

Impacts of Assimilation on Chakma and Garo Immigrants Living in
Dhaka

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that,

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2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.

3. The thesis does not contain material that has been accepted or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.

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Approval

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Abstract

Bangladesh is a home to 27 officially recognized indigenous ethnic communities. These ethnic tribes assume roughly 1% of the population. Bangla language has a very rich history. In a country where almost most of the population are Bengali, sustaining one's unique language, culture and identity is extremely challenging. The struggle is harder when many indigenous people emigrate from their native lands and move to Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh for work or higher education. This paper analyzes the effects of the majority culture on two generations of Chakma and Garo people living in Dhaka. Using in-depth interviews with eighteen selected participants from the two communities, this study locates the most significant impacts of assimilation with the majority culture in three aspects - language, kinship pattern and cultural practices of the indigenous groups. Using Gordon's cultural assimilation and Bhabha's cultural hybridity as analytical lenses, the analysis shows that assimilation is hardly a choice and is often forced. Most importantly it leads to cultural domination on the above-mentioned sectors.

Keywords: Assimilation, culture, hybrid, language, intermarriage, attire, food, culture loss, identity loss.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

There are approximately 476 million indigenous tribes living in around 90 countries worldwide. They comprise roughly 6.2% of the global population and belong to about 5,000 different ethnic tribes (“Indigenous Peoples”). Their cultural practices and language is unique to each community. There are about 27 different officially recognized ethnic groups living in Bangladesh according to the International Republican Institute. Some of the biggest groups are Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Garo, Santal, Manipuri, Munda, Oraon, Mro, Khasi, Kuki, Hajong and Rakhain. In Bangladesh tribal people comprise roughly 1.8% of the entire population (The International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs). Each tribe has their unique language and lived cultural practices. They have a mixture of religious beliefs, there are Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Animism and so on. Most of these ethnic tribes live in the hilly areas of Chittagong, also known as the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) or “Pahari” area, which is the south-eastern side of Bangladesh and shares borders with Myanmar and India. Some live in the northern part of the country, in Rangpur, Dinajpur, Rajshahi, Bogra districts for instance. Some tribes live in the hilly areas and some live on the flat land. Those living on the flat land are called the “plain-land ethnic groups”. The indigenous tribes have an agro based economy. In the Chittagong Hill Tracts the Chakma people do Jhum cultivation, also known as shifting cultivation. They clear a piece of land, cut down all the trees and vegetation that was previously growing and then burn the land. After that they cultivate it for a period of time before moving on to another piece of land. This is why they are also known as the “Jummas”. But over the years many of them have migrated to other parts of the country, especially cities like Dhaka to participate in the market economy.

All the indigenous ethnic groups have unique cultures. These cultures have very little in common with Bengali culture. The Adivasi people have been struggling to retain their identity for being a part of the country where Bengali culture is not only the popular culture but it is the culture of more than 98% of the population. But this struggle became more harrowing when the Bengalis started migrating to the hilly areas. After the independence of Bangladesh, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman declared Bangladesh as a country of Bengalis in 1972. When the tribal people wanted autonomy in the Chittagong Hill Tracts they were denied. In 1977 during the regime of Lieutenant General Ziaur Rahman Bengalis were sent to settle down in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. “Although the mainstreaming or assimilation process is not directly forced b[y] the government of Bangladesh, this process started when Bengali people illegally settled under government's patronization” (Hamme22). At one point the Bengali settlers outnumbered the native people. The tribal people started losing their lands to these settlers. Islam in his paper about ethnic conflict and discrimination stated, “The exploitation of indigenous people was however in a slow motion and it geared up since the construction of Kaptai hydro electric project in 1960. The tribal heritage was inhabited by non-tribes. In some situations the non tribal out numbed the tribal” (29). Additionally, development projects like the Kaptai hydro electric project uprooted thousands of native people from their homelands. Amena Mohsin stated, “The dam submerged 400 square miles of ground – 40 percent of the district's total area – including not only 54,000 acres of cultivable land but also the Chakma *raj bari* (Royal Palace)” (24). Not only did they lose their lands but also the villages did not even get electricity. Also, the Bengali settlers were increasing in number day by day. The ethnic groups have to compromise with their own lifestyle to live with the Bengali settlers till this day.

Every year thousands of people from all over the country migrate to Dhaka, the tribal people are no different. Those who migrate to Dhaka have to change their lifestyle to adjust with the majority culture. Moreover, the generations who were born and raised in Dhaka do not get to practice their culture as much as the first generation migrants. They have to adapt to various aspects of Bengali culture, which is the majority culture, including clothing, food habits, language etc. The second generation immigrants grow up with Bengali children, go to the same schools as them, wear similar clothes as them, eat similar food as them. Meanwhile their distinct ethnic culture fades away. Thus, indigenous cultural practices are becoming extinct. Bangladesh is a free country and is not under a foreign rule, yet for these indigenous groups, the many forms of domination and violence, including those that are institutionalized, continue to interfere, disrupt and challenge the regular continuity of fundamental practices with which their identity is tied.

This paper analyzes unavoidable assimilation leading to cultural domination on Chakma and Garo, two of the indigenous ethnic groups of Bangladesh, by observing changes in their language, marriage and family structure and cultural practices. It studies two generations, the first generation immigrants are the ones who grew up in their native land and moved to Dhaka later. And the second generation immigrants are the ones who were born in Dhaka. The goal of this study is to analyze the factors behind assimilation and the impacts of it on the indigenous cultures. Firstly, this paper studies language assimilation by analyzing the effects of Bangla language on their native language. Secondly, it studies cross ethnic marriage and the factors behind it. It also analyzes the changes in matriarchal traditions. Finally, it observes the changes in their food habits and attire.

Previous Studies

The injustices and violence against the indigenous people and their relationship with the state feature prominently in the existing literature on them. Amena Mohsin's seminal text *The Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh: On the Difficult Road to Peace*. Published in 2003, the book chronicles the flaws of the 1997 peace accord of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. On December 2, 1997, Bangladesh government signed a peace accord with the United people's party of the CHT. The goal of this accord was to end the conflict between the native hill people and Bengalis that has been going on since the 70s. As Mohsin observed, this conflict resolution accord had many flaws, "Although the accord has been held internationally as a successful case of conflict resolutions, it involves no third party mediations or direct international interventions by international actors nor were civil society incorporated within the peace process" (13). This accord was only focused on political issues and did not give much attention to the everyday issues of the ethnic people. She further stated, "While the Peace Accord was meant to resolve the armed conflict between the insurgents of the CHT and the government of Bangladesh it did not address the underline complaints of the hill people and is thus unlikely to establish peace until the GOB [Government of Bangladesh] seriously addresses these grievances" (13). The everyday struggles of the tribal people were always hidden from the mainstream media.

Hence, media representation of the tribal people remains equally problematic. Hana Shams Ahmed in her article "Politics of restraint: The media and the Chittagong Hill Tracts" talked about the image of the Chittagong Hill Tracts that is being portrayed. She wrote, "The main square in Khagrachhari does not boast a statue of M N Larma, who gave leadership to the Pahari emancipation movement, but possesses one of the late President Ziaur Rahman, who introduced Islamic values into the constitution and led the trans-migration movement of Bengalis

to displace the indigenous peoples in the CHT” (9). Her work brought into focus the alienation of the tribal people and how the media representation was always monitored. “‘Security reasons’ were always cited as a reason for not bringing it under mobile phone coverage. Even now, in remote places in the CHT, the only mobile phone operator that has good coverage is Teletalk, the state-run mobile phone company” (10). Thus the real stories of the hilly areas were always kept in the dark.

Bringing in the socio-cultural aspects into focus, Dewan Mahboob Hossain studied the characteristics of the ethnic communities and their problems in his article “Socio-economic Situation of the Indigenous People in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh”. As the indigenous people are the minorities, the author said “... their voices regarding their rights and problems are not that strong” (23). While talking about cultural differences he stated, “... their uniqueness makes them dissimilar to the mainstream society. This puts them in a disadvantageous position in the society. They remain deprived of the general facilities that the mainstream society enjoys” (23). The mainstream society is of course the Bengali society. In “An Overview of Indigenous Peoples in Bangladesh” Binota Moy Dhamai talked about the marginalization of the indigenous communities by the Bengali settlers. “Historically, Indigenous peoples of Bangladesh have been at the forefront of various struggles against feudalism and colonialism, and many members of these communities also took active part in the 1971 Liberation War of the country” (1) said the author. Despite such contributions, Indigenous people are one of the most “deprived, neglected and discriminated groups in all sectors” (1). The author further said, “The number of non-Indigenous people increased unexpectedly through a government population transfer (‘rehabilitation’) program that was carried out in order to

outnumber the local Indigenous population” (2). Here the author is referring to the migration of Bengali settlers to the homelands of the tribal people in the 70s and 80s.

Narrowing down to the issue of identity, and the cultural construction of the same, Bokhtiar Ahmed in his doctoral thesis titled “Beyond Checkpoints: Identity and Developmental Politics in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh ” studied the Pangkhuas living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Ahmed examined “... the everyday forms of identity and developmental practices in relation to a continuous hegemonic articulation of the state’s presence in this geopolitical margin” (9). He further talks about the names that have been given to them from time to time like migrants, indigenous, settlers, tribal and so on and how these names paint a picture of them being less civilized or backward. Md. Faisal Hammed traced the grave impact of this constant socio-political and cultural marginalization on the indigenous people in his article titled “Assimilation: A Challenge for the Indigenous Culture and Customs” and discussed the endangered customs and norms of the indigenous ethnic communities of Bangladesh. He highlighted the negligence of the young generation of the ethnic community towards their own culture by saying “Among the younger generation of indigenous communities today, there is a considerable interest and fascination with majority culture which acts as a diversion from their own distinct culture” (22). He further said “... a countercultural attitude has developed which rejects their own societal norms and values and seeks alternative lifestyles” (22). The tribal people, at some point of their lives, have to compromise with their own cultural norms to adjust with the mainstream culture. Because they are so low in population that their norms, costumes, language are disregarded.

Sujana Chakma in her paper “Chakma Language: Survival from being extinct in Bangladesh” talked about language loss among Chakmas in Bangladesh. She studied how the

majority language, which is Bangla, is being prioritized as it is the first language of the dominant group. She further said, “Chakma community people cannot sell their capital in the linguistic market by their mother tongue; as a result they are gradually shifting from Chakma language to Bangla” (43). This refers to the fact that there is no economic need for Chakma language which is why it is becoming merely a “household language”. Thus the future generations are not making that much of an effort to learn their mother tongue.

Md. Rafiqul Islam in his PhD thesis titled “The Changing Garo Adivasi Culture of Bangladesh: A Case Study of Marriage Rituals” talked about how various Garo wedding traditions are going extinct due to the effect of the dominant culture and their changing religious faith from animism to Christianity. For example, Garo were once strictly exogamous but now this rule is no longer enforced. Moreover, they are becoming more expecting of intermarriage with other religions which was also strictly forbidden once.

Uddin in his study on cultural assimilation of ethnic people talked about the changing attire of the indigenous women. He discussed how Pahari dress in a place where Bangalis are the majority indicates them as being “un-smart, ordinary and easy to defeat or assault” (22). This makes many tribal women not value their traditional wear. He further said, “Therefore, in the district headquarters of CHT, and other part of Bangladesh they almost have given up wearing their traditional dresses” (22).

It is evident from the existing literature on the indigenous community that assimilation is unavoidable. The above discussion also helped identify three broad areas of impact by the majority culture when assimilation takes place. Drawing from this, the present study will focus on three areas, namely language, family structure and everyday practices and examine the exact nature and manifestation of this neo-colonial domination in the same.

Research Gap

As the above review of literature suggests, there is much research done about the indigenous ethnic communities of Bangladesh who are living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Sylhet, Mymensingh and so on. Many of the indigenous people have emigrated from their native places and have settled in cities like Dhaka, Gazipur and so on in search of jobs. Market economy is growing exponentially in Bangladesh. Which is why these indigenous people, who mainly have an agro based economy in their homelands, are migrating to cities like Dhaka to participate in the market economy. Many of them also move to other places to pursue higher education.

Indigenous people who have migrated to Dhaka and other parts of the country for long or short term, or are born and brought up in Dhaka complicate the otherwise simple binary dynamic between us and them. This group of the indigenous population remains understudied. This paper studies the indigenous people who have migrated to Dhaka. It analyzes how their unique language, family structure and cultural practices are affected by the assimilation with the dominant culture.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The present study is informed by the following theoretical concepts/ideas.

Cultural Assimilation

The cultural assimilation theory helps understand the nature of the dynamic between the indigenous population and the Bengalis. According to cultural assimilation theory, in a country the minority ethnic group gets absorbed into the culture of the dominant group. Basically, the minorities gradually adapt to the cultural practices of the majority. To Keefe and Padilla assimilation is “... social, economic, and political integration of an ethnic minority group into mainstream society” (18). Yinger describes assimilation as the “process of change towards greater cultural similarity brought about by contact between two or more groups” (251). Milton Myron Gordon, an American sociologist, constructed seven variables of cultural or ethnic assimilation in his book *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins* published in 1964. According to him, it refers to minorities adapting to mainstream culture. He studied the Hispanic community living in the United States of America. In his book he subdivided assimilation in seven groups. They are- cultural assimilation or acculturation, structural assimilation, martial assimilation or amalgamation, identificational assimilation, attitude receptional assimilation, behavioral receptional assimilation, and civic assimilation. This paper uses structural assimilation and selective assimilation as lens.

Structural assimilation occurs when the minorities are surrounded by institutions that are dominated by the majority culture. When minorities have “entered fully into the societal network of groups and institutions, or societal structure” (Gordon 70). Gordon divides structural assimilation into two parts, primary structural assimilation and second degree structural

assimilation. Primary structural assimilation is “the degree of interaction in warm and intimate ties between minority group members and members of the majority group” (Floyd and Gramann 8). And Second degree structural assimilation refers to “the extent of interaction between members of minority and majority groups in less intimate settings, such as educational, work, and residential environments” (Floyd and Gramann 8). Another form of assimilation is selective assimilation. This refers to when the minority people purposefully assimilate to some of the aspects of the majority culture. They also hold on to some of their own cultural practices as well.

Researchers have different opinions about assimilation. “Some people suggest that it brings prosperity and wellbeing among those who are a neglected section of the population. On the contrary, it is treated as subversive for sustainable development and is a process of demoralization for the culture of a distinct ethnic group” (Ahmed 23). Adopting the mainstream culture does give the people of the minority culture opportunities that they perhaps would not have gotten. On the other hand, it may also sway them from their own culture and identity or make them look down upon them. “This view suggests that assimilation demolishes rich indigenous customs and different cultural practices that ultimately destroy the distinct identity of a particular group of population” (Ahmed 23).

While explaining Gordon’s cultural assimilation theory, Williams Allen and Ortega said that it is “... one group being completely absorbed by a ‘host’” (699). Cultural assimilation “...occurs when an ethnic group's cultural patterns change to those of the host society” (Shaul and Gramman 48). But the minority language, norms and cultural practices do not completely go extinct. As Shaul and Gramman observesay, “... assimilation does not always lead to complete replacement of one culture by another” (48). Meaning, the indigenous cultures do not get fully replaced by the dominant culture. Rather the ethnic people land on a hybrid space where they

know both mainstream culture and their own culture. This concept is discussed in Homi Bhabha's book *The Location of Culture*.

Cultural Hybridity and Third Space

Homi Bhabha in his book *The Location of Culture* talks about culture hybridity. Bhabha takes a different approach on post-colonial theory where he talks about a kind of postcolonialism where the colonized people are free to live. It is different from the concepts of some of the conventional theorists like Edward Wadie Said or Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in which there is clear separation between the colonizer and the colonized. Bhabha's theory of hybridity talks about a state of fusion between the colonizers and the colonized. To him, culture is not something that is static or pure. In *The Location of Culture* he says, "The very concepts of homogenous national cultures, the consensual or contiguous transmission of historical traditions, or 'organic' ethnic communities – as the grounds of cultural comparativism – are in a profound process of redefinition" (7). Bhabha does not believe the concepts of pure and uncontaminated culture. Rather it is in a constant motion, it changes and transforms people's identity. And his concept of cultural hybridity talks about a cultural state where both the majority and the minority culture is found. It is a cross-cultural exchange where the cultural practices of multiple cultural entities merge. This cross-cultural state is what Bhabha termed as the "third space".

This paper uses these theories to see the pattern of changes the dominant culture of Bangladesh has brought onto the unique indigenous culture of Chakma and Garo immigrants. It also attempts to figure out how the cultural practices and language that have not become extinct are surviving.

Research Methodology

This paper aims to study the impact of cultural assimilation on indigenous ethnic people who have migrated to Dhaka. The goal is to see how much these people have lost their own unique identity being heavily surrounded by Bengali culture. Furthermore, it explores how the second generation immigrants learn their own language and cultural practices. To do so, data was collected which were later analyzed to find patterns. Primary data was collected through interviews and secondary data was collected through close reading of the existing studies. Then qualitative research has been done to analyze the data. They have been arranged thematically through which recurring patterns have been found.

Data Collection

Two types of methodological tools have been used to collect data, primary and secondary. For primary research, some of the migrants were interviewed. The interviews were semi-constructed, I had some questionnaires prepared and improvised more questions based on their answers. The questions were open-ended. It was more like a friendly conversation where I was giving them topics to talk about and share their experiences. I took their consent and recorded the interviews. Also, I contacted them later for each for one to one interview, which lasted for approximately 20-25 minutes. The interviewees were divided between first and second generation of indigenous immigrants in Dhaka.

Sampling

Snowballing sampling and purposive sampling were used for sampling methods. Snowballing method is “A random sample of individuals is drawn from a given finite population” (Goodman

148). According to Parker and Scott, snowballing has become a popular method of sampling when it comes to studying hard to find communities. Because Dhaka is not the native land of these indigenous people, they do not live in specific areas of the city, they are scattered. Snowballing method helped me find prospective candidates.

Purposive sampling refers to “the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses” (Etikan 2). Basically, the participants are chosen because they have certain characteristics and can provide certain information useful to the research. I chose people who are non-Bengali Bangladeshi. Meaning the interviewees are Bangladeshi citizens but they do not belong to the Bengali culture.

Secondary data has been collected through close reading of the previous studies and theoretical texts. They helped me to create my hypothesis. They have also helped me to understand the history of these ethnic people and how they are living in their native lands. To understand the present problems of the indigenous people living in Dhaka it is very important to have a strong understanding of their lives in their native land. Based on those findings I established my hypothesis about the elements that can get lost by the influence of Bengali culture and prepared my questionnaires accordingly.

Sample Size

Twenty people were interviewed. Their demographic are listed in the following table-

Ethnicity	Generation	Age Range	Number of Interviewee	Education	Number	Gender	Number
Chakma	First Generation	25-49	6	High school	2	Male	3
				Higher Education	4	Female	3
				Illiterate	0		
	Second Generation	18-21	4	High school	2	Male	2
				Higher Education	2	Female	2
Garo	First Generation	25-49	6	High school	4	Male	3
				Higher Education	1	Female	3
				Illiterate	1		
	Second Generation	18-21	4	High school	3	Male	1
					Higher Education	1	Female

Figure 1: Demographic information of the interviewees

Six out of nine Chakma interviewees and only two out of nine Garo interviewees are highly educated. Also, there is one Garo interviewee who is uneducated. Clearly the education level is higher in the Chakma than the Garo. Also, the group of the second generation Garo immigrants is female heavy.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis has been done to analyze the data. It is a very popular data analysis method in qualitative research. This method is basically systematically organizing data and identifying patterns in them. In this paper collected data are arranged in three themes which are language, kinship and family structure and cultural practices. Separate chapters have been dedicated to each theme.

Limitation

It is not easy for the indigenous people to open up to a Bengali Muslim as it is the dominant class in Bangladesh. The immigrants were very hesitant at first to talk about their struggles and many others did not even want to do the interview as it is a very sensitive subject to them. Which resulted in a small sample size. With a bigger sample size this research would have been much more informative.

Chapter 3: Language

Language is one of the most important aspects of one's identity and culture. Nancy Bonvillain, a linguist and anthropologist said in her book *Language, Culture, and Communication: The Meaning of Messages*, “The language one speaks is an important aspect of individual identity and can be used to galvanize and focus group consciousness” (332). If a country has one official language, the identity of that country and that of the people is more closely associated with language. Bangla, which is the first language of the Bengalis, is the state language of Bangladesh. Though English is global language and is a mandatory subject in schools, Bangla is used for most of the official and non-official communication in the country. Even though most Bengalis living in Bangladesh are bilingual, they mostly use Bangla in almost every aspect of life. Which means the indigenous people of Bangladesh, who have different native languages, must be fluent in Bangla. There is no use of the indigenous languages other than indigenous people communicating with each other, which results in indigenous language falling out of use for everyday communication and consequently leading to the immigrants becoming less fluent in their mother tongue. The following section shows how this gradual erosion and eventual disappearance of the indigenous language happens by examining the factors in the linguistic assimilation patterns of Chakma and Garo immigrants.

Factors behind Language Assimilation

Indigenous languages are getting eroded by Bangla language especially in Dhaka. Most of the first generation immigrants' started losing their fluency in their mother tongue after migrating to Dhaka. And many of the second generation immigrants cannot speak their language, and those who do are not fluent. Two factors have been seen as the reasons behind the language

assimilation of the immigrants. They are heavily exposed to the majority language and education and economic purpose.

Exposure to the majority language

Exposure to the majority language is one of the major factors behind language assimilation among the immigrants. The more minorities are exposed to the majority language the less they use their own language. Geographic location plays a key role in this phenomenon in public exposure. In a study about language proficiency and assimilation Djajic stated, “Language skills are also found to increase with immigrant exposure to destination language” (838). The more exposed the immigrants are to the language of the majority culture the more proficient they will be in that language. Growing up first generation immigrants were fluent in their native language. Chakma and Garo first generation immigrants grew up in their native lands and lived in their communities with many other families of their ethnic group. Though they had to learn Bangla as it is the official language of Bangladesh, at home they spoke in their native language. They did have to use Bangla for school work and to communicate with Bengalis but they came back home to their own community. This gave them more opportunities to speak in their mother tongue compared to those who grew up in Dhaka. The exposure to the majority language was lower for them growing up. The first generation immigrants were only exposed to the Bangla language publicly.

However, when they migrate to Dhaka their fluency in their first language decreases. “Language loss can also be an issue for people who immigrate as adults to an L2 environment” (Guardado 345). The assimilation rate for the first generation depends on the amount of time spent in the majority culture. Djajic studies a similar situation and said, “Exposure depends on the number of years spent in the host country and the degree to which the dominant language is

used within the immigrant household and in the community where the immigrant lives and works” (838). The present study also supports this. Among the Chakma and Garo migrants under study, eight out of twelve first generation immigrants know their native language but are not fluent. They came to Dhaka at a younger age than the rest of the first generation immigrants and have spent over 15 years in Dhaka. On the other hand, four of the first generation immigrants have spent less than 15 years, which is why their grasp on their native language is comparatively stronger. Waas in a similar study found that German speakers who moved to Australia after the age of 16 started forgetting their first language after living in Australia for 20 years. This shows that first generation immigrants can also suffer language loss even if they were fluent in their native language before.

Similarly, the present study findings show, when the indigenous people migrate to Dhaka where they live scattered and not in a community, they tend to forget their own language. Their children, the second generation immigrants, who grow up in Dhaka do not really have a use for their native language other than talking to their relatives. Hence 100% of the second generation immigrants are found to be not fluent in their native language. As majority of the second generation immigrants confirmed, they did learn their native language at the beginning of their lives but as they started school and spent more time with Bengalis, they found themselves using their native language less and less as they grew up. Three out of six second generation immigrants claimed to reply in Bangla at home when they were being spoken to in their native language. Some used Bangla in school, with friends and even with cousins. Four out of six interviewees from the second generation immigrants claimed to only use their native language while talking to the elders in their native village. In Dhaka even when they talk to their relatives, especially cousins, they speak in Bangla. Their parents do not pressurize them to speak in their

native language. Because they are more fluent in Bangla, they end up speaking it at home. As Gordon's selective assimilation suggests that the minorities fully assimilate to some aspects of the majority culture and keep up other aspects of their culture. Language in this case becomes the first aspect of selective assimilation. However, one of the second generation immigrants claimed to speak in his native language at home. His parents have a strict rule about only speaking their native language at home.

This points to the second important factor of linguistic assimilation, leisure activities. Shaull and Gramman in their study on the assimilation process of the Hispanic-American community observed, "Leisure behavior may be a major contributor to the selective acculturation process". Meaning what the immigrants do in their leisure affects their assimilation rate. In this case, the leisure hours of the second generation immigrants are their hours after school or college. Thus the one second generation interviewees who follow the strict rule of only speaking their native language at home use his native language in the leisure hours which consists of talking to his parents and relatives. Likewise the five of the second generation immigrants have assimilated more in terms of language as in their leisure houses they speak in Bangla. They are in a way more exposed to the majority language than the others.

Exposure to the majority culture increases when the family members do not belong to the same ethnic group. "Marriage to a person proficient in the immigrant's origin language obviously reduces exposure" (Djajic 838). The second generation immigrants with both parents as Adivasi have less exposure, hence assimilate less to the majority culture. But one of the interviewees cannot speak their native language at all. Her father is Garo and mother Santal. Her parents interact with each other and with her in Bangla. She was never taught any of the native

languages of her parents. Growing up she was way more exposed to Bangla language than other second generation interviewees which is why she speaks Bangla as her first language.

Education and Economy

Language is not merely a method of communication according to Pierre Bourdieu, rather it is a mechanism of power of the dominant class. Indigenous immigrants losing their language is a sign of the power struggle. Bourdieu further said, “Languages are worth what their speakers are worth” (652) which means the language of the subordinate group is not valued much by the dominant group. Because the Chakma and Garo communities are the subordinate groups in Bangladesh their language has zero value when it comes to education and economy. Education system and economic purpose is another major factor in language assimilation of the minority groups. What importance does a language have if it cannot help one get a degree and get a job? As Djajic observed, “Language proficiency and education are other important determinants of cultural assimilation” (12). In a study conducted on Brazilian immigrants in Japan about how playing Judo, which is a leisure activity, has affected the assimilation of Brazilian immigrants in Japan, Ito¹, Nogawa, Kitamura and Walker discovered that the Brazilian immigrants who attended Japanese public school became fluent in Japanese language. Furthermore, Brazilian immigrants are surrounded by institutions that use Japanese language, like public school and Judo school etc., which helped the assimilation process. Similarly in Bangladesh, especially in Dhaka, most institutions use Bangla language. The indigenous languages are not used for education. Textbooks are written in Bangla and classroom teaching in schools are also conducted in Bangla. Interestingly in 2017 the National Curriculum and Textbook Board of Bangladesh published primary school textbooks in Chakma, Tripura and Marma language. A Dhaka Tribune article reported, “According to the District Primary Education Office, 1,22,034 indigenous

language textbooks have been distributed in Rangamati from 2017, and 723 teachers have been trained to teach in these mother tongues so far”. Before 2017 there were no textbooks in other languages. In 2017 the primary level textbooks were published in only three other languages. Which means other indigenous people are still facing problems. And these books are only valid in Rangamati. And from secondary onwards all textbooks are in Bangla. The reason behind having books in Chakma, Marma and Tripura language, according to the article, is to give the children some time to study Bangla and become fluent. But at one point Adivasi students have to be fluent in Bangla to graduate high school. The research population of this study confirms this language priority. As the data shows, six of the first generation interviewees have passed high school, five have pursued higher education and one is illiterate. The highly educated ones have comparatively higher paying jobs than the former. All of them have admitted to not being very fluent in their native language since they have to “speak in Bangla almost all the time”. Moreover, among the six less educated ones, four have admitted to be fluent in their native language and they work in family owned parlors and as house help. The rest of the less educated ones speak Bangla for the most part. Furthermore, the uneducated interviewee has claimed to be fluent in their native language. This shows how they have been structurally assimilated into Bangla language.

The first generation immigrants were already fluent in Bangla before migrating to Dhaka. Though they spoke in their native language at home but in school everything was in Bangla. And after migration they started living in a community where they could hardly speak in their native language. As mentioned earlier, indigenous people live scattered in Dhaka. Some people live close to their families but for the most part they do not have a community in the city. Furthermore, at work they have to speak in Bangla as most people are Bengali. Without being

fluent in Bangla they cannot get a job in Dhaka. Bhuiyan, in his article about indigenous languages in Bangladesh stated, "... if an individual from indigenous community wants to get a job in Bangladesh, he or she has to learn either Bangla or English. As a result, reversals of life lead indigenous people to lose interest in learning their own language" (4). After migrating to Dhaka structural assimilation happens when the minorities have "entered fully into the societal network of groups and institutions, or societal structure" (Gordon 70) of the majority culture. Which means the immigrants have to assimilate as they are surrounded by institutions, in this case school and work, of the majority culture. There is no economic or educational use of the indigenous languages, especially in Dhaka. Their second language becomes more important and practical than their first language.

Martin conducted a similar study on Hispanic Families in Vancouver about language loss. In his paper he stated, "Many immigrant families arrive in countries where their L1 is not the dominant language. Their children begin to learn the L1 prior to starting school. As soon as they enter the school system however, they begin to learn the dominant language and their LI starts to erode". Similarly in the case of the indigenous group the second generation immigrants learn their native language from their parents who are the first generation immigrants. They, the second generation, have no other use of their native language, which is their first language, other than communicating with their family members. They go to school where they have one or two people at most who belong to the same ethnic group as them. From textbooks and classes to talking to peers and teachers everything is in Bangla and English. They too get structurally assimilated as they have institutions that follow the majority culture all around them. It is not surprising that most of the interviewees cannot speak their native language anymore and even the rest of them can, they have lost their fluency. Some of them could speak their native

language quite well but as they started spending more time in school and started making friends, they got less and less fluent. Likewise Wong Fillmore in his research titled “When learning a second language means losing the first” discovered that the younger the children when they get exposed to the second language, the greater the impact of the second language on the native one. The second generation indigenous immigrants thus are more at risk of forgetting their mother tongue.

Akresh conducted a study about language assimilation in the USA and said, “Among the children English ability improves with age presumably because of increased contact with people outside the family, especially in school” (11). As immigrant children mingle with children from the majority culture, they practice the majority culture more and become fluent in it. He further stated, “Less than 68% of native of Mexican accessory who were 5 to 8 years old spoke English only or very well but over 83% of 13 to 17 year olds spoke it only or very well and just 4% spoke English not well or not at all”. Similar characteristics have been seen in the second generation Chakma and Garo immigrants in Dhaka. They understood and could speak their native language at first. But as they started going to school, they became more fluent in Bangla and spoke less in their language. And being fluent in Bangla and English is all they need for work which is why their native language has no practical use or importance to them.

Impacts on the Language

The impact of assimilation is resulting in language loss. There are many cases of open violence in the Chittagong Hill Tracts which are not seen in Dhaka. But disciplinary violence can be seen through language. In a study conducted in 2019 about language loss in Bangladesh Awal said, “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” (27). Those

who learn their native language first tend to have an accent while speaking Bangla. This is the reason why parents of two of the second generation immigrants have stopped teaching them their native language. “The indexicality of language, however, may sometimes work against the speaker, where the speaker’s dialect is perceived and evaluated negatively by interlocutors. A listener may ascribe social characteristics to a speaker that the speaker might want to resist” (Dyred 102). Three impacts have been seen on the ethnic language due to assimilation, they are- lack of encouragement to learn native language, mixing Bangla with native language and decaying alphabets.

Lack of encouragement

Because there is no economic or educational use of the indigenous language, the second generation immigrants often are not encouraged to learn it. One second generation, Bangla speaking immigrant said that her father, who is Garo, never tried to teach her Garo language. Her parents selectively let her assimilate. The only way second generation immigrants learn their native language is through their parents as they are not taught the native language in schools unlike Bangla and English. But many parents are not encouraging the second generation to learn the native language. Most second generation immigrants said that though they learned their native language as a child, their parents do not enforce it later and are rather indifferent towards retaining the language in their children. They see their parents speaking to their relatives in their native language but they do not care if the second generation immigrants reply in Bangla when they are being spoken to in their native language.

Decaying Alphabets

Garo language does not have alphabets but Chakma language does. Among 9 Chakma interviewees (six first generation, three second generation) only one knows their alphabets. His

experience shows the role of everyday popular discursive practices at the local level. Growing up in a rural village in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, he used to see villagers write the recipes of various herbal medicines in the native language. Some people would write religious sayings too in the native language. That is how he continued to read and write in Chakma alphabets. He did not learn it at school, rather his mother taught him. However, he started forgetting them since moving to Dhaka due to the lack of practice.

All the other immigrants have not learned Chakma alphabets simply because there is no use for it. The spoken language has some use, they use it while talking to their relatives but the alphabets have absolutely no practical use. Holy books are written in Bangla and/or English which are taught in school, all official documents in Bangladesh are either in Bangla or English. They are surrounded with institutions that do not use their native alphabets. So structurally they the alphabets get assimilated.

Hybrid language

Those who claim to know their native language but are not fluent and speak a hybrid language, between Bangla and their native language, at home. Meaning while speaking in their native language they use many Bangla words. It is because they speak in Bangla for most of the day. Also their vocabulary in their native language is very poor. One of the first generation Chakma interviewees is a teacher who teaches grades nine to twelve. He sometimes talks to his Chakma students in their native language. He stated,

When I speak to them in Chakma language I notice that they do not know very common words and expressions. For example, one day I jokingly asked some of my Chakma students if he knows what “radhahoro” (rooster) is. There is a saying about the connection

between a rooster and coming of age. But none of the students knew that “radhahoro” means rooster. I was shocked.

He lamented about next generation Chakmas forgetting their mother tongue and he said that parents must become more cautious about it.

Bangladeshi Bengalis are very sensitive about their language. “The [liberation] war was intensely nationalistic and had its genes in the culture and language of the Bengalis within the state of Pakistan. The Bangladeshi nationalist movement and liberation war were both predicted on the ideals of Bengali nationalism, as convicted in the language movement of 1948 to 1952” (Mohsin 21). Dhaka, which is dominated by Bengalis, is filled with institutions which are also dominated by Bengalis and Bangla language. Homi Bhabha, in his concept of hybridity, talked about when people get caught between two cultures. “... ‘hybridity’ happens when a person is caught between two different things, often two different cultures, which leads him/her to a ‘double vision’ or ‘double consciousness’” (Zohdi 146). In this case the Chakma and the Garo second generation immigrants grew up and the first generation immigrants have been living in a place where Bangla is the first and the official language. But to them Bangla is the second language. Therefore, they find themselves speaking a hybrid language at home which is a mix between their native language and Bangla. They “Hybridity and merged identity happens to the ones who are trapped between two different cultures, that of the colonizers and that of themselves as the colonized” (Zohdi 150). The second generation grows up not being fluent in their native language. But the first generation immigrants face “the alien cultures and languages, and their border and in-between lives puts them in “hybrid” situation and steals their pure identity” (Zohdi 149). Especially the first generation immigrants who have been living in Dhaka for over fifteen years and are comparatively more educated suffer from language loss the most.

Language assimilation is a massive threat to the indigenous cultures. The fact that none of the second generation immigrant interviewees can speak fluently in their native language and know their alphabets indicates that the future generations will suffer language loss even more. And at this rate indigenous languages will become fully extinct if necessary steps are not taken to preserve them. Clearly the family environment plays a huge role in language assimilation. The second generations who understand and speak their native language have learned it from their parents. It helps when both the parents belong to the same ethnic group. However the indigenous children whose parents are of different ethnicities do not know their native language. Family background matters a great deal in assimilation.

Chapter 4: Marriage and Family Structure

Kinship and family structure is one of the biggest parts of a culture. When someone from a minority culture marries someone from the majority culture that line of family lineage assimilates fully into the majority culture. Chakma and Garo immigrants are open to cross ethnic marriage which is giving birth to a new generation with a hybrid identity with both Bengali and Adivasi blood. As a result, the predominant patriarchal Bengali family structure is changing the matriarchal traditions in the Garo community. This chapter analyzes cross ethnic marriages and how it absorbs the Adivasi population into mainstream culture. It also studies the factors that further intermarriages. Moreover, this chapter explores the attitude towards patriarchy and the reasons behind its decay. Additionally it analyzes the influence of education and migration.

Cross-Ethnic Marriage and Identity Loss

Ethnic communities preserve their distinct customs through homogenous marriages. “Marriage organisation, in general, is seen as one of the important element(s) of social organisation among all ethnic groups in CHT in terms of maintaining group identity and livelihood situation” (Ahmed 132). Indigenous people marrying within their ethnic groups is what is keeping their unique culture alive till this day. Qian and Lichter in their study about cross ethnic marriages in the USA said, “Marital assimilation has been a historically important aspect of immigrant adaptation and acculturation” (289). Gordon’s theory of assimilation shows that intermarriage is the “final step” in the assimilation process of the minorities. When ethnic people marry people from the majority culture, the offspring from that marriage are more likely to get absorbed into the majority culture. “Once women are intermarried, they tend to adopt their husbands’ surname (Waters), begin to think of themselves less in ethnic terms, and, in some cases, even adopt their husbands’ ethnicity, relinquishing their own” (Rebhun 476-477). A second generation immigrant

said that most Adivasis who were Hindu before are converting to Christianity by the influence of the missionaries. The remaining Hindu Adivasis do not have much restrictions about marrying Bengali Hindus. But the offspring grow up to be more Bengali. If an indigenous woman marries a Bengali man their child will get the husband's last name. Bangladesh does not have hyphenated last names. Thus their ethnic names get lost in this process. Not having hyphenated last names automatically turns the mixed ethnic children more towards Bengali culture. Most children of adivasi women who marry into Bengali families end up marrying Bengalis. The next generation of that lineage will more likely live like a Bengali and get married to other Bengalis.

Nine of the first generation immigrant interviewees claimed to have no objection should their children marry into Bengali families. Though one of the first generation immigrants bemoaned, "When Bengali women come to our community we treat them with love and respect but when our girls go to Bengali households they are not given much respect. They often face domestic abuse and some have even been killed". Interestingly, his comments about domestic violence against Adivasi women who marry into Bengali families were made right after her daughter's interview was over. His interview was done before that. Clearly he wanted his daughter to hear the comments. This shows that some first generation immigrants see this assimilation as a threat to their identity. The same binary of 'them and us' is used in such construction and the Bengalis take the place of the other in the indigenous imagination.

Factors behind Cross Ethnic Marriage

Two factors behind cross ethnic marriage have been found from the interviews. They are- education and conservatism and geographic location. All the interviewees have highly emphasized these two aspects.

Education and Conservatism

Most Adivasi who live in Dhaka came here for education and work. They are less conservative than their former generation who mostly live in villages according to the interviewees. In addition, "... educated people are better able to adapt to different customs or to communicate their potentially different expectations and beliefs to their spouses. Because of this better 'technology' for adapting to a different culture, they become more likely to marry outside of their ethnic group" (Furtado, Theodoropoulos 5).

There are two parties, one is more conservative than the other. The less conservative are the first generation immigrants who migrated to Dhaka at a young age and have studied here and the second generation immigrants. 100% of the second generation immigrants are supportive towards cross ethnic marriage. Uzi Rebhun in the context of cross-ethnic marriages among Jewish Americans observed, "Education ...tends to liberalise the social, cultural, and political values that adolescents have" (659). The first generation interviewees who are uneducated or less educated had strong opinions about people marrying within their ethnic community. Kalmijna and Kraaykamp in their study about Moroccan and Turkish immigrants in the USA said, "Moroccan and Turkish migrants have considerably more conservative values about marriage and sexuality than natives, but there is also variation within the second generation" (654). Indigenous students who want to pursue higher education have to at some point leave their native land and migrate to big cities. And in the universities 99% students are Bengali. This is how young Chakma and Garo boys and girls start forming a deeper relationship with Bengalis. This assimilation process is the primary structural assimilation. It is "the degree of interaction in warm and intimate ties between minority group members and members of the majority group"

(Floyd and Gramann 8). The immigrants form intimate ties with Bengalis leading to marital assimilation.

When Adivasi move to Dhaka and get educated they do not care to follow the strict rules about homogenous marriage of the hill tracts. Furtado and Theodoropoulos in their study of intermarriage in the USA in 2008 said, "... the assortative matching effect posits that marriage surplus increases when education levels of husband and wife are similar. This implies that given a costly search process, educated immigrants may be willing to substitute similarities in ethnicity for similarities in education" (3). Similarly, the Chakma and Garo immigrants prioritize compatibility over ethnicity. "Religion and ethnicity have become less important in delineating the pool of eligible partners as endogamy, the custom that requires individuals to marry within their own racial, religious, and social groups, has declined" (Nelson and Otne 89). Educated immigrants care less about marrying someone with a similar ethnic. People are now more focused on choosing a partner who has a similar mentality. Qian and Litcher further said, "... the quest for more education among immigrants necessarily opens opportunities for upward mobility and social interaction with potential white marital partners, regardless of whether immigrants wish to become 'American' culturally or not" (70). Likewise the second generation Chakma and Garo immigrants do not marry Bengalis to purposefully assimilate to the majority culture rather they get structurally assimilated.

Geographic Location

Geographic location varies a great deal when it comes to cross ethnic marriages. In Dhaka the Chakma and Garo immigrants live in the closest proximity to Bengalis. It falls under structural assimilation as the immigrants enter into "the social cliques, organizations, institutional activities, and general civic life of the receiving society. If this process takes place on a large

enough scale, then a high frequency of intermarriage must result” (Gordon 279). This is also a part of primary structural assimilation. Because the immigrants live in such close proximity to Bengalis that they form intimate relationships with them which later leads to marriage. Most of intermarriage couples live in Dhaka or big cities. Basically Dhaka is the “third space” where the two cultures have mixed and created a hybrid culture. The Bengali-Adivasi couple create a hybrid culture at their home in Dhaka where they raise their children. Thus the next generation emerges with a hybrid identity. Though Bhabha’s concept of the “third space” is a mental state rather than a geographic location, Dhaka is a good physical representation of it.

Adivasi have been outnumbered by Bengalis in their native land and their population is even lower in Dhaka. When they study and live in Dhaka in a Bengali heavy community they are bound to marry Bengalis. “If there are fewer co-ethnics within close geographic proximity, the probability of encountering an acceptable same-ethnicity spouse purely by random chance decreases and thus the costs of meeting someone with the same ethnic background increases” (Furtado, Theodoropoulos 5). The interviewees’ socialization with Bengalis is thus somewhat forced. One of the interviewees working in a school observed that in his classes there are roughly one or two ethnic students. Other immigrants have likewise said that most of their neighbors are Bengali. Fifteen out of the eighteen interviewees do not know anyone from their ethnic community in Dhaka other than their family members.

In addition, there are no Chakma or Garo communities in Dhaka. In the hill tracts or other regions there are communities of Adivasi people in the sense that many families of the same ethnic clan live together. In such areas most people are comparatively older and because they live together, ethnic traditions and norms are very strong. There are villages where if an Adivasi marries outside their clan, he or she gets shunned. Chakma and Garo immigrants who have

married Bengalis live in Dhaka because they do not have to worry about getting shunned by their own family. But they might not be allowed to enter a community in their village. But the consequences of marrying outside one's clan is different in some cases. One of which is having the same religious belief. "Though marrying within the same ethnic community is the norm in CHT but if both the families follow the same religion then it is accepted by the elders" said one of the first generation interviewees.

Declining Matriarchy

Bangladesh, being a Bengali dominant country, has a patriarchal economy. Women go to the husband's house after marriage and children take their father's last name. When it comes to property inheritance, sons get priority over daughters. Patriarchy is something Chakma and Bengalis have in common. Garo on the other hand are matriarchal. Women are the head of Garo households and inherit all the properties from their parents. Garo children take their mother's last name, after marriage men stay with their in-laws. But this tradition has been majorly impacted by mainstream culture. Growing up with Bengalis, Garo boys have seen patriarchy everywhere other than their own house. Their ideologies are becoming more in line with Bengalis. Islam in his study about changing Garo culture in 2008 said, "Like neighbouring Bengali community, for education nowadays, male children are given first preference" (54). Education and migration to Dhaka is responsible for their changing point of view. In Dhaka where there are no Garo communities, Garo men see a world that is dominated by men. As they live in a patriarchal culture they get habituated to it. Education and migration to the city are the main factors behind it.

Education and Migration

Out of the first generation Garo immigrant interviewees, only two claimed to be a persistent follower of Garo matrilineal traditions and they are illiterate or not highly educated (did not pass school). All the other first generation Garo immigrants are educated, not highly but have at least passed high school. Education clearly plays a big part in the possible extinction of this matrilineal tradition. “Influenced by majority people” said Ahmed, “most of the Khasi and Garo young men and women do not follow the husband of hire system (in this system the husband is required to stay at his father-in-laws house). It is commonly seen among educated Garo that the wife moves to her husband's house similar to majority culture” (22). Garo men do not like the idea of leaving their house after marriage. One of the female Garo first generation immigrants said, “Now Garo men are getting educated and migrating to Dhaka. They are becoming more modern. Now they want their wives to come to their house and stay with their families”.

According to all the immigrants this change in their tradition has occurred because of the increasing number of educated Adivasi. Now men are getting more educated and have good jobs. It has made them think of their tradition as outdated. One of the Garo male interviewees has been teased for the matrilineal tradition. He said that his friends, when they used to get into fights in school, said things like “why do you people go to your wife’s house? Look at us, we bring ours with us’ and so on”. The educated Garo spend a lot more time with Bengalis in school. They take the same classes which makes their social circle with Bengalis wider. And children learn about manners, etiquette in school. They learn these not only through books and teachers but also from each other. And these lessons influence their habits and point of views. When Garo children grow up in an environment where patriarchal traditions are what most people follow it becomes somewhat of a universal truth.

Another factor is migration to the city. She said since men are going to school, they migrate to Dhaka for either higher education or to get a job. And these men do not want to follow the patriarchal system. In Dhaka, most of the population are Bengali who are patriarchal. When Garo men migrate to Dhaka they enter a highly patriarchal place. After living for a long time in a patriarchal environment they do not want to go back to matriarchal tradition. This is the second degree structural assimilation. It refers to “the extent of interaction between members of minority and majority groups in less intimate settings, such as educational, work, and residential environments” (Floyd and Gramann 8). The educational institutions are such settings where the immigrants form friendship with the Bengalis which leads them to learn about the norms of majority culture.

Matriarchy is one of the traditions in Garo culture that is polar opposite from the majority culture and even most other indigenous cultures. It is uncommon not only in Bangladesh but also in the world. When assimilating into patriarchal culture means one of the very few matriarchal tribes becoming extinct from the whole world. Moreover, people being accepting towards cross ethnic marriages is progressive, there is no doubt about that. On the other hand various cultural practices disappear as people from the minority cultures marry into majority culture.

Chapter 5: Cultural Practices

Cultural practices like clothing, food habits, songs, literature, poems and so on are a big part of one's cultural identity. Bangladesh, having a mostly Bengali population, has an identity that is highly associated with Bengali culture. For instance, fish is a big part of Bengali culture, especially Hilsa fish. There is a saying that goes "Mache Bhate Bangli" which means Bengalis can be identified by their love for fish and rice. Hilsa fish, which is very important in Bengali culture, is the national fish of Bangladesh. Saree is considered the national dress for Bangladeshi women. Bengali culture has basically become Bangladeshi identity. All the distinct indigenous cultures are always left behind. In a study conducted in 2016 about ethnic migration Wallendorf and Reilly stated, "Assimilation has several components. First, there is cultural assimilation (also referred to as acculturation), which involves changes in the behavior pattern of the immigrants. These behavior patterns include such elements as language, dress, and food" (293). This chapter studies the factors behind Chakma and Garo immigrants straying away from their traditional culture including food and attire.

In a study about identity and developmental politics in the Chittagong Hill Tracts Bokhtiar Ahmed stated, "The hill dwellers had been repeatedly stigmatized as 'primitive' or 'barbarians', or 'wild races' who practiced a primitive mode of subsistence with primitive technologies. The hill people and their culture still carry that stigma and it remains to the present day as a basic assumption for whatever ensued in the name of development in their life" (147). Many adivasis practice Bengali culture in their everyday life, it is not always because they want to but they have to. In a study about Garo culture Rafiqul Islam said, "the observable thing is that in the day-to-day contact with Bengali people they have been much more influenced and changed in their food habits, dress, songs, language, and behavior, and even in their housing

pattern” (61). Their cultural practices are not common in big cities like Dhaka hence it is very challenging to keep up. And the generation that was born and raised in Dhaka are even more abstracted from their traditional identity. They have to move out of our community and migrate to cities right after high school if they want to pursue higher education. That is when they mingle more with Bengalis than their own people. This is how they start straying away from their own culture. And the second generation immigrants, who were born and brought up in Dhaka, learn very little about their native culture. “A countercultural attitude has developed and many are rejecting their own societal norms and values and seeking alternative lifestyles. This practice and attitude is strongly visible among the indigenous people who live in urban areas. This process has emerged due to very close proximity to majority people” (Ahmed 22). The second generation immigrants grew up very closely to Bengali culture. Which is why when it comes to food and outfit choice, they go with the flow of the majority culture.

Factors behind Assimilation in Diet

One of the most important parts of a culture is food. Every culture has its unique spice palette, cooking technique, ingredients and so on. In a study about food and identity Almireco said, “Food choices tell stories of families, migrations, assimilation, resistance, changes over times, and personal as well as group identity” (4). Chakma and Garo cuisines have very little in common with Bengali cuisine. From their ingredients to cooking style, everything is different. The first generation immigrants are fond of their cuisine, they have it as frequently as they can. But in Dhaka they consume Bengali dishes way more. Two factors were found for assimilation in cuisine, they are- unavailability of ingredients and the second generation preferring Bengali cuisine.

Ingredients Unavailable

In cities like Dhaka, where cultivating one's own food is nearly impossible, spices and produce that are widely available are to Bengali taste. Adivasi food items are either not available in Dhaka or very difficult to find and expensive. In some way or the other, most Chakma and Garo people living in Dhaka have to get used to the Bengali diet. Most of the interviewees said that they often cook one or two traditional items with whatever they can find but they consume Bengali cuisine on a daily basis as it is easier and more affordable. Four out of eighteen interviewees said that they eat Bengali dishes on a daily basis with occasional traditional dishes. Five said that they make traditional dishes often with whatever they find. And two said that they cook at least one traditional style dish almost every day. "Na.kam Bitchi" (dry fish gravy), "Khari" (chicken/beef). Most of their vegetables are roots, leaves, stems, flowers and so on which are found in the wild. In some areas one vegetable vendor comes once a week with various hilly vegetables. Some interviewees said that they try to buy some of the vegetables, though the vegetables do not remain fresh by the time it reaches Dhaka, and cook Pahari food that day and maybe the next day. But they eat Bengali food for the most part. A lot of ingredients, especially vegetables that are essential in various Adivasi dishes are found in the wild. People living in Dhaka buy produce from local vegetable vendors and shops where they do not sell items like bamboo shoot, ginger flower, mushroom, snails, crabs and so on that are common in Chakma and Garo cuisine. Mushrooms and crabs are sold mostly in high end grocery stores and are expensive. "The fact that prices of goods traditionally consumed by immigrants are sometimes high in relation to other types of goods in the host country provides another incentive towards assimilation in consumption" (Djajic 836). They have to buy ingredients of Bengali cuisine. Wallendorf and Reilly further stated, "... lack of availability may force some

immigrants to make changes in which foods they purchase” (293). Which is why the first generation immigrants, despite wanting to have their traditional dishes every day, have to eat Bengali dishes. Most of the interviewees have their traditional food on holidays like Bizhu (Chakma festival) and Wangala (Garo festival). Some of them go to fairs to celebrate the day and eat traditional dishes. The first generation immigrants are structurally assimilated into Bengali cuisine. They are in a social environment where everything is according to the majority culture.

Even on Bizhu and Wangala they prepare some Bengali dishes, especially desserts, not only because of the lack of ingredients to make Pitha but also their children, the second generation immigrants, like them. In their hometown they make various ‘Pitha’ after rice harvest. But in Dhaka they have Semai, Payesh and so on. The first generation immigrants are the only ones who truly appreciate their traditional food. But the second generation immigrants have a different take on it. In a similar study about Somali women in Australia Burns studied how they had to adjust their diet according to the food availability in Australia. They had to add white bread and breakfast cereal and so on to their diet. Moreover, they could not eat goat and camel meat as they are not widely available in the country.

Preference for Bengali Cuisine

The second factor behind dietary assimilation is that the second generation immigrants are more accustomed to Bengali dishes. Growing up in a close proximity to Bengali culture, the second generation prefer Bengali cuisine over their ethnic food. Many second generation immigrants have never heard of or tasted many dishes from their native cuisine. All the second generation interviewees love Daal (lentil soup) which is one of the most common Bengali dishes. People in the hill tracts do not have it. Other dishes like chicken, fish and so on are cooked with turmeric powder, red chili powder and cooking oil in Bengali cuisine which is uncommon in Adivasi

cuisine. Dishes like Khari, Goppa which are very commonly consumed by the Adivasi taste too bland to the second generation immigrants for the lack of previously mentioned products. Fish and meat are traditionally cooked with no spices, “Garam Masala” or curry powder but only herbs in Chakma and Garo cuisine. This style of cooking is very different from Bengali style as in the latter there are various spices like chili powder, “Garam Masala”, turmeric powder, mustard oil, soybean oil and so on. A second generation immigrant said, “The first generation immigrants avoid oily and spicy food as in the Chittagong Hill tracts food is cooked with very little or no oil and spices. They are not used to such food. But we are used to eating mixed food, we are ok with it”. Three out of six second generation immigrants under study do not like their traditional cuisine. Two eat their traditional dishes but their favorite are Bengali dishes. In a study on the Monipuri community about urbanization of the Manipuri community Saunderson said, “The younger generations are following more and more mainstream habits, they are mirroring their dress, culture and food habits” (33). As the second generation grew up in a very close proximity with the majority culture that they have become fully habituated to the mainstream food habit.

However, one of the second generation interviewees enjoys their traditional dishes a lot. Some did not like their traditional dishes as a child and preferred Bengali food. But their parents altered the recipes of their traditional dishes which made those interviewees try them. And as they grew older they started truly liking their traditional dishes. And the parents of the other interviewees do not care if they eat their traditional dishes. Which is why they have gradually acculturated to Bengali cuisine.

Factors behind Assimilation of Indigenous Traditional Attire

Another important aspect of the Chakma and Garo holidays is that they often wear their traditional attire. Pinon Hadi is the traditional attire of Chakma women and Dakmanda is of Garo. Women wear their traditional attire more than men. Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy arranges cultural programs on Adivasi holidays where many indigenous people wear their traditional Adivasi attire. But many indigenous people choose to wear Bengali clothes even though they have their unique traditional attire. There are two factors behind this assimilation. Firstly, to some people their traditional dress seems awkward which is why they prefer not to wear it. And secondly, their traditional attire is not traditional to everyone which is why some people choose not to wear it in non-ethnic events.

Awkward Fit

According to the first generation immigrants, when their children do not have exams during Bizhu they wear Pinon Haadi and go to the fair or visit their relatives. But the husbands and sons never wear their traditional attire. All the interviewees admitted that women wear their traditional dress more than men. Some of the second generation immigrants have said that they have never seen their male relatives wear their traditional attire. None of the male interviewees wear their traditional dress. Even on religious holidays men wear shirts or Panjabis with pants. It is awkward, according to them, because the length of the Dhuti (the traditional pants) comes up till the knees. Because the pants are short, he and other men feel awkward wearing it. They feel like people will make fun of them in public. On the other hand, he wears three quarter pants sometimes outside of his house. Selective assimilation can be seen here as the indigenous male have decided not to wear their traditional attire whereas females do wear it occasionally.

Out of all the female interviewees only one has never worn her traditional dress. She said, “On the religious holidays my relatives always insist that I wear our traditional dress but I never wear it. I feel most comfortable in Salwar Kameez so I wear that all the time. Also, my parents do not have any problem with me not wearing our traditional outfit, they let me wear whatever I want”. All the parents of the second generation immigrants have no problem with them not wearing their traditional attire.

Not Appropriate / Traditional

Other than Bizhu and Wangala even the first generation Chakma and Garo immigrants do not wear their traditional attire. This has a lot to do with modesty. Salwar-Kameez, which is commonly worn by women in Bangladesh, typically covers most of a woman’s body. Uddin in his research about cultural assimilation and Bengali dress on ethnic physique in Chittagong Hill Tracts said, “Covering the body could also be a protective measure to the minority Pahari women to avoid Bangali nuisances” (21). He further stated, “In CHT, settler Bangali people have been observed crazy when they saw any Pahari girl/women with their traditional dresses that do not fully cover their whole body” (21). The previous generations were not concerned with covering their body. They even made changes to their traditional attire. Mahbub, Minhus, and Hui in their research on indigenous fashion in Bangladesh said, “With the increasing number of Bengali inhabitants in the Chittagong Hill Tracts area, Chakma women began feeling uncomfortable with their usual outfits in public places. Therefore, these days to counteract the gaze of the outsider, in urban areas they started adding an upper garment to their traditional wear, a blouse” (7). Moreover Syed Manzoorul Islam, a Bangladeshi academic, fiction writer and art critic said that when he was visiting the Chittagong Hill Tracts in 1972 the hilly women were not concerned about their bodies not being covered by their clothes. But since Bengali settlers arrived the dress

up of the natives changed very fast. Islam further said that some of his female Chakma students to only wear Selwar Kameez but also cover their heads to feel safer at various checkpoints in the hill tracts (Islam).

The first generation grew up seeing their elders preferring Bengali attire over their traditional dress. To them their traditional dress was more like home-clothes and Bengali dress outside-cloths. Moreover “Since Pahari people don’t feel free with traditional dress in outside they wear Bangali dress as a dress-code. In fact, they use the Bangali dress symbolically as a sign-board for not being treated as ‘upajati’ and not cheated as well” (Uddin 22). In their own homeland the first generation immigrants have seen the privileges of wearing Bengali clothes. Naturally after immigrating to the city, which is not their homeland, they prefer going with the flow of the majority culture.

All the female immigrants wear their traditional attire only on Bizhu and Wangala. In a study conducted on Muslim immigrants in America Stodolska and Livengood stated that many people from the young generation “only dressed in traditional clothing while attending services at the mosque and in their everyday life they preferred to wear more modern clothes that did not attract the attention of their co-workers, clients, or fellow students” (306). On other occasions like weddings, birthday parties and so on they wear Salwar Kameez. A second generation immigrant said, “Out of all the weddings I have attended, I have only seen one bride who wore our traditional dress and she is a fashion designer. It is because she is a fashion designer and she represents our community that she wore our traditional dress. Otherwise she would have also worn a Saree”. Weddings are one of the most culturally significant events. Nowadays people care more about trends and aesthetics than tradition. At school functions like farewell, orientation and so on, female students mostly wear Saree as it is their traditional dress. But

Adivasi students still do not wear their traditional dress. A second generation immigrant said, “Pinon Hadi cannot be worn everywhere. Saree is traditional in everyone's eyes, Pino Hadi is also traditional but not to everyone”. In a study about Nigerian immigrants in the USA Strübel said, “... being in public among non-Nigerians while wearing their ethnic clothing causes discomfort” (33). They were not embarrassed about their Nigerian ethnicity rather they were annoyed by comments and questions from non-Nigerians.

In Dhaka the second generation immigrant grew up watching people wear Saree and Salwar Kameez as formal or traditional wear. There are many stores coming up with new styles of Salwar Kameez and Saree. The second generation immigrant thus got structurally assimilated into Bengali culture. Most of the friends of the second generation immigrants are Bengali. Which is why leisure behavior also affects the assimilation process. They see their Bengali friends wearing the latest Sealwar kameez and Saree to function which entices them to wear those clothes as well. Ito1, Nogawa, Kitamura and Walker said, “... some ethnic minorities will become more like members of the dominant society in their recreation as they assimilate, however, recreational behavior that reflects core cultural values will be sustained, regardless of assimilation pressures” (12). A second generation immigrant said that because her mother wears their traditional dress all the time she also wears it sometimes at home. But she does not wear it outside other than Wangala, Garo harvest festival, and cultural programs.

Male Chakma and Garo immigrants have admitted to have abandoned their traditional attire long ago. But the attitude of the females towards their traditional attire is changing drastically. Similarly, their indigenous cuisines are also disappearing from the daily lives of the immigrants. While there are restaurants like Hebang that have brought hilly cuisines to the city, the traditional dishes are not becoming a regular part of the immigrants' lives. The interviewees

go to these restaurants but once in a while. With their busy lifestyle and the cost of eating out frequently have restricted them to take full advantage of such restaurants. The second generation immigrants are the parents of the future generations of the indigenous people in Dhaka. The immigrants not being close to their cultural practices signifies that soon many indigenous cultural practices will no longer be seen.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The Adivasi people have always been looked down upon. They have been given names like “Upojati” (tribal) “indigenous”, “Khudro Jatigosthi” (minority) and so on. Though all the Adivasi communities are very different from one another they have always been put under one category. “Orient is eternal, uniform, and incapable of defining itself; therefore it is assumed that a highly generalized and systematic vocabulary for describing the Orient from a Western standpoint is inevitable and even scientifically ‘objective’” (Said 301). In a way the Adivasi are treated as the Orient in Bangladesh. They are considered less civilized and barbaric to some extent. This stereotype has impacted the point of view of the indigenous people about themselves and their communities.

Because there is no economic and educational use of the native languages, many Chakma and Garo immigrants do not teach their children their mother tongue. Those who learn their native language are not fluent for the lack of practice. Most of the first generation immigrants and all the second generation immigrants speak in a hybrid language at home. And many Adivasi parents do not press their children to speak in their native language. This causes language assimilation of the Chakma and Garo language. Most of the second generation immigrants do not know their native language properly. This shows that there is a very high possibility that these languages will go extinct within a few decades, especially Chakma alphabets.

Furthermore, intermarriage between Adivasi and Bengali are increasing as the Adivasi are very low in number in Dhaka. And nowadays many educated people care less about ethnic differences and focus more on having similar interests and goals. Intermarriage causes the minorities to lose their unique identity as the offspring gets absorbed into the majority culture. This creates a generation with hybrid identity and puts them into a third space. But the future

generation inherits the father's last name. So the offspring of the Adivasi women who marry Bengalis get counted as Bengalis, not Adivasi. The Adivasi identity gets lost. Also, Garo men refusing to follow some of the matriarchal traditions indicate identity loss. They willingly assimilate into the majority culture and call their own culture backdated. They live in a third space where they call themselves Garo but are not willing to follow their own traditions.

Moreover, Bangladesh having a Bengali identity has caused the Adivasi, especially the immigrants to lose their unique cultural practices. The second generation immigrants are barely familiar with their ethnic food. While there are two restaurants that sell Hilly food, it does not help the second generation immigrants to get familiar with their cuisine very much. Some go to the restaurants once in a while but they consume Bengali food on a daily basis. Similarly, their traditional clothes which were once casual wear for them are becoming more occasional. This gives the Adivasi immigrants a hybrid identity in the sense that they identify as Chakma or Garo but dress like a Bengali. Even on special occasions, like weddings, most immigrants lean more toward Bengali attire. The only time some of them wear their traditional clothes is during ethnic festivals. A few of them wear their traditional attire as casual wear but at home, not outside. The reason is that it is different from the casual wear of the majority culture. Because all the institutions in Dhaka are dominated by people of the majority culture, the minority cultures have no choice but to assimilate.

Bangladesh as a country has a very Bengali identity. Maintaining one's unique identity in such a country is extremely difficult. Chakma and Garo people migrate to Dhaka for a better future for themselves and their future generations. But this "better future" comes at a cost. They have to compromise with their way of living to fit in with the dominant class. In Bangladesh,

especially in Dhaka, structural assimilation is bound to happen as almost all the institutions are dominated and owned by the dominant culture. Attending schools, working in the same offices as the Bengalis does not leave the immigrants a choice but to assimilate. The only way of saving some of the indigenous identities is through strong family bonds. Homi Bhabha talked about a space where the colonized are free to live. In Dhaka the immigrants are free to a certain extent, meaning there are no physical violence or cases of ethnic cleansing in the city. But the free space cannot save their unique identities. Yes, adopting to the dominant culture does open up many doors for to minorities. But it is hardly a choice as the alternative is isolation from the rest of the country. Without knowing Bangla language they cannot work or get educated in this country. And to live with people of the majority culture the immigrants have to adopt the cultural practices of the majority group. They are not choosing to assimilate rather being forced as the alternative is social isolation. The first generation immigrants have managed to hold onto some part of their ethnic identity but not everyone is able to pass them on to the next generation. Thus a generation is imaging who are not ethnically Bengali but talk, live, dress and eat like one.

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