Intersectionality in Human Capital Development of Indigenous Women in Dhaka: Mapping the Journey in Education, Employment, and Choice of Partner

By

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted for the completion of Master of Development Studies (MDS) degree at Brac University is solely the result of my own work.

2. The thesis contains no material previously published or written by a third party. Appropriate credit is given where reference is made to others' work.

3. The thesis has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

4. I have recognized all major sources of help.

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Approval

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of Summer, 2023 has been accepted as satisfactory in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Development Studies.

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Ethics Statement

This study prioritized key ethical considerations, such as voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, safety and confidentiality of the participants. They were contacted over phone for their voluntary participation in the interview. Participants were informed of the background, purpose, significance of the research and other relevant details, based on which, verbal consent was taken. The research used no recording device for interviews as participants were not comfortable with their voices being identified. The names of the participants have been kept anonymous to protect their privacy and confidentiality.

Abstract

The research recognizes the emerging phenomenon of Indigenous women moving away from the geographical confinements of their homeland and long-held association with informal employment. It seeks to understand their journey in education, employment, and choice of partner, considering various identity markers such as ethnicity, gender, age, location, and socio-economic status. Using the framework of Stereotype Content Model (SCM), the study identifies the perception held towards the study group by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. The study confirms a divergence of their experience from that of Indigenous men and non-Indigenous women. It highlights the complexity of issues affecting Indigenous women, emphasizing that these issues cannot be understood as single, isolated phenomenon. Acknowledging Indigenous women as valuable assets to their communities and society at large, the research aims to contribute to the creation of more inclusive and equitable policies that support the empowerment of Indigenous women.

Dedication

To Indigenous sisterhood.

Acknowledgement

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List of Acronyms

AA	Affirmative Action
BANBEIS	Bangladesh Bureau of Educational and Information Statistics
BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
BIGD	BRAC Institute of Governance and Development
CHT	Chittagong Hill Tracts
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
HCC	Holy Cross College
HSC	Higher Secondary Certificate
ILO	International Labor Organization
IP	Indigenous Peoples
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
SAD	Special Affairs Division
SCM	Stereotype Content Model
SES	Socio-economic status
SSC	Secondary School Certificate
UN	United Nations
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
UNPFII	UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
PARC	Public Administration Reform Commission

Chapter 1 Introduction

Background

Indigenous Peoples (IP) play a vital role in our shared humanity and enhance our diversity (Division for Social Policy and Development, Secretariat of the Permanent Forum of Indigenous People, 2007). Recognized as distinct social and cultural groups, they have collective ancestral connection to the lands where they live, or from which they have been displaced (United Nations, n.d.). Their reality is deeply connected to their unique identity, shaped by historical events. They face marginalization in accessing education and employment as they are deprived of control over their development path. Indigenous women face unique obstacles. With limited access to education, health care and ancestral lands, they suffer from a disproportionately higher poverty rate, which puts them at higher risk of gender-based violence. Their disempowerment stems from not only sex but also ethnicity, age, socio-economic status, and religion.

Overall lack of safety, lowering economic conditions, and dispossession of natural resources cause many Indigenous women to migrate to cities. By 2030, inhabitants of urban areas are set to account for two-thirds of the world's population, and women will constitute majority of the urban population (Chant and McIlwaine, 2015). Research suggests that planned and voluntary migration can provide a social safety net for loss of income (Evertsen and Van Der Geest, 2020). Migration is associated with an ambition to bring about upward social mobility (Visser and Gerharz, 2016). In Bangladesh, Indigenous women and girls who migrate to urban areas experience challenges, both from their own community and the dominant group, in progressive stages of life. They experience backlash defined in this study as a resistance against progress on gender equality and social justice, in response to challenges to power hierarchies. This resistance can be shown individually or collectively, formally or informally. Those in

privileged position manifest resistance to restore, maintain and increase their position in the context of inequality and injustice (Flood, Dragiewicz and Pease, 2018)

Research Gap, Aim and Question

There are very few evidence-based findings on the challenges experienced by the Indigenous women in Bangladesh belonging to middle-income or upper middle income households who migrated to urban areas individually or with their families. Their journey of accessing education, employment, and choice of partners encompass complexity and intersectionality within human capital development.

This research aims to map the experiences of Indigenous women belonging to middle or upper-income households from Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) living in Dhaka to explore how Indigenous women navigate education, employment and choice of partner while developing their human capital. The research explores:

- the challenges and opportunities in accessing education by girls of Indigenous communities;

- the access and experience of backlash in employment;

- the impact of their association with quota system in accessing education and employment; and

- the backlash experienced on choice of partner, influencing their ability to develop skills and continue with employment.

Significance of the Research

This research maps the journey of nine Indigenous women across progressive stages of their lives, encompassing education, employment and choice of partner. It explores their context in urban areas and in formal employment, a phenomenon previously unexplored. The study addresses the identity-based-constraints from Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

The study also explores how macro-level threat to identity affects the micro-level experience. An in-depth understanding of their journey is expected to inform policies and activities to develop their human capital while staying connected to Indigenous roots.

Structure of the Dissertation

The dissertation is arranged in five chapters. The first chapter states the aim, research question and objectives to introduce the research. The second chapter illustrates the conceptual framework adopted for the research. The third chapter covers the existing literature in Bangladesh's context. Chapter four on methodology delineates the research design and the sampling procedure including a summary of the participants' profiles. In the following chapter, the nine case studies are presented, while chapter six describes the findings and discussions from the case studies with a detailed analysis. The final chapter concludes the research, addresses limitations, and proposes potential recommendations for future research opportunities.

Chapter 2. Conceptual Framework

In viewing the world through the lens of Indigenous women, intersectionality provides a prism to shed light on their various identity markers as non-mutually exclusive categories of experience. Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term to mean that multiple forms of inequality compound themselves and create complex obstacles that cannot be understood by conventional approaches (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality presents the distinct forms of discrimination and drawbacks when multiple categories of social identity interact with one another. The concept focuses on the interconnected nature of social categorizations that generate overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination. The next sections elaborate the theoretical discussions pertaining to examining ethnicity, gender, age, location, social and economic conditions for human capital development of Indigenous women.

Indigenous Peoples

Definition

The United Nations defines Indigenous Peoples as inheritors and practitioners of unique cultures with social, cultural, economic and political characteristics distinct from dominant societies' where they reside in (United Nations, n.d.). Being Indigenous implies self-identification by individuals and acceptance from the community. In exercising this right to self-determination, they have the right to autonomy or self-government (Rahman, 2014). This autonomy and legitimacy as sovereign authority is claimed within the realm of state by perpetuating cultural and legal pluralism. Thus, Indigenous sovereignty is not synonymous to the sentiment of anti-state (Shrinkhal, 2021). According to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), Indigenous Peoples have collective rights essential for their existence and communal development. Collective rights is linked to the concept of land rights, the basis of which is customs, based on which the community decides

upon the system for land protection and use. Such rights contrast dominant models of privatization. IP's culture is based on their ancestral lands, and the relationship encompass spiritual dimensions. Thus, land creates the foundation of their traditional knowledge systems. IP commonly share a historical continuity with their lands prior to colonization. They maintain not only distinct social, economic and political systems, but also distinct languages, cultures, and knowledge systems. To be Indigenous, therefore, is to be distinct from the majority (Stewart, 2017).

Marginalization Based on Ethnicity

The UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) recognizes that identity, environment, language, gender, belief systems, traditions, and rights are at the centre of Indigenous survival and struggles. Although their local characteristics differ from community to community, they share a common experience of their long-held traditions and connection with nature affected by colonization. IP suffer disproportionately compared to non-Indigenous communities. Although they make 5% of the world's population, they represent 15% of the world's poor (Amnesty International, n.d.). They are marginalized by political systems. As their traditional rights to their ancestral lands are not formally recognized, they experience uprooting from their homes amidst conflict and environmental degradation (International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2018). States introduce militarization in IP's regions in the name of nation-building and unity. By declaring state of emergency, countries legitimize acts of violence by the military (United Nations Human Rights Office Of The High Commissioner, 2002). States further deny IP the scope to express their culture and learn in Indigenous languages, thus, restricting their progress. Education policies are designed to 'assimilate' Indigenous communities into larger society at the expense of their cultures, and rights (Wodon and Cosentino, 2019). Faced by these challenges, Indigenous parents consider their roles as cultural custodians first, and then as supporters of education (Sianturi, Lee and Cumming,

2023). When Indigenous parents fear negative perception from the peers of their children towards Indigenous cultures, they worry about children's ability to navigate potential conflict. By being alert to forms of racial discrimination that may harm their children's Indigenous identity, Indigenous parents act as identity shields to such discrimination (Milne and Wootherspoon, 2020).

To enhance the participation of the socially disadvantaged Indigenous communities, the state often establishes affirmative action, such as quota system to benefit marginalized groups. Supporters of affirmative action contend that it is required to bridge inequalities by providing Indigenous students special consideration in addition to their merit to access higher education. On the contrary, critics suggest that this step grants people without the required academic qualification to study at a higher level. As a result, there is a high probability of the student's failure and the overall lowering of the institution's standards (Rhea, 2014). Opponents further argue that non-beneficiaries stigmatize the beneficiaries since the latter would not have earned the opportunity in the absence of affirmative action (Leslie, Mayer and Kravitz, 2014).

IP suffer from long-running discrimination (DCOMM, 2007). They are nearly three times as likely to be living in extreme poverty as non-Indigenous communities (International Labour Organization, 2020). Although they are over-represented among the poor, globally they have an employment participation (63.3%) rate higher than their non-Indigenous counterparts (59.1%). However, more than 86% of IP globally work in the informal economy, which is accompanied by degrading working conditions and low social protection (Gigler, 2009) even when they have the same level of education, an Indigenous person earns much lower than a non-Indigenous person. Among Indigenous women, informality rates are more than 25% higher than non-Indigenous women. About a quarter of them are involved in waged occupations. This rate is lower than Indigenous men and non-Indigenous women. As a result, they suffer disproportionately from insecure property rights and climate change (Davis, 2002).

Gendered Disparity of Indigenous women

The socio-economic gap between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Peoples is growing in many countries, reported by the Human Development Index. The trend is also similar between Indigenous men and women (United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2010). The marginalization of Indigenous women results from additional layers, such as, gender roles and division of labor, gender-based violence which affects their access to education, employment as well as power and decision-making ability that influence their choice of partner.

Gender Roles and Divisions of Labor

Gender role expectations vary across time and groups. In many societies, men take over the role in the productive domain and are assigned with decision-making processes, while women are associated with reproductive or domestic role. Women play multiple roles across productive and community realms (ILO, 2000). Traditionally in Indigenous societies, women held respectable positions with equal access to natural resources. As Indigenous groups gradually lost collective ownership of lands, Indigenous women lost their traditional land rights (Division for Social Policy and Development, Secretariat of the Permanent Forum of Indigenous People, 2007). Thus, male members became sole inheritors of lands. Robbed of social safety nets and economic opportunities, Indigenous women face disproportionately high mortality and poverty rates and low literacy rates (DCOMM, 2007).

Women are held as the carriers of collective Indigenous identity and vibrant expressions of Indigenous cultures. Indigenous communities consider Indigenous women's adherence to cultural norms integral to cultural survival. In the face of threat towards their identity, the community subordinates the rights of individual women to upholding women's role as the carriers of group identity. As a result, Indigenous women are often denied the right to make

autonomous decisions regarding their own sexuality and marriage (United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2010).

Gender Based Violence

The relationship between gender and culture is often used to justify violations of women's human rights. Cultural practices are dynamic, influenced by power dynamics within societies. When Indigenous communities describe culture as static, there arises the scope to weaken protections for women. According to the ecological model, Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) operates in combination and interaction of factors at individual, relationship, community, and societal levels. Under this model, being obliged to marry is both family and partner violence against women (Frías, 2017). Women in former Yugoslavia were confined to their reproductive domain to maintain the nation's continuity. Sociologist Professor Nira Yuval-Davis argues when a nation is constructed around the myth of shared blood, women are expected to comply with motherhood expectations at the cost of individual autonomy (Yuval-Davis, 2003). Both Indigenous communities and dominant groups associate Indigenous women with representation of purity. As a result, when women "marry out" exercising their individual right, Indigenous community expels them from their collective identity (Roy, 2004). Among matriarchal groups, Indigenous women navigate a patriarchal world beyond their community that creates a conflict in their wider social interaction.

Indigenous women bear the prime responsibility of passing on traditions to future generations, and are the most noticeable expressions of their peoples' distinct culture. Hence, they are targeted due to their ability to sustain the tribes through child bearing. This outlook is tied to the cultural significance of violating 'enemy women' who belong to different race, religious and political affiliation (Roy, 2004). Decolonization, thus, is not possible without addressing gender violence because colonization has succeeded through this kind of violence (Smith and

Ross, 2004). Additionally, settlers use gender-based violence against Indigenous women as a tool to drive IP away from their lands (Roy, 2000). Owing to discrimination against minorities, law enforcement agencies fail to punish the perpetrators (Joseph, 2021). The establishment and expansion of tourism in Indigenous lands leads to increased insecurity of Indigenous women from tourists. This affects their freedom of movement and opportunities to earn a living (Vinding and Kampbel, 2012). In the process, these women's access to education and social interaction are compromised.

Migration

Indigenous women migrate to urban areas in pursuit of stability away from political struggles and land eviction in their homelands (Division for Social Policy and Development, Secretariat of the Permanent Forum of Indigenous People, 2007). The situation is reflected in Bangladesh too (Chakma and Akhy, 2015). Yet, their migration exposes them to triple conditions of vulnerability owing to being women, Indigenous and migrants.

Migration challenges 'traditional' gender roles of Indigenous women within their communities as they move away from geographical confinements and working as single young women in cities (Sandoval-Cervantes, 2016). The Millennium Development Goals mentions "non-agricultural employment" as an indicator of women's "empowerment". Access to increased diverse employment opportunities in urban areas contribute to improvements to women's position in society (Bradshaw, 2013). However, within the community, women's migration is not considered transformative if their work is considered to be an extension of their reproductive role (Mies, 1980). If women's self-perception of their own worth is low, then their value creation does not translate into bargaining power. Hence, migration is coupled with the extent to which women move out of confined roles and see themselves differently (Bruce, 1989). Migration offers women anonymity and exposes them to wider social interaction with diverse groups (Chant and McIlwaine, 2015). Cities' accessibility to all sorts of groups imply

that Indigenous women's anonymity benefits them in spaces where identity differences are accepted (Miranne and Young, 2000).

Access to Education, Employment, and Decision-Making Ability

Indigenous women face barriers that are common among non-Indigenous women in accessing education and employment. Yet, they also face unique struggles rooted in their Indigenous identity and geographic location (Baruah and Biskupsi-Mujanovic, 2023). However, Indigenous women's participation in employment leads to overall improved outcomes (Fredericks, 2009).

When a woman has opportunity to earn money, she becomes the decision-maker of her own life (Acharya *et al.* , 2010). When she receives higher education, her views become more equitable compared to older men's (Miranne and Young, 2000). With financial freedom, she acquires control over her reproductive capacity (Onwuachi-Saunders, Dang and Murray, 2019). She can choose to marry upon their individual volition without the fear of financial consequences, losing family support or social backlash. However, she often has to pay the price of being exiled from her community for marrying out (Roy, 2004). While she has transitioned through social layers, her multi-faceted identity remains a distinction with its own challenges. In this way, macro identity influences the micro experience of an Indigenous woman (Richards, 2005).

Perception of Identity

The perception towards Indigenous women, both by Indigenous communities and dominant groups can be explained by the stereotype content model (SCM). SCM is chosen for this study as it places qualitative differences in stereotypes toward different groups, while offering a conceptual framework that explains why and when these differences occur. Researchers use the model to explore how stereotypes influence intergroup attitudes and develop interventions

to reduce prejudice and discrimination (Cuddy *et al.*, 2011). The model suggests that group stereotypes form along two dimensions: warmth and competence. The dimensions combine at various levels and result in distinct types of stereotypes. Firstly, groups associated with low competence and low warmth are categorized under contemptuous stereotype. They include out-groups. Emotional response towards these groups is contempt. The behavioral responses are both active and passive harm, for example, distancing or rejecting. Secondly, groups perceived as highly competent and less warm are categorized under envious stereotype. Envy also stems from a perception of unfair gains. The behavioral response is ambivalent, including both positive and negative feelings. Thirdly, groups perceived to be less competent but highly warm are associated with paternalistic stereotypes. They are not considered to be harmful. Instead they are linked to feelings of pity. Finally, groups perceived to be highly competent and warm are associated with admiration. Their accomplishments do not threaten others' goals, rather evoke positive reactions from others. Others are motivated to collaborate with the fourth group (Oliveira *et al*., 2019).

		Competence	
		Low	High
Warmth	High	Paternalistic Stereotype ⬇ Pity	Admiration Stereotype ⬇ Admiration
	Low	Contemptuous stereotype ⬇ Contempt	Envious stereotype ⬇ Envy

Figure: Stereotype Content Model

These perceptions, in turn, can have implications in terms of how Indigenous Peoples view their own capabilities. The theory of stereotype threat suggests that members of a threatened group tend to underperform when their group identity is noteworthy. As a result of internalizing the stereotype, the members shifts performance in the direction of the stereotype. This confirms the very stereotype. They may feel high pressure which results in poor performance, despite equal or higher effort relative to their peers. On the contrary, externalization involves attributing stereotypes to other groups to maintain unequal power dynamics (Fiske, 2018). In this study, the perception towards the sample group from Indigenous and dominant groups will be evaluated along the dimensions of warmth and competence. Based on the outcome, the relationship between the perception towards the study group and the behavioral response of all groups will be drawn. Additionally, the study will suggest interventions to create a shift in the behavioral response.

Chapter 3. State of Indigenous Peoples in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is home to many ethnic tribes. The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), comprising of Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachhari districts, is home to ethnic groups, namely, Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Tanchangya, Mro, Mrung/Riang, Bawm, Khami, Chak, Pangkho, Khyang and Lushai. They are collectively called Jumma peoples for their reliance on jhum or traditional shifting cultivation. The groups have distinct cultures and mostly follow patrilineal family structure. Although Garo follows matrilineal structure, they are impacted by regular interaction with Bengali society and influence of Christianity (Jalil and Oakkas, 2012). The groups have cultural differences, yet they are collectively framed as a monolithic entity in the dominant imagination (Ching, 2019). This chapter describes the state of the Indigenous Peoples, especially Indigenous women in Bangladesh in reference to the theoretical discussion of Chapter 2.

Indigenous Peoples

Definition of Indigenous Peoples and their rights

Soon after the liberation of Bangladesh, the recognition of the distinct identities of the IP demanded attention in the making of the identity of the nation. The use of correct terminology is also vital as it sets the context of and defines the scope of the rights of the group it refers to, under both national and international law. Article 6(2) of the Constitution of Bangladesh states "The People of Bangladesh shall be known as Bangalees as a nation and the citizens of Bangladesh shall be known as Bangladeshis". The constitution failed to accommodate the distinct identities of the Indigenous Peoples (Chowdhury, 2014). Bangladesh is one of the 11 states abstaining in voting on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Ahmed, 2010). In 2011 the government enacted the "Small Ethnic Group Cultural Institute Law" categorizing the 40-45 non-Bengali ethnic tribes as "ethnic minorities"

(Jamhoor, 2021). On the other hand, the Act 12 of 1995 and Rules 6, 34, 45, 50 of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Regulation (1900) record the presence of 'Indigenous Peoples' or 'aboriginal' as per section 97 of the State Acquisition and Tenancy Act, 1950 (Rahman, 2014). IP are treated as "number 2" citizen with the ethnic minority status in the constitution. They are stigmatized as anti-national for claiming their rights (Kapaeeng Foundation, et al., 2013). Their contribution in the independence of Bangladesh is yet to be recognized (Mohaiemen and Islam, 2013).

Marginalization based on ethnicity

The absence of the recognition of Indigenous status implies the absence of recognition of customary ownership of lands. The Pakistan government constructed Kaptai Dam and different industries in the region in 1959. It submerged 54000 acres of arable land, displacing 1000,000 people (Parveen and Faisal, 2010). Not recognizing the customary land rights, the government didn't compensate 80000 swidden cultivators with lands. Land shortage triggered conflict in the region. In various phases the government executed transmigration program of Bengali settlers to this region. As a result, in 1947 IP constituted 97.5% of the total population, which decreased to around 51% in 2014. The government gave lands to settlers. Settlers further took lands from IP, using violent means, such as, rape and mass killings (Roy, 2000). The transmigration exacerbated the marginalization of IP's cultures and socio-economic development. Many were forcibly converted into Islam, a phenomenon considered an ethnocide according to the 1948 Genocide Convention. This gave further rise to the conflict between IP with Bengali settlers (Islam, Schech and Saikia, 2022). In response to IP's demand for self-determination, the government militarized the region under the banner of counter-insurgency (United Nations Human Rights Office Of The High Commissioner, 2002). The 1997 CHT Peace Accord was signed to end the insurgency. Many clauses including those

regarding demilitarization, settlement of land disputes, are unimplemented or partially implemented to this date (Rahman, 2014) .

As a result of land dispossession, Indigenous cultivators turned into irregular labor or became unemployed. A 2016 study indicates unskilled labor comprised 30% of the labor force. Among them, 33% were peasants and landless cultivators engaged in small business (Alamgir, 2020). Among the extreme poor, collecting and selling forest products became a livelihood option. When forests were declared as reserved areas, IP became involved in dispute with the forest department (Chakma and Maitrot, 2016). The overall marginalization of the region resulted in economic consequences. In 2013 the three districts had the highest percentage of population living below the national upper poverty line. In 2016 the poverty rate in CHT (65%) stood higher than the national average (23%). The fate of Indigenous women was more concerning. 94% lived below the absolute poverty line while 85% lived below the hardcore poverty line (Chakma and Maitrot, 2016).

The Bangladeshi constitution guarantees equality of opportunity. Article 29 states,

"There shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in respect of employment or office in the service of the Republic. No citizens shall, on grounds only of religion, caste, sex, or place of birth, be in eligible for, or discriminated against in respect of employment or office in the service of the Republic."

Admission at Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) level reserved 11% seats for quota, with no reservation for IP. Estimate of Indigenous university graduates is several thousands (Roy, 2004). The constitution's Article 29(3)(a) highlights due representation in public services for implementation of quota for backward section of citizens. Previously, first and second-class government services allocated five per cent quota ethnic communities. Public Administration Reform Commission (PARC) observed overall quota to be unconstitutional on the basis that

quota was built on emotional rather than logical grounds (Ali, 2004). The aim of geographic quota was to make civil service more representative, yet Dhaka had the highest quota facility whereas Bandarban received the lowest (Yasmin, 2010). In 2017 Bangladesh stood out among South Asian countries for the lack of fulfilment of nearly 90% reserved seats (Indigenous Labour Organization, 2017). Two studies of International Labour Organization (ILO) showed that only 0.66% positions were filled with Indigenous candidates between the 24th and 33rd Bangladesh Civil Service recruitment examinations (IWGIA, 2019). Later in 2018 the government abolished the quota system in first and second-class government services. As there is no recognition of the status of Indigenous Peoples, they receive no legal protection based on international standards protecting such rights (Guhathakurta, 2015).

Gendered Disparity of Indigenous women

Gender Roles and Division of Labor

According to traditional customs of Indigenous communities in Bangladesh, the ownership and inheritance is maintained de facto in the male lineage. Indigenous women in Bangladesh are associated with the role of primary caregivers. However, they are actively involved in food production, specifically agriculture (Vinding and Kampbel, 2012). When large-scale development encroached upon Indigenous lands, gender inequalities were exacerbated, leading to suffering of women who rely on natural resources for livelihoods (Chakma, 1994). As their primary responsibilities such as cooking, fetching water are hindered by loss of resources, their status in society was affected (Roy, 2004). Women and men's use of natural spaces have been additionally transformed by military presence in the CHT, and a decrease in resources. Since men became more involved in the regional political crisis, women diversified their roles across home, community and marketplace (Tiwari, 2003). Indigenous women are married off at an early age. The communities find that men are providers and marry in, women are at the risk of marrying out, so they concentrate on the male child more (Roy, 2004).

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Gender Based Violence

Bengali men are reported to rape and intimidate Indigenous women in the region (Visser and Gerharz, 2016). Indigenous women are subjected to exoticisation by Bengali security forces, settlers and tourists. Their colorful traditional dress is claimed to not be decent by the Bengalis. Such attitude elicits harassment and abuse, affecting their freedom of movement and opportunities to find work (Vinding and Kampbel, 2012). To These pull factors encourage Indigenous women to cross customary gender boundary and participate in the economy outside their community. They rely on community networks in the migrated space (Guhathakurta, 2015). In search of wage work, they are often confined to jobs in the informal economy that do not generate sufficient income. Lacking employment security, they are underpaid in comparison to the non-Indigenous employees (United Nations, 2014).

Access to Education, Employment, and Decision-Making Ability

CHT has a lower literacy rate as a result of long-term marginalization from mainstream development (UNICEF Bangladesh, 2019). Although enrolment has increased in recent years, the dropout rate is 59% (Mallick, Popy and Yesmin, 2022). Higher poverty rate combined with vulnerable livelihood opportunities presents a challenge to student enrolment in primary school (Chakma and Maitrot, 2016). Indigenous communities speak in different languages, yet the medium of teaching is Bangla in schools. In 2018, the government distributed books in five Indigenous languages. Most teachers could speak in Indigenous languages, however, they did not know how to read or write in those languages (Deshwara, 2022). Although the rule is to have schools within 3kms, schools in the CHT are further away (Alamgir, 2020). In addition, the political insecurity raises security concerns for girls who must travel long distance to attend school (D'Costa, 2014). Rather than seeking immediate refuge in politically secured neighboring locations, many Indigenous youth migrate to pursue education in stable environments (Visser and Gerharz, 2016). Access to tertiary education facilitates upward social

mobility in Bangladesh (Rao and Hossain, 2012). The access is shaped by the access to networks to identify opportunities for education and employment. Owing to their 'migrant' and Indigenous background, Indigenous students face difficulty relying to the same extent on networks as others in urban landscape do.

Some provisions of the Constitution mention affirmative action for Indigenous peoples in the name of the 'backward section of citizens'. There is no decision-making role of Indigenous Peoples in the Special Affairs Division (SAD) set up under the Prime Minister's Office to look after the welfare of Indigenous peoples (Chowdhury, 2014). There is hardly any Indigenous representation in the decision-making process concerning the quota in education. The army controlled the quota during high political instability. Loyalty to the army, rather than merit, often determined selection. On the flip side, owing to the increased cost of education, Indigenous students in higher education have been mostly coming from affluent families (Mohaiemen and Islam, 2013).

Owing to their low education rate and lack of employment opportunities, Indigenous women are overly represented in the informal economy. They lack negotiation power, and remain susceptible to unfair working conditions from employers, compared with non-Indigenous women. Compared to non-Indigenous women, they are also often paid less and assigned more taxing tasks (Vinding and Kampbel, 2012). In rural areas, landless Indigenous women work as day laborer in agricultural farms with significant gender pay gaps. An Indigenous woman receives 80-100 taka in a day while her male counterpart earns 120 taka per day. When women migrate to cities in search of livelihood options, many serve as service providers in beauty salons, where they face discrimination from Bengali employers and co-workers (Kapaeeng Foundation, et al., 2013).

The fate of Indigenous women is followed by the discrimination they face from customary personal laws and the land laws. The self-determination struggle has not considered gender issues adequately. Peace dialogues prior to the signing of the CHT Accord lacked women representation (Chowdhury, 2014). In the absence of elections, interim councils were formed where women's representation was very low. Only three out of the twenty-two members of the interim regional councils were women in 2010, while the interim hill district councils had zero (Mohaiemen and Islam, 2013). The customary administrative roles are assigned to men: only the son of a king or the headman can replace him. In the absence of a son, other relatives are preferred to the daughter (Roy, 2004). As a result, Indigenous women lack representation in the leadership structures (Mohaiemen and Islam, 2013). With the exception of Marmas, Indigenous communities do not allow automatic transfer of property to women. The process requires additional paperwork, which is a discouraging factor for the parents. Many Indigenous men fear that inheritance of ownership reform will give opportunities for Bengali men to marry Indigenous women and take over Indigenous properties (Kapaeeng Foundation, et al., 2013).

Perception of Identity and Choice of Partner

IP are stigmatized owing to their identity and cultural practices. This challenges their perception of themselves as Bangladeshis, living in the CHT or beyond. They constantly battle negative stereotypes, yet they emphasize Indigenousness as an important category of belongingness (Visser and Gerharz, 2016).

The arrival of outsiders, from colonial rulers, neo-colonial oppressors and Bengali settlers severely affected the status of Indigenous women (Tiwari, 2003). Women carry the honor of family and community in the eyes of the patriarchal communities. Hence, women's sexuality is controlled by confining her to the private and familial space. The status is constructed and preserved by the family, traditional institutions and endorsed by the state (United Nations Human Rights Office Of The High Commissioner, 2002). Therefore, even when faced with

assault on their bodies, women are expected to remain silent (D'Costa, 2014). Their community strongly holds them with their reproduction capacity, limiting their choices of agency. Thus, customarily women are not given the choice to choose their marital partners. Defying this norm leads to exclusion from the society and cultural practice (Poddar, 2021). They are under a close scrutiny of both Indigenous and dominant groups. When they speak out on gender issues, they fear being labeled as "feminists" or anti-community (Roy, 2004).

Impact of educational attainment and work status on timing of marriage

In Bangladesh age of women at first marriage is increasing with time. This change is associated with major social structural changes such as their educational attainment and urbanization process. For Indigenous communities, marriage of Indigenous women become a concern as they are closely tied with their reproductive capacity. When they attain education and employment, they can push back the timing of their marriage (Kamal, 2011).

Chapter 4. Methodology

The mapping of journey in education, employment, and choice of partner as a human capital development process of the Indigenous women followed a qualitative research approach. The following sections describe the philosophical position and approach to the research, the research tools, sampling and data collection process, and the data analysis process.

Philosophical Position and Approach to the Research

The exploration employed a case study approach. According to Yin, a case study is a thorough empirical exploration inquiring into a contemporary event within its real-life circumstances, especially when the boundaries between event and circumstances are not clear (Yin, 2014). The method is relevant to this study as it allowed to recognize and expound a social phenomenon of how Indigenous women are affected by multiple categories of their identity across progressive stages of life. The research theme doesn't have an established theoretical framework and, hence, could benefit from a more exploratory investigation. Thus, a collective case study was employed to study multiple participants comprising of similar characteristics to generate empirical data (Crowe *et al.*, 2011).

Research Tools

Case study participants were interviewed as their accounts encompassed intimate, complex life-experiences. The in-person interviews made the interaction more natural, raising the opportunity to build rapport with the interviewees. From May to June, 2023, nine face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted to develop nine cases by the researcher. The duration of the interview ranged from an hour to 90 minutes. An open-ended, semi-structured interview protocol was adopted to collect data from the participants. This was followed by an in-depth analysis.

Sampling and Data Collection

The research adopted purposive sampling to identify and select cases with rich information and optimum use of available resources. Availability, participation willingness and the ability to reflect on their experiences were taken to account (Etikan, Musa and Alkassim, 2016). Nine Indigenous women were purposively selected for the case studies. The selection was guided by their Indigenous identity, gender identity, education qualification, current location, socio-economic background and state of employment. The respondents were selected in such a way so that it was possible to get a representation of multiple Indigenous groups and age-groups. The study group comprised of Indigenous women from households living in urban cities belonging to an age-group is 23 to 38 years and of middle and upper-middle income households. All of them were either pursuing tertiary education or have completed tertiary education. Snowball sampling was utilized as representation of urban Indigenous women is low. The study relied on their referrals to other Indigenous women with similar characteristics.

The profiles of the nine case studies are summarized in the following table:

Case	Ethnicity	Age	Time of migration to Dhaka	Occupation	Marital status
C-1	Chakma	25 years	Seventh grade	Private Sector	Married
C-2	Marma	28 years	Born in Dhaka	Private Sector	Unmarried
C-3	Chakma	29 years	4 years of age	Doctor	Unmarried
C-4	Marma	25 years	3 years of age	School teacher	Unmarried
C-5	Garo & Marma	38 years	7 years of age	Private Sector	Divorced
C-6	Marma	32 years	15 years of age	Yoga instructor	Unmarried
C-7	Chakma	23 years	Born in Dhaka	Development worker	Unmarried
C-8	Chakma	26 years	7 years of age	Researcher	Unmarried
C-9	Marma	24 years	9 years of age	Private Sector	Unmarried

Data Analysis

The research adopted thematic analysis to analyze complex, textual qualitative data. Thematic analysis is used to recognize patterns in-order to identify themes. This approach is valuable to understand people's perspectives, ideas or values from a set of qualitative data, such as interview transcripts. From re-reading transcripts, researchers identify and label groups of repeating ideas, which reflect implicit topics based on which researchers seek to answer the study question. These themes have codes with a common reference point and a high degree of generalization that assembles data related to the subject of investigation (Vaismoradi *et al.,* 2016). A total of three themes were generated, based on which, the findings of this research are discussed in the following chapter.

Limitation

A limitation of this research is limited diversity of the study sample with a high representation from the Chakma and the Marma community. This is likely due to the higher representation of certain communities in education and employment in Dhaka. Besides, the number of Indigenous women in formal employment in Dhaka is limited. The nonprobability sampling tool makes a study sample susceptible to self-selection bias. Thus, the researcher's social network, which served as the starting point of the snowball sampling method, is limited.

Another potential limitation to consider concerns the data collection process. The interviews involved introspection into one's personal intimate experience with family, peers, partners and the larger society. Consequently, there may have been certain parts of the study interviews where participants may not have felt comfortable to share to the full extent. Altogether, it is possible that the findings may not fully capture the experiences of the desired group.

Ethical considerations

Each participant was informed of the purpose of the research and how the information would be utilized in the form of a dissertation. The data is made anonymous considering the safety of the participants. Hence, the names of participants have been changed to pseudonyms. The interviews entail personal life experiences of interviewees. As urban Indigenous women's representation is limited in number, there may arise a risk of identifying them out based on given data. The study, therefore, did not identify the respondents.

Chapter 5. Case Studies

Case Study 1

Ananya Chakma spent her childhood in Rangamati. At her school 'Rangamati Girls' School' she saw 60% and 40% representation of Adibashis and Bengalis respectively. She never felt singled out based on looks and customs. She recalls celebrating festivals of all religions together.

In search of better education opportunities, her father sent her to Dhaka when she was in seventh grade. In her new school Ananya was the only Chakma student. Her experience was lonely as the new peers and teachers pointed out her different accent. As there was no teacher to teach her Buddhist Studies, she sat through Islamic Studies class until a Hindu teacher was assigned. Based on her relatives' recommendation, Ananya was admitted to Holy Cross College (HCC) to complete her HSC. Her peers and teachers at her missionary school were respectful to her Indigenous identity.

In university, her peers, who had never come across Indigenous communities, assumed she was a foreigner. She found them ignorant about her Indigenous identity, without meaning any disrespect to her. They had less idea about smaller Indigenous groups like Khisa, Bawm. The university previously had a quota system, so she was assumed to be a beneficiary. Peers claimed that she was privileged with access to academic waver and public jobs despite having low qualification. Around this time, marketing agencies reached out to her with modeling opportunities. Her addition was considered to make campaigns look diverse.

At her first job, Ananya overheard a few colleagues discuss among themselves, '*A Ching Chang joined our workplace*'. One asked her if she lived on a tree. Another asked if Chakma in her name was spelled correctly as the only other Indigenous person he knew was named Sangma. When she traveled outside Dhaka for work, she was called 'Made in China'. During

this time she made friends with Indigenous students from a local university. Till this date, she guides them to the best of her capabilities.

Ananya runs an online page to raise awareness about her culture. Her audience, comprising of Indigenous and Bengali women, appreciate her content. She recalls posting a photo in a saree. Indigenous men questioned her why she didn't wear *Pinon Hadi* (Chakma traditional clothes). In Ananya's experience, it was a gendered attack. Indigenous peers label her 'cool kid' for her privilege. Indigenous community humiliates an Indigenous woman for being seen with a Bengali man on social media. It is not considered a problem when the gender identities are reversed. There are online pages dedicated to shame Indigenous women of all socio-economic status. When a Chakma man marries a Bengali woman, he is criticized, not ostracized. When my friend's sister married a Bengali man, she couldn't visit Rangamati, she recalls. She draws on similar experiences with the Chakma community's rejection of artist Kanak Chanpa Chakma's contribution to the Indigenous cause, because she married a Bengali man. Her relatives still hint at the fate of her late cousin. *She married a Bengali man, and paid the price by being bullied for Indigenous culture and killed by her in-laws for dowry*.

Case Study 2

In search of employment and children's education opportunities, Ching Ching's parents came to Dhaka. Overcoming struggles owing to their Indigenous identity, they always wanted Ching to exceed them professionally.

When Ching did well in public exams, her Bengali peers dismissed her achievement by claiming that she benefitted from quota. She also came across instances when Indigenous candidates were placed under quota even when they had high score like non-Indigenous candidates did. On social media, she found that Indigenous men claimed that only privileged

Indigenous city dwellers enjoyed the quota, depriving the needy. Fearing that label, Ching actively applied to institutions with no quota provision.

In her early schooling years, her parents never raised a concern about her interaction with Bengali boys. Her mother's tone started to change when Ching approached her teenage. She was reminded that they belonged to a small community, '*Everyone knew about everyone, so both good and bad news would always be amplified*'. Ching fared well academically, which was considered rare in her community. Her relatives confronted her parents, '*If you educate your daughter, you must be aware that she will likely marry a Bengali man.*' When a relative eloped with a Bengali man, news spread like wildfire. The woman was called *ungrateful, gold-digger* by the community. '*Her father wanted to jump off the roof, and the sons had to stop him. Only the sons stood by him.*' Ching recalls her mother being told to be aware of Ching's future. The relatives eventually moved out of Bangladesh to save their dignity. At festivals, relatives discussed, 'Our daughters are being given away to Bengali families. Our sons should bring in Bengali women to our society.' When her female cousin was engaged to an Indigenous army officer, his dating history with Bengali women was sidelined, "*Men tend to do this. It is a matter of time-pass because he plans to settle down with an Indigenous woman*".

When she was studying in a university, it was a trend to post photos with someone on their birthday. Ching found screenshots of birthday posts she was tagged in by her Bengali male friends on her mother's phone. Her mother also scolded her for taking pictures with Bengali men. As a result, Ching started blocking profiles of Indigenous community members to avoid the scrutiny. She lost online contact with her relatives. Concerned about being seen with Bengalis, Ching limited her extra-curricular activities, which made her lose social capital and confidence.

When Ching just passed Secondary School Certificate (SSC), her mother fixed her marriage. Since qualified Indigenous men were rare, her mother found a qualified suitor before he considered getting engaged to another Indigenous woman. Her mother planned to get Ching engaged before she continued her education and work. Suitors mostly came with a wide age gap. Ching's engagement would also imply the fulfilment of her mother's duty of preserving Ching's identity and accountability to their community. Fearful of her fate, Ching considered dropping out of university so that her compromised education status hurt her chances of being married off. Later, Ching changed her mind to become financially independent to become the decision-maker of her fate.

Case Study 3

Surita came to Dhaka as a toddler. She went to Holy Cross School, an all-girls school. Each class had Indigenous representation, and the parents were co-operative among themselves. The school showcased performance of different backgrounds at annual programs. Surita's tongue was tied to the tongue bed, causing slurring of speech. Her teachers cared for her and consulted her parents about it.

Her experience took a turn when she went to a boarding school. The new setting was very competitive. She was made to feel low about her academic performance. She learnt that *where someone came from* was a concern. "*There was a fashion show where I was asked to showcase my culture. Even when I wanted to perform a Bengali performance, I was asked to sing a Chakma song, but I was not even a singer*", she is not sure whether it was an attempt to single her out or appreciate her culture. At medical school, she performed well academically, but her peers dismissed it by claiming that she was admitted through quota in the first place.

Her mother told her about an aunt who was beaten up by her Bengali husband. '*My mom made me read news of rape to make me aware of rape committed by Bengali men. There was no way*

I could convince her that Bengali men could be good. Her actions made me feel repulsed by Indigenous men.' Surita started receiving marriage proposal at an early age. When her parents got to know about Surita's relationship with a Muslim man, they expressed their disapproval. *My mother told me she would rather marry me off to a Chakma rickshawpuller*, she knew her limits. Surita dated an Indigenous man as a practical choice. His family asked her to quit her job. When she broke up with him and got into a relationship with a Bengali man, her mother put her in rehab. "The rehab center knew I was not an addict. My mother bribed them to keep me there", she recalls her strategy of release by agreeing to her mother's term to break up with her partner.

Amused by pageantry, Surita participated in one. When her mother learnt about it, she cut off all contacts with her. As her popularity grew on social media, Chakmas dug up her photos with her Bengali partner and slutshamed her. They said, '*How could a girl like Surita be a role model?*'Surita received death threats online. The comments were written in Chakma language so that Bengalis couldn't understand them. Her mother received criticism from her family for Surita's participation in pageantry, and from Indigenous community for Surita's relationship with a Bengali man. Indigenous men started saying that Surita was taking after her cousin who married a Bengali man. When Surita's parents failed to change her behavior even after taking extreme measures like sending Surita to rehab, they finally accepted her.

Case Study 4

Thein Hla came to Dhaka when she was just three-year old. She went to a missionary school where the students were treated equally. "*The teachers saw my potential*", she recalls. At home, her parents made sure she spoke in her mother tongue so that she was connected to her roots.

Her first job was that of a sales assistant where she was mocked by colleagues and customers for her facial features. When she confronted them, the responded that they were just joking.

She tried ignoring the jokes as the Human Resource department didn't take her complaint seriously. She finds a similarity with her tutoring experience, when students' parents offered her less salary owing to her ethnicity. Growing up, she walked a lonely path with no one who could relate to her experience. Her Indigenous community labeled her as a spoiled brat as she went to an English medium school.

At present, Thein Hla is teaching at an English medium school in Dhaka in a conducive environment. Her colleagues are appreciative of her service. She runs an online blog to highlight different aspects of her vibrant Indigenous culture.

Case Study 5

Angela Marak studied in YWCA and HCC, two institutions considered well for girls. She reflects that middle class families prioritize values, and the missionary schools focused on them. Besides, English was taught by foreigners which gave students an edge on the language. She grew up with the same set of classmates from Class 1 to 10, who never singled her out. However, on her commute to school, she was called '*Oi Chakma! Upojati*!' by passers-by. After completing her SSC, she switched to Dhaka Commerce College. Her peers who had never met an Indigenous person became very curious about her identity.

Angela's aunts warned her that she would inherit nothing from her parents. Her father born in matriarchal Garo community couldn't inherit family property, while her mother from patriarchal Marma community had no inheritance owing to her gender. This motivated Angela to have a firm financial establishment.

In matriarchal Garo community, women's education is prioritized, and Angela's case was not an exception. Due to family's financial crisis, Angela got admitted to Islamic University, Chittagong as it offered her a scholarship. '*The university made it mandatory to take one Islamic course every semester. I didn't know Arabic language. So, I taught my peers*

Accounting, who in return taught me Arabic.' This way, she maintained her GPA required by the scholarship. Owing to her Indigenous and gender identity, she was made the poster of university's inclusion program. The only Indigenous woman and the only woman with a scholarship, Angela wasn't exempted from her classmates' discrimination. She was asked if she ate *ojogor* (python). As they were used to seeing Indigenous women working at salons, they were curious whether she found the time to work. The university administration was not co-operative with her. Angela overcame the challenges and graduated top of her class.

Growing up around a pastor father, Angela could never imagine marrying outside her community. If Garo women marry outside their community, they will lose out on matrilineal inheritance, she knows. She is aware that peers from other communities mock Garo men for being stay-at-home husbands. She finds that as Garo women are getting more educated, they expect their partners to financially contribute to the family. To comply with her family's wish, she married a Garo man. When they were divorced, her family didn't talk to her for a long time because they were afraid that she would marry a Bengali man. Disheartened, Angela isolated herself from the community. Yet, she considers shared blood important in life. Hence, she accepted her family who depend on her financially.

Case Study 6

In her early years of schooling in Bandarban, Saw Mra Khaing found herself in an inclusive classroom comprising of Bengali and Indigenous students. As most women from her community were financially dependent on their husbands, her father wanted her to be independent. When she was in class 9, she came to Dhaka where she was met with racist remarks like 'China, *naak bocha, chokh choto'* in public spaces. Once she was asked by a teacher whether she ate ants, infront of the whole class. Garnering courage and patience, a young Khaing responded that frying would make the ants invisible. *How could she eat them then?*

Khaing opened an Indigenous dance group to represent her Indigenous culture. Not bound by conventions, she decided to pursue yoga. Relatives asked her parents '*Why did she move to Dhaka for education if she ended up in yoga? How much will she earn? There is no respect in it'*. With no financial support, she co-founded her yoga center with the savings earned from dance performances. In the beginning, she felt insecure about her Bengali pronunciation. When the pandemic hit, she received the opportunity to provide yoga training to 3000 workers of a public institution. As Bengalis were more accustomed to Yoga, her work received acceptance. Her customers, except few concerned with her accent, were not concerned with her identity as word-of-mouth of her service spread. On the contrary, Indigenous community members commented on her Social Media posts that she was just *displaying her limbs*. Till this day, when she and her co-founder, a Bengali man, come on Facebook live, they receive hateful comments from Indigenous men. Seeing this, her family discourages her to continue her work.

Khaing works with Indigenous cultural representation in media where she faces no discrimination. She finds that Indigenous communities fear that upon marriage with Bengali men, Indigenous women will be transferred to Bengali families, oppressed by in-laws and later divorced. In the face of family's pressure to get married, she faces the challenge of being accepted by Indigenous men. As an independent woman working online, engaging in photoshoot, she perceives her work with novel value. She fears her creativity will be restricted upon marriage with an Indigenous man.

Case Study 7

Born and raised in Dhaka, Aishwarjya Chakma went to Holy Cross School which offered her a conducive environment. She runs a media platform that raises awareness on issues pertaining to Indigenous rights. Owing to her work, she had the opportunity to work with Indigenous boys whom she found often hostile to Indigenous girls. She found that exposure to the broader world positively impacted the view of Indigenous men towards Indigenous women.

In her family, the marriages of women were fixed early to prevent marriage with Bengalis. Hence, many women had to escape from the family to access higher education. Yet in her experience, Indigenous societies claim to be egalitarian to establish a distinction from Bengalis. Indigenous women are traumatized by both their communities and outsiders, while Indigenous men face backlash only from the outside world. Families still think sons will bring glory to the families while women must be controlled to protect future generations. Hence, Indigenous young girls grow up facing discrimination at every step from the community.

Case Study 8

Kritee Chakma grew up in Rangamati, where she went to Lakers Public School. Within the co-existence of Bengalis and Indigenous communities, she was never made self-aware of her Indigenous identity. Had she studied in a low-quality school, the situation would have been different.

When she moved to Dhaka, her classmates singled her out for her straight hair and small eyes. *"They asked me if I attended special Bangla coaching classes. It confused me because I am a Bangladeshi citizen. I am supposed to know this language"*, Kritee often reacted by lashing out. With time, she learnt to differentiate between ignorance and curiosity. After growing up, she received questions about her linguistic skills from Chakmas and Bengalis. This time it was about her fluency in Chakma language.

Kritee found her classes at HCC initially difficult. When she got into Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology based on quota, she felt inferior. A prior topper at her school in Rangamati, she didn't feel she belonged to her university. In third year, she received a marriage proposal from a Chakma man, pursuing PhD. Kritee's mother is hopeful about her daughter's future. Yet she is constantly questioned by her community for educating her daughter. With personal traumatic experiences from interaction with Bengalis, her mother gets

furious when Kritee is seen with Bengali men. To navigate this challenge, Kritee has consciously chosen a Chakma man to engage in a relationship with.

Case Study 9

Because of the nature of her father's government job, Yan Yan (C-9) was always on the move. In her public elementary school, her classmates refused to sit with her. When she shifted to army-run schools where students from various backgrounds studied, she wasn't singled out. When she moved to Dhaka, she drew the attention of her classmates who were simply curious about her culture. "*Exposure helps. If I studied in a lower-quality school in Dhaka, my experience with my peers would have been different*", she knows. When she was seventeen, Yan acted for entertainment content. Her relatives in the village felt represented watching it.

Yan finds that Bengali students learn about Indigenous communities from textbooks in class 6. With no further exposure, Indigenous representation slowly fades away. To preserve cultural representation, she runs an online blog showcasing different Indigenous attires.

Yan Yan came across her relatives criticizing her mother for wearing saree at functions. They considered wearing saree belittled Indigenous clothes. Yet, her parents always focused on protecting their culture when raising their daughters. Her parents even pressurized her elder sister to get married as relatives reminded them that since their family was well-off compared to other Indigenous families, it would be difficult to find a suitor. For the sisters, it was difficult to find open-minded Indigenous suitors with an urban background and an education degree. Other Indigenous men reduced them to just their privilege. Even their relatives commented, '*Haati ke palbe*?', associating them with high maintenance.

Yan Yan's aunt was ostracized for marrying a Bengali. The family later accepted the aunt, but her husband was never welcomed. Yan Yan plans to leave the country to live on her own terms, away from the communities' control.

Chapter 6. Findings and Discussions

This chapter discusses the findings in relation to the theoretical debates around Indigenous women and their state in Bangladesh discussed in Chapter 2 and 3. The findings are organized around the themes of access to education, access to employment, and choice of partner.

Access to Education

Awareness About Ethnic Identity

The respondents represent Indigenous women whose family had already moved to Dhaka before their birth or in their early years owing to the push and pull factors previously discussed. Owing to their comparatively privileged socio-economic status, the families could afford to look for better education opportunities for their children. With an almost equal representation of Indigenous and Bengali communities in their schools in the CHT, the respondents (C-1, C-6, C-8) found their Indigenous identity accepted in an inclusive environment. After migrating to cities, they (C-1, C-5, C-6, C-8) found themselves to be the only Indigenous person in the classroom, thus, drawing attention from peers and teachers. They were singled out for their distinct features, shamed for their eating habits and accent. Peers and teachers associated them with prevalent stereotypes associated with glass ceiling.

From a young age, respondents were held accountable for their cultural practices. The experience took a lonely turn when their classmates didn't want to associate themselves with them (C-9). Further, the respondents were questioned about their belongingness to Bangladesh, mislabeled as '*upojati*', evident in multiple cases. Such instances confirm not only the respondents' distinct characteristics from the majority but also the denial to express their culture, as mentioned earlier in the experience of being Indigenous. It further shows that assimilation of the respondents into broader society came at the cost of their cultures. A non-Indigenous person's level of exposure to IP and how early the person was exposed to IP

determined their attitude towards Indigenous communities. C-8 and C-9 further drew a connection with quality of the school, where a higher quality may imply that access to better resources drew diversity and inclusion. The study finds that when Bengali students see Indigenous representation in early school years, the latter's presence is normalized. Variably, peers' behavior was often a reflection of curiosity, not disrespect (C-6).

For Indigenous students, being singled out took another form when they were expected to adhere to their stereotyped racial box. For example, C-3 was asked to sing a Chakma song, while C-5 was made the poster child of diversity by her institution. Both instances left the respondents confused about whether their culture was appreciated or singled out. Such experience confirms marginalization Indigenous students face based on their ethnicity.

Choice of school

The study shows that Indigenous parents of C-1, C-3, C-4, C-5, C-7 shared a common preference for missionary schools for their children. Their choice was influenced by the referrals from Indigenous relatives for whom respect to Indigenous identity was a priority. This phenomenon can be explained by interconnected reasons. The parents were aware of the challenges their children might face in Dhaka, owing to their ethnicity. The parents concerned themselves with the roles to preserve their children's (C-4) connection with Indigenous roots and language. They found that teachers in missionary schools were respectful to different identities (C-1, C-3, C-5, C-7). These metrics are evident with the experience of C-1 in a non-missionary school, '*There was no teacher to teach me Buddhist studies. I sat through Islamic Studies class until a Hindu teacher was assigned*'. The examples of missionary schools like YWCA and Holy Cross School and College repetitively come up in this study as respondents mentioned the presence of Indigenous representation in all classes and the school's nurturing of the potential of students. Parents were co-operative with one another, and the teachers were genuinely concerned about the students' well-being. For example, teachers looked out for C-3

as she struggled with slurring of speech. Besides, the significance of the respondents' (C-5) socio-economic status was also relevant, as middle-class families sought holistic education to preserve their roots, instill values in their children while being equipped with tools to survive the competitive educational landscape in Dhaka. These concerns ensure the survival of Indigenous children in Dhaka. These reasons affirm Indigenous communities' efforts in preserving their roots, and newly establish its connection with parent's choice of school.

Quota

When the respondents navigated tertiary education, the concept of quota became a concern in both cases of participating and not participating in it. The presence of quota affirms their overall state of marginalization in education and employment. On one hand, Bengali peers perceived Indigenous respondents enjoyed an unfair advantage through quota despite having low scores. For example, non-Indigenous peers assumed C-1 was admitted into a private university based on quota, even when it was not available. The negative association with quota followed her even after admission. When C-3 performed well in exams, her Bengali peers dismissed her result by indicating that since she had got admitted into medical school based on quota, her later results were not valid. On the other hand, Indigenous members perceived that only privileged Indigenous students accessed quota, depriving those who needed it the most (C-3). The privilege association comes up with association of labels such as, 'cool kids', 'spoiled brats' used by their Indigenous peers (C-4, C-9). They (C-2) were not deemed representative of the Indigenous struggle. Respondents, thus, lost a sense of belongingness from both Indigenous and Bengali communities. They were considered too privileged for the Indigenous community, and too foreign for the Bengalis.

Association with quota system manifested in different ways in this study. C-8 exhibited an internalization of a sense of inferiority complex as she benefitted from quota. This poorly affected her academic performance and sense of belongingness to the institution. Her

experience affirms the likelihood of the failure of the beneficiary of affirmative action, but it doesn't necessarily stem from a lack of merit, but an internalized sense of stigma illustrated earlier. In contradiction, C-2 demonstrated externalization through fear of dismissal of her merit. She was aware that even when Indigenous candidates had qualifying scores based on merit, they were categorized under the quota system. Hence, she consciously applied to institutions with no quota system to prove her merit. Although this led her to often outperform her Bengali peers, it cannot be denied that an additional academic burden arises from an association with affirmative action. These findings demonstrate a complex relationship, encompassing guilt and shame, between respondents and quota system.

Access to Employment

Experience from Dominant Groups

Marginalization followed the respondents at work. In this stage, both the respondents and their peer groups were adults with established world views. For the latter, the respondents were often the first IP they came across with. Besides, peers had less idea about smaller Indigenous groups, like Khisa, Bawm. This indicates a hierarchy within Indigenous groups where certain groups (Chakma, Marma) have higher representation than others. Respondents (C-1, C-2, C-4) received racist remarks about their food habits, facial features from their colleagues. This confirms the lack of inclusion of Indigenous groups in formal workforce. Diverse tactics were employed to navigate the hostility. Some respondents responded with staying silent while others (C-2, C-4) confronted their bullies. Others viewed it as curiosity. Their (C-4) identity was also associated with a low negotiating power. This establishes that the respondents were perceived weak by co-workers from dominant groups.

Some respondents also reported finding certain conducive respectful work environments. They (C-1, C-8) were included in diversity campaigns, and (C-6) accepted by Bengali audience. This

different attitude of peers can be attributed to their early and higher level of exposure to IP, as discussed earlier.

Experience from Indigenous Communities

Working Indigenous women (C-3, C-6) faced harsh criticism from IP. This response is caused by two factors: a perceived high exposure to non-Indigenous groups and adopting an unconventional route for work. Both are perceived to be a threat to the respondents' Indigenous identity. The criticism reached their families, who, as a result, discouraged them from continuing their work. This hints at the additional obstacles Indigenous women face in exploring diverse and non-traditional occupations. Indigenous women's employment was perceived positively only when her identity as an Indigenous person and a woman was perceived to be protected. This confirms the expectation of previously elaborated gender roles from Indigenous women.

Choice of Partner

Gender roles and Division of Labor

Indigenous women, owing to their reproductive capacity, were seen as carriers of their Indigenous identity by their communities. As they migrated outside their localities, the community perceived a risk of their exposure to non-Indigenous groups and low exposure to Indigenous groups. Owing to their socio-economic status, the women in the study remained few of the privileged ones with access to education and employment in cities. Their community perceived it as a double threat because, firstly, finding potential educated Indigenous suitors for them would be difficult. Secondly, they were highly exposed to Bengali men. This meant that in the absence of Indigenous suitors, these women may choose Bengali men.

The findings affirm that higher education was not widely accessible to Indigenous women. Multiple respondents hinted at the perceived risk that came with their interaction with Bengali

men. This is highlighted in the remarks of C-7, "*Indigenous communities think if women are married to Bengali, the baby will be Bengali. Bengali women will be transferred to Indigenous communities. Indigenous women will be oppressed in Bengali families, and later divorced by Bengali husband.*" The statement confirms the reproductive association of women from previous discussion. The findings further establish that respondents' gender associated them as vibrant expressions of their culture. The respondents were questioned for wearing non-Indigenous attires by their community (C-1, C-9) because the community made a connection of not wearing Indigenous clothes as a rejection of Indigenous culture.

Social Pressure to Retain Ethnic Identity

The community perceived educating Indigenous girls and their employment as a threat to retaining ethnic identity. Hence, respondents' families were questioned and warned about the consequences of educating their daughters (C-2, C-3, C-8). This is reflected in C-2's quotes of her relatives to her parents, "If you educate your daughter, she will marry a Bengali man on her own choice". It must be noted that the parents themselves (C-2, C-3, C-8) were victims of oppression from Bengalis. In the context when the family had prior history of Indigenous women marrying out, they became actively preventive of such acts in the face of communal pressure (C-2). To refrain their daughters from choosing non-Indigenous partners, they started conditioning their daughters from an early age about marrying within. A respondent (C-2) quoted her mother "*We belong to a small community. Everyone knew about everyone, so both good and bad news will always be amplified*".

Families set the fate of Indigenous women who married non-Indigenous men as examples to deter respondents (C-1, C-2, C-3, C-8) from making similar choice. Families also felt that as their daughters would become educated women, and since they belonged to a financially privileged background, their potential pool of suitors would be very limited. This confirms the overall lack of participation of Indigenous groups in education and employment. It also

indicates that Indigenous women outnumbered Indigenous men in higher education. This left a smaller pool of educated, employed, urban Indigenous suitors for these Indigenous women. Hence, respondents' parents resorted to marrying off their daughters early, or, at the minimum, fixing their marriages with Indigenous suitors before they pursued higher education. The suitors often came with wide age gap, evident in C-2, C-6 and C-8. Conforming to social pressure, some respondents (C-2, C-5, C-8) consciously chose an Indigenous partner as a practical choice. In this study C-5 brings up a new dimension in matriarchal society. On one hand, within their society, Garo men were not providers. On the other hand, in broader patriarchal society outside their community, Garo men were mocked for being stay-at-home husbands. Hence, considering both contexts, C-5 complied to her family's wish by marrying an employed Garo man. Here both men and women of a matriarchal society face different challenges in the broader patriarchal society.

Backlash

A common finding from the respondents was the backlash they and other Indigenous women they knew experienced from their communities for choosing a non-Indigenous partner. This resistance is experienced against progressive changes in their life owing to their attainment of education, employment in urban area. This resistance reflects challenge to existing hierarchies within and beyond Indigenous communities. The study finds backlash as a gendered experience captured in the reflection of C-7, "*Indigenous women receive backlash from Indigenous communities and non-Indigenous communities, while Indigenous men receive backlash only from non-Indigenous communities*". The latter were criticized, but not ostracized (C-1). Their actions were deemed as an expected behavior from men (C-3). Besides, the community also found benefit in Indigenous men converting their non-Indigenous partners to their culture, "*Our daughters are being given away to Bengali families. Our sons should bring in Bengali women to our society*". This confirms the reproductive association of women, as discussed earlier.

Additionally, it draws parallel with the connection between loss of Indigenous resources upon women's marrying out.

On the contrary, Indigenous women had to bear the burnt from their frustrated dispossessed community. Women were labeled selfish (C-3) and slut-shamed (C-1) for marrying outside their communities. They were targeted and bullied (C-1, C-3) for even being seen with non-Indigenous men online. This compromised the respondents' social interaction and they gradually lost social capital (C-2). Families cut off their support, and in one case (C-3), went to an extreme measure of sending her to rehab. Even when another respondent (C-5) was divorced from her Indigenous ex-partner, her family interpreted her decision as an opportunity to marry a Bengali man.

This is how choice of partner becomes a concern for Indigenous women even before they reach adulthood. Scrutiny, guilt and fear of exclusion follow them across progressive stages of their lives. They walk a lonely path between two different worlds, without belonging to either. Thus, intersectionality shows where their experience diverges from other groups sharing similar identity categories.

Decision-Making Ability

The study shows that as the respondents were heavily scrutinized by their family and community. From an early stage they were motivated to do well to take decisions concerning their own lives. Education was a ticket to live a life on own terms. As Indigenous men faced less scrutiny, this motivation factor was absent. Owing to this motivation factor, more women than men become successful in education and employment. When Indigenous women completed education, they opened their doors to employment. They gained financial freedom with employment that allowed to make their own decisions without fearing financial consequences, especially concerning their very reproductive capacity they were associated with

by Indigenous and dominant groups. Besides, working in cities created a distance between them and their home locality. Their financial freedom and distance created an opportunity for them to escape possible backlash (C-2, C-3, C-5, C-6, C-7, C-8). For example, C-6 who was a yoga instructor reflected that her profession was not accepted by Indigenous men. She feared facing restriction on her work upon marriage. Yet, she was able to continue her work as her success was convincing to her parents. Thus, migration challenged their traditional gender roles. Overall, these factors motivated the respondents to prioritize education and perform well.

Motivation was a different catalyst in C-5. Her father came from matriarchal Garo society and mother belonged to patriarchal Marma community. She was aware about her possibility of not inheriting property from either parent. Hence, she was motivated to have a firm financial standing.

The study also shows that the respondents (C-4, C-9) exhibited the intention to use their platforms to raise awareness about their culture. The respondents (C-1) guided younger Indigenous students. This aligns with the studies' common finding where no respondent wanted to be disconnected from their ethnic roots even when their identity was questioned due to their privilege and location. Indeed, the instances of other Indigenous women mentioned by the respondents show that none of them wanted to be disconnected from their roots upon marrying non-Indigenous men. The Indigenous communities outcast them.

The study repetitively shows a tension between Indigenous women's agency and Indigenous survival. Even though they live in Dhaka, long-running historical oppression towards their communities affect them in direct and indirect ways. The relationship between gender and culture is used as a basis for justifying violations of Indigenous women's human rights. While culture constitutes a part of the context in which human rights violations take place, it does not justify them. Rather culture paves the way to participate in traditional life. Taking away

women's agency to preserve collective identity doesn't ensure an inclusive development of the community. For Indigenous communities that already have low education rate, expelling educated Indigenous women leads to the loss of their human capital development.

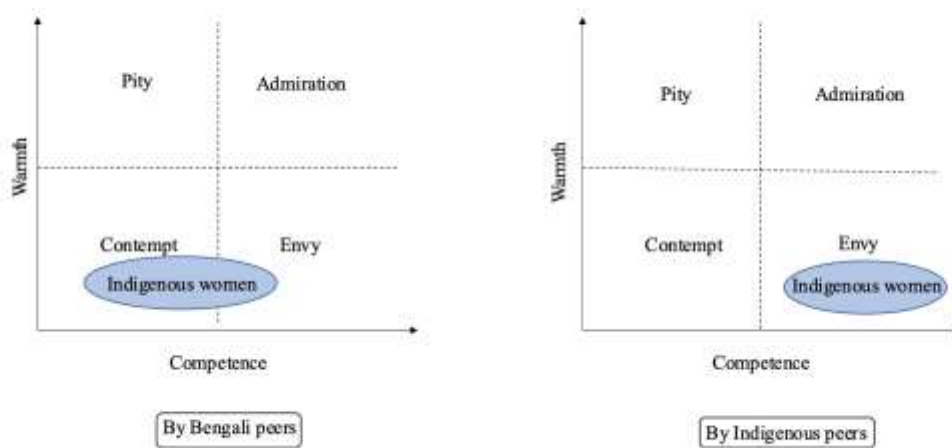## Perception of Identity

Figure: Stereotype Content Model

Overall Bengali peers placed the respondents in low competence and low warmth in SCM in terms of education and employment. Their peers exhibited contempt towards them. The behavioural responses encompassed distancing or rejecting. An implication of this perception can be seen in the parents' choice of school to offer children an inclusive environment and protect Indigenous identity.

Another implication was found when there was a perceived association of quota with the respondents. Bengali peers deemed them incompetent and showed low warmth. The feeling of contempt (univalent) among Bengali groups hints at negative stereotypes of outcasts in a conflict situation. The study reveals the presence of stigma through the "externalization" mechanism where Bengali peers tended to evaluate beneficiary performance prejudicially. This shows the presence of discriminatory attitudes toward Indigenous students with perceived

association with quota. There is also evidence of "internalization" where Indigenous respondents internalized their peers' low evaluation of their own competence. This perception affected how Indigenous respondents viewed their capabilities and performed academically.

To place women in admiration quadrant among Bengali peers, the situation of intermediate peace-conflict has to be addressed. Publicizing the achievements of affirmative action beneficiaries could weaken the stigma of incompetence. However, this is unlikely to increase warmth, rather it may increase hostility in the case of increased competition.

On the other hand, Indigenous communities exhibited low warmth, but deemed respondents competent owing to their perceived privilege. This behaviorally ambivalent response encompassed passive facilitation or active harm. It becomes evident with the use of labels such as 'cool kids' and viewing quota and employment accessible only to privileged ones. Respondents didn't face any concern regarding their merit. Active harm was visible in remarks targeted towards two instances: when the respondents opted in for unconventional professions and when they had high chances of exposure to Bengalis. Both instances hinted at the respondents' breaking away from traditional gender roles associated with reproduction and being expressions of culture. The SCM places them in the 'envy' quadrant. The envy emotion among Indigenous peer group hints and validates higher perceived inequality and intermediate peace-conflict. To place Indigenous women in high competence-high warmth quadrant among Indigenous peers, broader inequality needs to be addressed. Higher interaction among the groups can lead to higher warmth and reduce the perceived inequality gap.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

Indigenous women's experience in urban space is an emerging phenomenon. They bear triple burden for their gender, race and migrating status. The study sought to explore their journey across progressive stages of life, affected by multiple categories of their identity.

Access to education

The research findings indicate that Indigenous women had different experience of schooling in Dhaka compared to the CHT. Their racial identity elicited undesirable attention from peers and school administration, and they attributed this attitude to peers' low exposure to IP. Indigenous parents performed the role of identity shields and showed a common preference for schools that prioritized inclusion and values. Indigenous women reported to be associated with quota system, which in turn led to a stigma from Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups. In response, one group internalized the stigma and the other externalized it.

Access to Employment

At workplace Indigenous women interacted with people with established worldviews and with minimum prior exposure to IP. There was an overall exclusion of IP in workplace, although some women found themselves in conducive environments. Respondents employed different navigation tactics while some perceived peers' behavior as curiosity. Within Indigenous communities, women faced backlash when their work involved high exposure to non-Indigenous communities, which was perceived as a threat to their Indigenous identity.

Choice of Partner

Indigenous women were held custodians of their cultures for their reproductive capacity. Their education and employment came secondary to preservation of their identity. Patriarchy within Indigenous communities viewed women's rights as domestic issues. Indigenous women marrying out were labeled as traitors. Education and financial freedom enhanced their agency, however, they had to pay the high price of exclusion.

Policy Implications

The findings can be useful for identifying strategies to increase student development. These include building culturally responsive relationship between schools and Indigenous families.

In designing and implementing affirmative action program, potential stigma towards beneficiaries must be considered. Awareness on equity approach must be spread among non-beneficiary groups to increase acceptance.

To promote decent work, statistical data (disaggregated by sex, age, ability) on IP in education and employment is to be made more available and accessible. The data can be used in assessment of existing work conditions of IP, raising awareness of exclusion and inequality, and designing new policies.

Indigenous women experience multiple discrimination when it comes to choosing partners. Whether there is a reasonable basis behind the fear of loss of Indigenous lands consequent upon such marriages can be assessed. It is argued that initiatives to challenge discriminative cultures are most effective from within. The cooperation from community leaders, allies, policy makers, is required for the human capital development of Indigenous women.

Overall, the findings are beneficial to ensure the integration of Indigenous women. Urban Indigenous women can become an invaluable asset to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities when their potential is maximized.

Future Research Opportunities

Research can be expanded to follow the career path of the study group. Their examples will influence future Indigenous generations in negotiating their identities in urban landscape. Further research can explore the experience of less represented Indigenous groups, and examine whether the findings resemble those from the current study. Focused research can be conducted on IP from matrilineal Garo community to evaluate the interaction between macro and micro-structures. To enhance integration of Indigenous groups, cultural responsiveness of education and work institutions can be researched.

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