Indigenous Languages in Bangladesh: Loopholes behind the Scene
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Abstract

Every citizen of a country has his or her own linguistic rights whether he or she belongs to the mainstream dominated society or not. Linguistic rights mean the rights to learn and to use one's mother tongue (Arzoz, 2007). In this paper, the author highlights the constraints of indigenous people in Bangladesh using their own mother tongues. Indigenous people have been living in Bangladesh from pre-colonial period with their own linguistic and cultural uniqueness. Though they are living in a country which fought for its language right in 1952, their own languages are now marginalized constitutionally, economically, academically and socially. Therefore, the author focuses on some problems which are depriving indigenous people of Bangladesh using their own vernaculars. He also provides some recommendations enlivening indigenous languages at a certain level.

Keywords: Indigenous languages, present condition, barriers, solutions

Indigenous Languages in Bangladesh: Loopholes behind the Scene

Language is a part of culture, heritage, history, society and the national integrity of a nation. Through language, a unique worldview is expressed and identity is molded. Language holds the past, present and future of a community whether expressed through prayers, myths, spiritual beliefs, ceremonies, law, poetry, oratory, or through everyday greetings, humor, or through values of the community (ILO, 2008, p.2). Therefore, language is the herald of a community by being used in education, culture, and daily interaction, regardless of its status, number of users, publication of books, newspapers or anything in that language.

Experts generally agree that “there are slightly less than 7,000 languages in the world now” (Hoffman, 2009, p. 3), and among these languages only few hundreds are used as language of education; most of these are dominant languages. Several countries use one or two languages for national harmony and social stability. We see the same picture in Bangladesh also. In Bangladesh including Bangla "there are 45 different languages" (Sultana, 2011, p.15) such as “Chakma, Garo, Khasia, Magh, Monipuri, Munda, Oraon, Santali, Kachhari, Kuki, Tripura, Malpahad, Mikir, Shadri, Hajang” (Banglapedia, n.d). They are used by “45 different communities” according to the latest Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) of the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) (Roy, 2012, p.3).

Historically, experience has shown that people of Bangladesh know the value of languages as they have sacrificed their lives for language. The 1952 language movement is widely considered to have integrated the people of Bangladesh, which led to the liberation war in 1971 and ultimately the independence of Bangladesh. If we look back in time, we see that when the then-Pakistan got its independence from the British Indian empire, Bangla was used by 56.4% of people in Pakistan. In a summary percentage of other language users were: “Punjabi (28.55%), Sindhi (5.47%), Pushto (3.48%), Urdu (3.27%), Baluchi (1.29%) and English (0.02%)” (Akanda, 2008). These percentages

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show that Bangla was used by more than half of total population. Akanda (2008) further points out that:

_in spite of having the lion's share and 42 million Bangla speakers, it took almost seven years (1947-1954) for Bangla to get recognition as the national language of the then Pakistan. On the whole, Bangla got its rightful status for East Pakistan’s student wings, strong political leadership, large population, strong historical, literature and cultural background of Bangla. Most importantly, on 21 February 1952 people sacrificed their lives for their language rights in the then East Pakistan. Five persons – Mohammad Sakuuddin, Abdul Jabbar, Abul Barkat, Rafiquddin Ahmed and Abdus Sakam - are killed; the first three are students of Dhaka University (History)._

Considering the number of people in the then-East Pakistan province raising their voice for their own language rights; we find that the apathy of different governments after 1971 towards in protecting indigenous languages and recognizing indigenous people constitutionally is quite surprising. Debarring all languages from due recognition hampers the mutual understanding of mainstream Bangali and indigenous-people. On principle, indigenous people should not have to have a large population and quality leadership in order to receive their linguistic rights; rather it is the responsibility of the government to give indigenous people and their languages due rights for the linguistic and cultural enrichment of the country.

In Bangladesh, we can see that without proper guidance as well as the co-operation of the government and concerned authorities, it is difficult for any organization (domestic or international) to work on indigenous languages. For example, if any organization or even an individual wants to work with indigenous people on the hill tracts in the Southern region of the country, at first, they need permission from concerned authorities and have to take proper security measures for their free access in different places. Most of the time, it is a time-consuming and complex bureaucratic procedure. Therefore, patronization of the government is important for protecting indigenous cultures, languages and societies.

Conversely, experts have pointed out that indigenous people need self-awareness to claim their own logical rights. They should realize that language and culture are interlinked. Moreover, the role of indigenous languages is invaluable for the cultivation of indigenous culture, developing values and people’s creativeness (Antileo, 2016). As a vehicle of culture, indigenous languages allow the cultivation of identity and enable intercultural practice, in addition to the reproduction and transmission culture (ibid).

Therefore, in this paper the author talks about some obstacles which indigenous people are facing in using their own languages in Bangladesh. Effort has been given to provide some recommendations to overcome said obstacles.

**Objectives of the Research**

Challenges facing indigenous people in protecting their languages are numerous and can vary in different contexts. This paper aims to provide a systematic analysis of these problems in Bangladesh based on their present conditions. Here the author focuses on economic, social and cultural situation of indigenous people; their attitude towards their own mother tongue. These are from the author's own observations.
Research Questions

In this paper the author focuses on the following question: What are the problems indigenous people are facing in using their own mother tongues in Bangladesh?

Who Are Called Indigenous People in Bangladesh?

According to International Labour Organization (2008) commission, indigenous people are those who are living in a place long before pre-colonial time and who have protected their own culture, languages, social conventions from the influence of mainstream majority group of the society. However, it is not necessary for a community to live in a place for a long period of time to be considered as indigenous people; rather their lifestyle, cultural uniqueness and languages are equally important. Although indigenous peoples and minority groups share some common experiences, the former do not wish to be considered as minorities because “historical, traditional and cultural circumstances of indigenous people are different to that of minorities” (Roy, 2006).

Regarding indigenous peoples, Jose Martinez Cobo, the Special Rapporteur of the UN Commission on Human Rights, in his study on the “Problem of discrimination against indigenous populations” offered a working definition of “indigenous communities, peoples and nations” (Dhamai, 2013). The definition reads as follows:

*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 the societies now prevailing on 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 system (Individual vs. collective rights) (UNRIC, 2014).*

Now if we turn on indigenous people in Bangladesh, we see that “Indigenous people live in Bangladesh from pre-colonial people known as *Adivasi*, indigenous or *upojati* whereas they have rejected the term *upojati* and “tribe” for their connection with backwardness and primitiveness” (Roy, 2012). “They live in Chittagong Hill Tracts, Sylhet Division, Rajshahi Division and Mymensingh District of the country” (Linguistic rights, n.d.). Regarding the population of indigenous group Roy (2006) has identified 22 groups of people: (see Appendix).

Condition of Indigenous People in Bangladesh

Challenges facing indigenous people to protect their languages are numerous and can vary in different contexts. The author mainly focused on four points to show the conditions of indigenous people in Bangladesh and they are author's own observations.

**Employment opportunity.** The Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees equality of opportunity in public employment for all citizens irrespective of their beliefs, race, creed, caste, gender, or place of birth and no one could be denied access for Civil Service positions and cannot be discriminated
against because of their membership to a certain social group (Yasmin, 2010). Practically the actual scenario is totally different.

Some of the poorest of Bangladesh are found among the indigenous communities and the annual average rural household income is around BD Tk 66,000 (933.5 US$), while in the rest of Bangladesh it is BD Tk 84,000 (1,188 US$) (Roy, 2012).

Moreover, if an individual from indigenous community wants to get a job in Bangladesh, he or she has to learn either Bangla or English. As a result, reversals of life lead indigenous people to lose interest in learning their own language. Even the parents do not inspire their children to learn indigenous languages as there is no employment where those languages would be useful. For instance, “the current head of Patra tribe, Laxman Lal Patra, says, “My beautiful language (Laleng) is dying. Our young people have turned their backs on it. To them jobs and education are everything.” (Bangladesh tribes, 2012). As survival is the main issue, parents and children are reluctant about their language. This challenging situation makes some languages more powerless and thus obviously sends a very strong signal that people should forget their own language if they wish to seek any achievement. In the job market, either public and private jobs, there is no recognition and value of their mother tongues. Knowing good Bangla and English are core requirements for getting job in Bangladesh.

Institutional obligations. In 2010-2011 when there was a debate on the naming of indigenous people, the government proposed the Small Ethnic Group Institution Act-2010. A consequence of the proposal is the Fifteenth Amendment which indicates that indigenous people would be termed as “tribal” and “ethnic minorities.” However, “vocal members of the indigenous people prefer the term “indigenous” in English, and “Adibashi” in Bengali” (Roy, 2012).

As their identity has been taken away constitutionally, we are left to doubt whether indigenous people will be motivated to learn their languages or not. Indigenous peoples have already reacted negatively to these changes: for instance, during the constitutional amendment process, indigenous peoples’ organizations and leaders submitted a memorandum to the government demanding constitutional recognition of indigenous peoples/ Adivasi and their languages and cultures (Mikkelsen, 2012, p. 337).

This is not the first time they are fighting for their rights. In 1972 former MP Manbendro Larma raised the same question in parliament, that other communities should be formally recognized by government similarly to the Bangalis. It proves that historically government of Bangladesh is not interested in giving indigenous people recognition. We can notice the same mentality with different steps of present government: “Bangladesh has ratified ILO Convention No. 107 on Indigenous and Tribal Populations but abstained when the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was up for voting in the General Assembly in 2007” (Mikkelsen, 2012, p. 336) whereas “143 countries voted in favor of the Declaration” (Announcement of U.S. Support for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, n.d., para. 2). It indicates that the government is reluctant in adopting rights concerning the status of indigenous people. Most interestingly, though, the government recognizes August 9th as International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples, but they have not yet observed this day nationally. Moreover, in 2012 Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development & Co-operatives sent a letter to all district administrators not to participate or provide any cooperation to any program regarding the observation of International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples programs. This indicates the communal outlook of the government (Larma, 2013).
Besides, none of the education commission (so far six have seated) have talked about development and protection of indigenous languages. Even though the proposals in Education Policy-2010 states that text books will be prepared in the indigenous peoples’ own languages, so that children can learn about their culture and traditions in their own languages, we still do not know when this proposal will be enacted.

**Attitude of indigenous people.** We cannot blame the government one-sidedly for their negligence towards indigenous languages because "politics and economy etc. - serve as the primary motivation for language planning" (Cooper, 1989, p. 35). Indigenous people have to assert themselves as it is also their responsibility to claim their language rights. Some indigenous groups such as Chakma and Santhal are working on their languages—for example, with the Chakma language dictionary—the activity of other groups is not satisfactory. It is very significant that they should learn Bangla and English for claiming their rights, and their own mother tongue for cultural uniqueness and identity. They must understand that freedom of their mother tongue indicates their cultural autonomy. For example, in a case study in Namibia it is clear that Xuma Auala study both Afrikaans and English to use Afrikaans in an economy dominated by the apartheid state of South African, and English for an independent Namibia (Tollefson, 1991, p. 3). History also supports this idea. For example:

*In 1536 in Mexico, the Real Colegio de Santa Cruz was an educational institution for indigenous peoples and priests teaching in three languages: Castilian (Spanish), Nahuatl and Latin. It produced during its brief existence multilingual (indigenous) graduates that would shine in the religious, intellectual and social segments of society for decades, producing for example the first grammar of Nahuatl in 1547 by Andres de Olmos three years before the first grammar for the French language (Varennes, 2012, p. 5).*

*In China in 1950 several young people from the Miao community in Guizhau in southeast China began to explore the possibility of developing literacy in their native language and creating their own writing system. They travelled to Beijing and asked for help from the Chinese Association for writing reform. The association assigned specialists to improve their rudimentary writing design, which later the State Commission on Nationalities Affairs used to print literacy text books for these young people to take (Zhou, 2003, p. 219-220).*

Therefore, indigenous people in Bangladesh have to be more conscious about their rights and they have to understand the infrastructure by using different mechanisms such as writing books, dictionary in their own languages, protesting against government decisions, forming an intellectual group of their own people for claiming their rights logically and creating their own economic zone where they can use their own languages.

**Participation in economy.** In Bangladesh, tribal peoples constitute 1.13% of the country’s total population. Traditionally, agriculture is the prime occupation of the ethnic people, while trading, crafts, weaving and so on, are their secondary occupation. Occupation of higher skills and vocational trades are almost absent among the indigenous communities. Therefore, they are not
active in their economic contributions to the country, as we could expect. They always feel isolated and deprived as they are not treated as the full citizen of Bangladesh (Akhter et al., 2011, p.137).

The vulnerability and the historical injustices they have suffered as a result of the loss of their lands and related resources are globally known. Mullah (2007, p. 47-58) has acknowledged that the indigenous people are consistently facing social, economic, health, religion, land and law and order problems and 50% of the people are living under poverty line, and among them 20% are living under core poverty line. The national Poverty Reduction Strategy (2009-2011) contains the same observation regarding the poverty status and overall situation of the country’s indigenous peoples: it says “some of the ‘hardcore’ poor of Bangladesh are found among the indigenous communities” (Roy, 2012).

According to Mullah (2007, p. 47-58), the literacy rate among the indigenous people is very low compared with other groups in Bangladesh. As they are not up to dat educationally, they cannot contribute to the economy actively. It is without a doubt that without everybody’s combined effort, no country can be economically developed. So, the indigenous people should be provided with culturally sensitive education and training (Elhaut 2006). For instance,

*in the late 1970 when China was thinking about economic reform, they thought about both economic and political rationales. First, China’s economic reform and modernization required a high literacy labor force. Secondary, minority language literacy was believed to facilitate a smooth and rapid development of one nation with diversity (Zhou, 2003, p. 219-220).*

The same perspective can be seen in Western societies. During the 1960s, Western sociolinguists viewed that a major European language (usually English and French) should be used for final and specialized domains while local (indigenous) languages could serve other functions (Ricanto, 2000, p. 9-24). That means that for the development of Bangladesh, it would be beneficial to put some emphasis on Bangla and indigenous languages in parallel, to achieve national integration and economic development. We should also remember that support of indigenous languages in no way represents a threat to official language; rather it strengthens national solidarity and cultural integrity.

**Some Steps to Overcome These Barriers**

We see some barriers which are depriving indigenous people to be more active to the development of the country and national solidarity. Therefore, we need to take some steps to overcome these barriers and all relevant parties need to play their due roles.

**Be active.** Pro-activeness of indigenous people is needed to protect their mother tongues. They should take initiatives such as: writing novels, stories, poetries, newspapers in their own languages. They can also take initiatives to write books about their languages such as, grammar book, dictionary etc. The languages which do not have written form should be documented by recording conversation of parents, children and people from different occupations. They should also direct and produce films in their own languages. For example, in Australia Alice Springs-based Aboriginal publisher IAD Press created a **Picture Dictionary series** (Kroff, 2015). The books include English translations of the Aboriginal words, accompanied by culturally appropriate illustrations and a pronunciation guide (ibid).

It is not likely that documentation will end their responsibilities, but rather it will increase their tasks. They have to sketch a roadmap to observe the changes of their languages every five years, as
language change is a continuous process and they have to create new words to cope with the invention of new words, for instance, “researchers who were reviving the Kaurna language of South Australia’s Adelaide plains had to get creative. They created ‘mukakarmdo’ (lightning brain) for ‘computer’, ‘waratyatti’ (voice sending thing) for ‘telephone’ and ‘turraityatti’ (picture sending thing) for ‘television’” (Korff, 2015).

On the other hand, there are so many indigenous students who are studying at different universities in the country. They can take initiative to protect their languages. For example, several Saami PhD students at the Saami University College and University of Tromsø are completing projects on Saami revitalization (ICC, 2011).

Moreover, the more technologically connected among them can use social networks such as, Facebook, Twitter, different apps to make their languages well-known to the people of the country and also the world community. For example, “Shuar people are using internet for disseminating the community’s native language” (Kelly, 2015). On the other hand,

> in 2014 there were at least two apps helping to keep Aboriginal languages alive in Australia. Ma Gamilaraay, for the Gamilaraay language of south-east Australia, contains a dictionary of over 2,000 Gamilaraay words, and searches can be made in both English and Gamilaraay. The other app, Ma! Iwaidja, covers the Iwaidja language of Croker Island in the Northern Territory (Kroff, 2015).

They can also translate their literature into Bangla and English to make their own literatures and cultures more popular, and better known to national and international communities. For this they need a big amount of financial support. They can receive support from the more affluent within their community, the government of Bangladesh, different countries which support indigenous people, and also some regional and international organizations which work on protecting indigenous people’s rights. In Mexico, there is a festival on indigenous literature:

> “PoeTiSa in Tijuana have been inviting more indigenous-language writers, and prizes like the Premio de Literaturas Indígenas de las Américas, which in addition to the honor awards $25,000 USD, are helping indigenous writing gain visibility in mainstream Mexican media” (Mihaly, 2015).

By contrast,

> Apiaka is the spoken language of the indigenous people of the same name who reside in Mato Grosso, Brazil which have only one fluent speaker. However, there is a recent initiative to revive the language through the production of the ‘Apiaka Word’ textbook (Pegg, 2013)

**Increasing educational support.** Education is the best way of preserving indigenous languages. At least primary level education of indigenous people should be in their own mother tongue alongside Bangla. It is already proven that “students learn well when they use their own language in ways that are meaningful, practical and relevant to them” (Liddicoat, 2007, p. 13-29). For example, in a study it is found that “Bodo children in Assam, India, taught through their mother tongue, Bodo language,
done better than who are taught through the medium of Assamese” (Magga, Nicolaisen, Trask, Kangas & Dunbar, 2015).

On the other hand, if indigenous people do not receive government support, they could start their own initiatives to train their own teachers, who will teach their young children correct spoken and written form of their own languages. Here the elders can take the lead; they could be trained properly before teaching their own children at their own established language schools or at mainstream schools.

**Ensure rights of indigenous language speakers.** We should focus not only on the rights of the language as an abstraction, but also on the rights of the speakers of the language. Here, “we may distinguish between the rights of the speakers of a language to use it; and their rights to maintain it by teaching it to their children” (Spolsky, 1998). For example, “Shuar, an indigenous group from Ecuadorian Amazon, established *Federacion Interprovincial de Centros Shuar-Achuar*, a political alliance that has been working to represent and protect the Shuar people’s interests for almost a half century” (Kelly, 2015).

Supporting the rights of indigenous people on 13 September 2007 United Nations declared the rights of indigenous people which “addresses both individual and collective rights; cultural rights and identity; rights to education, health, employment, language, and others” (United Nations Human Rights, 2015).

On the other hand, we should acknowledge that willingness and strong documentation cannot alone ensure the revitalization of a language, for example, “Chamicuro, a South American language, has its own dictionary but no children can speak the language as they all shifted to Spanish” (Pegg, 2013). That means linguistic rights; willingness, documentation and learning environment of indigenous languages are inter-linked; they should be nurtured simultaneously.

**Establish indigenous language institute.** An indigenous language institute is essential in preserving and nurturing indigenous languages.; There should be direct involvement of indigenous people because “the direct participation of native people is essential in development of their writing system and in development of their language in all forms of communication, including film, radio, television, and national newspapers” (Pedraza, 1996). For example, “African Academy of Languages (ACALAN) works on fostering Africa’s integration and development through the development and promotion of the use of African languages in all domains of life in Africa” (African Academy of Languages, 2014). Maori Language Commission in New Zealand is another good model. The Māori Language Act 1987 represents a major milestone and achievement by finally making official the Māori language some 25 years ago (Varennes, 2012, p. 27). At this point the Institute of Mother Languages Institute (IMLI) in Dhaka, an affiliated institute of University of Dhaka, can play a vital role in collaboration of indigenous people. Initially they can start with short courses on indigenous languages. At the same time IMLI can work in collaboration of indigenous authority to preserving and documenting their languages.

**Language documentation and language users.** Language users are as important as language documentation to understand and explain their languages. For example,

*Man language users of China are now only one thousand. However, during Qing dynasty, Man language was used as the “national language” and there were a huge amount of books and documentaries written in Man and more than 200,000 pieces still exist now. The extinction of Man will lead to those documentaries*
not to be understood and their archeological values also unappreciated (Zang & Ma, 2012).

That means to drive the importance and value of your language to the next generation, there should have more interaction between young and old indigenous people. A ninety-six years old woman named Pan Jin-yu of Pazeh language (language of a Taiwanese aboriginal people) speaker is a very good example; she was able to teach 200 regular students in Puli and a few students in Miaoli and Taichung before her death” (Pegg, 2013).

**Use technological resources.** Technology can be a blessing for indigenous languages. The indigenous peoples do not need a big work force to use technologies such as camcorder, voice recorder, computer etc. They just need enthusiasm and minimum technological knowledge. Here, the indigenous youth can take a leading position in preserving their languages. They can preserve indigenous songs, stories, conversation of old people of the community, vocabularies related to their languages with translation in Bangla and English using different technologies. For instance, “Kuldip Musale who belongs to a remote nomadic tribe in India’s Western Maharashatra recorded songs and voices of elders on his smart phone when he got a chance to go home as he studied on boarding schools” (Das, 2013).[Conversely], Kansa, a Siouan language of the Dhegihan group, was once spoken by the Kaw people of Oklahoma. However, its last native speaker, Walter Kekahbah, has died in 1983. It is a good thing that before he died, a linguist named Robert L. Rankin met Kekahbah, and other surviving native speakers such as Ralph Pepper and Maud McCauley Rowe; they made extensive recordings of the three to document the language and help the Kaw Nation to develop language learning materials (Pegg, 2013).

In Australia we see a satisfactory progress; between 2011 and 2015 about 70 sound-printed books have been produced in Australia, mainly by Aboriginal organizations using the technology to improve literacy and maintain language (Korff, 2015).

There should be digital multimedia center for the preservation of these languages in indigenous populated areas, for example, “the development of regional multimedia centers in the indigenous communities of Khanty-Mansijsk Region (Russia) are beneficial for indigenous communities” (Spodina, 2008).

On the other hand, indigenous graduates can construct their own customized software to preserve their own languages in their own way.

**Responsibility of the premier authority of the country.** It is very important that premier authority of the country should find ways to always mind national integrity, economic development, and impression of the country in front of the world community. Individuals can use a language of wider communication [Bangla or English] for educational purposes to reduce ‘tribalism’ and group conflict (Baldauf, Kaplan, 2004, pp. 5-20) but at the same time autochthonous people should also receive institutional education in their own languages for a certain period of time at least through primary school. On this issue, the Chinese government can be a good example.
They have already taken some good initiatives as they have issued “National Common Language Characters Law” and “Law of Regional Autonomy of Minority Nationalities”, which have articulated the use of minority languages; provided the powerful protection and laid foundation for legislation of the use and enrichment of minority languages. There are about 10,000 schools where bilingual education are conducted in 21 minority autonomous regions and 13 provinces, especially Inner-Mongolia, Korean, Tibetan nationalities where the complete education system from elementary to tertiary levels have been established with the heritage languages as the medium of instruction, and the edition of textbooks written in minority languages also achieved great success (Zang & Ma, 2012).

Protecting language and culture together. Language and culture should be protected simultaneously because language is closely linked with culture; loss of a language is almost always accompanied by social and cultural disruptions as well (Simons, & Gordon, 2004, pp. 343-347). Here Zang & Ma (2012) point out that if a nation’s language is in danger, its songs, dances, music, and other forms of literature and art are all in danger. In other words, “saving a language is the first step to save its culture” (ibid). At the 31st Session of the UNESCO General Conference (October 2001), member countries unanimously adopted the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity recognizing a relationship between biodiversity, cultural diversity, and linguistic diversity (Brenzinger & Graaf, 2006).

Prioritize languages. Though the Bangladesh government has inaugurated International Mother Language Institute (IMLI) in 2010; it has so far documented only four languages of indigenous communities – Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Achik (Alom) (The Daily Star, 2014). Most interestingly, one must note that it has started working on those indigenous languages which have a large community, those languages able to endure for next few decades. That means IMLI should now start working on the most endangered languages in the country.

Ensure constitutional recognition. The constitutional rights of indigenous people should be restored immediately despite government’s unwillingness about their constitutional recognition. Government should ensure constitutional recognition and basic right simultaneously. [Here the government can] peruse a number of national constitutions of countries such as Finland, Australia, and Peru etc. for the promotion of minor languages (Phillipson, 1992).

[If we look at Finland], section 17 of the Constitution of Finland explicitly details the right to one’s language and culture. There indigenous groups are granted the right to maintenance and development of their own language. Austrian constitution is also a very good example: “under the Austrian Constitutional Law (1867), article nine grants equal rights to all languages used within the regions in domains of education, administration and public life” (Linguistic rights. n.d).

Follow constitution of other countries. Conspicuously, although the government is working on indigenous rights in many aspects; they steer clear the linguistic and cultural rights. Indigenous people should understand that if they lose their language; they will lose their most valuable identity marker. [If we look at constitution of Peru we discover that] on 5 July 2011, the Peruvian Congress passed Law 29735 for the preservation, development, revitalization, and use of
The government of Nunavut enacted two historic pieces of legislation: a new Education Act that will establish a bilingual system based on Inuit cultural values; and an Inuit Language Protection Act that will ensure that Inuktitut is used daily in public services and communications (Simon, 2008, p. 4).

**Conclusion**

Every citizen of the country has their own rights; government plays a crucial role in fulfilling their rights. Most importantly, all citizens should be treated as inhabitants of the country. Since indigenous people are deprived of their rights, premier authorities of the country should pay more
attention to fulfill their needs. At the same time indigenous people should feel proud of their indigenous identity.

On the other land, if we look at the status of Bangladesh globally, “it is known as a democratic country so recognizing rather than denying ethnicity holds the key to democratizing the state and development” (Salih, 1999, p. 3). Moreover, indigenous people should not feel deprived as they are also representing Bangladesh to the world community and contributing to the development of the country. They also have to be in the land of living and claiming their rights. They have to stand up and be counted by supporting their language and culture and affirming "I am who I am" (Pedraza, 1996).

The diversity of our culture due to the presence of indigenous communities is providing extra vigor to the national fabric of Bangladesh (Quader, 2014). However, the languages of indigenous people in Bangladesh lack vitality because there are problems in the efforts to preserve them. Here the government should give indigenous people the opportunity to use their own languages for a certain level of education and for certain activities. At the same time, indigenous people have to be aware of their linguistic rights. Overall, all parties should take necessary initiatives protecting indigenous languages as it the core branch of human rights.

References


Appendix

List of indigenous people in Bangladesh:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of People</th>
<th>Population (1991 census)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bawm</td>
<td>13,471</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chak</td>
<td>2,127</td>
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<td>Chakma</td>
<td>2,52,858</td>
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<tr>
<td>Khumi</td>
<td>1,241</td>
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<td>Khyang</td>
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<td>Lushai</td>
<td>662</td>
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<td>Mro</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pangkhua</td>
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<td>Tanchang</td>
<td>21,639</td>
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<td>Tripura</td>
<td>81,014</td>
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<td>Garo</td>
<td>64,280</td>
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<td>Koch</td>
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<td>Munda</td>
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<td>Oraon</td>
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<td>Horizon</td>
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</table>