

Extinction of Indigenous Language in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

The extinction of indigenous languages in Bangladesh is a complex issue that has been a matter of concern for several decades. This abstract aims to highlight the causes and consequences of this phenomenon. The country is home to numerous ethnic communities, each with its unique language and culture. However, the dominance of the Bengali language, both socially and politically, has led to the gradual erasure of these indigenous languages. Factors such as poverty, lack of education, and political marginalization have contributed to the decline of these languages. The loss of linguistic diversity not only represents a cultural loss but also has severe social, economic, and political implications. The absence of these languages can lead to a loss of traditional knowledge, as well as reduced access to education and employment opportunities for indigenous communities. This abstract concludes that urgent action is required to protect the indigenous languages of Bangladesh and preserve the rich cultural heritage of the country's ethnic communities.

Keywords: Language extinction, Indigenous languages, Language endangerment, Cultural diversity, Ethno linguistic communities, Language policy, Linguistic diversity, Linguistic rights, Endangered language documentation and preservation.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a critical component of human culture and identity, serving as a means of communication and a vehicle for the transmission of knowledge and traditions. However, the world is currently facing a significant loss of linguistic diversity, with many indigenous languages disappearing at an alarming rate. Bangladesh, a country with a rich cultural heritage, is no exception to this phenomenon. The country is home to numerous indigenous communities, each with its unique language and culture. However, the dominance of the Bengali language has resulted in the gradual disappearance of many of these languages, leading to the loss of traditional knowledge and cultural identity. This paper aims to explore the causes and consequences of the extinction of indigenous languages in Bangladesh. It highlights the social, economic, and political implications of this phenomenon and emphasizes the need for urgent action to protect and preserve the linguistic diversity of the country's indigenous communities. The paper concludes that the preservation of indigenous languages is not only critical for maintaining cultural diversity but also for promoting social justice, economic development, and political empowerment.

THE CAUSES OF THE EXTINCTION OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN BANGLADESH

Indigenous languages are at danger of extinction for a variety of reasons. The causes differ from time to time and location to location in Bangladesh. "In fact, along with the political changes in the state, changing state politics-engineering, geographical and natural adversity, ethnic conflict, and social prejudice hamper their advancement," (Syfin, 2016). Below are some examples to illustrate them. 'Cultural cause' is the fundamental point for those indigenous people will commonly switch from their original languages. People

are supposed to prefer speaking the languages that will give them greater possibilities in a state or across the board. For instance, Bengali is the official language of corporations and the national language of Bangladesh, thus the local indigenous population takes serious efforts to learn and use this language. They are constantly pining for the eminent tongue to use in public. Bangladesh's employment opportunities are primarily restricted to Bengali and English in a more general sense. This is another factor in the ethnic population in this country losing its language. Reversals in life, for instance, cause native people to lose interest in studying their own language. Even the parents do not encourage their kids to study indigenous languages because there are no jobs that would require them (Bhuiyan: Indigenous Languages in Bangladesh, 2016). The indigenous community believes that if they are kept within their native languages, they cannot be a part of the larger national language community in Bangladesh, and as a result, they are actively encouraged to learn national languages. This feeling of isolation is another factor in the detachment from native languages. Moreover, the majority of indigenous languages lack their own alphabets. Because they are unable to interact with each other in their native tongues, the indigenous people from different speech communities utilize Bangla as a common language. As a result, these individuals are naturally multilingual and have varying degrees of proficiency in Bangla (Faquire, Razaul, 2010). It is true that language flows like rivers. Languages are currently changing and being assessed. Hence, for an indigenous community, limited use of their native tongue also contributes to language loss.

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN BANGLADESH

Due to globalization and Bengali's statewide dominance, the use of indigenous languages is rapidly dwindling day by day. Indigenous people's dropout rates are rising as a result of their inability to study in their mother tongues. So, they are unable to enjoy the experience of high school education. Young indigenous people's linguistic proficiency falls short of that of their predecessors. There is unquestionably a danger of language dying or extinction.

Chakma

The important indigenous group known as the Chakma has its own alphabet. On their native tongue, they have already released a large number of novels. Over 310,000 people in the Chittagong Hill Tracts in southeast Bangladesh speak it, along with another 300,000 in Assam and Tripura in India and 40,265 in Mizoram. It is written in the Chakma script, commonly known as Ajhph and occasionally romanized as Ojhopath. In Chakma script, literacy rates are low. The only two nations where the local Chakma people reside, Bangladesh and India, neither legally recognize it (Wikipedia, 2019). In Bangladesh, the Chakma language is spoken by over 300,000. (2019). However because it is not widely spoken at the national level, the language may eventually go extinct. According to BSS, Rangamati (March 8, 2015), Bangladesh Betar Rangamati Center started airing local news on Wednesday for listeners of the largest (on population) ethnic community in Chakma.

Marma:

The Marma ethnic group resides in the three hill districts of Rangamati, Bandarban, and Khagrachhari in Bangladesh. Moreover, several Marmas reside in the Cox's Bazar and Patuakhali coastal regions. They go by the name Rakhain. They are viewed by many as an independent ethnic group. Nowadays, there are roughly 350,000 Marmas living in Bangladesh (Banglapedia, 2019). Marma is a part of the Tibeto-Burman language family's Lolo-Burmese branch. It is spoken by roughly 180,600 people in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, primarily in Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachari districts. It is considered one of the dialects of Arakanese, along with Ramree and Sandowa.

Garó:

Garó is an indigenous language spoken primarily by the Garó people in Bangladesh, India, and Bhutan. In Bangladesh, Garó is spoken mainly in the northern region of the country, particularly in the districts of Mymensingh, Sherpur, and Netrakona. Garó is a member of the Tibeto-Burman language family, which is one of the largest language families in the world. It is a tonal language, meaning that the pitch of a word can change its meaning. Garó also features a unique writing system, which was developed in the early 1900s by Christian missionaries who sought to promote literacy among the Garó people.

Garó has a rich cultural heritage, with a diverse range of songs, dances, and folktales that have been passed down through oral tradition for generations. The language has also been used to produce written literature, including poetry and novels. However, like many indigenous languages in Bangladesh, Garó is facing significant threats to its survival. The lack of formal education in Garó has limited opportunities for speakers to learn and use their language in formal settings, and the influence of dominant languages like Bengali has also marginalized Garó. There are concerns that the language may be lost within a few generations if concerted efforts are not made to promote its use and preservation.

Efforts are being made to promote the use and preservation of Garó in Bangladesh, including the establishment of Garó-language schools and the development of language learning materials. The Garó community is also working to raise awareness of the importance of their language and culture, both within their own communities and among the wider population of Bangladesh. Garó is a significant indigenous language spoken by the Garó people in Bangladesh, with a rich cultural heritage and unique writing system. However, the language faces significant challenges, including marginalization and lack of formal education opportunities. To ensure the survival of Garó, concerted efforts are needed to promote its use and preservation, both within the Garó community and among the wider population of Bangladesh.

Rakhaine:

Rakhaine culture has its own alphabet. Moreover, a lot of their literature is also written in the Bengali alphabet. Huq (2017) stated that “the new generation of Rakhain community is marginalizing and overlooking the Rakhain language,” which is more pertinent. He also advised that the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) produce books on history, language, and literature up to the HSC level in the Rakhain language in order to preserve this indigenous tongue. To teach those works in the classrooms, instructors with experience teaching the Rakhain language should be sought for.

Kokborok:

Kokborok is an indigenous language spoken in the northeastern part of India, specifically in the state of Tripura, which shares its borders with Bangladesh and Myanmar. It is also spoken by the Kokborok people who are one of the major ethnic groups in Tripura. Kokborok belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language family, which is a subfamily of the Sino-Tibetan language group. Kokborok is a tonal language, which means that the tone or pitch of a word can change its meaning. It has several dialects, but the Debbarma dialect is the most widely spoken. The language has its unique script called OIChiki, which was invented in the early 20th century by a Kokborok scholar named Rama Chandra Debbarma. The script has been standardized and is now used in the official documents of the Tripura government.

Kokborok has a rich history and culture, and its literature dates back to the 14th century. The language has a significant influence on the arts, music, and dance of the Kokborok people. The traditional music and dance forms such as Garia, Bizu, and Wangala are an essential part of the cultural heritage of Tripura and are performed during various festivals and occasions.

However, like many indigenous languages around the world, Kokborok is also facing challenges such as a decline in the number of speakers, the influence of dominant languages, and limited access to education and employment opportunities. In recent years, there have been efforts to promote the language and preserve its cultural heritage. The Tripura government has taken steps to promote the use of the language in education, media, and administration. There are also initiatives to develop digital resources and tools to support the teaching and learning of the language.

Monipuri:

Roy, Pinaki (2008) claims that the Marma people also use their own alphabet. The Monipuris originally used their own alphabet, but they now write with Bangla characters. Some groups, such as the Bom, Garo, Hajong, and Mro, write using the Roman or Bangla alphabets.

Santali:

Santali is an indigenous language spoken by the Santal people in Bangladesh, India, and Nepal. In Bangladesh, Santali is spoken primarily in the northern region of the country, particularly in the districts of Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Rangpur, and Thakur gaon. Santali is a member of the Munda language family, which is a branch of the Austroasiatic language family. It is a rich and complex language that features a diverse range of dialects and sub-dialects, each with its own unique features and characteristics. Santali is an agglutinative language, meaning that words are formed by combining different morphemes together. It has a relatively large inventory of sounds, including several nasal vowels, glottal stops, and voiceless aspirated consonants.

Santali has a rich oral tradition, with a vast corpus of songs, stories, and folktales passed down from generation to generation through oral transmission. The language has also been used to produce written literature, including poetry, novels, and plays. Despite its importance to the Santal people, Santali is currently facing significant threats to its survival. The language has been marginalized by the dominance of Bengali, the official language of Bangladesh. The lack of formal education in Santali has also limited opportunities for speakers to learn and use their language in formal settings. As a result, Santali is at risk of being lost, and there are concerns that its rich cultural heritage may disappear along with it.

Efforts are being made to promote the use and preservation of Santali in Bangladesh, including the development of language learning materials and the establishment of Santali-language schools. The Santal community is also working to raise awareness of the importance of their language and culture, both within their own communities and among the wider population of Bangladesh. Santali is a significant indigenous language spoken by the Santal people in Bangladesh, with a rich cultural heritage and diverse range of dialects. However, the language faces significant challenges, including marginalization and lack of formal education opportunities. To ensure the survival of Santali, concerted efforts are needed to promote its use and preservation, both within the Santal community and among the wider population of Bangladesh.

Mru:

Mru is an indigenous language spoken by the Mru people in Bangladesh. The Mru people reside mainly in the Chittagong Hill Tracts region of Bangladesh, which is located in the southeastern part of the country. The Mru language is a member of the Tibeto-Burman language family and is considered a highly endangered language. Mru has a unique linguistic structure with a complex phonological system that includes 28 consonants and 6 vowels. The language is also tonal, which means that the pitch or tone of a word can change its meaning. Mru has its own script, which is based on the Latin alphabet, and has been in use since the 1970s.

Like many indigenous languages around the world, Mru is facing challenges such as a decline in the number of speakers, limited access to education and employment opportunities, and the influence of dominant languages. However, efforts are being made by the Bangladeshi government and various organizations to promote the use of the language and preserve its cultural heritage. For instance, the government has established schools that teach Mru, and there are also initiatives to develop digital resources and tools to support the teaching and learning of the language. Furthermore, cultural events and festivals are organized to showcase the rich cultural heritage of the Mru people.

Mru is an important indigenous language in Bangladesh with a unique linguistic and cultural heritage. The efforts made by the Bangladeshi government and various organizations to promote the language and preserve its cultural heritage are commendable, but more needs to be done to ensure its long-term survival. The preservation and promotion of Mru language can not only benefit the Mru people but also contribute to the linguistic and cultural diversity of Bangladesh and the world.

LINGUISTIC RIGHTS AND BANGLADESH

In the modern world, linguistic freedom is seen as a human right both domestically and abroad. Humanity cannot exist without language, which can also be viewed as a personal asset. A person's identity is intimately correlated with their chosen language or languages. So, each individual person or community has the right to preserve their native or indigenous variation. In terms of language and education, international accords like the UNCRC have incorporated the linguistic rights of minorities and indigenous people (1989). Language is understood to be fundamental to cultural identity and strength. Also, according to UNESCO, respecting and recognizing linguistic diversity is essential for harmonious coexistence. 2003 (UNESCO).

The first step in obtaining linguistic rights is becoming aware of a language community. Every person has the right to understand and use their own language. The community of several indigenous languages in Bangladesh should struggle to preserve these languages. According to Bangladesh's constitution, "The state shall take steps to safeguard and enhance the unique local culture and tradition of the tribes, minor races, ethnic sects, and communities" (Act 23 – A). The right of indigenous people to create and use their own native languages is recognized by the Bangladeshi constitution. They must therefore experience its benefits both psychologically and practically in the actual world. In addition, the National Education Policy of 2010 upheld the rights of the indigenous communities to teach in their own languages. For examples, the aims and objectives of National Education Policy -2010 is mentioned 'to remove socio-economic discrimination irrespective of race, religion and creed and to eradicate gender disparity; to develop non-communalism, friendliness, global fraternity, fellow-feeling and respect for human rights (act-7)' along with 'to promote and develop the languages and cultures of the indigenous and small ethnic groups (act-23)'.

In order to promote adequate education and prevent indigenous pupils in Bangladesh from dropping out of school, experts believe that instruction in the mother tongue is essential.

'It requires special consideration to publish text books in as many ethnic tongues as feasible. An excellent bridge to acquiring a second language and then multilingualism is a solid foundation in the mother tongue. The learners can develop expertise and confidence thanks to it. Native language speakers will be able to read and write Bengali and their mother tongues with ease.

Kids will have more access to information and opportunities for breaks in life. The students will simultaneously comprehend both their own native culture and the community of Bengalis'. (2017) Selim.

It has been noted that numerous measures have been done by both government and non-government organizations to promote and preserve indigenous languages. In order to understand the status and background of various indigenous languages, the International Mother Language Institute in Bangladesh has performed anthropological statistics. From pre-primary to class two level, the NCTB (National Curriculum and Textbook Board) created and distributed books to many indigenous communities like Chakma, Marma, Kok Borok, Garo, and Sadri. ‘In order for ethnic children to learn their own native languages, steps will be taken to assure the availability of teachers from those ethnic groups and to create materials in those languages. The inclusion of the relevant indigenous communities in these projects, especially in the creation of textbooks, would be ensured’. (Page 8 of the National Education Policy from 2010).

THE ROLES AND EFFORTS OF THE BANGLADESH GOVERNMENT IN PRESERVING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

The government has a significant responsibility to foster an environment where all indigenous or language varieties would have a chance to coexist. The diversity of a country’s languages is a strength. A nation’s resources include its indigenous languages. So, the government ought to feed and support them. The ILO Convention (1989) [23] stipulates in Article 28 that governments must take measures to maintain social and cultural identity, customs and traditions, and institutions in addition to respecting the rights of indigenous people. Article 28 stipulates:

1. Whenever possible, children who belong to the concerned peoples must be taught to read and write in either their native tongue or the language that their group uses the most. In the event that this is not feasible, the competent authorities must consult with these groups in order to develop measures that will help them reach their goal.
2. Sufficient steps must be taken to guarantee that these persons have the chance to become fluent in either the national tongue or one of the nation’s official languages.
3. Efforts must be made to safeguard and encourage the growth and use of the native tongues of the impacted populations.

The Bangladeshi government has taken certain steps to safeguard indigenous languages from extinction. On the first day of the New Year, they specifically distribute textbooks to the pupils of the Chakma, Marma, and Tripura ethnic communities in Rangamati. This widely praised project was initially introduced in 2017. 25,000 pre-primary and first-grade students in the Chittagong Hill Tracts received textbooks printed in their languages on January 1st, 2018, as promised by the honorable Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina (Source: The Daily Tribune). ‘If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that gets to his head,’ said Nelson Mandela, and I concur. We would want to assert that without mother tongue in elementary school, the pleasure of education will be unaffected. If you speak to him in his language, that touches his heart. Lately, the government of Bangladesh has taken the effort to publish books in the Chakma Tribal Community’s indigenous language for use in basic education. As a result, books have been released with the Chakma Community’s written works. A local language dictionary called Bangla Vasar Anchoik Ovidan has been released by Bangla Academy, a government research and publication agency in Bangladesh (Dictionary of the local varieties of Bangla). It is a lexicographical compilation of local languages of Bangla. Without a doubt, it makes a significant contribution to the preservation of indigenous languages and local variations of Bengali. In addition, the International Mother Language Institute (IMLI), established by the government of Bangladesh, has been operational since 2010. One of the objectives of this institution is to prevent the extinction of indigenous languages. The Bangladeshi government started writing and publishing books in the Chakma, Marma, Santal, Mandi, Tripura, and Orao languages in 2012. It was ultimately determined to adopt the Chakma alphabet for the Chakma community, the Marma alphabet for

the Murma community, the Roman alphabet for the Tripura and Mandi tribes, and the Sadhi alphabet for the Munda and Oria populations. The government gave books in indigenous children's languages for the first time in 2017 to these communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Government should take the initiative to preserve all national indigenous languages. To develop and ensure the survival of indigenous languages, an academy or research cell should be established. Also, a larger percentage of the population will be curious to learn more about indigenous language and culture. Every language community in Bangladesh should use its linguistic rights. Every citizen needs to develop an understanding of their legal linguistic rights. The death of indigenous languages may result from direct or indirect pressure to use only the official national language. So, allowing for the development of indigenous languages may be a means of preserving them.

It is important to pursue academic research and development in Bangladesh's regional and native tongues. Finding the hidden gems of these languages in various linguistic and cultural components will be useful. The resemblance and dissimilarity of indigenous languages with other languages in the nation can be shown through comparative research. It is thought that academic study is particularly helpful in bringing these languages to life. Lexicographical works, which keep track of words, dictions, vocabulary, phrases, and idioms, are essential for semantic growth. The priceless words and lexical resources of a language might be saved in compiled dictionaries of distinct indigenous languages. The government should provide funding to create a dictionary of indigenous languages. Literature in native tongues can be very important to a nation's continued existence. The demise of literature "indicates the deterioration of a nation," wrote Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe (1749–1832). These communities can therefore prevent the extinction of their languages by creating and expanding indigenous literature.

Native-language literature can be crucial to the survival of a nation. According to Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe, the decline of literature "indicates the degradation of a nation" (1749–1832). Hence, these communities may stop the disappearance of their languages by producing and enhancing indigenous literature that reflects public opinion. Olatunji Isola, Ogunyemi, February 1995, 17 p. Indigenous languages should be covered in primary and secondary textbooks. Although the government began distributing textbooks in five indigenous languages—Chakma, Tripura, Marma, Garo, and Sandri—in order to facilitate indigenous students' learning in their mother tongues and to reduce the dropout rate, it should be extended at least to the secondary level in order to support education in indigenous languages. Also, parents' and students' awareness of this truth is crucial.

All the work won't make the policy work if students and their parents don't voluntarily want mother language instruction. Yet in order for this desire to be ingrained, parents and their children must see how mother-tongue education contributes to notable advantages in areas like economic empowerment, social mobility and influence, and routes to further educational prospects. (Maseko, Busani, & Nozizwe, Dhlamini, 2014).

Language discrimination should also be eliminated via linguistic awareness. Many linguistics awareness activities should be organized in the public sphere from both government and non-government levels, including at schools, colleges, and universities, as well as in public performances. Socio-cultural prejudice includes completely judging a race or society based on their language or linguistic variants. The preservation of intangible cultural assets, such as the music and language of indigenous linguistic communities, may benefit from linguistic awareness.

In indigenously populated places, there should be a digital multimedia centre for the preservation of these

languages. The government of Bangladesh has prioritized ICT-based education at the primary, intermediate, and tertiary levels as of the current (2019). The language and cultural traditions of indigenous people can be preserved, practiced, and broadcast to larger audiences via multimedia centres. For these languages to grow sustainably, public colleges that are government-sponsored must open a department for advanced study on indigenous languages. Moreover, an indigenous language cell might be established with this as a public or private issue. There may be hastened work done to promote these languages on a national and worldwide scale. Expert offers mother tongue based Multi-Lingual-Education (MLE) which will be a mix of indigenous mother languages and Bengali language in teaching-learning process. Learners will begin to build a deep connection with Bengali learning once they have mastered their mother tongues and have a firm command of them. This procedure, known as MLE, can be employed in classroom settings with indigenous students. (2005) Malone

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the extinction of indigenous languages in Bangladesh represents a significant loss of cultural and linguistic diversity. The factors contributing to this extinction are complex and multifaceted, including limited access to education and employment opportunities, the influence of dominant languages, and social and political marginalization. The loss of indigenous languages also means the loss of a unique perspective on the world, as each language embodies a distinct worldview and cultural heritage. While there are efforts being made to preserve and promote the use of indigenous languages in Bangladesh, these efforts need to be increased and sustained to ensure the survival of these languages. The preservation and revitalization of indigenous languages require the involvement of the Bangladeshi government, local communities, and various organizations, and it is essential to prioritize the protection of linguistic diversity as part of the country's cultural heritage. By working together, we can ensure that the voices of indigenous communities in Bangladesh continue to be heard, and their languages and cultures are preserved for future generations.

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