

“Let’s Go Back to Go Forward”

History and Practice of Schooling in the Indigenous Communities in Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh



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Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tromsø, Norway

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Thesis submitted by:

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Abstract

This research deals with the history of education for the indigenous peoples in Chittagong Hills Tracts (CHT) Bangladesh who, like many places under postcolonial nation states, have no constitutional recognition, nor do their languages have a place in the state education system. Comprising data from literature and empirical study in CHT and underpinned on a conceptual framework on indigenous peoples' education stages within state system in the global perspective, it analyzes in-depth on how the formal education for the indigenous peoples in CHT was introduced, evolved and came up to the current practices. From a wider angle, it focuses on how education originally intended to 'civilize' indigenous peoples subsequently, in post colonial era, with some change, still bears that colonial legacy which is heavily influenced by hegemony of 'progress' and 'modernism' (anti-traditionalism) and serves to the non-indigenous dominant group interests. Thus the government suggested Bengali-based monolingual education practice which has been ongoing since the beginning of the nation-state for citizens irrespective of ethnic and lingual background, as this research argued, is a silent policy of assimilation for the indigenous peoples. However, after decades of its existence in the region the monolingual paradigm appears to be shaken by the ethno-political struggle locally and endangered language survival movements nationally and internationally. This process is beginning evidenced by the presence of NGO-based schools, which are in a process to off-shooting mother-tongue based schooling for the indigenous children in the territory. By analyzing this historical development related to the forces at global, national and local level, the study is an attempt to define the changes within the conceptual framework and explain how changes have happened and the prospect for future change.

Dedicated to the memory of my father

Md. Hatem Ali Miah (1939-2008)

He died from a heart attack while I was away on my fieldwork for this thesis. He was very happy to see me enrolled in this Master Programme. He would have been very happy to have seen me successfully complete my master.

Foreword

“Let’s Go Back to Go Forward” is an outcome of research on the history of indigenous peoples elementary schooling in Bangladesh through qualitative approach¹ that incorporated insights from indigenous paradigm. In methodological jargon, one could articulate, I agree to some extent, that the indigenous methodology is a part, generated as complimentary or even extended or revised version of the existing qualitative approach. Insights that I got from the ‘indigenous paradigm’ suggest that researchers’ understanding with the notion of subjectivity as well as sensitized outlook towards the subject(s) -the indigenous people or issues relation indigenous peoples. I want to emphasize that the idea of the paradigm suggests doing research not only on them but also for them.

From the start of the research to the end of writing of findings, not surprisingly it was heavily a work of ‘chance and choice’. Qualitative research is an ongoing dialogue between the researcher and the reality in the field s/he encounters.

The first part of the research is more historical and describes and analyzes the beginning and evolvement of formal schooling in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) as far as the medium of instruction for the indigenous peoples is concerned. This part has been analyzed with the overall social and political growth surroundings the region. Next part of the study explores current practices of schooling and medium of instruction with data collected from the study area in CHT from a social anthropological point of view.

My first interest in this research topic of indigenous peoples’ education in Bangladesh arose through my professional background as researcher at BRAC, Bangladesh.

I have used the terms ‘schooling’ to mean education especially in pre-primary and primary stages (below grade I to grade V, target age group 4/5-10/11 years). By ‘pupil’ I mean learners enrolled in those lower grades of the education system. Although there are several related terms like bi-lingual, multi-lingual, multi-cultural, bilingual multicultural etc. indicate use of mother-tongue in schooling, I prefer to use mother-tongue based education (MTE) through-out this thesis.

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Mohammed Mahbubuul Kabir

¹ Qualitative research as an approach has been standing as a counter paradigm of so called positivism, the philosophical standing of quantitative research (Holliday 2002).

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List of Acronyms and Definition of Local Terms

Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
BRAC	Building Resources Across Communities
CB	Caritas Bangladesh
CHT	Chittagong Hill Tracts
DPE	Directorate of Primary Education
EIC	Education for Indigenous Children
ELC	Essential Learning Continuum
HDC	Hill Drastic Council
PCJSS (shortly PSS)	Parbotta Chattogram Jana Shonhoti Somiti
MTE	Mother-tongue based Education
NCTB	National Curriculum and Textbook Board
RED	Research and Evaluation Division
RDC	Research and Development Collective
UNECEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UN	United Nations
ZKS	Zabarang Kalyan Samity

Definition of Local Terms

Adivasi	Indigenous
Bawm	Name of an indigenous group in CHT
Chak	Name of an indigenous group in CHT
Chakma	Name of an indigenous group in CHT
Garó	Name of an indigenous group (also know as Mandi)
Jhum/Jhoom	Slash and burn agriculture
Jungly	People live in jungle, used to mean so called 'uncivilized' people
Jumma	Peoples cultivating Jhum
Kyong	Temple-based schooling
Khumi	Name of an indigenous group in CHT
Lusai	Name of an indigenous group in CHT
Madrassa	Madrassa is religious school, particularly for Muslim children
Mro	Name of an indigenous group in CHT
Oraon	Name of an indigenous group in North-West Bangladesh
Para	A small part of a village
Para kendros	UNECEF supported pre-schooling centre
Pahari	Peoples live in the hill
Shishu Shreni	Pri-primary
Sadri	Language of Oraon indigenous group
Rakhain	Name of an indigenous group in CHT
Tanghangya	Name of an indigenous group in CHT
Vasa Andolon	Language Movement
Upazati	Sub-nation
A-solay	in fact

Contents

Abstract	2
Foreword	4
Acknowledgement	5
List of Acronyms and Definition of Local Terms	7
<i>Acronyms</i>	7
<i>Definition of Local Terms</i>	7
Chapter 1. Introduction	12
1.2 <i>Nation-state, assimilation policy, education of indigenous peoples: Literature Review</i>	19
1.3 <i>Purpose of the research: Scrutinize the medium of instruction in schooling</i>	25
1.4 <i>Research questions: Language in schooling</i>	26
1.5 <i>Methodology : A qualitative slot with indigenous paradigm</i>	26
1.5.1 <i>Methods of data collection</i>	28
1.5.2 <i>Time and places: The important tasks</i>	29
1.5.3 <i>Overcoming objectivity: The way I was looking for data</i>	30
1.6 <i>Study Location: Dhighinala, Khagrachari, CHT</i>	31
1.7 <i>Recollecting myself in this research: Confession to the readership</i>	32
1.8 <i>Analytical structure</i>	34
1.9 <i>Limitation of the study</i>	36
1.10 <i>Outline of chapters: Structure of the thesis</i>	37
Chapter 2 From ‘Primitivism’ to ‘Civilization’: Schooling in the British and Pakistani Era 1757-1970...	38
2.1 <i>Perspective on colonization</i>	39
2.2 <i>CHT under British colony and Pakistan state</i>	39
2.3 <i>Schooling in CHT at pre-Bangladesh period</i>	41
2.3.1 <i>Pre-British (ancient- 1760): Schooling in Vihara and Pathshala</i>	41
2.3.2 <i>British colonial period (1761-1947): Beginning of formal schooling</i>	42
2.3.3 <i>Pakistan period (1947-1971): Expansion of modern schooling</i>	44
2.4 <i>An analysis on the notion, practice and consequence of formal education</i>	45
Chapter 3: Nationalism and Monolingualism: Bangladesh Era from 1970s-1990s	49
3.2 <i>Matrix Language: Domination discourse of a nation state</i>	51

3.3 Bengali language and embryonic nationalism: where are 'others' in the new state?	52
3.4 Matrix language: Tool of silencing other voices	54
3.5 Monolingual schooling challenged: global, national and local forces.....	55
3.6 Monolingualism in schooling: Pseudo assimilation and the resistance	57
Chapter 4. Towards Mother-Tongue based Schooling: A Paradigm Shift (2000s - Present)	59
4.1 Various streams with cultural unimportance: Schooling for indigenous children in CHT.....	60
4.2 Dominant language based schooling: Matrix of exclusions	62
4.3 Changed position in the government's outlook: Where is the mother-tongue in the classroom?	66
4.4 Negotiating with the national policy and local reality: A sloth process	67
4.5 Case of a complementary initiative: A local attempt for language survival.....	68
4.6 Towards the mother tongue education: NGO initiatives	69
4.7 Changing outlook and limited initiative: Paradigm shifting?	71
5. Mother-tongue based Education (MTE): Perceptions and Practices in CHT	71
5.1 Ensuring MTE: Global debate and local reality for indigenous pupils.....	73
5.2 Relevance of competency primary schooling for indigenous children of CHT.....	75
5.3 Practice of MTE in Khagrachari: Comparative Scrutiny in two cases	76
5.4 Challenges for MT Education in Bangladesh.....	80
5.4.1 Relation between the organizations: lack of coordination.....	81
5.4.2 Popular perception.	81
5.4.3 Government recognition and patronization: lack of fresh understanding.....	81
5.4.4 Mainstream hegemony: Within and outside of the classroom.....	82
5.5 Perception of the stakeholders on the MTE.....	82
5.5.1 The Chittagong Hill District Council, Khagrachari: Hazed with 'development'	82
5.5.2 Local education office: prescribed for 'assimilation is the way'	84
5.5.3 Community people: Digesting the new ideas	85
5.5.4 Local initiator: vibrant and network	85
5.5.5 MLE school teachers: Excited and engaged in the task.....	86
5.5.6 Bengali school teacher: Concerned with practicability	86
5.5.7 Local traditional king: Let's hope for the best	87
5.6 Integration or segregation? : MTE and the future of the indigenous peoples in CHT	88
6. Discussion and Conclusion: "Going Back to Go Forward"	90
References.....	97

Appendix A: Photos of Chakma peoples in different age and gender in study area..... 105

Appendix B: Correspondence between conceptual framework and observed circumstances..... 106

Appendix C: The 53 terminal competencies (English Version) for the primary pupils 107

The Leader

Gilbert Perez, November 1932

*They want us to go to school
And to turn the pages of books...
Why learn the language of books
When the forest speaks to you?*

*One cannot eat books
And pens and pencils are poor weapons
To kill the deer of the mountains
And the grunting boar.
Books, pencils and the black
Speaking walls
Only weaken the hand that pulls the bow;
Had I read the language
Of the trail more
And of the talking leaves less,
The twang of my bow
Would not have been
Only an echo in the thickets,
And I –
But a ghost in the forests
Of my fathers.*

Chapter 1. Introduction

The formation of the nation-state led to the denial of diversity of cultures and value systems of peoples and the creation of a single standardized pattern.

M.N. Karna (2000) Language, Religion and National Identity

It is now the social scientist's foremost political and intellectual task - for here the two coincide - to make clear the elements of contemporary uneasiness and indifference.

C. Wright Mills (1959) The Sociological Imagination

There has been a common trend among the different nation-states that through 'nationalism project', in certain stages of their development, they try to assimilate peoples who differ from its mainstream population in terms of ethnicity and language (Minde 2003, Dimitrova 2000, Marr 2000). The imposition of dominant language(s) as compulsory and/or only medium of instruction in school is the most common weapon used for this. Applying assimilation policy on the indigenous peoples through boarding schooling is well recognized phenomenon in the history of Canada, USA, Australia, New Zealand and Nordic countries (Trafzer et.al. 2006, Smith 2009). It is, however, assimilation by requiring a compulsory medium of instruction that is a less focused on by researchers in many countries especially in Asia. Thus, how the schooling process with its medium of instruction went through the indigenous communities in an Asian country, where concept of 'indignity' is difficult to establish and where governments deny presence of any 'indigenous peoples' needs to be scrutinized. Besides, in a developing society where ethnic minority indigenous peoples are all the more marginalized and the claim of indigenous rights itself is heavily disputed, more research attention is demanded. Thus, this study aims to investigate the history and current practice of elementary schooling focusing on the medium of instruction in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), an area where most of the (claimed) indigenous peoples of Bangladesh reside.

1.1 Conceptualizing indigenous peoples in the Bangladesh context

Before going any further, as a point of departure, the primary question on the meaning of indigenous people, the controversy it generated and presumably who they are in context of Bangladesh need to be dealt with. The term 'indigenous' is derived from Latin word *indigena* (a native), late Latin form *indigen-us* (born in a country) meaning 'born or produced naturally in a land or region; native or belonging naturally to (the soil, region, etc.)'. It is used

primarily for aboriginal inhabitants or natural products (Oxford English Dictionary 1989). Broadly, Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology defined 'indigenous peoples' as: "... peoples who were present in a given territory before the arrival of larger, usually European population groups" (Barnard and Spencer 2002: 609). An anthropologist Saugestad noted, "[p]artly the ambiguity is on the lexical level: the term 'indigenous' is frequently used as an adjective to mean 'local', 'native' and 'non-European'" (Saugestad 2001: 302). In the contemporary usage, however, 'indigenous people, refers to those "...societies encapsulated in a larger nation-state whose basic form of social organization was originally at the band, village, tribal, or ethnic minority level" (Appell 2002: 419). Indicating its contemporary meaning, Professor James Anaya said, "[t]oday the term *indigenous* refers broadly to living descendents of pre-invasion inhabitants of the lands now dominated by others" (Anaya 2004: 3). From these perspectives, the term generally indicates peoples who inhabited a land before it was invaded by colonial or like power and who are currently governed by others as its successors. However, beyond its lexical or encyclopaedic meanings, the concept 'indigenous' is increasingly popular but continually debated both on international and national levels. In fact, the social, political, and legal definitions of the term are much more ambiguous and controversial as the term has been taken up by a range of disenfranchised groups to define and promote their movements (Hodgson 2002) for rights.

As a sociological category, anthropologist Saugestad inferred, the concept of 'indigenous' is a subject to various definitions (Saugestad 2001), the key controversies, however, exists as Adam Kuper, an anthropologist, identified that even in European context "the difficulty of defining and identify 'indigenous people'" as "the history of all European countries is a history of successive migrations" (Kuper 2003: 390). As one of the recognized critics, Kuper regards present indigenous right movement as a pseudo claim of aboriginality and voided the rights and privilege that it entails. In an article titled 'The idea of Indigenous People' Beteille also criticized the concept and said that it "...not only breeds intellectual confusion, but ...also provides ideological ammunition to those who would re-orient the world according to the claim of blood and soil" (Beteille 1998:191 cf. Saugestad 2001:303). Thus, although the core meaning is ingrained in the term 'indigenous', a common agreement on it is hard to achieve.

In the middle of many criticisms and controversies on the concept, a working definition was developed by Mr. José Martínez Cobo, Special Rapporteur of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities at the United Nations, in his

famous work 'Study on the Problem of Discrimination against Indigenous Populations' which he finished between 1981 and 1984. He defined:

“Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop, and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems” (Martínez Cobo 1986, para 379).

This definition is now used widely and has stood the test of time remarkably well. However, from another angle, “...the key conceptual debate concerned the attempt to clarify an ambiguous relationship between the sovereign state and a special type of traditional community, that does not in itself constitute a political entity” (Saugestad 2001:305) still exists. In other words, as a concept, although it indicates peoples characterized by autonomous identity and ethnic differences, the question of their position in terms of demands of rights in compared to dominant and other non-dominant groups in the structure is continually pondered. To escape from this dilemma, Saugestad suggested:

“... indigenous, like ethnic, is a *relational term*. A group is only indigenous in relation to another, encompassing group, and thus the meaning depends on the historical context. Moreover, the relationship between a state and as indigenous minority is one of unequal distribution of power. The concept is coined to describe this inequality. It is also designed as a tool to change this inequality (Saugestad 2001:308).

One of the early addresses of the inequality issues could be traced back to the International Labour Organization (ILO) in their international conventions known as ILO Convention No. 107 and ILO convention No. 169. For a long time, these two conventions have been the safeguard of indigenous peoples' rights with some limits. The recent development of indigenous movement especially at the international level made it possible to draw a lot of attention to their rights. With the United Nation Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which was adopted by the General Assembly on Thursday September 13, 2007, a firm basis has been paved for claiming rights within the state structure. Although a majority of 144 states voted in favour, 4 states (Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States)

voted against and 11 states (Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burundi, Colombia, Georgia, Kenya, Nigeria, Russian Federation, Samoa and Ukraine) abstained from the process of voting in the adaption of the declaration. This position of states in voting on the declaration is just a proxy of the existing controversy on not only the concept of indigenous but the whole discourse.

Against the controversy over the concept, a professor of law Benedict Kingsbury suggested that the term may have a scope for an ongoing connotation that would keep it open for construction of different streams of thoughts. He also maintained that it is impossible at present to formulate a single globally viable definition that is workable and not grossly under- or over inclusive. Kingsbury argues that it would be impossible or misleading to seek to identify the prior occupants of countries and regions with such long and intricate histories of influx, movement and melding (Kingsbury 1998). Hence, although the concept of ‘indigenous peoples’ is fundamentally compound and its validity is very hard to ascertain in many states, it is a tool for peoples who lost their autonomy under colonialism or similar imposition and are struggling against the domination and marginalization, claiming their rights in the state structure.

As elsewhere, as a concept ‘indigenous peoples’ is and has been contested and is vacillating in Bangladesh too. Like many other Asian countries², the Bangladesh government never accepts any indigenous peoples within the border³. With India and Myanmar, Bangladesh argued and stressed that “‘...indigenous peoples’ are descendents of the original inhabitants who have suffered from conquest or invasion from outside” (Kingsbury 1998: 434). Similar to India, however, people who have long been denoted as Tribe⁴ and *Adivasi*⁵ has contemporarily been specified, both within and outside of the people concerned, as indigenous peoples in Bangladesh. Other words like *Upajati*, Tribal people, *Pahari*, *Jumma*, ethnic, ethnic minority are also used to specify the same in Bangladesh.

The current denial position of Bangladesh towards indigenous issues is not new, but a trend that could be traced back in the government’s position in not ratifying and/or abstaining from different international law instruments initiated towards the protection of rights of indigenous peoples. It should be remarked that Bangladesh ratified ILO convention 107 as

² Kingsbury noted that although the attitudes of governments in Asia on the application of the concept of ‘indigenous peoples’ differ considerably, it is strongly opposed by China, India, Bangladesh, Myanmar and (for the most part) of Indonesia (Kingsbury 1998: 417).

³ Still now there is no official recognition of the ‘indigenous people’ in the country.

⁴ The English term ‘tribe’ is used officially (i.e., statistics) in Bangladesh to mean *Upajati* in Bengali.

⁵ Note that the term ‘adivasi’, which is rooted in Sanskrit, is pronounced as ‘adibasi’ in Bengali.

the convention used both terms ‘indigenous’ and ‘tribe’ and viewed that indigenous and tribal populations are identified not only as distinct social groups but whose “...conditions of life ought to be ameliorated to promote their assimilation into the ambient population, leading eventually to national integration (Kingsbury 1998). Not surprisingly, this view of the government seems to be perpetuating towards the ‘tribal’ people of the country who are now demanding an indigenous status.

The existing view of the government to assimilate and integrate ‘tribal’ population is evident from the position in the ILO Convention No. 169 which Bangladesh did not ratify. Among others, at least one of the statements in article 7.1 of the convention presumably contradicted the motto and interest of the state where it is stated that indigenous and tribal population “...shall have the right to decide their own priorities for the process of development as it affects their lives, beliefs, institutions and spiritual well-being and the lands they occupy or otherwise use, and to exercise control, to the extent possible, over their own economic, social and cultural development” (ILO 1989)⁶. Thus refereeing the incongruence with the national interest, at the voting session of the convention Bangladesh government representative Mr. Hossain said, “ My Government maintains that Convention No. 107 preserve ...delicate balance between national interests and international responsibility. In the opinion of Bangladesh, ...essential balance has not been adequately ensured in the new Convention...”(International Labour Office 1990: 32/11). Subsequently in 1993, at the Permanent Forum on the Indigenous Issues at UN, Dr. Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations at the Second Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, New York 21 May 2003, clearly said, “[i]ndigenous peoples by definition are original inhabitants of any given territory or country. While ethnic minorities in Bangladesh may not fit this definition, the government has always been sensitive to their problems, according them priority attention” (Statement by Dr. Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury May 2003)⁷. The recent position of the Bangladesh state can be seen from its abstention on the United Nation Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples which was adapted in the General Assembly in the sixty-first session on the 13th September 2007. This reflects that Bangladesh over the years has not changed its view towards the indigenous (tribal) issues from what once the country held by ratifying the ILO Convention No. 107. In fact, as it appears, the government view of assimilating and

⁶ <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/indigenous.htm>

⁷ <http://www.un.int/bangladesh/statements/57/indigen.htm>

integrating 'tribal people' in the mainstream population people has still been prevailing which refutes the concept of 'indigenous peoples' and helps the state ignore the demands of indigenous peoples.

Throughout the world, indigenous movements work more like a dialogue and negotiation between the state party and the indigenous peoples. Although the indigenous peoples' movement in CHT Bangladesh has been going on since the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971, unlike many other places of the world, it was a violent one. It was, however, not so different from other places in terms of its aim and objective i.e., the demand of autonomy or self-determination within the nation state system. It must be said that primarily the movement was an ethno-political nature and not inclined with any 'indigenous' agenda we know it now. With a few exceptions, ample of literature depicted and analyzed the conflict in CHT as ethnic or ethno-political movement (Mohsin 2001, Gerharz 2004). Aimed at an autonomy within the Bangladesh state the *Parbotta Chattogram Jana Shonhoti Somiti* (PCJSS, shortly PSS)⁸ led the struggle from the beginning. One of the characteristic of the movement is that it tried to bring all the indigenous groups in CHT under an 'invented' symbolizing or naming of ethnic minority peoples of CHT. A historian and prominent researcher on CHT, Schendel showed how concept of *Jumma* was 'invented' (Schendel 1992) by the JSS as a symbol to paint the solidarity of fractious small ethnic groups in the region. JSS still uses the word to mean the non-Bengali hill peoples in CHT. In the 1997 Peace Treaty' JSS came to an agreement with the government about some power sharing on the local level and left the violent path. Many of the agreements in the treaty are still a matter of negotiations and realization. Not all indigenous peoples in the area, however, agreed with the provisions of the treaty. It is widely known that there are groups (against the JSS) who reject the 1997 peace accord and are assumed to be active still in the deep forest with arms and ammunitions. Apart from this, it may be acknowledged that the current mainstream indigenous movement in the CHT is in line with advocacy and negotiations. A major development under the umbrella of the indigenous caravan in Bangladesh happened along with the gradual participation of indigenous leaders in the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues at United Nations. Another development in the indigenous movement in Bangladesh, I should point, is undergoing by the current collaboration and associations of joint activities and

⁸ JSS lead the movement primarily non-violently, however, from mid 1970s, by discontent with the government attitude it formed an armed wing that fought against the Bangladesh army until 'peace accord' was signed in 1997.

demand of the rights of the indigenous groups in the hilly CHT area and plain land of the country.

Along with the scholarly debate on the concept of indigenous in Bangladesh, let me now reflect on the pattern and meaning of the terms that are used in the popular and official (both public and private) sphere to name or denote groups demanding indigenous status. I have already mentioned many of the terms both in Bengali and English that are used to identify peoples with an ethnic background other than Bengali, i. e., *Upajati*, Tribe, Ethnic minority, Ethnic communities, *Pahari*, *Adibasi* (*Adivasi*), indigenous etc. One of the official Bengali term *upajati* that lexically translates to the term ‘tribe’ is interesting if we break down the word - *upa* meaning ‘sub’ and *jati* means ‘nation’ – indicating people who are a sub-nation. Thus the term literally indicates a dissection among the citizen of the country, and its most frequent use in the official documents seems to be congruent with the attitude towards them. It is hard to identify when the term *advasi* is being used in Bangladesh for ‘tribal people’, however, it could be assumed from the roots of the word in Sanskrit that it is more contemporarily being used translating the term ‘indigenous peoples’. The civil society and other human rights organizations use these terms at large. Especially Asian Development Bank (ADB) and World Bank in their operational policy guideline used the word ‘indigenous’ in lieu of ‘tribe’ of Bangladesh.

The academics, however, are divided on the applicability of ‘indigenous’ term to ethnic minority peoples of Bangladesh. Many of the past and contemporary academic works, grossly or partly, have bypassed the question of ‘indignity’ for the ethnic minority peoples in CHT. It is no wonder that ‘tribe’ has been used in 19th and 20th century scholarly and journalistic writings. Along with others it can be particularly be noted that the writings of one of the most renowned classical anthropologists, Levi-Strauss, who worked on kinships of peoples of CHT, used ‘tribe’ for the inhabitants of the place (Levi-Strauss 1952).

Contemporary writings have also used various terminologies backed by the tribalism discourse incepted by the colonial rulers. In the middle of the 1980s, scholars in Bangladesh Studies used ‘ethnic minority’ in the edited book ‘Tribal culture in Bangladesh (Qureshi 1984). In this book an article by Islam indicates an early of academic interest on the language issue of the indigenous peoples. Acknowledging that there are considerable debates on terminologies, researcher Uddin in his work on ‘*Khumi*’ of CHT preferred to use words like *Pahari* (hill people) than other terms like ‘Tribe’ or ‘Ethnic people’ since, according to him, “...they tend to be addressed by the term...” (Uddin 2008: 34). He also, however, declaratively used terms like ‘CHT people’ which clearly seems to have no notion of

indigenous. Anthropologist Dewan, Barrister Roy and some other scholars tend to use the word 'Indigenous' in most of their contemporary writing (Dewan 1993, 1991, Roy 2003). A Norwegian anthropologist Dr. Bleie used the term 'tribe' in the title of her book, but clearly she made an undertone of indigenous by using the term –'Adivasi'. She also used 'ethnic groups' and apparently her usage of these terminologies had interchangeable meanings (Bleie 2005). Ball, in her remarkable work on the *Garo* community, discussed the issue extensively and indicated that terms '*tribe, upajati, adivasi, and indigenous peoples*' reflect a relation with the problem of the people concerned, yet "...none of the generally accepted and/or applied terms suits social reality all too well" (Bal 2007: 43).

Even though I agree with Bal, it should be noted that the categorization on whether it is popular, official or academic, naming the people has heavy influence. Pointing out that naming a minority group is hardly innocent, historian Niemi noted, "[o]n one hand they reflect attitudes towards the ethnic minorities, including prejudices, and on the other hand they function as legitimacy for certain chosen policy or even for ranking among the minorities (Niemi 2007: 22). From this perspective, naming ethnic minority people/'tribal' people in Bangladesh as 'indigenous', in the light of history and on the basis of the working definition of UN and other international convention, is to be seen as an attempt to capture 'social reality' of groups of peoples who were marginalized by colonization and continue to be marginalized in the parochial nationalistic practices of post-colonialism as well. Having stating this, to me indigenous peoples in Bangladesh are those groups (*Adibasi, Tribal, Pahari*) who ethnically (especially in language and culture) differ from the dominant Bengali population and inhabited the current state boundary before it was created. I would agree that no boundary or no naming, historically speaking, is permanent for the history of a people, yet for some, in some point of time, it is essential. Now, indigenous peoples across the world are asking and meeting that essential claim.

1.2 Nation-state, assimilation policy, education of indigenous peoples: Literature Review

From a long view of human history, formations of states are fairly new (Perry 1996). Before the emergence of nationalism and nation-states, according to historian Anderson, world population was mainly divided into local communities, religious communities and dynastic realms. Dynastic rule eventually took on nationalistic feature in Western Europe in the middle of the 18th century (Anderson 1991). Anderson with several examples synthesizes how the genesis of national consciousness and the formation of nation states appeared in Europe with the advent of capitalism and print technology. His argument was that fatal diversity of human

language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, the nation state (Anderson 1991). Of course there are many theories of formation and development of state or nation states across the world; it could be clearly distinguished with a cutting edge: colonialism. Colonization of different parts of the globe by the major European states changed the course of human history. Colonization is particularly interlinked with the indigenous issues, as its very nature and scope, demanded a re-examination of the approaches and practices of post colonial state towards the ethnic minority who eventually became a part of the state. With the 'post-colonial project of modernity' in the nineteenth and twentieth century in different part of the world, nation builders constructed state boundaries, developed national narratives, interestingly borrowed from the colonial notions reflected especially in linguistic and ethnic nationalism.

One of the general tendencies of every nation state is to homogenize its population in terms of language and culture, impose the dominant language on the non-dominant people who speak in other language(s). In essence it seems as if, "...in order to form a nation or state you have to have a language" (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000:426). Consequence of such state intents is fatalistic for the language community. Dorian has discussed how the rise of nationalism in Western Europe at the beginning of the industrial age coincides to a considerable extent with less tolerant attitude towards subordinate languages (Dorian 1989: 5). The process of the homogenization, commonly called assimilation, is the official policy for different nation-states at different time.

The question of why the state tried to assimilate indigenous peoples can be found in the nineteenth century pseudo-scientific theory of social evaluation or social Darwinism. The conception of bringing the indigenous tribal people from their 'primitive state' to the 'civilized' and modern is taken from the scientific theory of 'race', often described as social Darwinism or the theory of social evolution. Evolution of peoples and cultures were interpreted as proving that different parts of the world were at different stages of their development. This was in short the basis of that theory, and it influenced most of the academic and popular writings in the colonial age. It was used as a validation of colonial rule –that European are 'racially superior' to the subordinated people in the colony. It is interesting to note that the same outlook exists in the post-colonial state. An anthropologist Appell asserts that indigenous people have been subjected and are being subjugated by the dominant elites in the new nation states and appropriation of their resources is justified under the banner of development and progress. He termed this process as decentralized colonialism (Appell 2002).

The main weapon used to implement the assimilation policy is education. According to Kukkonen, educational institutions played the central role in colonizing the mind of indigenous peoples around the world (Kukkanen 2000). Plenty of literature vividly described how in many countries schooling has been the prime coercive instrument of cultural modification and assimilation. For example, Dr. John H. Bodley, a well known cultural anthropologist, explained how under colonial conditions, schooling was often a direct means of cultural modification. By citing the Cunnison report, Bodley also showed how Sudanese tribal nomads who spent as little as two years in schools returned to their homes without the skills needed for a traditional way of livelihood. Again, by analyzing Bull's work, Bodley identified how French colonial schools forbid native language and subjected children to be loyal to France (Bodley 1990:103). In an article historian Henry Minde has vigorously pointed out the process and consequences of Norwegian assimilation policy on Sami and Kven peoples of Norway. By concentrating on the education and language policy he identified detrimental and painful experiences for the Sami children who underwent schooling during that policy period. In sum, he showed how the policy tried to destroy the language and culture of those peoples and weaken self-esteem and change identify and in this process how many of them underwent cultural pain and psychological trauma (Minde 2003).

Over a long history of assimilative policy in different states, there have been protests, and counter arguments started coming largely at the middle of twentieth century. There were two particular developments that happened in the two wings of the new world organization, the United Nations - one was ILO 107 within the International Labor Organization and the second was expert acknowledgement on the urgency of mother tongue education for children at UNESCO in 1951. They drew more attention to the indigenous and tribal peoples, and mother-tongue education was said to be the amenable medium of schooling children for small indigenous communities. By the middle of twentieth century, although formal colonialism ended in many parts of the world, indigenous people did not get genuine autonomy to determine their fate. It is often argued, even today, in the postcolonial time, "Indigenous people are targets of various forms of internal and neo-colonialism" (Kukkanen 2000: 413). Thus indigenous peoples' right of learning their own languages in school in a nation state is still a matter of debates and is denied in the most of cases.

In a study on the socio-economic and pedagogical implication of the multilingual policy of education in Ethiopia, Gebreyohannes (2005) shows that there exists a strong link between language, education and development. He found that the policy of multilingual education is poorly and inappropriately practiced, and its outcome could be a threat to national unity and

educational quality. In another study on the significance of culture in the classroom teaching and learning interaction for indigenous ethnic minority children, researcher Tshireletso (2000) contended that children of ethnic minorities are marginalized in classroom teaching-learning activities on the basis of exclusion of their culture, language and lifestyle. His study recognizes the importance of mother tongue instruction for the children of Basarwa indigenous ethnic minority groups as important to their classroom learning situation to make understanding and meaning of classroom talk closer to their life experiences, to preserve their languages as part of their cultural identities and to empower them from dominance and control of Tswana groups socially.

One of great dilemma in education for indigenous peoples is how to combine or decouple the modernity with tradition. By studying a nomadic indigenous people 'Evenks' in Russia, Zhirkova (2006) revealed that 'new ' nomadic schools is not only giving basic education according to educational standards, but also provides indigenous knowledge and preserves the traditions in a modern environment. Stacy Churchill (1986) showed 6 stages outline which is most common policy responses to the educational and language needs of minority groups within the OECD. Although he suggested that differences between the stages are not always discrete, he attempts following ranking (in ascending order) by the degree to which such policies recognize and incorporate minority culture and languages:

Stage 1: "Assimilational" approach to education;

Stage 2: Modified form of assimilation where additional and supplementary programmes are promoted with emphasis adjusted to the majority society;

Stage 3: Multicultural education that recognizes the right to be different and respected for it, but not necessarily maintain a distinct language and culture;

Stage 4: The need for support of the minority language is accepted at least as a transitional measure. Accordingly, transitional bilingual education programmes are emphasized;

Stage 5: Recognize the rights of minorities to maintain and develop their languages and culture in private life to ensure these are not supplemented by the dominant culture and language;

Stage 6: The granting of full official status of the minority language (Churchill 1986, also cited in May 1999: 50).

To extend it into a broader purview for fitting in global parlance of policy response towards the indigenous language based education, following the basis of Churchill's six stages, three

stages could be underscored: a) “Assimilational” b) Multi-cultural c) Right based official status.

Although a relatively nascent emergence, the Bengali nation-state seemed to resemble other western states in regards to following a nationalism project. It was not because this new ‘nation state’ had all prerequisites like those western nation-states that started emerging in the middle of 18th century, but because of its internal political situation and elites’ aspirations to create a similar historical backlash in the post-colonial and post-independent era of the country. A write up by historian Fazal argued that the narrative of triumphs of the West European nation-states colonialism and industrialization were enticing for the decolonized and peripheral states in non-Western world (Fazal 2000). It’s a paradox in Bangladesh that once ‘Bengali language’ was used ‘as a central symbol’ (Hossain and Tollefson 2006: 241) for the forming of a national consciousness, the ‘Bengali nationalism’, was slowly imposed on small ethnic minority indigenous peoples of the country after independence. The 1952 Language Movement opposed Pakistan government’s imposition of *Urdu* as a state language; none opposed imposition of Bengali on the other ethno-linguistic groups within the national boundary. Surprisingly, key contemporary literature of or on indigenous peoples (tribal, ethnic minority) in Bangladesh has widely bypassed this issue of language imposition through schooling and assimilation. From literature, it appears that Bangladesh stands in need of refreshing its position towards the ‘indigenous’ concept under the international and nation law. It clearly showed that national monolingual education policy and practice has not been reconsidered against the reality of multilingual situation of Bangladesh

As noted earlier, the early writings on tribal/indigenous peoples are very much biased with the early 19th century Eurocentric view that depicted them as sub-human species or at least below the ‘standard’ of an educated modern individual. Abdus Sattar, once called ‘pioneer in social anthropology’ of East Bengal (Bal 2000), authored several books on the tribes of Bangladesh where a clear notion of the author could be traced that he saw these peoples as ‘primitive’. This outlook had led him to think that uplift of those people by means of education is essential because, “isolated and left behind, the tribe will become more inward looking aggressive” (Sattar 1971, cited in Bal 2000:40). According to Bal, the idea of primitiveness of indigenous people in the common people mind is influenced by Sattar’s work. His comment on the Garo (Mandi) indigenous people that “many of them have received education and come into light of civilization” (Sattar 1971 cited in Bal 2000: 40). However, Mohsin, perhaps most remarkable in criticizing government oppressive policies in her several works, suggests in her article:

Non-Bengalis should be given the opportunity to pursue an education in their mother tongue through, at a minimum, the primary level. The government should make adequate funds available for both printing books in non-bengali languages and providing training to non-Bengali teachers. The country's academic curriculum ought to be decentralized and democratized. [...] The curriculum must reflect the different cultures, histories and experiences that make up Bangladesh diverse minority communities. (Mohsin 2003 cited in Thompson 2007: 50)

On the contrary, a firm and lasting image of 'tribal' (*upajati*) image obsessed the common Bengali minds which I understand as a construction of colonialism. The philosophy of formal education, again as colonial construct, that the colonial rulers incepted in the Indian subcontinent to utilize natives in the governance, and 'civilize the tribal others' so that they make less trouble in colonial resource accumulation, is still persist in the post-colonial state. In a report of the clergy and human right activist, Timm (1991) showed how Bengalis see indigenous peoples in a culturally stereotyped way as 'primitive' or '*jungly*'. He also conceived that attempts to educate '*adivasis*' in Bangladesh are seen by the authorities as bringing them into 'the national mainstream'. Thus when education is considered as a mechanism of so-called development, usually it is devised under the umbrella of 'national' culture, the culture of dominant group(s) in the state system. As language is the basis of a culture, first dominant language reigns over other small languages. It becomes the language of school and often other voices are prohibited. Thus, small ethnic groups like indigenous peoples sacrificed their language in school. Since language and identity of a people is deeply related, losing the former brings the disappearance of the latter. Indigenous peoples, the inheritors of long lasting tradition, are wiped out from the national scene, and the process starts in the classroom of modern monolingual schooling. On one hand, there is no recognition of indigenous peoples in Bangladesh; thus the question of their education through their mother tongue has not been considered in any educational policy in Bangladesh. In CHT where the majority of indigenous populations in Bangladesh live has been disputed and an armed ethno-political movement had been continued from 1974 to 1997. With the Peace Accord, primary education sector in CHT transferred to the authority of Dill District Council, a semi-autonomous institution headed by an indigenous person. The accord also acknowledged the mother tongue education for the primary stage. Although the treaty acknowledged these provisions, it regarded non-Bengali in the CHT as tribal.

The constitution does not recognize any indigenous peoples within Bangladesh territory and despite the fact that the mother tongue of many 'tribal' indigenous peoples is different from the dominant Bengali; from the beginning the education for all citizens in Bangladesh is 'Bengali', the state language. Like language, the curricula and pedagogy of schooling in public primary school is significantly non/under/ misrepresented by ethnic minority cultures. Long standing pseudo-assimilation initiatives through education and language, I would argue, engendered their identity and existence as distinct peoples. Disempowerment, marginalization and extermination are some of subtle ways affecting indigenous peoples. Although no government of Bangladesh upholds any manifested policy of 'Bengalianization'⁹ like 'Norwegianization' that was taken by the Norway and last from about 1850 to approximately 1980, language policy in education resembles the process that excluded indigenous peoples' rights to learn in their mother tongue and these reflected the 'nationalism' project in the long run.

The above reviews indicate that the initiative of assimilation of indigenous peoples by the nation-state is a global phenomenon, which I assume to be true in the case of nation-state Bangladesh. It is pertinent to state that parts of the global mobility of indigenous movement also influenced local indigenous movements. In Bangladesh case, the indigenous movement emerged in 1980 and was invigorated by the end of the 1990s. Today, along with many indigenous peoples in many other places in the world, indigenous peoples in Bangladesh are in a struggle to establish the right to learn in their mother tongue in school as a part of its overall demand for self-determination.

1.3 Purpose of the research: Scrutinize the medium of instruction in schooling

As the literature review has shown, indigenous peoples in the nation state system often encounter assimilation policy especially through imposed language and culture in their schooling. From this perspective, I assume, Bangladesh is not to be regarded as an exception. Since there is no study scrutinizing this aspect of the indigenous issue in Bangladesh, the problem of the study is to examine schooling practice regarding medium of instruction for indigenous peoples in CHT. Thus the objective of this research is to find out how and why schooling began and changed in terms of the medium of instruction in the indigenous communities of CHT and come towards mother-tongue based primary schooling.

⁹ See Barua2001

1.4 Research questions: Language in schooling

From the intentions stated in the objective of the research, three research questions were formulated:

- 1) How did elementary schooling begin and evolve in the indigenous communities of CHT, with what medium of instructions, and why?
- 2) To what extent is this schooling sensitive towards indigenous language and culture?
- 3) What are the prospects and challenges of mother-tongue-based primary schooling for the indigenous peoples in CHT?

Setting these questions in the research was more like a process of visiting and revisiting the literature. From the process, I got to know, as historian Perry noted, how finding the right questions can be as difficult as getting to answer them (Perry 1996). Apart from this difficulty, to me and maybe for many other researchers, from a philosophical point of view the answer of a question is a part of the question itself as it is influenced by it. Thus, acknowledging the influence with a clear objective to know about the education situation, this study purposefully addresses those questions and seeks answers in the historical chronologies: time, actor, and events - for schooling practices for the indigenous peoples in CHT, Bangladesh.

1.5 Methodology : A qualitative slot with indigenous paradigm

The history of the encounter between the researcher and indigenous peoples is long within social sciences especially in anthropology, sociology and history. There has been a long standing obsession of Western academia and journalism on exoticism that was gratified by research ventures on non-Western, particularly the indigenous peoples. Hence, indigenous peoples might be one of most researched human group. “We are the most researched people in the world” is a comment Linda Tuhiwai Smith has heard frequently from several different indigenous communities (Smith 2002: 3). Long tradition of *research on* indigenous people has now been criticized in the Said’s lines in *Orientalism* (Said 1978), that shows Westerners look-upon non-western indigenous peoples as primitive. Orientalism was grossly used as a tool for validation of colonial rule over the globe. It now stands as a strong example of knowledge, knowledge production and its application related with power and manipulated by politics.

Against this Eurocentric approach, by which once these existing body of knowledge in social science was produced, many indigenous scholars suggested a paradigm shift - introduce and develop 'the indigenous peoples' project (Smith 2002), an indigenous methodology (Porsanger 2004), the 'Indigenous paradigm'¹⁰ (Kuokkanen 2000). The basic tent on which these paradigms stand is, "we derive our epistemology from the very intellectual milieu that gave rise to colonialism..." (Perry 1996: 26) and that to counter this colonialism, insider (indigenous peoples') engagement, views and interpretation is imperative for the research issues related with indigenous peoples. It asserts not to ignore the Eurocentric Western research methodology, as Porsanger noted, "...the indigenous approaches to research on indigenous issues are not meant to compete with, or replace, the Western research paradigm; rather, to challenge it and contribute to the body of knowledge of indigenous peoples about themselves and for themselves (Porsanger 2004: 105). Acknowledging the value of the indigenous paradigm, indigenous peoples preference and world view, however, is the task of interpretation according to the ethics of social science, Saugestad reasserted, "remove the researcher, indigenous or not, from the object of study. And, insider's perspective may at times oversimplify the complexity and pluralism of ethnic experiences in making its claim to authenticity and representatively (Saugestad 1998: 7). Transcending possible debate of research on, with and by indigenous people and taking a deep look into the question of how to do *research on* indigenous peoples' affairs, I took a methodological position that incorporates insights from these paradigms.

"Methods can be sufficiently flexible to grow naturally from the research question, and in turn from the nature of the social setting in which the research is carried out" (Holliday 1994: 21). Thus to do research in or about indigenous peoples' issues, as this thesis is all about, I ameliorate the indigenous methodology and had many insights applying in my study. Given that I am a non-indigenous person (description given in the following), my understanding is reflected in the research as the view of an 'outsider'. I am also trained mostly in Eurocentric research techniques. As all the processes of the research has been done in corporation and consultation with various peoples both indigenous and non-indigenous, the methodological position is to be regarded as a unique one. Despite being a researcher mixing and balancing of both non-indigenous and indigenous perspective, I am at the end a non-

¹⁰ The term 'indigenous paradigm' is used here with same meaning that Kuokkanen (2000) implied which is connected to the deconstruction of the consequences of colonialism. For more detail, see his remarkable article titled: 'Towards an "indigenous Paradigm" from a Sami perspective', where he put forward discussion on the need, significance, objective and characteristics of the paradigm.

indigenous person that made the decisions, which I should reiterate, with a sensitization of the indigenous people.

The study through its different stages followed a quantitative approach but it tried to take insights from indigenous paradigm. From planning to the data collection from the field, this project underwent several modifications. Salient modifications actually were done according to the suggestions I got at the proposal presentation and consultation meeting with both the fellow students at the University of Tromsø, Norway and colleagues at Research and Evaluation Division of BRAC, Bangladesh. Participants were in those meeting from indigenous as well as non-indigenous background. So, as a part of the Masters Programme in Indigenous Studies at the University of Tromsø, the study's approach has been influenced and shaped by my study and work experience, my supervisor's suggestions, and my fellow student and colleagues' comments both from home and abroad.

1.5.1 Methods of data collection

Data has been collected from both field work and literatures. Empirical data was collected during two-month (June-July 2008) field work at CHT, Bangladesh. During the fieldwork, I went and stayed in an indigenous community in *Khagrachari* district at CHT where different types of elementary schools were attended by indigenous children. In the study area, on the basis of medium of instructions and curriculum, two types of schools were identified that operated separately with public and private support and administration. As a major source, data was collected from schools and on school-related issues, i.e., curriculum, pedagogy, textbooks, extra curricula, school administration and supervision. Along with this, data was also collected from teachers, parents, local social and political personalities.

Apart from empirical data, a good deal of data was collected from written sources both from national and international perspectives relating to assimilation and education policy. Due to personal crisis (mentioned in preface) during fieldwork, the data collection process had to be shortened. Thus, for substituting the gap, this study in many important places predominantly depends on secondary sources. Hence this study used different methods in data collection under quantitative approaches. The following described how data collection methods were used for collecting data both from the field and secondary sources.

Participant observation in schools: During my stay in the field, I visited 3 BRAC schools, one *Zabarang school*, one *Para Kendro*, one *Anondo school* and one *Ahsania Mission supported school* and a government primary school. Except for the government school, which

was for primary (Grade I-V), all other schools were pre-primary (one year course, below G-I). Although I collected data from all other schools from school visits, I did my participant observation only in BRAC pre-primary schools as it was more accessible for me because of my professional affiliation with the organization.

In depth-interview: As key informants, I interviewed some indigenous and non-indigenous persons i.e., leaders, experts, administrators, activists, and teachers of the community.

Document analysis: As written sources, data was collected from tribal cultural institutes, libraries, NGO school project documents, the Ministry on CHT affairs and Ministry of Education, and the Government of Bangladesh (GoB). Additionally, other secondary sources like published journals, academic theses and photographs were collected from internet.

1.5.2 Time and places: The important tasks

According to the plan and schedule, I went to Bangladesh for fieldwork. During June-August 2008, the empirical data for this study was collected from the *Dhighbhinala Upazila* of Khagrachari district in Bangladesh. Bangladesh is my home country but the place Dhighbhinala, Khagrachari, from where empirical data was collected, was not known to me. Before this fieldwork visit, I visited the region for a few days about 3 years ago, but not the community from where data was collected. Let me elaborate more about how that place was selected for data collection for this research.

From the beginning I was looking for a place in Bangladesh where more than two organizations are operating education mother-tongue based programmes for the indigenous children. At first, having got some primary information from BRAC education programme at BRAC Head Office at Dhaka I thought of Khagrachari as the most probable site for fieldwork. In fact, besides Zabarang, a local NGO in CHT, BRAC Education programme (BEP) had been piloting a bi-lingual education programme in Khagrachari, *Dhighbhinala Upazila*. So, having some background information and according to my primary intention, I visited *Dhighbhinala*. I found that there along with two organizations namely BRAC and Zabarang, there are a few other organizations that were working on education but not in the mother-tongue of indigenous peoples. Gradually, I found that it would be interesting to draw some key information of all different type of schools in that indigenous prone locality and if they had any particular educational goals for indigenous (and non indigenous children) before finally deciding to enter the field. I start visiting different types of schools and finally chose

the place for the study. In the following days I purposively selected a bi-lingual school run by BRAC for collecting in-depth information. In the following section on the location of the study, the site is further analyzed.

1.5.3 Overcoming objectivity: The way I was looking for data

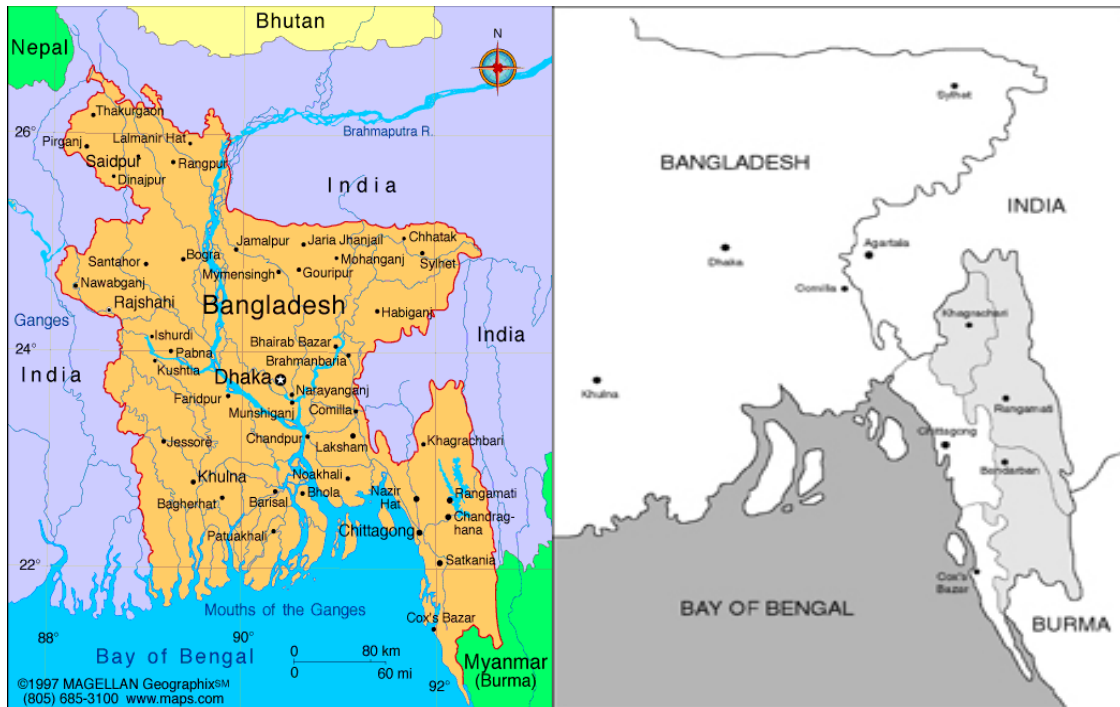
I was looking for data that could help me answer the research delineated questions. I presupposed that I should not be in a rush for data, but that data will come to me in a flow within context and situation. In this venture, I spent a lot of time with the informants in the interviews and observation, and in most of the cases in a very informal way. Primarily, I tried to have some background information of the place, people, culture, languages and the organizations and institutions of the field site. According to the project proposal, I was looking for capturing qualitative data, data that was comprised of words and voices of the people. My previous studies in indigenous studies and training in qualitative research methodology helped me to be alert in choosing informants, to interact with them with research ethics and to get reliable information. I wanted to know the people whom I met in different areas in the field and had good rapport with them by applying commonsense. During my whole stay and interaction with them, many of them expressed inquisitiveness about me and my work too.

I tried to stay more or less informal in all stages during my data collection whether it was an interview or participant observation. Though I knew that my informality would affect the scene too, I preferred it to being formal for some cases. As in the process of the data collation in the field, my own presence was an artificial interference; so, I was expecting the data to be less artificial, less affected by my alien posture if it was always informal. Thus, although I was not quite sure if informality ever ascertains artificiality, it just came out of my mind in the field to follow this practice. In the process of the data collation in the field, however, I should agree that my own presence was an artificial interference in many instances. At the same time, I was also trying to collect data, setting myself in a neutral position. Again, I was aware that pure neutrality in data collection was impossible. Apart from this, in most of the cases I wanted to keep 'natural' atmospheres through my gestures, body language and my dress. Whenever I visited a school, was a guest in household or visited a person for an interview, I tried to be a polite, friendly and 'non-threatening' person. It is true that I tried to be friendly and polite not only just to develop formal rapport (in the sense of social science jargon) but to overcome the barrier of my dominant ethnic identity.

Vary essentially I should recognize that the indigenous peoples whom I met, the informants of the study, were cordial and welcoming. Giving an impression that the work I was conducting had a true value for them, I enjoyed their special interest on my work. In general, during my field work, by transcending my non-indigenous personal identity, I tried to be an 'ethno-eccentric' person.

1.6 Study Location: Dighinala, Khagrachari, CHT

Khagrachari is one of 64 districts of Bangladesh and is better known as a part of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). Situated in the South-Eastern part of the country, this hill district is locally called 'Chengmi'. As a town Khagrachari was established in 1860. In fact, the district of CHT was established in 1860 under the 'Frontier Tribes Act 22 of 1860' and following the district of CHT Regulation Act the Chittagong Hill Tract was divided into three subdivisions (included Khagrachari) in 1900. In 1983, Khagrachari became a district. The Khagrachari Local Government Legislative Council was formed in 1989 (in accordance with the Khagrachari Hill Districts Council, Act 20), which, on the basis of the historic 'Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord', was turned into Khagrachari Hill District Council on 2 December, 1997. Administratively, the district consists of 8 Upazilas (Dighinala, Khagrachari sadar, Laksmichari, Mahalchari, Manikchari, matiranga, Panchari, Ramgarh), 34 union parishads, 123 mouzas, 953 villages, one municipality, 9 wards and 61 mahallas. This study only included only one of the upazilas named Dighinala. Dighinala Thana was established in 1923 and was turned into an upazila in 1985. The upazila consists of five union parishads, 20 mouzas and 140 villages. According to latest population census in 1991, population of Dighinali is 50,933; male 51.50%, female 48.5% (Banglapedia 2008).



Map-1.1: Bangladesh Map¹¹

Map 1.2: Chittagong Hill Tracts¹²

1.7 Recollecting myself in this research: Confession to the readership

In the summer 2000 when all my exams for my undergraduate degree in sociology was done, for first time with some of my classmates, I got a short-time job of field supervisor in a social survey project in North Bengal. We were working in some villages where a number of *adivasi* groups lived besides Bengali. This is first time I came close to the life of *adivasi* peoples of my country. I discovered myself surrounded by many new peoples and many different way of life. I remember I had many new experiences from there but one of them was very unusual. I was struck by a notice in a local restaurant that had a sentence like this: “This restaurant serves no food to *Upozati*”. At the turn of the 21st century, my classmates and I, who then already studied the record of discrimination in many societies, were stunned by such an open expression of discrimination in a public place. Later, informed the local administrator (TNO), and it was removed. This incident came back and forth in my mind in different situations and more so when I planed and conduct my master thesis.

Locating myself and my actions in this research should be critically looked at in line with what C. Wright Mills calls ‘sociological imagination’ (see the quotation at the beginning

¹¹ Source: <http://www.infoplease.com/atlas/country/bangladesh.html>

¹² Map by Jorge Monrás, 2000 Chittagong Hill Tracts - regions source: <http://www.iwgia.org/sw28364.asp>

of this chapter). I think my encounter with that incident has a lasting impact my position and in all actions including this intellectual pursuit – a master thesis on the *Adivasi* (indigenous) peoples (I have already described much of this in the Methodology section), but here let me take a broader and deeper look on myself in relation to this indigenous study research.

I hardly remember when I heard the word ‘indigenous’ or indigenous peoples. Looking back my memory in early life, I could remember some description of ‘*Upozati* (meaning tribe)’ in my social studies books in secondary schooling. I remember there were some description on the main groups-about livelihood and culture. There were some sketches of those peoples in the books as well.¹³ The next thing I could remember is participation of indigenous people in cultural functions that were broadcasted on the national TV- especially the songs and dances. A vivid picture imprinted in my mind is the ‘battle dance’ performed by some tribal girls. Apart from the national media, I have a memory of indigenous people mainly on the National Geographic channel. Still then, I just wondered about the exotic representation of these people and like many I had a conception that faculty of their mind had yet to develop.

An image was developed in my mind through the presentation of indigenous peoples in popular media. When I came to study at the University of Dhaka, I took the introductory anthropology course where I came to know academically more about the indigenes peoples in home and other countries where many classical anthropologists worked and became famous. I especially remember Margaret Mead (1973) who worked with the Samoa indigenous group and her work romanticized the work to me. I had classmates from ethnic minority communities who spoke in Bengali in different accent (even apart from the dialects) which seemed interesting. To be frank, I should confess that through all my exposure to books, media and study, I had a mixed conception of the tribal/indigenous people. ‘They’ are not like Bengali and because of their isolated living and less contact with civilized world/modern way of life, their way of life is still in so called ‘ancient society’. I shifted my conception, although not full as I understood from my study in indigenous studies at Tromsø, about the people from my study at Dhaka University. At least, I would assert that these people were not ‘ancient’ after my studies at the undergraduate level. Ellen Bal in her remarkable work underlined a particular case that indicated how perceptions of human societies as ranked according to their level of civilization have preserved in the classroom of Dhaka University which illustrate the reproduction of scientific discourse in ‘academic Bangladesh’ (Bal 2000). Not differing with

¹³ Now, I would suggest some research on the representation of indigenous peoples in school text books.

the example she depicted, I remember my own experience in the classroom led me to think differently on the issue.

I remember gossip over a tea. I remember one of my friends who loved a girl from an indigenous group but could not make relations any further due to ethnic difference.¹⁴ I remember a friend who called an indigenous classmate “sister.” I remember, I intended to visit the tribal areas in CHT which I did twice in my student life at the university. I remember I did some research and fieldwork on education for tribal people. Still then I had no conception of the term indigenous people. It was more like a small ethnic community that was my concern. But up to then, the issues of indigenous seemed vague to me and not very relevant. In those works, I understood the term “ethnic minority” in English as maybe it was to many social scientists, to mean the peoples known commonly as ‘*Advasi*’, or ‘*upazati*’.

No one can see the world apart from his own eyes and yes, I believe, both in two ways: when it is open and when it is not. We are the product of every single incident in our life and our eyes are shaped and coloured by them. From my training in Sociology at the University of Dhaka, I can assert comfortably that broadly a person is product of the society he belongs. To reflect on myself, allows me to recapture this concept and add that I am no more convinced of the narrow definition of society after enjoying a privileged position in globalization. It is now better to see myself apart from the ‘society’ where I was born and lived 30 years. The world was not to me only what I read in atlas map. I am convinced that what is good for ‘us’ and what is good for ‘others’ is a matter of ethical standard and it is to be especially taken care of when ‘we’ are , somehow, not within ‘others’.

1.8 Analytical structure

While there has been a debate within political science on how and why nation states arose, what its basic characteristics are or how it is so essential among the human organizations, people had and even many of them have been living without being involved in such political entity for a long time. Nation states appeared as large, politically centralized, class-based societies with an expansion tendency. According to anthropologist Bodley, states were inherently unstable. Political scientist Perry noted, “they have grown and collapsed, expended, contracted, and disappeared, and other states have grown on their ruins” (Perry 1996: 11). Their appearance suddenly made the world unsafe for tribal nations. There are two

¹⁴ Inter-ethnic marriage is rare in Bangladesh

possible options for tribal nations: either become a new nation state and defend or be absorbed or extinguished within other the expending nation state. “Early states spread slowly until the beginning of the industrial era, at which time they controlled half the globe” (Bodley 1988: 2). It is more often than not; the population of a state inherently includes multiple categories of people or groups: social class, ethnic groups etc. A state system essentially leads and coordinates and/or regulates important economic activities and access to resources as its core activity, and this process inevitably includes conflict of interest among the groups. On the one hand, a state tries to eradicate cultural differences and on the other hand it fosters internal differentiation in power and wealth (Perry 1996). With the expending industrial society under the political underpinning of nation state, indigenous nations find it difficult to sustain their original adaptive system with nature and livelihoods. Bodley noted, “They suffered demographic upheavals, resource depletion, internal inequity and conflict, and increased pathologies. They were often locked into grossly inequitable and discriminatory economic relationships with the dominant state society, and they were reduced to insecurity and poverty” (Bodley 1988: 2).

The discourse of indigenous has emerged against this perspective of marginalization in a state system and addressing the rights of peoples concerned. In this study, to analyze the history of education in CHT focuses on the medium of instruction, so I will use some concepts as ‘analytical terms’, which are already established in the literatures of social sciences particularly related to indigenous studies. These concepts expressed either an attitude and/or policy option (either have taken or to be taken) by the state towards the indigenous peoples or a response in other way round (see Niemi 2006, Churchill 1996, Bodley 1988, 1990). Although these terms are taken across the places where indigenous peoples exist, there appears to be a trend and succession which is shown in the Chart 1:

Chart 1: Trend of treatment of indigenous peoples

Exoticism/Primitivism Assimilation Integration ~~Segregation~~ ~~Self-~~
determination

Let me now reflect on the meaning of these concepts. The terms *Exoticism or Primitivism* is one of the early conceptualizations of the Western thinking on the peoples colonized in USA, Canada and Australia. This concept was also used for peoples in India especially who were

beyond the caste system, named after 'Tribe'. Early anthropologies widely used this concept backed by the theoretical understanding of so called Social Darwinism. It was the assumption of classical anthropologist like Tylor and Frazer that the intellect of people everywhere was the same except that some people who were 'primitive'. Barnard and Spencer noted, "a primitive mentality is one side of simple dualism of which the other side is European ('civilized') mentality" (Barnard and Spencer 2002:451). The concept of *assimilation* indicates a "[p]rocesses where by individuals or groups of differing ethnic heritage are absorbed into the dominant culture of a society" (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2008). It has been an official policy in Norway and some other countries including Australia and Canada for a long time. Along with other cultural agents, schooling and education was used as a tool to achieve it. The *integration* is also a process – "... bringing of people of different racial or ethnic groups into unrestricted and equal association, as in society or an organization; desegregation" (The Free Dictionary 2008). State authority allows ethnic minorities to keep their different identities but it would be under a vast control of a national society. Segregation, on the contrary, is "the policy or practice of separating people of different races, classes, or ethnic groups, as in schools, housing, and public or commercial facilities, especially as a form of discrimination" (The Free Dictionary 2008). It allows ethnic minority to make a certain number of choices at different levels but there remains a close relation with the larger state mechanism. Self determination is the ultimate political goal for ethnic minority indigenous peoples within a nation state structure. Self-determination is not and does not require or justify a separate state for the indigenous peoples, in fact,

"it is a rare case in the post-colonial world in which self determination, understood from a human right perspective, will require secession or thee dismemberment of states... Some changes in existing structure of governance ...are needed to bring about and ensure an atmosphere in which they live and develop freely, under condition of equality, in all spheres of life" (Anaya 2004:8).

1.9 Limitation of the study

The concept of 'indigenous people' is a debated issue with no previous work in CHT, Bangladesh. Thus, the focus in the field of their schooling and language is under the light of the indigenous discourse, and many of the propositions and conclusions, which are backed by evidence in the research, need further in-depth research. Looking at the issue in a wider angle of national and international records is also new. As a result, all over, both the scope and level of analysis maintaining time and events sequence was a bit hard handle with the amount

of data collected in a two month field work for this Master level thesis. At the same time, my personal crisis occurred during the fieldwork, which made it hard to touch in many planned areas. Apart from this, one major drawback has been my inability to speak or understand indigenous languages. So, in the data collection, although I largely interviewed the people who could speak Bengali, in observation at schools, many expressions of respondents in schools may have been gone unnoticed. Last, another significant aspect of limitations in the study was not to enter into the vast area of theoretical debates on identity even though I was aware of the fact that the issues I was dealing in the study were very much related with it. Thus, looking at the extent early schooling not in the mother tongue could change an identity (whole or partially) of peoples has been remained unanalyzed. Here, for practical reasons like time and range of a master thesis, my discussion is confined with an attempt to explain and analyze the history of schooling and medium of instruction for the indigenous peoples in CHT, Bangladesh.

1.10 Outline of chapters: Structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter 2 deals with the schooling in CHT the British and Pakistani era 1757-1970. Chapter 3 focused on the early Bangladesh period 1970s-1990s and showed the monolingual practice in schooling in the area. Chapter 4 concerns with 2000s – present time and show a paradigm shifting from monolingualism towards Mother-tongue based schooling. Chapter 5 deals with current practices of mother-tongue based schooling in my study area focusing dynamics of perceptions and grassroots reality. Chapter 6 comprehensively discusses the key propositions drawn in the preceding chapters against the research questions and round up with some conclusive discussion.

Chapter 2 From ‘Primitivism’ to ‘Civilization’: Schooling in the British and Pakistani Era 1757-1970

To civilize them as far as we can is our imperative duty.

E.T. Dalton: Letter dated 11 June 1859 to W. Gordon Young¹⁵

I am aware that much may be and has been done to civilize those tribals....But that moral conquest can be secured only by the knowledge and those habits which education gives, and the means of education have hitherto been very sparingly employed.

Willam Adam (1838): Third Report on the State of Education in Bengal¹⁶

The start of formal schooling or so call ‘modern education’ in the territory presently known as CHT is closely linked with the history of British colonization in the Indian subcontinent, and more precisely with the greater Bengal, which then became the colonial center in India. Hence, it was heavily influenced by ideas of colonizer towards the colonized, who remained as part of ‘Excluded Area’ or ‘Tribal Areas’. Any discussion on the beginning of formal schooling in CHT, therefore, inalienably entails a reference back to the thoughts and events during that time in and around the colonized regions. Thus, in this chapter, I will describe and analyze the historical development of modern schooling in the CHT by citing historian’s remarks, debate and arguments on this phenomenon. In brief, I will also discuss how a traditional schooling was replaced by British formal schooling driven with a colonial outlook and how it succeeded in the Pakistan nation state as well. Lastly, by delineating thoughts and events in that phase, comprehensively I will inquire the notion, practice and consequences of formal schooling on the indigenous peoples (who were called ‘tribal’ people at that time) in CHT. All discussions, however, are preceded by an exposition of how colonization was started by the British in India in 1757, which spread to the CHT in the middle of eighteenth century. So, there are several consecutive questions that this chapter precisely aims to answer: from when, where and how formal schooling was implanted; how did it develop over time in

¹⁵ Letter dated 11 June 1859 from E.T. Dalton to W. Gordon young, Director, Public Instruction, Bengal, appeared to Report on the Public Instruction in Lower Bengal, 1869-70, p. 29 , cited in Bara 2002: 142

¹⁶ William Adam is remarkable for surveyed the state of elementary schooling in Bengal and Bihar which now stands as one of early record in spread of education in the region

the region as part of British colonial state; and how it succeeded in the Pakistani postcolonial state?

2.1 Perspective on colonization

By the sixteenth century, a handful number of states extended its economic boundary through trade and business to overseas areas that turned into political domination and colonization. In essence, few European states fell into a fierce competition primarily to discover new land and establish domination in different parts of the world. World trade and commerce particularly captured by European commercial groups and their interests influenced states on their behalf to start violent conflicts and war (Perry 1996, Anaya 2004). They fought each other to capture the lands and include its population within an existing state system named after 'colonial state'. That was the beginning of the age of colonization. Thus colonial states historically tended to be extended geographically, economically, politically and culturally. Materials or ideology or both fuelled this tendency. Across the world many indigenous peoples had been living on ancestor land usually in various small and autonomous societal formations. In most cases, they find themselves encompassed within state systems one way or another. In fact, conquest and incorporation of indigenous peoples within colonial states had happened over the few centuries up to the middle of twentieth century (Perry 1996).

By the eighteenth century, one of the key reasons of British state expansion into overseas colonies was to capture raw material and export finish goods and boost the industrial revolution at home. In India, the British entered for business purpose through the East India Company, eventually colonizing the subcontinent for more than 200 years leaving various impacts. Like all other parts of India, colonial rule in CHT brought enormous socio-political and economic changes and dilapidated their political autonomy as it had been existed for long (Dewan 1993). In next section, I will trace briefly how CHT came under the British invasion in reference with British colonialism in India in general and Bengal in particular.

2.2 CHT under British colony and Pakistan state

The Indian subcontinent is one of the oldest places of human existence. Several big and small Hindu and Buddhist dynasties had ruled this place for centuries. When the Muslims invaded from Persia and Asia Minor and established rule as early as 11th century, the place was well known in the world for its long tradition, heritage and fabulous wealth (Johnson, Robert

2003). In the middle of 16th century Sirajuddaula, the *Nawab* (prince) of Bengal, was defeated at the battle of *Plassey* on 23 July 1757 in a war with East India Company force, which laid the foundation of British colonial rule in Bengal as well as India (Banglapedia 2006). For around one hundred years the East India Company rule was extended to different parts of the subcontinent. After the shake of the *Sepahi* (native soldiers) in the Mutiny of 1857 to 1858 India increasingly came under direct British rule (direct Crown rule) as the British East India Company was dispossessed of and in 1877, Queen Victoria was crowned empress of India (Collingham 2006). This rule lasted for around ninety years up to 1947. During the whole period, colonization consolidated different corner of the sub-continent and people experienced changes in their life. For centuries, this place has been inhabited by peoples from many different ethnic identities. British colonization dismantled the previous way of life in many ways; it changed land tenure system, implanted new administrative and forms of capitalist economic relations. As a consequence, although there were infusions in many of the areas, what stood apart was the introduction of a new official language and of course, a ‘modern’ education system.

Before the British influence in the region, it is often claimed, CHT was historically an autonomous area administered by the traditional authorities as *rajahs* or ‘paramount chiefs’ (Dewan 2003, Roy 2005). ‘‘During the whole period of the *Mughals* and East India Company’s rule the Chittagong Hill Tracts region had never been under their direct control’’ (Ministry of CHT Affairs 2007). Rather, when the British colonial state penetrated into the CHT in 1860, ‘‘the population of the HT – the ridge-top living as well as valley – living people- had developed an economic system of their own which was in harmony with their ecological and social environment’’ (Mohsin 1997). Subsequently after the *Sepoy Mutiny* in 1858, the region was ceded to East India Company and was formally annexed with Bengal province of British India in 1860. When CHT region came under direct control of the British rule it was constituted into a separate district by Act XXII of 1860. Later on, the British enacted new law to administer the region, namely Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulations 1900 which were also known as the Hill Tract Manual. Initially contact between *Pahariyas*¹⁷ (People living in the hill) and British rulers were confined in collection of tax, then it was cotton in the beginning which turned into cash in 1789. This introduced the money-economy in the region.

¹⁷ The term *Pahariya* is still commonly used by both the indigenous and non-indigenous peoples to indicate indigenous peoples, who are distinguished from the dominant ethnic group –the Bengali.

When British rule ended formally at the middle of the twentieth century, it was marked by the formation of two major nation-states on the basis of the ‘Two nation theory’, propagated by Jinnah in which the basis of nation was religion (Bose and Jalal 1998). In fact, “[t]he decision to divide British India was taken at the very tail end of the colonial period” (Schendel 2005), when the two political parties failed to come to a consensus on the status of Muslims in independent India. India and Pakistan started a journey of bloodshed in the early hour of division. There were huge riots between Hindu and Muslims, the two main religious groups, in stinging their space in new nations. Theoretically, it was thought that Muslim majority areas would be included in Pakistan and others in India. Though the CHT was a non-Muslim majority district, it was annexed to East Pakistan due to the Chittagong port which was annexed with East Pakistan and CHT in regard to the hinterland of the port. Gerharz noted, “it had been a highly controversial, since this culturally distinct area had almost no commonalties with the rest of East Bengal” (Gerharz 2001: 26). Leaders of the region wanted to join with the India state which was ignored (see Gerharz 2001, Schendel 2005 why and how it was ignored).

2.3 Schooling in CHT at pre-Bangladesh period

As an ‘excluded tribal’ region, as it was regarded at that time, primarily CHT did not catch much attention for British colonial ruler. Moreover, due to the geographical location, it was alienated from other areas of the colony for long time. Since the British entered the region relatively later than others regions surrounding areas, formal schooling did not begin before the middle of the nineteenth century. Not much history is documented on schooling and education in CHT at pre-Bangladesh time. With some of ‘sporadic and casual’ records along with some oral sources, I will describe the pre-Bangladesh historical development of modern schooling in the CHT region delineating time and events into three broad phases: a) Pre-British, b) British India and c) Pakistan.

2.3.1 Pre-British (ancient- 1760): Schooling in Vihara and Pathshala

The pre-British time can be divided in two phases: ancient and medieval. In the greater area of Bengal, writings of travelers suggest that learning centres called *vihara* was the place where Buddhist and Brahmanic (Hindu) scripture were taught. Generally those learning centers used to teach grammar, philosophy, dialects, medicine, astronomy, music, art, *chaturveda* (four

holy scriptures in Hinduism), *sankhya* (counting), *Mahayana shastras* (Buddhist scriptures, and *yaga* (Amin 2007). The school centre was established in the teacher's house or in a temple with auspicious support from the affluent village leaders as well as common inhabitants. Students moved from teacher to teacher after mastering specific subjects. Schooling was non-formal in nature and the medium of instruction was the Sanskrit language. Education was a privilege for elite (Amin 2007). In the medieval period, Bengal was ruled mostly by the Muslim rulers who came from central Asia and elsewhere and education was heavily influenced by Islamic tradition. Mosques and *Madrasha* (Muslim schools) were established with state patronage and support. Schooling was closely associated with religion so different system evolved for Hindu and Muslim children. Muslim schools were called *Madrasha* where the focus of education was mainly the Quran and Arabic language. *Pathshalas*, the school for Hindu children, taught Sanskrit and Bengali and religious studies. "Persian or Farsi was the state language so both Hindu and Muslims studied Persian" (Amin 2007: 39).

It is hard to make a point on how the learning centers of CHT resembled the rest of Bengal. Although not much is known about the education in CHT before British influence was established in the region, like all other places in Bengal, schooling in CHT was also religion based, mainly Buddhist. My informants generally share this view that in ancient time schooling in the region is known to be primarily religious practice based. Buddhist religious gurus taught religious scripts in the *Pali* language, but literacy in Chakma and Marma languages were also imparted. Besides religion and literacy, students used to master traditional medicine, astronomy, counting, art and architecture. They were used to teach some technical education as well (Chakma 2008). Besides, children used to learn and help in the *Jhum* cultivation, which is by nature a family agriculture venture.

2.3.2 British colonial period (1761-1947): Beginning of formal schooling

Before British rule in Indian began, there was no formal education system in the sub-continent. State was also invisible or no supreme authority dictate over the schooling, as according to an educational historian Basu, in 1757 when the East India Company embarked on its political career in India, there was no education system organized and supported by the state (Basu 1982) and learning environment was non-formal. At the same time, despite the fact that there was not a formal system of education; thousands of village schooling system had existed in all most every corner of the Bengal (William Adam 1838). Education suffered

a relative neglect in the early period of Company rule in the region. Basu also noted that by the early nineteenth century, village elementary schools were in a state of decline (Basu 1982). It was also noticed that education support became limited and was spread only through European Christian missionaries in Bengal. Until the Mutiny of 1857, East India Company was responsible for education in India. Since 1958, education had been the responsibility of the Indian Government based in Calcutta, which was in turn answerable to Indian Office in London (Whitehead 2005).

With the passage of charter Act of 1813, the 13th regulation obliged the East India Company to set aside one *lakh* (1000,000 rupees) for native education, the intention was both to promote oriental culture and western science. The same act also allowed missionaries to spread the gospel in India and establish schools, which were up to then restricted by the company for being neutral in religious matters in India (Whitehead 2005). By the 1830s, the Company changed its focus from the oriental education and literature and decided to use the fund for the European literature and science through English language. “Although the activities of the missionaries were localized in *Serampore*, it is likely that they contributed to bringing about several systematic changes in education in the entire region. First and foremost, they introduced regular and fixed hours of instruction and a broad curriculum. Vernacular education was promoted by producing books in Indian languages. English education was also introduced in this time” (Amin 2007: 40).

Historical records showed that modern formal education was started in CHT by British colonizers which was already started in other parts of the Indian empire. British colonizers, as a part of introducing western education in the sub-continent, set up a boarding school in *Chandroghona* in 1862 which is one of earliest marks of formal schooling in the region. That school became the Middle English school in 1869 and upgraded to the High School in 1890. According to the Chakma, this school contributed most prominently in the advancement of education in CHT (Chakma n.d.:31). Apart from this, in 1870s, two primary schools were established in CHT: one was in *Manik Chori* and another was in *Bandarban*. These two schools were closed in 1871 because of a scarcity of student. It is said that the most problem in those days was to find enough students from the indigenous peoples who were interested in attending school (Chakna n.d. :31). Many reasons have been raised such as the fact that the *paharis* were not solvent enough to send kids to the school on one hand, and on the other hand, geographical hazards and parents’ lack of interest to send children to school deterred students in schooling. They used to argue that it would be better to engage in the productive works than passing time in a school. Overall, parents had a belief that education alienates

children from household work and family. So, mass education did not flourish in the early state of British educational venture (Chakma n.d.:31).

Considering the bleak scenario of the education in CHT, the Inspector of School formed a separate Education Board for CHT districting it from the Chittagong Division. There were fourteen members, half were government officers on the Board. Three circle chiefs, head men and a Sister from Baptist mission were private members of the board. Deputy Commissioner (DC) was the chairman of the Board. Including vocational education in the curriculum, this board tried to introduced it in CHT which create a lot of excitement among the inhabitants in the place. Krisno Kishore Chakma, a 'tribesman', was appointed as school inspector on the board. He used to encourage people in village after village to send children to school. According to Chakma, it was his ceaseless efforts that raised consciousness among the common people on education and helped increase number of students in school. When the British influence ended in 1947, the number of primary school was 144, middle school was 10 and high school was six.

My informants share the view that the schools set up by the British wanted to use their mother tongue. However, many leading persons from the indigenous communities took a position against it. Moreover, considering the unavailability of teachers and the prospect of small language in schooling, they proposed the idea and started to use Bengali. It was also important that the language they learn in the school should have use in provincial and government administration. Still sometimes, the medium of instruction was English for the upper grade of schooling.

2.3.3 Pakistan period (1947-1971): Expansion of modern schooling

In 1947 when British rule ended in the subcontinent, the present day Bangladesh became the Eastern wing (province) of Pakistan. The government of Pakistan on 30 December 1958 appointed an education commission named the 'Commission on National Education, 1959'. It is also known as the Sharif Commission after its chairman SM Sharif, the then West Pakistan Education Secretary (Banglapedia 2006). Along with some important changes to the curriculum, the commission recommended that all primary education should be offered in Bengal (Amin 2007). So, in that period, indigenous children who attend school presumably had to go through schooling in Bengali medium instruction. For the indigenous people of CHT, it could be seen as a primary initiative to integrate 'tribal people' into the Bengali West Pakistani population. In fact, the Government of Pakistan ratified the ILO Convention on

Indigenous and Tribal Populations (Convention No 107) in 1960 which had been an integrationist approach towards the ‘tribal’ peoples (International Labour Office 1990).

The Pakistan era, an intermediate between the British and Bangladesh periods, turned out to be streaming the flow of so-called modern education in CHT. The Pakistan period of the early 1960s was the hay-days of modernization thinking. General Aiub Khan, president of Pakistan, declared the ‘Decade of progress’ period from 1958-1968 (Dewan 1993). In this period, like other places of the country, the number of schools increased in CHT as well. In 1961, under the leadership of DK Power, DC of Chittagong Division, a committee was formed to investigate educational development in the region, and it came up with a report of recommendations. According to recommendation of the committee, primary education was set free for all. Although the committee recommend setting up 724 primary schools in the region, only 169 new schools were established and total number of schools was 391.

An aspect of expansion of formal schooling within the indigenous community in 1960s was related with the wide unemployment, mass displacement and landlessness in the region during that period mainly due to *Kaptai dam*. Because of *dam*, thousands of indigenous peoples lost their lands, livelihood and were compelled to migrate to other places in the region. It was a time of social crisis, segregation and confusion. The pursuit of education was seen as directly related to greater job opportunities especially in the public sector as it had grown hugely following after the departure of British (International Labour Office 2000). The most affected people were the Chakma.

Soon after a quarter of century, the ‘theory of two nation’ was shaken. A generation of Bengali national consciousness and an armed struggle by the Bengali *Muktu Bahini* (freedom fighters) against the Pakistani military force formed a new nation-state Bangladesh dividing Pakistan. It nullified the religion-based notion of nation. We will come back to the topic in the next chapter.

2.4 An analysis on the notion, practice and consequence of formal education

Colonial education projects everywhere were and still have been a contested phenomenon. At the heart of it, colonial education plays a role of precursor in imposing culture of colonized peoples and Rountable noted, “[a]ll that one culture can ever do, when it contact with others, is to act as missionary for its own belief...”(Rountable XL, 1949 cited in Whitehead 2005). It is argued from one side that the metropolitan power of the colonial rule usually shaped and guided the education policy, and educational institutions promoted the needs of

the colonizer, ignoring for the most part the aspiration of the colonized (Basu 1982). In the same way, a well known critic of colonial education Samir Amin contained that colonial education had two key purposes: ‘the destruction of traditional or indigenous culture and consciousness, and the training of an elite of subordinate servants’ (Amin 1975, cited in Whitehead 2005). It is now not a wonder in history that colonial authority everywhere regards the colonized peoples as ‘primitive’ or uncivilized. The obvious reason is the ethno-centricity of thinking of the time. It was thought that ‘progress’ is inevitable. It was such a strong belief that it negated anything like independent indigenous/ tribal nations. “‘Progress’” has been forced on them because expanding states required the resources they controlled’ (Bodley 1988).

It was not a wonder that indigenous people who are now living in CHT were seen by the British colonial rulers as ‘primitive’ and early in their development in the human race. Bara noted, “ The colonial ideologies ...highlighted Indian backwardness on the one hand and, on the other, talked of teaching the Indian the advanced civilization of the West through modern administration based on laws and a system of justice. The colonialist saw that in their project, an adjunct tool with proven expediency was Western education” (Bara 2002). The racial perception of the missionary, patron of education for the ‘tribal people’ at the time, can be realized from the following excerpt: “‘Without schools men become bears and wolves...” (Report of the Chhotonagput mission 1863, cited in Bara 2002). From the anthropologies to the educational policy makers, this idea was prevalent. For example writing about the peoples in CHT in 1870 an anthropologist Lewin titled his books ‘Wild Races of South-eastern India’ (Lewin 1870).This view also captured the educators of the colonial education system that have been reflect in the quotations that I documented in the beginning of the chapter. The notation of British colonial education in India, I supposed, was the same but more detailed is analyzed in the rest of the chapter.

Firstly, in previous description of the history, I showed that the East India Company rulers were not initially interested in education in the Indian colony, and the main purpose of the venture was making profit through trade and business. But along with the expansion of the business in the empire, it became costly to employ English officers who were highly paid (Basu 1982). Educating Indians and employing them in subordinate posts for running business profitably could be argued as one of main purposes to introduce western education in India. Secondly, like all other colonies, British had seen India as a big market for their booming industrial goods in the aftermath of the industrial revolution. Indicating Indians as the potential consumers, Macaulay once said that they should not be “too ignorant or too poor

to value and buy English manufactures’’ (Young 1935 cited in Basu 1982:23). Thirdly, it was also expected that Western education would create a positive bond between the ruler and the ruled and foster the stability of the British rule. In essence, Britain wanted a small class of English educated people who would, according to Macaulay: ‘‘ interpret between millions whom we govern; a class of person Indian in blood and colour but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect’’ (Sharp 1920 cited in Basu 1982). Besides, ‘‘Liberals and utilitarians were convinced of the superiority of Western culture and were anxious that at least a small group of Indian imbibe it’’ (Basu 1982: 26). Fourthly, Evangelical and the other missionary saw education as the way to ingrain the Christian faith among the natives. In 1813, this group pressurized the parliament that ‘company charter should contain a clause setting aside *lakh* of rupees for education’ (Basu 1982).

It can be reiterated that British colonizers did not come to India to educate the people here, but they ultimately ended up doing so (Whitehead 2005). Writings about the pre-Bangladesh education in CHT thus can be traced to colonial education which is controversial. It encounters widely divergent interpretations from contrasting ideological perspectives. Mainly two ideological underlines can be drawn here: Orientalist and the so called Anglicist (Whitehead 2005). The former was in favour of oriental language and tradition of education in the Eastern perspective. On the contrary, the later, the Anglicist was the advocate of the introduction of the Western education. It can be stated that it was equally true that the education devised for the natives including the ‘tribes’ was heavily influenced by ethnocentricity in the Anglicists purview. In disguise of their ‘civilizing project’, which was again based on misperception on human race, they wanted to serve their self-interest, the economic gain for the mother state Britain, above anything else. In the context of CHT, indigenous people had to get education in a language other than their mother tongue, which supported the colonial economic relations. However, in essence, it can be concluded that mass people were not attracted to that education. Only a small number of people from the elite class entered into it and became a different person in his own home.

Clearly the British introduced education in the region for making a class of people who would collaborate in their business and administration which ultimately would help protecting the colonial rule. However, from the ideological and intellectual point of view of some colonial administrator and policy maker, it was depicted as a mission of civilization. It was not so different in the Pakistani period as well. For some, the period of Pakistani rule was the second phase of colonization (Dewan 1993). Similarly, Pakistani government’s signing the ILO 107 reflected the integrationist approach that was then in line with the dominant

development discourse of the time. Thus, they expended the number of schools in the region keeping the same trends of colonial education system.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the history of schooling in CHT from the emergence of Bangladesh as nation state up to the 1990s, a period characterized by imposed monolingual practice and undermining indigenous language and culture in education. Discussion of the following chapter also entailed how monolingual practice was defused and, finally challenged by different socio-political forces within and out of Bangladesh.

Chapter 3: Nationalism and Monolingualism: Bangladesh Era from 1970s-1990s

I have but one language - yet that language is not mine.

- Jacques Derrida (1998) Monolingualism of the other:

Or, the prostheses of origin ¹⁸

Development of different languages is one of the fascinating events in human history; however, not all peoples are blessed to speak their mother tongue in many important places including the classroom. Of the 6800 languages currently spoken in the world, less than 500 languages are used and taught in school. Strikingly, more than half of the states are officially monolingual. (Hornberger 2008). Inheriting an overwhelming population who speaks Bengali, Bangladesh had no hesitation taking Bengali as the state-language in its constitution after it had gained independence on 1971. It has been used as the only medium of instruction in schooling since then. Against this backdrop was the first delineating theoretical reflection of the nation state and use of language. In this chapter I will trace the history of the beginning of monolingual schooling in the Bangladesh nation-state, especially its practice in CHT. In a way, I will also underline how the monolingual paradigm in education has been challenged. Thus the key question this chapter deals with is: when, how and why was monolingual schooling in Bangladesh started, developed and, finally challenged?

3.1 One Language in a nation-state: For what, for whom?

No nation presumably comes into being naturally (Bhabha 1994), and it usually has an intrinsic relation with the state. There, however, remains a dilemma on who comes first. “[W]hile nationalist movements create states, it is the states themselves which create nations’”, as Schendel and Zurcher noted, “however much nationalist everywhere may claim that the reverse is true” (Schendel and Zurcher 2000:1). Before the emergence of the nationalism and nation-states, world population was mainly divided into local communities, religious communities and dynastic realms (Anderson 1991). Once the state is embroiled in the world map, it is continuously built up and develops an effort to create ‘one’ nation which

¹⁸ The line has been quoted from back cover page of the book.

eventually leads to a joining between the two concepts into one entity- the nation-state. In this process of nation-building within a state structure, often the first and foremost strategy used is acculturation/assimilation/integration of the 'others' (ethno linguistic/ethnic/ minority/tribal/indigenous peoples) within the border. The process of assimilation attacks peoples of other identities within the nation state and tries to homogenize them. As in most of the cases, identity is primarily related with language, with the language of the dominant nation gaining dominance at the expense of the language of small groups. It appears as one nation-state is fulfilling its 'historical duty' by denying or undermining other languages and cultures within the territory. It is as if, Skutnabb-Kangas noted, "in order to form a nation or state you have to have a language" (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000:426).

A common pattern can be found by looking into how a nation state emerges and opts to gratify its elite's goals through more concrete existence and various mechanisms. It is evident that often small elite group/s have been preserving their stakes in the non-dominant group of peoples, even in their democratic practice. Strategies following this pattern have been identified by the scholars in different epochs of history and social setting for many different peoples. Getting insights from philosophers like Bourdieu, Michel Foucault and Norwegian peace researcher Galtung, Skutnabb-Kangas has convincingly developed a model of how the elites socially construct their own resources, especially their non-material resources, so that these are seen as resources to be accrued. She exemplified, "...socially constructing the dominant languages (and its speakers) and culture as us, as the self-evident norms, the mainstream, valuable resources" (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000: 405). Further, from this perspective, nation is socially constructed in a subtle way where at the very basic level power relations are set. The unequal distribution of resources are not questioned and/or accepted as granted because of the subtle construction of reality in the power relations. The next section further looks into how a dominant language, a non-material resource, being socially constructed within a nation state, helps maintain acceptance of power relation with the non-dominant society and minority groups such as indigenous peoples.

3.2 Matrix Language¹⁹: Domination discourse of a nation state

Matrix language is a non-material resource that asserts itself through a political and social parlance. It is often regarded as an ‘official’ language of a nation-state. Thus, it is used as a medium of instruction in the classroom, a language of communication in court, parliament, police, military, hospital and so on. It is essentially used in government offices, in media, in sports, and in religious activities. In many nation-states, for instance, it possesses orthography, standardization, and literary tradition. Usually, an institution or academy can be found to ‘protect’ it and above all the libraries preserve it. In the economic sphere, matrix language asserts its domination by being a language of bank, used in transaction and financial contact. It becomes the language of constitution and the national identity ‘passport’ is written in this language. Very significantly, it is the language of education system and works for acculturation of new generations of the populace, the masses.

The pressure exerted by the matrix language could be diverse: intentional, accidental or neglect. The pressure that matrix language put on the embedded language is intentional where constitution or the legal binding declares use of one language in that state. Sometimes, overwhelming predominance came from the use of media and sometimes dominant groups either fail to recognize the existence of embedded languages, or fail to enact and enforce supporting legislation or to push illegal actions damaging to the embedded language. ‘Neglect can be repressive. Lack of a policy is just “no policy”’.²⁰

Let me now make an overview of what is the basis of this language domination in a state. It can be asserted that domination is underpinned on the basis of the nation-state itself. Historically, as Skutnabb-Kangas noted, ‘the traditional stereotypical image of a nation-state is a product of an evolutionary process starting with tribal societies and developing via many phases towards higher forms of social organization of people’s lives’ (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000: 405). In essence, it is acclaimed that the national identity is linked to the language itself. The history of nationalism in the West appears as a product of West European ‘Romanticism’: ‘A nation state comprised one ‘nation’, and this imagined community was, especially in the German nationalist tradition, ideally seen as united by one single language’ (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000:425).

¹⁹ *The ‘base’ language is called the matrix language (ML)* (Myers-Scotton 1993:20 qtd. In Lingupedia). More elaborately, ML is ‘a language that is connected to political structures, that serves purposes of national or regional communication (Class Notes HIF 3620 by Laura A. Janda: Language & identity in Multilingual Environment)

²⁰ Class Notes HIF 3620 by Laura A. Janda: Language & identity in Multilingual Environment

The great myth that nation-state creates is: one state, one nation and one language where groups of embedded languages are deprived because their languages are regarded more as 'dialect' than 'language'. Although linguistic diversity is a reality everywhere in this globe, it is a common parlance that a powerful group pushes upon its language on a subordinate population. The answer to the question why is presumably clear: maintaining, existing, dominance, and hegemony (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000: 426). In the hegemonic world, where in fact we live, power and resources are not distributed equally, and one of the effective hegemonic strategies is the use of language by which a small elite class in centre(s) excludes others (the subordinates/minority/periphery) from access to power and resources. According to Skutnabb-Kangas:

“The various forms for exercising power and control ...in relation to minority education are one part of strategies which the small power elite needs to use in order to stay in power. The power relations are regulated by process captured in several –isms. And language is today central in and for many of these strategies” (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000: 393).

She further pointed out that we do not have a word for the –ism where inequality is based on formal education (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000:393). According to her suggestion, let us name it 'Educationism' where language in education has been used as a weapon to deprive many linguistic minority indigenous peoples all over the world. In other words, the history of the nation-state and nationalism is a play where ruling elite envisions a form organization, an imaginary community on the basis of socially constructed ethnic identity where often, and maybe essentially, 'the others' are excluded. In this process, underpinned on matrix language and dominant culture, they elapse other nation(s) and people(s) within its national boundary where a language in education appears as one of prime choices for the nation-state. This process, for many nation states is declared as official assimilation policy. The following sections traced aspects of Educationism and analyzed how nationalism emerged and, at the same time, monolingual education policy introduced and imposed 'state-language' on indigenous peoples of Bangladesh.

3. 3 Bengali language and embryonic nationalism: where are 'others' in the new state?

Many ethnic groups have inhabited the territory now named Bangladesh. It was ruled by many dynasties from both in and outside of the region. Empires were created and destroyed, while new forms of polity emerged and collapsed again. Thus language and cultural diversity has been a reality for a long time. As the previous chapter showed, when British rule ended

formally at the middle of twentieth century, it was marked by the inception of two nation states: India and Pakistan. It was claimed to be built on the basis of so called 'two-nation theory' where the basis of nation was religion: Hinduism and Islam (Jahan 2000). Although ethnically Bengali, half of them joined with India (mainly resided in its West Bengal province) as they were Hindu. The rest, Muslim Bengalis, became citizen of the Pakistan nation, residing in the East Bengal province of the country.

After a quarter of a century, however, the two nation theory failed when it was discovered by the Bengalis that the disparity between East and West Pakistan deepened over the years. Bengalis from East Pakistan sparked a nationalist movement starting in 1952 when *Urdhu* was declared as the only state-language of Pakistan. Through bloodshed and the student movement, *Vasa Andolon* (Language Movement), Bengali achieved recognition of Bengali as state language of Pakistan, equal with *Urdhu*. This movement began the genesis of national consciousness among the Bengalis of East Pakistan and furthered the nationalist struggle. In essence, the Bengali political elite nullified the notion of nation based on religion and were able to push a Bengali national consciousness where Bengali language became the prime stimulus. Bengali fought nine months with Pakistani armed forces with generous help of India. The Indian armed force were involved in a direct war with Pakistan along with *Mukti Bahini* (freedom fighters) at the end of the struggle, which both created a joint force. On 16th December 1971, Pakistan army surrendered to the joint force. This, ultimately, divided Pakistan and the East Bengal province of Pakistan became a new nation state, Bangladesh. Bengali nationalism, which the new nation state once upheld in their struggle for independence, was then consolidated in subsequent state formation during decades to come after independence.

“The birth of Bangladesh in 1971 was the first instance of an ethnic-linguistic nationalist movement succeeding in creating a new state in the post-colonial period ” (Jahan 2000: 3). With a 98 per cent Bengali population, the new state appeared as a unique example of an ethnically homogenous country in the world. But it was as early as after the independence; questions were raised on the use of the term 'Bengali' to mean nationality for every citizen including ethnic minority indigenous peoples who in now way could be called Bengali. Before the finalization of the Constitution of Bangladesh, Manabendra Larma on 15 February 1972, asked for 'the restoration of autonomous region for the 'tribal' and their special rights' (Barua 2001, Mohammad 1997). The first Bangladesh government has been indifferent on this claim and negligence on the ethnic people is explicit when they are not recognized in the new state constitution. “The constitution of 1972 stated that 'by nationalism

all citizens of Bangladesh are Bengali'...' (Schendel 2001:114). In fact, the ruling party rejected Larma's plea and "...interprets it as a challenge to Bengali nationalism and a conspiracy against Bangladesh sovereignty" (Barua 2001:103). In another occasion, he pronounced, "I am a Chakma, I am not a Bengali" (cited in Barua 2001:104). Again, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Bangladesh' first prime minister, on a visit to Rangamati in 1973 "asked the 'tribal' to become good Bengalis like other Bengalis and to join the national mainstream" (Bangladesh Observer 1973, cited by Barua 2001: 104). The successive governments followed the paths of beginner. Subsequently after about one decade of independence, President Zia-ur-Rahman changed the term 'Bengali' to 'Bangladeshi' to mean the nationality of all the population of the land. The change from Bengali to Bangladeshi nationalism further marginalized and alienated the ethnic communities (Mohsin 2001).

3.4 Matrix language: Tool of silencing other voices

Based on the nationalistic approach, the Bangladesh state ignored other ethnic identities or nationality. Thus, the question of recognition of the 'indigenous peoples' was obviously far removed. From the beginning, small ethnic groups were generally termed as *Upazati* (sub-nation, not a full nation like Bengali) by the government. This derogatory term signifies an inferior position, but was ingrained in such way that until recently not many indigenous person hesitated to identify themselves by this term. The official usage of the very term, I would argue, was nothing but deepening the process of making them be seen as 'inferior'. So, it was not a wonder that their language would never be recognized as standardized enough for use in education or to study as a subject. The new independent nation, without recognizing the actual multilingual situation, unanimously declared Bengali as the medium of instruction in education.

The first Education Commission in Bangladesh 'National Education Commission' was formed in 1972 and in 1974 it issued an influential report known as the 'Qudrat-e-Khuda Education Report'. The Qudrat-e-Khuda Education Commission recommends, "We must...use Bengali as the medium of instruction at all level of education to make our educational schemes successful." (Bangladesh Education Commission Report 1974, in Jalaluddin and Chowdhury 1997: 271). On this recommendation, educational historian Hossain and Tollfson noted, "Like the Constitution, the Commission's report presented an ideology on Bangladeshi Nationalism...The commission also provided a pedagogical rationale for Bengali-medium instruction" (Hossain and Tollfson 2007: 249). From this

provision, as one may see, indigenous minority peoples' rights for learning in their mother tongue as well as other educational needs were ignored in the new state.

This policy of imposing a language clearly had a resemblance with the concept of 'matrix language'. It appeared to be divisive when one counts the impact of this provision on the pupils of different ethnic minority groups who became part of the population of the state in the historical process. In recent studies, it has been clearly identified that a major hindrance in schooling in CHT is language, the medium of instruction in school (Durnnian 2007).

3.5 Monolingual schooling challenged: global, national and local forces

The answer of the question on how and why Bengali Matrix Language has been challenged and by whom need to be extracted from the history as well. As mentioned already, by default the compulsory language in public education is Bengali. From this provision, indigenous peoples in CHT have still been imparting schooling in Bengali, not their mother tongue. Besides, as my informants pointed, education in all public and public supported primary school curricula reflects the Bengali culture which, deprive children's manifestation of cultural capital that they inherit from their cultures.

It should be mentioned, however, that despite government's plans to make Bengali the only medium of instruction in school, it never has happened truly except for formal public schools. The existence of the *Madrassa* and the emergence of private 'English Medium' schools could be identified as the first challenge to the monolingual paradigm in Bangladesh. In those schools, the medium of instruction is not Bengali. However, they are tiny in number in the region and are not much related to mass indigenous peoples' schooling. Although not related, still it is an anomaly for the monolingual paradigm in education that government had planned.

Some of my informants shared their view that the impact of global and national indigenous movements challenged the monolingual practices and were influential in introducing the new schools based on mother tongue instruction. In fact, from around the early 1970s to 1990s, global and local indigenous movement appeared as a great force. Success of the locals could be identified as the 'The Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord 1997'²¹ signed by Government of Bangladesh (GoB) with the indigenous political wing call

²¹ The accord is, in essence, the first specific acknowledgement of the right of mother-tongue education for the 'Tribal' peoples, as the word 'treaty' used to refer non-Bengali (non-tribal) people. By the accord, generally

Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS), who represents the inhabitants of CHT. According to the accord, the local education authority was to be handed over to the Hill District Council, an autonomous body representing mostly by indigenous peoples. More importantly, in Article 33(b) of that accord, the government agreed on ‘mother tongue primary education’ in CHT. This article ‘transfers authority’ and ‘approval of mother tongue in primary education’ paved the way for introducing new types of primary schools beyond existing monolingual structure.

Challenges to monolingualism also came from another historical break on November 17, 1999 when UNESCO announced ‘21 February’ as International Mother Language Day. In response to the disappearing minority languages, this land-marking announcement was an international recognition of the Language Movement in 1952, which took place in Bangladesh (then East Pakistan). As mentioned earlier, in this bloody movement, a number of university students including common people moved against the imposition of Urdu as the only state language of the country and demand the recognition of Bengali as a state language. To make this day recognized, it was argued that:

“ Since the languages of the world are at the very heart of UNESCO's objectives and since they are the most powerful instruments for preserving and developing the tangible and intangible heritage of nations and nationalities, the recognition of this day would serve not only to encourage linguistic diversity and multilingual education but also to develop a fuller awareness of linguistic and cultural traditions throughout the world and to inspire international solidarity based on understanding, tolerance and dialogue” (Banglapedia 2008).

Most of my key informants had the opinion that International Mother Language day had worked positively on the rightful demand for introducing in the mother-tongue based education for indigenous children in Bangladesh.

In addition, to some extent global development discourse has had influence on changing monolingual paradigm in Bangladesh. Especially the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals (MDG) in September 2000 restated ‘Education for All (EFA)’

dealing with subjects like vocational training, Primary and Secondary education would be added assigned functions of the Hill District Councils (HDCs). Significantly, as the accord very clearly mentioned in Section B Article 33b, ‘Primary education in mother-tongue’ would be one of the functions of HDC (CHT Peace Accord 1997).

profoundly. MDGs Goal 2 focuses on achieving universal education to “[e]nsure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling” (United Nations 2008). This declaration put huge pressure on the member governments of the organization to bring all children into school and literacy. This along with development initiatives for the indigenous peoples helped focusing on indigenous children in school who often ‘lag behind’ from the students of dominant ethnic group in enrollment and achievement. It has also upheld the problem in various ways in developing countries where a limitation of resources hinders taking any added support for indigenous children. This discourse helped pressure governments to take initiatives focusing on the ethnic minority/indigenous children so that they were attracted to school and their completion rate in school increases. In this purview, under the Primary Education Development Programme II (PEDP II), GoB prepared a ‘Plan for Extending Primary education of Tribal Children’.

Finally, the sector that is challenging Monolingualism by standing in empirical ground is the civil society organizations and NGOs. Bangladesh has a long history of civil society driven development initiative for the underprivileged section of society. Basically, NGOs are the forerunner who came and played a key role in introducing schools aimed at indigenous children. These schools have played a huge role in introducing mother-tongue based education for indigenous children. Field observation found a few local initiatives as well in this venture. It has been also noticed in the locality that a social worker was striving to revive and preserve the language and culture of the indigenous community. A lack of monetary support was reported as the reason for lack of sustainability of such local private initiatives. The national NGOs and local NGOs schools who were running schooling for indigenous children are still in a state trial and error. In fact, curricula and pedagogy for the indigenous children are still in a stage of insufficient understanding and proper coordination.

3.6 Monolingualism in schooling: Pseudo assimilation and the resistance

To trace the history of the beginning and development of monolingual education in the Bangladesh nation-state, its important to note that the historical existence of the nation-state appears abstractly among a populace often to serve for material gains for dominant group of people, the elites. Being a member of the non-dominated group in a state system, such as the ethnic minority and particularly the indigenous, are one of first groups excluded from the right shares of their stake. The hegemony that states spread through subtle power relation helps maintain existing inequality and legitimize it. Language or language in schooling is one

of the direct means by which a nation-state maintains and enhances inequality. The Bangladesh case is not an exception. Clearly, it followed educationism, an approach that marginalizes the minority indigenous people in the country educationally, linguistically and culturally. If we look deep into the case, the monolingual practice, which is passionately backed by the nationalism project of newborn nation-states, it would primarily appear as the assimilation policy towards the indigenous peoples in CHT. In terms of content and form, it is not so different than many other nation states. Since the policy has never been stated officially in Bangladesh, here I would call it undeclared policy of 'pseudo assimilation'.

Based on educationism, the 'state language' as the only medium is torture for many pupils. It opens only two ways for a pupil, go through and cope somehow with the language or drop out. How a child would learn through a language which is not their mother-tongue has not been considered for a long time. The indigenous peoples global and local movement works as forces pushing for the right to learn through mother tongue. Historical developments in Bangladesh around the last decade of twentieth century have been influenced by different local and global stimuli that have particularly challenged its monolingual paradigm in different ways. To me, as many of my informants identified, discourses like endangered languages, indigenous peoples' rights movement, and education for all were factors behind the change in this paradigm in the context of CHT. With the signing of the 'Peace Accord' the government acknowledged that the primary education in the area should be in the mother tongue. A shift of the paradigm began. In the existing practice of monolingual education in Bangladesh, this is a big change, the beginning of a new era for indigenous peoples against the existing 'silent assimilation'.

The next chapter will reflect on how, in the midst of differential monolingual provisions and practices, the beginning of mother-tongue based education for the indigenous pupils' elementary schooling in CHT makes a difference and further challenges the monolingualism, while considering whether or not this could be called a paradigm shift. Additionally, reflection will pay attention to how and by whom this new educational practice is being tried to introduce mother tongue instruction in the region.

Chapter 4. Towards Mother-Tongue based Schooling: A Paradigm Shift (2000s - Present)

It is necessary to provide education to adivasi/ethnic minority people with a curriculum that allows learning in their own language at the primary level.

Bangladesh: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (2005)

Indigenous children should teach in first phase of primary education in their own language and gradually should be turned into Bengali medium. This will help to reduce dropout rate among the indigenous children.

Prof Serajul Islam Choudhury ²²

Education, especially basic primary education in Bangladesh has been a priority area of development for a long time. When Bangladesh got independence in 1971, the literacy rate of the country was only 16.8 percent. Since the beginning, the state has been trying hard to ensure the provision of universal and compulsory free primary education for all children. The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, adopted in 1972, significantly acknowledged education as a basic right of the 'people'. Constitutionally the state is obliged to 'establishing a uniform, mass-oriented and universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children' (Constitution of Bangladesh). In this venture, primary schools were nationalized, kept free and finally, it was made compulsory for all children aged 6 to 11 under the Primary Education (Compulsory) Act 1990. As a result, during the whole last decade of the 20th century, public primary education witnessed a gradual increase of child participation in schooling but a fall in quality. In terms of quality, indigenous children suffered more than mainstream children. Since indigenous populations and their rights have no acknowledgement in the state apparatus (Durnnian 2007), their educational failure has never been a separate issue before the end of last century. Ensuring quality by introducing mother-language based education has begun a discussion about the issue as early as the turn of the new millennium. Bangladesh has witnessed a quantitative expansion of the primary education system and a substantial increase in enrolment rates in recent years, but the inequitable access to quality primary education is still omnipresent (Ahmed et al 2005). Bangladesh is one of the signatories of UN Millennium Development

²² Cited by Deabnath 2008

Goals (MDGs) where goal 2 aims to ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. The goal of Education for All (EFA) by establishing true access to quality primary education for the masses, however, is still unmet. Ensuring quality primary education for the ethnic minority indigenous children is one of key challenges in achieving the primary education goal of Bangladesh. Research findings showed the provision of schooling is inadequate and more crucially, language instruction in classroom and cultural reflection in the textbooks in mainstream government primary school are mostly alien to indigenous children (Drong and Tripura 2004, Nath 2001). On this backdrop, I will find answers to several questions: what is the existing situation of schooling and medium of instruction in my study area against the overall CHT; how does the lack of mother-tongue based schooling for the indigenous children in CHT work as an exclusion mechanism in primary education; to what extent has the government changed the out-look materializing MTE in the area, and who are the actors in the practical field of mother tongue education in CHT and how they are working.

4.1 Various streams with cultural unimportance: Schooling for indigenous children in CHT

Like many other places in Bangladesh, elementary schooling in CHT has different streams. In the study area, I found indigenous children were attending many different educational institutions run by different stakeholders i.e., the community, religious personals, government, NGOs and private venture. I identified eight major streams in and surrounding places of my study area, and indigenous children attend all for elementary and primary education except the ‘madrassa’: a) Temple based religious education b) Government formal primary school c) Non-Governmental Registered Primary School d) Community school e) Satellite primary school e) NGO based Non-formal school and f) Private schools g) Madrassa. Apart from this, there are some non-formal educational programmes operated by both government and NGO or government and NGO collaboration for early learning for further school preparedness. One prominent example of this kind is Para (community) Centre (PC) at the village level serving groups of 25-30 families supported by United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). Primary schools in CHT are claimed to be inadequate and are often hard to reach places (Nath 2001, Tripura 2008). Many of my informants also suggested this and pointed this out.

In CHT, traditional religious institutions are one of the first organized education providers for indigenous kids. They are mostly temple-based schooling (Chakma 2002)

locally called *Kyong*. In those institutions children can learn mainly the religious activities i.e., preaching, meditation, and recitation from the religious books. They are taught some basic skill along with the religion. Apart from this, since the first introduction in 1862, modern formal based schooling has increasingly been dominating the region.

Following the same structure of central educational system of the country, the modern primary schooling is being running in the region. Schools follow a uniform curricula and textbooks. Government primary schools, Non-government Registered primary school, community and satellite school and some private schools (except so-called English medium schools) are the example of this formal education system. Schools are open for all children from all communities. Language of instructions in these schools is Bengali, the language of the dominant population. So far, my informants told me, government primary schools or government-supported primary schools are the key provider of basic and elementary education. Recently there are some kindergartens and schools have been running by the local private initiatives. They are expensive and concentrated in the proper areas especially in the middle of *Thana Sadar*²³.

Other operations of primary schools in my study area are national and local NGOs. Some of the NGOs are operating with mother-tongue partially or in a segmental way for the pre-primary and primary classes based on their own objectives and goals. Mainly two of them are undertaking a pilot project to introduce mother tongue based education (MTE) for up to the primary state. NGOs are generally concerned with basic education and operate schools mainly through the non-formal educational approach (I will discuss on this issue more at the end of this chapter and in the next chapter). Usually, in NGO schools, teachers are recruited from the local community and remunerated by the organization. Although they follow the government designed curricula, they use (or could choose) text-books both designed and developed by them or by the government. The per capita operational cost of schooling is lower than the government system, and the operation is heavenly donor fund depended.

By the Peace Accord 1997, the overall authority of the primary education is rest under the Chittagong Hill Drastic Councils (HDC). With the authority that HDC got from the accord, it can oversee and take decision on affairs of all government primary schools or government supported in the region. In fact, other schools are perceptibly under this authority too. However, at the same time, management structure of the government primary school is kept as the same as other parts of the country. As a result, sometimes it looks like ‘dual

²³ Small administrative unit of the country

control' (Chakma 2002: 5) in the government school administration. In interviews, a local education officer of my research area, however, did not comply with this view.

One of the common characters of all types of educational provision is that they in one way or another teach with the state language Bengali following the government prescribed curriculum which my informant perceived as not culturally relevant for most of the indigenous pupils. It is conspicuous that the first actor to come forward to ensure that all schools use mother tongue or make provision of mother tongue and a culturally relevant schooling - is the council. Having consulted the HDC nearer to my study area I came to know that they have projects on this. I am also told by the informants outside the council that the political issues do not allow the council takes much broader decision and initiative. On the positive side, the council cooperates and encourages the NGO initiative of mother tongue schooling in the area.

4.2 Dominant language based schooling: Matrix of exclusions

In our earlier discussion, we saw that the emergence of Bangladesh was a process of a profound nationalist movement, and the Bangladesh state has categorically been proclaimed one nation: Bengali/Bangladeshi. It has also been discussed how the national education policy in terms of language in the school disregarded the languages of indigenous peoples in the region. Thus, public as well as other primary schools in the indigenous areas have been providing education through only one language, the Bengali that still continues as it is. Thus, the exclusionary role it plays needs an in-depth scrutiny, which I feel has a 'direct' and 'indirect' expression. Indicating the direct expression of the exclusion process relating the language barrier in schooling, one of my informants, an indigenous leader stated :

“Even after 5/6 years of their age, they neither understand Bengali, nor English; they even don't speak their own language clearly. By entering school first time they face hard problem in learning Bengali or English. Many times, they can't speak or don't understand. So after attending few days or months, they leave schools, and dropout.”

This view also supported by, Dewan in her journalistic exposition,

“...primary school children in CHT are required to take classes in Bengali-the state language. This linguistic barrier makes it difficult for them to understand textbooks or follow their teacher's lessons. School becomes boring for them and eventually they start to lose interest in learning” (Dewan 2008)

Since the primary education system itself is mostly biased on the mainstream language and dominant culture of the society, a certain number of indigenous children especially who live in interior areas of CHT encountered this direct exclusion. Those who live far from the town encounter this language problem mostly because of this lingual problem. In fact, many of them either never enrolled or drop out early or are unable to acquire the competencies the education is intended for. The form of direct exclusion is too open for them. Others of course encountered exclusion in the forms of few educational provisions in the areas. In one of my informants' voice:

“If we consider not only Khagrachari, but all three hill districts of the region, situation primary education is not something to be content with. There has been inadequate number of primary school in the area even before the independence. Since education was underdeveloped, we did not get skill teachers. [...] Those teachers are still in our schools and they cannot teach properly according to revised textbooks and curriculum.”

Similarly, many educational studies on indigenous children of CHT showed some basic statistics that precisely indicated the relative disadvantage of indigenous children in imparting primary education. For instance, in a study researcher Nath found that indigenous (ethnic minority) children were lagging behind the Bengali children in terms of both net enrollment rate²⁴ and gross enrollment ratio. He also found some ethnic groups net enrollment rate is as low as only 7.7 (*Mro* children) percent where in the same area the net enrollment rate of Bengali children was 67.6 per

Table 1: Literacy by Ethnic groups in CHT

Community	Literacy rate (per cent)		
	Mate	Female	Average
Bengali	58.38	46.81	52.88
Bawm	73.81	54.76	64.29
Chak	70.83	32.00	51.02
Chakma	74.83	56.18	65.89
Khumi	12.82	2.70	7.92
Kheyang	38.10	13.89	26.92
Lusai	100.00	90.00	95.00
Marma	64.79	41.54	53.68
Mro	34.88	06.06	22.39
Pankhua/Pankko	77.34	19.56	44.44
Tanghangya	32.39	14.70	23.74
Tripura	36.24	18.24	26.65
Rakhain	94.12	60.00	85.19
Average	55.56	38.47	47.24

Source: ADB 2000

²⁴ Net-enrolment rate is defined as number of eligible children for primary schooling (age 6-11 for Bangladesh case) enrolled in school per 100 children.

cent (Nath 2001). Again, non-enrollment and drop-out rates are disproportionately higher among the ethnic indigenous groups indicated in research studies. In essence, it was found to be as high as double the national average (Pinnock n.d., ADB 2001 cited in Durnnian 2007). However, interestingly, besides a few exceptions, not much disparity can be seen from the literacy rate of indigenous communities in comparison with main-stream Bengalis (Table 1). In this study conducted by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), in fact, in terms of literacy rate, apart from apparent relative gap between mainstream Bengali peoples and some indigenous groups, a huge gap was found among the indigenous groups between the genders. Whereas *Bawm, Chak, Chakma, Rakhain and Lusai* had literacy rate over 50 percent, there are groups like *Tanghangya* and *Khumi* who had literacy rates as low as around 33 percent and 13 percent respectively. A relative difference, by pattern, is noticed in the table 1 in terms of gender. Here again, the groups that remained in the bottom compared with other ethnic groups had a lower rate of female literacy rate and vice versa. Noticeably, literacy rate for the female *Khumi* and *Mro* was as low as around 3 percent and 6 percent.

Here it must be noted that this rate of literacy was deduced, I suppose in most of the cases, in terms of Bengali, which is not the mother tongue of indigenous peoples. Since literacy itself is intrinsically related with language skills, understanding and usage, and there were almost no institution what could provide literacy skills in other language than Bengali, this table mostly reflects a picture of literacy among the indigenous peoples in their second language, Bengali. This relatively comparative picture of literacy rate could be interpreted as interrelated with language domination in the region. It is thus a sheer reflection of the outcome of long indented conversion of an indigenous person into a Bengali speaking literate person²⁵. In this interpretation, as we see, Bengali is the only choice in school and many indigenous groups became literate at a higher rate, even higher than the mainstream Bengali in the region. I will return in this topic again in this chapter and find the more reasons behind the higher literacy rate among the indigenous groups in Bangladesh.

There is no concrete study on mother tongue literacy of the indigenous peoples of CHT. The table 2 has been constructed with the data from Ethnologue, an encyclopedic reference catalogue of world languages. Table 2 shows also the variation of the L1 (first or mother tongue of indigenous peoples) and L2 (second language, in this case Bengali) only for

²⁵ Literacy in Bangladesh is not measured through text based method. Simply 'asking a person if he can read and write a letter' literacy in any language is reported. So, it is susceptible to bias.

the Chakma community. However, it also showed the variation of the literacy rate between and among the communities.

Table 2: Literacy rate of some indigenous peoples in CHT by L1 and L2

Community	Percent of peoples literate in language(s)	
	L1	L2
Chakma	2.5	70
Chak	na	25
Khumi	na	60
Muro	na	10

Source: Gordon (2005) Ethnologue

The exclusion, however, is not very visible through statistical information when it clearly showing a high literacy rate second language. It would not be visible either in the statistics of the high drop-out rate and non-enrollment ratio clearly. In fact I would argue that the exclusion of indigenous children from education can only limitedly be explained in general statistical indicators and comparing with non-indigenous population. As most indigenous children are disadvantaged by an education system that does not recognize their language or culture, it is the cornerstone of the exclusion mechanism that I would refer to as the ‘indirect’ exclusionary form. Entering the classroom, they must learn in a language they do not understand in most cases (Durnnian 2007). As language of education plays such vital role in children’s cognitive and educational development, schooling for children in CHT hardly could full fill that goal. In essence, rejecting a child's language in the school is like saying no to the child’s identity and culture (Minde 2003). Cummins maintained, “When the message, implicit or explicit, communicated to children in the school is "Leave your language and culture at the schoolhouse door", children also leave a central part of who they are-their identities-at the schoolhouse door. When they feel this rejection, they are much less likely to participate actively and confidently in classroom instruction” (Cummins Undated). The students in school physically are not attending to their education properly are ‘silent-drop-out’ which is grossly overlooked. Thus, this crucial ‘indirect’ aspect of exclusion from education for the indigenous children of the country is readdressed. Along with this, lingual differences and its implications on educational achievement seems to me still an unexplored and overlooked area of educational research in Bangladesh which needs to be addressed in dealing with indigenous children exclusion in primary education.

4.3 Changed position in the government's outlook: Where is the mother-tongue in the classroom?

As has already been noted, government recognition of the use of mother tongue in primary education in CHT came through the 'peace accord' signed between GoB and JSS in 1997, but the question remained how far the government has worked on it during the past decade. Nothing in significant scale can be seen except gradually recognition of mother tongue education in some crucial official documents of the government. Primarily a successive change in the approach of mother tongue based education is conveyed in the rhetoric word 'local language' in the Primary Education Development Programme II (PEDP II) documents. In Appendix H Summary of Indigenous People' Development Framework of PEDP II, the Strategy for the PEDP II for remote areas stated that, "The medium of instruction for 1-2 grades will be in local language" (MoPME 2001 cited in Durnian 2007: 22). It is interesting to note that the document used the term 'indigenous peoples' not making clear on what sense but avoiding 'mother-tongue' it simply used 'local language'.

Similarly, a crucial strategy document of the country called National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction (PRS)-Unlocking the Potential also recognized the urgency of introducing education for *Adivasi/ethnic minority children* in their mother tongue at primary level²⁶. Thus, although synonymous, without using the term 'indigenous', government slowly acknowledged that 'Specific segments of the population, particularly within ... ethnic groups and in remote locations, still have to struggle for access' (GoB, undated) and mother language based education could be a effective approach to address the issue.

Although in the peace accord and other strategy papers, the government acknowledged the introduction of mother language based education for the 'Tribal' or *adivasi* children, in reality no practical initiative has ever been taken. By consulting with the key decision makers of the HDC near my study area, I was informed that they were considering a process of mother tongue education that would be 'a complementary type' i.e. mother tongue will be taught as a subject in different class. The intended project is, according to my interviewees, going through several channels in the government ministries. So, it seems to me the project had to go a long way.

The central government approach at the practical level can be understood through comments of the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) Chairman Prof. Dr M

²⁶ the quotation in the beginning of the chapter

Masir Uddin who was asked about the issue by a national newspaper journalist. In February 2008, he told him that they have no plan to publish indigenous textbooks now. "We'll make curriculum and publish primary textbooks according to the direction of the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE)" (Debnath 2008). Schooling for an indigenous child who lives in remote village of CHT, speaks in different languages and is familiar with different social environment, is likely something new to her. The central curricula are intuitively very different than her home and social situation. One of the NGOs working on MTE expressed dissatisfaction relating to the lack of proper guidance. By pointing to government leadership in the field and NGO schooling forwardness, Chittagong regional director of Caritas James Gomes said,

"We have made three types indigenous textbooks -- Marma, Chakma and Tripura -- for primary level. But we are working only in limited areas in three CHT districts. The government should take initiatives to publish indigenous textbooks which will help reduce the dropout rate at primary level" (Cited in Debnath 2008: 1).

4.4 Negotiating with the national policy and local reality: A sloth process

It is now more of a function of the Hill District Council (HDC) of the area to deal with the issue of mother tongue in primary schooling. Several initiatives of the Council have been identified from in-depth interviews with the leaders of the organization. First, they are thinking to develop some pre-primary centre in mother tongue instructions. One of the informants stated, "we know that we have to learn Bengali. We also have to learn English. But to curb the dropout rate, it seems to us that at least a pre-schooling education is needed in mother tongue." There is another plan of the HDC decision-makers to introduce mother tongue education as 'co-curriculum' within the government existing forms, contents and curriculum of primary schooling for indigenous peoples. According to the informants, they are planning to develop books of indigenous languages as a subject to be studied in different stages of primary schooling. Students of a particular language community will study and follow instruction in mother tongue in those subjects.

The last thing they claimed to have been doing is facilitating non-formal pre-primary schooling initiatives of the NGOs. However, the chair of the HDC did not hesitate to say that 'their activities need to be more coordinated with the HDC.' He further added,

"The aim and objective of HDC is the aim and objective of [central] government, as it is playing a part of that. So, policy and plans of HDC are not different than the

government policy and plan. NGOs are working as a help of that same goal. So, how are helping and in which areas are needed to be identified and with an understanding and proper planning. If it is done, then they would not overlapped and misunderstand each other.’’

It also was apparent from the view of my informants that there is some lack of prompt initiative for mother tongue based education, and proper coordination of the NGOs who are trying to introduce mother tongue based schooling for the indigenous pupils. Not much doubt that no visible progress of the Council was not but an indication of vision and leadership in this area.



Anando Mohan Chakma, a primary school teacher at CHT, was showing a newspaper article (tagged on his window) on the UN declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. Photo: Kabir M.M. (2008)

4.5 Case of a complementary initiative: A local attempt for language survival

From this discussion it is more or less apparent that the government has changed the outlook of MTE in the area. On one hand, the council is still limited with the ideas of supplementary language development within the current system of primary education, but they have yet to take any functional initiative with sound policy for a long term programme. Surprisingly it was not long before a similar initiative was realized as a local initiative. It was Anando Mohan Chakma, a primary school teacher who once introduced a supplementary course in Chakma language for the primary pupils in nearby places of my study area. He convinced the local administration to allow him. He asked some of his colleagues in other schools to take part in his project. He generated some small fund for this and undergoing the course he initiated, students would get some basic literacy in the language. Running his project successfully for two years, the project stopped prematurely due to lack of funding.

4.6 Towards the mother tongue education: NGO initiatives

The CHT is a region with hilly terrain and ethnically diverse groups living scattered geographically. By the 1990s, due to Bangladesh Government undisclosed policy of Settlement in CHT, about half of the population is now Bengali. A good number of people from the Chakma community stated that they gradually gained literacy after ejection from their ancestral land for the hydro-electric project in the 1960s. However, the educational situation of other indigenous group in CHT was very poor. By addressing challenges constantly and supplementing government initiatives in universal primary education, Non-government Organizations (NGOs) were visible actors in the education sector of Bangladesh from the beginning. NGO programmes were designed to reach the underprivileged and/or hard to reach children who either missed the schooling or dropped-out. CHT was one of the impoverished areas of the country for long time, and NGO were not visible in the development activities in the CHT area due to the conflict. The educational situation of the region was reported as bleak. Since the peace accord made the environment relatively calm, many NGO activities are now involved in the area. Due to the government non-involvement in the MTE the activities of NGO was more visible. Education has always been a priority area of development and many of them are against continuing as an existing Bengali medium school, trying to introduce mother tongue primary schooling.

The problem of education in CHT had been identified by the NGOs from long before their active participation in the field. The long standing problem of language barrier, teachers' disgust to stay in remote area and using temporary, unskilled and untrained teachers made many schools non-functional institutions. In an official plan of action paper UNICEF identified:

“Access to primary schools remains difficult for many *paras* in the CHT and not all children have enrolled at school. The challenging terrain, the lack of qualified teachers and the lack of adequate learning spaces for children are issues to be addressed in the future education support in the CHT. This will need to be addressed by supporting both non formal education as well as formal education to reach those children not currently attending school. In addition, multilingual education has yet to be realized as schools offer lessons only in Bengali and not in local languages. Efforts to support multilingual education are underway ” (UNICEF 1995: 2).

NGOs did not, however, introduce the mother language based education in the region at the outset. In fact they were also following the government prescribed curricula, textbooks and

traditional teaching using what was used in other areas of the country. However, as soon as the development of endangered language, ethnic indigenous movement and its accord where the government agreed in allowing languages other than Bengali and over all the declaration of International Mother Language Day, a strong focus was put on the CHT region where about 11 ethnic indigenous groups had been living with their different language and culture. Here, the UNESCO Dhaka office played a key role. Very interestingly, from the turn of the last century with the support of donors, UNESCO started several trials of bi/multi lingual education for indigenous peoples, and the government up to now made no obstruction of those initiatives. In June 2005, UNESCO organized a national seminar on mother language based education with various donor and agencies and NGOs operating such education.

Different local NGOs come to the practical field with support from the donors and NGOs. They for the first time introduced mother language based education in the region. The pioneers among them are BRAC, ZKS, Caritas Bangladesh (CB), and World Vision. It should be mentioned that NGOs provide education in a non-formal approach. It was interesting to note that in my small study areas, there are as many as 4 NGOS operating schools where only two were following mother language based education. It was interesting to note that the one NGO who has mother tongue based education pilot programme was at the same time running some vast number of non-formal schools both in Bengali and Indigenous languages. Introduction of education in mother-tongue was also introduced by NGOs for plain land indigenous people of the country. For example, *ASHRAI* is operating 432 *Oraon* and children are studying at 17 non-formal schools through instruction in *Sadri*, their mother tongue (UNESCO 2007).

Education for indigenous people in mainstream government primary and government supported primary schools is using Bengali. Although identified as a key barrier in achieving quality primary education for indigenous population, there is no sign that mother language based education is being implemented in government or government supported schools in CHT. This chapter has shown that on one hand, educational provisions controlled and influenced by the government had no change in usage of Bengali for the indigenous children. On the other hand, more crucially this chapter also showed that NGO run schools are trying to introduce mother language instruction in the classroom and cultural reflection in the textbook for the indigenous kid although it is limited in scope. It can be argued that until mainstream government educational institutions introduce the mother tongue based education, the right of all children to get education in mother tongue will not be realized. Government primary schools should be linguistically, culturally and pedagogically friendly to the indigenous

children. ‘Government support and action is prime need for institutionalizing mother tongue literacy programmes...’ (UNESCO 2008). In the specific case of CHT, since the HDCs are the authority of primary education in the regions, they should step forward to convince the central government to change curricula and introduce mother language based education in all schools where indigenous children study.

4.7 Changing outlook and limited initiative: Paradigm shifting?

This chapter analyzed the existing situation of schooling and medium of instruction in my study area against the overall CHT and showed that various types of elementary education is used in the region. In terms of language, all were using Bengali except the newly incepted Mother Tongue based Education (MTE), a current pilot study in my study areas. I have also discussed widely that the lack of mother-tongue based schooling for the indigenous children in CHT work as an exclusion mechanism for primary education in both direct and indirect ways. The other side that I focused was that changed government views are not necessarily coupled with a proper initiative to materializing MTE in the area. Instead there is often little change in this area. The HDC’s supplementary project, which was pre-tested by a local initiative can have some insight and has come up with a new vision. With a lack of government practical initiative, national and local NGOs are in the practical field of MTE although limited with the pilot project. A lot of support gained by the international institution of these NGO initiatives is also a fact. From all these discussion on the MEL both by NGOs and local initiatives, it seems that the paradigm is shifting slowly. In another way, it is crossing towards a policy of ‘integration’ for indigenous peoples in our conceptual framework; at the same time, the existing presence of Bengali schools is still leading towards a backlash- the assimilation fervour for the indigenous peoples in CHT.

In the next chapter I will scrutinized the perception and practice of MTE with a centering focus of two schooling cases run by two NGOs as pilot programmes for introducing mother language based education for the indigenous children in my study area.

5. Mother-tongue based Education (MTE): Perceptions and Practices in CHT

Studies show that we learn better in our mother tongue. But then it has to be taught in school, which is not the case of all minority languages.

UNESCO 2003:4

There is no general rule that primary education should be in the mother tongue.

Gupta 1997: When mother Tongue Education is not Preferred (p.1)

Based on the previous chapter, this chapter will first analyze local practice, and relevance and the significance of MTE for indigenous children with some reference to the debate on the mother tongue and education. Subsequently, a critique will be put forth on the existing competency based monolingual education and its irrelevance for the educational and language needs of indigenous pupils in contest of Bangladesh. Next, a comparative discussion would show how the NGO based mother-tongue education was being practiced in my study area in CHT. Towards the end, through the analysis of perception of several stakeholders, I will analyze the challenges of MTE in the existing system of educational context of CHT. Finally, I will try to find the answer of how the current practices and perception of MTE fits into the model or policy towards the indigenous peoples.

5.1 Ensuring MTE: Global debate and local reality for indigenous pupils

Although many international education policies²⁷ acknowledge that every child has the right to have education in mother tongue, there are some controversies regarding the medium of instruction in school or language of teaching learning. Most modern states that have minority speech communities and ensure indigenous peoples language in classroom are engaged in a policy debate. On the language policy in education, the general trend is that modern states are less willing to “officially grant and acknowledge speaker-rights to indigenous language communities” (Stroud 2002:39). Now for a long time since 1951 when at a meeting in Paris initiated by UNESCO, educational specialist suggested to take every effort to provide primary education in the mother tongue for the simple reason that it is culturally, psychologically, and pedagogically more appropriate to do so (Yadav 1992). The UNESCO report concludes: “...pupil should begin their schooling through the medium of mother tongue, because they understand it best and because to begin their school life in mother tongue will make the between home and school as small as possible” (UNESCO 1953, cited by Yadav 1992: 177).

Although a persuasive argument, some scholars in the field of language in education are not convinced with this recommendation. There are many criticisms on the use of mother tongue in schools that has emerged since the UNESCO recommendation. From this block, it is often argued that the claim of necessity of mother language is not substantiated by solid experimentation. Some also argued that the emphasis on the mother tongue medium is to neglect the obvious need for a language of wider communication (Bamgbose 2000). Mounting one of the first attack on the UNESCO recommendations Bull asserted that “in

²⁷ As a response to this process of assimilation, movements to protect minority indigenous peoples’ rights, the rights of self determination, languages and cultural survival, grew globally by the middle of twentieth century. Over more than two decades of struggle at the international level, the UN General Assembly approved the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples where in Article 14.1 states, “Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning (United Nations, 2007). In essence, being an integral part of indigenous peoples’ movement for self-determination, indigenous language revival initiative (through education), becomes a key issue in the indigenous discourse. According to Stephen May, “[a] key concern within these wider claims to self-determination is the retention and promotion of indigenous languages and cultures...” (May 1999: 1). A report written by experts of the United Nations Permanent Forum for Indigenous Issues points out that the right to mother-tongue medium education is an educational linguistic human right (Hirvonen 2008: 15).

place of more education in more vernaculars, it would seem more practical to formulate a long-range educational program aimed at a gradual reduction in the number of languages and dialect in the world'' (Bull 1964 cited in Bamgbose 2000:76). Gupta has pointed out that the mother tongue education may foster the ethnic division and may be counterproductive by being a factor that diminishes access for the minority groups to the power structure (Gupta 1997).

This anti-mother tongue use in schooling position, however, has been criticized with evidence from research. More and more clear understanding came from the pedagogic research that pointed out that it would be a myth to think that children would learn better without learning the mother tongue first (The Danish Education Network 2008:5). In a study of mother tongue and bilingual education in Africa, it was also found that at minimum the first 6-8 years of schooling in child's first language is pertinent for both children's sound educational base and socio-economic return from educational investment for the society (ref). In their studies, Cummins (1996) and Dutcher and Tucker (1997), also showed that instruction in the mother tongue is beneficial for first language (L1) competence, achievement in other subject areas, and is a necessary for the foundation in cognitive development in second language (L2) acquisition.

As already noted, the default compulsory language in public education is Bengali. Since the language of instruction in public school is Bengali, minority indigenous groups have until recently no alternative to learning Bengali, the language of majority people. Bengali people comprise about 98 percent of the total population of the country. Indigenous peoples are only two percent of the population, divided in 45-71 ethnic groups and most of them speak in their own mother tongues, making it hard to argue to introduce mother tongue in schooling.

Since the beginning of the international indigenous movement, many of these minority groups have been demanding the right of study in mother in schooling. Since their languages and culture are not represented in the national setting, their tongue is ignored by the government formal education system. As a result, like many other endangered languages, languages of indigenous communities are ignored and indigenous children are marginalized linguistically and educationally. Several studies have shown that mother tongue education is one of key recommendations that the indigenous communities forwarded (Drong, and Tripura, 2004, RDC 2004). However, after three decades of monolingual practice in the education system since independence, a few national and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), with the help of international donor support, started first language-

based education for the indigenous children. These NGO based educational programmes created an exceptional opportunity for the indigenous peoples to study in their languages and hence halted their language from the process of extinction. In that sense, this NGO initiated schooling in first language for the indigenous people is contributing to the indigenous language revitalization in Bangladesh.

5.2 Relevance of competency primary schooling for indigenous children of CHT

The primary education in Bangladesh is competency based. In a competency-based education strategy, students are expected to acquire some specific competencies according to their gradual development in grades. Such an educational program includes a set of learning objectives that are clearly specified so that their accomplishment can be understood in the form of specific learner behaviours and knowledge. Minimum levels of achievement of these objectives are established as the criterion of success. This idea was first introduced in America in the late 1960's in teacher education programs, and was later adapted for other professional educational, and vocational training programs in UK and Germany (Mohsin n. d.)²⁸.

In Bangladesh, since 1992 a curriculum with 53 competencies has been introduced at the primary education level and identified as the Essential Learning Continuum (ELC). The ELC is a listing of competencies, which serves as a guide to determine what to teach and measure among the pupils at the primary level. Competency was defined in this way 'the acquired knowledge, ability and viewpoint when those could be applied in real life at the right time could be called competency'. Now the competencies are reduced to 50 (Appendix C). If you set the competencies on the socio-cultural context of indigenous children of Bangladesh, it would be interesting to note how irrelevant it is from the day to day practice of the people. In fact, the chart of competency for the primary level education is itself controversial even for the dominant population. Going through the list of competency for the pupils of primary school, several short-comings may be identified generally that are obviously not much relevant for the indigenous peoples. Here I will concentrate our focus of analysis only with those competencies that seems disputable for the peoples who do not speak the language they teach by.

²⁸ For more about competency based education see http://www.cpcs.umb.edu/support/studentsupport/new_student/competency_education.htm

First, from the impartial perspective, the first two competencies seem to be so weird as it suggests to ‘place unflinching trust in the oneness of Allah, the Almighty creator and Custodian of the universe’. Interestingly, the important point here is that it did not keep space for other religions. As no indigenous peoples in the country follow Islam, putting this as the competency is regarded as a direct assault to their faith. However, by competency 3 and 5, the recognition can be found for other religion.

Since the philosophy of primary education is aimed at Bengali speaking people, it is not a wonder to find the competency between 24 and 27 only focus on the Bengali language as it is the recognized language of education at primary level. It was emphasized that students learn and talk in correct colloquial Bengali with their classmate. By observing the whole scripts of the list of competency, it could clearly be deduced that it was designed on the assumption that in all probability children in primary school would be Bengali, knowing Bengali culture and language. Not to mention that there seems to be no indigenous participation in designing these educational precepts. One of my informants who was a school teacher in a government primary school, regretted that what he teaches his pupils is ‘false’. He pointed out to me that the reflection of Bengali culture in the textbook. He gave me an example from a story of a book, he said, “‘Look how books is deceptive for us, my name is Anu, I pray *Johorer Namaz* (evening prayer). I go to *Eidgha* on Eid day. Is this the culture we are familiar with here in our community?’” He asked. He continued, “‘How’d our kid know our language, our culture?’” (Italic indicates his emphasize). This way of designing education philosophy not considering the small culture and language is not uncommon among the nation states as Mitchell and Salsbury stated: “‘Since the persons in privilege were often the person of power, it is understandable that the educational curriculum of the country seldom dealt with the judicious pluralistic treatment of the various micro culture in a nation.’” (Mitchell and Salsbury 1996: X).

5. 3 Practice of MTE in Khagrachari: Comparative Scrutiny in two cases

The strategy of Multi-lingual education (*MLE*) recognizes the importance of children beginning their education in their mother tongue (*Durnnian 2008:V*). One of the basic characteristics of MLE is the use of more than two languages for literacy and instruction. It starts from where the learners are, and from what they already know. This means learning to read and write in their first language or L1, and also teaching subjects like mathematics, science, health and social studies in the L1 (Nolasco n.d.), the language they speak and

understand. Local community ownership, local teachers, and an appropriate and relevant curriculum are also important elements of a successful mother tongue-based MLE programme (Durnnian 2008: V).

This section will reflect on two organizations offering mother tongue education for the indigenous peoples in the study area in Khagrachari, CHT. How the curricula were designed, who designed it and the pedagogy for these schools will be discussed.

Additionally, student participation in the class will be discussed. We will take two prime models of education now in practice educating indigenous people in CHT- a) BRAC Model and b) ZKS Model. The two models are described and analyzed in more detail in this chapter: Box 1 and Box 2 show that BRAC and ZKS model of MTE programmes for pre-primary children which are aimed to continuing up to primary education. *The comparative analysis will be done on the basis of following themes:*

Aims and objective. While both models are in pilot phase their comparative analysis could be thriving. Both projects aim to offer education through mother tongue of indigenous peoples. Both of them claim that they are addressing the educational and language needs of the indigenous children. Both are designed for the children age group 5-6 years. About the aim, ZKS states: The primary objective of the program is to ensure that indigenous children have access to learning facilities and resources in their mother tongue. As a result, children will have improved access to quality education and be



Demonstration of ‘Discipline’ and orderliness in school . Photo: Kabir, M.M. (2008)



A student practicing orthography in mother her mother tongue in a MLE school

Photo: Kabir, M.M.(2008)

empowered to participate in decision-making in matters which affect them within the classroom, school, family and wider society (Zabarang Kalyan Samity n. d.).



Students' participation in a MTE school in the study area. Photo: Kabir, M, M (2008)

Curriculum and materials. The things that children were learning in schools were basically two: alphabets and extra-curricular skills i.e., drawing, singing, dancing and cleanliness. Both organizations employed material development staffs who are responsible to produce books and other teaching learning materials. Staffs were working in close cooperation and guidance of experts from home and abroad.

Teaching learning process in classroom. The pre-school classroom where I conducted my participant observation was equipped with necessary materials for teaching learning i.e. books, charts, black board etc. The teacher had a guide that she followed in her teaching. Since this schooling was just for building confidence and teaching some survival strategy for the pupils in the further schooling, a major part of the teaching was learning extra-curricula, i.e. singing song, perform dancing as single or in peer or in a group. However, as a basic focus, I found, teaching and

supervisor emphasize on learning the alphabets. The teacher first teaches students some alphabets and then ask them on the board to follow her. For a successful performance, other students are asked to encourage by giving claps.



Community participation: a parent peeping through classroom window. Photo: Kabir, M. M.(2008)

Pedagogy and language use. Both models were taking enormous care in pedagogy and language use in the classroom teaching. Teachers were recruited from the community who speaks the language. It was found that

many teachers were trained in the orthography in the language as they were not familiar to it. Teaching learning is mostly learner based. Observation indicated that there were sufficient student-teacher and student-student interactions. The teacher brings students to the board to write the alphabet she just taught. The other also asked to say if the letter written in the board is correct. One by one every student are tested and other students participation is ensured.

Discipline and Extracurricular activities
It is to be noted that these schooling initiatives are for children to prepare a base for the further continuation in education, a big part of the activities in school are extra curricula – performing indigenous songs, dance and so on. They are asked to draw picture and colour it. They were found as disciplined generally with some small crowdedness.

Box: 1 BRAC Model:

BRAC is the pioneer organization in indigenous educational activities in Bangladesh. In 1985, BRAC Education Programme (BEP) appeared with full-fledged interventions including an innovative non-formal primary education (NFPE) model. NFPE was designed to address the basic and primary educational needs of rural poor children specially girls. Subsequently BRAC initiated several need-based education programmes. Education for Indigenous Children (EIC) is one of key examples started in October 2001. BEAC recent pilot project called 'Bilingual Education Project' which is undergoing in two areas of CHT. It is a pilot project. In brief:

1. Project name: Mother Toungue based Multilingual Education (MT based MLE).
2. Aim and objective: Build a strong educational foundation by bridging mother toungue with Bangla and English. Reduce drop out from secondary education.
3. Schools : Total 10 schools are piloting now (5 at Dighinala, Khagrachari & 5 at Kawkhali, Rangamati).
4. Next step: After finishing *Shishu Shreni* the studetns will go to
5. Grade -1 and continue to Grade - 5.

Source: Personal communication with Subrata Khisa, EIC Group of BRAC Education Programme.

Control and management and community participation. In terms of control and management, SKS and BRAC have variation. Since ZKS is a local NGO, all of its staffs are from the indigenous communities from top to lower level. On the other hand, BRAC had a core group for management in the central office in capital where both indigenous and non-indigenous staffs were responsible for the management. The BRAC bi-lingual programme management team called Education for Indigenous children (EIC) component of BRAC education programme. However, in the field level management is manned by the staff with indigenous background.

Sensitivity towards indigenous culture and identities. In any education programme for indigenous people is required to be characterized by the level of sensitivity and commitment to traditional indigenous culture. From the material development to the pedagogical interaction in the classroom appeared to be although willingness of maintaining the this standard. Both of the organizations aimed at using a full primary course in indigenous peoples mother tongue.

5.4 Challenges for MT

Box 2: ZKS Model:

The ZKS model of Multi-Lingual Education (MLE) program is providing learning opportunities for indigenous pre-school children in the Khagrachari District located in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). The program was developed in partnership with Save the Children UK after consultations with local communities. This pilot project for the indigenous children is using mother tongue. Three major indigenous language communities, *Chakma, Marma and Tripura* are included as medium of instruction. This is still in early of its stage and introduced the pre-primary schooling.

This model is claimed to be ensuring ‘inclusive quality education’. Executive Director of ZKS maintained that ‘quality’ in education means learning opportunity of children in their own language and contents of curriculum address their culture and daily life (Tripura 2008) and ZKS is following that in this programme.

Education in Bangladesh

There are various challenges in the newly introduced education system by the NGOs. On one side, there are various challenges from the technical side, the other delicate aspect of challenges include Bengali hegemony, popular perception etc. I have elaborated it more in the following sub-sections:

5.4.1 Relation between the organizations: lack of coordination

Lack of coordination between organizations was reported by the concerned organization. There are many aspects of coordination especially when a new education system is being developed with introducing new languages. Especially, the ways of spelling and other grammatical and pedagogical issues must be coordinated between the organizations that are working to achieve the same goal.

5.4.2 Popular perception.

From the lay people to the educated citizens, the educational policymakers and administrators, and even the local stakeholders seem to have possessed and perpetuated a conception that runs contrary to the introduction and practice of mother tongue education, including culture and traditional views in so called modern education system.

A Bengali settler's view: (journalist) "In fact *pahari* are more advanced in education".

5.4.3 Government recognition and patronization: lack of fresh understanding

Although a clear indication from the government treaty for the 'indigenous'/tribal peoples education has been given for CHT it is yet to be developed as firm policy . Given that no policy is such a policy of ignorance, linguistic education rights of indigenous peoples of the country is suffering a lot. While the monolingual state language policy in education underlined by the singular nation imagination institutionally blocked any major governmental steps in fostering mother tongue education for indigenous people, the CHTDC regulation and CHT peace accord induce optimism. It is, ultimately, indigenous people themselves to take decision and have more way to go for this regards.

5.4.4 Mainstream hegemony: Within and outside of the classroom

The global tendency that has been observed over the past decades is clearly toward smaller languages, particularly minority and indigenous languages, to die out (Schmidt 2008). As a result, indigenous peoples are losing their identity and knowledge. It is true in the case of Bangladesh as well where indigenous people and languages are yet to be recognized by government in nation state. However, some civil society NGOs started schools for indigenous children in their mother tongue which seems to have appeared as an alternative. The NGO initiated schools are suffering many challenges but as I argue, with the lack of a government initiative, this development is a major step in ensuring the right to learn in mother tongue and revitalizing indigenous language and culture in Bangladesh.



Drawing of an indigenous student. In it, she put her name in Bengali, manifestation of Bengali hegemony Photo: Kabir, M. M.(2008)

5.5 Perception of the stakeholders on the MTE

Perception has a closer or subtle link with the act of an actor. In this section, various stakeholders relating the MLT perception has been documented and analyzed considering two points: first, discussing the perception of different stakeholder concerning the MTE would let people know about the dynamics of views and ultimately further the prospects of the practice. Second, the perception would help set standards according to the conceptual framework (Appendix B).

5.5.1 The Chittagong Hill District Council, Khagrachari: Hazed with 'development'

According to the latest development of the CHT region with the 'Peace treaty' the education administration went under the authority of CHDC. Having interviewed with the highest decision making personalities in the CHTC in the study area, it can be deduced that this semi-

autonomous body is still limited in its functions concerning the local education, in one of key personalities, in so-called developmental aspects- setting up new government schools, repairing, and employing teachers. This office also patronizes local and national MTE educational initiatives but vary interestingly, they yet to have any self dependent projects to introduce indigenous' mother tongue in the government schools. Although it is a mandate that rest upon them from the peace accord that mother tongue will be medium of education in primary schooling in CHT. So far, as one of councilor of the office described, they are taking a project to introduce 'different indigenous language' as a subject to be studied by the respective indigenous community.

Whatever initiatives they have taken or not, an interview with one key person (non-indigenous) with the decision making body of this office, it was revealed that an assimilative outlook persists when he talks about indigenous (using the term *upajati*) education. The following conversation is just a simple reflection of this view (name of place and person mentioned in the conversation has been omitted from the original interview):

Q: How do you work on the education in CHT?

A: From District council, we mainly look after the 'development' side of the schooling in the area.

Q: What do you think about when a small indigenous child learns through Bengali? What do you seen in Para Kendro?

A: I am so impressed, surprised to see how so little kids in many *kendos* who mostly below 6 years, but they are so expert in Bengali, especially they sang *Bangla* songs for us. I suppose, if proper 'nursing' can be ensured, it is not a big deal at all. The way it is now divided in terms of mother language is careless; yes, mother tongue is important, but 'nursing' could overcome the problems. I have never thought that they would do so well (in Bengali).

Q: Why do they do so good?

A: It depends on 'nursing'. Besides, I also visited 8 *para kendros* in the Bengali community, but they even are not as good as those (indigenous) are. They could not do so well. Thus, I want to reiterate the issue –the demand of mother tongue, how would you validate the demand if those kids below 6years sings so 'good', recite lyrics (in Bengali).

Q: What do you think about the demand of 'mother tongue'?

A: Many people propose it and insist that it has to be used (in school). It is true that there are some place in the region, in the 'root level' there are some villages, some *para* where common people do not understand Bengali, use of (indigenous) mother tongue can be used,

but in urban areas or near urban areas, or in a multiethnic areas where people understand it, it is not required there. For example, what I mentioned earlier case, all children were *Upazati*, but they sang (Bangla) song so well. This happened this morning. We have a meeting on this issue tomorrow.

5.5.2 Local education office: prescribed for 'assimilation is the way'

“Why should we divide our people in a same country? We should bring ‘them’ up, we need to live our life together side by side” told the local officer of government education authority in the study area. He thinks indigenous peoples languages are ‘dialects’. In the interview, this non-indigenous person raised the question: ‘what would it be if all the regional dialect speakers of Bangladesh demand to learn through their ‘mother tongue?’ It was revealed from the visit and informal talking with the school teachers that there was an unwritten/official order to all government schools in the region not to use other ‘dialects’ in the classroom and use the standard Bengali. However,

consulting with an officer in the education office it was known that, often teachers have to use indigenous language(s) to make students understand the lesson. When that officer, an indigenous person was asked about her own schooling experience, she said: “we used to live in urban place where we had a lot of interaction with the Bengali, thus got not much problem in coping with school lessons in Bengali”.

Generally, it was suggested from the education office to deal with other issue than ‘language’ as those were, according to them, more important for the *Upazati/pahari* children concerning education. They draw mainly the issue of poverty and hard to reach schools. Although I told them that I wanted to know about the perception on mother tongue education, not to advocate it, one education officer exclaimed,



Art works on the wall of a classroom used local ingredients Photo: Kabir, M. M. (2008)

“ if you suggested to keep *upazitis* ignorant in Bengali, it would be detrimental, how do you ensure study in higher level. There is more crucial issue than it for them. There are children who cannot have food before come to school, and many children leave schools early because of this. Address the issue of hunger first than anything else”.

5.5.3 *Community people: Digesting the new ideas*

Perceptions of common people seemed to be fragmented. Although it was from casual conversation, many people who were educated seemed aware of the language issue and inclined to agree with it. The opposing view- learning through Bengali is also found to be prevalent. In an interview, one of the key informants asserted very remarkably that when they were attending a workshop on bilingual school project in the community, a section of people even from the indigenous community upheld their proposition that introduction of mother tongue education would be detrimental for the future of indigenous community – as it would take children backward. Surprised with what his fellow community members said, he put the following position clear by saying:

“I want our children to go onward. But, to me, going ahead is learning mother tongue, practice in daily life. It is possible and enhanced by education in mother tongue. Even though it seems to push children backwards, I would recommend going back first to let them really go forward.”

5.5.4 *Local initiator: vibrant and network*

At the beginning, the local NGO was involved with the primary schooling by conducting several supporting activities. Getting a support from the international fund, they conducted some studies in the region. Language came out as the key barrier in the primary education for indigenous children in the area. Then they start thinking to address the language problem and come out with idea to have a pilot project of schooling, starting 2 years of pre-primary and further five years of primary education in mother tongue. By then, already the peace accord was signed where schooling based on mother tongue was acknowledged. At the same time, some international NGOs assured support for mother tongue education in the area.

To summarize his view he told with expectation:

“Talking with the peoples concerned with the schooling in local level seemed very affirmative in their venture. One of my informant told, “...we much have to ensure it (schooling in mother tongue), we have no other alternative”.

5.5.5 *MLE school teachers: Excited and engaged in the task*

The teachers were from the local communities and most of them I met were female. All of them had secondary school certificate. All of them were teaching in a school for the first time in life. More interestingly, however, they were teaching in a language that they did not got their education. They told me that they used to use the language in home, but they did not know the orthography. Taking this profession, first gave them the possibility to learn how to write in their mother tongue. Thus, excitedly, many of them expressed their satisfaction with the programme, and they expressed their hope that their mother tongue has a chance to survive.

5.5.6 *Bengali school teacher: Concerned with practicability*

A Bengali school teacher who teaches in a registered government primary school had given me an interview where some of the crucial aspect of implementing MTE in a wide scale in the area came out:

Q: What difficulty you encountered in teaching the indigenous children in this Bengali medium school?

A: *Asole (in fact)*, we do not understand their languages. We faced problems to understand them especially at the beginning (of teaching). Now, however, situation is getting better, they can speak *fluently* in Bengali in school. Although they use their language in their home, but here (in school) they rather prefer not to speak in their languages. Overall, they are much improved both in language and education. In this hill area, for example, Chakma adivasi are alert; the others, the Mammra, the Tripura are not so much.

Q: How do they do in the study?

A: Chakma are overall good. Even, better than the Bengali. Others are weak. Their families are not conscious enough. So far I know the Chakma community made advancement in education; in terms their *chalchoron* (gesture), *achar-achoron* (rituals and behavior) their progress is notice worthy.

Q: What do you think how did they make this improvement?

A: Because of their consciousness. Others are not so conscious.

Q: What do you think how did they get this consciousness?

A: *Asole*, usually, consciousness comes through education. Those who did not get the light of education are not conscious. I suppose, Chakmas have been in touch with education for a long time now. As a result, gradually, they are improving.

About the 'language' in school, the discussion went on as follows:

Q: When you teach in Bengali, what happens for the pupil whose mother tongue is not Bengali?

A: I used to get problem in understating at the beginning, but there are some similarities of their language with Bengali. For example, they pronounce 'cher' in their language what is 'char' in Bengali. Thus, now I understand what they mean. However, I have some Chakma students who speak fluently in Bengali, no problem. But those who are new, attending school first time, we face some trouble to teach language (Bengali) at the beginning.

Q: What do you think about the demand of learning in mother tongue?

A: It may be important, but their mother tongue, for example, Chakma, it needs not to be learned, at least not here (school). Otherwise, all teachers have to be employed in schools in CHT from their communities. I guess, it is only way, alternative won't work. Then, schooling system have to be segregated. Chakma schools for the Chakma, Marma schools for the marma and Bengali school for the Bengali. [...]

Q: Do you have any question to me?

A: I think this segregated policy of schooling, letting pupils learning in their own languages, is not and never least feasible for a poor state like Bangladesh. If we want to do that, for example where we are now, then five schools have to be set up for five communities. Marma language is different than the Chakma. So a Chakma teacher would not be able to teach Marma. I wonder, if our government ever manages it?

5.5.7 Local traditional king: Let's hope for the best

The post of circle chief is a government appointment along with the tradition. Most of the works a raja does, he asserts, is government works such as revenue collection. However, he is also involved in many other socio-political activities like traditional justice, performance of traditional culture and practices. When I was in conversation with the Raja, he was using *Upazati* to mean themselves. When I drew his attention to the word and asked what he feels about the using the word, he made a smile and corrected himself. He said, it has been used for

a long time, but I think adivasi term is appropriate for us. He thinks that government is soft towards the policy of indigenous people. He stated that maybe one day, the government would 'recognize' and accept the word 'adivasi' or indigenous.

Then he also mentioned:

“I think if schools use the mother tongue of indigenous peoples, the dropout rate would be slashed by 85 to 90 percent. But if the existing situation (teaching/learning in Bengali), I guess, the *Bormise*- the language we use for conversation would disappear gradually. Through mother tongue, we have no scope to get education, nor do any research nor do other practices. As a result, it is gradually withering out. I doubt if our next generation would use our mother tongue. Look, my kids speak *maximum in Bangla*. Even if they use mother tongue, they do it using 30 to 40 percent Bengali. I think gradually this rate will go up from 50 to 90 percent in future. Next generation, I doubt, would hardly know what our language is, what our rituals is or what our culture is. By this process, we would loss our existence (as people). (Italic indicates his emphasis).

In his conclusion, he told me his hope,

“We have been asking government to make provision for mother tongue education for us in many different forums. We asked to include our culture our rituals in school teaching-learning. Government has done many things for us, yet I believe, there many things to be done.”

5.6 Integration or segregation? : MTE and the future of the indigenous peoples in CHT

I have analyzed the examples of two case studies in MTE practices in my study area at the centre and the debate on the mother tongue education in schooling, capturing the dynamics of the perception of the peoples concerned with the process. In this chapter I have shown the prospects and limitations of the practice of MTE and subsequently examined the existing formal primary education and its conservative practices concerning indigenous pupils. From this view, monolingual education and its disregard for education focused on the language needs of indigenous pupils. Next, these delineated facts from the analysis of the chapter broadly can be conceived as the beginning of 'segregation' strategy or what Churchill called the 'start of right based option in education. From here, it should be mentioned that the educational context of CHT is perceived as still bringing the legacy of colonialism and assimilation. The policy strategy at different levels needs to contribute to ensuring educational

rights in mother tongue for the indigenous children that one could hope in a way was a milestone in revitalizing indigenous language and culture. At the same time, it is true that the Bengali medium of instruction is on-going on a wide scale through public schooling. It appears to me that both the assimilation and segregation are ongoing for CHT in terms of education and medium of instruction in the area.

In the next and final chapter, by pointing out and analyzing key findings I will discuss comprehensively the history and practice of the indigenous education case of CHT in Bangladesh and within the conceptual framework and will draw conclusions.

6. Discussion and Conclusion: “Going Back to Go Forward”

Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.

United Nations (2007): Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Article 6

Over the previous chapters, I have described and analyzed the history of elementary schooling for the indigenous peoples in CHT, Bangladesh, which ended with an in-depth inquiry into the opening of mother tongue education and its current practice in the area. Here, by studying the history of educational practices in CHT from the British colonial period to the contemporary nation state Bangladesh, I scrutinized what forces act behind what medium and how change happened. In this final chapter by briefing the key findings, I will discuss comprehensively key propositions drawn against my research questions and finally, place them within the conceptual framework²⁹ that I drew in the first chapter.

My first inquiry in the research has been to find out the reasons behind the development of different elementary schooling for indigenous peoples in CHT in terms of medium of instruction. As a point of departure I dealt with the concept ‘indigenous people’, which is contested globally and nationally. With a reflection on global and local debates, I synthesized it and conceptualized an operational definition of indigenous peoples in the context of Bangladesh. In a national context, as I read the literature and observed it in fieldwork, the concept of *adivas* (as indigenous) is gradually taking a ground, yet it has not gained a place in the government official jargons. I also showed how in government position was attached to the lexical meaning of *adivasi* and its English translation ‘indigenous’ which is not surprisingly easy to refute with a simple question, ‘do the indigenous peoples really first settle’ in the region?’ With evidence of frequent migration of different peoples in the region (Garherz 2004), it suggested a favourable verdict to the government position. Clearly in the debate, however, subsequent questions arise: then why and how do some groups make this claim of indigenous status in Bangladesh? In this case I formulated an operational definition of indigenous peoples of Bangladesh by pointing out that international law allows non-

²⁹ For an overview, I have put my finding in correspondence with the conceptual framework I drew in the first chapter in Appendix B.

dominant people(s) in a nation state, with distinctive cultural traits which has a continuation up to the present time, who had a settlement history before colonization and erection of existing state structure to call themselves indigenous and claim the status of indigenous people. By using this definition that included peoples who have been usually called 'tribe' *upazati*, ethnic minority, *pahari* in CHT, I entered into the key area of the study- the history and current practice of education especially the beginning of mother tongue based education.

Early history of education in the indigenous communities in the CHT seemingly not well documented. My informants suggested, however, that traditional family learning system related with *Jhum* cultivation had existed for the children for generation as *Jhum* cultivation, as a way of livelihood, requires support all family members. So, this learning was essentially imparted as a way of living for the people in the region for a long time in the early time. Besides, in the pre-British period, evidence suggests that there were religious learning centres in the region similar to the surrounding areas in the form of *Bihara* or *Patshala*. These were more like informal schooling that were replaced by formal schooling later on. It is no doubt that the formal education, in its current form appeared after the annexation of British rule in CHT during the 1860s. Although the British policy in education in the colonies had a positive outlook towards the local language and culture substantially, it hardly has helped small ethnic groups in many places in the colony. As in the case of Indian subcontinent, the colonial ruler had depicted them differently from the 'natives', in terms of the state of their civilization, their education ventures or civilizing process imparted with the regional native language(s). It is also a fact that in the CHT British colonial schooling, kept Bengali as a medium of instruction, the language of wider Bengal province of the colonial administration in India. This trend extended to the Pakistan period as well when CHT remained as a part of East-Pakistan province of the post-colonial state. This is the period when Bengali in the East Pakistan struggle against the imposition of *urdhu* as state language by the West Pakistani dominant groups. The struggle for language in 1952 in the East Pakistan, as it is widely held, generated a national consciousness among the Bengali, which eventually turned into struggle for independence in 1971, finally giving birth to a new nation state, Bangladesh. The phase from pre-British up to the Bangladesh has been found to be influenced by the notion of 'civilizing' which is in a way policy of assimilation (Appendix B).

The emergence of Bangladesh created hope for prosperity and equality for its citizens which has not happened for the ethnic minority indigenous peoples in CHT. What I drew from this historical development of formal schooling in the CHT in the colonial era, which seems as a transition from the traditional way of teaching learning to a formal setting, was the

beginning of acculturation of these people within the mainstream provincial people in the colony. Since there were more and more human resource deemed to be beneficial for running the local administration, colonial government presumably wanted to bring the 'tribal' peoples in the administration too, for their ease in ruling the area. The process of acculturation also succeeds in the Pakistan era, when very clearly the state declared that the language of the state would be *Urdhu*. If the Bengali had not fought against this decision and compelled the state to change it, the course of history would have certainly been different.

In my study of the Bangladesh period, the course of history of schooling in the CHT in Bangladesh era appeared to be not so different from the previous eras. Although it would have been more plausible for a new state, which had a record of cultural and political struggle for language and identity, to make free and suitable scope for exercising other cultures and languages, it seemed to have chosen the typical path. With a population highly homogenous in terms of language (98 percent speaks in Bengali), this new state made no recognition of other ethnicity and asked for homogenization- to be Bengali. State language and medium of instruction has been Bengali for the all public schooling so far. This arbitrary imposition of language for all public schooling for indigenous peoples in the region, back by the theoretical analysis, appeared more like a silent policy of assimilation, which continues today.

In 1974, discontented with the unfriendly attitude towards them, indigenous people started guerrilla warfare with the armed force of Bangladesh for two decades. So, the region was isolated and civil society as well as government until recently, have maintained a conservative out-look in CHT. After the peace accord in 1997, primary education was handed over the HDC and mother tongue education was acknowledged. This could have been the end of the monolingual education practice in the primary education in the region. However, after one decade of the treaty, no education policy has been devised for the indigenous children to ensure mother tongue education. On the other hand, some international and nation NGOs came forward to introduce the mother tongue education for the indigenous children. In my study area, I found national and local NGOs have been undertaking a pilot project of mother tongue education since 1997. At the same time, I found the existing schoolings in the area that use Bengali for instruction in the classroom. My second inquiry was to examine the sensitiveness of schooling towards indigenous language and culture, and observing the mix of schooling in terms of language use, this analysis let me to argue that both the process of assimilation and integration are ongoing.

My third and final inquiry in this study was to find out the challenges and prospects of mother-tongue education for the indigenous peoples in CHT. As described and elaborated, in

Bangladesh indigenous education in mother tongue is a recent phenomena that started from the beginning of this century. It is to be noted that Bangladesh government agreed to allow education in the CHT through mother tongue as a provision of the Peace Accord is certainly to be perceived as a positive development; however, at the same time, the accord did it officially with consideration of ‘tribal’ people who speak in different language. The difference of ‘tribe’ and the ‘indigenous’ makes a difference as with the connotation of tribal, it does not indicate them as a people/nation.

British colonizers introduced formal education persisted without much change (Barua 2007) for indigenous peoples even in post-colonial era, in the Bangladesh state. The fact is that the formal public education is heavily influenced by and serves the conformity of the dominant group culture and language. It is depicted, like many nation states in the post colonial world, that Bangladesh state’s hesitation to recognize small ethnic minority indigenous peoples and Bengali based public education is presumably an undeclared or silent policy of assimilation for the indigenous people in CHT. After three decades of monolingual education, however, the NGO based schools are offering more mother-tongue based education than the existing monolingual education. From this historical development, this thesis argued that NGOs seem to be a significant force in challenging the nation state’s monolingual practice in primary education. They are ensuring educational rights in mother tongue to the indigenous children which, ultimately, is revitalizing indigenous language and culture in CHT. Now, this final chapter will analyze how mother tongue education for indigenous peoples evolved, developed and what results were seen in other countries.

The legacy of the colonial outlook, trying to ‘civilize’ or uplift ‘others’ still exists in the psyche of state education policy makers, administrators, as well as people in general. This view is especially noticed when they were asked about content and curricula and medium of instruction for people who seem marginalized in society for whatever reasons in general and by ‘language’ in particular. Schooling or education is perceived as the way out of it. It is seen to be the only equalizing tool in society. Thus, a local education administer in our study area did not hesitate to “‘not to divide’ by language, we all should develop together”. His ideas of equality enter into the question, despite the fact that many of the children in CHT drop out early in the schooling mainly because of language problem which many other studies identified as first and foremost hindrance of schooling in CHT. It could be argued that one of the indigenous community (Chakam) are proportionately higher in literacy rate the mainstream Bengali. Silent assimilation (not much differ with the colonial outlook of

‘civilizing’) and the national population assumed their culture and language are superior and give no place for others-the indigenous.

By delineating historical development of education in Bangladesh in reference to indigenous peoples’ schooling practice, it is clear the problem is not well researched. Likewise and more crucially, no study has looked into how the social (as well as political and historical) forces acted behind the recent development of ‘Bi/multi-lingual’ schooling (in NGO-run schools) for indigenous communities in CHT where mother tongue(s) is being used fully in the classroom as the only medium of instruction.

No matter the intention or philosophy, it is true that every education system is a conscious choice to bring change in the lives of the people that it targets. The big question is how a society would design an education for its ethnic minority indigenous population who have a different culture and a different mother tongue. Thus opinions about provisions of education, curriculum content, and above all the language of teaching and learning are often fiercely held and hotly debated (Webley 2006). One predominant paradigm is that an education which obliges minority indigenous children to accept a dominant language and ignore, stigmatize, and replace or displace the mother tongue is a subtractive language education. It subtracts from the children’s linguistic repertoire, instead of adding to it (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000).

The current education system in Bangladesh is a legacy of colonial domination. Even in post-colonial times, the state has yet to demystify the legacy and create a truly liberated policy of education for all including the ethnic minority indigenous peoples. A few factors made it possible to rethink the education of *adivasi* peoples of the country. The government is paying increasing attention, and even agreed in a treaty to use mother tongue in CHT area, and NGOs are experimenting with the introduction of indigenous language based education on the primary level. It has to be noted carefully that although the concept of indigenous has not been acknowledged in the government, it is more like that ethno-linguistic groups’ demand of recognition of right of learning in mother tongue has been granted. This conclusion is just an indication of the existing government outlook too. There is no complacency for the advocates who hold these peoples as indigenous and should be granted the right to learn mother tongue in school. So far, it is likely that the government will not soon take part with any project in favour of mother tongue education for the indigenous peoples. Thus, the strategy of ‘silent’ assimilation seemed to be continuing besides the segregation strategy that will be ensured by the mother tongue practice in NGO schools.

When a language dies, presumably the existing identity of the people speaking the language has severely been threatened. This thesis by taking the impetus of the indigenous perspective looked throughout the history of education as it is evolved and reached its current practice. The analysis of the perception of stakeholders showed there was much enthusiasm on newly introduced mother tongue in schooling, although conservative viewpoints still exist within many citizens. Fortunately, the dynamics of perception at the local level shows potential. At the same time, putting the local realities against a vast canvas – the global indigenous march towards the establishment of rights, especially in the education, use of mother tongue in school - and analyzing the possibilities show great promise. Specifically, it has analyzed and indicated the pseudo assimilation of indigenous people in CHT is being challenged by the mother tongue based education, which is again analyzed by how global, national and local forces play a role in the change towards the introduction of mother tongue education in the study area. Findings uphold the prospects and challenges of the indigenous mother tongue based education in Bangladesh. Finally, the research critically sought how the so-called ‘progress’ philosophy based education is too infertile and inappropriate for the indigenous peoples needs and purpose.

Nothing is static for good, not even the indigenous language, culture and society. A long-held derogatory view appeared to persisted in the notion and practice of education for the indigenous people that they should be civilized, assimilated, uplifted or included mainly through modern education. Ethnocentricity and parochial view overshadowed the genuine reality- the fact that as a human group they have the freedom to determine their own progress with their own indicators streamed from their own world-view and language. It seems it has been a delayed response in truly acknowledging the philosophy of diversity for harmony and relevance not just in the society, but in the classroom as well. To take the notion, one must travel back to the historical injustice of using a language which is not the mother tongue of a people. Contemporary education philosophically speaks for economic development where bringing people to the upper level of understanding and maturity is hardly ingrained. An individual, a group, a people without its language, would hardly be fulfilled and full-grown in the social sphere. An education without language of the people is just the process of curtaining the growth. From an economic point of view some would argue that it would be better to use the language of national and international communication at the early schooling. Mother tongue based schooling is not against this position. However, including indigenous culture in the textbooks and using their language in schooling is seen as a paradox that has no apparent benefit in practical life. It just appeared to be preferring and establishing the tradition

in lieu of modernity, favouring regression at the expense of progression. For a revitalization of the mother tongue its usage must be ensured in school as a medium of instruction so that future generations value their own tradition and culture. This is a position against the notion of ancestral languages of indigenous peoples belonging to the past and apparently being irrelevant in the national economic life in the so-called 'modern world'. From the indigenous perspective, it has been relevant, and there is an existing concern and strong desire to protect the language which is so important for the smooth flow of their identity and progress as a people, a notion vividly echoed in the voice of one of my informants: "Let us go back (to our mother tongue) to go forward".

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Appendix A: Photos of Chakma peoples in different age and gender in study area



Appendix B: Correspondence between conceptual framework and observed circumstances

Theoretical outlines1		Apparent context for the Indigenous peoples in CHT2	
Policy or approach of state towards the indigenous people*	Churchill's stages: Language and education policy for the minority**	Period	Medium of instruction in schooling
Civilizing the 'primitive'		British and Pakistan c. 1757- 1970	Bengali English
Assimilation	Assimilation	1. Bangladesh 1970s-1990s	Bengali
Integration	Multi-lingualism	2. Bangladesh 2000s-present	Indigenous languages
Segregation	Right-based official status.		
Self-determinism			

* Based on the our delineation in Chart 1 of this thesis

** Based on the discussion of Churchill 1986 in the literature review of this thesis.

Appendix C: The 53 terminal competencies (English Version) for the primary pupils

1. To place unflinching trust in the oneness of Allah, the Almighty creator and Custodian of the universe.
2. To feel grateful to Allah for His infinite mercy and to express such gratefulness by remembering Him in all deeds.
3. To know the life history of Hazarat Mohammed (peace be on him), the prophet of Allah and in case of the followers of other religions the life history of the preachers of their respective religions.
4. To love all creations of the Creator.
5. To show respect and tolerance to the followers of all religions.
6. To show respect to all irrespective of their sex, financial status occupation and lifestyle.
7. To be interested in manual work and to be respectful to people living on manual work.
8. To show respect and do duty towards parents, elders, neighbours and relatives.
9. To be aware of one's own duties and responsibilities as a member of the family and to take part in household work.
10. To be aware of one's own duties and responsibilities as a member of the society and to take part in social activities.
11. To be aware of one's own duties and responsibilities as a citizen of Bangladesh and to discharge civic duties.
12. To allow others to express their opinions and to show respect for such opinions.
13. To play active part in combined decision-making about different programmes undertaken by the school.
14. To grow as a competent team leader and team member by performing duties and responsibilities with honesty and devotion.
15. To know and love the country.
16. To take pride in national tradition and culture (language, folksong, arts & crafts and eminent personalities).
17. To show respect to the national flag and national anthem.
18. To avoid wastage of resources.
19. To realise the importance of building up healthy body for living a healthy life.
20. To be willing to build up a healthy body through participation in games and sports and physical exercise.
21. To know and observe the rules for the preservation of physical health and environmental

health.

22. To know and realise the importance of balanced food and to develop the habit of eating such food.

23. To know about the common diseases, their causes and preventive measures and to be willing to take preventive measures against them.

24. To understand and correctly read materials printed and hand written in easy Bangla and through reading skill to continue acquiring knowledge by reading material written in Bangla.

25. To express by writing correctly and distinctly in plain Bangla his/her own observation, experience and intention, to be able to write simple letters and applications and to be able to fill in different kinds of forms.

26. To talk in correct colloquial Bangla in order to accurately and effectively express as well as exchange thoughts and feeling with classmates and others.

27. To comprehend the main theme by listening attentively to conversations, speeches, descriptions etc. in Bangla.

28. To gain basic ideas of numeracy and to be able to make use of numbers.

29. To know four fundamental operation and to be able to use them.

30. To apply the simple methods of computing/calculating in solving the day to-day problems.

31. To know and to use the units of money, length, weight, square measure, measurement and time.

32. To know and understand the geometrical signs and figures.

33. To develop the ability to collect facts and information.

34. To develop the habit of reading newspapers, periodicals as well as books outside the syllabus.

35. To think independently and to develop the ability to express own opinions.

36. To accept new ideas and to feel interested in discussing them with others.

37. To accept and to feel interested in accepting constructive criticism of others for self-development.

38. To know and understand through observation and enquire the immediate natural and social environment.

39. To attain the skill of “scientific enquiry” in respect of specifying the aim of enquiry, observing and classifying different aspects of environment and drawing simple generalizations.

40. To identify the relationship between cause and effect and to make simple study in respect

of the ordinary problems of day-to-day life.

41. To observe and identify the improvement in the standard of day to-day life due to application of science and technology and realise its importance.
42. To express oneself through arts like sketching, drawing, clay-work, paper-work, music, dance drama etc.
43. To observe and appreciate the beauty of natural and social environment.
44. To develop the habit of keeping tidy one's own belonging and environment.
45. To observe discipline.
46. To take care of individual as well as public property.
47. To develop punctuality.
48. To know how to behave with people of different relationship and to develop manners accordingly.
49. To know about the children of other countries and to get interested in their ways of life.
50. To read simple material hand written or printed in English.
51. To listen to and understand simple conversation, story and rhymes in English and to get pleasure out of them.
52. To speak simple sentences in English in order to make others understand one's own observation and ideas.
53. To write brief accounts of known things in correct English.

Source: National Curriculum and Textbook Board (n.d.): Revision and modification of curriculum of the primary stage against the background of universal primary education-essential learning continua (primary education). Dhaka: National Curriculum and Textbook Board.