

Deforestation and its impact on the language and culture of Patro community in Sylhet

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Abstract : Patro is one of the indigenous communities in Bangladesh. They have been living in Sylhet in hilly areas from about six hundred years ago. They have distinct culture, historical background and lifestyle like other indigenous communities in Bangladesh. Now they are facing many problems with concrete culture and abstract culture. They have different language but this language is in vulnerable position for ecological change or climate change. They have also distinct housing and settlement pattern which is very significant to indicate the indigenous character. This also is changing for the impact of climate change. Language is a main wheel to express any culture, so I shall give emphasize it to analyze patro culture. Climate change is one of the causes that can influence on Patro language and culture. I shall discuss these changes and how these impact on culture and language patro community. This article attempts to search for the indicators of changing the language and culture of discussed community. It is expected that climate change have changed Patro language and culture and which changes are propellers to influence the patro culture are found.

Key-words: Language, Culture, Climate, Minority, Patro, Community

1. Introduction

Bangladesh is a land of 55 thousand square miles and it has many ethnic minority peoples. 'Bangladesh is one of the countries, most valuable to climate change with high population density. Together with high level of poverty and vulnerability and depleted ecological system makes it more vulnerable to climate change (Yasmin, 2019: 85). They have distinct culture and language. They have increased the beauty of our country. That is our pride. There are many high and low lands, mountains and hills, lakes, rivers and canals, green

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trees, birds, animals in our country and they have made the country attractive. There is also a big source of natural assets in our country (Doha, 2008). These ethnic minorities are struggling for their existence for climate change and destroying their ecological systems. 'It is now an accepted fact that the culture of the forest people is being destroyed. This is mainly due to the process of deforestation and the intrusion into these areas of non-forest people and similar other factors' (D'Souza, 2008: 65). The impact of climate change is falling upon on their culture and language violently. This change is very destructive for them. They are suffering from all kinds of natural and human made disaster.

The lives of ethnic minority in Bangladesh are fall in trouble and it goes to uncertainty day by day. Their living lands areas are shrinking tremendously. The forests which are related with their cultural and economic lives are decreasing in a significant way. So all of the ethnic minorities are struggling for getting back their rights (Drong, 2001).

More than 50 minorities live in Bangladesh. Patro is one of them. They are a tiny ethnic community in the hilly areas of Sylhet. In the past, people of tiny communities, whose living standard, customs and culture, rites and rituals, dancing and singing were the same, identified themselves as patro. 'The patra, an indigenous community as well as minority group is living at Sylhet region in Bangladesh. Like other ethnic and indigenous groups, this community has different connotations and recognition regarding their ethnicity (Rahman, 2007:69). Patro has different and distinct culture. Their living areas were full resources by its natural hilly forests, trees or several fruits, agricultural lands etc. They have been living in the hilly area and they have been living with the natural assets surrounded by them for a long time. But now a days the patro area is decreasing in a mentioned way. Climate change is the main reason of changing of patro language and culture. Now patros community is living in an acute poverty. 'The main causes of chronic poverty are losing valuable assets and resources. Many patra people have lost their landed properties and their own resources for managing necessary commodities for their consumption' (Ahmed and Biswas, 2007:3).

2. Patro culture and its background

The patro are claiming themselves as the decedents of Raja (king) Gour Gobindo, the last hindu king of Gour state Sylhet though there are no recognized history about them. Most of the patro people consider themselves as Laleng among their cultural arena. They are decline peripheral and little known ethnic group at Sylhet in north-east region of Bangladesh. Though patro community or its identity mentioned as pator and pathor and though their culture laleng is also recognized as their identity. Hye (2007) mentioned-

There is no recognized and institutionalized record how and when the Laleng people were settled in Sylhet permanently. Their history of pricing is completely unknown and elusive. But, there are a few traditional and popular stories regarding the background of the community. Finding no other government and non-government recognized and institutionalized record; the researcher has to depend on the oral history of the aged people of the Laleng community.

The Laleng consider themselves as the descendants of Raja Gour Gobind, the last hindu king of Gour of Sylhet. When Gour Gobin was defeated by Shahjalal, the laleng lost their right to live in the capital Gour, and after then they were living in deep forest of northern Sylhet which was formed as the Laleng village in course of time. It effected all aspire of their life like profession, food etc (Hye, 2007: 35).

The traditional profession of the patro community was charcoal making and selling. They used to make charcoal in the hills and forests and sell it in Bazar especially to hotels and goldsmith. Hunting and making mully a kind of drink for cow to increase their milk. Their food practices are very similar with Bengali people. Moreover, Patro culture has distinct from others. In addition, patro mostly tried to detach from national or local politics though internal faction also seen in the community.

The patros are now in declining community and faces threatened to their existence. Back into their previous history, once they had green hilly environment and healthy lives by their own resources in

the area with full of agriculture and forest resources. Now they are living in a backward position.

3. Patro history and ethnicity

Patro is an unfamiliar ethnic minority in Bangladesh. There is not any recognized information about them. Patros came from the origin of Tibetan-Himalayan peoples, popularly known as Bodo. They are an ethnic and linguistic community, early settlers of Assam in the north east of India. Bodos belong to large ethnic group called the Bodo-Kachri. Another belief is that patros are the decendent of Monogolic Monokher family. They belongs to the Bodo-sub-section of Bodo-naga section under the Assam-Burmese group of the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Tibeto-Chinese family. Patros are therefore, the brances of the ethnic group named Boro. Patros peoples have been migrated to Assam from south-west China via Tibet and Bhutan in ancient times. They deployed the north-east part of India including north-east part of Bangladesh, Sylhet.

Patros have history but there is no clear conception and information about them. They consider themselves as the decendants of Raja Gour Gobind, the last Hindu king of Gour of Sylhet. There is a Muslim object in Gour named Borhanuddin. Once he sacrificed a cow for fulfilling his desire of a son, which was respected by Gobind as God. Accidently, a crow felt a piece of meat in the worship place of the king which made him very ferocious. He wanted to find out the cow killer and at last he could do it. Then Raja Gour Gobind cut the hands of the newborn baby as a punishment. The oppressed Borhanuddin, then went to the emperor of Delhi and wanted justice. At that time Hazrat Shahjalal was staying Delhi and he heard this pathetic incident. The emperor sent army to punish cruel king Gour Gobind. Hazrat Shahjala also joined with 360 disciples with them and tried to preach islam in Bangladeh. At last Gour Gobind defeated with Hazrat Shahjalal. Gour Gobind lost his kingdom and fled away with some followers in the deepest forest of khadimnagar, Sylhet. The patros had been living there for years. Later on, they came to the day light and communicated with the other peoples of Sylhet. When the people asked them about their

identity they treated them as patro or laleng. There are 3259 patros live in the sadar upazila of Sylhet, Goainghat, Zointapur-these three upazila, six unions, in total 32 villages and in a family's 552 (filedwork, 2022).

The real name of the patro community is Laleng. The meaning of the laleng in patro language is pathor (stone). They made the charcoal from the wood and sold it different places of Sylhet. So these peoples are named pathor, pattor, patro. 'in local land records of Sylhet they are mentioned as Khasia. But they are different in Physique and complexion and are not as sturdy as khasias' (khan, 2003: 10). The physical appearance of patro people are different from others. Their body middle size in height, body color is not too bright or black. Exceptionally, a little number of patro people is black. According to Moinus Sultan, 'this group is a branch of mongoloid people. Beside someone doesn't as admit them as pure mongoloid for the mixture of black in body color. According to them, this group is generated with the mixture of mongoloid and proto-australoid (Biswas, 2015: 109)

4. Methodology

This is an ethnographic study. There are some books have been published in this area. These books will be treated as secondary source. Peer reviewed and scholarly articles already had been published in the Patro culture and language related journals. These are also taken as secondary sources. Here also tried to discuss about the climate change and its impact on the patro culture and language. So this related books and journals are also discussed and mentioned here.

4.1 Research rationale: The climate change and its impact on patro language and culture has been identified in this article. There is no any writing about the climate change and its influence on the patro language and culture. So this is the first attempt to identify the impact of climate change and its impact on the patro community. Ashaduzzaman (2013) said-There are many reference and significant books written about the culture and history of ethnic minorities in Sylhet. But there are a few books available about

patros (Ashaduzzaman, 2013:141). The paper has suggested some indication for the development of patro community culture.

4.2 Research questions: To mention the climate change and its impact on patro culture I have tried to answer the following two questions-

- a) What is the traditional language and culture of patro community?
- b) How does climate change impact on the patro language and culture?

5. Climate change, its impact and changing patro culture and language

Climate change is the threat for the social development. Bangladesh is facing such kind of problems (Uddin and Islam, 2017). This is more than risk for the ethnic minorities of Bangladesh. Especially this connotation is acute for the patro community of Sylhet. Once upon a time patro would live in a hilly area of Sylhet. They live in forests and live with a forest. They were in a healthy ecological environment in that time. In a recent, they are in vulnerable position for climate change, losing their forests, lands etc. They also are losing their traditional and historical culture and language for climate change. Language is the wheel of expressing culture in all sphere of life. There are many factors that change patro culture and language because of changing climate change of patro living area. These factors have been impacted on material and abstract culture of patro community. These are-

5.1 Social structure: There is clan system in patro community. 'They are divided into twelve clans' (Mohanto, 1999: 805). They called their clan as Rai. They have twelve clans. Some of them identified more than twelve clans. There is no caste difference in patro community, though they are in hindu in religion (Sultan..?)

5.2 professions: The main profession of patro community is cultivation and then selling charcoal. But in course of time the deforestation of patro area they have no scope to cultivate and to make and sell charcoal like before. So they are bound to change

their profession. 'a good number of patras have opened shops and started business. A few of them are service men' (Mree, 2007: 543). Some of them are engaged in day labor, building labor, micro business, transport labor, wood clumber etc (Gourango, 2014: 3).

Most of the patros live on cultivation of hilly areas. They have so far sound economic condition. In nineteenth century the tea cultivation began in the patro areas and their economic condition fell in trouble. The patro cultivated land is being decreased by the outsiders though almost of the land owner was patro. The English tea cultivators took away patros lands without giving any compensation. This process was started ninety century and it was launched till half of the twenty century (Mohanto, 1998). Now this is very acute in the patro area where the patros are going to lose their land and asset. They have no land, forests and assets like before and for that they are bound to change their profession.

5.3 Housing and settlement pattern of patro community: Patro lives only in a few villages of Syhet. They used to live in Sylhet in the Sylhet metropolitan area. 'The presence of these people is unknown to most of the people of Bangladesh as they want themselves to be hidden and live in deepest part of the forest adjacent Sylhet city (Mri, 2007: 431). Patros housing and settlement pattern have been dependent on the activity pattern, available building material, Socio-economic condition, Socio-cultural activities, and neighborhood, environment and geo-climate factors.

Houses of patro community are mud-nut. The room arrangement of the patros house is very different from the other mud houses of Bangladesh. The Bengali peoples use to build a house hold around a family court yard surrounded by three or more built forms. But a single built form is used for a single house hold of a patro family. There is no private court yard, just a linear courtyard for all families of the settlement. Rectangular houses face the linear court yard. Their housing follow linear pattern because with population increases their house grows by length. They are generally peasants and doesn't need any large court yard to sundry paddy. So the court yard they use is quiet utilitarian for their group-leaving. We can say easily that patro people have a settlement pattern and indigenous

housing of unique archetype, a successful community interactive dwelling space. In recent situation, the community is in socio-economic and cultural threat. For lack of security they keep themselves apart from the outer world. Now their housing and settlement pattern are being changed for climate change (filedwork,2022).

5.4 Traditional clothing and present condition: Sometimes Clothing is the indicator of ethnic minority character. This is also applicable for the ethnic minority patro. There is also close connection environment and climate condition with the ethnic minority clothing. Once patro peoples would live the deepest forest and they have no communication other community of Sylhet. They would live in separately from the other peoples. So they would wear slightly dress. The male patro would wear generally spices of cloth (nangti), gamcha, women would dress especially Paticot and blouse. Now a days this is radically had been changed among patro peoples. Now they aren't detached from other community, there are many outsider live in patro area, so patro has no security to live and wear traditional dress. Now almost patros have to leave the traditional dress and to wear modern dress like other communities of Bangladesh. Hye said-

There is no specially in their clothes. Their clothes are as like as Bengali Hindu. The male generally put on Gamcha and shirt, but occasionally they wear Dhuti and Punjabi. In the time of marriage they wear draw less white clothes. The laleng women use Shari and Blaos and youth use kamiz with orna like Bengali. The women never use under clothes like bra as well as panty. Beside, some women are using paticoat now (Hye. 2007: 85).

Once upon a time patros people dependent on the forest. Their main foodstuff was rice, fish, the animals of the forest. Tortoise, deer, Rabbit, kuichcha, Boar, hare, pig, duck, forest cock and hen, pigeon and different kinds of birds, vegetables were their food. They drink wine. But they don't eat beef. Now there is no deep forest in a patro area. So they can't hunt the wild animals. For this, they are habituated with the food of other community of

Bangladesh. Now they eat rice, fish, different meat, bread, vegetables etc.

Patros peoples habituated with drinking bear. This bear named Handi and Haira. They use about 108 wild elements to make this drinking. Now they can't manage so many elements because of deforestation. They only use 20-30 elements to make such kind of bear. 'To make this drinking is the expression of ethnic minority characters (Charakrobartti, 2000: 57).

5.4 Religious belief and rituals: Like other community patro has strong religious belief. They have traditional religious belief and that is mainly animism. They pray with different stones which were available in the patro area. They have given stones many names in a patro language. Now a day there is no available stones in their area. For this they can't worship such kind of stones. Now they are engaged in worshipping Hinduism. Deforestation and climate change of patro area makes them to worship in different religious practice fieldwork, 2022).

5.5 puja festivals of patros: The worship of patros is more or less now same as the Hindus. They perform many puja festivals as patros. Traditionally their mainly worship was animism. Most of worship was animal or tree related. Now they are changed in to Hinduism. There are no trees or animals or stone like before as patro area. They also live in hardships. So it is not possible for them to maintain the traditional puja systems in their society.

5.7 *The funeral system*: To die is an inevitable truth for mankind. To accomplish the dead body different community maintains distinct rituals. For this purposes, there is a various systems in a different society (Hasan and others. 2011). There are two funeral systems in patro community- dead body burring systems and to put on a tomb. It has got in a research that if someone dies in dead of night then he has to put on a tomb-this is the tradition of a patro community. After got death new the relatives come to take part in funeral systems as a tradition they carry some rice and drinking. This system is changing day after day as the climate change of patro area.

6. Patro Language and its present condition

Minority languages may thus be not merely linguistics in interest, but may also constitute political problems of all degrees of importance. In principle, it seems highly doubtful whether governmental interference either for against a language or dialect is politically wise-except in so far as someone or more of them may be necessary for the conduct of official affairs. Unless approved by the great majority of the governed, prohibitions and commands alike arouse resentment rather than willing obedience, and a policy of linguistic *laissez faire*, so far as possible, would seem to be most expedient. Only when a minority language becomes means for violent subversive political activities does governmental action appear to be justifiable. Speakers of minority languages are subject, by the very constitution of society, is to certain social and economic disadvantages (Rilley, 2010:232).

Patro is one of the decay ethnic minorities in Bangladesh. They are now living in the shadow of poverty. Their material and abstract culture are facing many problems. They are lag behind, because they have no lands, forests of their own. So they have changed their profession. As they changed it, there is an influence on their abstract culture. Language is one of the main vehicle and parameter to judge the culture of any community. Patro has traditionally resourceful language. But there is no written script or form of this language. So this language is changing day by day. When they speak in their community they use the patro language. Every patro members speak and understand this language. Every patro understand the meaning of the patro language. When they communicate with non-patro community they use Bengali language. So every patro is at least bilingual in this sense. Their language is now in wane. The young generation is not interested in patro language. They want to speak Sylhety Bangla language. For the forestation and climate change there are many settlers in patro areas. Patro has to live with them, to contact with them and every day they have to communicate with others by the help of Bengali language. On the other hand they have no cultural words which are used in to indicate names, places, dresses, foods and foodstuff,

different tools and machineries etc. As a result patro language is in risk and the user of this language is decreasing day by day in a mentionable way.

7. Suggestion for the improvement of patro culture

The ethnic minorities of Bangladesh have their own language, social structure, religious beliefs, dress, communities feeling and ideas, thinking, mind and mentality, customs and principles, food habits or cultural traditions. But their cultural traditions-material and abstract cultures are losing day by day (Toru, 2008).

Patro community has cultural and traditional history. They are an indispensable part of syheti or Bangladeshi culture. But their cultural heritage is going to decay for many reasons. To protect their culture some steps should be taken immediately-

To establish patro cultural institute in a patro area;

To publish a magazine giving emphasis on the patro culture and language;

To arrange festival and seminar, conference;

To establish patro cultural wing;

To set up a patro museum.

I think the mentioned of these ways will be helpful for patro community for their development.

8. Conclusion

The peoples of hilly areas lose their lands, houses, the right of their forest. They only lose and lose; they don't get back for ever. This is the reality and the ethnic minority of Bangladesh is living under these circumstances (Drong, 2001).

Patro is a peripheral ethnic minority in Bangladesh. They are losing their everything-material culture and abstract culture. For deforestation and climate change, this process is being increased. Most of the patro is not conscious about their right. Throughout patro area there is a fundamental lack of resources, including lack of infrastructure, sub-standard condition, and lack of sanitation, food,

and drinking water as well. In the same way patro community is worsen situation with ecological situation. They have lost their traditional hill forests and forest resources for many reasons. They have failed to regenerate hill resources as well as local resources. They have also failed to manage their agricultural land properly. They are also losing their culture for the pressure of the outside culture. They do not have representation at the national policy making level.

Patro is the part and parcel to glorify the cultural diversity in Bangladesh. So some steps should be taken to their development. Representation of the patro peoples in national policy level is essential in order to make their concerns public. Rectifying the issues of ethnic patro peoples is part of bringing peace, promoting sustainable development, eradicating poverty, removing discrimination, promoting human rights, and strengthens democracy, as well as preserving the cultural diversity of Bangladesh.

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