




## MULTILINGUAL CRISIS IN BANGLADESHI MANIPURI CULTURE: STRUGGLE OF ABORIGINALITY AND IDENTITY

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### RESEARCH ARTICLE



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#### Abstract

Every nation and every race have their own Language and culture which defines their aboriginality and Identity. There's lot of indigenous communities in Bangladesh. Manipuri is one of those indigenous communities. They experience a variety of linguistic difficulties, which are examined in this study. Manipur's cultural landscape, which is historically placed within the larger framework of the Indian subcontinent, is distinguished by a complex tapestry of languages that reflect its different ethnic and tribal identities. However, Bengali, Bangladesh's national language is becoming more and more dominant, endangering this linguistic variety. Besides that, while adapting to the modern world they started using English. Academic or in any other sector they r facing English frequently. That's why this language is mixing with Manipuri language (Meiteilon). This study explores how this linguistic shift impacts the cultural integrity of indigenous Manipuri communities by examining the decline of traditional languages, the decline of cultural practices linked to these languages, and the psychological and social effects on both individuals and communities. Additionally, it explores the intricate relationship between the fight for aboriginality the acknowledgment and defines of indigenous rights and identities and examining how these conflicting discourses influence Manipur's linguistic landscape. We used qualitative method in our research by doing some Interviews and FGD. This study intends to contribute to a better understanding of the issues that multilingual cultures experience in navigating globalization and the constraints of nation-building while keeping their own cultural identity.

**Keywords:** *Multilingual, Crisis, Bangladeshi Manipuri, Aboriginality, Identity*

### Introduction

Among the Manipuri people in Bangladesh, the theme "Multilingual Crisis in Bangladeshi Manipur Culture: Struggle of Aboriginality and Identity" faced with various intricate relationship between language, culture, and identity. Originally the Manipuri language, traditions, and rituals of the culture is originated in northeastern India, Manipur. In 18<sup>th</sup> century during British colonial rule Manipuri people started migrating to Bangladesh. From then they started living there and under pressure to blend in with the larger Bengali-speaking community, which creates difficulties. Besides because of academic and to maintain globalization, Manipuri people started using English. Due to this assimilation process, there is a multilingual crisis, putting the Manipuri language in danger of being dominated by Bengali, English and other prominent languages. Younger generations may find it more convenient to adopt the dominant language for social and economic integration. It could result the loss of indigenous practices and the decay of cultural identity in such a multilingual setting. Due to the variety of national identities, which does not always take into account their minority status, the Manipuri people of Bangladesh are thus torn between preserving their unique heritage and maintaining these forces. This circumstance represents a larger problem facing indigenous people globally, as national policies and globalization pose a threat to minority languages and cultures. This study tried to find dominance of Bengali and English language preserving at Manipuri language and culture among the Manipuri community in Bangladesh and the effects of multilingual crisis on Bangladesh's Manipuri community to ensure cultural heritage and aboriginality.

Meanwhile, keeping cultural identity poses various challenges for the indigenous Manipuri people of Bangladesh. Meiteilon is the Manipuri people's mother tongue. Thriving supremacy of Bengali and other languages is referred to as the "multilingual crisis." This problem has great effects on the community's cultural identity, legacy, and social harmony. As the national language of Bangladesh is Bengali, hence the indigenous community makes a serious effort to learn and use it. They always yearn to communicate in the regarded language. In Bangladesh, job opportunities are primarily cramped to Bengali and English in general.

This is another matter contributing to the indigenous community's language faced crisis in this country (Awal.2019). The Manipuri language and the Manipuri way of life, traditions, and customs are in danger of disappearing as younger generations significantly choosing Bengali as their primary language for social activity, education, and communication. Even the parents do not inspire their children to learn their own languages, as there is no employment whither those languages would be useful (Bhuiyan.2016). A crisis is created when the community's cultural expressions – such as festivals, rituals, and traditional knowledge – become more and more detached from their linguistic origins as a result of Bengali being the dominant language.

Like other communities in Bangladesh Manipuri peoples speak multiple languages. These multilingual environments can often lead to a crisis in cultural identity, as the younger generation began to prioritize dominant languages (such as Bengali or English) over their own languages. This linguistic shift can erode the traditional cultural expressions, rituals, and practices.

The term "Aboriginality" here refers to the cultural and ancestral heritage of indigenous communities. As globalization and national policies continue to promote dominant languages and cultures, indigenous languages may face extinction. This linguistic erosion directly challenges the sense of belonging, cultural unity and pride of these communities.

Language plays a crucial role in shaping the worldview and identity of a community. As indigenous languages and dialects decreasing, there is a loss of unique knowledge systems, oral histories, and traditional narratives, which are essential for the community's survival and cultural integrity.

The multilingual crisis is not only a linguistic issue but also a political and socio-cultural one. In Bangladesh, the indigenous communities of the Manipur region often face marginalization, and their struggles for rights, recognition, and cultural preservation are intertwined with their linguistic challenges.

This research topic is academically relevant because it contributes to the growing field of indigenous studies, language revitalization, and sociolinguistics. Socially, it has the potential to raise awareness about the challenges faced by the indigenous communities in preserving their languages and cultures in the modern world.

### **Dominance of other languages on Manipuri language and culture**

An ethnic group is people with a unique language and culture. The Manipuri people live in Bangladesh as well as India, mostly in the state of Manipur. With an emphasis on their fight to preserve their indigenous identity in a country where Bengali is the primary language, this article explores the linguistic problem that the Manipuri population in Bangladesh is facing. The difficulties of maintaining language, preserving culture, and navigating identity in a multicultural setting are all closely related to this problem.

The loss of a language has a significant impact on a community's sense of continuity and belonging since language is an essential component of identity. Because Bengali is so widely used, the Manipuri language, which has its own script and a rich literary heritage, is in danger of becoming marginalized in Bangladesh. Research on language endangerment (Fishman, 1991; Grenoble & Whaley, 2006) emphasizes the variables that lead to language shift, such as limited areas of usage, societal pressure, and lack of intergenerational transmission. According to research on the Manipuri population in Bangladesh, these causes are at work, as the Manipuri language ability of the younger generations declines as they use Bengali more frequently in their everyday life.

Being a minority group in Bangladesh is a difficult challenge for the Manipuri community as they negotiate their identity. As both Bangladeshi and Manipuri, they have to manage their dual identities while striking a balance between their urge to fit in with society and their loyalty to their ancestral culture. Research on minority identification (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Phinney, 1990) looks at how ethnic identity is formed, how social categorization occurs, and how intergroup connections work. Using their particular language and cultural history as indicators of distinctiveness, research on the Manipuri minority in Bangladesh (Das, 2017) explores how they create and express their identity in relation to the dominant Bengali culture.

### **Effect of multilingual crisis on preserving Bangladeshi Manipuri heritage and aboriginality**

The larger issue of cultural preservation is entwined with the linguistic crisis. Traditional behaviors, rituals, and knowledge systems are at risk of being lost as the Manipuri language declines. Cultural identity studies (Barth, 1969; Hall, 1990) highlight how culture is potential and how communities adjust their identities to meet outside influences. Studies conducted on the Manipuri community in Bangladesh examine the methods they use to preserve their cultural heritage, including religious activities, community-based language projects, and cultural festivals.

Despite its potential benefits, multilingualism has drawbacks, especially for minority language populations. A hierarchy where some languages are seen as more prestigious or practical than others might result from the dominance of one language (in this case, Bengali), which can push other languages to the margins. Research on multilingualism examines the cultural, social, and cognitive facets of language use in multilingual settings (Grosjean, 2010; Cenoz, 2013). Research on the Manipuri community in Bangladesh (Chakma, 2022) highlights the difficulties of preserving their mother tongue while simultaneously becoming proficient in the dominant language. It also looks at how multilingualism affects their language attitudes, language practices, and sense of identity.

The multilingual crisis in Bangladeshi Manipuri culture is a complex issue with far-reaching implications for the community's aboriginality and identity. Further research is needed to understand the specific factors contributing to language shift and cultural change, as well as the strategies that can be employed to support the preservation of Manipuri language and culture in Bangladesh.

## Methodology

This study explores the Multilingual Crisis in Bangladeshi Manipuri Culture: Struggle of Aboriginality and Identity through a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for this study (relevant line) it can be used to understand specific communities within a larger society, such as a workplace, a school, or a religious group. The main advantage of ethnography is that it gives the researcher direct access to the culture and practices of a group. It is a useful approach for learning first-hand about the behavior and interactions of people within a particular context. (Caulfield.2023)

### Study Area

This study focuses on Manipuri community living in, Bangladesh. A part of Manipuri people lives at Sylhet, in Bangladesh. The peoples in here are facing multilingual crisis because they have to use Bengali and English with their own mother tongue (Meiteilon) in daily life.

### Sampling Method

A Stratified Purposeful Sampling technique was applied to select participants. This method ensured the inclusion of Manipuri Meitei peoples with various professionals and related to linguistic background. A total of 12 participants were selected, including 5 Tertiary students 4 Professionals and 3 litterateur ensuring gender and generation balance.

### Data Collection Methods

#### I. Interviews

Interviews were conducted with Manipuri community to gain an in-depth understanding of their perceptions and experiences. This method offered flexibility to explore emerging themes during the conversation, aligning with qualitative research principles (Bryman, 2016).

#### II. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

We organized FGDs with students, teachers and others to encourage dynamic discussions. FGDs are particularly useful for generating a range of ideas and identifying patterns of agreement or divergence among participants (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

## Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using discourse analysis. This involves analyzing the language used in the data to understand how people construct meaning. The six-step framework by Braun and Clarke (2006) was applied to ensure a systematic approach.

## Research Validity and Reliability

To enhance validity, data triangulation was used by combining interviews and FGDs. This approach ensured that findings were corroborated through multiple methods. Reliability was ensured by maintaining consistency in data collection procedures and using peer debriefing to minimize researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

## Findings and Discussion

The findings of the study are presented and discussed in the following sections based on the individual interview and FGD. The first part concerns the findings of 5 students' interview (S1-S5), the second part is 4 Professionals interview (P1-P4), the third part is the interview of 3 Litterateur(L1-L3) The last part is based on the findings from Focus Group Discussion (FGD). They were directly interviewed to get related information about multilingual crisis in Bangladeshi Manipuri culture with ten relevant questions. They had also freedom to give their valuable opinions

### Findings from Students' Interviews

**Student (S1)** remarked *"In my daily life I respectively use Bangla, Meiteilon and English. And I think my parents are more proficient than us. I never listen any Manipuri poem but I often use Manipuri song in social gathering, there are several words that I replaced from Manipuri to Bangla."*

**S2:** *"As I'm Manipuri and living in Bangladesh, I have to use Bangla and Meiteilon (Manipuri language) and I also use English for academic purpose. I don't see much different between mine and my parent. They too use mixed Meiteilon."*

He adds, *"To make communication with my Bengali friends I have to use Bangla. I listen Bengali, Hindi and Manipuri songs. But I don't read or use Manipuri poem. I use many replaced words such as Lagiroi (Mathou ta de), Dorkar (mathou), Suja (achumba)"*

**S3:** *"I think that for the sake of livelihood all of Manipuri community has to speak in Bangla or Sylheti. I read Bangla, Hindi and English poem more than Meiteilon. But I always listen Manipuri music."*

**S4:** *"Our culture is mixed with Bengali culture. I listen Manipuri old songs and after that I listen Hindi songs. I Don't read any kind of poem. I use English just for Academic purpose. Usage of English is very minimal, just in word. Some replaced words are Bazar (keithel), Purba (nongpok), Paschim (nongchuk)"*

**S5:** *"I mostly use Bangla and sometime English. I speak Manipuri just at home. Yes, I think ours is declined than our parents. I often listen and enjoy Hindi and Bangla. Just sometime I listen Manipuri. At Social gathering we use both Manipuri and Bangla languages songs and poems."*



### **Findings from Professionals Interviews**

**(Doctor) P1** *"I mostly use Bangla. Just at home or in community I use Manipuri. Those who are at countryside they use Manipuri most of the time. But now many students are out for college and university. They use Bangla and English. At social gathering we use Manipuri song and just sometime we use poems. I use English for academic or official need and to make communication with my foreign friends. With that, most of the time I speak mixed language of Manipuri, Bangla and English. I use some mixed or replaced words those are Chair(tangbal), Bazar (Keithel), Boi (Lairik), Hawa(nungsit), Bidesh (mapan lamdam)."*

**(Teacher) P2** *"I mostly speak in English for my profession; I'm an English teacher. After that I use Bangla and Meiteilon, Whenever I'm at home I always use Meiteilon that time I use manipuri poem and song also, but when my surrounding is Bangali community then I use Bangla and English song or poems."*

**(Banker) P3** *"As I work at bank I have to communicate in Bangla. I speak Bengali around 70% beside Meiteilon and English. I always try to listen Manipuri songs. Whenever I am at home I always speak in my mother tongue. My parents Meiteilon is more perfect than me. Some replaced words are Nasta, Bathroom."*

**(Teacher) P4** *"Though Our Bangladeshi education system depends on Bangla and English language. There are no more versions available in Bangladesh. So, they have to study in Bangla or English Version. So, most of the student's take Bangla version because it easy to communicate and understand any kind of topic, that's how our surrounding enacts us to speak other language. I use replaced word regularly like, Baba (pabung), Akash (atiya), Time (pungja)"*

### **Findings from Litterateur Interviews**

**L1:** I Mostly use Bengali, but when I speak with my family members or friends (Meitei), I use Manipuri. It has declined drastically. When we have gone out to attend our social activities (such as educational institution or work-related purposes), using Bengali is the only choice we have. Nowadays we use Bengali so often that many of teenage boys and girls find it comfortable to use Bengali/ Hindi/English words rather than using Manipuri words in our social gathering events. At our socio cultural and religious events, we mostly use our mother tongue. Kulintang(nailcutter), shen (taka/poysha), leima (rani), cheirouba (boishakh)

**L2:** *"I think that the changes of language are normal, it happens whenever interact more than one language. The level of ability to speak our own language I think it similar with my parents. Using Manipuri song and poem it depends on my surroundings."*

**L3:** *"I love poetry so much for that I often write some poet in my own language. Whenever I attend social gathering, I always try to use Manipuri songs and poems mostly. I think that my Manipuri language is more proficient than my parents."*

From these questions they claimed that they speak Bengali more than their own language Meiteilon. They mostly use Bengali for their academic case. They also use English beside Bengali for professional reason. At program or in any kind of event they use Bengali and Manipuri song.

### **Focus Group Discussion (FGD)**

**Respondent (R1):** *"I always feel comfortable to speak in Meiteilon but I can't read and write in my own language. I never learnt our alphabets. From childhood we started attached with Bengali alphabets. To introduce myself and my own community it's very important to know language which carries high value. Extent our own language to our next generation it's not so hard but I think that, ability to understand this language is declining day after day."*

**R2:** *"I usually write poem in Manipuri. From these habitual things I used to write and read Manipuri language book. For communication the language is important. So, I totally think that to identify someone it plays a great role. I think our next generation can also adopt the language properly. But when it comes to perfectly using language it's gradually falling down by our surroundings."*

**R3:** *"I have to use many words from Bangla and English. And it's mixed up with Manipuri. I am quite fluent in speaking and listening Manipuri. But unfortunately, I don't have any idea how to write or read in Manipuri as I have grown up in Bangladesh. If we learn properly about Meiteilon and also teach them how to understand and speak in this language, they can easily grab this language. I think, language is a significant thing that carries identity of every culture. In the case of Manipuri language, this language has its own letters and history. Which hold the information behind the creation of Manipuri's."*

**R4:** *"I hardly think that our ability to speak in Manipuri language is changing day by day. The biggest reason is multilingualism and mixed culture. I think to cultural identify language is not so important. Most of the Manipuri people doesn't know Manipuri alphabet. They couldn't read or write any kind of text in Meiteilon. But they can speak and understand what others saying."*

**R5:** *"It's pretty sure that next generation can adopt this language properly. I think it's not so easy to extinct their mother tongue. I personally can write read and speak properly in Manipuri language and it's very soothing to me. I think that, ability to speak Meiteilon could change after a long period. However, I believe that, to represent our own identity language comes first."*

### **Discussion**

Manipuri language has its own unique script and literary heritage which is becoming marginalized in Bangladesh. There's lot of reason behind transmission of this language such as societal pressure, lack of intergenerational transmission etc. Multilingual is not always a threat or not negative thing. Being able to speak several languages is their own life skill. But when it comes to transmitting language by a whole community, that time that becomes crisis for their own culture and heritage.

After this case study the all of respondent gave answer about Multilingual crisis negatively. From the interview we ensured that there's occurring multilingual crisis. Use of the pure Meiteilon is decreasing generation by generation. And one interviewer remarked that changes in language are normal. Language is changeable. Somehow it affects their culture. (Wierzbicka,1997) argues that languages impose cultural constraints on their users. Learning and speaking a given language help people to subtly absorb cultural norms, values, and ways of thinking ingrained in that linguistic system; in other words, "becoming" part of the society connected with that language. The language plays a great role to preserve any cultural identity. But from the interview and FGDs we got that because of multilingualism; their pure Manipuri Language (Meiteilon) is changing drastically. At FGDs a respondent mentioned that one culture has intimate connection with their history. Manipuri has their own alphabets and their alphabets represent their history and heritage. In our opinion, multilingualism has an extensive effect on preserving Manipuri cultural aboriginality and identity.

### Recommendation

Based on the study, as a researcher we offer the following recommendations that there should be taken initiative step to preserve Manipuri culture, tradition, arts to practice in Bangladesh. Also organizing festival events and documenting traditional knowledge. On the other hand, to preserve this language they have to encourage their next generation to speak the native language as they grow up. It's mandatory to understand cultural diversity and appreciate them to know or learn their culture and heritage. As Manipuri has their own Alphabet and literature, Government should consider including Manipuri language book at academic curriculum. By implementing these recommendations, it is possible to support the Bangladeshi Manipuri community in their struggle to maintain their aboriginality and identity while facing of multilingual challenges.

### Conclusion

Language carries the cultural knowledge, history, tradition and heritage of nation. To define aboriginality and identify the culture, the Language plays the most vital role. As for the Manipuri Community they are facing Multilingual crisis. To preserve their own culture and language they have to practice their Language and do the cultural activities regularly. But, because of mixed culture the ratio of doing cultural activities is decreasing day by day. The older generation used to speak more proficiently than the current generation. There's lot of reasons behind this. According to (Awal,2019) the young indigenous people often feel shame or uncomfortable to speak in their own languages in public place or institutions. However, as a Bangladeshi they have to speak Bangla for sake of their livelihood. Besides, even though they can't speak proper Bangla they use local language (Sylhety). On the other hand, for academic or professional purpose they occasionally use English. As a result, their cultural identity is in threat. From this finding we found that, multilingual crisis in Bangladeshi Manipuri is really happening and it's affecting their cultural aboriginality and identity. It is high time to save indigenous languages of Bangladesh from language loss.

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