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Indigenous languages in Bangladesh: A sociolinguistic study

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Abstract

The paper reveals the socio-linguistic position of Bangladesh where numerous indigenous or ethnic languages are under the threat of 'Language Loss'. At present day language loss or language death has become a common phenomenon in different territories in the world, Bangladesh is no difference. Extinction of indigenous languages in Bangladesh is associated with several socio-political and cultural reasons as well as the unconsciousness of language planning and policy making. It is noted that due to the domination of one variety of language over another language or another variety has made the threat of language loss. Our study explores the historical and political reasons of language loss, linguistic imperialism, and physiological state of indigenous speakers about their mother languages as well as national and international linguistics rights in this land. We know that language loss is vividly accompanied with the loss of cultural, aboriginal and racial heritage. The paper also accumulates the picture of language loss and threat of different indigenous communities with references. It is believed that the course of language extinction is executed by oppression and suppression as well as the trap of power politics. The papers inter-links between linguisticism and language loss, which can be considered as a violation of Linguistic Human Rights of Bangladesh. The role of media and government are mentioned herewith with several propositions about how to reverse and cease loss of indigenous languages. The present situations of major indigenous languages and the linguistic inferiority complex are illustrated vividly in intra-national and international levels with due references.

Keywords: Indigenous language, linguistic imperialism, linguisticism, socio-cultural impacts, language and power-politics, linguistics inferiority complex, language extinction

Introduction

As stated in Wikipedia, 'An indigenous language or autochthonous language is a language that is native to a region and spoken by indigenous people. This language is from a linguistically distinct community that originated in the area.' The United Nation Department of Public Information claims indigenous language as, 'At present, 96 percent of the world's approximately 6,700 languages are spoken by only 3 percent of the world's population. Although indigenous peoples make up less than 6% of the global population, they speak more than 4,000 of the world's languages.' The paper believes that the indigenous languages of the entire world are not only a way of communication but also a significant media of expressing an extensive and complex system of bearing and sharing knowledge. It is both a medium of expression ideas and central to the sense of identity and cultural of their speakers. More to the point, indigenous languages comprise knowledge, peace, rights, inclusion as well as diversity. So, issues of indigenous languages have got the place of many researches at present day. Beyond doubt, every language is like a pearl of a necklace which is useful to shine the map of global language and thus it is very urgent to think more about the position and proposition how to save them from extinction. To realize the fact, the UN General Assembly proclaimed 2019 as the International Year of Indigenous Languages to draw attention to indigenous languages and their preservation, revitalization and promotion in home and abroad.

Bangladesh is a land of cultural diversity and multi-traditional resources including language, festivals, cuisines, customs, etc. It is a land of 1, 47,570 km². In accordance with the constitution of the government republic of Bangladesh, Bangla/Bengali is the national language of Bangladesh. It is the only official language of this country too. According to the 2011 census conducted by the Government of Bangladesh, the country's indigenous

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Population comprises approximately 1,586,141, 1.8% of the country's total population (IWGIA, 2019) [25]. Bangladesh is full of multicultural indigenous languages. 'Not only is Bangladesh ethnically heterogeneous—with Bengalis long coexisting with lakhs of Santals, Biharis, Khasis, Garos, Bishnupriya Manipuris, Oraons, Mundas, Chakmas, Marmas, Tipperas, Mros, and other peoples—it is also highly diverse linguistically' (Sameer Ud Dowla Khan, February 21, 2018) [35]. As reported by Ethnologue (2019) [2] (an international web portal), 'The number of individual languages listed for Bangladesh is 41. All are living languages. Of these, 36 are indigenous and 5 are non-indigenous. Furthermore, 4 are institutional, 12 are developing, 15 are vigorous, and 10 are in trouble'. As stated by Murshed (2011) [24], there are currently 40 indigenous or ethnic languages inside the country. Indigenous communities belong to individual languages, lifestyles as well as cultures in Bangladesh. The development and expansion of these indigenous languages are getting harder due to several socio-political reasons. The negligence to these languages may lead to language loss which means a linguistic situation when a huge number of resources from a language are going to extinct.

Reasons of indigenous language to be extinct

There are many causes of indigenous languages to be under threat of extinction. In Bangladesh, the reasons vary time to time as well as place to place. 'In fact, along with the political changes in the state, changing state politics-engineering, geographical and natural adversity, ethnic conflict and social discrimination hinder their progress' (Syfin, 2016) [27]. Some of them are illustrated herewith. 'Cultural reason' is the key fact for those indigenous people will often switch from their native languages. It is said that people prefer to speak the languages by which they will get more opportunities in a state or entire country. For instant, Bengali is the national language in Bangladesh as well as it is the official and corporate language so the indigenous community try to learn and practise this national language gravely. They always hanker after the prestigious language to speak publicly. Employment opportunity is mostly limited to the language of Bengali and English in broader sense in Bangladesh. This is also a reason of language loss of ethnic community in this nation. For example, 'reversals of life lead indigenous people to lose interest in learning their own language. Even the parents do not inspire their children to learn indigenous languages as there is no employment where those languages would be useful' (Bhuiyan: Indigenous Languages in Bangladesh, 2016). The sense of isolation is also cause of detaching from native languages because the indigenous community thinks that if they are being confined within their native languages, they cannot be a part of larger national language community in Bangladesh, and thus they are highly being pursued to acquire national language. Besides, most of the indigenous languages do not have any own alphabet. 'The indigenous people from one speech community cannot communicate with that from another in their own vernacular, for which they use Bangla as a Lingua Franca for the communication. These people, therefore, have naturally been bilingual with different degrees of control in their second language, Bangla (Faquire, Razaul. 2010)' [15]. It is a fact that language is like flow of rivers. Languages are being changed and evaluated from the time being. So, limited use of an indigenous

language is also a cause of language loss for indigenous community.

Linguicism to indigenous languages in Bangladesh

Linguicism is a belief to consider one language or language variety is superior to another language or language variety. Linguicism is also called, 'Linguistics Discrimination' as well as 'Languagism'. Linguicism is a big reason to make indigenous languages extinct.

'Linguicism may be in operation simultaneously with sexism, racism, or classism, but linguicism refers exclusively to ideologies and structures where language is the means for effecting or maintaining an unequal allocation of power and resources. This could apply, for instance, in a school in which the mother tongues of some children, from an immigrant or indigenous minority background, are ignored, and this has consequences for their learning. Linguicism is also in operation if a teacher stigmatizes the local dialect spoken by the children and this has consequences of a structural kind, that is, there is an unequal division of power and resources as a result.' (Phillipson, 1992) [6].

In Bangladesh, most of the people consider that Standard Bengali language is superior to other native varieties or indigenous languages. It leads indigenous languages to death. At present, the young indigenous people often feel shame or discomfort to speak in their own indigenous languages in social gathering or institutions. It should not be keeping in mind that one language or language variety is superior to another. Linguicism is a socio-cultural prejudice. Linguicism does not exist on paper, rather it exists in mind set up. In Bangladesh, the speaker of standard Bengali language feels Bengali language is more prestigious over other varieties and indigenous languages. It paves the way to linguistic discrimination as well as a threat to the existence of expanding other existing indigenous languages. The mental attitude towards minor linguistic communities should be respectful; besides, it should keep in mind that they are the assets in home and abroad. The negligence toward multicultural indigenous languages may lag behind us from strong sources of knowledge. Similarly, it often occurs that local varieties of national language are also overlooked or ignored in a country. In Bangladesh, there are many regional varieties of Bengali language in Bangladesh. Among them, only *Promito Bangla* (Standard Bengali) is warmly accepted and respected in official and academic purposes. Even, speaking of local varieties is regarded as odd in office and academic fields. It is definitely a sign of linguicism culturally.

Indigenous Languages and power politics in Bangladesh

Language is closely related to power. It is noted that a language has no power and politics at all. The power of a language community makes the language powerful. The power of a language depends on the socio-political power of the language community. This is true to almost all national as well as international languages in the world. In Bangladesh, the political and social powers including media, jobs, and education are mostly limited to Metro-people. So, the language of academically educated Metro-people of Bangladesh dominates over other languages in Bangladesh. Parents of working-class family also try to make their

children speak in Metro-people language. The rise of academically educated metro-people makes this language followed by others. The language of TV dramas is transcribed in metro-people language. "Power is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault, 1979, p. 92)^[20]. The power of a language community associated with their languages, and thus the expansion of a language happens. Indigenous language communities should be powerful socially, culturally and politically to make their languages powerful in a big extend. These communities have to a part of power politics in the country.

The language that a person uses reflects the language community's power. A useful way to think about a language community's linguistic power is through the ethnolinguistic vitality model (Bourhis *et al.*, 1981; Harwood *et al.*, 1994)^[21].

Sometimes, indigenous people think that their languages are not as prestigious or suitable as other languages for globalization and socio-economic development. It proves the way to linguistic suicide. Very often, they begin to loan words from other languages, to speak with other languages. For example, many indigenous people willingly make their children speak Bengali (national language). 'They emphasis Bengali rather than their mother tongues' (Khokon. S, 2019). According to the statistics, 49% Santal indigenous people consider Bengali is more important to them than their mother language. Sometimes the readers of indigenous literatures are not available.

The hill tribes of Bangladesh use their languages in oral form and they use Bengali in written form. Although they discuss many social issues in their own native languages, they write them in written form in Bengali. (Das. K, 2019)^[26].

Expert thinks that Bengali language appears as a Linguistic Hegemony over other indigenous language because of several reasons including economic, profession, development as well as social prestige. Most of the cases, indigenous people are bound to learn Bengali though they have working mother languages (Khokon S, 2019). It can be regarded as 'Socio-cultural Linguistic Imperialism' because they hardly get any opportunity to practise and expand their mother language in national level, even at home. The reality of expanded usages of national language (Bengali) has appeared as imperialism over indigenous language. Bengali and English gradually suppress the prides of indigenous languages pragmatically (Das. K, 2019)^[26]. Experts consider that language extinction happens because of the minimization of use of indigenous languages in a country. In Bangladesh, the number of indigenous people is increasing but they accept another language. If a language community increases in number but decreases in the use of mother tongues, it can be regarded as the impact of linguistic imperialism.

Psychological unrest between metro-language and indigenous Languages

In Bangladesh, a psychological unrest between indigenous language speakers and metro-language speakers is continuously going on. The indigenous speakers get less

prestige speaking their own varieties in office or academy. It draws them in *Linguistic Inferiority Complex* inside themselves. *Linguistic Inferiority Complex* may be defined as a psychological stage where a speaker feels his or her language might not be suiting in particular situation as well as less prestigious. It makes the speakers less confident dealing with people. Moreover, the speakers of metro-language think that indigenous language speakers are not worthy to them, so, they ignore and sometimes mock at the speakers of local varieties as well as indigenous speakers in Bangladesh. This makes a psychological unrest between them in dealing and working together. Linguistic insecurity is the anxiety or lack of confidence experienced by speakers and writers who believe that their use of language does not conform to the principles and practices of Standard English (Nordquist, 2018). The term is coined by American linguist William Labov in 1960s. The indigenous language communities feel a lack of confidence using their languages in national and international issues. Labov (1972)^[32] pointed this psychological unrest as, '*suffering from feelings of inferiority*'.

Standard language (A fact for indigenous language extinction)

Standard language means a particular variety of a language that is regarded as the most correct way of writing or speaking the language (Standard Language, 2019). Standard language is considered the standard form of a language. Sometimes, standard language may be a threat to other native varieties as well as indigenous languages in a country. 'The varieties of Bangla in the different region show variation at different levels: phonological level, morphological level, syntactic level and semantic level of their linguistic structure' (Faquire, 2012)^[30]. In Bangladesh, standard Bengali language is used as official and academic language. It leads a way to extinct of other native varieties and indigenous language. The domination of standard language makes a burden on their native varieties in Bangladesh also. For example, the local varieties of *Noakhali* or *Chittagong* are not getting official prestige over standard Bengali language.

Linguistic Rights in the context of Bangladesh

Linguistic right is considered nationally and internationally a human right in present world. Language is an essential part of human being as well as it can be thought an asset of an individual. A language or language variety is closely associated with the identity of a person. So, every individual person or community has a right to continue his indigenous or native variety alive. In terms of language and education, the linguistic rights of minorities and indigenous people have been integrated in international conventions such as the UNCRC (1989). It is acknowledged that language is elementary to cultural identity and empowerment. Besides, in consonance with UNESCO, respect and recognition of linguistic diversity is indispensable for peaceful cohabitation. (UNESCO, 2003).

Awareness of a language community is the first step to gain linguistic rights. Every individual should be aware of his or her own linguistic rights. In Bangladesh, the community of different indigenous languages should work to save these languages. In conformity with the constitution of the republic of Bangladesh, 'The state shall take steps to protect and develop the unique local culture and tradition of the

tribes, minor races, ethnic sects and communities' (Act 23 - A). The constitution of Bangladesh approves the constitutional rights of indigenous people to develop and practise their own native languages. So, they must feel the rights of it psychologically and practically in real world. Along with, the National Education Policy- 2010 asserted the rights of indigenous community to use their native tongues in the field of education. 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)'.

Expert believes that education in mother language is necessary to ensure proper education as well as to stop drop out from school of the indigenous students in Bangladesh.

Special attention is required to bring out text books on mother tongues as many ethnic tongues as possible. A strong foundation in the mother language provides a good bridge to learning a second language then Multilanguage effectively. It enables the learners to achieve competence and confidence. The learners of indigenous groups will be able to read and write their mother tongue and Bengali language fluently. They will be able to get access to more information and breaks in life. Simultaneously the learners will understand their own indigenous culture as well as Bengali culture and community. (Selim, S, 2017) [17].

It is noticed that different government and non-government organizations have taken several initiatives to develop and nurture indigenous languages. International Mother Language Institute in Bangladesh has conducted anthropological statistics to know the position and history of different indigenous languages. NCTB (National Curriculum and Textbook Board) prepared and distributed books to different indigenous communities namely *Chakma*, *Marma*, *kok Borok*, *Garo* and *Sadri* from pre-primary to class two level.

'Measures will be taken to ensure the availability of teachers from ethnic groups and to prepare texts in their own languages so that ethnic children can learn their own indigenous languages. In these initiatives, especially in preparing textbooks the inclusion of respective indigenous communities will be ensured'. (National Education policy -2010; page-8).

Function of Media to save indigenous languages

The loss or death of any indigenous language denotes a loss or death of a culture. A language contains idea and knowledge of a nation, race, or community (Alleydog, 2015) [22]. It should be remembered that the loss of a language means expiration a part of humanity's global cultural heritage. It will lead to defame of civilization. It will not be expected to get their languages and cultures disregarded, denigrated and suppressed. Subsequently, the role of media is highly influential for any socio-cultural change and awareness. To save indigenous and local

varieties of a specific language, media can play a great role. At present, in Bangladesh, media are working a lot to popularize indigenous or local varieties of Bengali to entire nations. For example, many dramas are produced and telecast in local varieties. Every language variety is like different colourful pears of a necklace either they are indigenous, native, or standard.

The multiple creations do not invite disorder,
Nor are the many languages the enemies of humankind
And all the various dances of humankind are beautiful
They are enriched by the great songs of our planet.
(Mazisi Kunene, 1882) [32].

It is noted the scenario of the drama is a common environment in almost every professional and academic sections in Bangladesh. Here, the speakers of Standard Bangla are getting high prestige in work place, in contrast, the speaker of native or indigenous language speakers are underestimated. It is true that now a day the media of Bangladesh broadcast some dramas or telefilms on the language of local varieties. But there is a discrimination too done by the media of Bangladesh. The media only focus on the local variety of these communities which are socio-culturally stronger like *Barisal*, *Chittagong*, *Noakhali* etc. There are lot of other varieties of language speakers which are overlooked or do not take place in media. It also leads to the risk of language death of minor language speakers. To save mother languages, different indigenous language communities struggle a lot in the fields of education and cultural activity. As a result, a few books have been written and published in indigenous languages. In 2005, a novel published in indigenous *Chakma* language. There is a long historical heritage of *Monipuri* language. In addition, the *Santali* people have been practising literature for 140 years.

Roles and contributions of government to save indigenous languages

The government has a big responsibly to create an environment where each language varieties or indigenous languages will get place to exist with equal opportunities. Every language variety is asset of a country. Indigenous languages are resources of a country. So, they should be nourished and sponsored by the government. The ILO Convention (1989) [23] provides Article 28 to respect the rights of indigenous people as well as it asserts the responsibility of respective governments to develop action to protect social and cultural identity, customs and traditions, institutions hereafter. Article 28 provides that:

1. Children belonging to the peoples concerned shall, wherever practicable, be taught to read and write in their own indigenous language or in the language most commonly used by the group to which they belong. When this is not practicable, the competent authorities shall undertake consultations with these peoples with a view to the adoption of measures to achieve this objective.
2. Adequate measures shall be taken to ensure that these peoples have the opportunity to attain fluency in the national language or in one of the official languages of the country.
3. Measures shall be taken to preserve and promote the development and practice of the indigenous languages of the peoples concerned.

The government of Bangladesh has taken some initiatives to protect indigenous languages from language endangerment. In particular, they distribute textbooks to the students of Chakma, Marma, and Tripura ethnic community in Rangamati on the first day of the New Year. This highly acclaimed initiative was first launched in 2017. As pledged by the honorable Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina, 25,000 pre-primary and first grade students in the Chittagong Hill Tracts received textbooks printed in their languages on the first day of 2018 (Source: The Daily Tribune). In agreement with Nelson Mandela 'If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart', we would like to say that without mother tongue in primary education, the pleasure of education will be untouched. Recently, the government of Bangladesh has taken initiative to publish books for primary students in indigenous language (Chakma Tribal Community) from NCTB under Ministry of Education in Bangladesh. And thus, the written form of Chakma Community has been published in books. *Bangla Academy* (a government research and publication center in Bangladesh) has published a dictionary of local language named *Bangla Vasar Ancholik Ovidan* (Dictionary of the local varieties of Bangla). It is a lexicographical collection of local languages of Bangla. Beyond doubt, it is a great contribution to the nourishment of local varieties of Bengali language as well as indigenous languages. Besides, the government of Bangladesh set up International Mother Language Institute (IMLI) which has been working since 2010. Protection of indigenous languages from being extinction is one of the aims of this institution. In 2012, the government of Bangladesh took initiative to compose and publish book in (Chakma, Marma, Santal, Mandi, Tripura and Orao languages. Finally, it was decided to use Chakma alphabet for Chakma community, Marma alphabet for Marma community, Roman alphabet for Tripura and Mandi communities and Sadhi alphabet for Munda and Oria. In 2017, the children of indigenous community first got books on their own languages from government.

Literature on indigenous languages

Literature is the most powerful weapon to save, develop, expand as well as nourish a language as well as language varieties. So, it is believed that Indigenous literature can build a bridge between cultures. Though the powerful literature, a language can live a long time, it fuels a language to survive a long time. For example, we can mention *Sanskrit* language which is still alive for great epics named *The Ramayana* and *The Mahavarta*. So, literature is compulsory for the existence of a language. Sumana Chisim, a well-known author from Garo population, wrote a book on Garo folklore titled, "DeLong (2019)" from Thakbirim publication in Bangladesh. The book is also translated in Bengali language (National Language of Bangladesh). Sumana believes that every culture is enriched by a variety of experiences and stories, which make it unique. By reading books from a culture, we get to learn about its people, rituals and discover many similarities with our (Sumana, 2019). There are many indigenous publishers in Bangladesh which work to promote and expand indigenous heritages in home and abroad. Sadhan Maibam (2019) is the owner of "Teuri" publication who published 35 new releases in the year of 2019 whereas more than 10 books are written by indigenous writers. Mithun Raksam (2019), publisher of

Thakbirim, said, "Readers should be more enthusiastic about expanding their horizon and read indigenous books... then again, publishers have some responsibilities too. They need to promote the works of indigenous writers. (Daily Star, Bangladesh; February 17, 2019)". From time being, the language of literature turns to the tongue of metro-people and on standard Bengali language. And thus, gradually the literature of Bengali language loses the taste of local varieties or indigenous language. No popular literature has been written on local varieties or indigenous languages after that in Bangladesh.

The present situation of some of the indigenous languages in Bangladesh

Day to day, the practice of indigenous language is decreasing gradually due to globalization as well as domination of Bengali countrywide. The dropout rate of indigenous people is increasing because they cannot study in their own mother tongues. So, they are unable to get the pleasure of study in high school. The language competence of young indigenous people cannot reach the score as their ancestors. It is definitely a risk to language extinction or language death.

Chakma: *Chakma* is a significant indigenous community who belong to own alphabet. They have already published many books on their native language. 'It is spoken by nearly 310,000 people in southeast Bangladesh in Chittagong Hill Tracts, and another 300,000 in India in Assam and Tripura and 40,265 in Mizoram. It is written using the Chakma script, which is also called *Ajhā pāth*, sometimes romanised *Ojhopath*. Literacy in Chakma script is low. It is officially recognised by neither the Bangladesh government nor the Indian government, the only two countries where local Chakma people live' (Wikipedia, 2019) [16]. Almost 300,000 people speak Chakma language in Bangladesh (2019). But the language may go to be dead because it is not being used in national level. As reported by BSS, Rangamati (March 08, 2015), Bangladesh Betar Rangamati Centre began to broadcast local news in Chakma language from Wednesday for the listeners of major (on population) ethnic community.

Marma: Marma is an ethnic group in Bangladesh, the Marmas live in the three hill districts of Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachhari. Besides, some Marmas live in the coastal districts of Cox's Bazar and Patuakhali. They call themselves Rakhain. Many consider them as a separate ethnic community. Presently the number of Marmas in Bangladesh is about 350,000 (Banglapedia, 2019). Marma is a member of the Lolo-Burmese branch of the Tibeto-Burman language family. It is spoken by about 180,600 people in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, particularly in Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachhari districts. It is considered one of the dialects of Arakanese, along with Ramree and Sandowa.

Rakhanine: The Rakhanine community has own alphabet. Besides, many literatures of them are written in Bengali alphabet too. More to the point, Huq (2017) [12] found, 'Rakhain language is being marginalized and overlooked by the new generation of Rakhain community'. To save this indigenous language, he also suggested that National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) should publish books on history, language and literature in Rakhain language up to HSC level. Teachers who have Rakhain language background should be recruited to teach those books in the classrooms.

Kok Borok: It is reported that there are more than two hundred thousand of Tripuras in Bangladesh. The most noteworthy experience in this period was inauguration of first literary magazine of Kokborok speaking people namely 'Santua' in 1991 which was published and edited by Prashanta Tripura. This magazine had been severed a long time though it is not published regularly now. The Kokborok literature has got a place in Tripura state in India by various sections of literature like poetry, rhymes, stories, songs, novels, translation works, religious books, drama and many others have already been covered by the authors. Following the footprints of the scholars of Tripura state in neighboring country India, the Kokborok speaking writers of Bangladesh are gradually bringing out their literary works a few in quantity. Among the renowned poets active in practicing Kokborok in Bangladesh, the names of Surendra Lal Tripura, Boren Tripura, Mahendra Lal Tripura, and Barajanth Roaza can be cited.

Mandi (Garo): The word 'Mandi' literally means the daughter of nature. They worship nature respectively. The main language of Garo is Mandi. This is the Chinese Tibetan language. It is the main language of the indigenous people of the mountainous region of the state of Meghalaya, India. This Mandi language is also spoken among the Garo of Bangladesh. The Garo language is written in Latin alphabet. Apart from this, there is a separate sub-language among them. The sub-language of the Garo tribes living in Netrokona, Tangail, Sherpur and Mymensingh in the greater Mymensingh region is called *Achik*. It is the mother language of them. The word *Achik* means hill in the Garo language. The absence of alphabet or writing is on the reason of extinction of the art, literature, culture, history and traditions of the Garo community. The ideas and beliefs of the Mandi society were originally written in the *Achik* language. But during the great famine, the literary history of those writings disappeared. It is said that when Garo left the famine-stricken Tibet, coming to the Indian subcontinent, the man who had the *Achik* language scrolls written on the skin of the beast ate all the booklets on the way. Then, the alphabet was lost forever. However, Garo had spoken the language orally a long time.

Monipuri: According to Roy, Pinaki (2008), the Marma people also have their own alphabet. The Monipuris once had their own alphabet but now they use Bangla letters for writing. Other communities including the Bom, Garo, Hajong and Mro use the Roman or Bangla alphabet for writing.

Mro /Mru: Mru is also known as Mrung (Murung) that is a Sino-Tibetan language as well as called a recognized language of Bangladesh.

It is spoken by a community of Mros (Mrus) inhabiting the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh with a population of 22,000 according to the 1991 census, and in Burma. The Mros are the second-largest tribal group in Bandarban District of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. A small group of Mros also live in Rangamati Hill District. (Wikipedia, 2019) ^[16].

There is a long history about Mru language and it has particular alphabet.

The Mro alphabet was created during the 1980s by Menlay Murang, or Manley Mro, a Mro who believed the creation of the alphabet was a redemption for a

catastrophe told in Mro legend. The legend talks of the god Turai writing down a script and religion for the Mro people in a book and giving it to a cow to deliver. Unfortunately the cow became hungry on the long journey to earth and ate the book. Thus knowledge of the script was lost. Around 80% of the Mro are thought to be literate in their own script, and it is taught in schools for the first 3 grades of primary education. (Mro, 2019)

Propositions to save indigenous languages in Bangladesh

The propositions to save indigenous languages including protection of endangered languages, human right instruments along with protection and promotion of linguistic diversity. It is better to take proper steps to promote indigenous language rather than lament the death of these beautiful language's aftermath.

- 1) Government should come forward to saving every indigenous languages of a country. Academy or research cell for indigenous languages should be set up to develop and make indigenous languages continue living. Besides, the people of a larger portion will be interested to know more about indigenous language along with culture.
- 2) Linguistic Rights should be realized by every language community in Bangladesh. The sense of linguistic rights needs to be established in the mind of every citizen. Direct or indirect persuasion to only official national language may lead to indigenous language death. So, acceptance to work on indigenous languages can be a way to save them from existence.
- 3) Academic research and development should be conducted in local varieties of language and indigenous languages in Bangladesh. It will be helpful to find the treasures of these language in different linguistic and cultural elements. Comparative study can be conducted to disclose the similarity and dissimilarity of indigenous languages with other languages in the country. It is believed that academic research is very conducive to give life these languages.
- 4) Lexicographical works are must to semantic development as well as record words, dictions, vocabulary, phrase and idioms. Compiled dictionaries of various indigenous languages can save the valuable words and lexical resources of a language. Government should sponsor for composing indigenous languages dictionary.
- 5) Literature on indigenous languages can play great role for existence of a nation. Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe (1749-1832) said, 'The decline of literature indicates the decline of a nation'. So, to write and expand indigenous literature, these communities can save their languages from extinction.
- 6) Media should be non-bias on every language community including local varieties and indigenous languages.

The media should be restructured so as to deeply reflect the socio-cultural dimension of the country. For instance, government monopoly on broadcast media should be eliminated and the control should be transferred to non-governmental organization. This will improve the image of the media and make them

reflect people's opinion. (Ogunyemi, Olatunji Isola, Feb 95, 17p.)

- 7) Primary and secondary text books should be publishing on indigenous languages. Though the government started distributing textbooks in five indigenous language people – Chakma, Tripura, Marma, Garo, and Sandri – not only to make easy learning of indigenous student in their mother languages, but also to restrain the dropout rate, it should be expanded till secondary level at least to promote education in indigenous languages. Besides, consciousness of students and parents are very significant in this fact.

If pupils and their parents do not actively desire mother tongue instruction, then all the effort will not make the policy viable. And for this yearning to be inculcated, parents and their children will have to see that mother-tongue education leads to conspicuous benefits in such spheres as economic empowerment, social mobility and influence, and pathways to further academic opportunities. (Maseko, Busani & Nozizwe, Dhlamini, 2014) ^[19].

- 8) Moreover, linguistic prejudice should be wiped out by linguistic awareness. From government and non-government levels, several linguistics awareness programs should be arranged in public domain including at schools, colleges, universities as well as in public concerts. To evaluate a race or community based on their language or linguistic varieties are totally a part of socio-cultural prejudice. Linguistic awareness may be a safeguard of intangible cultural heritage including language and music of indigenous linguistic communities.
- 9) There should be digital multimedia center for the preservation of these languages in indigenous populated areas. At present (2019), the government of Bangladesh have given priority in ICT based education in primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Using multimedia center, the language and heritages of indigenous people can be saved, practiced and broadcast in broader sections.
- 10) Opening department for advance study on indigenous languages at public universities (government sponsored) is a must for sustainable development of these languages. Besides, indigenous language cell can be set up with public or private concern herewith. Expedited works may be done in these places to promote these languages in national and international levels.
- 11) Expert suggests mother tongue based Multi-Lingual-Education (MLE) which will be a combo of indigenous mother languages and Bengali language in teaching-learning process. After developing a good skill on mother languages, using a good command over their mother tongues, learners will start to make a strong bridge with second language (Bengali) learning. This process is named MLE that can be used for indigenous children classroom practices (Malone, 2005) ^[35].

Conclusion

Hammering the last nail, it is fair to conclude that indigenous languages in Bangladesh are full of knowledge which is a unique system and understanding of the world. Patronizes of these of languages are needed for peace

building and reconciliation with the indigenous communities in the country. The age today is characterised a world of human rights. So, there is no way to show negligence of the rights of indigenous communities to speak and work on their native languages in national level with pride and acceptance. Social inclusiveness and international cooperation are associated with the development of them in national and international levels because these languages are part of inclusion. Every language is characterised with diversity, indigenous languages are not different. The art of these languages is laid in the treasure of diversity. It is high time to save indigenous languages of Bangladesh from language loss.

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