

Love, Longing and Commemoration:
A Study of Chakma Culture through the *Ubogeeet*

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in English

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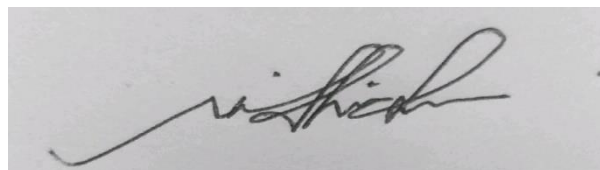
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Abstract

Bangladesh is home to more than forty-five indigenous groups who are mostly located in the north (east and west), the south and southeast regions of the country. The Chittagong Hill Tracts is home to nearly 70% of the indigenous population currently residing in Bangladesh. Whereas the intermittent socio-political conflict surrounding the area is the subject of much scholarly debate, serious scholarship on the rich literature of these ‘othered’ communities of Bangladesh is lacking. This paper provides a critical analysis of a particular type of folk song called the *Ubogeeet* which is popular among the Chakma community. *Ubogeeets* are colloquial ‘love songs’ that are fiesty, playful and nuanced in meaning, offering a fascinating insight into certain socio-cultural aspects of the traditional Chakma ways of life. Unfortunately, these songs, perceived by the younger generation as old-fashioned, antiquated and even vulgar, are fast disappearing from the Chakma culture. This paper argues, firstly, that Chakma literature is an important part of Bangladeshi history and culture, and secondly, that it is imperative to preserve and renew indigenous literature such as the Chakma *Ubogeeet* for future generations who need to be aware of the rich and complex history of Bangladesh and its multilingual indigenous literature.

Keywords: *Ubogeeet*, indigenous, literature, colonialism, music, education

Dedication

I dedicate this work to myself, for believing in humanity. Also, for working hard to complete this work.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my heartiest gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Mahruba T Mowtushi who nurtured my learnings. Her lively and caring guidance supported me to understand things in a better way which immensely helped me in my research and writing this paper.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Bangladesh is home to forty-five ethnic groups located in the north-east and north-west, south and southeast regions of the country. The indigenous communities live in both plain lands and hilly areas. The largest population of indigenous communities live in the southeast border of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). For years Chittagong Hill Tracts was evoked by the national imaginary as a place of great natural beauty, picturesque landscape and exoticism, home to diverse ethnic groups. It is the home of eleven indigenous groups: the Chakma, the Marma, the Tripura, the Khumi, the Lushai, the Chak, the Khyang, the Bawm, the Pankhua, the Mro, the Tanchangya. Together they comprise 70% of the entire indigenous population in Bangladesh. Numerically, Chakma's are the largest indigenous group in Bangladesh which is considered to be socially, economically and culturally advanced, because they have the highest number of educated population among all the indigenous communities living in Bangladesh. The modern education of enlightenment has played a big role in the transition of Chakma community's social and political stand. The modern education has visibly changed the Chakma societies need and taste in literature. It is unfortunate that the so called educated younger generations of the Chakma community have little or no idea about and interest in their traditional folk songs. Traditional songs much like traditional cultural practices such as *Ubogeeet*, *Thenga Banga Geet*, *Genghuli Geets* have become 'unfashionable' and 'backward' among the educated class or group.

For centuries, *Ubogeeet* has been a popular traditional song-form among the Chakma and Tanchangya communities. These folk songs are mostly oral and depict the everyday life of people in these communities. The lyrics of the songs are dialogic in nature and are prepared instant. The *Ubogeeet* songs are different to the modern songs. The lyrics of the songs are not specific, anybody who wants to sing the song just follows the unique tune of *Ubogeeet*. *Ubogeeet*

is a form of love song that is performed in a conversant style between the lovers. However, as the time passed by it has become rare to enjoy the song in its natural form. *Ubogeeet* have begun to lose its popularity among the local people. Nowadays only a handful people can sing these folk songs but they sing it with a fixed lyrics alike the modern songs. As an indigenous to see my heritage disappearing like this, makes me feel no better.

However, Chittagong Hill Tracts is the most militarized area of Bangladesh and therefore, has remained under strict concentration. The 20 years long civil war that started in 1977 and finally ended in 1997 with a peace agreement between the government and Parbattya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS).¹ The agreement was known as ‘Parbattya Chukti’ but later on public addressed the agreement as ‘Shanti Chukti’. On 2nd December, 1997, Abul Hasanat Abdullah, convener of Hill Tracts Affairs, on behalf of Bangladesh government and Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma, on behalf of the inhabitants of Chittagong Hill Tracts signed the agreement paper. But even after the peace agreement, atrocities continued in the Hills and thus attracted the researchers. The conflict of Chittagong Hill Tracts became a topic of interest to many researchers. Hence, a good number of researchers like Amena Mohsin, Hana S. Ahmed, Nasrin Siraj, A. M. Serajuddin, Prashanta Tripura, Kabita Chakma, Bhumitra Chakma have vastly worked on the political and social history of Chittagong Hill Tracts. The indigenous communities in the region have a vast, diverse and rich literature but despite of that, very few research has been done on indigenous literature. Non binary research papers exposing the states evil practices in the Chittagong Hill Tracts is remarkable, but it is also necessary to uphold the richness of indigenous literatures. Not because the indigenous communities are weak and need special attention but because their literature actually has a lot to share with the world.

¹ “*Chittagong Hill Tracts Treaty*”, 1997.

Ironically, the picturesque landscapes which have been preserved by the indigenous communities for centuries, are worthy to be included in the national tourism projects, but the cultures of the preservers are not worthy to be included in the national interest. Also, even though the state erases the histories of violence, land loss and absence of rights, the state is quite comfortable with the celebration of indigenous festivals, food cuisine and promotion of ethnic tourism.² Media represents the indigenous communities and their lifestyles as exotic and primitive that ultimately makes the communities the ‘other’ in the Bengali majoritarian country. Media has always been biased towards the population of Chittagong Hill Tracts. Media broadcast only two types of news about the Chittagong Hill Tracts, first, ‘Pahari Bangali Clash’ and the second, ‘Upajati Sangskritik Onusthan’. This biased representation of indigenous people living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, manufactures the consents of the majority Bengali to justify the violence against the ‘othered’ communities. Lately, the unnecessarily forceful development in the name of tourism and educating the ‘backward’ indigenous communities have become a danger to preserve their rich diversified cultures. This persuasive attitude of the so called civilized groups towards the uncivilized indigenous groups is nothing but an ill practice of cultural imperialism. This paper will explore few questions, they are- why *Ubogeeet* is no more a popular song among the Chakmas and Tanchangya community? Have the indigenous communities lost their power to love each other? and is the education system of Bangladesh liberal ?

² Ahmed, Hana S., "Tourism and state violence in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh" (2017). Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository. 4840. p- 28.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Edward Said in his book *Culture and Imperialism* have said that, culture is aggressively associated with a nation that creates the “Us” and “them” groups out of a degree of xenophobia.³

In case of Bangladesh the Chittagong Hill Tracts region is considered to be the odd and according to Said’s theory the “Other” part of Bangladesh. For a large number of people who are residents to Bangladesh nurtures different languages, cultures, religion, identities and genetic features. The label of being an “other” however, is not limited to the so called “primitive” residents of Chittagong Hill Tracts only. In short, any group of people having a non-Bengali culture is presented as primitive or so called small tribes. Ellen Bal in “They Ask If We Eat Frogs Garo Ethnicity in Bangladesh” have criticized the generalization of so called tribal people living in Bangladesh. She argues that the discourse of indigenous and tribal somehow generalize the political, social, economic, and cultural characteristics of tribes and that this generalization perhaps explains more about the categorizer than about the categorized. Which carries the danger of becoming a social reality while generating a distance from the “observing self”.⁴ However, her in between position on Christian missionaries in the life of Garo communities escapes the issue of international colonization. She claims that Garo people’s conversion to Christianity is an introduction to “modern world religion” and that the religion conversion have played the role of a mediator between the Garo’s and the state. They brought education, provided healthcare and social services to modernize the Garo community.

³ Edward Said, “In time, culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state; this differentiates “us” from “them,” almost always with some degree of xenophobia.”, *Culture and Imperialism*, p 12

⁴ Ellen Bal, “This has enabled administrators, politicians, and academics alike to group all tribes together into one single category. But the essence of what tribal or indigenous might mean remains highly elusive and only broadly defined”, “They Ask If We Eat Frog Garo Ethnicity in Bangladesh”, 2007, P 211

But indigenous people's demand for inclusion in global civic discourse challenges the exercise of modernization and development. For indigenous people's cultural, social, political, economic, and physical integrity has been directly attacked in the name of development. The capitalistic idea of development legitimize forced assimilation, relocation, while introduce the deadly alien epidemics, and sanctions private violence by settlers, that is why, indigenous peoples have targeted the source—the meaning of development itself.⁵ For, the western notion of development is too materialistic and indigenous communities demands “spiritual development”.

The modern world have gave birth to the new Third World elites, who frequently are the members of ethnic groups. These have emerged into a group which is favored by the colonial administrators, educated in western capitalistic ideologies, and returning to their country of origin to carry out the work of “civilizing” and “modernizing” their country, their community people. Whereas In reality, it was the colonial powers who intentionally draw the political boundaries of these multiethnic states with little or no regard for the ethnic boundaries of the indigenous peoples. As a consequence, the political dominance of one educated/ resocialized ethnic group who ingrained the values of modernizing programs and they have been internalizing it over others, who are labeled as backward, primitive, uncivilized, and so on.⁶

In the mid-nineteenth century, during the British colonization period nakedness had become a symbol of wildness to the whites and after a century later in the modern era it had become a symbol of underdevelopment. It basically changes according to the interest of so called ‘civilized’ society. The result of social exclusion and the built of I would say “neo-ethnic elites” have started showing its impacts in the late 20th century. As Willem van Schendel has pointed

⁵ “Development Can Have Many Meanings: Indigenous Peoples and the Discourse of Modernization”,1993, P 6.

⁶ “Modernization represents the sum of attributes perceived by elites as endowing them with moral superiority, and non-modern societies are therefore, by definition, morally inferior”, “Development Can Have Many Meanings: Indigenous Peoples and the Discourse of Modernization,1993, P16.

out in his “A Politics of Nudity: Photographs of the 'Naked Mru' of Bangladesh”. He clearly stated that it is not only the westerners and Bengali who have considered the natural state of ones being as primitive and ‘less civilized’ but also by the other ethnic communities who came considerably much under the contacts of the world majority.⁷ During the internal war in 1977-1997 which raged in Chittagong Hill Tracts, the leaders in the movement (who were mostly Chakma) ignored Mru’s, perhaps because they do not want to get associated with the term ‘backward’. Mru people through the photographs of the westerners immediately grabbed the attention of the outer world, as the ‘primitive tribal’. In Bangladesh, the double yardstick of nakedness and 'superstition' has been applied to portray the people of the Chittagong hills as primitive, wild and underdeveloped.⁸ And it is then when the so called advanced ethnic groups like Chakma, Marma, Tripura and many more have started to deny the authentic beauty of their neighbor Mru’s to escape the label of ‘savage’. The Mru women’s ethnic attire were so romanticized in the photographs that it became the epitome of exoticism.⁹ The cameras have been used as weapons to exploit the indigenous people of Chittagong Hill Tracts. A forced authenticity has been caused out of the exploiters ‘savage’ interest.¹⁰

⁷ Willem van Schendel, “And among the hill people, the Mru, who have their own community religion and wear few clothes, have come to be seen as the most primitive. It is not only Westerners and Bengali who have read the nakedness of the Mru as a sign of primitivity; Chittagong hill people belonging to other groups have done so too. Among the Marina (a Buddhist group), it is common to classify the Mru as less civilized.”, “A Politics of Nudity: Photographs of the 'Naked Mru' of Bangladesh”, Cambridge University Press, May 20002, pp 349, 350.

⁸ Willem van Schendel, “A Politics of Nudity: Photographs of the 'Naked Mru' of Bangladesh”, Cambridge University Press, May 2002, p 351.

⁹ Willem van Schendel, “through photographs. The Mru do not write, they do not speak in public media, beyond their region. And yet, the Mru woman clad only in a short black skirt and the Mru man with flowers and coins in his long hair have become instantly recognizable to people throughout Bangladesh as the stereotype of the 'primitive tribal'. These images build on a lively photographic tradition which seeks to represent the naked Mru as the epitome of the exotic.”, “A Politics of Nudity: Photographs of the 'Naked Mru' of Bangladesh”, idib, p 353.

¹⁰ “in 1963 some European visitors armed with cameras encountered a group of Mru women on a road. One of the visitors felt that she had to 'prepare' these women for the photographs, imposing her own aesthetic conventions on them (plate 9). The result (plate 10) was a photograph of three embarrassed and angry Mru women (note toes curled up in annoyance), quite different from the Brauns photographs.”, idib, p 355.

“After 1947, however, Mru women had gradually taken to wearing white or coloured cotton wraps when they moved outside their villages (see below), and these women were wearing them too. The visitors now prevailed upon these women to take off their wraps, all the while snapping away at them. The women complied, visibly annoyed and uncomfortable but too intimidated to refuse. They looked down and away from the camera, clutching their wraps, feeling shy and unhappy”, idib p 355.

Economic Weekly is an Indian institution that enjoys global excellence has once published an article in 1998, under the name “Chakma Autonomy”, which states about the autonomy of Kashmir and Chittagong Hill Tracts. At the same time criticizing the opposition parties of the two countries and their chauvinistic reactions on violating the ‘unitary’ character of their state. The voice of the article was clearly echoing in support of the then governments of the countries, while shifting the blame of oppression on the opposition parties. It also warns that the Bengali chauvinism upon the non-Muslim, non-Bengali Chakma’s might harm the peace accord. Although, the civil war in Bangladesh was really not between the government and only the Chakma’s. The article clearly generalized all the other ethnic communities who fought for their rights, under the name Chakma’s. Media has always played a vital role to shape people’s thoughts. As Noam Chomsky have argued that the mass is supposed to be the “spectator” whom the “specialized” class will make to think what they have already fixed them (spectator) to think. Losing control over the mass can cause revolution. To prevent this it becomes necessary to turn the public against strikers, to present the strikers as disruptive, harmful to the public and against the common interests. It is again by the help of media, the Bourgeois manipulates the mass to go against that bad people around, who wants to destroy the harmony with their talk of class, struggle and rights.¹¹ Chomsky brutally criticize how media is being used by the “specialized class” of “responsible men” to manufacture the consents of “the bewildered herd”.¹² A random article on Bangladesh’s most buying newspaper *Prothom Alo* comes under the name “Go Hard on Terrorist Groups in CHT” just makes sense to the argument that Chomsky made. The article carries the information of the regular murder, extortion and

¹¹ Noam Chomsky, “The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda”, p 13.

¹² Idib, p 10.

kidnapping incidents occurred by the (tribal) rivalry groups in CHT. And portrays how insecure the residents of Chittagong Hill Tracts are despite of being heavily militarized.¹³

Most of the politicians and academics have addressed Chakma's as the most populous among the other ethnic communities living in the CHT. According to them Chakma's are the most enlightened and competitively advanced. When a national primary level text book and a scholarly article introduce a community as a group who are full of festivals, to whom singing and dancing are highly valued parts of their religious customs and rituals¹⁴ and have strange food habits, the mass only cannot be judged for stereotyping the indigenous communities. However, highlighting the Chakma communities as much civilized than the "other" indigenous communities is not only common in the non-indigenous writings but also among most indigenous writings. Therefore, the process of establishing Chakma's as the neo-ruler or so called 'civilized' of the hierarchal society is quiet visible. Which has caused identity crisis and devaluation of cultural history among the so called educated class of indigenous communities. As Joshua B. Nelson says that how we still lack to arrive at anything like an encyclopedic knowledge of even a fraction of the world's Indigenous peoples that would not say something deductive rather than inductive about Indigenous people's history, culture, or literature.¹⁵ It is high time to realize that the indigenous literatures can equally provoke thoughts and persuade its readers to educate themselves from each other's histories, beliefs, and practices. The indigenous literatures can help the readers to learn about the successes, challenges, and failures

¹³"Go Hard On Terrorist Group In CHT", 26 December, 2019, published in Prothom Alo newspaper. This is the link-
<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwiUg8yz6aXwAhX3zDgGHfUkBkEQFjAEegQIBRAD&url=https%3A%2F%2Fen.prothomalo.com%2Fopinion%2FGo-hard-on-terrorist-groups-in-CHT&usg=AOvVaw3rdfcc0jJD4pbDveMcqAkit> .

¹⁴ Saad, "Special Issue: Religious Studies in South Asia: The Dhaka Initiative Religious;Aspects of Adibasi Life in Bangladesh", p 95.

¹⁵ Joshua B Nelson, "The Use of Indigenous Literatures", Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma,2014 , p 4.

of the indigenous communities. Finally to understand the needs, expectations, and, perhaps above all, they can offer in the way of help to those who need and want it.

Chapter 3

History of Chakma

3.1 Pre-British Colonization

There have been much debates about the origin of the Chakma communities in South Asia since, they do not have any particular written history or written record. What they did have is the oral history and oral literature which over the time have chances to get disappeared, forgotten or marginalized. The history written in Chakma alphabet by the Chakma ancestors are known as ‘Bijog’. Most of the Chakma population are the inhabitant of central Chittagong Hill Tracts. They have their own culture, historical traditions, folklores, alphabets and religion. The Chakma researchers and historians claim that they are the descendants of the Sakya dynasty¹⁶, which is the clan Gautama Buddha was born to, originating in Lumbini, now a province in Nepal. “Chadigangchara Pala” is an oral folklore which is believed to be passed by the Chakma ancestors. The folklore is sung in a traditional and unique tune known as ‘Gengkhuili’. It basically tells the story of a prince named as Prince Bijoygiri, who was the crowned prince of Champaknagar. Being the eldest son of Sakya king, Sangbuddha, he was to become the next king after his father retires. However, the prince once leaves the kingdom around 590 CE to fight a war against Magadh, to which he won the Rosang kingdom of Arakan and Chittagong.¹⁷ But after the victorious expedition in his way back to Champaknagar, he found out that his father, the king has passed away and meanwhile, his younger brother Samargiri have become the king of Champaknagar. The throne has been given to the younger prince to regulate the kingdom. It has been rumored that Prince Bijoygiri have died in the war against Magadh. Bijoygiri in grieve decided not to return Champaknagar and along with his

¹⁶ Sharadindu Shekhar Chakma, *Chakma Jatir Itihas*, 2013, Dhaka, Janapriya Prokashani, P-22.

¹⁷ Supriyo Talukder, *Champaknagar Sandhane: Bibortoner Dharai Chakma Jati*, 1999, Rangamati, Upajatiya Sangskritik Institute, p-19.

soldiers, marched towards the conquered land and established another kingdom in Arakan. Chakmas believe that through this establishment of new kingdom they have come to Arakan, then to upper Burma and finally ventured into ‘Chottagong’ or what is now known as Chattogram. The history of Arakan supports this popular story of ‘Chadigangchara Pala’.¹⁸ Arakan’s legendary history book ‘Rajoang’ has a similar story with a similar description to the story of Chakma ancestors.

A much earlier history says that Kosala king Prasenajit’s son Prince Virudabha in 547 BC took avenge on the Sakya clan and massacred the Sakyas of Kapilavastu kingdom.¹⁹ And thus the Sakya survivors of that massacre took shelters in Nepal, Bhutan, Assam and Burma. Before Bijoygiri the existence of 15 more kings can be traced.²⁰ From historical information it is known that Sakya king Dhaja Raja passed through Manipur on way to Kubo Valley in Myanmar, where he established his kingdom. However, researcher Birajmohan Dewan have claimed that if there is any glorious history of Chakmas, most of it should be found in the ancient Burmese history.²¹ An Arakan scholar San Tha Aung believes that the Chakma Raja or Thetmong and his people are Thets, one of the original races of Burma, but now extinct in Burma or Myanmar.²² Chakmas are known as the Sak/Thek/Thet to Burmese people. A Nepali Buddhist scholar, Professor Asharam Sakya have claimed that there are similarities between the cultures of Chakmas living in Chittagong Hill Tracts and Sakyas living in Nepal now. Hence, the Chakmas can be the descendants of Sakyas.²³ Capt. T.H. Lewin has also claimed

¹⁸ Sharadindu Shekhar Chakma, *Chakma Jatir Itihas*, 2013, Dhaka, Janapriya Prokashani, P- 25.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Biraj Mohan Dewan, *Chakma Jatir Itibrityo*, 1969, Soroj Art press, Reserve Bazar, Rangamati Parbatya Zila, p-73.

²¹ “The exclusion of Chakmas from the Burmese history will dim the national ancient history of Burma. The history of Burma informs about the important periodic incidents of scattered Chakma history” (translated by me), Biraj Mohan Dewan, *Chakma Jatir Itibrityo*, 1969, Soroj Art press, Reserve Bazar, Rangamati Parbatya Zila, p- 37

²² Supriyo Talukder, *Champaknagar Sandhane: Bibortoner Dharai Chakma Jati*, 1999, Rangamati, Upajatiya Sangskritik Institute, P-20

²³ Sharadindu Shekhar Chakma, *Chakma Jatir Itihas*, 2013, Dhaka, Janapriya Prokashani, P- 24

that although the primary origin of the Thek or Chakma cannot be traced but there is no doubt that, they were evidently once the inhabitants of the Arakan province.²⁴

‘Agar Tara’ is considered to be the ancient holy scripture of Chakmas.²⁵ Which have 28 ‘taras’ and each of them holds the holy speech of Gautama Buddha, taken from all three ‘Pitakas’²⁶. To which Sharadendu Shekhar Chakma, a former Bangladeshi diplomat, argued that the religion which the Chakmas follow, have much similarities with the Buddhism originated from ancient India. Hence, Chakmas cannot be the originals of Arakan neither their religion.

The history of Chakmas are obscure.²⁷ According to the research of Supriyo Talukder, the first seven Chakma Rajas reigned in Arakan. The Chakma Rajas from the 8th Raja to 23rd Raja have reigned in Upper Burma. It is estimated that from 9th century to 1330 BC, 26 Chakma Rajas have reigned the Upper Burma. Later on, in 1330 Raja Arunjug lost his kingdom to Arakan king Mangthi in a war.²⁸ Some research have shown that Burma once got divided into three parts and among them one was under the rule of Chakma king, Mwn Tsni. He has been driven out of Burma in 1448 for disrespecting Buddhism and sheltered in Alikadam, southern part of Chittagong.²⁹ In 1550, a Portuguese geographer and historian Joa de Barros³⁰ drew a map in the name of ‘Descripcao do Reino de Bangala’. In which a place near the river Karnafuly can be seen named as ‘Chacommas’.³¹ It is estimated that the name ‘Chacommas’ came after the

²⁴ Capt. T.H.Lewin, *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong And The Dwellers Therein With Comparative Vocabularies of the Hill Dialects*, p- 67

²⁵ Sharadindu Shekhar Chakma, *Chakma Jatir Itihas*, 2013, Dhaka, Janapriya Prokashani, P-27.

²⁶ Tripitaka meaning “triple Baskets” which consists ancient collections of Buddhist scriptures. Tripitaka is also known as Pali canon in English. It is divided into three parts- Sutra Pitaka, Vinaya Pitaka and Abhidhamma Pitaka.

²⁷ Paritosh Chakma, “History of the Chakmas: Descendants of Sakya”.

²⁸ Supriyo Talukder, *Champaknagar Sandhane: Bibortoner Dharai Chakma Jati*, 1999, Rangamati, Upajatiya Sangskritik Institute, p 67.

²⁹ “The Chakma king Mwn Tsni was driven out from upper Burma in 1448 because his alleged disrespect towards Buddhism. He took shelter at Alikadam under the Muslim officer in the present Chittagong district. He settled the Chakmas in Ramu and Teknaf.” “Chittagong Hill Tracts Gazetteer”, p 25.

³⁰ De Barros from 1525 to 1532 served as a treasurer in Lisbon and till 1567 served as a crown agent.

³¹ Sharadindu Shekhar Chakma, *Chakma Jatir Itihas*, 2013, Dhaka, Janapriya Prokashani, P 25.

Chakma tribe who are already living in that area. According to a Tibetan historian Lama Taranath's book on ancient Indian Buddhism in 1608, the first scripturally traceable Chakma king was Raja Otitbahon, who was the son of king Balasundra.³² After that unfortunately, till king Chandan Khan no reliable sources of information are available on Chakma history. Then as per the Mughal records, in 1711³³ Chandan Khan was elected as the king of Chakma hill people. In 1715 Jalal Khan received the throne as the Chakma king. During that period his kingdom faced the lack of everyday necessities including salt, dry fish, black cotton, chicken, tobacco and sugar. And to fulfill the necessities he decided to allow the traders of plains to enter in hills. Henceforth, he requested Mughal Faujdar to allow exchange of trade facilities and decided to pay a trade tax of 11 mounds of cotton. Later on, for producing a good amount of fine cotton during the Mughal era, the Chittagong Hill Tracts came to known as the 'Karpas Mahal' or cotton estate. However, in 1724 Raja Jalal Khan refuses to pay the tax and as a result Mughal emperor's Dewan or collector, Kishan Chand attacked on him, which forced him to flee in Arakan.³⁴ According to the history of 18th century, Shermusto Khan (1737-58) was the successor after Jalal Khan, whose residence was is in Arakan. In 1737 Raja Shermusto Khan submitted himself to Mughal emperor and took the land known as 'Kodala' from the Mughal. This is to be noted that the addition of 'Khan' title in the name of Chakma Rajas have come from the Mughal era. There are possibilities that the Rajas have taken the Muslim names and surnames to impress the Mughal empire. Because although their names sounds like Muslim names but they did not follow the religion Islam. After the death of Shermusto Khan, his cousin Sher Jabbar Khan became the Chakma king. He ruled the Chakmas from 1758-65.

³² Sugata Chakma, *Bangladesher Upojati o Adibasider Somaj, Songskriti o Achar Bebohar*, Rangamati, Upajatiya Sangskritik Institute, p 13.

³³ *ibid*, p 17.

³⁴ Sugata Chakma, *Bangladesher Upojati o Adibasider Somaj, Songskriti o Achar Bebohar*, Rangamati, Upajatiya Sangskritik Institute, p 17.

3.2 British Colonial Period

Following the Battle of Plassey in 1757, the British East India Company took control of Bengal. In 1765 Sher Daulat Khan (1765-82) became the Chakma king under the British Government. Meanwhile British raj started collecting cotton from this area as a tax. The British did not have any direct connection with the Chakmas.³⁵ As the time passed by, the British government started increasing the amount of tax. To which Raja Sher Daulat Khan refused to pay the tax. Raja Sher Doulat Khan revolted in 1776 against the British Government.³⁶ As a result a clash between the Chakmas and the British started to grow. In 1782 after the death of Raja Sher Doulat Khan his son Jaunbux Khan succeeded the throne. During the reign of Raja Jaunbux Khan the clash between the British and the Chakmas became intense. During his reign the longtime clash finally outburst into a war. A guerilla war was fought against the British soldiers by the Chakmas in 1783, 1784 and 1785³⁷. Later on in 1787 the war came to an end. Chakma Raja Jaun Bux Khan and Lord Cornwallis signed a petition for peace in 1887. Meanwhile, it has been argued that Arakan was invaded by King Bowdowphya in 1784 and conquered it completely on 12th January 1785. During the time of Arakan invasion, Bowdowphya's army supposedly killed more than 22,600 Arakanese people from 1785-1789. It was also estimated that not less than 50,000 of Arakanese refugees migrated from Arakan into Chittagong District.³⁸ It is estimated that a lot of Chakmas also became refugee to Chittagong, since Jaunbux Khan still had connection to Arakan.³⁹ From 1791 the British Government decided to receive money instead of 'karpas' or cotton from Jaunbux Khan.⁴⁰ The date of Raja Jaunbux Khan's death cannot be traced but on 28th April in 1797 Dr. Francis Buchanan a Scottish

³⁵ Ibid, p 18.

³⁶ "In 1776 he revolted against Government, and two expeditions were sent against him and Ramoo, or Ramoo Khan, his relative, and a chief man of the tribe" Capt. T.H.Lewin, *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong And The Dwellers Therein With Comparative Vocabularies of the Hill Dialects*, p 66.

³⁷ Sharadindu Shekhar Chakma, *Chakma Jatir Itihas*, 2013, Dhaka, Janapriya Prokashani, P 108.

³⁸ "The Voice of Rakhine", edited by Maung Ushang, the first compilation, 7th March 1987, pp 18,19.

³⁹ Supriyo Talukder, *Champaknagar Sandhane: Bibortoner Dharai Chakma Jati*, P 44.

⁴⁰ Sugata Chakma, *Bangladesher Upojati o Adibasider Somaj, Songskriti o Achar Bebohar*, p19.

physician discovered that Tabbar Khan (1798-1801) already succeeded his father's throne. In 1801 after the death of Raja Tobbor Khan, his younger brother Jubber Khan (1801-12) succeeded the throne. As per royal rules, Raja Jubber Khan's son Dhurmbux succeeded the throne in 1812. Dhurmbux had three wives- Kalindi Rani, Atok Bibi and Hari Bibi. Together they had only one child from Hari Bibi named Princess Menoka. In 1832 after the death of Raja Dhurmbux his elder wife Rani Kalindi (1844-73) looked after the throne, to which British Government objected in the beginning but later on accepted her as Chakma Rani in 1844. In 1860 British declared the Chittagong Hill Tracts as an independent district and announced Chandraghona as the main town. Until the year 1860 the British Government did not interfere directly with the internal economy of the hills.⁴¹ Chittagong had its first school in 1863, which was built in Chandraghona. On 5th January in 1861 Nabab Muhammed Reja Khan handed over Chittagong district to Henry Valerist.⁴² On 1st September in 1881, The Government of Bengal declared to divide the district into three circles, accordingly- Chakma, Bomang and Mong⁴³. On 7th May in 1897, Bhuban Mohan Roy was crowned as the Chakma king. He was the first one from the Chakma community who passed the High School Entrance Exam, from the school 'Rangamati Government English School.⁴⁴ After that in May, 1900 British Government passed the Chittagong Hill tracts Regulation act.⁴⁵ This act is also known as the Hill Tracts Manual. Moreover, British then divided Chittagong Hill Tracts into 369 moujas⁴⁶ for better ruling

⁴¹ Capt. T.H.Lewin, *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong And The Dwellers Therein With Comparative Vocabularies of the Hill Dialects*, p 29.

⁴² Sugata Chakma, *Bangladesher Upojati o Adibasider Somaj, Songskriti o Achar Bebohar*, Rangamati, Upajatiya Sangskritik Institute, p 18.

⁴³ Ibid, p 21, Sharadindu Shekhar Chakma, *Chakma Jatir Itihas*, 2013, Dhaka, Janapriya Prokashani, P 55.

⁴⁴ Idib, p 21.

⁴⁵ Sharadindu Shekhar Chakma, *Chakma Jatir Itihas*, 2013, Dhaka, Janapriya Prokashani, P 117.

⁴⁶ "According to Hill Tracts Manual, the area of a mouja should be not less than 0.5 square miles and not more than 20 square miles.", idib, P 55

system. Later on distributed the moujas to the circle chiefs. However, in 1935 Chittagong Hill Tracts was declared as 'Excluded Area'.⁴⁷

3.3 Post-colonial Period

After the British left in 1947, Nalinakhsya Roy became the Chakma king under the Pakistan government. Raja Nalinaksha Roy, who had assumed power in 1935 accepted Pakistani sovereignty as there was little he could do, besides he was promised autonomy by Pakistan Government. On 25th March, 1948 Pakistan governor General Mohammad Ali Jinnah came for a visit to Chittagong. There the Chakma Circle Chief Nalinakhsya Roy and Bomang Chief Kyaj Sai too visited Chittagong to welcome him and present a proposal. The proposal includes the interest of all three chiefs of Chittagong Hill Tracts and asks for the autonomy of Chittagong Hill Tracts, so that the indigenous tribes can maintain their own rich culture and behavior.⁴⁸ In 1956 the Chittagong Hill Tracts was again declared as an 'Excluded Area' by Pakistan.⁴⁹ In 1960 the Pakistan government finally completed building the Kaptai hydroelectric dam in the Karnafuli river. The Kaptai artificial lake was discovered by closing the doors of the dam which managed to submerge 81,920,00 acres of lands of Chakma's including the Chakma king's palace 'Suromya'. 125 moujas went under the water among 369 moujas. 40% of the agricultural lands were submerged and around 18 thousand families became refugees. This inter- migration is known as the 'Bor Porong' ('Bor' means Biggest 'Porong' means migration) in the Chakma history. They were promised to be compensated but till 1964 thousands of families had got no compensation.⁵⁰ Pakistan government have spent only 2.6 million US dollars while had a budget to spend 51 million American dollar.⁵¹ They were left on their luck.

⁴⁷ Sharadindu Shekhar Chakma, *Chakma Jatir Itihas*, 2013, Dhaka, Janapriya Prokashani, p119

⁴⁸ Idib, p 118

⁴⁹ Idib, p 119

⁵⁰ Idib, p 125

⁵¹ Idib, p 125

In 1953, Raja Tridib Roy was anointed as the 50th Chakma Raja.⁵² During the liberation war in 1971 the Chakma Circle Chief Raja Tridib Roy remained neutral in the first place but, as the tense grew intense between East and West Pakistan Raja Tridib Roy got inclined to the establishment of Pakistan. Because Pakistan promised him to give autonomy on Chittagong Hill Tracts. Before getting inclined to Pakistan establishment he tried to cooperate with the Awami League, but eventually it did not work out. Seeing no other option, to achieve the autonomy in Chittagong Hill Tracts Raja Tridib Roy supported Pakistan. In an interview once he said that he supported Pakistan because the rebels of East Pakistan were already exploiting the indigenous people of Chittagong Hill Tracts.⁵³ According to a researcher shares an incident that took place on 5th December 1971, a group of Mukti Bahini from Tripura province came to Chittagong Hill Tracts through Panchari. To welcome the Mukti Bahini a group of Chakma met them with a goat but all of those Chakma group were killed except the goat.⁵⁴ The king's lack of expertise in foresight has backfired on his decision. Eventually the war between East and West Pakistan turned into a war between India and West Pakistan. The king fell in deep trouble. On 9th November, 1971 he left Rangamati and started his journey as an ambassador of Pakistan.⁵⁵ He left the throne to his 12 years old son Debashish Roy knowing the family will be accounted for his wrong decision. He left his mother Binita Roy, wife Arati Roy and other family members back in Rangamati, East Pakistan and never returned back to new born Bangladesh. The paths of the king and queen got separated and Chakmas again became guardian less. He died in 2012, far away from his family, alone in his home in Islamabad. A

⁵² Prashant Matthawan, "Chakma Raja: A Buddhist king in Pakistan", 22nd May, 2020

⁵³ "One of the chief reasons in my decision to support the Pakistani nation rather than the rebels in 1971 was that the people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts are not Bengali, but unfortunately, the government of East Pakistan at that time was exploiting the area and the indigenous population", Nirupama Subramaniam, "Chittagong's former Chakma raja who left Bangladesh to live in Pakistan", The Indian Express, 20th September, 2017

⁵⁴ Sharadindu Shekhar Chakma, *Chakma Jatir Itihas*, 2013, Dhaka, Janapriya Prokashani, p 134

⁵⁵ Idib, p 130

researcher addresses him as a Buddhist king, who had given up his throne and his people, for Pakistan⁵⁶.

Devasish Roy became the new Chakma king in 1977 when he became an adult. He married to Rani Tatu Roy and together they had a son and a daughter. After Rani Tatu died in 1998 he married to Rani Yan Yan in 2014. Together they have another son. He is still in charge of duty as the Chakma Circle Chief. Raja Tridib Roy's wrong decision to support Pakistan government during the liberation war in 1971 has caused the young Raja to get the stamp, son of a 'Rajakar. In a new born country the Chakma Raja as well as the Chakmas were left with the tag of being an anti-national that automatically makes them powerless. Even though there are few Chakmas who has also fought in the liberation war but it could not grab much attention. In the new born nation the term traitor or 'rajakar' got much popularity. Hence, the Chakmas got excluded from the Bangladeshi alike the people of 'Bihari concentration Camp' in Dhaka, Mohammadpur. The educated Chakma's started running from their roots, as the root causes them shame and harassment. Hence, the so called educated class in the Chakma society slowly distanced themselves from their culture and literature to become a part of the majority Bengali population.

⁵⁶ Prashant Matthawan, "Chakma Raja: A Buddhist king in Pakistan", 22nd May,2020

Chapter 4

Chakma Culture in *Ubogeeet*

The Bengali renaissance in the late 19th century to early 20th centuries have not only influenced later Bengali literature but also Chakma literature. The introduction of radio in the late 20th century plays a vital role in Chakma literature. Before the arrival of the radio, Chakma's enjoyed performances of their traditional literature that includes folk songs, poems and folktales. There are three types of folk songs in Chakma literature, these are: *Ubogeeet*, Genghuli Geet and Hobi Gan. Among them *Ubogeeet* is a traditional folk love song popular among the Chakma and Tanchangya youths. These songs are sung in a particularly high tone/note and the lyrics, which are romantic in nature, are performed in a conversational style or dialogic fashion. The songs are sung both with and without traditional musical instruments like the flute or 'Hengorong', and are set in a unique melody.

Although *Ubogeeets* are love songs, these songs also depict the social and communal values of the Chakma community. *Ubogeeet* lyrics do not refer to the romantic emotions of the singer, but also creates images of what everyday life and culture look like. Below is a translation of an *Ubogeeet* by the Chakma poet and lyricist Alomoy Chakma⁵⁷. This is to be noted that, all the translations of this *Ubogeeet* are mine.

⁵⁷ Male- O *Chikko* (dear) I don't see my uncle aunt,
Have they gone to some work?
You seem alone oh *Chikko* (dear),
in the monoghar.

Female- Have we been as wealthy as you,
To let them stay in home
We don't have the luck oh *Dado* (Elder brother),
To enjoy roaming in laughter and colours.

Male- I don't like the sayings of the wealthy,
In every talk of yours.

You have known me whole life,
How stranger do you think of me.

Female- I am just making fun oh *Dado*,
Why are you in the yard?

4.1 Diction in *Ubogeeet*

Language is the foundation of a culture. It is the medium through what people communicate with each other. As any other language, Chakma language is the key to Chakma culture. The community is mostly dependent on their oral history and that is what makes the Chakma

Come sit on the *chan* (the extended frontside of the monoghor),
Let me fan you with my *khadi* (traditional wearing piece of cloth).

Man- I spend the day roaming around,
People think I am a madman.
I feel you are distancing me,
Heard that people are searching for you as a their bride.

Female- I surely have to leave,
the village someday.
For how shall I spend my entire life,
In my parents house.

Male- You did not reply to my
Whisperings in your ear,
Having your words can allow me
To come with the rice beer urn in your house.

Female- these words are not from your heart oh *Dado*,
But from your mouth.
Let not yourself be unlucky,
To be with a dark skinned woman like me.

Male- How can you talk like this,
After knowing everything.
Have my chest been like a *mammara* (locally grown variety of hilly cucumber),
I shall have shown you oh *Poranbi* (Sweetheart),
By splitting my chest.
How have you become so cold-hearted,
oh my *poranbi*,
I had a desire to make,
It is to be with you in this lifetime.

Female- I just checked you a bit,
Please don't be angry oh *Da*.
The mouth refuses to burst even thou the heart bursts,
Try if you can understand from this.
Parents have gone to hard work,
Will come back soon.
If your heart beats for me,
Hurry and ask for me as a bride.

Male- holding two hands,
I give you my words today.
I will spend the rest of my life ,
Laying on your lap.
You and I will knit a home
In this *chagala* (a particular area/ village).
We will spend the rest of our lives
In laughter and colours.

literature so significant. The Chakma language is an ancient language. It is the words that makes the sentence of a language meaningful. Diction defines the style of a language. At the same time the diction also carries the essence of a culture to which the language belongs. Diction plays an important role in *Ubogeeet* for it provides these folk songs with a truly Chakma cultural essence. The lyricist's choice of diction in these song is intentional because those words are less used in the contemporary Chakma society. Words like 'Chikko' and 'Poranbi' as we see in the song, are affectionate terms of endearment for a loved one or a romantic partner in the Chakma language. Ironically and sadly, these affectionate words have recently become a symbol of backwardness among the contemporary Chakma community. Another word in the song is 'Chagala', which means a village. This word has become an alien word to the Chakma youths who prefer to use instead the word 'Adaam' and not 'Chagala'.

Ubogeeet being a traditional folk song usually carries the folk diction. But the folk dictions are considered inferior to the so called educated Chakmas. Linguicism⁵⁸ as Tove Skutnabb-Kangas have coined, is what cause linguistic imperialism. The lesser use of certain Chakma words are causing a replace of Bengali or English words. So, the faster the original Chakma words disappear the more chances are there to cause the death of the language. A Chakma speaker's regional area and clans can be identified by what diction they use. However, the folk dictions have lately become a sign of inferiority and backwardness among the Chakmas so, these folk terms are going extinct. Lately, Chakmas are becoming more and more inclined to the urban ideologies hence, they are adopting the urban culture that denotes the folk culture. The urban

⁵⁸ "Thus, linguicism can apply to (a) which language(s) one uses; (b) how one uses them; and (c) which language(s) one does NOT use/know or one is not competent in, all according to the norms of those who (arrogate to themselves the power to) judge others by their languages" Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, "Linguicism", *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics*: Malden, MA: Blackwell.

culture is heterogeneous, invariably impersonal, secular, disorganized and most importantly capitalistic whereas folk culture is homogenous, religious and completely opposite to urban culture. Indigenous people who live in the Hill Tracts region are always in contact with their community hence, the practice of the mother tongue is there. But going out of this region hampers this practice. Nowadays, most of the indigenous students are going to the cities after they complete their Intermediate Board exams, in the hope to receive a better quality of education and success thus, in order to cope with the urban pace they need to adapt the city environment. The adaptation refers to changes and modification of cultural manifestations.⁵⁹ But unfortunately, in the way of learning to cope with the city life they lose their folk cultures steeping into the web of city complexities. Hence, it can be said that apart from imperialism, it is linguisticism of the so called educated Chakma society, which is equally responsible for the negative changes like, class discrimination in Chakma culture.

4.2 The Chakma Society

Culture and society are intertwined. Edward Said in his *Culture and Imperialism* defines culture as a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society's reservoir of the best that has been known and thought.⁶⁰ That is why the depiction of Chakma society in the *Ubogeeet's* automatically upholds the culture of the community. Traditionally the *Ubogeeet* used to be the private songs and generally sung in private. Since the *Ubogeeet* contains references to sexual longings and desires, as well as the open exclamation of romantic love, it has been considered obscene and harmful to the young.⁶¹ Therefore, singing *Ubogeeets* in front of the elders and in public is considered offensive. The idea of *Ubogeeet* as folksongs however, is also imbued with the traditional values in Chakma society. In the above mentioned *Ubogeeet* the

⁵⁹ Md. Mustafa kamal Akand, "Folk Culture and Urban Adaptation: A Case Study of the Paharia in Rajshahi", p 44.

⁶⁰ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 1993, p-13.

⁶¹ This is a link to the article, "Chakma- Jummaland", published from the website "Voice of Jummaland". <https://sites.google.com/site/voiceofjummaland/chakma-ch.t>

lyricist creates the aura of a romantic relationship between a young boy and a young girl, while also giving the listeners an idea of the Chakma culture. Traditionally the opening few lines of the song have much to say about the society of the Chakma, as it describes the day to day workings and happenings of the people. The para-

“Male: O *Chikko* (dear) I don’t see my uncle aunt,

Have they gone to work?

You seem alone oh *Chikko* (dear),

in the monoghar.”

This song is written for the male singer who asks, if the parents of his beloved are at work, the implication is playful with a hint of the man’s sexual longing for his beloved. The parents leaving early in the morning for hard work is a common scenario in the Chakma community. The residents of Chittagong Hill Tracts are agrarian farmers.⁶² There are two types of cultivation in the region as- Jum⁶³ cultivation and plough cultivation. Since back then most of the Chakma’s were unaware of the paddy field cultivation, doing jum was most of their occupation for earnings. Man and women participate equally in the jum cultivation. Juming is crucial to Chakma culture. The vegetables and crops grown in the jum are different in taste and scent. As mentioned in the eighth paragraph of the song, the “mammara’ is a variety of cucumber locally grown in the hills. The song also describes a girl, who has “darker complexion” and who is alone in her house (*monoghar*)⁶⁴. *Monoghar* is the early pattern of Chakma houses [describe in a few sentences what the house looks like and is made of what] before the introduction of the Bengali style house which is built on the ground. In the song the girl feels insecure because of her darker complexion that also gives an idea on the notion of

⁶² Sudhin kumar Chakma, *Changing pattern Of The Chakma Society In The Chittagong Hill Tracts*, Khudra Nree-gosthir Sangskritic Institute, Khagrachari, p 30.

⁶³ Jum- “A primitive type of agriculture which was practiced by the pioneer agriculturists in many parts of the world and is found to have survived in some areas where it is practiced today.” The practice is also known as slash and burn cultivation”, idib, p 30.

⁶⁴ Monoghar- A house on raised platform, built with wood, bamboo and a thatched roof.

beauty among the Chakmas, who prefer fairer complexion. The notion of beauty in fair complexion also represents the racist side of Chakma culture. The main theme of the *Ubogeeet* lies in the middle section of the song. The middle section attests to more romantic emotions of the singers. The romantic and equally sensual gesture of the young lady urging to fan the young man with her 'khadi'⁶⁵ gives the listeners an idea about the traditional attire of Chakma women. Another intrinsic part of the Chakma society is the use of rice beer which the male part mentions in the seventh para in the *Ubogeeet*. The rituals and ceremonies connected with marriage, vary in different societies and cultures. Rice beer in Chakma society is being used in the auspicious occasions only. The young man asking the girl to visit her home with a rice beer urn is actually a way of giving proposal to the bride's father. However, the society that is depicted in the *Ubogeeet* is different from the 21st century Chakma society. It changed like other colonized societies of the world but of course in a slower pace and in a different way. Because, education is a slow process to manipulate a group ever since Chakmas were introduced to western and Bangla version of education.

4.3 Evolution in Chakma music

The southeast region of Bangladesh is a borderland and of scant national consideration. The southeast region, Chittagong Hill Tracts, is considered to be the remotest part of the country. Until 1976 the region was out of the reach of newspaper and print media. After the liberation war of 1971, Bangladesh Betar operated 12 regional stations throughout the country. Two out of twelve regional stations were established in the south-eastern part of Bangladesh for special concentration on ethnic minorities living in the Chittagong region⁶⁶. For the indigenous people, the indigenous language programme was a very welcome contribution to the notion of

⁶⁵ Khadi- The second piece of the traditional Chakma women attire. It is basically a piece of cloth around 2.5 feet long, used as a breast band.

⁶⁶ Md Abdul Hoque, "Only a Single Programme in Radio Can Give a Feeling Of Being a Member Of The World.", 2009, p 4.

promoting local indigenous language. The radio programs ‘Paharika’ (20th August 1979) and ‘Girisur, Rangasur’ were broadcasted seven days a week.⁶⁷ The broadcasting of Chakma music has benefitted the community and improved the economic condition to some individual⁶⁸. The industrialization of the modern world has brought a huge change into the Chakma music world. In the late 20th century singing was no more a profession of the ordinary people, few Chakma elites have also took this as a profession. The royal family member’s participation are remarkable. The Chakma music found a new dimension in the modern musical instruments like- violin, musical keyboards, drums and many more. A subtle change was there in their music. In this paper I will discuss about a late 20th century popular romantic song, ‘gaburi jei bereyoi⁶⁹’ or ‘young lady let us tour’, which is again translated by me. The song is written and composed by renowned musician Ratan Tripura and sung by Subrata Chakma and Banashree Chakma. The modern love song is sung with modern musical instruments. The modern song is

⁶⁷ Md Abdul Hoque, “Only a Single Programme in Radio Can Give a Feeling Of Being a Member Of The World.”, 2009, p 2.

⁶⁸ “radio has created an awareness of education, sanitation and family planning; indigenous groups have found themselves to be members of a world indigenous community; the indigenous groups have found inspiration to protect and disseminate their language, culture and heritage which in turn has encouraged the promotion of lyricists, singers and writers among themselves”, Md Abdul Hoque, “Only a Single Programme in Radio Can Give a Feeling Of Being a Member Of The World.”, 2009, p-8.

⁶⁹ The song is retrieved from <https://youtu.be/eSbpM5ShozI>

The lyrics of this song are translated by me.

The lyrics-

Male-Young lady let us tour, to see my house
I have built a house to marry you.

Female- Young man let us tour, to see your house
That you have built to marry me.

Female- Your sweet talks melt my heart,
But what hope has brought you here
If, you are not giving gold and silver.

Male- I will give 7 notes of 20 rupees
For daaba (a tradition where the groom provides goods to his father in law)
I will give gold for your ears and hands,
Silver bangles for your ankles
To marry and take you.

Male- Under the moonlight of Fagun(Bangla month) month
We will sit on the Udon(the front yard of home)
Sitting side by side
We will talk about our hearts.

Female-You will talk about yours
I will talk about mine
We will pass this life
In happiness and pain.

different from the traditional *Ubogeeet* and is sung publicly. The modern Chakma love songs rejected the conservative idea of singing love songs in private and adapted the shorter length of songs. The commonalities between the *Ubogeeet* and modern Chakma love songs were the essence of language and depiction of Chakma culture. As in the song ‘gaburi jei bereyoi’, mentions a custom of Chakma marriage known as ‘Daaba dena’ which refers to money or goods or animals, that the father of the bride makes to the groom through negotiations and groom must fulfill it to proceed the marriage. The young lady in the song demands gold and silver as it is the custom among the Chakma to wear gold in marriage ceremonies. In answering, the young man promises the young lady 7 notes of 20 rupees, gold for the hands and ears, and silver bangles for the ankles. Chakma women traditionally do not wear anklets rather they wear a form of bangles on their ankles called *banguri*⁷⁰ which the young man mentions in the song.

However, an analysis on the love songs of last decade not only introduces the different versions of Chakma songs but also concerns the significant loss of Chakma cultural values. The love songs of the past decade are mostly about the celebration of the nature and their intense emotions for their loving ones. A popular romantic love song ‘Hoda De’⁷¹ sung by Novonil Chakma, an Indian born Chakma, and Sourabhee Debbarma, who is an Indian and the lyrics are written by Debal Chakma. The song is no doubt melodious and romantic but the fact is that the song does not carry the essence of Chakma culture, and this is the same case in other Chakma love songs that have been produced in the last decade. The ancient Chakma culture has become alien to the most educated members of this ethnic community in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. There is a proverb among the Chakmas that says that ‘education is the backbone

⁷⁰ Banguri is a traditional ankle ornament, which is round in shape alike the bangles adorned on the wrists.

⁷¹ This song is retrieved from You Tube <https://youtu.be/cF3hOR8tAJg>.

of a nation' but a foreign education that is insensitive to the local culture, prescribes foreign literature and theories, is also the backbone of inequality.

Ubogeeet folk songs are a direct reflection of Chakma society and culture, but a comparative study to the contemporary, modern Chakma songs will reflect a much changed Chakma society. Culture is not monolithic as Edward Said reminds us in *Culture and Imperialism*, it changes with time for better or worse and with contact with other cultures. But I argue that the changes in the Chakma community have brought much negativity because the changes have been brought in the name of "civilizing the uncivilized". The so called civilization came only after considering the Chakmas as 'uncivilized'. Education is fundamental to development and growth but a pattern of education that is founded by racism raises questions. Education in CHT⁷² commenced with the foundation of a boarding school at Chandraghona in October, 1862, under the British colonization.⁷³ The school was providing elementary education until in 1892-93 the number of school of all categories reached 36 in numbers. Education in Indian subcontinent during the colonial period is incomplete without Macaulay's 'Minutes on Indian Education' in India. Thomas Babington Macaulay was a British politician who came to India in 1834 and served till 1838. Although his stay in Indian subcontinent was for a short period of time but he left the impact of forever. Macaulay in his essay tries to establish an idea of superiority and inferiority. To be more specific, the superiority of the west (particularly Britain) and inferiority of the rest. Macaulay was successful in implementing his ideology in the education system of Indian subcontinent. Bengali scholar Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar was a follower of Macaulay's ideology in the essay, who tried to implement 'the downward filtration theory'⁷⁴ among the mass. Educating elites in the western education system was the first

⁷² CHT- Chittagong Hill Tracts.

⁷³ Sudhin kumar Chakma, "*Changing pattern Of The Chakma Society In The Chittagong Hill Tracts*", p-9.

⁷⁴ Downward Filtration Theory believes in passing the knowledge or something through the elites to the mass. Thomas Babington Macaulay, "Minutes on Indian Education", 1835

priority of the elite scholars. This practice is no different in the Chakma society. Economically, the upper strata of the Chakma society took the advantage of western education⁷⁵ and became the so called “educated class” of the society. This shows that economic condition is a major determinant for the ethnic ordinary population to receive education. During the Pakistan period an aggressive policy of establishing primary school was implemented which increased the importance of education in CHT.⁷⁶ The Pakistan government ended the practice of teaching the ethnic people in their mother tongue and dispensed it with the textbooks written in Bengali which provides the knowledge of Bengali. After the liberation war in 1971, this practice continued till in 2017⁷⁷ the government passed the bill that demands primary education to indigenous children in their mother languages. The indigenous students finally are supposed to get their education in their mother tongue, after around 70 years of learning in Bengali and of being a vernacular in Bengali. The horrific impact of the majority culture was revealed when a newspaper published an article under the name “Indigenous Language Textbooks Collect Dust”⁷⁸. The article reveals that despite of having textbooks in their mother tongue, the students are unable to receive their education in it because there are no experts to teach them in their tongue. Apart from failing to receive education in their mother tongue, the indigenous communities have also failed to understand the necessity of their unique identity. Because the education in the Bengali medium has been introduced to them as a medium of development

⁷⁵ Sudhin Kumar Chakma, “*Changing pattern Of The Chakma Society In The Chittagong Hill Tracts*”, p-10.

⁷⁶ Sudhin Kuman Chakma, “*Changing pattern Of The Chakma Society In The Chittagong Hill Tracts*”, p-11.

⁷⁷ Mikrak Mrong Shuhel, “Indigenous Language in Education”, this article got published on 16 February, 2016 in The Daily Star newspaper.

<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjf3Pu5psTwAhUxzjgGHXHsCDcQFjAAegQIAhAD&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.thedailystar.net%2Fflaw-our-rights%2Findigenous-language-education-511519&usg=AOvVaw0JBet99VKPv-jRYfbt8hdE>

⁷⁸ Nuruchsafa Manik, “Indigenous Language Collect Dust”, this article got published on 21st February, 2018 in The Dhaka Tribune a newspaper.

<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjf3Pu5psTwAhUxzjgGHXHsCDcQFjAKegQIFxAD&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.dhakatribune.com%2Fbangladesh%2Feducation%2F2018%2F02%2F21%2Ftextbooks-in-indigenous-languages-remain-shelved&usg=AOvVaw0Hk-ntvd66Y8lnLaqUpI4L>

and civilization. The losing of the *Ubogees* are one of the signs of this ideology of superior and inferior culture. *Ubogees* are traditionally sung in the hills, but as the Chittagong Hill Tracts started its journey to modernity, it divided the hill tracts into towns and villages. During the weave of modernity *Ubogees* did not evolve alike the societies hence, remained as a part of the villages. Villages in the modern world are seen as 'backward' and 'uncivilized', equally, the once popular folk love songs, *Ubogees* have also become a sign of backwardness. Hence, the love songs once so popular among the communities are no more popular, rather have become a song of shame and disgrace.

Chapter 5

Bangladeshi Education System For/Against Diversity

5.1 State colonialism and ‘inferior’ identity

Indigenous identity is one of the major issues faced by the ethnically diverse people living in Bangladesh. Historically Bangladesh has diverse languages, religions and ethnicities. But on account of the ignorance and chauvinistic mindset of the Bengalis, the nation and its people hardly recognized their existence.⁷⁹ According to The Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, article 6.2 A, all people living in Bangladesh have only one identity and that is “Bangalee”.⁸⁰ This constitution clearly denies the existence of groups who possess different ethnic identities while at the same time, excludes people who do not identify themselves as Bengali. Moreover, the exclusion of ‘non-Bengali’ ethnic groups is a chauvinistic approach that validates the homogenization of the state. Under the colonial discourse the exclusion of certain population has created two groups in the nation, the superior or elite Bengali group and the excluded and subaltern groups, termed as ‘upajati’ or sub-national. Bangladesh violates the right to self-identification and self-determination by referring to the indigenous communities in degrading terms such as- “upajati” or sub-national, “khudro jatishaotta” or minor races, “nrigoshthi” or ethnic sects and “shomprodai” or communities.⁸¹ The state imposes these specific terms to identify the ‘other’ ‘non Bengali’ communities, which are strictly rejected by them (indigenous communities). The terms- “upajati”, “khudro jatishaotta”, “nrigoshthi” and “somprodai” devalue indigenous national, social and cultural identity of these people. In social

⁷⁹ “National Seminar on Indigenous Peoples in Bangladesh: Human Rights and Sustainable Development Goals”, 2015

⁸⁰ “The people of Bangladesh shall be known as Bangalees as a nation and the citizens of Bangladesh shall be known as Bangladeshies”, “The Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh”.

⁸¹ “The Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh”, article 23, part II.

stratification these words designate lower social ranking.⁸² However, around 50 years ago it was East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) that fought against this ideology of homogenizing a state. Bangladesh has a history of immense sufferings before its independence from Pakistan. Cultural clash was a significant aspect behind the chaos between East and West Pakistan. East Pakistan Within the time period of 1947-71 embraced Bengali linguistic nationalism which worked as a ladder to emerge of the sovereign nation-state of Bangladesh. The time period has been also phrased as internal-colonialism; while anti-colonialism movement followed temperament of nationalism.

Ironically, after the country achieved its independence, it became the neo colonial power and marginalized the minority populace of its country. The indigenous population had to struggle for 39 years long until The Bangladesh Education Policy 2010 ensured the right of all children to receive mother-tongue education. It is the hypocrisy of the state that took such a long time to realize the importance of mother tongue in ethnic minority communities living in the country.

The national policy of Bangladesh uses various degrading terms to identify the indigenous people of Bangladesh, which alienate the people socially, economically and culturally. Indigenous people of Bangladesh have been struggling for their recognition as “indigenous people” ever since the government has denied the existence of ‘indigenous’ people in the country on 30th June, 2011.⁸³ Although, until 2009 the government of Bangladesh itself celebrated the ‘World Indigenous Day’, but the United Nations declaration of indigenous rights in 2007 might not have served the colonial interest of the government that resulted the 15th amendment of the constitution of Bangladesh. Once dominated and extorted by the British and the Pakistan governments, the region (East Pakistan) itself has grown to be a

⁸² Farhat Jahan, “Indigenous Identity Desputes in Democratic Bangladesh”, p- 7.

⁸³ Cacilie Mikkelsen ,“*The Indigenous World 2012*”, p- 336.

colonizer of sorts. The long history has witnessed the strategy to rule over a region is to attack the natives morally. Moral degradation fastens the process of imperialism.

5.2 Language and Literature

Bangla is the state language of Bangladesh and is the mother of tongue of 98% of the population. The rest 2% of the population have a variety of mother tongues and these are varied and neglected. A mother tongue plays a vital role in framing the thinking and emotions of a people. It is also the most powerful cultural instrument that helps to preserve and develop the tangible and intangible heritages of a community. The 2% population of Bangladesh speak around 39 different languages, one of them is the Chakma language. Like many other communities, the Chakma's have their own language and alphabets. Although the majority of the Chakma's are fluent in their mother tongue, a good number of them do not know how to read and write the mother tongue. This inability to read and write in one's mother tongue is perhaps a result of a long history of cultural and colonial oppression. The East India Company at first declared the Chittagong Hill Tracts to be an "excluded area" and never interfered with the internal economy of the hills until the 1860s. After that the British government had its first school in 1863, a boarding school at Chandraghona.⁸⁴ The first school established among the indigenous communities was a missionary school and hence, that preached the superiority of the western culture. During the British colonial period the version of education was in English, Urdu and Bangla were the options. During the colonial period, indigenous students were expected to become vernacular in English and taught them that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India. Then during the Pakistan era it changed and the version of education was Urdu and later in Bangla⁸⁵. They read and wrote

⁸⁴ Sudhin Kumar Chakma, "*Changing Pattern of the Chakma Society in the Chittagong Hill Tracts*", , Khudra Nree-gosthir Sangskritic Institute, Khagrachari, p 30p-9.

⁸⁵ Sudhin Kumar Chakma, "*Changing Pattern of the Chakma Society in the Chittagong Hill Tracts*", Khudra Nree-gosthir Sangskritic Institute, Khagrachari, p 30 p-11.

in Urdu as the second language, serving West Pakistan became imperative during this period. After the independence of Bangladesh the aim changed into becoming a Bengali 'bhodrolok'. Therefore, ever since the indigenous communities have encountered the western education system, all they have been learning is about the language and the culture of the one in power and educated. In short, for more than 100 years the indigenous communities who have access to education are learning that they are 'inferior', that they are subalterns, and an 'outsider' community in Bangladesh. Among the indigenous communities, the Chakmas had maximum access to education because of their geographical location in the hill tracts⁸⁶. Linguistic error and illiteracy in mother tongues should not be a surprising issue for, indigenous children for the past century or so have been growing up speaking, singing and praising a language that is not their own. The Bangladeshi anthem song 'Amar sonar Bangla, ami tomai valobashi' is an alien song to the indigenous children, because they do not call their homeland 'Bangla' and in school assemblies when they sing the song they do not feel the love, they just practice what they have memorized.

Every day in the school grounds what indigenous children are becoming is the subject of colonial split, the split consciousness of being both identities. Their conscious mind sings the anthem while their unconscious mind sings a song in their mother tongue. All they are learning is that their mother tongue has no value. So they should not be talking or singing in their mother tongue to be a good student. Hence, just providing primary books in few 'ethnic minority' languages is going to change nothing but as if putting a tag of 'discounted' on a product, while the price remains the same. Teaching the indigenous children to be indigenous is not going to help until or unless the general textbooks are humane enough to teach the real history of

⁸⁶ Idib, "The literacy of the Chakmas as such could not be ascertained because no separate survey for each ethnic group has so far been undertaken. It is to be noted that among the local people the Chakmas are highly educated in the region." pp 9,10.

Bangladesh which includes the indigenous people. To explain them about the level of hunger and the environment that makes the indigenous people to eat snakes, frogs, pork and snails. Having a different mother tongue is not a matter of shame, having a different culture means having a different literature and a person with yellow skin, smaller eyes and flatter nose can also be a citizen of Bangladesh. The necessities of learning the state language teaches a young learner to devalue the mother tongue and thus cause linguistic error. That is why learners neither gain expertise in mother tongue nor in the state driven official language. The hegemonic education system also excludes the rich and vast literatures that the indigenous communities have been preserving. The exclusion of indigenous literature from school textbooks means depriving the future generations of their history.

Literature is not only meant to provide pleasure but helps us to understand things with empathy. What it does besides giving pleasure is that it enriches us with the history, the history that prepares us for the future. Literature might come in a fictional form but it always comes with the lessons that can save us from the upcoming disasters. That is why as Edward Said in his “Culture and Imperialism” has suggested about the “contrapuntal reading”. Because it is the contrapuntal reading of history that enables us to understand the necessity of an inferior to become a superior. Reading the literature contrapuntally helps us to understand the power of the inferior who makes the superior.⁸⁷

5.3 Becoming the “superior Self”

The linguistically, physically and culturally different communities in Bangladesh have always been ‘othered’. They are considered inferior to the mainstream Bengalis. As a result, the so called educated people in those communities struggle throughout their lives to become the

⁸⁷ Edward Said, “In an important sense, we are dealing with the formation of cultural identities understood not as essentializations (although part of their enduring appeal is that they seem· and are considered to be like essentializations) but as contrapuntal ensembles, for it is the case that no identity can ever exist by itself and without an array of opposites,” *Culture and Imperialism*, p 52.

superior self or a self that considers itself better than others. As said earlier, the dilemma between the conscious and unconscious mind of the indigenous students make the subjects of colonial split. The conscious mind and the unconscious mind within them gets split. But the thing is, psychological colonization not only splits the subject but also splits the indigenous communities. However, it is the hegemonic education system that psychologically convince the indigenous reader to act inferior. As Frantz Fanon says about the vicious circle in which at all cost the socially defined “inferior” tries to prove their richness of thought and equal value of their intellect to the socially defined ‘superior’.⁸⁸ The reason for calling this a vicious circle is because it limits one’s ability. That the so called “inferior” never tries to become bigger or greater than the so called “superior”. The same picture can be seen in the Chakma society as well. Chakma’s are socially defined as ‘inferior’ so when they reach the hegemonic education system, the highest thing they aspire to become is as successful as a Bengali or a westerner. The fact is, a Chakma can never be a Bengali or an American, the same goes for the Bengali and the American. The problem with this aspiration is what makes the educated Chakmas aim to become alike the oppressors who claim themselves better than the rest. To become one of the majority it causes them to distance from their roots. The educated Chakma eventually feels at a given stage that her/his race does not understand her anymore. As a result they create an intentional gap between them and their identities, because their root identity suddenly becomes a matter of shame to them. An identity is build out of one’s language and culture, so when the educated Chakma aspires to become someone they are not, they are actually rejecting their own history and heritage.

Furthermore, the colonial class accepts the socially “inferior” only then when s/he is ready to make more “inferiors” for the empire. And the inferior agrees to it because as Fanon claims, when the educated ‘inferior’ convey the master's orders to their fellows, they too enjoy a certain

⁸⁸ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, p 12.

position of honor. And they enjoy it because all these educational years through various theories he has been trained to behave like a master. On the other hand, in the indigenous societies an outsider is welcomed but not worshipped. They tend to worship their own people who, they consider intellectual. So, the easier way to colonize the indigenous societies is by its own people. Hegemonic education helps the colonial state to accomplish it. The other way to accomplish it is by providing power to a particular group. The generalization of indigenous communities under the name Chakma is a political strategy to avoid the different identities of the indigenous communities. The identification of Chakma as the most advanced among all the other communities carries a voice that Chakma's are 'superior' to the rest of the communities. The unnecessarily highlighting of the Chakma's in media, research papers or newspapers can cause another split. This paper considers it as a threat because the three major indigenous groups Chakma, Marma and Tripura are shadowing the other indigenous communities who needs crucial attention.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Literature is an intrinsic part of human culture and civilization. It is impossible to define the past without a memory of the present, and literature captures that memory. The reason behind writing this thesis paper has been to understand the necessity of literature to understand a culture. Culture is all those practices as Edward Said has defined in *Culture and Imperialism*, that exist in an aesthetic form in the society and that its principle aim is pleasure⁸⁹. Apart from the regular practices, culture is also preserved through literature, whether it is in a written or oral form.

Literature embodies culture and culture embodies history. History defines the cultures of the past and that is why it is a part of human culture. The first chapter of this thesis looked at the recollection of both written and oral Chakma history. Although the Chakma community has their own alphabets, they did not have written record of their history until 190 when Raja Bhuban Mohan Roy encouraged Satish Chandra Ghosh, a high school teacher to write the book *Chakma Jati: Jatiya Chitra o Itibritto*. Later on Raja Bhuban Mohan Roy also wrote a book on the Chakma history named called *Chakma Rajbongsher Itihas* in 1919. Interestingly, both books were written in Bangla and not in the Chakma language. Apart from these two books there are other examples of Chakma oral literature that have been transmitted from generation to generation for centuries.

The second chapter of this thesis analyzed the once popular love song called *Ubogeeet*. The *Ubogeeet* songs were used as a communication between the young Chakma and Tanchangya lovers. The songs also describe and represent Chakma culture. However, the modern notion of

⁸⁹ Edward Said, "First of all it means all those practices, like the arts of description, communication, and representation, that have relative autonomy from the economic, social, and political realms and that often exist in aesthetic forms, one of whose principal aims is pleasure.", *Culture and imperialism*, P 12.

industrialization in the late 19th century has evolved the Chakma music arena. As the time went by and the community grew with the hegemonic education system, *Ubogeeet* songs slowly lost all its charm among its own people. The third chapter analyzed the impact of hegemonic education system upon the Chakma community. The chauvinistic education system does not celebrate diversity, it teaches homogeneity. The Bangladeshi education system does not understand the barriers of a student whose mother language is not Bangla. The current education system of Bangladesh teaches a 6 year old student how to fight against the other for a materialistic achievement. It teaches the values of materialism over spirituality. On the other hand, indigenous students are left to compete/fight against Bengali students in a Bengali favored environment. In schools and education institutions through numerous theories the indigenous students are taught how to be a vernacular in Bangla or English. So, when the indigenous student reaches a certain maturity in life, s/he finds alienated from both societies. As a result, s/he aspires to be the one in power and slowly pretends to be a part of the majority Bengali.

While a selective literature teaches us to be biased, a general literature allows us to reread and reanalyze history. Literature helps us to find the gaps that a chauvinistic state attempts to cover over. It is literature again that allows its readers or listeners to understand about the conflicts of the past in a different way. That everything that happens have a reaction from both sides, submission of oneself is also a reaction. Studying literature in a contrapuntal way helps us to awaken the unconscious state of our minds and see both the sides of the story. To decide in the present reconsideration of the past is vital. Chakmas revolted because they historically have been doing that for a long time. As Chakmas have no documented history of where they came from and all they have is oral literature, the oral literature needs to be well researched and well preserved. The Bangladesh government has not yet sponsored research to find the historical roots of the many indigenous communities that are native to the country possibly because it

will put the state's political stand contradictory. So, the only way to understand the history of the Chakmas is through their literature. To understand the political environment in Chittagong Hill Tracts the contemporary literature is important. The research papers on the past conflict is not going to help to understand what the common people are feeling, what is their perspective. Literature is produced by and produced for the common people. It is important to understand the psychological trauma of the common indigenous people that the past, the civil war has caused. Not everybody wants to fight.

Because writing about the conflict most of the time represents the violence and oppressions in a region that foreshadows the rich literature that already exist and literature that has grown out of trauma by the conflict. Through literature one is allowed to understand the perspective of the oppressed and as well as that of an oppressor. Just as the once colonized realized the brutality of colonialism and rose against it, the indigenous people need to decolonize themselves. We do not understand the injustice until we know what justice is. Analyzing the conflict monotonously sometimes silences the reasons for not practicing the violence. Monotonously writing about the conflict of Chittagong Hill Tracts sometimes glorifies the violence committed by both sides.

Culture changes with time and according to external as well internal circumstances. It is important to understand the history of the Chittagong Hill Tracts conflict. But it is also important to recognize issues like class, gender and ethnic disparities faced by indigenous societies. The Bengali majority are unaware of the indigenous literature so are the indigenous communities. All they know is what the state wants them to know.

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