. I consulted these sources to familiarise myself with the state of the art of various concepts and debates that I had to grapple with in this research, as well as to gain a deeper understanding of the socio-economic-political context of the CHT. Although this research project is somewhat exploratory in nature, I needed to equip myself with relevant concepts and debates to in preparation for my ethnographic fieldwork. As Atkinson (2017: 4) underscores the importance of concepts and ideas: ‘…when we embark on fieldwork of some sort, we ought to have some idea of what sort of social science we are embarking on, and what sort of ideas are likely to be productive. We bring ideas to the field as well as drawing them from our field data and our experiences.’ Although the proposed research enquiry can considerably change once the researcher encounters the realities of the field, concepts can guide her/him in navigating the ‘unpredictable terrains’ of the field (Gerharz, 2017a). Without some initial ideas to guide the fieldwork, a researcher is left in the dark about what to look for (Atkinson, 2017). However, it does not mean that the researcher should rigidly adhere to pre-conceived ideas and go to the field with the assumption that what to explore in the field is already known (ibid.: 5).

During the preparations for fieldwork, my research colleagues advised me to let go of any preconceived ideas and to remain open-minded while in the field. As I embarked on my fieldwork, I realised that the concepts and debates that I had familiarised myself with were partly ‘in conversation’ with the realities in the field. Some of them aligned with the field realities, while others did not correspond to them as expected. Through continuous reflection and analysis, I made the decision to be guided by the realities encountered in the field. This approach of allowing the field realities to shape my research created a sense of ‘being navigated’ within me (Gerharz, 2017a). An illustration would be helpful in this regard. During the preparatory phase of my research, my primary focus was to explore the Tanchangya villagers’ relationship with the state using the notion of everyday resistance (Adas, 1986; Scott, 1985). While in the
field, I realised that the notion of everyday resistance could not capture the diverse strategies employed by the villagers. Consequently, I started to pay attention to not only everyday resistance but the entire repertoire of strategies employed by the villagers when encountering diverse manifestations of the state, as well as market actors. This iterative process of engaging with textual materials continued throughout the research, in which ethnographic fieldwork played a prominent role.

2.3 Ethnographic fieldwork
I conducted my ethnographic fieldwork for around six months, starting in late April 2019 and concluding in early November 2019. The focal point of my ethnographic fieldwork was Meyachara village. Several factors led me to choose this village as my fieldwork site. While I was preparing for my fieldwork in early 2019, I sought suggestions from friends and family members for a suitable fieldwork location. During this time my wife introduced me to Meyachara village, which she had visited around 2014. She informed me that Meyachara is a peaceful village where the villagers are hard-working, market-conscious, tradition-adhering, and share the trait of ‘dhora-dhoijje’ (literally ‘tied’ with one another, denoting strong community bond). These characteristics were so relevant to my research that Meyachara immediately captured my attention.

Additionally, Meyachara appeared to be an excellent choice because the Wagga-Ghagara area, where the village is located, was not covered under the state-sponsored transmigration programme implemented in the CHT (see Chapter One). My assumption was that the absence of Bengali settlers would add nuances to understanding the state-indigenous peoples relationship in the CHT. A final reason that influenced my decision was the relative peacefulness of Meyachara and the adjacent villages of the Wagga-Ghagara area. After doing some research, I learned that the Wagga-Ghagara area experienced a lower degree of violence involving state and non-state actors compared to many other areas of the region following the CHT Accord. This consideration was crucial as news of violence in some parts of the CHT, involving armed groups and state forces, was surfacing on social media during my fieldwork preparations. Finding a safe location appeared crucial to ensure my personal safety, as well as the safety of the community I planned to study. My assumption was that the surveillance by state forces would be limited in areas with lower violence, reducing the likelihood of disruptions arising from their activities.
The first two weeks of my fieldwork were spent in Dhaka city and Rangamati district. During this time, I engaged in discussions about my research with several academics and indigenous activists, as well as meeting some knowledgeable friends and relatives. While receiving valuable information and advice regarding conducting fieldwork in the CHT, I used this time to collect published materials from libraries and personal archives and make necessary preparations to ‘enter’ Meyachara. With the kind support of the village gatekeepers, my wife and I made our initial visit there on 5th May. A meeting was organised at the courtyard of a popular village teashop regarding our visit. Around 20–25 villagers (mostly men), including several local leaders, attended this meeting. During this meeting, I presented my research objectives and requested their cooperation and support. Upon receiving their consent and assurance of support, we also discussed arrangements for our potential accommodation inside the village. Once the necessary preparations were made, my wife and I moved to Meyachara in mid-May.

Meyachara is an ethnic Tanchangya village, located in the Ghagara-Wagga area of Rangamati district of the CHT. The village consists of 88 households, most of which are interconnected through several patrilineages. The composition of the samaj grouping (see Chapter Four) differs from the village grouping. During the fieldwork, there were 122 households within the Meyachara Samaj. A samaj is an informal social self-organisation, which plays a central role in performing various social-religious activities of its members and mediating the redistribution of resources. Approximately a quarter of the households of Meyachara Samaj belong to adjoining villages, while a few households from Meyachara village participate in the samaj groups of neighbouring villages. The majority of the villagers are peasants, while some belong to other professions (e.g., shopkeepers, NGO workers, and autorickshaw drivers). Notwithstanding these varied occupations, agricultural production and market engagement form the core of everyday life for the Meyachara villagers. The village households have unequal economic, cultural, and social capital, which makes their internal relations subject to power differences. Various factors, including economic class, political affiliation, and level of education, contribute to the hierarchically organised positions of the villagers. Similarly, the routine interactions of the villagers with the market and local state actors are shaped by negotiations based on unequal power and resources.

I have outlined the factors that influenced the selection of Meyachara as the site for my fieldwork. I have also provided an overview of my entry into the village, along
with some essential information about this village community. Before delving into the processes of primary data collection and analysis, it is necessary to analyse the methodological considerations that influence the overall process of this fieldwork-based research.

2.3.1 ‘The village’ as an ethnographic site

In the current academic context in which ‘multi-sited’ ethnographic approaches have become normative and ‘the village’ has largely disappeared from anthropological writing (Sorge and Padwe, 2015), one might question why I have chosen a village as the site for studying the relations of Tanchangya villagers with powerful institutions of the market and the state. However, the objective of this research centred on a village is not to create a ‘holistic representation, an ethnographic portrayal’ of a village being charged with a kind of crude localism (Marcus, 1995: 99). Significantly, although in the classical ‘village-study’, the culture and societies of the people were regarded as ‘bounded, homogenous and static units’ (Mitchel, 2010: 7), Shah reminds us that there is indeed no such thing as a truly ‘bounded village ethnography’, as the people of the study village are always connected to other sites through their relationships with other people and processes (Shah, 2017: 52–53). Following from this line of argument, what this research primarily represents are the actions, relations, and processes that the people of this village perform and engage in, rather than the physical location itself. This emphasis on exploring social relations, rather than the specific place, is congruent with an emerging ethnographic approach known as ‘relational ethnography’, which involves ‘studying fields rather than places, boundaries rather than bounded groups, processes rather than processed people, and cultural conflict rather than group culture’ (Desmond, 2014: 548). Although my fieldwork was centred on Meyachara, the processes and relations of the villagers led me to other locales beyond Meyachara. Going beyond the ‘boundaries’ of the village, the fieldwork included interactions with actors (e.g., government officials, activists, and traders) other than the Tanchangya villagers of Meyachara in multiple locations with whom the actions and processes of these villagers were connected in various ways.

In the current globalised world, no locale can truly remain isolated and detached from others. Accordingly, I conceive Meyachara village as a dynamic rather than static entity, akin to a living organism. The village is going through an incessant process of evolution through interactions between ‘local’ and ‘external’ (and potentially ‘global’) sectors. As Sorge and Padwe (2015: 241) point out, villages function as ‘localized sites
for the negotiation of meanings, as well as sites that respond to the changes wrought by late modernity and to the myriad political, economic, and cultural forces that operate on a global scale…’ This dynamism of villages requires careful attention, particularly to overcome the dialectic opposition of ‘village ethnography’ focused on the ‘immobility’ of people and their social relations, and ‘multi-sited strategies’ associated with different forms of mobility (e.g., migration and displacement) (Gallo, 2015: 249). After all, mobility (as well as immobility), whether spatial or social, short-term or long-term, is an integral part of the life struggle of virtually every village community in the world. This shift in perspective invites us to view villages as:

places enmeshed within amorphous realities significantly characterized by a circulation of people, goods, images and ideas not moored to any single place. Villages have not remained stagnant, nor have they been abandoned, and their particular modernities yield unique insights into the experience of the contemporary world and its various transformations over the past decades (Sorge and Padwe, 2015: 241)

In the context of my analysis, the village simultaneously means different things—a place for living, agriculture, trade, bureaucracy, relations, politics, culture, power struggles, resistance, and negotiations—virtually an assemblage of all fundamental aspects of social life. The village is regarded as a foreground where villagers encounter and formulate everyday strategies to negotiate larger processes and systems—including the market and the state. It is not merely a representation of a geographical unit but a social space that allows for the observation of the changes within the society from the ‘bottom up’. Rather than being a mere location where research is conducted, the village functions as a ‘conceptual prism’ through which social relations and socio-economic-political mobility of people can be comprehended (Gallo, 2015: 255).

2.3.2 Relationality in ethnography

Understanding the acts and the relations of social actors requires deep immersion in their everyday life, which can only be achieved by building and developing relations with them. Therefore, far from being a monolithic, one-dimensional, and researcher-centred enquiry, I view my ethnographic study in Meyachara as a process of building relations with the research partners. The understanding of relationality adopted in my fieldwork begins with contrasting the ‘Eurocentric’ worldview of human existence and knowledge production: ‘I think, therefore I am’ (Chilisa, 2012: 109). This view is rooted in the ontological standpoint that individuals can flourish only in relation to other human beings, and the epistemological viewpoint in which ‘knowledge [is] nested within the social relations of knowledge production’ (Chilisa, 2012: 109; Kovach, 2010:
Different qualitative research methodologies (e.g. indigenous and feminist) are claimed to be essentially relational in nature where ‘the researcher is not a neutral instrument of the research process’ (Kovach, 2009: 32).

Gathering knowledge using a relational approach requires adopting the following epistemological standpoints. First, the researcher must try to move away from the position of ‘researcher as expert knower’ to ‘researcher as learner’ (Doane and Varcoe, 2015, cited in Gerlach, 2018: 5). Secondly, the researcher does not just ‘extract’ knowledge, but also brings along knowledge and contributes in this joint relational process of co-creation of knowledge. In a research interface, both the researcher and the researched bring together ‘diverse knowledge pools and expectations’ (Gerharz, 2018: 19). Hence the research is not simply a process of extraction by one party but rather an exchange of knowledge by the involved parties. Highlighting this collective dimension, the relational approach acknowledges not a unidirectional but ‘a bidirectional flow of knowledge’ (Ross et al., 2010: 2). Thirdly, the process of co-creation of knowledge in a relational context is not universal but situated, which varies depending on time and place (Kovach, 2009). Therefore, knowledge generation here is regarded as a contextual process: ‘relationality reinforces complexity and the multiple ways in which people are both shaped by and shape other people’s responses, situations, experiences, and contexts’ (Doane & Varcoe, 2015, cited in Gerlach, 2018: 5).

Relationality played a major role in the overall process of conducting my ethnographic fieldwork. My introduction and access to Meyachara were made possible through my existing relations, while my stay in the field was a journey of building and strengthening new relations. As mentioned earlier, my wife was the source of my initial knowledge about Meyachara and its villagers. She also introduced me to a friend of hers who helped me to find contacts among some elders and local leaders of the village. These contacts were instrumental in facilitating my entry into this village community. While still in Germany I discussed my research with them over the phone. All of them happily consented and agreed to support my research. During my first meeting with the villagers in early May 2019, these contacts assisted me in explaining my PhD research and also seeking cooperation from all the villagers for the field stay.

After my wife and I had relocated to Meyachara, I dedicated a significant amount of time towards building and strengthening relationships with my research partners. During this process, my methods of data collection (see below) simultaneously worked as an important means of socialisation. Here I would like to underscore that casual greetings exchanged with the villagers in everyday settings and on social
occasions played a crucial role in this relationship-building process with the villagers. For instance, when asking ‘How are you?’ or ‘Are you doing well?’, many villagers used da (elder brother) to address me, despite the fact that I was younger than them. Likewise, I also called the villagers da (elder brother), bhuji (sister-in-law), di (elder sister), bonoi (brother-in-law), uncle (using verbatim English), jidhu (uncle, father’s elder brother), or jedhe (aunt, father’s sister-in-law), depending on the person I was addressing. Such casual addressing and exchanges were not merely following the local cultural codes; at the same time, they were expressions of mutual love and respect. L.T. Smith (2021: 137) demonstrates that indigenous peoples consider respect a key element in their relationships. Thus, mutual respect between the villagers and myself eventually fed into our continued processes of ‘becoming relatives’ of sorts.

2.3.3 Researcher’s positionality: Dealing with contradictory personhoods

The issue of relationality becomes particularly relevant in the context when the ethnographer shares some fundamental commonalities with the researched community. My positionality as an indigenous activist-turned-academic from the same geographic location, the CHT, shaped both my research and my relations with the research partners. In this regard, I recall Gardner’s (1999) reminder of the presence of multiplicity and the contradictory nature of the researcher’s personhood during ethnographic fieldwork. My entry into the field was simultaneously that of an ‘insider’ as well as an ‘outsider’. On the insider side, I carried my identity as a ‘local’. I was born and raised in Rangamati, the same district where Meyachara village is located, and had some knowledge about the geography of the village. Although I had never visited this village prior to my fieldwork, I was not completely detached from Meyachara and its villagers. Independent of my knowledge, I found that I was already connected to some villagers through my existing relations, which I discovered only after starting my field stay. Additionally, I brought with me the membership of an indigenous community (the Chakma) and several years of experience as an indigenous human rights activist based in Dhaka and Rangamati. Being a part of the same historical processes of the economic, social, and political developments in the CHT, Tanchangya villagers and I were already connected by the senses of shared belonging, commonality, and fraternity. Moreover, even before entering the field, I had acquired sufficient knowledge about the Tanchangya ethnicity—including language, belief systems, and material cultures. The knowledge pool that I gathered about the Tanchangya can be attributed to my relations with many Tanchangya friends and colleagues over the years as well as my marital
relationship with my wife, who happens to be Tanchangya.\textsuperscript{25} Thus, due to my activism, existing relations, and knowledge of the Tanchangya ethnicity, I enjoyed several insider privileges during my fieldwork that many outsider researchers cannot expect. This made my ‘rapport-building’ with the villagers easy, while most verbal and non-verbal exchanges that the villagers and I had had during the fieldwork were understood well by both parties without the need for any translation.

Contrarily, I also carried my outsider self with me into the field. Significantly, I carried along my identity as a Chakma, a different ethnic group among the indigenous peoples of the CHT. Although there are considerable similarities between the Chakma and the Tanchangya in terms of language, belief, and culture, both the Tanchangya and the Chakma are distinct and separate ethnic groups in their own right. This distinction is politically important as, in local discourses, a small section of the Chakma believes that the Tanchangya is a sub-group of the Chakma, although there is no agreement whatsoever from the members of the Tanchangya regarding this claim. Such a claim has even led a section of Tanchangya authors to vehemently assert that it is a distinct ethnic group, emphasising their distinction from the Chakma (e.g., B.K. Tanchangya, 1995; K. Tanchangya, 2008). Moreover, the distinction between the Tanchangya and the Chakma is also significant in the context of accessing rights and entitlements provided by the state (e.g. reservation in government jobs). The Chakma is not only the largest indigenous group in the CHT, but it is often politically, socially, and economically more dominant than other indigenous groups, including the Tanchangya. This power difference between different groups leads to inequalities in the enjoyment of rights and entitlements and eventually contributes to the reproduction of hierarchies among them. Although these distinctions did not create any barrier during my fieldwork per se, in close conversations with me, some villagers indicated the relative power differences between these two groups by pointing out the privileges enjoyed by many members of the Chakma ethnic group (e.g., as government officers and politicians). They also used expressions like ‘toma dagi’ (your people) and ‘toma Changma’ (your Chakma) in contrast to ‘ama Tanchangya’ (our Tanchangya) to highlight the differences between these two groups.

Besides, my entry and stay in the field was that of a PhD student who lives in Germany. Although this aspect of my identity too never stood in the way, it did imply

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{25} Notably, my wife and her relatives belong to Doinna Gosa clan, while the villagers of Meyachara belong to Karwa Gosa clan. Therefore, they have some linguistic and cultural differences. See Debnath (2008) for Tanchangya clans.}
some power differences and a certain degree of distance from the villagers. They were generally aware that I was a PhD student in Germany on a scholarship. This information served as an important marker in creating hierarchical relations with some villagers because the majority of them did not have the privilege of pursuing higher education and relied on limited earning potentials from family farming. Therefore, my wife and I tried to maintain a ‘low profile’, which was reflected in our behaviour and lifestyle in the field, such that our ‘foreigner’ identities did not create any unnecessary distance with the villagers. Accordingly, my wife and I only carried and procured items that were essential for my research and our stay in the field (e.g. laptop, cell phone, and stove), while avoiding items of comfort (e.g. TV, cable connection, and refrigerator), which have become integral parts of our ‘modern’ life. Nevertheless, there were instances when some curious villagers asked about my income. In response, I informed them that the monthly stipend that I received was enough for my wife and me to survive in Germany but not enough to make us wealthy. Thus, despite my attempts to immerse myself in the lives of the villagers, I could not ‘shake off’ some aspects of my outsider identity. Despite all ‘nearness and dearness’, a subtle distance between me and the villagers remained. As I reflected while in Meyachara: ‘I can never be a full insider.’

Significantly, the multiple personhoods that the researcher carries should be seen as trajectories, rather than ‘natural’ identities. Gardner (1999: 51–52) reminds us that the personhood of the researcher is composed of not just a single identity but multiple identities, which are fragmented and subject to endless transformation. Similarly, Gerharz (2017a: 2) suggests that the ethnographic positioning of the researcher should be viewed as a process closely linked to the practices, actions, and meanings in the field, where the ethnographer navigates according to the ever-changing environment. In the same vein, my personhoods were not fixed entities but underwent gradual changes throughout the course of the fieldwork. My ethnographic experience was a journey of shifting positionalities. From being almost a complete stranger, I found myself positioned in the process of becoming a friend, brother, uncle, or nephew who would be frequently invited for lunch or tea. From merely a PhD researcher based in a foreign land, I increasingly became someone who could be trusted, with whom stories, experiences, and opinions could be shared without fear. Although this process of ‘becoming’ was never fully completed, it played a supportive role in my field data collection, as indicated below.

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26 It should be noted that there is currently a remarkable consciousness among the older generation of villagers to provide higher education to the members of the younger generation.
2.3.4 Methods of data collection

With my shifting positionalities, the villagers and I developed different nodes of relationships that were unequal but ‘warm’ enough to allow me to gather rich ethnographic data to write this dissertation. This relationship-building was, of course, made possible by the friendliness, kind support, cooperation, and generosity of the villagers in various forms. Additionally, the main ethnographic methods that I used—participatory observation, informal conversation, and interview—served simultaneously as strategies for building relationships as well as data collecting data. I will now outline my data collection methods below.

2.3.4.1 Participatory observation

The first major method of data collection was participatory observation, which simultaneously served as a strategy for everyday socialisation with the villagers. My first few weeks in Meyachara were spent mainly ‘hanging out’ with the villagers in various locations within and around the village—homes, courtyards, fields, roads, Buddhist temples, marketplaces, and village teashops. I observed that teashops constitute an important site of the everyday social interactions of the villagers. These are the spots where villagers routinely meet and exchange important news, information, and knowledge with one another. Therefore, the village teashops are also linked with the various strategies that they develop to tackle the odds of their lives. Considering these important aspects, I chose village teashops as major sites of socialisation and observation of the everyday lives of the villagers. Throughout my stay in Meyachara, I made regular visits to the teashops, particularly to those that seemed to be most popular among the villagers. In addition to engaging in casual conversations and sharing tea, my routine job in these teashops was to attentively listen to and carefully observe the villagers—their discussions, gossip, and behaviour. They emerged as important sites for learning and comprehending the issues that the villagers put emphasis on and shared ‘publicly’.

Moreover, teashops are arenas where the power differences among the villagers are routinely displayed. For instance, I observed that some elders and the leaders of the samaj (see Chapter Four) would often take the lead in the discussions held at the teashops. At the same time, the teashops also function as spaces for growing and re-cementing different nodes of relationships between the village’s individuals. Everyday interactions and various forms of exchanges (e.g. news, information, and tea) contribute
to the rebuilding and strengthening of solidarity among the villagers.\textsuperscript{27} The everyday discussions of the village teashops even involve ‘hidden transcripts’ (Scott, 1990) vis-à-vis the actors outside the village, including state functionaries, traders, NGO workers, and high-level political figures. Here, the villagers can share hope and despair, agony and anger, and hatred and love, which they are unable to express openly to the members of superordinate classes outside the community. In this way, the village teashops function as spaces that offer insights into the discourses concerning the struggles ‘within’ the villagers’ lifeworld, as well as the interfaces where they struggle and negotiate with actors ‘outside’ the community.

However, my participatory observations were not limited to the teashops alone. Facilitated by my six-month stay in Meyachara, I engaged in such observations in virtually every important location in and around the village. Each of these spots had its importance in terms of understanding specific social phenomena. For example, one such site that I frequently observed was Ghagara Bazaar, which consists of shops and an open marketplace situated by the Dhaka-Rangamati-Kaptai link road. In particular, I visited this location on bi-weekly bazaar days (Saturday and Wednesday). Ghagara Bazaar was an important site to observe how villagers engage in routine negotiations with market intermediaries to secure the best prices for their agricultural produce (vegetables, fruits, and herbs). At the same time, this marketplace served as an arena to witness the expression of mutual support and the reconstruction of community solidarity among the villagers. It was common to see Meyachara’s villagers deliberately choosing a spot in the market where they usually sold their agricultural produce, enabling them to support one another. It is common that one villager would look after or take charge of selling the agricultural produce of another villager in the absence of the latter. Additionally, since Ghagara Bazaar was frequented by all Meyachara Samaj members, financial contributions made by the samaj members for various purposes, such as supporting a bereaved household or organising a religious ceremony, were collected at a shop within the market-place where villagers regularly ‘hang out’ after completing their sales of agricultural produce.

In addition to my routine and ‘everyday forms’ of participatory observations, I took part in various life-cycle rituals (e.g. birth, marriage, and death) as well as other social and religious ceremonies that I came across during my fieldwork. Many such rituals took place in the homes or courtyards of the villagers, while others were held in

\textsuperscript{27} Alongside the possibility of occasional friction and weakening of relationships between two villagers.
the Buddhist temple or similar community places (e.g. cremation grounds), depending on what the occasion was and how it was planned. During the early stages of my fieldwork, I took part in ceremonies that did not require any invitation (e.g. religious ceremonies and death rituals). As my relationships with the villagers deepened during this period, I started to receive invitations to attend a wider range of rituals that involved invitations by the host families—birth rituals, weddings, various forms of pujo\textsuperscript{28}, Mangala Sutta\textsuperscript{29} ceremonies, and saatdinya or saptahik kriya\textsuperscript{30}. I observed that such religious and social occasions are spaces where some special forms of socialisation take place. Often, they involve participation by a large section of the community members, as well as a communal meal. Members of different generational councils of the samaj perform their allocated duties to make such social events successful (see Chapter Four). The village or samaj leaders sometimes make major decisions and announcements concerning the samaj on such occasions. The aim of my participatory observation in such rituals was to learn how things are done, who does what, and how different actors play their roles. I observed how power differences play out, things discussed and debated, decisions made, tasks and responsibilities assigned among the villagers, and corrective measures against the defaulters in their responsibilities are taken. While attending these rituals, to the extent possible, I followed the local codes of the village (e.g., making financial contributions and showing respect to the elders).

2.3.4.2 Informal conversation

My participatory observation in everyday life and social-religious ceremonies of the villagers often included ‘informal conversations’, which emerged as a major method of understanding the life struggle of the villagers. These involved verbal exchanges with the villagers while in teashops, attending a ritual, walking along village roads, or visiting people’s courtyards. Informal conversations often occurred spontaneously and did not follow any specific patterns, and were not limited to my research topics. There were occasions when I naturally joined in the conversations initiated and continued by the villagers. When these informal discussions emerged as important or relevant to my research, I ended up jotting down the discussion in a pocket notebook. When

\textsuperscript{28} A pujo or puja is an animistic ritual performed by an osa or priest to appease ancient deities/spirits for the health and wellbeing of the members of the family, relatives or community. See also B.K. Tanchangya, (1995).

\textsuperscript{29} A Buddhist ritual aimed at wellbeing of the members of the family, relatives or community.

\textsuperscript{30} A death ritual involving Buddhist rituals and a communal meal, performed a week after the cremation of a deceased person.
simultaneous documentation was not possible, I would reflect on the main topics of the conversation and later make entries into my fieldnotes when I returned home.

The informal conversations that I had in private were sometimes qualitatively different from the public conversations that I had in teashops or the temple. While I would be an active listener and less of a participant in the conversations in public spaces like teashops, my engagement with the partner(s) in private conversations along the village roads or courtyards would be more intimate and involved, with both parties asking questions and replying. I could ask and discuss more personal and sensitive topics in such private settings, which did not seem appropriate in the teashop and other public conversations. Such conversations provided me access to multiple layers of ‘transcripts’ within the community.

I discovered that informal conversations with villagers were a great way to gain insight into their social world and their perspectives on the world around them. These conversations often offered new insights and helped me refine my research inquiries. For example, one particular conversation with a villager named Sujit had a profound impact on my research. As we walked home from a local teashop one evening, Sujit casually mentioned that electricity, roads, and education were essential for development. At first, I didn’t question his statement. However, as I pondered our conversation later that evening, I realised that there was more depth to his words than I had initially grasped. This realisation fundamentally altered my preliminary understanding of the relationship between the state and the villagers, which ultimately shaped my data collection process. Chapter Six of my dissertation is a direct result of this process.

2.3.4.3 Interview
I discovered that while participatory observations and informal conversations brought about new ideas and knowledge, they were not always able to provide complete answers. Sometimes, they even raised more questions. To address this matter, I recognised the need for a method of data collection that would help me delve deeper into the issues at hand. Therefore, I turned to conducting extended conversations—in-depth interviews. I started with a few interviews in the early stage of my fieldwork to learn about the community, its livelihood sources, and history. However, the majority of the interviews that formed the basis of my dissertation were conducted after several weeks of initial observations and conversations. I conducted a total of 50 in-depth interviews with the villagers, as well as over a dozen interviews with government
officials, political activists, customary chiefs, NGO workers, lawyers, and academics in
Rangamati and Dhaka with the intent to learn about the connection of the village’s local
realities with the broader context of the country.

The selection of the interviewees was done using a purposive sampling method. The first spell of interviews in Meyachara was done with some elders, school teachers, and local leaders (all male) who initially seemed to be very knowledgeable about the issues (e.g. the villagers’ livelihood and history) I intended to learn. Unfortunately, the interviews didn’t go as well as anticipated due to the poor choice of interviewees. I discovered that young and middle-aged villagers who rely on agriculture had more current and extensive knowledge about agricultural production and marketing than many of the older villagers or teachers. From this point onward, the relatively younger sections of the peasant members of the village became my main target respondents for questions related to agricultural production and market engagement. However, the interviews were not limited to this group, as different members of the village (and beyond) specialised in certain issues or events. As a result, the selection of interviewees was guided by my continuous reflection on the knowledge gained from the sessions of participatory observations, informal conversations, and interviews that I had already conducted.

Unlike impromptu informal conversations, most in-depth interviews with the villagers (as well as interviewees outside the village) were planned in advance. For many interviews, the villagers and I jointly set the time, date, and place of the interviews. The majority of the interviews were conducted at the homes of the interviewees, in their most intimate and private surroundings, where they felt comfortable and safe to express their ideas, thoughts, and opinions. A couple of interviewees opted to have the interviews at our temporary residence in Meyachara, as it seemed more convenient for both parties. Despite my efforts to make it convenient for the research participants, some interviewees were initially hesitant but later agreed to be interviewed. However, despite my repeated insistence, two young male peasants declined to be interviewed. While they provided different excuses, I remained in the dark about the exact reason behind their refusal.

As most interviews were planned in advance, I had my notebook, recorder, and a set of questions on a piece of paper ready with me. The interview questions on the paper were primarily intended to guide me through the interviews. The orders of these questions were never strictly followed but remained flexible. They basically helped me to stay on track in my conversations with the research partners. Sometimes it was the
interviewees who led parts of the conversations, or rather, the topic of the conversation itself guided the questions and answers. Therefore, going beyond the ‘frame’ created by the questionnaires in hand, I often asked impromptu follow-up questions. As a part of my preparation, I would typically read the questions before heading out for an interview, so that I could limit my reading of the questions from the paper during the interview sessions. Additionally, there were instances where I formulated specific questions tailored to the person being interviewed and the particular topic of the interview. In a few cases, I also conducted multiple interviews with the same individuals who appeared to be the most knowledgeable about certain issues or events. For example, in the case of rural infrastructural projects (see Chapter Six), I conducted multiple interviews with two local leaders, for they were actively involved in these projects and were identified by other villagers as the most knowledgeable individuals in this regard. In such cases, the interview questions revolved around various aspects of the topic, issue, or incident.

The main goal of avoiding rigid questionnaires was to create a more relaxed, adaptable, and amicable environment during the interview sessions. Therefore, both the informal conversations and in-depth interviews that I conducted are congruent with the ‘conversational method’ used in indigenous research methodologies (Chilisa, 2012; Kovach, 2009; 2010). Unlike conventional formal interviews, where the interviewer asks questions and the interviewee merely responds, in conversational approaches, the participation between the researcher and research partners is dialogical (Kovach, 2010). The objective of following such an approach was to create, to the best of my ability, a safe, equal, and free dialogical space between myself and my interviewees.

2.4 Reciprocity
Virtually any kind of social research can involve a relationship of reciprocity between the researcher and the research partners. Reciprocity is particularly relevant for ethnographic research because it demands the full immersion of the researcher in the lifeworld of the research partners for a considerable amount of time. Reciprocity serves as an integral component of the relationship-building process during ethnographic fieldwork.

Nevertheless, it requires additional attention as its time span extends well beyond the duration of ethnographic fieldwork. In indigenous research methodologies, reciprocity has been identified as a fundamental principle for guiding research on these communities (Chilisa, 2012: 7; Kovach, 2010; Wilson, 2008). When operating within
an indigenous research paradigm, Shawn Wilson (2008: 77) suggests that one of the questions that the researcher should ask her/himself is: ‘What am I contributing or giving back to the relationship?’ in exchange for the knowledge shared by the researched community. Kovach (2010: 46) argues that reciprocity is so crucial to indigenous methodologies that it should commence during the preparation phase, and discussions on how the research, as well as the researcher, will give back to the community should take place at this stage.

I would like to highlight two dimensions of reciprocity that concern my ethnographic field research while drawing on relevant scholarship on indigenous research methodologies. The first dimension concerns how the research itself might directly benefit the community. It is linked to the significance and relevance of the research to the community being studied (Kovach, 2009: 82). This dimension encompasses the potential material and practical benefits that the research can bring to the community as well as the acknowledgement of its epistemology (Barrett, 2019). In this regard, L.T. Smith (2021: 16) suggests two important ways to share knowledge back to the community that scientific research often overlooks—‘sharing knowledge’ and ‘reporting back’. A researcher can reciprocate by sharing the knowledge she/he has learnt from the community by directly presenting the research to the community and creating opportunities to provide feedback and ask questions on the research (Wilson, 2008: 66–67). Moreover, giving back to the community often involves writing (e.g., reports or publications). Significantly, writing is essentially ‘a process of defining, thus the power resides in the writer’ (Kovach, 2009: 132). Therefore, indigenous research frameworks suggest shifting the power of the researcher to the ‘researched’ in control of the research process and outcome by allowing for enhanced voice and appropriate representation of the community (Kovach, 2009: 82).

Giving back to the community through writing can also involve an acknowledgement of the co-creation of knowledge by the researcher and the ‘researched’, documenting and analysing issues facing the community, and even influencing policy change and action. While policy change is often an ambitious goal for any research endeavour, I believe that reciprocating with the community should include attempts of publishing the written text to the best of the researcher’s ability, so that the research results could reach a wider audience and potentially be used. Scholars (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008) writing on indigenous research methodologies also emphasise publishing the research findings in appropriate formats as a means of giving back to the community. This is one of the main reasons why I chose to go for a PhD by
publication. I made it explicit in my first meeting with the villagers, explaining the potential for this form of reciprocation, without any direct ‘material’ (monetary or otherwise) reciprocation, in exchange for which I will obtain a degree. As a part of this process, I have shared my published papers with some villagers who have access to the internet and received their comments.

The second dimension of reciprocity is not directly associated with the research itself but rather pertains to the specific context of the community where the ethnographer conducts the fieldwork. While living with the community, an ethnographer can become involved with different forms of gift-giving and reciprocation with community members. In certain indigenous communities, gift-giving is considered a protocol that signifies respect, reciprocity, and shared belonging (Kovach, 2009: 127). Soon after moving to Meyachara, my wife and I became involved in different forms of reciprocal relationships with the villagers (see also Chapter Three). These reciprocations commenced with the generosity of the villagers in different forms, including providing us with a place to stay (an under-construction house belonging to a school teacher), assisting in arranging essential amenities for our stay in the village (e.g., water supply and electricity), frequent offers of fresh food (e.g. vegetables and fruits), and invitations for meals. Many of my casual visits to the homes of the villagers and in-depth interviews were accompanied by food and drinks offered by the host’s family. While the villagers continued to offer us gifts and support in various forms, my wife and I attempted to reciprocate to the best of our ability, with the means available to us. We tried to do so by sharing expenses for tea and autorickshaw fares or by occasionally inviting villagers for food and drinks at our temporary residence. However, our reciprocations were never commensurate and we often felt a sense of guilt that we were giving back far less compared to what, and how frequently, we were receiving. This feeling of indebtedness, or the ‘spirits’ of the gifts that we received, ‘haunted’ us then and continues to do so to this day (Mauss, 1954).

2.5 Creating safe spaces
Throughout the course of this research, ensuring the personal safety of the research participants and myself was a primary concern. I felt that transparency regarding the field research and the protection of the personal information of the research participants was crucial in this regard. In my first interaction with the villagers, I explicitly conveyed that the main objective of my research was to obtain an academic degree by writing and publishing about the community. I was transparent in mentioning that in
order to avoid any potential ramifications emanating from the writing and publication of my research, I would not use the real names of the village and the villagers in my writings. Furthermore, I mentioned that they should not expect any direct and immediate financial or material benefits from this research, as my contribution will be primarily in the form of writing about some social phenomena occurring around this village community. During this first meeting, I also sought their permission to conduct the research and ensured that I obtained their free and informed consent. I made this request despite the fact that four local leaders whom I had contacted over the phone beforehand already welcomed me to conduct the field research. I felt that obtaining open consent was necessary to reaffirm that a significant portion of this village community was supportive of my research, as well as to secure necessary support and cooperation from the villagers in general for our stay.

I tried to remain transparent and cautious about personal safety while collecting data, particularly during the in-depth interview sessions. Before commencing the interviews, I reiterated to the interviewees that the objective of the research was academic and that pseudonyms would be used for the names of villagers and for the village. I also informed them that I was documenting our conversations. Furthermore, I asked them to refrain from sharing any information that they believed could potentially cause harm or risk to them, and to inform me if any parts of the conversations they preferred not to be made public. Ensuring the safety of the research partners during the interview sessions was crucial, as it was the time when they could express their thoughts, opinions and emotions most freely. In order to protect their personal safety, I refrained from taking pictures of the interviewees and the interview sessions. My idea was, unlike other forms of documentation, photographs of the interviewees could potentially lead to the worst possible consequences, particularly because the persons in photographs can be easily identified. The photographs of the villagers that I captured mainly depicted various activities in the village, including farming and social or religious ceremonies.

Keeping in mind the importance of personal safety for both the villagers and myself, I took several precautionary measures to protect the data I collected in various formats (audio recordings, photographs, and notes in my notebooks) during the fieldwork. Firstly, right from the beginning, I used pseudonyms for the village and the research partners in my notebook. I followed the same approach when referring to other actors and institutions that I interacted with or wrote about. Secondly, considering the potential sensitivity of the issues I was exploring and the data I was gathering about the
villagers, I took precautions by creating backup copies of the electronic data (e.g. audio recordings, texts, and photographs). While in Meyachara, I kept multiple copies of this data on my laptop and on portable memory sticks and drives. During my occasional visits to my family in Rangamati town, I ensured that the latest version of the data was stored on a memory stick in a locked location. These measures were aimed to safeguard the confidentiality and integrity of the data I collected.

2.6 Processing and analysing the data
My data collection and analysis were based on continuous processing throughout the study. The process of analysing and organising the primary data, collected through participatory observation, informal conversation, and interviews, began while I was still in the field. This analysis involved continuous reflection on the data as it was being collected, with the aim of identifying critical themes and patterns. While I managed to transcribe some audio recordings during the fieldwork, it was not always possible to transcribe all of the audio materials simultaneously with data collection. Therefore, the preliminary analysis of the field data significantly relied on documenting my major reflections in the field notebooks. This was done alongside random scribbling and drawing of mind maps to capture various ideas and themes. Furthermore, this data analysis process in the field involved making a chain of decisions regarding which social phenomena to observe next and revising and refining the questions I would ask my research partners.

The process of continuous reflection and making decisions while in the field was crucial in ensuring the accuracy and depth of the primary data that I collected. To enhance the validity and depth of the data, I employed a technique known as ‘triangulation’—which involves using multiple methods or sources of data (Carter et al., 2014: 545; Fusch et al., 2018: 19). Triangulation involves looking at the same data from various viewpoints (Fusch et al., 2018: 20). In ethnographic research, triangulation entails employing ‘two or more comparable processes within research to enhance the comprehensiveness of data, to contextualise the interpretations, and to explore a variety of similar and dissimilar viewpoints’ (Tiainen, 2006: 6). While the bias of the researcher is inherent in any qualitative research and is impossible to completely remove from the research process, triangulation helps mitigate this bias (Denzin, 2017; Fusch et al., 2018; Valencia, 2022). By mitigating bias and achieving an enhanced level of validity and reliability of the research results, the ultimate goal of triangulation is to enhance the
quality of research (Carter et al., 2014; Fusch et al., 2018; Konecki, 2008; Valencia, 2022).

Significantly, Denzin (2017) distinguished four types of triangulation in research, involving data, researchers, theories, and methodologies. However, my research primarily focuses on data and methodological triangulation. To ensure the validity of the primary data and achieve a level of saturation, I employed triangulation both within one method (data triangulation) and across multiple methods (methodological triangulation). To gain a deeper understanding of a particular phenomenon, I conducted in-depth interviews with multiple individuals or multiple sessions of participatory observations of similar events. For instance, I observed that even though dadan is generally an exploitative credit arrangement, most peasants go for this loan arrangement (see Chapter Five). To gather diverse perspectives towards dadan, I asked villagers from diverse backgrounds about their reasons for opting for dadan and avoiding it.

In some cases, triangulation also involved examining data across different methods. When significant findings emerged from one method, I sometimes used another method to further investigate and enhance the depth of the knowledge. It was common that ideas generated from participatory observations and informal interviews prompted me to verify them and receive diverse perspectives upon them during in-depth interview sessions. However, this process was often not unidirectional and linear. For example, my curiosity about the samaj was sparked when attending a Buddhist religious ceremony in late May at the local temple, where the karbari (village manager) announced some information about two members of Meyachara Samaj. The following day, while having an informal conversation with Ananda, a neighbour in his courtyard, I asked the size of Meyachara village, and he mentioned that Meyachara has a larger samaj compared to neighbouring villages. These consecutive mentions of the samaj made me realise its significance in the community, prompting me to include questions about the samaj in my interview sessions. However, to fully comprehend its role and functions, I actively participated in various samaj-based social and religious events throughout my fieldwork, as it was participatory observations during such occasions that provided a richer understanding.

Upon completing my six-month ethnographic fieldwork, I returned to Germany in November 2019. Soon after my return, I began to transcribe my remaining audio materials. While I transcribed most recordings, I deliberately omitted some that were deemed irrelevant to the research. It took several months to complete the transcription
phase. Although I was aware that transcription is always a time-consuming and tedious job, I deliberately refrained from outsourcing it to someone else, considering that the meanings of the conversations might get lost in the transcription process. After finishing the transcription, I resumed the analysis of the empirical data more systematically. To facilitate this process, I used the data analysis software MAXQDA (version 2020) for better organisation. While referring to the themes that emerged while in the field, I used an inductive coding process, rather than using predetermined codes ‘to discover the meaning that people award to their social worlds and to understand the meanings of their social behavior’ (Boeije, 2010: 12, in Datta, 2015: 59). This iterative process involved constant back-and-forth movement between ethnographic data and the concepts and data from the textual materials. For instance, when a theme emerged from the analysis of the field data, I needed to triangulate this theme with relevant concepts and debates using textual sources. During this stage of processing and analysing the field data, I took notes and documented my reflections as necessary. The production of the text of this dissertation also continued side by side. Thus, ensuring the security of the processed and analysed data, alongside the ‘raw’ data, once again became crucial. In this regard, I followed a similar strategy as in the field by keeping backup copies of the data files. This time, in addition to having multiple backups on my electronic devices, I started to keep backup files of the data and the written texts on the internet, including in online drives like Google Drive.

2.7 Limitations
While the methods used in this study were effective in generating rich data, I would like to acknowledge that they were not devoid of limitations. An inescapable limitation is the production of an incomplete and fragmented form of knowledge regarding the life struggles of the Tanchangya villagers of Meyachara. Since my fieldwork in this village was only six months long, I was unable to experience and examine all major changes, trends or events in the economic, social and political spheres of the villagers. For instance, although I closely observed how the harvest and marketing of culantro took place, I was not able to witness firsthand how culantro seeds were procured, how lands were rented for farming, and how the slack period (months before harvesting) was managed by the peasant families of the village. Moreover, even during my stay in Meyachara, I was unable to participate in every social-religious occasion that I came across (e.g., due to lack of invitation or unawareness), interview every person that I intended (e.g., because some villagers lacked interest), or receive answers to every
question I asked. As a result, I have not been able to explore every major aspect of the life of this village community. Nor has this study incorporated all the knowledge that I have gained while living in close contact with the villagers. Therefore, this ethnography is essentially a subjective and partial representation of the everyday struggles of the Tanchangya villagers of Meyachara.

2.8 Conclusion
In this chapter, I have described the methodological framework that has guided this study. I have also outlined the rationale for adopting an ethnographic approach and the main methods used. Moreover, I have explained the methodological considerations I made regarding the fieldwork site, my positionality, and the relationship between the villagers and myself, as well as the significance of reciprocity between myself as the researcher and the Meyachara villagers and the processes of data protection and analysis. Although this study has certain practical limitations, it has been effective in delving deep into the strategies of survival and/or upward mobility that the Tanchangya villagers employ in relation to market intermediaries and local state functionaries. The following analytical chapters stand in support of this claim.
CHAPTER THREE

Subsistence, risk-taking, and reciprocity among the Tanchangya in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh


No alterations have been made to the above publication, except for the text that contains language errors and to adhere to a consistent style for the sake of the formatting of this dissertation.

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the livelihood strategies of Tanchangya culantro cultivators of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh, in relation to their subsistence, risk-taking, and reciprocity practices, who have been embroiled in compulsive market participation due to paternalist state policies. It puts forward two propositions. First, the objectives of protecting subsistence and improving familial situations drive Tanchangya peasants to employ flexible strategies in relation to risk management and income generation. Second, it proposes that reciprocity practices provide minimum security to village households in times of crises and exigencies and work as a safeguard against the exploitation of capitalist Bengali traders. It concludes that subsistence struggles lead peasant families to choose the most suitable crops and farming methods while remaining open to diverse income sources. Village reciprocity practices, either as dynamic and evolving relationships between two actors or involving the larger community, having different forms, supplement this struggle of peasants for survival.

3.1 Introduction

Political and scholarly discourses on indigenous peoples have focused on spectacular episodes of dispossession and marginalisation, such as dam, mining, and plantation, caused by capitalism, which is often seen as a force emerging from the outside. While these discourses have been critical in understanding and exposing the harsh lived experiences of many indigenous communities, a recent scholarly debate has drawn attention to piecemeal processes of dispossession and struggles resulting from capitalist
relations emerging ‘from below’ (Li, 2010, 2014). Unlike extraordinary episodes, as this emerging debate maintains, capitalism can emerge ‘by stealth’ (Li, 2014: 9). In this paper I engage with this emerging debate by offering an analysis of everyday processes of encountering the market by indigenous cultivators in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region of Bangladesh where paternalist state policies caught up indigenous peoples in capitalist processes.

Situated in the southeast corner of Bangladesh, the CHT is the only highland region of the country. The 11 indigenous peoples that live in the CHT are, taken together, known as Pahari (Hill Peoples) or Jumma Peoples. Sopher (1964) categorised these Hill Peoples according to the geographic and agroecological locations of their habitations as streamside or valley people (e.g., Chakma, Marma, and Tanchangya) and ridgetop or mountain people (e.g., Bawm, Lushai, and Mro). A critical factor that distinguishes the Hill Peoples from the ethnic Bengalis coming from the plains, who constitute the dominant majority of Bangladesh, is the practice of jum (shifting/swidden) cultivation.

In analysing how the Hill Peoples are dealing with mundane capitalist processes after being shifted from subsistence-oriented jum cultivation, I draw on livelihood strategies of Tanchangya culantro (eryngium foetidum)31 cultivators of the Ghagara-Wagga area of the CHT in relation to their subsistence, risk-taking, and reciprocity practices – some central ideas of ‘moral economic’ scholarship. A major reason behind selecting these rural communities is their close proximity to the markets (in both senses – ‘place’ and ‘space’) while having an amazing blend of tradition adherence and market orientation. Unlike many ‘remote’ Hill communities, they are exposed to risks and opportunities associated with regular market participation. Moreover, this area is characterised by the absence of land conflicts resulting from state policies, a dominant feature of the CHT, which allows greater lucidity in understanding the complexities of livelihood strategies oriented towards market engagement.

I particularly use Meyachara32 village of the Ghagara-Wagga area as a case where I lived for 6 months in 2019 as a part of my PhD research. Situated a few kilometres away from Ghagara Bazar, an important meeting point for indigenous peasants33 and predominantly Bengali intermediaries coming from surrounding urban

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31 A popular green herb used in local cuisines. Locally known as baor, biledi baor, and bilati dhania.
32 The names of the research participants and the village are pseudonymised.
33 The term ‘peasant’ (interchangeably used with ‘cultivator’ and ‘agriculturalist’) is used here to denote settled subsistence-oriented cultivators (as opposed to profit-oriented capitalist farmers) who locally identify themselves as ‘khetkhulye’ – people involved with small-scale farming.
centres, this village is well connected with wider national markets. Meyachara consists of 88 families. While it is a village of smallholder peasants, non-farm livelihood sources (e.g., job or petty business) contribute a significant share of income for some families. Class cleavage is not wide among them, although based on the variations in terms of material resources, they can be divided into high, middle, and low-income families. The size of the land owned and the form of employment of family member(s) are two major indicators of the wealth of these households.

The topography of Meyachara is characterised by an interesting blend of rugged hills with steep slopes, flat valley lands, and a small stream. Counter-insurgency measures imposed by the state forces during the 1970–80s forced homes in the interiors to be relocated to the flat valley land near the village road. Additionally, a recent trend of bringing the village’s homes closer to the village road from the hill slopes, along with population increase, has exacerbated the pre-existing crisis of cultivable valley lands. Therefore, farming here is reliant on hills and remaining valley lands.

Staying among the Tanchangya villagers allowed me to observe and participate in their everyday life, while semi-structured interviews and informal discussions with interlocutors generated deeper knowledge about their life worlds. Interviewees were chosen following purposeful sampling based on initial observations. Having an ethnographic approach of immersing in the everyday life of peasants was critical in understanding the multiplicity of processes, relations, and forces that they routinely engage with.

My positionality as an indigenous researcher coming from the CHT shaped my data collection and writing processes. While offering me ‘insider knowledge’ about the community, my positionality eased the processes of getting access, building trust, and continuing relationships with the interlocutors. It also gives me access to the inner dialogues of indigenous peoples. However, my membership to a different ethnic group (Chakma) maintains a certain distance from the Tanchangya.

This paper puts forward two major propositions. First, while it is plausible that Tanchangya peasants tend not to put subsistence at risk, they make use of flexible strategies in order to save their families from going below the threshold of subsistence as well as to augment family resources seeking to improve their situation. Thus, they can be prudent risk-takers who follow innovative strategies of risk management. Second, the reciprocative and redistributive practices not only provide them with minimum insurance during dearth and extraordinary moments of life but also serve as a ‘safety net’ against the domination of market intermediaries.
First, I revisit some moral economic approaches towards subsistence, risk-taking, and reciprocity in order to sketch out how this paper utilises these notions in relation to the livelihood struggles of Tanchangya cultivators. Next, it outlines major state policies that contributed to transforming largely self-reliant indigenous economies in the CHT to market-dependent economies. The third and fourth parts of this paper deal with how the drives to protect familial subsistence and improve family situation shape strategies of Tanchangya peasants in dealing with risks associated with agricultural production and other income-generating activities. The final parts examine how reciprocity practices support Tanchangya peasants in times of crises and exigencies and ensure protection in their negotiations with Bengali intermediaries over the ‘just price’ of culantro.

3.2 Revisiting peasant subsistence, risk-taking, and reciprocity

While analysing the moral economy of precapitalist Southeast Asian peasants Scott (1976) places the primordial goal of maintaining reliable subsistence at the core of the struggles of a peasant family. Scott (1976: 4) claims that, driven by this primordial goal a peasant avoids the risk of going below the threshold of minimum income and ‘minimizes the subjective probability of the maximum loss.’ The use of the term ‘subsistence’ with contemporary agriculturalists, however, obscures their possible relationship with markets, especially in years of high yields and surpluses (Edelman, 2005: 335). In fact, the state of peasants being embedded in trade and markets is a feature of any contemporary economic system (Scoones, 2020: 28), as production aimed at subsistence can take place through exchanges in the market. Therefore, subsistence, as used here, is embedded with risks and opportunities associated with production and market participation.

Tania Li (2014: 14) claims that such a cautious model as Scott’s is more suited for the cultivators in fertile rice-growing areas where they have the possibility of intensifying production using intensive techniques (e.g., terracing and irrigation) than in the contexts (e.g., frontier areas) where there is plenty room for experiment. Indeed, a generalised claim of peasants being merely risk-averse agents is too simplistic because many peasants can even be ‘risk-preferring’ (Henrich & McElreath, 2002). Different studies show that peasants can be calculated risk-takers who keep their income sources diversified (e.g., Banerjee & Duflo, 2007; Plews-Ogan et al., 2017: 420–21; Xu, 2017). Therefore, I maintain that far from being risk-averse, many agriculturalists may engage in constant trial and error for their survival.
‘Moral economists’ claim that the safety first logic led precapitalist peasants to develop village-based reciprocal arrangements composed of kin, fellow peasants, and patrons with the intent to ensure minimum income of the village members (Scott, 1976; Wolf, 1969: xiv–xv). Significantly, Polanyi (1957, 1944/2001) differentiated three forms of economic integration – reciprocity, redistribution, and market exchange, the first two being the foundations of precapitalist economies prior to the ‘great transformation’. While reciprocity is founded on movements between ‘correlative points of symmetrical groupings’, redistribution requires ‘appropriational movements toward a centre and out of it again’ (Polanyi, 1957: 250).

While supporting this claim of reciprocity practices being a dominant feature of precapitalist economies, I underscore that reciprocal relations depend on the history of interactions between and among people (Carrier, 2018: 24). As Scott (1976: 46) highlights: ‘The key is the actual content of the relationship – the actual patterns of reciprocity – and not its formal descriptive terms.’ But all kinds of reciprocal relations are based on ‘relative uncertainty’ – when X gives something to Y, X cannot predict what or how the return (if at all) from Y will exactly be (de L'Estoile, 2014: 66). In fact, although gift contributes to building and sustaining social relationships, often there is no clear obligation or guarantee of reciprocation of a gift (Elder-Vass, 2020: 679; Heins et al., 2018: 127). Kerkvliet (2005: 16) claims that strong trust can develop among people with kinship ties or other kinds of personal relationships, who have regular contact, reciprocal interactions, and share a common geographic space.

‘Moral economists’ (e.g., Polanyi, 1957; 1944/2001; Scott, 1976; Thompson, 1971) claim that the transition to market economies results in the breakdown of village-based practices of reciprocity and redistribution. Undeniably, the emergence of capitalist relations – characterised by the private and unequal ownership of means of production, competition, and compulsion (Li, 2014: 8) – may result in the erosion (if not breakdown) of reciprocity practices. However, capitalism is not an ahistorical force that emerges in every place following one single trajectory. As Walsh-Dilley (2013: 659–60) shows, engagement with new markets may even strengthen community reciprocity practices. Similarly, as the case of the CHT shows, reciprocity among Tanchangya peasants, although eroded, emerges as a strategy for dealing with compulsion arising from mundane processes of capitalist market development (Li, 2010).
3.3 Emergence of agrarian market capitalism in the CHT

*Jum* cultivation once was the main source of living for Hill Peoples (Lewin, 1869: 13; Sopher, 1964: 107). It was not just a mode of agricultural production, but a ‘way of life’, where community ties and mutual reciprocity and redistributive practices worked as protection of families in times of crises and exigencies (Adnan, 2004: 153; CHT Commission, 1991: 49; Mohsin, 2002: 82). While swidden lands were managed through communal arrangements, the toiling work involving farming was done through mutual sharing of labour (Mohsin, 2002: 82). A labour-sharing arrangement that the Tanchangya commonly practised until a few decades ago was *bawlhunya.* When a family needed extra hands for farming (e.g., harvesting) or non-farming purposes (e.g., repairing a house), it would ask for support from its fellow villagers. The ‘able’ souls of the village would then help the host family. The host family did not have any obligation to pay wages but would often arrange a good meal for the helping souls according to their ability. As agricultural production was mainly targeted at meeting the needs of the family, this *jum*-centred economy required limited market engagement (Shelley, 1992: 81).

The modernist lenses of sedentarism of the colonial British officials identified *jum* cultivation as ‘primitive’ and ‘wasteful’ (Mey, 2006: 259; Mohsin, 2002: 81–87; Tripura & Harun, 2003: 21). A major consequence of such attitude was the active promotion of plough cultivation in the region since the 1860s (Mey, 1996: 80; Mohsin, 2002: 81–87; Sopher, 1964: 107–8). The plough scheme included interest-free loans, exemption of *jum* tax, and establishment of private land rights (Mey, 1996: 79–83). Around the same period, the British started to introduce forest conservation policies that shrank land for *jum* cultivation (Mohsin, 2002: 89–93). In 1883, one-third of the total forest area of the CHT was converted into ‘reserved forests’ where farming was totally prohibited (Mey, 2006: 259–60).

Despite initial reluctance, the British were successful in gradually transforming a section of valley people into plough cultivators. Particularly some Chakma and Marma benefited the most from it as they managed to acquire plough lands (Arens, 1997: 1811). As the Hill Peoples were not accustomed to wet-rice cultivation, richer Hill families relied on Bengalis with requisite skills imported from the plains, who were followed by an influx of Bengali craftsmen and merchants (Adnan, 2004: 21; Sopher, 1964: 108). This shift to plough cultivation led to the partial substitution of

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34 Similar practice was known as *maleya* and *lahcha* among the Chakma and the Marma respectively.
reciprocity practices with monetary exchanges, and mutual labour organisation with individualised transactions (Mey, 1984: 78–79). It also resulted in increased commodification and higher dependency of the Hill Peoples on product and credit markets dominated by Bengalis (Dewan, 1990: 157–58; Mey, 1984: 78). Bengali traders and moneylenders have since then become in hegemonic control over all major monetary and credit transactions in the hills (Jahangir, 1979: 599–600; Mey, 1984: 79).

After the formation of Pakistan in 1947, its ruling elites continued with the process of uplifting the ‘backward’ hill economies through the implementation of mega development projects that wreaked havoc on the local population. The Karnaphuli Hydroelectric project was particularly devastating which resulted in the loss of homes and most arable plough lands, alongside massive uprooting and displacement of people (Adnan, 2004: 24; Mohsin, 2002: 102–6). The state rehabilitation programme for the displaced population included several fruit plantation projects, which also sought to abolish jum (Mey, 1984: 105–6; 1996: 120–21). These developments, alongside a rise in population, created an additional burden on the remaining swidden lands and forests in the region. As jum cultivation became increasingly economically nonviable, people were forced to look for alternative sources of livelihood (e.g., fruit gardening).

The denial of indigenous leadership’s demands for self-determination and protection of socio-political-cultural rights by the leaders of the Bengali nation-state soon after the liberation in 1971 drove indigenous peoples to go for a sustained political movement led by the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS). After the military took over the power of the country in 1975 this movement was forced to turn into an armed struggle. Alongside the imposition of heavy militarisation since 1976 and the implementation of a massive transmigration programme of Bengalis from the plains since the late 1970s aimed at demographic engineering of the region (Adnan, 2007b), transforming hill economies was a major counter-insurgency strategy. Measures were taken to break down the economic independence of indigenous peoples by imposing infrastructural development projects, depriving them of ‘traditional’ livelihoods, the orientation of modern agro-industrial technology, and integrating the resources and locals more with the national markets and the ‘mainstream’ (CHT Commission, 1991: 77–85; Gerharz, 2017b: 141–43; Levene, 1999: 351). Over the past four decades, the state has been active in promoting market-oriented crops (e.g., rubber and fruits), in place of jum (Harun & Tripura, 2003). On the other hand, the state supported Bengali settlers and merchants in accumulating land and consolidating power and domination over key economic sectors of the region (Adnan, 2004: 139).
The abovementioned shifting structural conditions, on one hand, and the dire need for survival, on the other, naturally led indigenous peoples to adapt their agricultural production and engagement with capitalist market economies. However, as virtually all major marketspaces are under the hegemonic domination of Bengalis, their participation is mainly as subordinate agents embroiled in (subsistence-oriented) production (ibid.). Indigenous cultivators, such as Tanchangya peasants of Meyachara, therefore, have virtually no choice but to negotiate everyday market transactions through individual strategies and existing reciprocity practices.

3.4 Subsistence struggle, risk-taking, and the emergence of culantro in Meyachara

Meyachara once was a community of *jum* cultivators. They were forced to abandon traditional rice-based *jum* cultivation about 40–50 years ago because it appeared to be nonviable as a source of livelihood. During this transition, particularly poorer villagers suffered from economic hardship and had to supplement their income from logging, charcoal production, and wage work. In this pursuit of finding a secure livelihood, the earlier generation continued with constant trial and error with choices of crops and farming methods, while taking the marketability of the crops in the emerging markets into consideration. While the state was actively promoting the market economy ‘from above’, the villagers continued their experiments to explore market opportunities ‘from below’. They employed a trial-and-error method such that when one crop turned out to be nonviable, they sought out another crop that might potentially secure their livelihoods.

In this prolonged process of finding a suitable crop, at one stage ginger held the title of the ‘champion’ for several decades. It used to be a durable crop and generated sufficient income to let many peasants fulfil their aspirations alongside meeting their current needs. However, the era of ginger came to an end in the last part of the 2010s when a rhizome rot disease swept the entire region. Fortunately, culantro was already adapted to valley conditions and farmed in the village as ginger's competing alternative. It was traditionally grown on hill slopes as a ‘minor’ crop of the *jum* crop mix.

As far as the story goes, culantro farming in the valleys was first introduced by a Tanchangya cultivator of the nearby Roisyabili area who tried out farming culantro by broadcasting culantro seeds similar to rice farming in beds. Kumar, visiting that area, found this method interesting and brought it back to Meyachara. Around 1988–89, he tried it out on a small scale. Although initially, culantro did not interest other peasants, over these decades, the knowledge of farming culantro evolved to a great extent, and
Tanchangya peasants emerged not only as the custodians of this knowledge but also the proud educators of neighbouring Chakma and Marma village communities.

Currently, culantro is grown as one of the components of polyculture practised in the area. A wide range of vegetables is grown in the same patch as culantro which aligns with its growing season, which starts in January and continues up to October. Culantro is harvested in roughly 4–5 rounds, starting in May, with an interval of 3–4 weeks between two harvests. The culantro harvest involves hand-picking plants from the patch, washing them in the stream, and binding them into bunches of 1 kg after separating unnecessary parts. Once culantro bunches are ready, they are either picked up by the agents of Bengali intermediaries from designated spots near the village road to be transported to various cities of the country in large volumes or they are sold by growers directly in the nearby marketplaces.

Despite the knowledge gained concerning production and delivery, farming culantro right at the foothills of rugged hills means risks of landslides, soil erosion, and flash flood during the wet season, while the dry season means a regular crisis of water. Moreover, there are occasional experiences of diseases, pests, bad seeds, and low fertility of the land. But even in a good year, the challenge that virtually every peasant household—regardless of wealth and income status—must deal with is the crisis of capital. Culantro farming requires high capital investment every year—for all its inputs are pricey. Therefore, whether a peasant family would go for farming culantro or not essentially depends on if it has been able to secure capital from either its internal sources or from outside. Most peasant families plan well in advance to save funds for seeds and land35 for the following season. Yet virtually every family has been forced to borrow credit of some sort in recent years, either from ‘formal’ sources (e.g., banks and NGOs) or from Bengali intermediaries.

Why do peasants choose to grow culantro in the face of such a large constellation of risks and challenges then? The greatest motivation behind growing culantro is that it places the subsistence of most peasant families in a safer position, along with the possibility of surplus in good years. As Shuvasish, a needy peasant, claims, ‘If I don't farm (culantro) at all, I would miss out on the sales that take place during this time (rainy season). If I don’t farm culantro, the transactions (bechakena) won't be there, and the income would not keep rolling. When I farm culantro, it keeps rolling.’ This concept of ‘rolling’—denoting continuation and repeated streams—of

35 There are only few families with enough valley land to farm culantro every season after mandatory rotation with rice for regeneration of soil quality.
income is a critical feature of culantro. While it is harvested in 4–5 rounds for over 5–6 months, each of them generates cash inflow.

Some villagers compare the ‘rolling’ nature of income from culantro with jobs where one gets a monthly salary. What this regularity ultimately provides is a kind of autonomy in managing the risk of high price fluctuation of culantro, as well as flexibility in meeting household and external claims. Due to this feature, many growers, particularly middle and poorer peasants, consider it essential to cultivate culantro. As Adinath, a needy peasant, presents his logic: ‘You have to farm it… for your survival. Even if you farm other crops, you have to farm at least a bit of culantro. With culantro, you can ‘do’ bazaar and can continue transactions.’ In the local context, ‘doing’ bazaar implies purchasing food and other essentials, especially on weekly market days. The notions of ‘rolling’ incomes and ‘doing’ bazaar are closely connected to the most frequently mentioned advantage of culantro farming—the vegetables that are grown alongside culantro. There is no requirement for additional investment in the vegetables except for the seeds. Vegetables become ready for harvest several weeks before the culantro harvest takes place. Their abundance generates regular cash inflow to the growers for several months after meeting their dietary needs. A major reason behind growing vegetables alongside culantro in the form of polyculture is to ensure food security (Plews-Ogan et al., 2017: 422). As Sunil, a middle peasant, informs, ‘Usually, by the time it is Bishu, the vegetables become ready for harvest… If you grow culantro, there is no shortage of vegetables... You only need to buy meat and fish.’

3.5 Alternative crops and risk management

With the rapidly emerging market economy in the background, the goals of securing subsistence and a better future for the villagers have led them to cover ‘every possible corner’ with different cash crops (particularly fruits and drumstick), in addition to culantro, for income generation. However, the choices of new crop varieties, farming methods, and technologies always involve the risk of failure. For that matter, while opting for a new crop, they do not only contemplate profitability but also negotiate with their primordial nature of risk aversion. Therefore, the trial of a new crop variety starts with trying it out on a limited scale. Ashutosh, a middle peasant, explained to me his experience with Java apple for which he had got a good price on the previous market day. He had planted some Java apple trees along with other fruit trees about 6–7 years

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36 Local weekly market days are Saturday and Wednesday.
37 Bishu is the biggest social festival of the Tanchangya, celebrated every year from April 12–14.
ago as one of the first persons in the village. Because of his current success, he was thinking to cover his orchard with Java apple trees.

In a similar vein, when making relatively high investments, they would try to minimise risk to the extent possible by gleaning adequate information, learning methods well, and building partnerships. For example, Ananda, a middle peasant, closely observed his paternal cousin, Montu, before making up his mind to go for developing a papaya orchard in the hills. Montu, a middle peasant, received regular income on market days throughout the rainy season of 2019 from a small papaya orchard that he had developed in the hills the previous year by improvising a water-supplying technology of an NGO. Ananda then planned with his maternal cousin Sanjib to jointly develop a papaya orchard in the hills using the technology of Montu. They then jointly accumulated capital in addition to the land of Ananda and the experiences of Sanjib of farming papaya to develop a papaya orchard.

Such ventures of mono-crops, unlike emerging capitalist fruit production in the CHT, are less practised by middle and poor rural peasants because the general trend among them is to opt for mixed fruit trees. My observation reveals that this practice is rooted in the goal of diversifying income sources and the sedimented knowledge of polyculture: mixing crops in the hills. As Vanu Kumar, a middle peasant, contends:

We cannot survive if we do not do it (fruit farming) in stages. We have limited land. If one item finishes, we need another. Say, when mangoes and litchis are gone, then guavas would arrive… Basically, something has to be there. If one goes away, what will we survive on? For that reason, we have to farm different items. If we can grow all year round, then the year rolls. If this item pulls through a month and another item another month, the year may take its turn.

This logic of income diversification particularly applies to drumstick, an emerging yet already a ‘celebrity’ crop. Grown in the hills, now virtually every family has at least some drumstick trees. The growing popularity of drumsticks is not because of the income it generates with limited capital and care, but its harvest season. Its harvest takes place during a slack period (March–April) when income from other alternatives becomes seriously limited, while cash is necessary for the lavish celebrations of Bishu that take place at this juncture.

The abovementioned analysis of flexible market-oriented survival strategies is not exhaustive. The need for additional cash income has led a section of middle and poorer peasants to take up off-farm vocations such as that of seasonal wage workers, agents of intermediaries, autorickshaw driving, and shopkeeping, alongside farming, over the past few decades. Yet some more wish to engage in off-farm livelihood sources
in the future. However, no peasant of this generation foresees complete abandonment of agriculture with the common notion: ‘farming has to be there’, as agriculture still is the dominant provider of subsistence for their families. The bottom line is that they keep their windows of opportunities for a better future open.

3.6 Intra-community reciprocity and redistribution

While every peasant family employs innovative and flexible strategies for a secure livelihood, these strategies are primarily built on the material resources that each patrilineal peasant family has inherited and accumulated (or lost), but also on factors such as entrepreneurship, employment, and skills. This diversity in resources and capabilities leads a good number of families to supplement their subsistence activities with reciprocal exchanges with their fellow villagers.

3.6.1 Food sharing

I first encountered the generosity of food sharing among Meyachara’s villagers on the day my wife and I moved to Meyachara for my ethnographic fieldwork. In the evening, Jonaki, a middle peasant and a neighbour, brought us beans, luffa, and other vegetables from her farm, anticipating that we would not have anything for dinner. We were not introduced to Jonaki before, but she had learnt from our gatekeepers that we would become her neighbours for a few months.

As I investigated this practice of gift-giving in the form of food (vegetables and fruits) sharing further, it became apparent that it is a commonly practised arrangement of everyday reciprocity in this village community. Such exchanges are common among relatives and neighbours within the village and occasionally extend to people from other locales. As Ashutosh, a middle grower, explains:

Sometimes… they are just simply shared with relatives. Say, you have not farmed while I have – I will share with you for consumption. As a neighbour, I have to give to you. And sometimes… you have farmed while I have not. Then you will share with me. This is normal. We are supposed to share… Say, your sister is visiting you and they have not farmed, then you would say, “Go to the patch, pick vegetables, and take them away.”

The form of such sharing can be different depending on the form of the relationship between individuals. Jonaki clarifies: ‘If someone does not have something, we would say, “Find that (from the farm) and take it away.”’ But if it is within the members of the same family lineage, say, Rina's family (cousin) has some items on their farm, and either we don’t have them in ours or ours is a bit far, we would just fetch them from
their farm, cook, and eat. They also do that.’ Such exchanges can be very spontaneous and require no prior agreement between the giver and the receiver. Ashutosh contends: ‘Say, I am picking beans (from the patch), and you are passing by. I ask you, “Do you have beans?” And you reply, “No.” Then I feel compassionate and offer you some beans.’ I observed once the daughter of my main gatekeeper, a local leader, sharing joy because they had received beans from four neighbours on the same day by coincidence.

Beyond kinship, such exchanges of food largely rely on continuously evolving fluid relationships between two villagers (and outsiders). While the consumption of fresh produce by all families in the village follows the same local culinary science, low-income families value it differently from their high-income neighbours. For low-income families, the value of a bunch of beans or luffas may lie in saving the family from going hungry. As Manu, a needy peasant, explains: ‘People give (vegetables) if asked. Some give spontaneously. Some give feeling compassionate (towards the receiver).’ He also clarifies that the exchange does not have to be between two kin or employer and employee, but can occur between any two individuals who share a good relationship: ‘One can ask anybody… because people care for one another (cha-cha).’

However, it should be noted that not all the food grown is shared with others, nor is the sharing equal among families. As market sales of vegetables or fruits constitute a major share of income for growers, they are shared particularly when they grow in abundance. Families must prioritise their own dietary needs or income from sales when the produce become scarce. Likewise, families with limited land and income remain more on the receiving end, as opposed to their high-income neighbours who possess greater capacities to share. When relations of reciprocity become so unequal, they become indistinguishable from clientelist relationships of patronage.

3.6.2 Labour and resource sharing

This relationship of cha-cha, manifested through food-sharing, however, does not fully apply to wage work, as it is largely monetised. The toiling work of manual clearing of weeds before harvest and picking decent-sized culantro plants during each harvest round create plenty of job openings for women and girls. During each harvest round, a one-kani (40 decimals) plot demands 8–12 female workers for 3–5 days. Therefore, every peasant family must hire extra hands regardless of its farm size, and virtually every family becomes a provider of extra labour to others. Female workers take turns – after completing one farm, they would move to another – but always after completing their own farm first. Due to evolving relationships among different households, these
rotating bands of workers are often composed of the same members, although they are sometimes reformed and regrouped. Some women from richer families also work for others, but this redistributive arrangement of labour is an opportunity for women from middle and low-income families to augment the regular family income. Several female workers opine: ‘If you stay idle, who will give you BDT 250 (US$2.98)? And if you go to work for 4 days, it becomes BDT 1,000 (US$11.90). Who would give you that?’ This arrangement can be related to hitherto practised *bawlhnuya*, although voluntary helping out has been replaced by cash wages.

Since the male member(s) of the harvesting household take(s) care of carrying, washing, weighing, and binding culantro, wage work opportunities are limited for men in culantro farming. Therefore, men from the poorer families look for other farm and off-farm wage work in and around the village. One popular wage work is logging firewood in the nearby hills, particularly during the dry season when brick kilns of the neighbouring Chittagong district are fully operational. During other times, they are seen engaging in wage work in valley farms, clearing weeds and bushes in the hills, and participating in construction work of different sorts offered by richer families. Kripayan, a needy peasant, explains: ‘My income is now mainly from wages… I do whatever work is given by the *malik* (owner). If he asks (me) to clear weeds or cut bushes, I do it. … I do whatever work I come across. I work basically within the village. Where else would one get work?’

Being a small community largely connected through kinship ties, there is no restriction concerning who can work for whom. However, a closer investigation reveals that often a certain *malik* is offering wage work frequently to the same person(s). Most low-income families appear to be protected by their high-income patrons – often close relatives – through the frequent provision of wage work. For example, Sukhiram, a needy peasant, is often seen working for his uncle Vardrasen, a high-income agriculturalist, who managed to send his son abroad for work some years ago. Patrons may also pay wages upfront, lend money, or help procure food and essential items. Such protections also involve granting permission to use agricultural equipment (e.g., water pumps or spray machines) that poor families cannot afford. Although less frequent, but it is not uncommon for a landed relative to temporarily grant the right to use a piece of land for living or small-scale farming. Poor peasants reciprocate such ‘favours’ of the relatively rich patrons through a wide range of actions – from expressing gratitude and

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38 US$ 1 is equivalent to BDT 84 (average rate of 2019).
loyalty to ‘voluntarily’ ‘helping out’ the rich with some household chores or taking care of their culantro fields.

In rare instances, relationships between two persons grow in such a fashion that they can even arrange for occasional exchanges of labour without involving any monetary exchange. It can be in the form of hitherto commonly practised but now nearly extinct (due to increased monetisation of labour) arrangement of exchanging labour days named *bala dhara-dhari*. Instead of exchanging cash wages, it involves keeping track of the number of labour days (*bala*) that two persons helped each other and returning an equal amount of labour days. Also, there can be such relationships where spontaneous ‘helping out’ (*bawl-dena*) occurs without keeping track of hours or days. As Rabi, a needy peasant, outlines: ‘I often work with Bitu (friend)… We don't exchange money for work. We help each other (*bawla-boille*). You help me. I help you.’ He clarifies that such ‘helping-outs’ are not reserved for everybody: ‘How we respond to someone's appeal (for help) is dependent on who is calling.’ The recipient of this ‘gift’ may choose to ‘help out’ the giver later if she/he wishes on another occasion. But there is no accounting of working hours, no exchange of money, and no obligation to return.

### 3.6.3 Extraordinary moments

Such microscopic quotidian peasant reciprocations become suddenly vivid when extraordinary moments appear in rural scapes. When a birth, a marriage, a major sickness, a death, or an extraordinary incident of that sort occurs, it transcends the boundaries of smaller and evolving relationships among peasants. In such cases, exchanges involve all local institutions mediating reciprocity – kinship, friendship, village membership, and the *samaj*. A *samaj* here is a social institution based on membership to a local Buddhist temple that involves a range of socio-cultural-religious affairs concerning the members of the *samaj*. The *samaj* plays a central role in life course rituals as well as in settling minor disputes involving *samaj* members through arbitration (*bichar-salish*). However, exigencies that involve forces such as the state, market forces or political parties are usually considered beyond the scope of the *samaj*. Thus, the scope, role, and functions of the *samaj* here have some similarities with the *samaj* in Daripalla villages in the plains of Bangladesh that Adnan (1997) studied, although they are considerably different in terms of structure and distribution of authorities and responsibilities.
According to the local tradition, each family ought to be a member of a *samaj* and obligated to shoulder certain duties and responsibilities towards it. Such responsibilities include financial contributions, volunteering chores, and participation in different socio-cultural-religious events. In return, every *samaj* member is entitled to special benefits and care from other *samaj* members. Especially during times of crises and exigencies, *samaj* members collectively shoulder a major share of the burden faced by affected members. Following is an abridged version of a longer ethnographic vignette of an extraordinary moment:

*As Roshni, the two-year-old daughter of Sukhiram, a needy peasant, dies early in the morning after struggling with her sickness for several weeks, men from every family head towards the cremation ground with logs, bamboos, and other materials. Villagers collected money for Roshni's treatment and prayed for her recovery. Now that she is gone, they are contributing materials, labour, and craftsmanship needed for her burning ceremony – mogoda. After noon, her body is burnt in the participation of over 150 people from the *samaj*. Then the grieving family receives spontaneous financial contributions from participants. *Samaj* members continue financial contributions for a week and take most responsibilities of hosting the (final) saatdinya or saptahik kriya ceremony a week after mogoda, involving a community gathering, religious rites, and a community meal.*

Extraordinary moments, such as the case of Roshni's, are of paramount importance for understanding not only the redistribution of labour, money, and other resources but also the processes of reconstruction of community integrity. These moments are often spontaneous and can transcend the limits of similarities and differences of the evolving smaller nodes of intra-community relationships. It is also important to note that alongside social, cultural, religious, and emotional dimensions, such incidents can have serious economic implications for a village household. When the economy of a family is challenged and the community's reciprocative and redistributive institutions extend support, the burden of the family becomes lighter.

### 3.7 Reciprocity and encountering market capitalism

Being a market-centred community dependent on cash crops, the livelihood struggles of the Tanchangya peasants ultimately come down to the price that they receive for their

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39 Elsewhere I have provided a detailed account of dadan contracts that I describe in this section (*Everyday Politics of Dadan Contracts and Price Differences in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh*, B. Chakma forthcoming) (Chapter Five of this dissertation).
agricultural produce, particularly culantro. This is especially because the capital investment is so high for culantro that the overall income of a peasant family in a particular year lies in what kinds of prices it receives. This section analyses how peasants perceive just price, and how the community operates as a protection mechanism in their everyday negotiations with Bengali intermediaries that are in hegemonic control of both credit and product markets.

I documented that the price per kilogram of culantro ranged between BDT 40–140 (US$0.48–1.67) over the harvest season in 2019. Different culantro growers received different rates at different times from different market actors. The decision of where a peasant family would sell its culantro or to whom it would deliver primarily depends on whether it has received advance money – dadan – for culantro or not. For over two decades, a growing number of Bengali line\textsuperscript{40} intermediaries from surrounding urban areas have been supplying ‘interest-free’ dadan to the growers in Meyachara and the surrounding villages. Only a handful of peasant families were found that managed to ‘avoid’ dadan contracts with their ‘capacity’ to generate capital from other sources. But since many growers struggle with the high capital investment in culantro, when celebrating Bishu or in case of a family emergency, they seek readily available advances from line intermediaries. Therefore, these advances are not necessarily a matter of choice but often due to the desperate need for cash (Li, 2010: 399). Moreover, such advances do not involve the kind of hassles that one must go through when credit is taken from institutional sources. But once advances are received, recipient cultivators become contractually obligated to supply culantro to the dadan-providing intermediaries at prices determined by the latter throughout the season. Since prices offered by these fixed intermediaries are always below the competitive market prices, it poses the question of the ‘justness’ of the prices received by peasants.

While the margin received from the running market price is a determinant of the justness of the price, dadan contracts additionally require taking the gap between the market price and line price into consideration. It is generally accepted that the line intermediaries can pay BDT 10 (US$0.12) less than the running market price of culantro per kilogram as a premium because line intermediaries do not charge any explicit interest on their advances. Beyond this margin, the price becomes ‘unjust.’ In practice, even a BDT 20 (US$0.24) price differential is often tolerated. But when the difference becomes BDT 30 (US$0.36) or higher, many growers start to express

\textsuperscript{40} Line implies the market space created by dadan-providing intermediaries.
disappointment. Nevertheless, for several weeks, the difference remained BDT 40 (US$0.48) or above in 2019. This situation of exploitation and disappointment raises a moral question: should peasants adhere to the obligation to supply as per the terms of dadan contracts?

Generally, most peasants continue to supply to the line intermediaries from whom they have received advances. The main reason seems to be a kind of ‘loyalty’ that has developed out of this interdependent patron-client relationship between peasants and rich intermediaries due to years of transactions and interactions. My observation reveals that this loyalty has not ‘naturally’ developed out of the mere morality of ‘keeping the words.’ It has been ‘earned’ by the intermediaries using artificially imposed control mechanisms over peasants. Such sophisticated control measures of intermediaries include establishing themselves as essential gateways to the wider markets; creating dependence through easily accessible credits; a network of employees (i.e., agents, wage workers, and autorickshaw drivers) from among peasants who ensure their indirect but constant presence inside communities; occasional gifts (e.g., snacks at local eateries); and contacts with local state and political leaders. In the case of a breach of a contract, intermediaries can ‘set precedent’ through invoking local arbitration (shalish-bichar) using local political party members, the verdicts of which would often go in their favour. For instance, in 2016, Rajat borrowed BDT 40,000 (US$476) as dadan from Kashem, a line intermediary. Rajat supplied culantro two rounds for BDT 30 (US$0.36) and BDT 40 (US$0.48) per kilogram to Kashem, while the market rate was running at BDT 60–80 (US$0.71–0.95). In the third round, Rajat took about 200 kilograms to Ranihat Bazaar and sold at BDT 75 (US$0.89). As this news reached Kashem, he lodged a complaint to some local political party leaders.41 Their verdict was that Rajat must return the money that he had borrowed within a few days. As Rajat was short of cash, he had to sell his cow to return the money. Kashem since then stopped offering advances to him.

Thus, the dadan contracts place peasants at a twofold risk. If they supply all their produce to line intermediaries at a lower rate, their subsistence can be at risk. On the other hand, supplying all their produce to unspecified non-contractual intermediaries at higher rates creates the risk of being abandoned from readily available advances and facing arbitration. Therefore, a ‘weapon of the weak’ (Scott, 1985) that many peasants employ is to surreptitiously supply a portion of the harvest to another non-contractual

41 Members of a local branch of the PCJSS.
intermediary at a higher rate like Rajat did but supply the rest to the contracted intermediary so that they don't ‘get busted’. In this case, the claim that peasants make is that the line intermediary has not purchased the entire farm with his dadan even when they ‘get busted’. The second but even more popular practice is to sell culantro to the marketplaces in small volumes. Such piecemeal ‘nibbling away’ usually stays beyond the notice of the intermediaries. If somehow noticed or brought to attention, peasants can claim that they have been forced to take some to the marketplace just to make some shopping money for essentials – bazaar khoroch – because the rate offered by her/his line intermediary is too low. The third weapon is available to all peasants – to bargain for a higher rate than the offered rate through direct confrontation. In some cases, some peasants become successful in securing some bazar khoroch.

This struggle for just price is primarily individual. Yet, it also has collective dimensions, for all peasants eventually become involved in this struggle – through a kind of shared trust and obligation of protecting one another. Peasants often require one another for the above-mentioned instances of ‘everyday resistance’ (ibid.). It is common for a peasant with better contacts to assist a fellow peasant in selling her/his produce to a non-contractual intermediary. Moreover, dealing with intermediaries requires regular updates about prices, moves and motives of intermediaries, strategies of fellow peasants, and information about changes in the market. Therefore, the villagers maintain a thick web of information, knowledge, and assistance in their everyday interactions. While every peasant is a beneficiary and recipient of this invisible network, every peasant is a provider. One of the major sources of information in this network is the employees of the line intermediaries. But probably the ‘collective silence’ of the entire network of the peasantry regarding any of their surreptitious delivery of culantro reflects their communal solidarity par excellence in their negotiations with the line intermediaries. Even paid employees rarely reveal information about this ‘secret business.’ After all, the supplying peasant is a relative or a neighbour whom he will meet the next day. In this regard, sustaining this relationship with fellow villagers is generally regarded as more important than the relationship with the rich intermediaries. However, as the case of Rajat shows, it cannot be claimed that the solidarity of this web of relationships is entirely effective, for relationships between and among different peasants are uneven. In some cases, the aim of maintaining long-term clientelist relations with a powerful patron like Kashem can supersede maintaining a relationship with a weaker neighbour. Time and again, cases are observed when information reaches intermediaries and confrontations between peasants and intermediaries take place. Yet,
the trust and solidarity that grow out of complex relationships of customs, kinship, friendship, and everyday interactions among the villagers still rarely let such incidents occur.

3.8 Conclusion
To conclude, while engaging in the debates on the everyday struggles of indigenous peoples, I explored the livelihood strategies of Tanchangya culantro cultivators in the CHT, focusing on their subsistence, risk-taking, and reciprocity practices. As it emerged in the analysis, structural conditions set by colonial and post-colonial states have embroiled contemporary Tanchangya cultivators in compulsive market participation with capitalist traders and intermediaries. Therefore, the idea of subsistence revolves around market engagement, which leads to the evolution of its localised meanings and understandings, particularly in relation to the selection of the most suitable crops and farming methods.

I argued that while many Tanchangya peasants place importance on secure subsistence, their routine market engagement, characterised by dealing with regular risks and uncertainties, makes their position far from being conservative. They can be prudent risk-takers who not only assume tolerable risks associated with production and market engagement but also develop a diversified portfolio of income generation. Therefore, they remain flexible, open, and innovative with the objective of improving their family situation. This openness drives many peasants to do ‘whatever work’ they get. The openness towards work is not exclusive to any particular class but rather a part of the collective pride of being peasants in Meyachara. As Aungshu, a rich peasant, claims, ‘No one sits idle here.’

The examination of reciprocal exchanges reveals that increased engagement with market economies has led to the erosion of traditional reciprocity and redistributive practices. However, the existing reciprocity and redistributive arrangements still provide minimal insurance for their subsistence. Such intra-community practices take on various forms, emerging from ongoing relationships among villagers, encompassing kinship, village membership, friendship, and patron-client ties. These varied relationships develop over time and form nodes of different sizes, shapes, and shades through their everyday sharing of food, labour, employment, and resources. Therefore, they are evolving and negotiated associations rather than static ones.

However, there are two situations that transcend these small nodes of village reciprocity arrangements. First, in the face of an extraordinary moment of the life
course, the fluid boundaries of these small nodes are transcended, and the larger community becomes involved. Community members shoulder some burden that arises from such occasions. The second situation involves negotiating ‘just price’ for culantro against Bengali intermediaries who have hegemonic control over credit and product markets. The village network of peasants serves as a ‘safety net’ by equipping peasants with necessary market information, providing mutual support, and maintaining a collective silence when peasants use their everyday weapons against the exploitation of Bengali intermediaries.

Finally, the case of culantro growers stimulates a re-thinking of concepts such as the gift, reciprocity, and community integrity when individualism and self-interest are becoming increasingly dominant in this era of capitalist globalisation. This case reminds us that friends, kin, and neighbours hold significance, not just money. The arrangements in place to provide protection during times of crisis among fellow human beings indicate that there is an ongoing necessity for reciprocal and redistributive arrangements to ensure the survival of indigenous cultivators confronted with the risks and uncertainties of participating in markets controlled by capitalist traders and intermediaries belonging to a dominant ethnic group.
CHAPTER FOUR

Samaj as a Form of Self-Organisation among Village Communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh


My contribution to this paper includes empirical data collection and analysis, input into the theoretical debates that it engages with, and writing the empirical sections of the paper.

No alterations have been made to the above publication, except for the text that contains language errors and to adhere to a consistent style for the sake of the formatting of this dissertation.

ABSTRACT

Bangladesh has a strong tradition of self-help during natural disasters, a remarkable amount of social movement activism, and a large number of non-governmental organisations supporting people in micro-credit schemes. In this article, we shed light on the hitherto neglected field of self-organisation initiatives among the indigenous population in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region of Bangladesh. We critically evaluate organisational types initiated and formed by community members themselves and analyse one particular form, the samaj organisation among the Tanchangya. Based on an analysis of samaj’s defining characteristics and features, and its significance for self-regulation in indigenous communities, we compare our findings with writings on samajes of Bengali Muslims and Hindus. In our case, the local Buddhist temple and social events are major arenas where the duties and responsibilities associated with samaj membership become apparent. Rather than constituting the ‘traditional’ counterpart to ‘modern’ institutions, samaj continues to represent a specific and informal mode of community formation which continues to take over important social, ritual, and political functions within the contemporary society shaped by nationalist state-formation. We conclude by arguing that samaj among the Tanchangya is constituted by reciprocative and redistributive practices which strengthen a collective sense of belonging.
4.1 Introduction

With a strong tradition of self-help during natural catastrophes such as floods or cyclones, a remarkable amount of social movement activism, and a large number of non-governmental organisations supporting people in micro-credit schemes, Bangladesh has become well-known for its successful self-organisation, particularly in its rural areas. At the same time, the relatively young nation-state, which came into existence only after a bloody civil war against the Pakistani regime in 1971, has been subject to massive developmentalist intervention and treated as an ‘aid lab’ (N. Hossain, 2017). These traits have contributed to the construction of an imaginary of a mainly rural, more or less homogeneously poor population with strong social ties at the community level. This imaginary overlaps with the Bangladesh state’s efforts of projecting the image of a homogenous Bengali Muslim population. That the country is also home to an ethnic and religious diversity has hardly been addressed by these narratives. Apart from so-called ‘religious minorities’, or non-Muslim (Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian) Bengali populations, Bangladesh is also home to 1,586,141 indigenous people, the largest concentration of which live in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), a hilly region in the south-east, bordering Myanmar and North-East India. Surprisingly, their initiatives in self-organisation are given little attention in either policy debates or the existing scholarship.

In this article, we shed light on the hitherto neglected field of self-organisation initiatives in the CHT. Particularly, we critically evaluate organisational types which are initiated and formed by community members themselves, paying special attention to so-called ‘traditional’ forms of self-organisation. The article is structured as follows. In the first section, we review the literature on Bengali-dominated self-organisation in the plains of Bangladesh. We show how self-organisation has become an important part of the country’s self-understanding, but also reveal that post-colonial development has led to a diversification of said self-organisation. Furthermore, we highlight that samaj, hitherto a major informal institution in the plains of Bangladesh, is currently in decline due to a number of socio-political transformations in recent decades. In the case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, nation-building attempts have been shaped by the developmentalist imaginary of unequally advanced segments of the population, leading to a construction of stereotypical images of indigenous peoples as ‘primitive’ or

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42 Interestingly, the compilation of statistics published by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics in 2018 fails to mention either religious or linguistic differences (see BBS, 2018).

43 This number originates from the 2011 census. Indigenous groups, however, claim that the number of indigenous is as high as five million (see P. Chakma & B. Chakma 2020).
‘backward’. Our research shows that there are similarities, but also many differences between self-help initiatives in the plains and the hills. Particularly, we map self-organisation initiatives and critically evaluate these against the background of existing power relations. In the second section, we focus on samaj as a specific organisational form among the Tanchangya community. The Tanchangya, who constitute one of more than eleven linguistically and culturally different ethnic groups in the CHT, is a close-knit indigenous community with a strong sense of ethnic belonging, and is locally well-known for running various self-help initiatives and organisations. We focus on the case of ‘Meyachara Samaj’ (pseudonym) for the empirical analysis. Based on rich empirical data collected in selected rural areas of the CHT, we will reveal Meyachara Samaj’s defining characteristics and features, as well as its significance for self-regulation in indigenous communities. Our analysis of Meyachara Samaj reveals that the local Buddhist temple and social events are major arenas where the duties and responsibilities associated with samaj membership become apparent. We conclude by arguing that samaj among the Tanchangya is constituted by reciprocative and redistributive practices that strengthen a collective sense of belonging.

4.2 Self-organisation in Bangladesh

The existing literature on self-organisation reveals a strong alignment with notions of community and locality. Classical definitions of community associate it with more or less clearly defined geographical spaces where dense social relationships can exist and face-to-face interactions produce a strong sense of togetherness and commonality (Appadurai, 1996; Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2005). Since Tönnis’ differentiation between community (Gemeinschaft) and society (Gesellschaft), sociological thinking has been dominated by an understanding of community as a location where individuals are bound together by commonly shared values and moral ideals. Social relationships within communities are marked by stable, authentic, emotional, and ‘warm’ connections between individuals, whereas society appears to be artificial, rational, contractual, and ‘cold’ (Laux et al., 2010: 40–41). This differentiation, which mirrors other binary forms of describing social phenomena, has informed analyses of social order in all parts of the world and forms an important tool for categorising societies along the tradition-modernity continuum. It is strongly linked to the differentiation of informal or formal institutions, with the former being associated with traditional forms of organising social relations and the latter being assigned to the realm of modern society. Thus, the community is at the centre of self-organisation. This is the space where collaborative
and solidary decision-making serves the aim of solving collective problems based on the needs and preferences of its members (Neubert, 2021: 8). As we shall see in this section, this imaginary has found fertile ground in Bangladesh, a country marked by a large rural population and largely dependent on food production from the flood-prone deltaic region.

Existing literature on the history of self-organisation provides an ambiguous picture. On the one hand, colonial government and European observers have described the Bangladeshi region as having fewer corporate institutions in comparison to other parts of South Asia (S.A. Islam, 2002: 97). This imaginary, described as an example of ‘institutional atomisation’ (Tepper 1976, cited in S.A. Islam, 2002: 97), was regarded as a structural deficiency. On the other hand, it has been acknowledged that community organisations have contributed to the provision of various social security services, something that the (pre-)colonial powers and later the ‘weak state’ could not. Lewis, for example, notes that there is a lengthy tradition of community organisation and voluntary actions such as village welfare societies, cooperatives, and associations (D. Lewis, 2011: 112). Private voluntary work is undertaken by better-off members of the community in organising schools, and mosques, or providing relief for victims of natural disasters (Ibid.: 112). Whether in Muslim, Hindu, or other communities ‘giving’ used to have an important function in the societal order. During the early twentieth century in particular, many self-help village-level organisations were formed, some with the support of local administrators, others solely from villagers’ own initiatives (D. Lewis, 2004: 306; D. Lewis, 2011: 112).

A traditional form of local self-organisation is samaj. Literally meaning ‘society’ or ‘association’, samaj denotes a social institution which generally consists of households or families living in close proximity to each other and often belonging to one or several patrilineages (Adnan, 1997, 2007a; Bertocci, 1970). It is responsible for dealing with samajik (literally ‘social’) affairs, under which fall the socio-economic activities, rights, and responsibilities of the members/families who belong to a samaj. In addition to relationships through kinship, patron-client relations among multiple actors can also be constitutive of the samaj, whereby samaj is controlled by charismatic leaders and their supporters (Lewis & Hossain, 2008b: 72). In such contexts, gaining leadership in samaj requires the building of reputations through participation in public

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44 Bangladesh has been identified as a ‘weak state’ within a ‘strong society’ (White, 1999).
45 For example, kabi samaj (poet’s association) and sahitya samaj (literary association/society) among Bengalis.
activities and charitable work (ibid.). Thus, *samaj* is largely an informal social institution led by informal leaders.

After the liberation war of 1971, Bangladesh lay in ruins. The war-related destruction was further aggravated by vulnerability resulting from its geographical location, where the confluence of various large rivers flowing into the Bay of Bengal causes frequent flooding and tropical storms, the region had been massively affected by famine on top of a seasonally occurring poverty and associated lack of food known as ‘monga’ in the northern districts of Bangladesh (Paul et al., 2013). This disastrous situation spurred a huge local and international relief effort. As part of the initial relief support, top-down approaches reinforced clientelistic links with local rural elites (D. Lewis, 2011: 113). At the same time, as local traditions of self-organisation were deepened and transformed, interventions from international organisations supported the emergence of one of the largest NGO constellations worldwide. Local activists had to acquire new skills to access funds and were inspired by outside ideas, while it was oftentimes members of the reformist elite and the progressive middle class who sought to build careers in the social sector (D. Lewis, 2011: 114). In this context, Naomi Hossain (2017: 66) highlights that, over the course of the institutionalisation and professionalisation of the sector, private patronage has become organised philanthropy, and taken over an essential role in providing welfare and social security. In modern Bangladesh, increasing autocratic rule and a corresponding shrinking space for civil society, increasing class disparities due to neoliberal interventions, especially in rural areas, and the resulting enlargement of spaces of violence shaping people’s everyday lives (Gerharz & Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2017) have contributed to an ambivalent relationship between the state and civil society.

Despite the trend towards NGOisation in Bangladesh, *samaj* has survived. In most scholarly literature, *samaj* is described as a ‘traditional’ form of local self-organisation, in contrast to the state as a ‘modern’ form. At the local level, *samaj* and Union Parishad (UP), the lowest level of the state administrative structure, exist side by side (Arens, 2014: 179).46 While *samaj* is often described as being organised along kinship and patron-client relationships (D. Lewis, 2011: 22; Mahboob, 2003), the UP is a democratically legitimised and formalised local organisation, inseparable from the

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46 The Union Parishad (Union Council), comprising of a chairman and twelve members, represents administrative geographical unit called union. A union is made up of nine wards, each of which are comprised of a number of villages. The elected union council members are entrusted with providing services to local citizens in relation to development, law and order, and welfare. Retrieved March 14, 2022, from http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd.
state apparatus. Due to its informal character and independence from the state, *samaj* is considered a relatively flexible and negotiated institution (Bertocci 2001, cited in Lewis & Hossain, 2008b: 72). In practice, there are often overlaps between the two institutions because some individuals belong to both. The fact that the state machinery is described as being ‘overlaid with a complex web of informal relationships between power-holders’ (Lewis & Hossain, 2008b: 10) can be explained by the significant role that patronage plays in the Bangladeshi state (D. Lewis, 2011; Schulz & Kuttig, 2020: 142). Therefore, both the state and the society, viewed as separate and distinct entities, are shaped by overlapping patron-client relationships at different levels.

Research on *samaj* in the plains of Bangladesh has further shown that while it has become weaker in some locations (Lewis & Hossain, 2008b, 2017), it has completely disappeared in others over the past few decades (Siddiqui 2000 cited in D. Lewis, 2011: 22). The reasons behind its continued decline include a rise in intergenerational tensions, the growth of party politics after the fall of Ershad’s military regime and the restoration of parliamentary democracy in 1991, and increased external linkages of *samaj* households (Lewis & Hossain, 2008a: 39). Studies have shown that in contemporary rural plains of Bangladesh, *samaj* is utilised only occasionally and that even then, rather than the leadership being made up of the hitherto *matbars*, or informal village leaders, it is now led by actors such as the chairmen of UP and other figures of the ruling political parties (Lewis & Hossain, 2008a, 2008b, 2017).

Research on the Bengali-inhabited plains of Bangladesh has revealed that *samaj* mainly functions as a type of assembly where village leaders decide about village affairs and that women largely have no official place and no voice in the meetings (e.g., Adnan, 1997; Bertocci, 1970). The main functions of *samaj* are: (a) to provide stability, for example through conflict resolution; (b) to provide a social space where solidarity and fraternity are performed; and (c) to mediate social relationships between its members as well as between members of different samajes. *Samaj* is vested with the task of ensuring that people conform to a morally correct code of conduct. It provides a basic frame of reference for social activities and constitutes a form of sociality for its members. Its boundaries, thus, are clearly demarcated.

A major activity of *samaj* in the plains region is to convene *salish* or *bichar-salish* (local arbitration)—a temporary council of *samaj* leaders. Lewis and Hossain (2017: 48) claim in the plains that nowadays, *salish* is a major means through which *samaj* is sustained as a meaningful institution. Many *salishes* are now dominated by UP chairmen or leaders of ruling political parties (Lewis & Hossain, 2017: 50); however,
they are still an important means of adjudication in rural Bangladesh. While the significance of class or caste-based dependencies has decreased due to an increased diversity of livelihood options available to poor populations, providing them with more economic independence from richer community members (see Arens, 2014: 185), *samajes* have been further drawn into the realm of party politics. Therefore, rather than the erosion of such a ‘traditional’ institution, or its replacement by more ‘modern’ institutions, *samaj* has been transformed as part of a convergence of formal and informal societal realms. In contrast to that in the Bengali-dominated plains, *samaj* in the Chittagong Hill Tracts has not only been subject to lesser scholarly attention but has also interacted with state formation and the subsequent establishment of formal organisations in very different ways. After briefly discussing the historical and political context of the CHT, we concentrate particularly on *samaj* among the Tanchangya in order to elucidate its peculiarities vis-à-vis *samaj* in the communities in the plains.

**4.3 The Chittagong Hill Tracts: Conflict, peace, and self-organisation**

A look at the history of the Chittagong Hill Tracts and its relationship with the newly created Bangladeshi nation-state reveals why civil society and self-organisation have received little scholarly attention. Belonging to the Himalayan foothills, stretching between North-East India and the Arakan Hills of Myanmar, the CHT used to be regarded as belonging to Zomia, a territory untouched by state domination (van Schendel, 2002; Scott, 2009) until the British annexed it in 1860. While the integration of the hill region into the South Asian territory alone brought with it massive changes in cultural terms, the British soon decided to assign a special status to the region, and to protect the ‘tribals’ living in the territory from Bengali influence by adapting the so-called Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation of 1900—a manual that described how to administer the CHT and thus served as the main tool for the region’s enclavement. While the regulation did protect the traditional customs and values of local indigenous peoples, it also turned the region into one on the margins of the nation-state, making it prone to the exploitation of its economic resources (van Schendel, 1992: 114).

With the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, East Bengal became a part of Pakistan. Pakistan continued the colonial enclavement policy in the CHT. In the 1950s, the Pakistani government decided to invest in the ‘development’ of the region, at the heart of which was the construction of a hydroelectric power plant. The resulting reservoir swallowed up huge areas of formerly populated and cultivated land and rendered a large number of people homeless without compensation. Many Hill Peoples
decided to take refuge in neighbouring North-East India. This massive uprooting, which continued over the next decades, destroyed local forms of self-organisation and left little room for new forms as communities were torn apart and dispersed.

The economic exploitation of the CHT and political domination over the local indigenous peoples have been justified by citing cultural differences between the ‘civilised’ Muslim and the so-called ‘tribals’. In line with European views informed by assumptions of a unilinear social evolutionism, the Hill Peoples have been described as ‘savages’, ‘wild’, and dependent on a nomadic lifestyle. As a ‘people without history’, they have been constructed as ‘primitive’ and thus separated not just from the European colonisers, but also from the more ‘civilised’ and sedentary Bengalis (Ibid.: 103). Although anthropological interest in the CHT in the (post-)colonial period has revealed some insights into the complexities of the social, political, and cultural lives of the Hill Peoples, Bangladeshi writers have continued to reproduce the colonialist imaginary. Scholars have tended to look upon the Hill communities from a ‘bird’s-eye view’ with little ethnographic sensitivity or interest in the constitution of social order.

This kind of limited knowledge production within the post-colonial nation-state reinforced the adoption of a cultural assimilationist policy, in which the Hill Peoples were invited by the Bengali ruling elites to ‘promote into Bengalis’ (S. Chakma, 1985: 49), but which left little space for to the consideration of local forms of self-organisation. After 1971, the leadership of the new Bengali nation-state required that the inhabitants of the CHT should integrate into the Bengali mainstream. Local leadership, however, opposed the idea and demanded the recognition of their identity—to be respected as culturally different, not inferior. After decades of being dominated and the devastating experience of being treated as the collateral damage of the large hydroelectric development project, the Hill Peoples made strong demands for more self-determination. A space for political self-organisation, however, was denied them. A resulting spiral of violence turned the region into one of South Asia’s most militarised spaces. The CHT was isolated from the rest of Bangladesh and foreigners were denied access. Human rights violations and atrocities went unseen and undocumented. As part of its counter-insurgency strategy, the Bangladesh government encouraged Bengalis from the plains to resettle in the hills in large numbers, ultimately enforcing a dispossession of land of many indigenous peoples and leading to a shift in the demographic composition. Once again, a large number of CHT inhabitants had to flee to neighbouring India or were internally displaced. In addition, a terrorist imaginary attributed to the local population and constant surveillance by the military forces
discouraged them from engaging in local forms of self-organisation. In some areas, however, local institutions survived the armed conflict, which formally ended in 1997 with the signing of a treaty. As we will show, these local forms of self-organisation have been transformed in different ways.

Like in the plains of Bangladesh, many local communities actively maintain their *samajes*. The relationship of informal *samaj* to the local formal administrative structure shapes its self-conception and functioning. The CHT’s formal administrative structure, however, is more complex than that of the plains and can be summarised as being comprised of three main components. Firstly, the formal administration is inseparable from the nation’s overall administrative and bureaucratic structure. As elsewhere in the country, the administrative system in the CHT is constituted by the Union Parishad at the lowest level, the Upazilla Parishad (Sub-district Council) at the sub-district level, and the District Administration at the district level. Secondly, an indigenous administrative system, unique to the CHT, constitutes a major part of the administrative body. The indigenous administrative system was formalised by the British after the annexation of the region in 1860 and is made up of a council of local indigenous chiefs. It is organised into three tiers, whereby a *karbari* (village manager), headman, and raja form the representation of a village, several village representations are conglomerated into second-tier *mauzas*\(^{47}\) and then circles\(^{48}\) (see Roy, 2000). Thirdly, an additional local governance structure was created under the auspices of the CHT Accord of 1997. Although many of the agreed provisions of the accord remain unimplemented, it has enabled the formation of a semi-autonomous administrative structure comprising the CHT Regional Council and three Hill District Councils. As per the CHT Accord, these councils have to be bestowed with a number of tasks that include development as well as law and order in the region. The accord also allows for the recognition of the above-mentioned indigenous administrative system. As will be explained in the following section, the tasks of the lower level units of the indigenous administrative system can overlap with *samaj* and customary leaders such as *karbaris* can play a major role in *samajik* affairs in the CHT. Contrary to the plains, however, although representatives of the formal administrative system, such as local UP representatives, have recently gained some more prominence and power in the *samajes*, the concentration of party-dominated political representatives is not as advanced as in

\(^{47}\) A *mauza* is a territorial administrative unit and is comprised of a number of villages.

\(^{48}\) A circle is comprised of a number of *mauzas*. The British divided much of the CHT into three circles and 373 *mauzas* following the annexation of the CHT in 1860.
the plains. Rather, so-called customary leaders, *karbaris*, teachers, and other respected individuals maintain a powerful position in many rural contexts.

Notably, the unique administrative system in the CHT was largely shaped by the ideals and practices associated with land management and shifting cultivation practices—practices which distinguish the CHT from much of the country. Before the introduction of plough cultivation and private property ownership by the British, as part of the formalisation of the administration of the CHT, all land was collectively ‘owned’ by indigenous communities. The demarcation and allocation of land for shifting cultivation was collectively determined by indigenous communities, under customary leadership (Mohsin, 2002). The various practices involved in shifting cultivation—from vegetation burning to harvest—were carried out by groups which operated under the premise of mutual cooperation and help (Ibid.). Thus, reciprocal and redistributive practices were major elements of this subsistence-oriented ‘way of life’ of indigenous peoples. Such practices began to break down as the production relationships in the CHT became more monetised through the introduction of plough cultivation and the privatisation of property—processes which have been actively promoted in the name of ‘progress’. Remnants of such practices are still found in institutions such as *samaj*.

The CHT Accord of 1997 reopened the CHT for developmentalist interventions on an unexpectedly large scale. One of the major findings from various analyses and fact-finding missions conducted by donor agencies in the late 1990s was that the conflict had led to an erosion of self-organisation and that intervention was required in this field in particular (Gerharz, 2001). The rationale behind a focus on strengthening so-called civil society actors pursued by interventions, however, has been mainly driven by functionalist considerations. Due to the fragile ‘post-conflict’ situation, state institutions rest upon a rather volatile ground, which increases the risk of developmental cooperation. In line with approaches to peace-building developed during the 1990s, donor agencies have argued that local ‘civil society’ organisations should also be involved in or indeed take over the implementation of development programmes.

Since the early 2000s, there have been intensive moves towards NGOisation in the CHT, in line with similar developments in the plains, where empirical studies reveal that the NGOisation in the rural areas has been shaped by processes of technocratisation (White, 1999) and de-politicisation (Feldmann, 2003). The increased number of NGOs, many of which have focused on micro-credit schemes and so-called ‘confidence-building’ initiatives, has certainly strengthened the sector responsible for delivering services to the local population (see Gerharz, 2002). This has not only sidelined other
existing forms of self-organisation, especially in rural areas but also contributed to their invisibility among scholars and policy-makers alike. However, our empirical research shows that in the CHT, various forms of self-organisation do co-exist and that they have relationships to, overlap with, and influence each other. Especially in rural areas, samaj continues to be the dominant mode of self-organisation, taking over important regulatory tasks and contributing to social cohesion. In order to show how samaj continues to provide stability and how it contributes to the establishment of social order, we will now detail an in-depth analysis of a specific case of self-organisation, the Meyachara Samaj, in a locality inhabited by Tanchangya, one of the indigenous groups inhabiting the CHT.

4.4 ‘Meyachara Samaj’: Samaj as a (trans-)local form of self-organisation
A samaj is usually centred around a specific territory (Karim, 1990: 92), which can be a smaller geographical unit such as a village or a larger cluster of villages. In some contexts (e.g., among the Chakma of the CHT), a samaj represents all the households within the boundary of a location (often a village). In such cases, the geographic location and boundaries are important factors for identifying different samajes that are ‘located’ next to one another. Although location is important for samajes in virtually any context, in some cases samaj groupings emerge primarily based on a social institution (e.g., a mosque or temple) or even an influential family (Mahboob, 2003), where territory is less important. In such cases, it is the loyalty to a particular social institution or a family, not the locale per se, that determines membership to a samaj.

Our research focus, Meyachara Samaj, belongs to this category. Therefore, a samaj may not necessarily be bound to a fixed territory, while samajes are subject to break-ups and regroupings (Adnan, 1997). Far from being a static social institution frozen in time, a samaj can be compared to a dynamic organism, made up of households which are subject to processes of evolution. In this vein, Meyachara Samaj has been undergoing transformations for generations. One cannot know exactly what earlier constellations of Meyachara Samaj were like prior to 1951, when the first Meyachara temple, within the territory of several Tanchangya villages, was established. The temple gradually became the centre for the different samajik affairs of the surrounding villages. Over the last five decades, three more temples have been established in these villages. Subsequently, separate samajes have been formed around these temples and enticed a considerable number of villagers to change their membership to these new samajes.
Our data reveals that Meyachara Samaj has undergone an increase in membership since the foundation of the temple and that both the in-migration and out-migration of individuals and families have contributed to a reconfiguration of the samaj. As an example of in-migration, several Tanchangya households moved to the village of Meyachara after the Kaukhali massacre in 1980. These households were co-opted into Meyachara Samaj. Out-migration (temporary and long-term) has been triggered by a rise in awareness among samaj members of greater opportunities for education and work in other locations, particularly since 1990s. The temporary or long-term absence of these members, however, does not always trigger the end of samaj relationships.

This out-migration of individuals and families reveals an important issue of belonging associated with a samaj. According to established Tanchangya custom, it is mandatory for an individual to belong to a samaj. While one can attain membership to a samaj by birth, a membership can continue even after an individual or a family moves from the samaj territory to a new location. This phenomenon is particularly evident among students studying in cities, or individuals and families that have moved to other locales in order to improve their livelihoods. Therefore, a change in one’s location does not lead to the automatic termination of membership, but one can retain membership through the occasional participation in samajik affairs and making contributions (e.g., subscription money), according to conditions determined by the samaj. In other cases, those moving permanently to other locales may at some point cease to be members of their old samajes and become members of new ones. In such cases, these migrating members usually inform the previous samaj leaders of their intent, and their name is then removed from the list of members of the old samaj. An exception to this is the custom of matrimonial change of membership: When a woman is married off to a man of a different samaj, the transfer of her membership is ‘automatic’ and she is co-opted by her husband’s samaj. In rare instances, the husband can also move to his wife’s location and become a member of his wife’s samaj.

Our analysis shows that despite its territorial character, samaj is primarily a social institution to which people belong, irrespective of their location. With the population of Meyachara becoming increasingly mobile due to changing modes of income generation and the transformation of educational opportunities, Meyachara Samaj has developed mechanisms which ensure that memberships continue to be valid despite the (temporary) absence of individuals or families. We can thus conclude that

49 The CHT’s indigenous peoples reportedly experienced over a dozen massacres between 1970s and 1990s, carried out by Bengali settlers with support from the state (see Mohsin, 2002).
Meyachara Samaj is more translocal than a local institution and that it functions as a space for belonging which continues to bind out-migrated members to a locality.

4.5 Samaj organisation

While each and every member is constitutive of Meychara Samaj, members have certain activities, rights, and responsibilities that keep the samaj functional. An ‘active’ membership to a samaj is underscored by engaging or milana (literally ‘to mingle’) in samajik affairs. In this regard, a basic/foundational responsibility is cash contributions to the temple. Every samaj household is obliged to contribute a yearly subscription to meet the regular temple expenses. Additionally, samaj members make contributions to various Buddhist festivals during the year as well as to necessary developments to temple infrastructure.

Meyachara Samaj is made up of members from three councils, which represent three different age groups or generations. Similar to samajes in the plains, the council of the elders (the murubbi or bura-buri samaj) is considered the highest tier in the structure, and with them lies the ultimate decision-making power and responsibility for major samajik affairs. This is followed by the council of hoichchya-mangoin (the hoichchya-mangoin samaj) which represents those persons that are married but are not considered old enough to belong to the council of the elders. There is no specific age limit for a person to transition from a category of hoichchya-mangoin to that of the elderly. Normally, those who have grandchildren, or whose children are married are considered eligible to join the council of the elders, but there can also be deviations from this custom in practice, particularly when it is deemed necessary for the samaj. However, the transition from the juba or gabuchchya (youth) category to hoichchya-mangoin is strictly defined by marriage. Only persons of 18 years or older, who are not yet married, are allowed to be members of the youth council (the juba or gabuchchya samaj). As soon as a person is married, she/he ‘automatically’ becomes a hoichchya-mangoin. In addition to these three councils, there is a committee which governs the temple, comprising elderly and hoichchya-mangoin samaj members, which takes care of the day-to-day running and development of the temple. Each of these four councils and committees has a president (usually a man), elected by oral voting, who is responsible for convening meetings, coordinating affairs concerning the council or committee, and representing the council when necessary.

While each of these councils does have specific responsibilities to perform (see below), in practice the de-facto leaders and major decision-makers in samajik affairs are
men who have gained respect within the community. First and foremost among them is 
the local karbari, the customary village manager, responsible for settling social and 
family disputes, who is usually nominated by the villagers and appointed by the circle 
chief. The karbari also plays an important role in dealings with other local state officials 
and non-state actors (e.g., NGO officials). Therefore, the karbari is essential in the 
village as well as in samajik affairs.

As in the plains, local public representatives (e.g., members and chairmen of 
UP) have emerged as important players in affairs concerning samajes in the CHT in 
recent decades. They play key roles in representing their constituencies when 
interacting with high-level state and non-state actors. Their role is also critical in 
securing state resources pertinent to samajes (e.g., temple funding). Yet other influential 
samaj leaders may also include state officials (both current and retired), teachers, 
political activists, and those who have gained influence due to their individual charisma, 
position, and/or their material contributions to the samaj. Therefore, Meyachara Samaj’s 
leadership is still rather heterogenous, and yet to become the domain of political actors, 
unlike in the plains. The transformation of the samaj leadership, in this context, can be 
read as the response to the process of state-making in the CHT. Our data reveals that 
this form of self-organisation is entangled with other forms of organisation and is 
increasingly important as a means to acquire access to the resources distributed by the 
state.

4.6 Temple, rituals, and samaj

Meyachara Samaj combines several patrilineages. The descendants of the three brothers 
that founded Meyachara village represent the largest percentage of the households in the 
samaj, and the individuals (men) that often take the lead in samajik affairs belong to this 
lineage. As with established Tanchangya customs, membership to the samaj is 
formalised through membership to the Meyachara Buddhist temple.50 Local versions of 
Theravada Buddhism shape their social world. As various Tanchangya samajik affairs 
also involve religious rites, Buddhist rituals, and samajik affairs overlap, and it is 
sometimes difficult to differentiate what is ‘social’ (non-religious) and what is 
‘religious’.

As membership to the samaj is also based on the membership to the temple, 
Meyachara Samaj is not only represented by the households in Meyachara village where

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50 Some members perform puja or pujo (animist rituals) involving ancient deities in addition to Buddhist 
rituals—an expression of syncretism which is quite prevalent in South Asia.
the temple is located but rather by the 122 households in Meyachara and three
neighbouring villages which belong to both the Meyachara temple and the Meyachara
Samaj. Similarly, several of the 88 households within the boundaries of Meyachara
village do not belong to the Meyachara Samaj but to samajes ‘located’ in neighbouring
villages. This underscores the fact that the samaj represents more of a religious and
social space than simply a location.

In addition to the financial contributions mentioned above, samaj members also
contribute to the temple in kind. The celebration of special religious festivals at the
temple and the development of temple infrastructure often require physical labour
which samaj members gladly contribute. For example, when bricks and sand needed to
be carried up the hill where the temple is located for further construction (e.g., a
staircase), it is the samaj members who performed the task. Additionally, samaj
households are obliged to take sowaing (cooked food) to the temple for the Buddha
idols and the monk on a weekly rotational basis which is set by the samaj. Samaj
members also donate cooked food on festival days.

Buddhist religious festivals at the temple are of particular importance for the
samaj, being occasions on which samaj members can come together for social
interactions. In addition to the collective performing of religious rites in this social
space, on said occasions samaj members often share a communal meal. Important
decisions concerning the whole samaj or specific samaj members can be made,
announced, and even acted upon. For example, at a religious festival in 2019, it was
announced that Roshni, a two-year-old girl, was sick, and the collection of donations to
support her treatment immediately began.

Aside from religious festivals that take place inside the temple boundaries,
major life-course events (e.g., births, marriages, or deaths) involve the performance of
Buddhist rituals at home. However, the ‘formalities’ (e.g., inviting monks to one’s
home, or organising a communal meal) required with these major events for samaj
members involve activities that reveal the non-religious components of the samaj.
While the specific rituals involved in these events differ, all of them require some form
of engagement from the samaj. Since the organisation of such events often revolves
around questions of the host family’s capacity (e.g., how many people are to be invited,
or what food is to be served), there is no obligation to invite or engage all samaj
members. Rather, the host family can choose to engage only a sub-section of the samaj

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51 If the host family wishes, religious rites involving life-course events can be performed in the temple as well.
(e.g., close kin or elders). Be it a large or small event, once invoked by the host family the *samaj* becomes obligated to respond accordingly. Aside from participating, other *samaj* members outside the host family shoulder much of the burden associated with such occasions. Even at the smallest events, elderly people are often invited to offer blessings and recognition (especially in marriage). They also oversee and provide guidance and advice concerning such events when it is required. Depending on the needs and desires of the host family, members of the younger councils become directly involved in carrying out different activities.

Financial contributions are also common on such occasions. Participating members from elderly and *hoichchya-mangoin* councils as well as non-*samaj* guests usually give money to the host family as a token of their blessings. In the case of a death, monetary contributions are spontaneous and particularly evident, as *samaj* members, relatives, and other well-wishers make cash as well as material (e.g., wood and bamboo) contributions to support the family of the deceased in performing the final rites. Donations often exceed the amount which is required for these rites. The event of death was particularly referred to when explaining why membership to a *samaj* was important to our interlocuters. The reasons given were not necessarily for the financial contributions, but also the fact that that whole *samaj* stands by the aggrieved family.

*Samajik* affairs are largely built on reciprocal and redistributive practices in a Polanyian sense, where money and labour are pooled together to be redistributed among *samaj* members as deemed necessary. Three councils perform their responsibilities to meet the needs of the *samaj* members. On the occasions of *samajik* events, the elderly council members provide necessary guidance and advice concerning the rituals, while the younger councils implement different activities. For example, in case of a *samajik* event involving a community meal (e.g., death or wedding), the *hoichchya-mangoin* council members usually shoulder the responsibility of buying, preparing, and cooking the food necessary for the event. While providing support to the older councils, the youth council members than do the necessary cleaning and preparing of the place of the event, washing of utensils, and serving of food and drinks. Although smaller sub-groupings involving *samaj* members based on kinship, friendship, or patron-client relationships also exist, there is generally no observable divide in terms of overall participation or contribution. In fact, *samajik* events strengthen community solidarity, despite internal divides or disconnections that might exist among individual *samaj* members. While similar traits can be found among the Tanchangya outside the context of the *samaj*, what distinguishes *samajik* occasions is that members are not only
necessarily ‘guests’ but to some extent play the role of ‘hosts’ too. This distinction becomes clear in the following example: Member A of Samaj X resides in locale Y, otherwise dominated by Samaj Y. In the case of a samajik event, Member A would primarily ask for support from Samaj X, not from Samaj Y. The members of Samaj X would then shoulder the necessary responsibilities of hosting the event, while neighbours of Member A, Samaj Y members, will be invited but primarily as guests. Samaj, thus, has an important function in the local society: it provides a space for reciprocity and thus contributes to building informal security.

4.7 Solidarity, collaboration, and conflict

Religious and life-course rituals reveal the strong solidarity that exists among samaj members. This also applies to the enjoyment of privileges resulting from access to the resources that a samaj possesses. Several years ago in Meyachara, the youth council members raised funds from families within the samaj and purchased furniture, equipment, and utensils which are frequently required for the organisation and decoration of large samajik events. These items are also rented out to households in need. The rental rate offered to samaj members is half that offered to people outside the samaj. These items have thus become a source of income for the youth council, which is then used to fund samajik affairs while reducing the cost of organising events for samaj members. Possessing these items also allows greater autonomy in organising future events, which previously had to be rented from traders in surrounding urban or commercial areas.

However, deviations from and dissent over samaj customs do take place. Not all members contribute or participate in all samajik activities, and some violate agreed promises. There have been cases of members committing offences, or engaging in disputes, requiring salish or local arbitration. How the samaj deals with such issues depend on the type, frequency, and relative degree of the act. As regular and occasional financial contributions to the temple are foundational parts of a samaj membership, they are considered obligatory. When one fails to make regular financial contributions, the samaj can respond through such minor actions as samaj leaders requesting payment from the defaulters. When members fail to respond correctly despite such requests, samaj responses can gradually become harsher. For example, in mid-2019 Meyachara Samaj leaders started an initiative to raise funds to complete the construction of the first floor of the temple which they had started in 2014. Samaj members were asked to pay their dues plus an additional amount. Two months later a samaj leader announced at a
religious festival that some families had not yet paid their dues. He then blamed these families for not caring for the *samaj* and uttered: ‘Will a time not come when they will need support from the *samaj*? Will there be no wedding or death in their families?’ He further threatened that, if needed, a meeting would be convened with all *samaj* members, and representatives would be sent to said families. His speech involved not only the threats of boycott and arbitration but also the public shaming of members who deviate from accepted norms. In practice, however, such threats rarely materialise into action. Several weeks after his speech we asked the *samaj* leader whether further actions would be taken against those who still had not paid their dues. He replied: ‘Still no action can be taken properly. . . Say, you are not paying; there is nothing to do to you’. He then added that such social sanctions rarely take place, citing the importance of ‘*manabata*’ (benevolence) towards the defaulters.

Nevertheless, such public shaming can bring about changes in the behaviour of members. A follow-up discussion with another *samaj* leader revealed that the due contributions were indeed paid in the months that followed. The claim of ‘benevolence’ can be interpreted from the perspective of the solidarity among *samaj* members—which is particularly visible in their everyday interactions. For instance, the *samaj* leader who outlined the threats at the religious festival was observed some days later calmly interacting with the same affected families.

In contrast to the non-payment of subscription monies, certain more serious offences (e.g., theft or robbery), and interpersonal or family disputes may lead to *salish*. When an offence or dispute occurs between members of a generational council, respective council members first try to resolve it internally. If the issue cannot be resolved, younger councils can reach out to members of higher councils or *samaj* leaders. In the case of a minor interpersonal dispute, the members involved are brought together and the issue is resolved through a dialogue or ‘hand-shake’. In the case of petty crimes like theft, actions can include a beating of the accused person(-s) and achieving a (coerced) promise of non-repetition.

The council of the elders is responsible for carrying out *salish*. A frequently named example from our research was marriage-related disputes. The *karbari* and other *samaj* leaders frequently lead such arbitrations. Depending on the context, other important and relevant non-*samaj* actors such as public representatives, *mauza* headman, and political activists also take part. When the issue is between members of two different *samajes*, the leaders of both *samajes* become involved to help resolve the issue. It is worth noting that instances requiring such arbitration have been rather rare in
the years before our research took place. Some research participants mentioned that the reason behind such relative peacefulness is that the younger members obey the elders. The *samaj*, thus, plays an important role in solving internal conflicts among its members, but also across different *samajes*. Similar to the *salish* by *samajes* in the plains of Bangladesh, Meyachara Samaj employs *salishes* to regulate community coexistence.

### 4.8 Conclusion

This paper has analysed various aspects of Meyachara Samaj as an example of *samaj* among the Tanchangya population, locating it within the wider socio-political context of the CHT and the declining practice of *samaj* in the plains of Bangladesh. The analysis reveals that *samaj* among the Tanchangya can be compared with *samajes* of Bengali Muslims and Hindus, while it has some features that make it unique. The *samaj* among the Tanchangya is a translocal form of organisation, formalised through membership to a Buddhist temple. *Samaj* membership is constitutive of a number of rights and responsibilities associated with *samajik* affairs, which are particularly visible during religious practices and life-course rituals. For the Tanchangya, the community solidarity expressed through these rights and responsibilities makes membership in a *samaj* not only essential but also an important element of their identity. For this reason, *samaj* members spontaneously participate in and contribute to *samajik* affairs. When deviations from accepted norms take place, the remedial actions undertaken are largely corrective, rather than punitive. The ‘benevolence’ towards *samaj* members cements this solidarity among them. This results in *samaj* among the Tanchangya being not merely an institution of maintaining moral order among the *samaj* members, rather, it emerges as an institution of the reciprocity and redistribution of economic, social, and other capital that contribute to producing a collective sense of belonging. With increasing integration into the nation-state and thus being confronted with the growing significance of formal institutions, the social meaning of *samaj* keeps changing. Albeit less than in the Bengali-dominated plainland, *samaj* in the CHT is being transformed due to the growing economic and social influence of representatives from formal state and non-state institutions. Rather than constituting the ‘traditional’ counterpart to ‘modern’ institutions, *samaj* continues to represent a specific and informal mode of community formation which continues to take over important social, ritual, and political functions within the contemporary society shaped by nationalist state formation.
CHAPTER FIVE

Everyday Politics of Dadan Contracts in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh


No alterations have been made to the above publication, except for the text that contains language errors and to adhere to a consistent style for the sake of the formatting of this dissertation.

ABSTRACT

This article analyses the processes of dadan contract negotiations between Bengali intermediaries and indigenous Tanchangya peasants of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh, in the culantro sector. The research extends the debates on the dadan system and interlocked market relationships by highlighting the everyday dynamics of dadan and the issue of ‘just price’ that arises from such contracts. The article argues that the dadan loan system leads to greater spaces for exploitation. While it facilitates peasants’ access to credit for agricultural and social reproduction and the supply of culantro to wider national markets, it also creates a dependency of Tanchangya peasants on Bengali moneylending traders. Such an analysis reveals the limitations of existing studies on dadan in accounting for the social, cultural, and political aspects of dadan contracts, alongside their economic aspects. The article concludes that contested moralities associated with the pursuit of familial subsistence and contractual obligations shape peasants’ decisions and strategies concerning such contracts.

5.1 Introduction

The Persian term dadan, meaning to give, developed as a technical term in Bengal to denote an arrangement of providing loans or working capital advances (Habib, 1964: 399). By the second half of the 17th century, most commodities involved in long-distance trade were secured through dadan arrangements; the expansion of European...
trade facilitated the further growth of the *dadan* system until around the beginning of the 19th century (Crow, 1989: 227, note 4). From that point on, however, ‘the British East India Company's domination of trade … excluded *dadni* merchants from most branches of export trade’ (ibid.). Patnaik (1999) illustrates how merchant capital in the form of cash advances acted as a key factor in the expansion of commercial crops (for example, cotton and indigo) under colonial conditions. Despite shifts in these conditions and various developmentalist interventions (such as microcredit) during post-colonial eras, *dadan* persists as a commonly found credit arrangement in agrarian South Asia. In the deltaic plains of Bangladesh, the *dadan* system is prevalent in various sectors, including food grains, cash crops, fisheries and ‘forest resources’ (Crow, 1989; K.M.N. Islam, 2010; D.J. Lewis, 1991; Nowsad Alam et al., 2021).

This article analyses the processes of negotiations between Bengali intermediaries and indigenous Tanchangya peasants over *dadan* contracts in the culantro\(^{53}\) (*eryngium foetidum*) sector. Culantro, a culinary herb, was once grown by indigenous cultivators of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (hereafter Hill Tracts) region of Bangladesh mainly for consumption. The gradual increase of its popularity locally and in the plains of Bangladesh over the past decades facilitated the emergence of culantro as a major crop among indigenous peasants of the Kawkhali–Kaptai–Rangamati Sadar belt of the Hill Tracts. This area currently supplies culantro to the entire country through a network of Bengali intermediaries. Drawing on ethnographic data collected from May to November 2019 from Meyachara,\(^{54}\) an ethnic Tanchangya village, this research extends scholarly debates on the *dadan* system and highlights the everyday politics of *dadan* contracts. Primary data were collected through participatory observations and in-depth interviews with local villagers.

The *dadan* system is a mechanism through which different markets become interlocked (D.J. Lewis, 1991: 296). In an interlocked market (ILM), actors simultaneously engage in two or more markets, and transactions in the conjoint markets are contingent upon the transaction in the initial market (Swain, 2000: 308). Neoclassical scholars argue that the aim of such interlinkages is to achieve improved allocative efficiency by reducing transaction costs and risks and uncertainties in markets (ibid.). However, others (including Adnan, 1984; Bhaduri, 1973, 1986; Bharadwaj, 1974) suggest that interlinkages are a possible mechanism of surplus extraction, facilitated by existing power relations and the access the actors have to

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\(^{53}\) Also known as spiny coriander, *bilati dhania*, and *baor*.

\(^{54}\) Pseudonyms are used throughout for the names of research participants and for the village.
resources. Bharadwaj (1974: 4) claims that while there can be ‘limits’ of exploitation in any one market, the interlinking of markets magnifies the exploitative power of dominant actors by extending surplus extraction from the initial to the conjoint markets. While reiterative exchanges between agents in ‘impersonalised markets’ determine the price of a product, in an ILM relationship, it is often the superordinate actors that contractually involve the subordinate actors in multiple markets and impose a product price upon the latter (Adnan, 1984: 80–119; Polanyi, 1957: 247). In credit–product interlinkage, the dominant actor usually stipulates that the subordinate actor sells their produce to her/him, thereby depriving the latter of access to the open market (Adnan, 1984: 88). Notably, although ILM can be a purely economic relationship, it can often overlap with the patron–client ties of the actors by serving as a kind of social insurance in times of crisis (Bhaduri, 1986: 269). Scholars have analysed dadan both as a mechanism of exploitation as well as a patron–client relationship (K.M.N Islam, 2010; M.M. Islam, 2017).

While acknowledging the significance of studying dadan from the perspective of surplus extraction and patron–client dimensions, the examination of the everyday dynamics of dadan presented in this article explores two propositions. First, while the dadan system leads to greater spaces for exploitation, it facilitates peasants’ access to credit for agricultural and social reproduction and the supply of culantro to wider national markets. This eventually results in a relationship whereby the peasant becomes dependent on the creditor. Therefore, dadan can be viewed as a contested arrangement of exploitation. Second, by specifying the ‘social embeddedness’ of market transactions (Polanyi, 1944/2001), studies on dadan must pay additional attention to the extra-economic (socio-cultural-political) aspects (Bhaduri, 1986: 268) of these contracts, alongside their economic aspects. This allows the documentation of complex power struggles over dadan contracts, in which multiple actors, relations, processes, and structures become entangled.

Thus, this research highlights some aspects of dadan contracts that remain under-analysed in the existing scholarship. First, in contrast to the ‘mainstream’ peasantry of deltaic Bangladesh, ethnicity plays a pre-eminent role in dadan relations in the Hill Tracts — that is, there is a broad convergence between economic roles and ethnic (Bengali–indigenous) segmentation. As this article will show, the current culantro intermediary–peasant relations are rooted in the historical processes of ‘deep ethnicisation’ of markets in the Hill Tracts. Second, Bengali moneylending
traders\(^{55}\) employ additional measures such as surveillance networks and social sanctions, alongside economic tools, to enforce dadan contracts. Third, this research shows that everyday peasant politics involves a complex mixture of strategies whereby individuals are supported by community-based solidarity groups. The struggle for a ‘just price’,\(^{56}\) associated with family subsistence, remains at the core of everyday peasant politics and points to the notion of ‘contested moralities’.

In the following sections, the article outlines the methodology of the study and analyses the conceptual framework for everyday politics that it adopts. It explores the nation-state-building processes that shaped ethnic differences in terms of access to and control over markets in the Hill Tracts. It then turns to a detailed study of how dadan is linked to the agricultural and social reproduction of Tanchangya peasants; the issue of ‘just price’; and the control measures put in place by Bengali intermediaries. The analysis then examines the everyday politics of peasants in dealing with surplus extraction by these market intermediaries. The article concludes that contested moralities associated with the pursuit of subsistence and contractual obligations shape peasants’ decisions and strategies concerning dadan contracts. Thus, by highlighting the everyday dimensions of dadan contracts — the pre-eminent role of ethnicity, usage of surveillance networks and social sanctions by moneylending traders, and the situated strategies of peasants, which revolve around the issue of ‘just price’ of culantro — the article links debates on everyday politics with economic theories on interlocked markets.

5.2 Methodology
The ethnographic fieldwork from which data are derived was carried out between May and November 2019 as a part of the author’s PhD research. The fieldwork began with the participatory observation of the everyday life of the Tanchangya villagers of Meyachara. To provide deeper knowledge about the lifeworld of the villagers, 50 in-depth interviews were conducted in and around Meyachara, using purposive sampling. Participants included local peasants, public representatives, customary leaders, NGO workers, and schoolteachers. However, all the interviews cited in the article are those of

\(^{55}\) Typically, Bengali traders and moneylenders are two separate categories and, where this applies, they are identified separately as ‘traders’ and ‘moneylenders’ in this article. However, through the interlocking of product and credit markets, the same individuals can simultaneously take up the role of both trader and moneylender. In such cases, they are referred to here as ‘moneylending traders’.

\(^{56}\) From the peasants’ perspective, the issue of just price relates to how ‘just’ or ‘fair’ the price is that they receive from culantro sales in relation to capital investment and open market prices. This is further elaborated on below.
the peasants. As some peasants also work as agents and activists, additional information has been provided in the text to identify them. Furthermore, in order to understand the connection between the local realities of the villagers and the larger context of the country, interviews were also conducted with government officials, political activists, customary chiefs, NGO workers, lawyers, and academics in Rangamati and Dhaka.

The author's positionality as an indigenous researcher hailing from the Hill Tracts worked to his advantage in gaining access to the ‘field’, building trust with the villagers, and engaging with them in the inner dialogues of indigenous peoples. While his positionality as an indigenous researcher granted him ‘insider knowledge’ about the community, his membership in a different ethnic group (Chakma) and affiliation with a university in Germany maintained a certain distance. Such an ambivalent positionality of being an ‘outsider’ and ‘insider’ at the same time shaped the processes involving data collection, analysis and the writing of this article.

5.3 Everyday politics
The notion of ‘everyday resistance’ (Adas, 1986; Scott, 1985) was a critical departure from conventional understandings of resistance as open, collective, and organised confrontations. In highlighting the role of such mundane, dispersed, and disguised forms of resistance, it was pointed out that collective and public defiance can be potentially catastrophic for peasants and other subordinate groups. Scholars claim that the survival and effectiveness of everyday acts of resistance are founded on their surreptitious and anonymous nature (Adnan, 2007a; Kerkvliet, 2005). Using Tilly's (1993) ‘repertoire’ concept, Johansson and Vinthagen (2016: 421) termed these quotidian acts collectively as a ‘repertoire of everyday resistance’, implying ‘a combined result of the interplay between social structures and power relations, as well as activists’ creative experimentation with tactics and experiences of earlier attempts to practise resistance, together with the situational circumstances in which the resistance is played out.’ Such acts require little or no organisation to ‘embrace, comply with, adjust, and contest norms and rules regarding authority over, production of, or allocation of resources’ (Gyapong, 2019: 4). They seem to be particularly critical in contexts such as dadan where subordinate actors are in a relationship of dependency emanating from distinct power positions. These power relations can play out in intersections of arenas, such as ethnicity and class (Johansson and Vinthagen, 2016). Nevertheless, anonymous acts do not always go unnoticed and unpunished, because of systems of surveillance and control by dominant actors (ibid.).
Building on this literature, this article extrapolates from the situated and dynamic nature of the everyday politics that actors employ from their ‘localised repertoire’, either individually or using informal village-based networks. However, rather than focusing on the differences between discrete acts, this article argues that all interconnected acts — compliance, resistance, and avoidance — of the localised repertoire can be taken into consideration. While resistance involves showing dissent against the superordinate, compliance reinforces class and status differences (Kerkvliet, 2009: 233–36), avoidance is ‘the act of not engaging with the space, time or relation where power is exercised’ (Vinthagen and Johansson, 2013: 24). Scholars claim that resistance and compliance are not mutually exclusive concepts; rather, subordinate groups may make use of both depending on time and space (see, for example, Camp, 2004; Kerkvliet, 2009). Therefore, it is important to view strategies such as ‘compliance’, ‘resistance’, or ‘avoidance’ not as either/or choices, but as a combination of situated techniques. Moreover, the possibility of departures from everyday politics cannot be ruled out. Other scholars have delineated how occasional shifts between everyday and organised forms of resistance can take place under special circumstances (e.g., Adnan, 2007a; Lilja et al., 2017). Such exceptional departures, however, can fail due to the lack of organisational network, command structure and political strategy among subordinated actors (Adnan, 2007a: 220–21). Nevertheless, taking the whole repertoire into consideration can help us understand how the same actor is making use of creative and complex combinations of contradictory acts in dealing with power (Vinthagen and Johansson, 2013: 23–26).

Just as Gupta (2001: 91) critiqued Scott on the potential of everyday acts to make ‘utter shambles of policy’, one should remain cautious against romanticizing the implications of such unorganised acts. These quotidian acts are not aimed at seizing the positions of the dominant classes, but rather at negotiating with those who extract resources from ‘the weak’ (Beveridge and Koch, 2019: 151). They are not intended to collapse structures but rather to ‘erode’ them (ibid.: 153). They are aimed at ‘minor’ yet immediate gains for survival. Indeed, actors perform such acts ‘not as a deliberate political act; rather, they are driven by the force of necessity — the necessity to survive and improve a dignified life’ (Bayat, 2000: 547). This moral drive for survival shapes how subordinate actors view justice vis-à-vis other actors (Scott, 1976). This research is therefore attentive to such acts, and their moral aspects, and not to long-term outcomes. I argue that paying attention to everyday politics is a useful framework for understanding the complexities of dadan contracts, where organised actions rarely take
place. It is also important to locate the broader context within which dadan contracts are negotiated, as detailed below.

5.4 Processes of ethnicisation of markets in the Chittagong Hill Tracts
Situated in the southeast corner of Bangladesh, the Chittagong Hill Tracts has a history and features that separate it from the rest of Bangladesh (see Figure 5.1). The area's hilly and forested terrains are a complete contrast to the plains of Bangladesh. It is home to 11 indigenous peoples\(^{57}\) who are distinct in terms of their languages, cultures and beliefs in comparison to the Bengalis who constitute the country's majority. Collectively these indigenous groups are known as Pahari (Hill) Peoples. British colonial policies of isolating the indigenous peoples from Bengalis and promoting nation-building processes based on homogeneous categories by Bangladeshi and Pakistani states led to the construction of dichotomous identities — Bengali versus Pahari Adivasi (indigenous peoples of the hills) (Uddin and Gerharz, 2017: 212). The construction of this dichotomy shaped the processes of ethnicisation of markets in the Hill Tracts.

\(^{57}\) Bawm, Chak, Chakma, Khumi, Khyang, Lushai, Marma, Mro, Pankhoa, Tanchangya, and Tripura.
Unlike most of the plains, *jum* (shifting or slash-and-burn) cultivation was once the main source of livelihood for the indigenous peoples of this region (Lewin, 1869: 13). This *jum*-centred way of life was grounded on community solidarity, reciprocity and redistributive practices that served as insurance in times of crises and exigencies (Adnan, 2004: 153; CHT Commission, 1991: 49; Mohsin, 2002: 81–87). The land was ‘owned’ by the community, while selection and demarcation of land for each family were done in agreement with fellow villagers and the headman. All major activities related to farming — including slashing and burning the vegetation, fire management, sowing seeds, and harvesting — required considerable labour and were done by
mutually assisting working groups (Mohsin, 2002: 82). This subsistence-oriented mode of production required very limited market participation (Shelley, 1992: 81).

The *jum* economy experienced dramatic shifts due to colonial policies. In 1787, the Chakma chief of the region agreed to pay a cash tribute (replacing the previous payment in cotton) to the East India Company (Shahabuddin, 2018: 230–34). The need for readily available cash led indigenous peoples to borrow from Bengali moneylenders and merchants from the plains, which accelerated the processes of commercialisation, monetisation, and indebtedness of the hill economy (Adnan, 2004: 20; Mey, 1984: 19; Shahabuddin, 2018: 233). Soon after the British annexation of the Hill Tracts in 1860, Bengali traders and moneylenders were able to monopolise all major financial transactions in the region (Mey, 1984: 20; Shahabuddin, 2018: 234). Colonial administrator Thomas Lewin (1869: 25–26) noted the very exploitative nature of Bengali traders and moneylenders.

This indebtedness and the marginalised position of indigenous peoples in the Hill Tracts’ economic spaces were aggravated by the promotion of plough cultivation from 1868 onwards (Mey, 1984: 76–79; Mohsin, 2002: 83). While indigenous peoples were not accustomed to plough cultivation, its introduction facilitated an importation of Bengali sharecroppers and other craftsmen with the requisite skills and technologies (Adnan, 2004: 21; Mohsin, 2002: 81–87; Sopher, 1964: 108). As plough cultivation began to yield surpluses, it was apparent that indigenous peoples did not have the market mechanism to dispose of agricultural products, facilitating the emergence of a class of Bengali middlemen (Shelley, 1992: 66). Bengali traders began to provide *dadan* contracts for different agricultural products (Mey, 1996: 116). During this time there was an increase in the number of bazaars (marketplaces), which were almost entirely in the hands of Bengali traders (Mey, 1996: 130; Shelley, 1992: 81–82).

The introduction of private rights as a part of the plough cultivation scheme created some cracks in the community-based land rights systems, thus facilitating a greater acceptance of Bengali credit systems associated with land and product markets among indigenous peoples (Mey, 1984: 79; Mohsin, 2002: 88). These developments led the British officials to formulate policies to control moneylending and in-migration of Bengalis, including through the promulgation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation of 1900 which became effective on 1 May that year (Government of Bangladesh, 1971: 138–39, 171–72; Mohsin, 2002: 32–34). But such ‘protective’ measures had little effect, and since then Bengali businessmen have emerged as a class that was ‘in absolute control of all monetary and credit transaction in the hills’ (Mey, 1984: 79).
The ‘protective’ measures of the British were withdrawn and processes of ‘opening up’ of the Hill Tracts were accelerated some years after the formation of the state of Pakistan in 1947. This led to an influx of Bengali traders and moneylenders into the region who gradually tightened their grip on the hill economies (ibid.: 24–26). The state project of ‘uplifting’ the ‘backward’ and ‘primitive’ hill economies into the ‘national mainstream’ was implemented together with some large-scale ‘development’ initiatives (see, for example, the Karnaphuli Hydroelectric Project\(^{58}\)) that resulted in the uprooting and displacement of many indigenous peoples (Adnan, 2004: 24; CHT Commission, 1991: 62; Mey, 1984: 102).

The processes of ethnicisation were further reinforced after the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971. The denial of indigenous political leaders’ demands for autonomy and recognition of their rights by Bengali national leaders led to a period of tension. This eventually resulted in a protracted armed resistance of indigenous rebel forces led by the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS — the CHT United Peoples’ Party) from the mid-1970s. The state responded with full-scale counter-insurgency measures through the deployment of the military (Shelley, 1992: 133). A massive Bengali transmigration programme was incorporated into the counter-insurgency measures as a strategy of demographic engineering through increasing the population of Bengalis in the region (Adnan, 2007b: 13). A range of economic measures was introduced, including integrating Hill Tracts economies with ‘the mainstream’, and promoting trade, commerce, and industry (Arens, 1997: 1816; Gerharz, 2017b: 141–43; Shelley, 1992: 135). Over the past four decades, state policies have been targeted at cash crop production which have increased the dependency of indigenous peoples on market economies over which they barely have any control (Adnan, 2004: 115–28; Arens, 1997: 1814).

The indigenous insurgency formally ended in 1997 through the signing of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord, a peace agreement that enshrines the protection of rights and acceleration of ‘development’ of the populations of the region. Soon microcredit was introduced as a part of development interventions. However, Bengali traders and moneylenders continued to play a dominant role in providing loans to indigenous peoples (Adnan, 2004: 136). \textit{Dadan} offered by Bengali moneylending traders served as a major credit arrangement in different agricultural sectors of the Hill Tracts (ibid.: 70).

\(^{58}\) The construction of the Kaptai Dam, built on the Karnaphuli River in the heart of the Hill Tracts by the Pakistan government in 1963, displaced more than 100,000 indigenous peoples.
Such a consolidation of ethnically differentiated market engagement determines the current processes of everyday negotiations that take place in the culantro sector.

5.5 Agro-social reproduction and the need for credit in Meyachara

Meyachara is a village of nearly 100 families. It is situated a few kilometres away from Ghagara Bazaar, a small yet important crossroads connecting three hill districts of the Hill Tracts region as well as the port city of Chittagong, thus serving as a melting pot for indigenous growers as well as predominantly Bengali market intermediaries. Smallholder peasants constitute the village's majority, alongside some petty entrepreneurs and government and NGO workers. Although originally a community of jum cultivators, the drive to secure subsistence and to meet shifting market demands led the villagers of Meyachara to experiment with different cash crops on the hill slopes as well as some valley lands. Culantro has been a major crop for the livelihood of Tanchangya agriculturalists over the past two decades. It is now mainly grown in valley plots through a form of polyculture involving a mix of vegetables.

Culantro is a labour-intensive crop, requiring high capital investment. The investment in land rental depends on whether a family has enough land to farm culantro every year, after mandatory rotation with rice, which is required for regenerating soil quality. The question of how much land is sufficient depends on various factors (for example, family size and off-farm income), although plots of two kanis (0.8 acre) or above are generally considered adequate for rotation. Therefore, most peasant families meet their needs through a yearly land rental arrangement named aga-wah. Under this arrangement, they enjoy usufruct rights over the land for a season in exchange for a competitive market price. The lessors are families from the same, or from a neighbouring, village with ‘more than enough’ land or who are willing to lease (for example, due to urgent cash needs). Occasionally, cultivable lands are secured through long-term lease contracts called bondhok whereby land is mortgaged for cash, usually for several years. Under bondhok, the lessee enjoys usufruct rights over the plot for an agreed period and the lessor can rescue the land at the end of the period by repaying the loan.

Culantro seeds often require an even higher capital investment than land. At the start of the season (December/January) valley peasants procure these seed grains from cultivators growing culantro on hill slopes mainly for seeds. Because the whole culantro

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59 Polyculture is a form of agriculture where several crops are simultaneously cultivated.
plant is sold, it is often not possible for the valley cultivators to preserve their own seeds for reproduction, except when one can grow culantro in the hills for the purpose of seeds. The third largest share of the production costs of culantro is spent on employing labour. Although the introduction of herbicides some years ago significantly reduced the need for manual weeding, several rounds of weeding are still required throughout the season. Additionally, during each harvest round\textsuperscript{60}, a one-	extit{kani} (0.4 acre) plot requires the labour of 8–12 workers for 4–5 days. Women from within and outside the village supply the labour, in exchange for a generally accepted daily wage rate of BDT 250 (US$ 2.40). Total costs related to soil preparation, erection of sheds, fertilizer, herbicides, and pesticides, along with the above-mentioned expenses, amount to around BDT 100,000 for a one-	extit{kani} plot. The decision to farm culantro thus rests on whether a peasant family has been able to secure enough capital either from its own or outside sources.

Despite having diversified strategies of farm and off-farm income generation, funds from such earnings are not enough for agricultural and social reproduction for many families. Virtually every family in Meyachara has borrowed some form of credit in recent years, from both formal and informal sources. Loans taken for agricultural purposes are not necessarily invested in agricultural production but can be used for meeting urgent consumption needs, exigencies, acquiring assets, small businesses, and investment in human capital. As observed elsewhere (Aliber, 2015; K.M.N. Islam, 2010), despite having access to ‘institutional’ sources of credit, such as NGOs, banks, and specialised state interventions,\textsuperscript{61} ‘informal’ dadan credit is popular among the peasants of Meyachara.

In interviews, peasants from the village described several hindrances to accessing institutional credit. Depending on the credit source, these challenges concern collateral, processing time, formalities, bribes, and networks. Although microcredit is easily accessible, the repayment regimes imposed by NGOs involving regular cash instalments are extremely difficult for culantro cultivators to meet since the bulk of their cash income becomes available only at the end of the production season (April/May) after the sale of the harvest. No other sources of credit can provide comparable flexibility and certainty of purchase and renewal of loans compared to the moneylending traders. Dadan requires little formality as it is mainly based on the

\textsuperscript{60} There can be three to five harvest rounds depending on the farm.

\textsuperscript{61} For example, loans from the Bangladesh Rural Development Board and the Amar Bari Amar Khamar project (a Bangladesh government social welfare programme designed to reduce rural poverty in Bangladesh through small loans).
interpersonal relationship and trust between peasants and intermediaries. Thus, while charity, gifts, and reciprocity practices among the villagers provide minimum support in meeting various needs, recourse to *dadān* loans enables peasant families to mobilise major capital requirements for agricultural and social reproduction.

### 5.6 *Dadān* contracts and ‘just price’

With the gradual rise of demand for culantro in wider national markets and increased capacities of production due to the introduction of new agricultural technologies, a growing number of Bengali line intermediaries from surrounding urban areas have emerged as providers of *dadān* loans to Tanchangya peasants. This emergence of *dadān* in the culantro sector was also facilitated by two major state interventions in the 2000s — electricity connections and brick roads. Villagers collectively contributed the necessary ‘bribe’ money, and local leaders, particularly Union Parishad (Union Council) representatives, led the processes of achieving these developments by lobbying higher-level bureaucrats and politicians. While electricity allowed for expanded irrigation, the brick road facilitated the marketing of culantro. Thus, despite disruptions in some years caused by poor quality seeds in 2011–12 and flash floods in 2017, the *dadān* arrangement continues to grow in the culantro sector.

Loan advances are usually offered around the time seeds are procured (in December and January). The volume of seeds sown often serves as the basis of estimating the amount of credit issued. Although there is no fixed standard in this regard, a higher volume of seeds facilitates the possibility of more credit. Aside from seeds, the costs of land, labour, and other inputs may also motivate borrowing. Peasants also ask for loans during the ‘lean period’ (March to April — the months before harvesting) and in times of emergency. A *dadān* contract is an oral agreement between a peasant family and a line intermediary whereby the former receives a monetary advance from the latter with the obligation to sell the produce to the intermediary as the condition of loan repayment. There is no explicit interest applied to the money borrowed, but once advances are received, the borrower is obliged to sell culantro to the

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62 A major technological advance has been a herbicide named Panida which significantly reduces labour cost for weeding, while increasing the capacity of peasant families to handle larger plots for culantro production.

63 Locally, ‘line’ implies the market space created by *dadān*-providing Bengali intermediaries. Bengali intermediaries who provide *dadān* loans are known as line intermediaries, while other Bengali intermediaries are known as non-line intermediaries.

64 The lowest governance unit in Bangladesh.
intermediary at ‘negotiated’ rates, rather than open market rates, until advances are fully repaid.

These artificially set prices are always below competitive rates of local marketplaces (such as the bazaars of Ghagara and Ranihat). This differential poses the question of the ‘justness’ of the prices received by peasants. Locally, the justness of the price is understood from two viewpoints. The first is whether the prices received by peasants give them a viable margin above the cost incurred in producing the crop. Despite having a low margin, a price of BDT 50–60 per kg or above is considered ‘viable’. While this consideration applies to all peasants, the second specifically concerns the danan takers. How wide is the gap between the open market and line prices? Since intermediaries do not charge any explicit interest for their advances, a generally accepted price differential is a maximum of BDT 10 per kg below the market rate. This is generally considered ‘just’, while any differential above this ceiling is regarded by the peasants as ‘unjust’ and tantamount to ‘exploitation’. During the harvest season in 2019, the gap between open market and line rates per kg was almost always higher than the accepted differential of BDT 10. In some weeks, the price difference was as high as BDT 70 per kg. Such intensity of exploitation leads one to ask how, and why, intermediaries can sustain their domination in the market despite unduly lowering the price paid to the indebted culantro cultivators.

5.7 Control
The Bengali intermediaries do not reside in and around Meyachara but come from surrounding urban centres. Nevertheless, routine interactions with peasants in the arena of danan lead these intermediaries to develop certain economic and extra-economic mechanisms to maintain their surveillance and control over peasants. These mechanisms involve peasants themselves, market mechanisms, political actors, and credit. The most visible mechanism that has developed is the network of employees of intermediaries. Virtually all the activities under danan cycles are facilitated by intermediaries’ ‘agents’, who are assisted by wage workers and auto-rickshaw drivers. Often these employees are indigenous peasants from the same villages as danan takers. The job responsibilities of agents include assisting in the screening of peasant borrowers, danan payment and recovery, keeping track of transactions, and the day-to-day supply of culantro from the danan takers. They are also responsible for keeping an eye on fellow peasants to ensure their compliance with the terms of the danan contracts. Thus, they serve as the first line of surveillance over the danan borrowers. Despite enduring the routine domination of
the intermediaries as their employers, these agents seem to remain largely loyal in carrying out their everyday duties. However, this loyalty is not blind submission to the authority of the intermediaries, especially since these actors are involved with not one but multiple social relations.

While the role of these employees is aimed at the smooth functioning of the dadan cycle, interpersonal relationships between dadan takers and intermediaries develop mainly through direct interactions. Their everyday interactions at various rural sites contribute to the reproduction of their interpersonal relationships. Occasional invites, visits, and gifts further cement these relations. Some peasants cherish their memories of rare visits by intermediaries to their homes and sharing meals together. Notably, intermediaries are astute enough not to forget to invite ‘their’ peasants on major religious or social occasions. They even make the necessary arrangements so that their peasants do not miss out on such occasions. As one local villager called Badhan explained: ‘He [the intermediary] has become like a family member. He visits us sometimes. We visited his home in Chittagong recently on the occasion of Eid after he had invited us. He even arranged a car for us. We did not have to pay any fare’. Such expressions of gratitude are rooted in the economic and ethnic differences between these actors. However, peasants understand that these invitations cannot be attributed to pure friendship, generosity, or religiosity, but rather are issued to maintain (commercial) relations. As Shova, another local villager, noted: ‘If we don't get meat [from a sacrificed animal during Eid], they would ask whether we have got [meat] or not. Ever since I moved [married in] to this community, they [husband and other peasants] have been visiting [‘their’ intermediary's home] during Eid. They invite peasants. Bengalis maintain that relationship. They know it very well.’

Secondly, the intermediaries use market mechanisms to maintain their control. The culantro market is largely monopolised by Bengali intermediaries, constituting an integral part of the broader process of ethnicisation of market participation in the Hill Tracts. Bengali businessmen exclusively dominate the broader national markets, where participation requires high levels of capital, familiarity with complex market networks and various requisite skills. These resources and skills remain unattainable for most indigenous persons from the rural Hill Tracts. As a result, the role of indigenous peasants in the culantro supply chain is limited to handing in their produce to the Bengali intermediaries. In contrast, large amounts of culantro procured from the Kawkhali–Kaptai–Rangamati Sadar belt are transported every day by Bengali traders to different parts of the country. Thus, Bengali traders have established themselves as
essential gateways for the channelling of culantro to broader markets. This discrepancy in accessing broader markets allows the intermediaries to keep line prices below open market rates using the excuse of *arat* or dealer prices of culantro. An *arat* is a large wholesale market for fresh produce found in bigger cities like Dhaka and Chittagong that serves as the key point of the supply chain for different agricultural products. Fresh produce from across the country reaches *arats* every day for pooling and further distribution. Since Tanchangya peasants do not have any direct participation in *arats*, they have no mechanism to monitor and challenge the claims of intermediaries concerning *arat* prices. Locally, despite internal differences and competition, the *dadans*-providing intermediaries maintain one single agreed-upon (line) rate for culantro. Intermediaries claim that this collectively determined rate is required to maintain ‘stability’.

However, peasants claim that this collusive price-setting mechanism is the key to keeping the rate paid to them low. They blame intermediaries for having a cartel of buyers — a ‘syndicate’ — to maintain the low price paid to cultivators. As Ananda, a peasant farmer and local villager, clarified: ‘It is the intermediaries who decide the price of culantro. I sold for BDT 60 and BDT 50 for two days, and then the culantro price dropped. Intermediaries can just do a “hello” [speak over the phone] and maintain a “syndicate” to keep the price down.’ Indeed, according to peasants, this price does not change immediately if there is a rise in open market prices but it drops as soon as market prices drop. Even when the price continues to rise in open markets, intermediaries first monitor for at least a week before raising the rate. Even then, this raise is rarely proportionate to open market rates. The goal is clear — to maintain a considerably higher margin of profit for the intermediaries based on lowering the price paid to the indebted peasants compared to the open market rates.

Thirdly, there is control involving political actors. When regular measures fail to keep *dadans* takers ‘under control’, and a breach of contract by peasants leads to bitter conflicts, intermediaries may consider social and economic sanctions to ‘teach a lesson’ to the recalcitrant peasants. An extreme mechanism in this regard is invoking *salish-bichar* (local arbitration) to ‘set a precedent’. While *salish-bichar* can take place at the village level, intermediaries prefer to take them to the level of political party members. These arbitrations led by political activists are different from normative *salish-bichar*, based on customary practices of dispute resolution (Adnan, 1997).

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65 Members of local chapters of PCJSS, sometimes together with members of the Awami League, Bangladesh Nationalist Party and Jatiya Party.
Intermediaries prefer to involve indigenous political activists, because the judgements issued by the latter are often in their favour, while the cultivators accused of breaching their contracts can be easily persuaded to comply with the rulings due to political pressure. Although these political activists have diverse socio-economic backgrounds, being parts of wider political networks, they hold and can exercise power over peasants. Their rulings often involve (forced) return of the credit taken.

In their ‘hidden transcripts’ (Scott, 1990) Tanchangya peasants express their frustration over such arbitrations. As Kumar, a peasant farmer, lamented: ‘If they [intermediaries] go to them [political activists] and an arbitration is staged, you have to repay the [dadan] money even by selling or keeping land or trees or whatever as mortgage [bondhok]. Do they [activists] understand the plight of the peasants?’ Kumar’s question reflects the peasant version of morality whereby peasants are forced to breach contracts because intermediaries violate the ‘moral economy’ of the peasant (Scott, 1976) by appropriating surplus through the imposition of ‘unjust’ prices, threatening their subsistence. On the other hand, political activists focus on moral obligations inherent in dadan contracts — that is, once one enters a contract, one is obliged to comply with the agreed terms. Shyam, a peasant farmer and activist, claimed that there are shortfalls on both sides: ‘When the price became BDT 60, the intermediaries were offering us BDT 40. On that side, intermediaries use such tricks. The peasants also use some tricks. When culantro is cheap, they want a higher price and when the price is higher, they may supply outside (to non-line intermediaries). Thus, both sides have some faults.’ Peasants believe that arbitrations are linked to the issue of chanda66 that intermediaries pay to some political parties. To defend high price differentials, intermediaries often argue that they have to recover the money that they have to pay every year as tolls and chanda to the Union Parishad, bazaar authorities, and political parties. Each intermediary claims to pay BDT 200,000–300,000 every year. Political party members consulted, however, claim that the total amount is not above BDT 30,000–40,000. Whatever may be the amount, peasants express their resentment at being burdened with having to fund such ‘extortions’ through the lowering of prices received from intermediaries compared to the corresponding open market prices.

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66 ‘Chanda’ can mean ‘subscription’, ‘contribution’ and ‘extortion money’. Here chanda implies money demanded by local political parties. Political activists claim that chanda is a ‘voluntary contribution’ in support of their political programmes, while the state labels it as ‘extortion’.
A final control mechanism involves the perpetuation of credit. Each intermediary has money readily available for *dadan* loans, for ‘his’ existing, and particularly ‘good’ peasants, and when available, for new ones. While having access to easy credit is undoubtedly an advantage, ready availability puts peasants in recurrent loops of *dadan* contracts, resulting in perpetual indebtedness among them. As Shyam explained: ‘What the intermediary does is he would give money — take as much as you need. Thus, he keeps the peasants stuck’. The phrase ‘keeping stuck’ denotes that most *dadan* contracts do not terminate with the end of a culantro season but are carried forward to the next season, thus perpetuating the indebtedness among peasants. Bhaduri (1986: 268) refers to this situation as ‘borrower's risk’ as opposed to ‘lender's risk’ found in conventional literature on credit. Moti, a peasant farmer and an agent, noted: ‘There is always some money due from the previous periods. We cannot end collecting the old [*dadan*] money because peasants fail to repay all.’ Peasants may fail to repay advances for different reasons including crop failure, price fluctuation and family needs. Vanu, a peasant farmer, explained why peasants usually remain ‘stuck’ to one particular intermediary:

If we are able, ending transactions [with one intermediary] is not a problem. When we are done [repaying] with one intermediary, we are free to go to another. We can then sell to anybody we want. But we are not able to do that because we experience loss. Last time I experienced *gula* [culantro disease]. Then I experienced the sickness of my younger son. If the capital is lost like that, how can you repay the money?

Thus, the failure to repay loans is a major contributor to ‘perpetual indebtedness’. One failure can lead to further borrowing, usually from the same moneylending traders. As a major share of the income from the harvest is almost immediately taken away as loan repayment, many peasants have to renew loans, often leaving them heavily indebted (Bhaduri, 1973: 122).

Moreover, there is a ‘voluntary’ aspect to this failure. Intermediaries rarely put pressure on cultivators for repayment of the total amount, and even reissue additional credit, provided peasants continue to supply culantro to them. Taking advantage of this, some peasants may deliberately choose not to repay the whole amount. The attitude is: ‘Let there be some due. I will get more when I ask’. Rather than creating pressure, intermediaries even encourage their ‘good’ clients to keep some amount due in order to keep their businesses as usual. As Julu, another peasant farmer, explained: ‘Well, I am your permanent client; will you ever like to lose me? You are making money because of
me. That is the benefit if we don't repay. Some [intermediaries] may say, “Don’t repay
the whole amount.”

5.8 The repertoire of everyday politics
This nexus of surplus extraction, dependence and perpetual indebtedness raises
questions concerning whether or how peasants should engage with dadan. In this
regard, they display a divergence of perspectives and possible strategies towards dadan
due to differences in their socio-economic positions and relations. The repertoire of
their possible options can be analysed in terms of compliance, covert resistance,
 avoidance, and open confrontation.

5.8.1 Compliance
Like any other contract, entering a dadan contract implies that the parties involved are
obligated to comply with the terms. That is, an intermediary provides money in
advance, while the dadan-taking peasant supplies all of her/his crop to this intermediary
throughout the season while repaying the loan. When there is repayment outstanding,
the debt and associated obligations of the parties are automatically carried forward to
the following season(s). Therefore, along with this perpetuity of indebtedness, the
obligations to comply are also perpetuated. This also implies continuity of clientelist
relationships, and hence power differences, between the dadan taker and the dadan
provider. Despite high price variations, most peasants enter the contract and comply
with the terms. This compliance is due not only to the controls mentioned above but
also to some practical reasons. First, it is hard for those families who grow larger
volumes of culantro to sell in open marketplaces, where sales take place in relatively
smaller volumes. Depending on the harvest round and the quality of the crop,
anywhere between 800 and 1,800 kg of culantro can be harvested from a one-kani plot
in each round. It is easier for larger cultivators to supply to line intermediaries than to
sell in marketplaces, not least because pickup takes place conveniently at the farm gate.
It is a real hardship to carry hundreds of culantro bunches by auto-rickshaw to
marketplaces before dawn on bazaar days (Saturday and Wednesday). Second, larger
growers find it beneficial to enter dadan contracts because they offer relative security in
terms of demand. Usually, line intermediaries accept whatever amount a family can
supply in a given harvest round. Contrarily, non-line intermediaries, having no

67 Harvest volume varies in each round.
contractual obligation to accept, may stop accepting culantro at any time, especially when there is an abrupt drop in demand. For this reason, larger growers prefer accepting price differentials to risky sales. As Julu explained:

If we take [dadan], transactions with intermediaries continue. The business is not for one day. Now I am getting BDT 10 less than other people. Even if I get BDT 10 more (from non-line intermediaries), where would I supply my culantro to? After taking for half a day, they may not take my culantro anymore. We cannot say anything if the price goes down. But the line intermediary is bound to take. Why? Because I have transactions with him.

A final reason behind compliance is the moral obligation of keeping a promise. Some peasants highlighted this and the importance of complying with the terms because they have borrowed money and given their word they will repay that money. As Vanu, a peasant farmer, stated: ‘Even if the price is not good enough, I always give to the [line] intermediary. … Those who do not want to break trust, they supply culantro to [line] intermediaries’.

Nevertheless, compliance here does not mean absolute submission. Dadan takers can negotiate a raise in the rate before each harvest round begins. Most do this privately, while some do so in public. Even when intermediaries agree to raise prices, however, they never do so in terms of price per kg, because the news of a rise per kg by one intermediary affects the line price as a whole. As Aungshu, a peasant farmer, clarified: ‘if the intermediary increases for me, and someone else gets this news, others will also ask for raise. … Everyone's rate has to be increased. Then he would fall in trouble. That's why intermediaries do not allow that easily’. For this reason, in the event an intermediary agrees to a raise for an individual peasant, it is usually in the form of a lump sum or ‘comfort’ money. Aungshu expanded on his statement: ‘when asked, intermediaries would offer, say, BDT 1,000 or 2,000 for “tea”. It is up to that level. They give this money as consolation. But asking would not result in an increase of BDT 10 per kilogram’. Notably, even a small raise is never automatic but depends largely on the bargaining power and loyalty of peasants. Having the ability to supply culantro in bulk gives larger growers more bargaining power than smaller cultivators.

5.8.2 Covert resistance
Although all contracts are intended to be complied with, not every peasant ultimately complies with the terms. Despite being aware of control and surveillance measures and the consequences of non-compliance, and even being generally loyal, some peasants
occasionally choose to break their contracts. This is done in the form of surreptitious sales of culantro to non-line intermediaries at the farm gates or in marketplaces and can happen after failing to get a favourable outcome in price negotiations with the contractual lender. This situation arises especially when open market prices soar, while the line rate either remains unchanged or increases disproportionately. When this happens, non-line intermediaries appear frequently and approach potential cultivators, irrespective of their dadan status. The news of a price hike spreads fast through village information systems and can lure dadan-taking peasants to sell their produce to these non-line intermediaries at higher rates.

Such surreptitious sales are privately negotiated, one-off, and veiled under the cover of anonymity. They are often assisted by informal networks of fellow peasants, friends, and kin. Village community members generally maintain a ‘collective silence’ concerning such transactions. Consequently, cases in which the news of such ‘secret business’ reaches intermediaries, and consequences follow, are exceptions rather than everyday phenomena. As Mantu, a peasant farmer and an agent, admitted: ‘We keep them [transactions] secret, so the intermediary does not know about that even if someone sells [surreptitiously]. If we don't inform, how would he know!’ Agents were all aware of such cases but very few of them resulted in any repercussions from intermediaries, potentially indicating the ignorance of line intermediaries about them. Thus, this ‘secret business’ ostensibly delineates the presence of strong intra-community solidarity that supersedes patron–client relationships between intermediaries and peasants. As solidarity is ‘a feeling of reciprocal sympathy and responsibility which promotes mutual support’ (Wilde, 2007: 171), peasants cannot easily deny community solidarity built on kinship, friendship, and other societal ties. Moreover, such acts of covert resistance are safeguarded by the pragmatism of selling only a portion, not the entire harvest. As Amitav, another peasant farmer, told me:

> It is common that peasants don't supply their entire produce ‘outside’. In order to conceal the share that is sold, as well as to keep contacts with [line] intermediaries, we supply a share to [line] intermediaries. … Some on this side [line] and some on that side [non-line]. But not supplying to them [line intermediaries] whatsoever is a problem. They would mind. They may do something [to ‘teach a lesson’].

A second form of covert resistance is selling negligible amounts of culantro in bazaaars at competitive rates on bazaar days. Such ‘nibbling away’ usually escapes the notice of line intermediaries. If this practice is noticed, or someone is ‘busted’, peasants can always claim that they have been forced to take some culantro to the bazaar in
exchange for money to purchase essentials (bazaar khoroch) because the rate offered by their line intermediary is too low to meet the consumption needs of the family. Additionally, in the event of a confrontation, the argument of a peasant's 'residual' rights over the farm can also be made. As Julita, a farmer and local villager, stated: ‘Even though there is an agreement, he has not bought my entire farm with BDT 50,000. But one cannot sell all [produce]. She/he must sell them in small volumes. He would not say anything if it were five or ten kilos.’ No case was observed where such piecemeal resistance led to conflicts. Surreptitious sales can be related to the argument of a ‘subsistence ethic’ (Scott, 1976: 13–34). This imperative to ensure subsistence pushes some peasants to violate the moral obligations under dadan contracts and to be ‘immoral’. Vanu summarised it as follows:

Peasants cannot survive if they act simply. The peasant owes money to the workers and a lot of money to the intermediary. She/he must pay the workers because they have to survive as well. In such situations, the peasant becomes embarrassed because she/he must pay the workers, and she/he has to feed her/his family too. Then what she/he does is supply surreptitiously. Peasants normally do not like to do that.

Thus, surreptitious sales delineate a situation of competing moralities — the obligation of saving family, versus the obligation to comply with contractual terms. Poor peasants simultaneously deal with the material realities and the norms and expectations of being a ‘good’ peasant (Ripoll, 2022: 1574).

5.8.3 Avoidance
Over recent years, most peasants have borrowed through dadan, while a handful of families have never entered such contracts. Some of those who previously borrowed may also have skipped dadan in some seasons by supplementing funds from other sources. The aim is simple — to augment the family income by avoiding price differentials. As Sunil, a peasant farmer, explained: ‘We have never taken dadan. You will get the answer if you do some calculations. This year, I have supplied for three rounds. In these three rounds, I have made about BDT 50,000 additional.’ When peasants are free from dadan, they enjoy the flexibility of monitoring changes in local market rates and making decisions accordingly. Sunil elaborated:

I supplied for five days at BDT 65. Because the price was rising, I said to the intermediary that there is no more culantro left. Thus, I cancelled this intermediary. Then I approached another intermediary. I supplied about 350 kg at BDT 75 to him. Then I said that the crops had been finished. Then I supplied to another one. I supplied him with about 256 kg at BDT 80.
Such practices are contingent upon the shrewd and pragmatic actions of peasants, making use of informal networks, and their ‘haggling’ skills. They are structured to take advantage of price changes in the open market and the freedom to switch from one trader to another to achieve higher returns. However, those that avoid taking *dadán* contracts find it difficult to deliver their product. While line intermediaries have the necessary arrangements in place to ensure a smooth collection of the product, those that do not participate in *dadán* contracts often have to make their own arrangements. As a local villager and peasant farmer Sanjib argued: ‘It is easy for them [*dadán* takers] because their labour is less, while ours is more because we have to carry and sell them in the market. On the other hand, they just speak over the phone and agents come to take from here.’ For this reason, peasants without *dadán* contracts who have larger plots prefer to sell at the farm gates. By contrast, those with smaller plots (0.2 acre or less) are in a position of relative advantage due to their ‘smallness’. They can harvest culantro and take suitable amounts of the herb to the marketplace and trade at the best available price.

From the credit point of view, those who avoid *dadán* must cope with the lack of readily available credit from a wealthy patron who can provide insurance in times of crises and exigencies. Every year *dadán* avoiders may have to muddle through during the ‘lean season’, which coincides with lavish celebrations of Bishu, the largest social festival. Whereas *dadán* takers can meet their additional cash needs with *dadán*, those without a *dadán* contract may need to revise their consumption pattern during this time. As Sunil explained: ‘I tell my wife that if we can survive for two months (“lean period”), we don't need anything else. Perhaps we will eat rice with salt or meat/fish once in a while only, but we will still be able to live. If we take [*dadán*], we will be doomed’. Those that avoid *dadán* mainly rely on institutional sources with relatively easy terms (for example, the Amar Bari Amar Khamar project mentioned above) to meet their credit needs.

### 5.8.4 Open confrontation

The above analysis shows that even in the context of high exploitation, the complex situation of domination, dependence, and indebtedness leaves little room for open confrontations. In recent years, peasants reported open confrontations only when some (undefined) ‘lines’ were crossed, and negotiation attempts turned into irreconcilable conflicts. Such sporadic incidents occurred in relation to prices, surreptitious delivery
and, occasionally, denial of additional dadan loans. Such instances of conflict are often at the interpersonal level. The ultimate consequence of such rare confrontations is the break-up of relationships. Peasants then either switch to other intermediaries or stop selling to line intermediaries. Generally, peasants do not wish to be involved with public confrontations because of the inconveniences associated with credit and product delivery. Such conflicts are not supported by community norms, and being associated with an open conflict may result in a loss of respect. For example, in October 2019, Shimul, an NGO worker, became involved in an argument with Kudrat, the family dadan provider, in relation to ‘surreptitious sales’ made by his father Kumar. Kumar claimed that the sales were a ‘protest’ against Kudrat’s denial of an additional BDT 20,000 as dadan that he had asked for. This resulted in some villagers criticizing Shimul in a village shop for having been involved in a dispute while he himself was not involved with farming. Moreover, non-repayment of dadan as ‘overt resistance’ is barely an option as there is a dominant morality among villagers in which repayment of debt is expected, and those who do not adhere to that, stand to lose respect within their own community. As Kumar explained: ‘How can you not repay [a loan]? You will not get respect. You will not get friends.’

The only reported instance of collective public action was a ‘strike’ in 2014 that involved a large number of Meyachara peasants. Some joined openly, while others did so covertly. The strike occurred as a protest at the refusal of their demand for a raise in the line rate. The pickets were successful in preventing Meyachara villagers from supplying culantro for four to five days. Then some poor peasants and agents resumed supplying culantro claiming that they needed money for food and essentials. As Aungshu, one of the strike organisers, explained: ‘Some farmed one small goda (0.1 acre) only. They said, “You are feeling well! Where would I get money if I do not supply produce tomorrow? If I stop supplying for a week, where would I get money from? What will I eat?”’ Thus, the threat to the subsistence of poorer peasants emerged as a major obstacle against this collective resistance. As a result, the strike had little effect on the overall supply of culantro and ultimately ended with a minor raise in the line price as a kind of consolation. Peasants blamed the lack of unity among them as a failure in the organisation of collective actions. Aungshu claimed: ‘The live frogs cannot be weighed on one scale. If you put one on it, another jumps out. We are like that.’ This lack of unity can be attributed to internal differences among peasants, in relation to resource endowment, and dependence on and loyalty to intermediaries, as
well as atomistic competition among peasants to sell on the market or to gain a long-term clientelist relationship with a particular moneylending trader.

5.9 Conclusion
The analysis presented here shows contestations of power between Tanchangya peasants and Bengali intermediaries over dadan in the culantro sector. By drawing on the everyday dynamics of such loan contracts, this article has argued that dadan facilitates greater spaces for exploitation, while it leaves peasants dependent on intermediaries for credit and product supply. The struggle over ‘just price’ remains at the core of this ‘symbiotic’ relationship of power. Furthermore, it is argued that moving beyond purely economic analysis, dadan relations need to be historically situated and embedded within wider socio-cultural-political contexts. The specific context of the Hill Tracts, where ethnicity plays a pre-eminent role, adds some interesting insights to our understanding regarding dadan. Through the primary ethnographic research conducted in this study, the everyday dynamics of dadan contracts in the culantro sector reveal new insights. First, the domination of Bengali intermediaries over Tanchangya peasants involves a combination of economic and social measures, such as the monopoly and control of intermediaries over product and credit markets to allow artificially depressed culantro prices to exist, while surveillance networks and socio-political sanctions enforce the terms of dadan contracts. Second, differences in terms of economic class cut across the ethnic divide, which is particularly evident in the collaborative role of indigenous peasants as surveillance agents of Bengali moneylending traders. Third, everyday peasant politics involves compliance, resistance and avoidance by individuals and community-based solidarity groups. Peasants display strong community solidarity by offering mutual assistance and maintaining ‘collective silence’ about surreptitious breaches of contracts by individual actors. Their micro-political everyday politics points to competing moral obligations associated with the pursuit of subsistence and agreed-upon terms of dadan contracts that shape their decisions. Thus, this case widens the debates concerning everyday politics, a notion usually employed in subaltern, sociological and anthropological studies, by establishing a novel connection between everyday politics with economic theories on interlocked markets.
CHAPTER SIX

Encountering the State: Situated Strategies and Perspectives of Tanchangya Villagers in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh


No alterations have been made to the above publication, except for the text that contains language errors and to adhere to a consistent style for the sake of the formatting of this dissertation.

ABSTRACT

Building on anthropological developments in the study of the state that highlight its margins, informal connections, and everyday dynamics, this paper examines the diverse strategies that Tanchangya villagers employ while negotiating peace and ‘development’ processes with local state actors in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), Bangladesh. It shows that the state is manifested in various forms at the local level. In a myriad of forms of encounters with state actors, Tanchangya villagers employ situated strategies of avoidance, engagement, and resistance. The paper claims that these strategies ultimately contribute to challenge the dominant processes that confine Tanchangya villagers to a state of marginalisation and aim to aid in the struggle to create greater spaces for the social, economic, and political dimensions of their lives. Thus, this paper offers an analysis of micro-power struggles that take place in the CHT’s rural spaces vis-à-vis the complex matrix of peace, citizenship, and ‘development’ in the region.

6.1 Introduction

The past few decades have seen a growing interest in the study of the state. Anthropological literature, in particular, has paid attention to advancing an understanding of the state beyond the conventionally held idea of it being a discrete, monolithic, and unitary entity that remains outside societal relations, by drawing attention to how the state manifests itself at the local level and how ordinary people experience it (Still, 2011: 315). This turn of ‘re-embedding’ the state into the society has revealed that boundaries between the state and the society are not only ‘blurred’
(Gupta, 1995), but also ‘fluid and negotiable according to social context and position’ (Fuller and Harriss, 2001: 15). This shift in the understanding of state-society relations has extended debates to highlight the margins of the state (e.g., Das and Poole, 2004), informal social relations (e.g., Berenschot and van Klinken, 2018), and everyday discourses, practices, and representations (e.g., Sharma and Gupta, 2006). Inspired by these theoretical developments, this article approaches the state by exploring the diverse strategies that people in the margins employ when negotiating with local state actors.

The analysis of this paper draws upon the case of indigenous Tanchangya villagers in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh during the post-CHT Accord period. Signed in 1997, this ‘peace accord’ marks an important turning point for the local populations, for not only did it end an official end to the decades-long armed conflict between state forces and the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (CHT United People’s Party, PCJSS), a solidarity organisation of indigenous peoples, but also because of the promises it makes to uphold the citizenship rights of all people of the CHT and to expedite the ‘development’ process. However, with most of the provisions of the accord still unimplemented two and a half decades later, the political landscape in the region remains one filled with frustration and mistrust. As was during the period of insurgency, it is the state which continues to be the main determiner of the overall peace and ‘development’ situation in the region.

This notwithstanding, in this paper I highlight that there are overlooked yet active processes of negotiating peace and ‘development’ by the Tanchangya villagers ‘from below’. I argue that the state, far from being a cohesive and unitary entity, is manifested in various forms at the local level. Earlier ethnographic works have highlighted the discrete strategies, such as avoidance (e.g., Shah, 2007) or extraction (e.g., Still, 2011), which people in the margins employ while encountering diverse manifestations of the state. However, I show that in a myriad of forms of encounters with state actors in the CHT’s rural spaces, Tanchangya villagers employ situated strategies, which include avoidance, engagement, and resistance. I argue that these strategies are employed to challenge the dominant processes which limit the citizenship rights of these indigenous villagers, and thus feed into an ultimate goal – the

68 The Tanchangya is one of 14 indigenous peoples found in the CHT, alongside ethnic Bengalis, the majority population of Bangladesh.
69 Ethnic groups indigenous to the CHT are now collectively known as Pahari or Jumma (Hill Peoples).
70 As opposed to the common understanding of ‘development’ as a vision and practice which embodies overwhelmingly positive change, I hold a critical view of the unquestioned usage of this term, particularly when taking into account the western invention of such categories as ‘developed’ and ‘underdeveloped’, in which unequal socio-economic-political positionings of groups of people are seen as something natural, often ignoring the historical roots behind these inequalities (see Woldeyes, 2021).
achievement of a ‘good life’. The goal of achieving a ‘good life’ here is a multifaceted one, intersecting with struggles to create greater spaces for the social, economic, and political dimensions of villagers’ lives. Thus, I extend the understanding of the state by underscoring the micro-power struggles of rural actors vis-à-vis the complex matrix of peace, citizenship, and ‘development’ in the CHT, which until now has remained understudied.

The analysis referenced in this paper particularly concerns the lived experiences and perspectives of Tanchangya villagers of Meyachara71, a village of predominantly smallholder peasants, where I conducted a six-month ethnographic fieldwork in 2019. The fieldwork was enriched by semi-structured interviews with Tanchangya villagers, while participation in their everyday lives generated deeper insights into their perspectives. Methodologically, I go against the grain of existing public discourses on the CHT that are dominated by the construction of indigenous peoples as victims, or losers of battles over state power and resources. The research partners involved in this study are considered as active, knowledgeable, and capable actors (Giddens, 1984). I start with a review of the theoretical developments in an anthropological understanding of the state that shape the empirical analysis of this paper. Next, I outline the historical processes that have shaped the marginalised position of the CHT’s indigenous peoples. In the final section, I explore the situated strategies of dealing with the state that Tanchangya villagers routinely employ.

6.2 Anthropology of the state: A review

The study of the state in anthropological scholarship has come a long way since Abrams (1977/1988), in his seminal essay, identified the state as an ‘ideological project’ rather than a material object, and focused on how it is reified. He claimed that the ‘a-historical mask’ of the state creates the illusion of unity, while its unity and cohesion are, in fact, if at all, ephemeral (Abrams, 1977/1988). Following a similar line of argument, Mitchell (1991) rejects the conventionally held idea that the state is merely a structure and instead suggests focusing on the practices which make said structures apparently exist, and thus have a ‘structural effect’. While highlighting that the state is not a standalone entity separate from the society, he proposes taking the distinction between the state and the society seriously, ‘a line drawn internally within the network of institutional mechanisms through which a social and political order is maintained’

71 The names of the research participants and the village presented here are pseudonyms.
(Mitchell, 1991: 78, 95). This view is helpful in (re-)conceptualizing the state as a part of other social institutions (e.g., family or civil society) (Sharma and Gupta, 2006: 9).

Such an ‘anthropological turn’ in the study of the state inspired scholars to take a look back at the state from its margins. To Das and Poole (2004), the margins of the state are understood from three perspectives: 1) peripheries where the state is yet to become prominent; 2) the illegibility of the state’s practices, documents, and words; and 3) the spaces between biopolitical bodies, laws, and discipline. Scholars (e.g., Das and Poole, 2004; Gupta, 1995; Sharma and Gupta, 2006; Shah, 2007; Still, 2011; Uddin and Gerharz, 2017) show that the state manifests itself in its margins in multiple forms. A focus on the margins of the state allows us to go beyond the areas where its boundaries are more or less clearly demarcated – such as an army camp – and to pay attention to sites such as village roads or tea stalls, which are not usual sites in which to study the state (Gupta, 1995: 384). Following this line of argument, this paper aims to illuminate such rural spaces where the ‘statehood’ is supposedly limited.

While analysing the state in India, Gupta (1995: 384) shows that state officials at local or peripheral levels frequently blur the lines between ‘public servants’ and ‘private citizens’. I argue that this idea is applicable primarily to state representatives in the civil bureaucracy who, despite being a part of the state apparatus, still remain in close contact with private citizens through other social institutions. In contrast, it may not apply to those state agents who represent more regimented state institutions such as the military, whose possibilities for interaction with private citizens are limited by the strict rules and regulations. The gap between ordinary citizens and members of regimented forces becomes particularly significant in contexts such as the CHT where members of state forces represent the dominant (ethnic) group as opposed to the ‘other’ (Wimmer, 1997).

This idea of ‘blurred boundaries’ between the state and society (Gupta, 1995) is closely connected to the notion of ‘informality’ in relation to studies of the state. Berenschot and van Klinken (2018: 96) argue that in many post-colonial countries, the notion of citizenship relies upon social networks and relationships, based on norms of reciprocity and how these relationships might be used to influence bureaucrats. In such contexts, individual ‘brokers’ play important roles in reducing the vulnerability of the poor (D. Lewis, 2011: 104). These ‘brokers’ can use their procedural knowledge and relationships with state actors to assist poorer citizens in comprehending their citizenship rights (Berenschot et al., 2018: 131). Thus, by emphasizing interpersonal relations, informality draws on the fact that state agents are still members of social institutions, and that bureaucratic processes often cannot be separated from ‘informal’
social processes (Berenschot and van Klinken, 2018: 99). In fact, studying the
Bangladeshi state demands an additional attention to ‘informality’ because the state
system at the local level is ‘overlaid with a complex web of informal relationships
between power-holders’ (Lewis and Hossain, 2008b: 10). However, this emphasis on
the ‘informal’ does not mean that distinctions between ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ are
easily drawn, as the boundaries between them are blurred and are constantly re-
negotiated (Schulz and Kuttig, 2020: 141). In fact, Lewis and Hossain (2019: 7) suggest
to conceive informality as integral to how the state functions.

A final theoretical component pertinent to this paper stresses the ‘everyday’ as a
primary arena for conceptualizing the state. Sharma and Gupta (2006: 11–20) highlight
the fact that alongside the state’s multiple systems of representation, everyday practices
of state agencies are a major sphere where the state is encountered, reproduced, and
boundaries are drawn. Likewise, Veena Das (2004: 248–49) claims that the official sites
of law are better understood when the ‘everyday’ is considered as a primary ground for
investigation. While recognizing Gupta’s (1995) emphasis on the discursive
construction of the state, in this paper I primarily investigate the everyday encounters of
Tanchangya villagers with local state actors. Just as the state can manifest itself in
various ways in peripheral locations as a fragmented and multilayered ‘translocal entity’
(Gupta, 1995; Sharma and Gupta, 2006: 6), the everyday encounters of ordinary citizens
take place in myriad ways. I argue that such manifestations are not only numerous but
can also be contradictory. On one hand, the state can emerge as a translocal entity with
a ‘legitimated monopoly over violence’ (Das and Poole, 2004: 7). On the other hand,
the state serves as a source of resources essential for survival, or the improvement of
quality of life (Still, 2011). Therefore, such everyday encounters are not limited to mere
interactions with or imaginations about the state, but they also emerge as foregrounds
for the formulation of people’s negotiation strategies with the state, for example in the
learning about bureaucratic procedures (Sharma and Gupta, 2006: 17).

Following from abovementioned scholarly debates, I draw on the repertoire of
strategies that Tanchangya villagers in rural CHT employ when negotiating with
different manifestations of the state. First, they make use of ‘avoidance’ when it comes
to encounters with repressive state actors – the security forces. The objective is to avoid
the anticipated violence of these state agents. I argue that these state forces do not
represent only Bengali settlers – the ethnic ‘others’ (Uddin and Gerharz, 2017), but can
also project an image of indigenous peoples as ‘killable bodies’ (Agamben, 1998) who
can be killed, tortured, or detained with impunity. Therefore, the desperate attempt to ‘stay away’ from repressive state agents (Shah, 2007) is a strategy that indigenous villagers follow in everyday settings. The second strategy involves extracting resources from the state (Still, 2011: 316; Yang, 2005). As in the case of Alirajpur in India, where bribes are deeply embedded in the social fabric of everyday life (Nilsen, 2012: 620), in the CHT bribes play an important role in dealing with various local state actors in order to gain access to the state resources. While cash is commonly used as it is elsewhere, I show that in the Tanchangya villages, ‘hospitality’ emerges as a major means to gain access to desired state resources. This strategy of ‘engaging’ particularly relates to infrastructure improvement schemes implemented by different state departments. The final strategy is ‘routine resistance’ against some state actors. I use the case of electricity ‘theft’ for irrigation where an ‘early warning system’ has been developed by villagers to protect them from raids by the Power Development Board (PDB) officials. The main objective of this strategy is to address the challenges associated with agricultural production vis-à-vis the water crisis in the region and the need for electricity to support irrigation.

6.3 State-indigenous relations in the CHT and the ‘peace accord’

The CHT is located in southeastern Bangladesh, sharing international borders with India and Burma. Indigenous peoples living in the CHT are ethnically and linguistically distinct from the Bengalis. After the annexation of the CHT by the British Raj in 1860, the colonial officials gradually introduced various policies to isolate the indigenous inhabitants from the Bengalis of the plains with the argument of creating ‘protection’ from the ‘crafty’ Bengalis (Shahabuddin, 2018). Colonial policies contributed to the construction of dichotomised entities – e.g., Pahari or indigenous Hill Peoples versus Bengali – which was perpetuated in various forms during the periods of Pakistani rule and modern-day Bangladesh (Uddin, 2010). As the participation of indigenous Hill Peoples in these unfinished nation-state building projects remained peripheral, systematic processes of ‘othering’ these communities have continued. As part of these processes, they have been viewed from two contradictory perspectives. On one hand, they have been perceived as ‘backward anthropological subjects’ who need to be brought forward to the ‘national mainstream’ (CHT Commission, 1991; Mey, 1984: 101–102). On the other hand, they have been portrayed as enemies or threats to

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72 This argument is founded on the claim of state-driven ‘genocidal processes’ enacted on indigenous peoples (see Levene, 1999; Mey, 1984).
‘national integration’ who need to be ‘tamed’ (Levene, 1999: 363; Mohsin, 2002: 37; Uddin and Gerharz, 2017). How the processes of viewing indigenous peoples as different from the ‘mainstream communities’ during the eras of Pakistan and Bangladesh have gradually pushed them to the margins is briefly outlined below.

Soon after the formation of Pakistan in 1947, its ruling elites started implementing large-scale ‘development’ projects in the CHT, on the grounds of ‘national interest’, which had devastating impacts on the local population. The Karnaphuli Hydroelectric project was the most devastating among them, causing the uprooting and dislocation of tens of thousands of families and the loss of most arable lands in the region (Adnan, 2004: 24; Mohsin, 2002: 102–106). Around the same time, the measures introduced by the British on the grounds of ‘protection’ were annulled by constitutional changes, thus paving the way to ‘open up’ the CHT to Bengalis from the plains (Adnan, 2004: 24; Mey, 1984: 24–26).

The domination of Pakistani rulers culminated in the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971, where the liberation forces emerged as victors. Following this victory, representatives of the indigenous peoples demanded constitutional recognition of their identities and autonomy from the leaders of the Bangladeshi state. The Bengali leaders of the newly born state, founded largely on ‘Bengali nationalism’, categorically rejected the indigenous leadership’s demands (Mohsin, 2002). This denial triggered the formation of the PCJSS in 1972, whose initially democratic movement turned into an armed struggle after a military regime took control of the country following the assassination of prime minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975 (Adnan, 2007b: 12).

The state responded to this armed resistance by following a few major strategies. The first was heavy militarisation in the CHT. As armed clashes between state forces and insurgents escalated, human rights violations became widespread, causing limitless suffering among civilians. Secondly, between 1979–85 the state implemented a massive Bengali resettlement program, in order to transform the demographic composition of the region and turn the indigenous population into a minority. Bengali setters received state-provided food rations, land, and other support for survival (Arens, 1997: 1813). Coupled with the settlement of around 400,000 Bengalis, indigenous peoples experienced attacks from military and Bengali settlers, losses of access to land, and waves of migration of thousands of families to India (Mohsin, 2002: 177–88). Thirdly, the state implemented various ‘development’ projects in order to support the counter-insurgency measures. On the one hand, the goal of these projects was to develop infrastructure to facilitate military operations (Arens, 1997: 1814).
such ‘development’ initiatives contributed to the destruction of subsistence-oriented indigenous economies by replacing them with market-oriented economies and modern agro-technology (CHT Commission, 1991: 62; Levene, 1999: 351). As a result of these counter-insurgency measures, ordinary indigenous peoples, particularly those in rural areas, were caught in a situation of restricted peace and limited citizenship rights.

After a series of dialogues, the CHT (‘Peace’) Accord was signed between the PCJSS and Bangladesh government in 1997. Alongside a commitment to uphold human rights and speed up ‘development’ in its preamble, the accord includes provisions for, inter alia, the declaration of the CHT as a ‘tribal populated region’, the demilitarisation of the region, settlement of land disputes, and the formation of semi-autonomous regional councils (United Nations Peacemaker, n.d.). Its implementation, however, has been an utter failure and remains a source of contention and mistrust. Government spokespersons continue to pay lip service to the accord, despite the fact that major provisions continued to be unimplemented. On the other side, the PCJSS frequently blames the government for betrayal regarding the accord’s non-implementation. Moreover, human rights violations in different forms have continued apace, while various state-corporate ‘development’ projects have contributed to further loss of access to lands by indigenous peoples.

Meanwhile, the indigenous political leadership experienced multiple fractures, which began with the formation of the United Peoples Democratic Front (UPDF) in 1998. Indigenous political forces became involved in violent conflicts between themselves and underwent further splits in the years that followed (Panday and Jamil, 2009: 1066). These conflicts not only considerably weakened their internal solidarity, but also considerably reduced their bargaining power with regard to the state. In addition, a clampdown on indigenous political activists by state forces began in 2017, which resulted in an increase in search operations, arrests, and detentions throughout the region, affecting not only activists but significantly restricting the lives of ordinary villagers.

Thus, although indigenous peoples of the CHT supposedly enjoy a certain degree of self-determination in various socio-economic-political spaces as per the accord, the state continues to regulate virtually every aspect of life in the region. Even post-accord, various state policies continue to alienate indigenous peoples from the state. Therefore, ordinary indigenous peoples routinely endeavour to negotiate with the state at the local level by utilizing situated strategies for desired changes, as outlined in the case of Meyachara below.
6.4 Armed forces and violence: Avoiding the state

A factor that continues to qualitatively differentiate everyday life in the CHT from the rest of Bangladesh is the widespread presence and control of state forces. Estimates are that about one-third of the Bangladeshi army is permanently present in the CHT (Mohsin, 2002: 172; IWGIA, 2012: 12). The ubiquity of military and paramilitary personnel at hundreds of check posts, camps, cantonments, resorts, and monuments leads one to immediately feel the domination of state forces. All temporary military-paramilitary camps in the CHT were supposed to be dismantled as part of the accord. Yet over 400 temporary camps, alongside large cantonments and barracks (Hill Voice, 2021) situated in major strategic locations in the region, continue to announce the presence of state forces in virtually every sphere of life in the CHT. Scholars (e.g., Ahmed, 2017: 28; Nasreen, 2017) have delineated how the presence of check-posts and routine checks of civilians at these check-posts have historically drawn a ‘discursive political boundary’ between the CHT and the rest of the country. However, it is not only in these ‘fixed’ establishments that local citizens encounter members of state forces but also in sites where ‘statehood’ is supposedly limited. It is indeed a ‘normal’, everyday phenomenon for local people to come across members of state forces in their vehicles plying along navigable roads and waterways, or as foot patrols at different rural sites — including villages, marketplaces, and schools. Therefore, the presence of the state forces in the CHT remains similar to the pre-accord period.

Militarisation was a major state strategy against the PCJSS insurgency. The armed conflicts between rebels and armed forces had far-reaching consequences on the lives of civilians. An atmosphere filled with violence and mistrust during this period, left ordinary citizens, particularly those in rural areas, caught between the two armies. While a large section of indigenous peoples provided support to the PCJSS via different means (e.g., food and shelter), the relationship between villagers and rebels was strained at times due to rebel members suspecting the villagers of spying for the armed forces and the repression of villagers by some unscrupulous rebel members. Contrarily, indigenous villagers were generally assumed by the ethicised state forces as being complicit with the rebels and hence were subjected to routine repression and violence. As a result, alongside experiences of restricted citizenship, stories of silent compliance, and flight to safer locations such as nearby jungles, temples, or urban areas still remain vivid in the memories of indigenous villagers. Nasreen (2017: 116) claims that indigenous women displayed great resilience during this period by acting pragmatically
(e.g., not revealing vital information). These experiences continue to shape the present-day strategies of villagers concerning the avoidance of imminent violence and harassment by the armed forces.

For instance, in August 2019, I was having a conversation with a group of Tanchangya women and men under a temporary hut by the village road of Meyachara, while they were preparing culantro\(^{74}\) (*eryngium foetidum*) that they had harvested to be delivered to Bengali intermediaries. A woman in the group suddenly whispered in a low voice that ‘…’ (using a code word) were approaching. As I did not immediately understand what she meant, I quickly turned around and saw that an army foot-patrol carrying automatic weapons was silently passing by. The villagers quickly put their eyes down on the pile of culantro and kept on working silently, perhaps to pretend that they were busy. At best some were stealing glances at the soldiers, but not staring. As the army soldiers moved beyond earshot, a woman said in a low voice, ‘Perhaps they “smelled” something.’ Continuing her thought, a man opined, still in a low voice, ‘They are probably conducting a raid against those who sell alcohol.’ The oldest person (a man) present in the group then requested all to stay silent, just in case the soldiers could still hear them. No villager could confirm, nor did they actively want to know, where this patrol was headed.

I observed such foot patrols almost every time I visited the nearest marketplaces on the weekly market days – Saturday and Wednesday. Although indigenous villagers pass them by or observe them from a distance in crowded marketplaces, they rarely express excessive curiosity to learn more about such patrols. Their approach is similar when it comes to the temporary training camps set up by the armed forces in village schools.\(^{75}\) Rather than observing closely or asking what is going on, villagers merely pass by when soldiers conduct training on school grounds. These examples make it clear that fear of imminent violence is present among villagers in their encounters with the security forces. Therefore, maintaining a certain distance from the members of the security forces emerges as a major strategy.

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\(^{73}\) Meyachara and its surrounding villages were not affected under the Bengali resettlement programme, due to the active lobbying of the local Tanchangya leaders. Therefore, the area does not have an associated history of violent encounters with women by the Bengali settlers and military, such as sexual assaults and rapes, such as has been experienced by indigenous women elsewhere in the CHT (see CHT Commission, 1991; Nasreen, 2017; Uddin and Gerharz, 2017). During the escalation of military operations against insurgents, Tanchangya men would hide in the jungle to avoid the possibility of being targeted as insurgents or their collaborators and thus avoiding violent confrontations, while the women would take care of their homes and fields.

\(^{74}\) Locally known as *bilati dhania*, *biledi baor*, or *baor*, a major crop in Ghagara-Wagga area.

\(^{75}\) Such camps can be set up for one to several nights.
Tanchangya villagers remain cautious particularly when the situation in the CHT turns *garam* (tense) due to increasing communal tensions or violence, armed clashes, or state clampdowns on indigenous political party members, all of which increase the possibility of military repression on ordinary indigenous villagers. While conducting my fieldwork, the villagers of Meyachara informed me that a clampdown of state forces on the members of local political parties (PCJSS and UPDF) was going on. During that time, Vanu, a villager affiliated with the local chapter of the Awami League, the ruling party, explained why evasion is used as a strategy:

…it is better to stay away [from the armed forces]. The other day I was in the field at the lower edge of the village, the army came along the stream. They were asking for people. There is no clear reason as to whom they would ask or look for. Recently one [PCJSS activist] got arrested by the army and beaten so much that he was not accepted at the police station.\(^76\)

As Vanu spotted this patrol, he silently turned around and headed home using a different path than usual. He elaborated on why he did so:

First, they would beat you; then they would ask for your identity. For that reason, I did not face them. They will arrest first. That’s why, in such *garam* situations, you are supposed to stay away, no matter how big of a leader you are… It does not matter what party you support. There is no better strategy but to stay away.

While explaining the reasons behind the desperate attempts to avoid encounters with state forces, Vanu underscores the dominance of the military over the cadres of the ruling party (as well as the civil administration) in the CHT, a situation unique to the region. His statement also supports the proposition that the state does not operate as a unitary and monolithic entity.

However, the ubiquitous presence of the armed forces barely allows indigenous villagers to avoid all encounters with them. When such encounters do occur, villagers may use innovative techniques such as feigned ignorance or dissimulation to save themselves. As an example, Jiban, a peasant, was washing culantro in the stream and was questioned by an army patrol. The soldiers asked for his name, but he pretended to be deaf and used body language to avoid answering. His use of dissimulation was simply to avoid further enquiries by the soldiers, which bring with them the possibility of negative consequences. Generally, however, compliance is the only choice that the

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\(^76\) The military can hand over people that they arrest/detain to the police after an interrogation, which often involves torture. In the case that a person is seriously injured following an interrogation, the police may not want to accept them because the responsibility for that person can then be transferred to them.
villagers are left with in encounters with the armed forces. Aungshu, a high-income peasant, explained his experience in June 2019:

We were on our way home this morning and suddenly the army stopped and checked us [on the main road near Meyachara]. They forced us to get down from the autorickshaw and checked the baggage of the ama mela [literally “our girl”, used to denote house help] whom we were escorting from her home in Kabachari... And what else could we do? We had to follow what they said.

Compliance in such situations, however, should not be understood merely as a passive submission to the domination of the forces. Rather, such pragmatic acts involve active responses from the villagers to save themselves from anticipated violence.

6.5 Procuring rural infrastructure: Engaging with the state

The state, however, is not viewed by villagers as merely a source of repression, particularly when it comes to the procurement of state resources in the form of rural infrastructure. In Meyachara, signs of the state as an infrastructure provider become immediately obvious when a visitor takes a walk along the brick road that connects the village with the main (tarmac) road, a part of the road network of the CHT. Alongside this brick road, the utility poles, schools, and the pucca building of the Buddhist temple make the presence of the state somewhat ubiquitous. At first glance, these structures may lead one to construct an image of the state as a generous provider. However, it emerges from the observation that the state neither provides these infrastructural changes as a part of fulfilling its obligations towards its citizens nor that the villagers are but passive beneficiaries waiting for the merciful giving of the state. Rural infrastructure works implemented by the state are often the result of an accumulation of pragmatic acts by villagers. Many of the infrastructure projects are seen through the villager’s imagination of the state as being able to be reached through officials who need to be ‘satisfied’. None of the aforementioned infrastructure projects was completed at once, rather in multiple stages, and virtually every major step in their realisation tells a story about how they came to be. The story of the electricity connection is a case in point.

Electricity connection was nonexistent in Meyachara and neighbouring villages up until 2000. Therefore, electricity was something that the Tanchangya villagers had long yearned for. In 2001, some families from Meyachara and those of a neighbouring village, Jurachari, made a ‘deal’ with an engineer from the PDB for electricity connection to both villages in exchange for a bribe of BDT 60,000 (US$ 714). As these
families from Meyachara attempted to pool together half of the total demand, families from the upper part of the village did not take part because they believed that the state would establish an electricity connection for free. As the complete amount demanded by the engineer was not reached, the utility poles which were installed only reached the lower part of Meyachara, covering less than half the families of the village. As they began seeing the lightbulbs illuminating the homes of their neighbours at night, the families who had missed out started to look for quick ways to get an electricity connection for themselves.

After several months, they made contact with the district head of the PDB through a relative-in-law who visited Meyachara. They also found two distant relatives of the official who, together with a member of the local Union Parishad (Union Council, UP)\(^{77}\), took up the responsibility of inviting the PDB chief to the village. The plan was to arrange a feast for the PDB chief, who would be accompanied by his staff and family members. Money was collected from aspirant families, and a lavish feast was arranged for 35 guests. As the feast took place, the relatives and the UP member raised the issue of electricity connection. Being ‘satisfied’ with their hospitality, the PDB chief promised to bring electricity coverage to the whole village. As news of this promise spread, families from neighbouring villages without electricity also enquired about the electricity connection. The local UP member and the relatives of the PDB officer took the lead in dealing with the matter. The PDB district chief advised them that the matter now went beyond his capacities and that they were to collect BDT 100,000 (US$ 1,190) to ‘help expedite’ the completion of paperwork in Dhaka, the capital. Thus, after a wait of about one further year, Meyachara and several nearby villages received electricity.

This anecdote demonstrates at least two lessons. Firstly, villagers often have to make some investment either in the form of cash or hospitality to please state officials in order to achieve desired changes. While the use of cash is common in obtaining a wide range of citizenship rights, hospitality is particularly important in achieving such infrastructural changes in rural settings. Unlike cash, hospitality (i.e., the invitation of influential figures, the arrangement of festivities, and the serving of food and drinks) has some interesting aspects. Similar to the case of the Bunun people of Taiwan (Yang, 2005: 493), eating and drinking together play a crucial role in the establishment of relationships with state actors in the CHT. Because of this relationship aspect, Tanchangya villagers always use terms such as ‘feeding’ or ‘sharing food’, rather than

\(^{77}\) UP is a rural and the lowest governance unit in Bangladesh.
‘bribe,’ when describing such occasions of hospitality. Aside from an expression of generosity, hospitality allows villagers to show respect to state officials that might eventually foster a sense of connection to these officials that cash may not offer. Moreover, hospitality ostensibly invokes norms of reciprocity, often leading to higher probabilities that desired changes might actually happen. State representatives receiving such ‘entertainment’ often make promises on the spot about fulfilling the demands made by villagers. Therefore, the story of entertaining the PDB chief is far from an exception. There are many stories of pre-planned feasts or the impromptu arrangement of food and drinks for bureaucrats and politicians, even including Members of Parliament. This, however, does not mean that every effort leads to a desired outcome or that the support which is eventually received is sufficient to complete the desired project. Such projects are then completed through further engagements with the state and/or the pooling of resources (e.g., money or labour) by villagers.

Second, the role of local leaders, particularly the public representatives of the UP, is crucial in ‘brokering’ such initiatives. Being the lowest administrative unit, the annual budget of the UP is often too limited to implement the many needed rural infrastructural works (see Lewis and Hossain, 2008b). Therefore, going beyond their official mandate, they can attempt to reach out to higher-level state institutions such as the Hill District Council (HDC) or the CHT Development Board (CHTDB) for rural infrastructure projects. As Sanjit, a UP representative says: ‘Where there is a need for BDT 1,000,000–1,500,000 (US$ 11,905–17,857), what can we do with BDT 60,000–70,000 (US$ 714–833)? We cannot carry on “development” work due to the shortage of funds… That is why we have to request the HDC and the CHTDB.’ Thus, although local public representatives constitute a part of the state apparatus, they can still take the lead in connecting villagers with higher-level bureaucrats and public representatives. On such occasions, they act more like society members than state representatives.

Being public representatives, they are in a good position to access information, learn bureaucratic processes, and maintain contacts with state representatives at higher levels, as well as ruling political party cadres who can influence bureaucratic processes despite being ‘outside’ the state machinery. Vanu explains the importance of local public representatives in acts involving procuring state resources: ‘You need a representative of the public. It does not matter whether she/he is clever or a fool… No matter how clever or old we are, our ten efforts are equal to her/his one effort. The
public representative is similar to the sarkar.\textsuperscript{78} Appealing to lower-level public representatives can be effective particularly when they are affiliated with the ruling political party and/or possess an individual charisma in dealing with higher-level state representatives or political cadres who operate as quasi-state actors.

For the same reason, desired infrastructure changes may remain unrealised due to the limitations of local public representatives. Debu, a disgruntled villager, blames the poor performance of a local public representative for the people’s resulting suffering during the rainy season due to the lack of a proper road on his side of the village:

The chairman was saying that… he will make the road pucca. He won’t be able to do anything. He has to know how to “cry”… When you are the running chairman, you have to know how to “cry” in front of the sarkar… that I need this and that in my area.

Aside from skills such as ‘pleading’ for resources, villagers expect that local public representatives remain informed concerning resources made available by different state organs that can potentially benefit their villages. As Vanu opines:

The members and chairmen have to remain aware about what is being allocated where... where the sarkar is distributing solar panels, where the sarkar is providing things ‘for free’, where they need to lodge applications… They should know such news. That is the reason why they have been made representatives of the public.

However, in highlighting the critical role of these local self-government representatives in ‘brokering’ infrastructure changes I am not claiming that they are benevolent angels solely working for the ‘common good’. As elsewhere in Bangladesh (Lewis and Hossain, 2008b), Tanchangya villagers point to various instances of petty local-level corruption that demonstrate the fact that some of these representatives too can pursue goals of self-interest at the expense of their communities.

6.6 The struggle over electricity: Resisting the state

It was around noon on a mid-summer day in 2019. I was listening to Jonaki and her husband, Ananda, about culantro farming in their courtyard while they were cleaning vegetables to sell at the market. Suddenly, Jonaki’s face turned pale as she spotted a pickup truck of the PDB plying along the village road some fifty meters away from their home. Initially undecided, Jonaki then quickly picked up her cell phone and called a relative of hers to ask whether he knew that a PDB vehicle had entered the village, and

\textsuperscript{78} Although sarkar literally means government, people often use this term to denote both ‘government’ and ‘state’.
whether the cable and the water pump which he was using for watering his culantro patch, were disconnected from the electric pole and hidden. Her relative replied that he could take care of the pump but not the cable. In the course of the afternoon, it became known that the PDB team had seized several coils of electric cable and a water pump as part of this raid targeting illegal connections. In the case of the confiscated water pump the PDB team demanded BDT 6,000 (US$ 71) from the owner to leave it behind. The owner offered BDT 3,000 (US$ 36) but they did not accept. They took the pump with them suggesting that the owner contact them later to retrieve it.

This ethnographic vignette offers a vivid picture of everyday politics vis-à-vis state-delivered electricity, something which villagers struggled to obtain two decades ago. This situation of control by state actors and the resistance of Tanchangya villagers stems chiefly from the need for water for irrigation vis-à-vis the agroecological context of Meyachara and the surrounding villages. Agricultural-social reproduction in these villages, surrounded by rugged hilly terrain, is highly reliant on irrigation from seasonal streams, most of which dry up during the dry season (November-May). Therefore, villagers rely on the leftover water from a few natural catchments found along the otherwise dry riverbeds and underground reservoirs which are harnessed by digging wells. As donor-funded ‘development’ initiatives mushroomed in the CHT during the early years of the post-accord period (Gerharz, 2002), the water crisis in various areas of the CHT was also addressed to some extent. In Meyachara, for example, about a dozen ring wells were set up mainly with support from Danida. At around the same time, electricity was brought to the village, and most villagers gradually became dependent on electricity-powered water pumps and (one-inch) plastic pipes, to supply water from the abovementioned sources for household and irrigation purposes.

The villagers of Meyachara informed me that a shortage of water is increasingly becoming a challenge, particularly with respect to agriculture. Dealing with the challenges associated with irrigation is particularly critical in these villages because the culantro season begins in December-January, coinciding with the dry season. The most popular way to deal with the water shortage during this period is to use electricity-powered water pumps and pipes to irrigate culantro farms. However, electricity costs money and its regular usage for irrigation can considerably increase the required amount of capital investment. Culantro is already a capital-intensive crop for which many villagers depend on credits. Therefore, tapping electricity for irrigation from

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79 A few were also set up by the HDC and the Department of Public Health.
utility poles using hooks and cables has emerged as a survival strategy for a large number of rural cultivators. Another reason given for electricity theft is that villagers cannot use their legal residential electric meters because their agricultural plots are often far away from their homes. As many villagers do not have sufficient land for culantro farming, which requires a crop rotation with rice every second year, they depend on other lands rented from richer families located in various spots in and around the village.

Moreover, alternatives to illegal connections are not always feasible. Diesel water pumps (together with a three-inch pipe), for example, not only cost money for rent and fuel, but also require a minimum depth of water, so it is only feasible in certain cases. Another alternative is the so-called krishi (agricultural) meter, which can be used to legally measure electricity consumption for irrigation at a tariff lower than for residential consumption. However, the krishi meter is yet to become popular as many low-income peasants have little interest in investing their money in it, as their farming itself remains uncertain due to shortages of land and capital. Thus, the agro-ecological and economic situation of villagers has turned the usage of illegal electricity for irrigating culantro patches into a somewhat essential practice. Stealing state-supplied electricity, however, is not without risks, and most villagers say that the safest time to do so is at night. Yet as staying up all night in darkness and mosquito bites are conditions not favoured by many, villagers dare to tap electricity during the daytime, despite being aware of the risk of raids by PDB officials.

PDB raids involve several lower-level officials suddenly appearing in villages, particularly during the dry months, in a pickup truck, and acting against illegal electricity connections. Actions may involve the disconnection of power lines, seizure of electric cables and other appliances being used while tapping electricity, charging of fines, and filing criminal cases against illegal users. The raids are aimed at controlling the widespread theft of electricity in the country. However, the Tanchangya villagers claim that PDB raids are nothing but a way for these state officials to be able to demand (cash) bribes. In the event one gets ‘busted’, she/he can negotiate a bribe on the spot, or communicate to the officials that they will take back the seized items at a later date. Indeed, most seized items rarely reach the PDB offices and any negotiations that take place are often informal, outside of the office space.

The raid teams are unarmed and mostly consist of not more than five people. Yet an ‘invisible power’ behind these officials leads villagers to be largely accommodative of such raids, as Manu, a needy peasant, expresses after he lost his cable in a raid:
‘What to do? What could I say? They just took away… I could not do anything.’

Expressions of anger among villagers remain largely limited to the level of ‘hidden transcripts’ (Scott, 1990) in their everyday discourses. Their resentment is expressed in the form of character assassinations of these electricity officials: as ghushkhor (bribe-takers), or calling them derogatory names related to their physical features, like kalaya (dark guy) or motaya (fat guy). With such expressions of anger remaining beyond the perception of these state actors, it becomes clear that the villagers are conscious of the fact that the state is, after all, about discipline and order. Chiran, an elder, chided a young man after the latter expressed his desire to collectively chase PDB officials with sticks: ‘Do whatever you want but don’t go beating or chasing. You cannot go against the sarkar. These PDB guys are also like the army. All the villagers will suffer if something is done against them.’

With the need for electricity for irrigation on the one hand, and the risk of raids on the other, Tanchangya villagers have developed an ‘early warning system’ based on village relationship networks to warn themselves from raids and save themselves from the consequences. According to this informal arrangement, as soon as information of an imminent PDB raid is received, or a PDB pickup truck is spotted in or around villages, villagers inform their close kin, friends, or neighbours, as Jonaki did. This news spreads fast through the village-based networks. Those using illegal lines then try to take care of their cables, pipes, and water pumps before the raiding team arrives.

Occasionally, some villagers may covertly get information about forthcoming raids from PDB officials who are in close contact with them. For example, some Meyachara villagers maintain a warm relationship with a petty official of the PDB through everyday interactions and invitations to social events that involve a meal (e.g., weddings). Occasionally, they even arrange food and drinks for this official. Despite being a state employee, this official is considered an individual with manabata (benevolence), not a repressive state agent. This is underscored by the fact that this official never demands bribes or said meals from the villagers for the support that he provides. Thus, this official is a clear example of agents that collapse the boundaries between the state and society.

These arrangements in the rural CHT can be compared with the informal practices in the slums of Dhaka. In these slums, access to and use of electricity are controlled by local mastaaans (musclemen) or influential leaders who, in collaboration with state actors, take charge of the distribution of utilities among slum-dwellers. Unlike Tanchangya villagers, slum-dwelling working-class Bengalis have little
opportunity to challenge the spaces produced by these influential actors, as they are hindered not only by their marginalised socio-economic-political positionings but also because their physical security and economic survival largely depend on these influential actors (S. Hossain, 2012).

These informal arrangements of everyday resistance of the Tanchangya villagers against state actors are rather spontaneous ‘self-help’ measures, with little organisation, and do not, of course, guarantee full protection from potential ramifications, as outlined above. But they are the only choices that many families are left with. Therefore, they justify, for example, illegal electricity usage highlighting how needy peasants benefit from it. As Laxmiram, an elder, argues:

Farming culantro requires a lot of water… I wish to clearly say to the PDB people, to their faces – you doing this [raids] means you are “killing” the cultivators. Be it stealing or something else, whatever the cultivators are doing, they are doing it to grow crops. They are not wasting the water; they are giving it to the fields. I wish to say that when they harass. That it is benefiting us.

6.7 Conclusion
This paper has illustrated how Tanchangya villagers negotiate with diverse local state actors to create greater spaces for the socio-economic-political dimensions of life following the signing of the CHT Accord. This paper explored how Tanchangya villagers, as active and capable agents, encounter, imagine, and formulate strategies in relation to local state actors in their everyday lives. An ethnographic lens on the lives of these indigenous villagers was used to ‘discover’ and analyse these micro-political life struggles in the CHT, the results of which help us to better understand state-indigenous relations in the CHT.

As it emerged in the analysis, structural conditions aimed at ‘othering’ indigenous peoples, set by colonial and post-colonial states, pushed them to the margins of the state. Political efforts to change the indigenous populations’ situation through the accord remained largely on paper. The accord shows that formal policy changes do not always bring the desired changes in the everyday lived experiences of ordinary citizens. Therefore, citizens such as Tanchangya villagers maintain their struggles in order to achieve the desired changes ‘from below’.

The analysis of state-indigenous relations presented in this paper can be summarised from at least two aspects. First, the Bangladeshi state as a fragmented ‘translocal entity’ emerges as multiple manifestations which are often discrete from one another and even contradictory. The various embodiments of the state in the form of
officials and politicians, interactions with these state representatives, symbolic representations, and bureaucratic processes reinforce the anthropological claim that the state is far from a coherent entity. Depending on its manifestation, the state can be both a source of repression as well as a source of resources necessary to improve the quality of life. Second, the encounters with the various manifestations of the state lead Tanchangya villagers to employ situated strategies. Their first strategy involves the evasion of encounters with state forces, with the goal of avoiding the anticipated violence from these actors. However, such encounters are sometimes inevitable due to the overwhelming presence of state forces in the region. The second strategy is to embrace the state when the possibility exists to procure resources from it. Procuring state resources in the form of infrastructure projects often requires entertaining the relevant high-level state bureaucrats and politicians, a process in which lower-level public representatives play an important role. The final strategy is to resist some state actors, as illustrated through the case of illegal electricity connections, actions which stem from the need for survival associated with agricultural production. This covert act of resistance is founded primarily on village-based relationship networks.

The micro-level everyday politics of people at the margins reminds us that the struggles of the ordinary which take place in various socio-political-economic processes rarely make the news in popular media or are the topics of policy debates. However, the significance of such struggles for the survival of ordinary indigenous peoples is far from trivial. Although the ‘victories’ achieved through such struggles may seem negligible in the scheme of major policy changes, it cannot be denied that they ultimately contribute to the resistance of larger processes that have confined indigenous villagers in a state of marginalisation, and feed into their efforts towards achieving a ‘good life’.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

7.1 Introduction
Based on the case of the Tanchangya villagers of Meyachara, I explored the survival-cum-upward mobility strategies of the Hill Peoples of the CHT during the post-Accord period. These situated strategies of Tanchangya villagers were explored in three social contexts that shape their everyday lived experiences. The first social context revolves around the immediate social world of the villagers, characterised by internal hierarchies, along with their systems and practices of self-help, reciprocation, and redistribution that help to foster internal harmony and solidarity among them. The second context highlights interactions and negotiations between Meyachara’s peasant families and Bengali moneylending traders. This interface was examined by underscoring the processes of negotiating in dadan loan contracts by both parties. The third social situation represents the interface between the villagers and the state, illustrating how Tanchangya villagers experience and perceive the state through their encounters with its diverse manifestations at the local level. Throughout the processes of exploring, analysing, and presenting the situated strategies employed by these villagers, I immersed myself in their lifeworld while engaging closely with relevant scholarly debates and the broader economic-social-political context of the CHT. Therefore, the outcome of this research endeavour was the deepening of my knowledge about the life struggles of these Tanchangya villagers, a wide range of economic-social-political issues concerning the CHT, and various social scientific concepts and debates related to people’s survival-cum-upward mobility. Simultaneously, this intellectual exercise contributed to the scholarly debates that I engaged with and the scholarship specific to this region through the co-creation of knowledge by my research partners.

In this concluding chapter of this dissertation, I reflect on the major highlights, empirical findings, contributions, and limitations of this research. First, I revisit the core points of this research, which encompasses the broader context where the research is situated, the methodological approach, and the conceptual framework. Then, I summarise the main findings and contributions of each empirical chapter. Finally, I outline the limitations of this research and provide suggestions for future studies.
7.2 Core points of this research

I have argued that the everyday struggles of the Tanchangya villagers are intricately connected to the processes of marginalisation experienced by the Hill Peoples as a result of the broader nation-state-building process in the CHT. Moreover, I have contended that the strategies employed by the Tanchangya villagers in relation to the market and state actors are multidimensional, diverse, and contextually situated, often intertwined with various social networks. These situated strategies aim to ensure their survival and pursuit of a ‘good life’ by creating broader spaces in the economic, social, and political dimensions of life. To support these central arguments, I have addressed the following core points in this research.

First, I have outlined the gradual changes brought about by colonial rule and post-colonial nation-state building processes in various spheres of the CHT, which shape the situated strategies of contemporary Hill villagers in relation to market and state actors. The analysis revealed that the ruling elites during the British, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi periods continued to view the Hill Peoples of the CHT and their economic, social, and political practices as incompatible with their modernist and developmentalist visions. These views contributed to the process of ‘othering’ the Hill Peoples and constructing antagonistic binaries such as Hill Peoples vs. Bengalis. They also led to a wide range of policies and structural changes aimed at transforming the economic, social, and political spheres of the Hill Peoples’ lives. As a result, the predominantly subsistence-oriented, community-centred, and reciprocity-based economies of the Hill Peoples have been transformed into family-centred and market exchanged-based economies, dominated by their ethnic ‘Others’. Additionally, the state has also undergone a process of ethnicisation, primarily representing the dominant mainstream communities. Consequently, the economic and political autonomy of the Hill Peoples have significantly declined, and issues pertaining to their survival and the improvement of their living standards have become major concerns. However, the scholarly work on the CHT have paid only limited attention to the situated strategies employed by the ordinary Hill Peoples. This research is an attempt to fill this gap in scholarly knowledge by examining the life struggles of the Tanchangya villagers of Meyachara.

Second, I have argued that in the absence of ethnographic approaches, most scholarly work on the CHT fails to produce ‘thick descriptions’ of the social phenomena under study. As a result, studies highlighting the situated strategies of the Hill Peoples often fail to delve deep into the complex interconnected issues and social relations that underlie these strategies. To address this gap, this research followed an ethnographic
approach, primarily built on a six-month participatory observation-based fieldwork centred on Meyachara, supplemented by secondary sources. Additionally, my continuous reflection on the knowledge generated by these two main sources served as the third component of this research. My close engagement and conversations with the research partners among the Meyachara villagers generated deep insights about their life struggles. The textual materials provided me with concepts to make sense of their life struggles, as well as a contextual basis, and connections to relevant scholarly debates. Thus, adopting an ethnographic approach enabled me to gain an intimate understanding of the inner workings of the intricate micro-politics of the life struggles of the Tanchangya villagers, while highlighting the complex power relations among individuals, systems, and institutions that are closely intertwined with their life struggles.

Third, this research has built upon the scholarly debates on survival strategies and related concepts (e.g., reciprocity, relationality, and everyday politics). Through a review of the existing scholarship, I have put forward five proposals for research that have also influenced the analysis that I have presented in the dissertation. First, in contexts where various dimensions of life are critically and inseparably linked, studies must highlight the multidimensionality of situated strategies employed by people. Focusing solely on one dimension of life (e.g., economic) fails to capture the bigger picture of the life struggles of the social actors under study. I have shown that much of the scholarship on the situated strategies employed by the Hill Peoples emphasised specific dimensions (e.g., economic or political). My research addressed this scholarly gap by following a multidimensional approach to examine the multiple interlinked dimensions of the lives of Tanchangya villagers. Second, the notion of survival strategy must be understood in conjunction with upward mobility. I have argued that it is important to emphasise this connection as actors may employ the same strategies for both survival and improving their standard of living. This proposition is particularly critical in contexts where the actors (such as the Tanchangya villagers) are not homogenous but draw upon the same pool of resources, capabilities, and social networks while pursuing their respective strategies. Third, it is necessary to place individual social actors at the centre of analysis while examining their situated strategies. The actor-oriented approach invites us to emphasise the agency of social actors to highlight their knowledgable and capability in overcoming adversities even under extreme domination. Fourth, studies on situated strategies employed by individual social actors must pay attention to the relationality of these individuals with other social
actors. In many contexts, the existing social networks support individuals in addressing adversities and achieving their aspired goals. Finally, it is important to consider all interconnected strategic acts within the repertoire that the social actors rely on. Studies can benefit from paying attention to the diversity of actions as social actors often maintain a diversified portfolio of strategies rather than relying on a single one. These diverse acts range from individual everyday actions to collective actions, as well as the use of avoidance, accommodation, and resistance.

Fourth, the primary focus of this research has been on the diverse strategies employed by different social groups among the Tanchangya villagers. Rather than romanticising their implications, my attention has been on how these strategies are employed, the factors that shape them (e.g., morality), and their immediate results. The diverse micropolitical acts highlighted in this dissertation are often for immediate gains supporting the goals of survival and for creating wider spaces in various aspects of life. They are not aimed at breaking down repressive systems or taking over the positions of dominant actors. As exemplified in the case of dadan contracts, the everyday political acts of Tanchangya villagers employed against Bengali moneylending traders are intended to secure favourable prices for their agricultural produce rather than dismantling this system of informal moneylending or becoming moneylending traders themselves.

7.3 Summary of discussions, findings, and contributions
The analysis of the situated strategies of Tanchangya villagers has been presented in the form of a ‘cumulative dissertation’ centred on four analytical papers. These papers constitute Chapter Three to Chapter Six of this dissertation, with each addressing a specific social issue. The major arguments, findings, and contributions presented in these chapters are summarised below.

In Chapter Three, I have analysed the livelihood-related strategies of Tanchangya peasants highlighting their subsistence, risk management, and reciprocity practices. I have argued that while protecting familial subsistence is important for Tanchangya peasants, it does not make them conservative in terms of risk-taking. As prudent social actors, they routinely deal with risks and uncertainties associated with agricultural reproduction and market participation. Their flexible strategies, aimed at securing subsistence and improving family conditions, involve constant experimentation and decision-making regarding crop choices and farming methods. While being flexible, open, and innovative in the context of improving the family
situation by creating a diversified portfolio of income sources, Tanchangya peasants continue their experimentations with new crops and agricultural technologies and engage themselves in off-farm livelihood activities. I have further argued that the self-help and reciprocity practices provide the Tanchangya peasant families with a minimum level of insurance during times of scarcity and extraordinary situations in life. Moreover, these practices function as a safety net against the domination and economic exploitation by the Bengali capitalist trader moneylenders. Consequently, despite significant erosion, reciprocation, and redistribution still serve as social insurance for Tanchangya villagers. Thus, by engaging with the debates on reciprocity, gift-giving, and community solidarity, this chapter drew attention to the micro-political everyday struggles of the rural Hill Peoples, an aspect to which existing scholarship concerning the region has paid little attention.

In Chapter Four, I have analysed institutions of self-organisation in the CHT that have received little attention in the literature concerning this region, unlike the Bengali-inhabited plains of Bangladesh. Taking the case of the Meyachara Samaj, a local self-organisation in which the majority of Tanchangya villagers participate, I have evaluated self-organisational activities initiated by the community members. I have analysed major defining features of the samaj among the Tanchangya and explained its significance for this community. While drawing attention to the samaj in the context of the CHT, the contribution of this chapter lies in making a comparative analysis of samaj organisation between the Bengalis of the plains and the Tanchangya of the CHT. Similar to the Bengali-inhabited plains, the samaj among the Tanchangya is largely constituted of neighbouring patrilineages. One of its major functions is to persuade and pressurise the villagers to conform to morally correct codes of conduct, thus providing a basic framework for different social activities. I have demonstrated that despite several similarities between the samajes in these two contexts, the samaj self-organisation among the Tanchangya has some distinctive features. Firstly, while patrilineage does play a role, the membership in the samaj among the Tanchangya is formalised through membership in the rituals of a local Buddhist temple. Thus, rather than representing a physical location, samaj here functions and sustains itself as a translocal social space. Secondly, being a samaj member among the Tanchangya essentially entails bearing certain responsibilities in relation to other samaj members, manifested through engaging with and contributing to different social-religious activities and being entitled to various privileges. What is unique about the samaj among the Tanchangya is that the samaj members play the role of ‘hosts’ rather than ‘guests’ during the performance of a social-
relational ritual by a member of the *samaj*. Thirdly, the *samaj* among the Tanchangya is organised by three generation-based councils, each assigned specific roles and responsibilities, with the council of the elders at the top of the *samaj* hierarchy. However, in practice, the *samaj* is led by a particular group of individuals, the *samaj* leaders, who have gained respect and prominence within the community, regardless of their generational status. Thus, unlike in the plains, where *samaj* leadership is under the hegemonic domination of political leaders, the Tanchangya *samaj* leadership remains diverse, with the representation of people of different backgrounds. I conclude this chapter by arguing that the *samaj* among the Tanchangya operates as an institution of reciprocity and redistribution of resources that contributes to the reproduction of a collective sense of belonging among community members.

Chapter Five focuses on the processes of *dadan* contract negotiations between Tanchangya peasants and Bengali intermediaries regarding production and marketing of culantro, the cash crop. A major argument that I have put forward is that while *dadan* leads to greater scope for exploitation by market intermediaries, it facilitates Tanchangya peasants’ access to credit and the supply of culantro to wider national markets. In this sense, *dadan* can be viewed as a contested mechanism of exploitation. Secondly, I have explained the social, cultural, and political aspects of such contracts, alongside their economic aspects, by highlighting their social embeddedness. Through emphasising everyday power struggles over *dadan* contracts, the analysis of this chapter reveals a complex constellation of actors, relations, processes, and structures that play out in such contestations. I have also highlighted that the peasants’ decisions and strategies regarding these contracts are shaped by contested moralities concerned with protecting familial subsistence and the obligations arising from such contracts. Theoretically, the analysis of this chapter has engaged with debates on interlocked market relationships of the *dadan* loan system, by highlighting their everyday dimensions and shedding light on several under-analysed aspects of the *dadan* system in the existing literature. First, although *dadan* is primarily an economic relationship between two parties (e.g., peasants and market intermediaries), ethnicity plays a prominent role in these relations within the CHT, setting it apart from the context of the mainstream peasantry in Bangladesh. Secondly, I have emphasised the use of surveillance networks and social-political sanctions, in addition to economic means, by Bengali trader-moneylenders. The integration of such a combination of economic and extra-economic means has received limited attention in the existing literature. Finally, I have argued that the repertoire of everyday politics employed by Tanchangya peasants
to secure just prices of their crops encompasses compliance, covert resistance, avoidance, and occasional open confrontation, with individuals receiving assistance from community-based support groups. Thus, this chapter widens the debates on everyday politics, a concept used in social studies on power struggles, by establishing a novel connection between this concept and economic theories concerning interlocked market relations.

In Chapter Six I have examined the situated strategies employed by Tanchangya villagers—while negotiating peace and ‘development’ processes with local state actors. This chapter has built upon anthropological developments in the study of the state that highlight its margins, the informal social connections that play out in bureaucratic processes, and the everyday dynamics of encountering and perceiving the state by ordinary people. Engaging with these debates, this chapter makes the following contributions. First, it draws attention to the fact that the Bangladeshi state manifests itself in multiple forms at the local level. The diverse local embodiments of the state, including state functionaries and interactions with them, symbolic representations, and bureaucratic processes support the anthropological claim that the state is a fragmented, rather than a coherent entity. Second, the myriad forms of the encounters and experiences of Tanchangya villagers with different manifestations of the state are discrete and divergent. Depending on the form of manifestation, the state is viewed as a source of repression, or as a provider of resources that can improve the quality of life of villagers. Third, given the diverse manifestations of the state, the strategies employed by the villagers are pragmatic and situated, encompassing acts of avoidance, engagement, and resistance. The strategies of avoidance may involve non-engagement, feigned ignorance, and compliance as attempts to evade imminent violence from repressive state actors. The strategies of engagement involve ‘pleasing’ relevant state actors with the intent to access state resources. Lastly, the strategies of resistance involve expressing dissent against a section of state actors to secure access to essential means of survival (e.g. electricity for irrigation) by using village-based relationship networks.

7.4 Limitations of this research
While making the scholarly contributions noted above, this research also has certain limitations. First, my primary focus was on the situated strategies employed by Tanchangya villagers and their immediate results, rather than their long-term outcomes. Whether or not these micro-political acts could potentially result in long-term outcomes like policy or structural changes was beyond the scope of this research. Nor was I able
to discover any instances in which the villagers had taken over the positions of powerful market and state actors. Although investigating such phenomena would have been interesting, it was practically challenging for me to delve deep into these processes within the limited timeframe of my fieldwork. Such enquiries would have required prolonged and close engagement with research partners and long-term observation of changes within the research context. However, the limited scope of this research points to the potential of longitudinal studies in the future.

Second, although the level of analysis of this research was Meyachara village, I have been able to cover only a fragment of the life struggles of the residents of this village. This limitation is perhaps common in ethnographic research, as no study can claim to generate a complete representation of the culture of a community. For this reason, the findings and lessons learned from this research cannot be generalised as the realities being faced by all ordinary indigenous peoples of the CHT. Rather, my objective in this ethnographic case study has been to deeply examine certain aspects of social change among a particular section of the ordinary Hill Peoples. Taking this limitation into consideration, future studies could aim for achieving greater generalisability. It could be achieved by conducting comparative analyses of multiple village communities with diverse socioeconomic, ethnic, and geographic backgrounds.

7.5 Final remarks
A key motivation behind conducting this ethnographic research was to go against the grain of popular discourses that portray the Hill Peoples merely as losers in battles over resources and power with state and market actors. My intention has been to present them as proactive social actors with agency, thereby drawing attention to the fact that despite being on the margins, ordinary Hill Peoples, such as the Tanchangya villagers of Meyachara, persevere in their constant struggle for survival and improvement of the quality of their lives. Through this research, I have explored and highlighted the micro-political life struggles of the Tanchangya villagers of Meyachara, which rarely make headlines in popular media or become topics of political debate. The analysis has revealed that as trivial as they might seem, the role of situated strategies employed by the Tanchangya villagers is far from insignificant in supporting them in overcoming adversities and moving forward, contributing to their ultimate goal of achieving a ‘good life’. Simultaneously, these seemingly minor strategic acts serve as covert expressions of dissent against the processes that have embroiled these Hill villagers in marginalised positions.
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this submitted dissertation is entirely my own work and has been composed without having received unpermitted assistance, and that no sources have been used unless otherwise indicated, including entirely or partially included text excerpts as well as graphs, tables and the use of analysis software. Moreover, I declare that the submitted electronic version corresponds to the printed version of the dissertation and that it, in this or similar form, has not yet been submitted and assessed as a component of doctoral performance.

It is also to declare that no commercial brokerage or consultancy services were hired for the completion of my dissertation.

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PhD in International Development Studies at IEE, Ruhr University Bochum. My PhD project titled Community, Market Intermediaries, and the State: Survival-cum-upward Mobility Strategies of Indigenous Villagers in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh was awarded Magna Cum Laude.

Curtin University, Perth 02/2012–08/2013
Master of Human Rights, Centre for Human Rights Education (CHRE), Curtin University. My dissertation titled Self-determination of the Jummas of Chittagong Hill Tracts: A Journey through the History was graded as high distinction (82%). Course Weighted Average: 80.75%.

Master of Business Administration, University of Dhaka with a major in Accounting and Information Systems. Cumulative GPA: 3.77 (on a scale of 4.00).

University of Dhaka, Dhaka 03/2003–06/2008
Bachelor of Business Administration, University of Dhaka with a major in Accounting and Information Systems. Cumulative GPA: 3.50 (on a scale of 4.00).

WORK EXPERIENCE

Teaching Assistant
Scholars at Risk Advocacy Seminar 03/2021–09/2021
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The responsibilities include training, supervising and managing a group of international students engaging in real-world advocacy campaigns to support imprisoned and at-risk academics.

Intern (Volunteer)
Genocide Studies and Prevention: 04/2020–12/2020
An International Journal
Online/Bochum, Germany
The responsibilities include aiding the journal editors, including internal review and editing of papers submitted to the journal for publication.

Project Coordinator (Human Rights)
Kapaeeng Foundation (KF) 10/2013–02/2018
Dhaka, Bangladesh
The responsibilities at KF (www.kapaeeng.org) included coordination of various projects implemented by the organization related to the human rights of indigenous peoples in Bangladesh. Tasks included: research, advocacy, capacity-building and fund-raising.

Project Assistant on Reconciliation Action Plan (Volunteer Intern)
Amnesty International Australia 02/2013–08/2013
Perth, Australia
The internship at Amnesty International Australia aimed at assisting the organization to build a better understanding of Aboriginal history, culture, plight, and struggle through creating awareness among the organizational staff and volunteers.

RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS


PUBLICATIONS IN OTHER FORMATS (SELECTED)


- Chakma, Bablu (2016) Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and Indigenous Peoples in Bangladesh: How Have We Come? Kapaeeng Foundation, Dhaka, Bangladesh.


RESEARCH PROJECTS (UNPUBLISHED)


SCHOLARSHIPS AND AWARDS

- Research School PLUS grant (No. B_2019_01_001) of RUB Research School, Ruhr University Bochum for May-November 2019 to conduct field research in Bangladesh.
- Development Oriented Scholarship of Bread for the World for 2018-2023 to pursue PhD in International Development Studies at IEE, Ruhr-University Bochum.
- Australian Development Awards (ADS) of Australian Government for 2012-2013 to pursue Master of Human Rights at Curtin University, Australia.

WORKSHOPS, TRAININGS AND CONFERENCES (SELECTED)

- *Workshop: Theorien in den Asienwissenschaften*, organised by German Association for Asian Studies from 31 January – 02 February 2020 at Ruhr-University Bochum, Bochum, Germany.
- *Summer School Humanitarian Action 2018*, held from 30 July – 4 August 2018, was organised by the Institute for International Law of Peace and Armed Conflict, Ruhr University Bochum in Bochum, Germany.
- 16th Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) held from 24 April – 5 May 2017 at the UN Headquarters in New York, USA.
- 4th Global Action-Research Workshop for Young Human Rights Advocates organised by Dejusticia held from 27 August – 3 September 2016 in Bogotá, Colombia.
- 70th session of the Child Rights Committee and 30th session of the Human Rights Council held in September 2015 at Palais Wilson in Geneva, Switzerland.