

## “Cultural” and “Geo-Cultural” Identity: A Critical Analysis of Kymlicka’s Multiculturalism in the Context of Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh

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### **Keywords:**

*Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), Cultural Identity, Diversity, Geo-cultural Identity, Identity, Multiculturalism, and Pahari People.*

### **Abstract**

*In Bangladesh, a large number of minorities or indigenous people live in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) who prefer to introduce themselves as “Pahari” to create a distinguished identity from mainstream. Even in most cases, the Bangali population residing in CHT acknowledge their identity in the similar way. This distinctiveness is not solely cultural what Kymlicka assumes, rather it is ‘geo-cultural’. This paper focuses on the collective role of cultural and geo-cultural identity to define the complete ‘self’ of the marginalized population by analyzing and critiquing Will Kymlicka’s thoughts on multiculturalism. A randomly selected sample of indigenous and Bangali residents of CHT participated in this ethnographic study where data was collected through observations and face to face interviews. Qualitative data analysis procedure was followed to analyze and ultimately, thematize the collected data. The findings of this research very evidently demonstrated the acceptance of cultural varieties in today’s globalized multicultural world. Besides, it justified the importance of cultural and territorial rights of the minors which would eventually construct a complete identity for them. Hence, a perspective of cultural tolerance and promoting geo-cultural rights can advocate multiculturalism strongly boosting the true identity of a marginalized cultural group.*

## **1. Introduction**

Currently world cultural diversity is a very crucial phenomenon and Bangladesh is not out of this. Many countries contain diverse languages, religions, cultural groups, or diverse ethnic groups; besides international migration is an additional factor of today’s world. So, clashes between majorities and minorities are common, and sometimes these conflicts become the vital cause for much violence all over the world. This violence may be caused by a number of demands including the demands for native language, controlling a certain area within boundaries with existent migration system. In addition, some administrative decisions like government holidays may also contribute to this violence. Will Kymlicka outlines a new liberal approach to resolve these issues in multicultural politics, though he does not agree with the traditional concept of multiculturalism. According to his opinion, the fundamental needs of the culturally minor groups, the natives and the immigrants have been subjugated in the current democracy with very less or no seriousness. Argument may arise that the demands of minors can be well protected and served by The Universal Declaration of Human Rights but Kymlicka disagreed on this point stating that some of the basic issues on minority rights cannot be addressed by the supposed human rights. In this regard, some common yet timely questions like the issue of recognized official language, state funded education policy in native languages, preserving the cultural identity of the immigrants can be brought into consideration which are yet unanswered in current human rights policy. Therefore, there must be something additional for the minority in the existing human rights policy which ultimately leads to Kymlicka’s primary claim to incorporate universal human rights and particular “group-differentiated rights” for the minorities in the conventional theory of justice in multiculturalism that means ensuring ‘special status’ or ‘priorities’ for the minors in the adjusted theory of justice (Kymlicka, 1995a).

In Bangladesh, the citizens have different identities apart from their nationality, and two major identities can be brought under their ethnic identity: Bangali and ‘Pahari’. Most of the Bangali people

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are Muslim, Hindu, Christian and a few of them are Buddhist. In Bangladesh, 91.04% are Muslim which means the Muslims are mainstream here. Beside the religious identity ethnic identity is more crucial here, as because 99% of total populations are Bangalis who are the actual mainstream (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2022). So, the other 1% are ethnic minorities, and most of the indigenous people like Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Tanchangya, Chak, Pankho, Mro, Murung, Bom/Bawm, Lushei tribe, Khyang people, Khumi and other Mongoloid people of this country live in Chittagong hill tracts (CHT) who preferred to call themselves as ‘Pahari’. Most important thing here, a few of them are Bangali, who also introduce themselves as ‘Pahari’ as they live in CHT. So, here this group of Bangali people introduce themselves with their geographical identity rather than cultural identity. They may concern about their cultural identity; at the same time the cultural identity may depend on the geography they belong to which may be labeled as ‘Geo-cultural identity’. In 2013, a prominent researcher and professor of a public university in Bangladesh, Md. Munir Hossain Talukder devised the term “geo-cultural” identity in one his articles to report on the mainstream culture and marginalized culture, and the stress and anxiety between them in a society that celebrates multiculturalism. Kymlicka has emphasized on the prevalence of minority rights but less concentration is given to the relationship between the individual’s native land and their cultural perspectives (Talukder, 2013). This study is going to investigate whether people consider only cultural background in terms of constructing their ‘self’ or both the geographical and cultural identities, namely ‘geo-cultural identity’, come into their consideration. It will also advocate that multiculturalism can be more interesting with the acknowledgement of diversity considering the evaluation of geo-cultural identity within.

## 2. Literature review

In his work, *The Rights of Minority Cultures* (1995b), Kymlicka opined that leading a life with suitable and strategic adjustments between the cultural diversity and the conventional ideologies of freedom, justice and democracy is the ultimate option left to us. He believes that individual’s freedom is dependent on cultural membership. People want to maintain their own culture, and hence, access to a societal culture is the legitimate claim for individual freedom. Protecting individual freedom involves opportunity costs for governments, and so Kymlicka has to determine to what extent this claim is justified. Intercultural pluralism may not be widely influenced by the varieties of national minorities (Kymlicka, 1995a) whereas there is no denial of the fact that the vibrant arts, music, literature etc. can be considered as the necessary supplements from the ethnic minorities towards the versatility of mainstream culture (Talukder, 2013). He thought diversity enriches lifestyles, our experiences, and also promotes our interests, and that is why we should support it. Kymlicka’s “cultural membership” concept was criticized by many scholars. Amartya Sen believes that individuals have multiple socio-cultural identities; among those which one they will choose that is the point. To Kymlicka, it should follow one’s culture. But Sen claimed that Muslims get more opportunities in terms of deciding their additional beliefs and preferences keeping their Islamic fundamentals intact (Sen, 2006). For example, a tribal child might have two identities, a Chakma (her ethnic identity) and a student. So, if her institution follows a certain dress code, she should follow it as a student. But to Kymlicka, it is her cultural right to wear Phinon (Chakma women wear), and the institute should revise their rules. Again, by giving this sort of extra facilities, we treat them unequal, and it may push them to become isolated. But Kymlicka (2019) claims, by this argument, minority culture is going to be lost. With the same argument, we may claim the indigenous languages should be practiced at home, but they should learn mainstream language for institution. The minority people may acquire the state language as an added variety to their culture but no ethical justification should confine them to accept that. According to Kymlicka (2019), different groups of indigenous people look for indemnity in terms of the application of various conventional law and order to facilitate their individual rights like religious attitudes which ultimately creates contentiousness in their claims. Such as, in Britain, Muslims and Jews have taken their stand against the traditional laws of keeping Sunday off and butchering animals whereas in Canada, Sikhs do not want to leave their turban and that is why they want to be excused from the rules of wearing motorcycle helmets and official police uniforms in the conventional laws; in USA, the conservative Jews in military service want to have the permission to wear yarmulke whereas in France,

Muslim girls prefer chador as a part of their school uniform and that is why, they want a bit relaxation in the regular school uniforms. Here, Brian Berry considered this permission as equally partial. He raised question why culture should be considered as the end of argument. Unlike Kymlicka, he perceived culture as a powerful identity which can not only embrace the rights but also signify it (Barry 2002). He argued, culture cannot be regarded as moral entities, and he also wondered how culture is involved in politics. But it was experienced in the time of colonization in Canada, clash between the French and British was of course economic and political. Beside economy and politics, the conflict was also cultural, and it was revolving around the differences of language and religion. So, there is no doubt that ‘culture’ is also a political tool.

However, Barry (2002) believes that citizens of a country get rights as they are citizens. These rights should be same for all citizens whatever their gender, culture, race, religion, place of residence etc. is. But cultural membership cannot give any rights to citizen. Here, we need to notice Bangladeshis (equally applicable for all mainstream all over the world) get a long vacation during Eid-festival (again equally applicable for the festival of all mainstream, like Christmas in West, Chinese New Year in China, Durgapuja in India etc.). Now the main festival of Chakma (a Bangladeshi indigenous group) is ‘Bizu’, which lasts three days; whereas during their fest they do not get public holidays. So only citizenship right is not sufficient for minorities which Barry claims. Many liberals (e.g. Jeremy Waldron) believe that since a minority does not need their own culture in practice, she could at best claim the “right of non-interference”, a similar right to practice religions privately without getting any support from the state. For example, if the Chakmas get extraordinary leave on their Bizu fest, they may celebrate it without any interference. However, Waldron is doubtful whether human beings need any deep bonding to their own culture and language, and should protect their cultural membership to live a worthwhile life. He proposes the “cosmopolitan alternative”, according to which without feeling any deep relation to a particular culture, people can select and pick “cultural fragments” from a variety of cultures. For example, one can eat Chinese food and listen to Western rock music without being a member of either Chinese or Western culture. So, he rejects Kymlicka’s core idea that cultural membership shapes and gives meaning of our lives. Waldron (1991) believes people need culture but it does not imply that one’s cultural structure can make each of her options valuable or meaningful. Meaningful options may originate from fragments of a variety of cultures. At present this is the highest challenge for multiculturalism to adjust these two worldly aspects. According to Waldron (1991), concept of good or justice and cultural membership are not necessarily connected. They are both subject to individual choice. It is true that subjective values exist, but when moral philosophers design a new ethical concept, obviously they design it from objective view, otherwise we cannot justify one’s action. Waldron further argues that the modern world is a creation of heterogeneous cultures, not homogenous cultures. For example, we had Palestinian culture, then Germanic folklore, and then the Roman Republic mythology. So, the idea of “a single cultural matrix” is unacceptable in a liberal theory as it locks individuals into a particular choice, lifestyle, and interest. In short, Waldron (1991) maintains “identification with a single cultural frame or matrix”, has none of the importance that Kymlicka claims it does. Here through multiple matrix, we may enjoy different food, music, dress etc. but what about language, public holiday and some others which are already mentioned by Kymlicka?.

Frederik Stjernfelt (2012) added that Kymlicka’s idea of ‘differentiated citizenship’ makes an immediate clash between mainstream cultures and minority cultures. For Kymlicka, Canadian government should give extra facilities to the immigrant (for celebrating Durga-Puja, or other religious festivals). The common debate is the government earns financial assistance mainly from mainstream Canadian citizen. It may be unrightful to the Government to spend that money for the cultural support to the minorities. A question may we raise here. How should the culture be defined? Does culture mean only festival, dress code, food habit or language; or some other issues are also involved there? Is celebration of Durga-Puja only a religious aspect of culture which just belongs to a certain group of people and to the page of calendar, or it is somehow connected to geography? In Durga-Puja, many ritualities are directly related to the geography, which might be available in some specific part of India and Bangladesh like the Shiuliful (Night/Coral Jasmine), Kashful (Saccharum spontaneum), most importantly the season of Autumn etc. which may not available in Canada! Again, Canadians may find

it comfortable in complete suit or blazer suit. But when they travel to Equatorial region, these dresses may not make them comfortable. So, culture is one's identity by Kymlicka, no doubt it is. This culture is not just depending on religion, language, dress-code; besides establishing cultural right, it is a pragmatic demand to redefine culture.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Study Area**

Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) was at the core of our concentration for a large number of ethnic minorities and indigenous people reside over there. Besides, a good number of Bangali people, namely 'Bangali', living there for quite a long time also attracted our attention. Therefore, CHT was a perfect setting for us to carry on this research where we could get connected to both these groups and ensure their participation over the issue of cultural and geo-cultural identity. CHT, the extensive hilly region locate in the south-eastern part of Bangladesh, is divided into three districts: Khagrachari, Rangamati and Bandarban. Among these districts, two spots of Khagrachari and one spot of Rangamati have been selected as the research site to conduct the study.

Khagrachari is a district of Chittagong division in the south-eastern part of Bangladesh. The district has Tripura state on her north, Rangamati and Chittagong district on the south side, Rangamati on the east, and Chittagong and Tripura on the west side. The total area of this district is 2699.56 sq. km. and approximately 5,18,463 people have their residence there. 52% of the total population is indigenous people that includes the Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Thangchanga etc. The other 48% is Bangali people who are basically 'Bangali' people, moved to this place for business, job or some other reasons. The district is divided into 9 upazillas which include 35 unions. For conducting this study, Khagrachari Sadar and Dighinala upazillas were selected. Khagrachari Sadar has the area of 299.92 sq. km. with a population of 1,11,833 people. Among the indigenous people in this upazilla, Chakma, Tripura, Marma are the most in number. The Bangali population mostly consists of Muslims and Hindus. To be precise, we visited Muslimpara, AP Battalion of Khagrachari Sadar as our research site to collect data. In addition, the researchers also visited College Tilla of Dighinala upazilla to collect data for this study. The area of Dighinala is 694.11 sq. km. with a population of 1,07,363 people and it has 5 unions under this upazilla. Again, most of the indigenous people belong to Chakma, Marma and Tripura whereas most of the Bangali people are either Muslims or Hindus.

Rangamati, the other district selected for this study, is located in Chittagong division under the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The district is surrounded by Tripura on the north, Bandarban on the south, Mizoram state of India on the east, and Khagrachari and Chittagong on the west side. Rangamati is the largest district in the country with an area of 6116.13 sq. km. The number of inhabitants is 6,20,214 people approximately where most of them are indigenous people including Santal, Chakma, Marma, Thangchanga, Tripura, Bone, Khumi, Murang, Mro, Kheyang, Lushei, Pankho etc. and most of the Bangali people residing over there started living here long ago for business, job or any other purposes. Rangamati district is divided into 10 upazillas and Baghaichari in the selected upazilla for this study. Baghaichari has an area of 1931.28 sq. km. with a population of approximately 78,519 people. Precisely we visited to Shijok College Para in Baghaichari upazilla to collect data where a good number of indigenous and Bangali people reside.

#### **3.2 Participants**

For this study, sample size was selected in two phases. In the first phase, a total of 10 families, 6 indigenous families and 4 Bangali families, were chosen randomly to observe their behavior, life-style and culture in their own home environment. 6 indigenous families included 5 Chakma families and 1 Marma family. Besides, 3 out of the 10 families were from Muslimpara, AP Battalion, Khagrachari; another 3 families were picked up from College Tilla, Dighinala, Khagrachari; the other 4 families were chosen from Sijok College para, Baghaichari, Rangamati. There were 40 members altogether in

those 10 families ranging from 3-5 members in each family. In addition, 2 adults from each of these 10 families also participated in one to one interview which took place in the later phase. In the second phase of sample collection, 20 more participants, 10 indigenous and 10 Bangali, were taken to join in individual interviews. 10 indigenous interviewees comprised 6 Chakma participants, 3 Marma participants and 1 Tripuri participant. Besides, 5 out of these 20 newly added interviewees were from Muslimpara, AP Battalion, Khagrachari; 7 participants were from College Tilla, Dighinala, Khagrachari; the other 8 participants were from College Tilla, Dighinala, Khagrachari. These participants were again chosen randomly who were basically engaged in various types of professions including teaching, farming, health sector, government services, banking etc.

### 3.3 Data Collection

To conduct this study, data was collected between January, 2020 to December, 2020. Three field visits were conducted during this period of time with a four-days' time-span for each visit. The researchers spelled out the objectives of this study to the participants precisely before the initiation of data collection process. Most of the participants cooperated willingly with a lot of intensity. Only a few others were uncomfortable to allow the researchers collect necessary information but they became a lot easy with times. However, each of the field visits was divided into two phases of data collection. The first phase was collecting data through observation and the second phase was for interviewing the participants. In the study based on ethnography, data regarding the life-style and behavioral pattern of the participants can be collected through observations, interviewing, documents and artifacts (Fetterman, 2009; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019; Spradley, 2016) but the most demanding ethnographic data collection procedures are thought to be observation and interviewing (Creswell, 2012).

In the first phase of every field visit, researchers collected data through observing the participants' behavior, way of thinking, life-style etc. According to Jorgensen (1989), observing the participants can create an opportunity for the investigator to change his role from being an outsider to an insider to the participants. On each of the four-day visits to research sites, first three days were assigned to the observations of the randomly selected families. The researchers spent approximately 8-10 hours with each family, observed their attitude and way of life, and took notes on the required information. In this phase, there was no organized question-answer session except a few informal discussions regarding the objectives of the research, their opinion about it etc. Rather, most of the time, the participants were observed closely and silently without affecting their regular activities.

In the second phase of data collection, participants faced open-ended, semi-structured interviews. The fourth day of each field visit was assigned for this purpose. A total number of 40 participants took part in these one to one interviews. Among these 40 interviewees, 20 participants were taken from the previously visited 10 families (families visited in the first phase of data collection), two from each family. The other 20 participants chosen for the interviews were newly selected. Again, this selection was made randomly among the people of various professions like teachers, health practitioners, police, farmers, government officials and NGO workers. Each interview lasted for 15-20 minutes. The questions were mostly open-ended in nature followed by a few supplementary questions wherever required. Both the researchers were present in each of the interviews and the medium of communication was mixed depending on the preference of the participants; some preferred using English whereas some others were comfortable in using Bangali. In terms of the interview location, the first 20 interviewees (taken from the previously visited families) were interviewed at their respective home, and the last and newly selected 20 interviewees were interviewed at their respective workplace.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

To analyze data, the researchers followed the qualitative data analysis and representation strategy presented by Creswell (2012). Firstly, to start the data analysis process, the collected data was organized and highlighted where required. In this organization process, all the records, both documented and audio-taped, were put into one single file. The audio-taped interviews were transcribed verbatim and some of the interviews, conducted in Bangali, were translated into English. Following the organization of the data, all the transcriptions and field notes went through rigorous investigation to get a sense of the whole database. While exploring these data, margin notes, memos etc. came into regular use to highlight the necessary information. In the third phase of data analysis, coding was done based on the margin notes, memos and other highlighted segments of the database. Researchers scrutinized for the recurring categories in all these documents to check the frequency of particular codes being used by the participants and made a short list of 20 tentative codes. In the fourth phase, all the tentative codes were brought under 5 broad themes as the representatives of the whole set of data collected. Finally, themes were interpreted and explained in broader segments of discussion to make sense of the collected data. Later on, these interpretations were presented and discussed thoroughly, and necessary comparison was made among themes and other contextual analysis.

#### 4. Findings And Discussion

##### 4.1 Globalized Culture

Preserving any particular cultural identity in a global village is always very challenging at both individual and national level. Even the cultural thoughts and beliefs are getting linked to the development of science and technology in terms of bringing sundry cultural groups under one unified umbrella. Hence, keeping the cultural uniqueness intact from getting amalgamated is thought to be impossible in this globalized world full of diverse cultural identities. Bangladesh is more or less in the same side of the coin and in the follow-through, CHT has got almost the same ratio of indigenous and Bangali (Bangali) inhabitants there.

We noticed very subtle differences between educated ethnic people and Bangali residing in CHT. They are almost merged with each other. As Bangali are the mainstream of Bangladesh, their lifestyle is considered as a standard here. Therefore, most of the educated families who are sharing almost same economic level enjoy almost the same standard of life regardless of their indigenous or Bangali identity. We visited ten families, including both indigenous and Bangali families, where six of them were educated families. By and large, there was no or very less difference in their lifestyle. Except food habit, the other aspects of these indigenous families like language skill (state language), religious practice, room decoration, hospitality etc. are identical to the Bangali. While we asked question on this, one of our Chakma participants told:

*“In this twenty first century, it is really not obvious to keep ourselves isolated. And if you have two options; one you get opportunity to lead a cozy life where all civic amenities are available, and another you may try to keep your culture up by which life seems more challenging; then which one will you choose?”*

Here the question itself gave the answer. Another point was mentioned by a Tripura female participant:

*“Saree is a traditional attire for Bangali female. But these days, women are more outgoing; they prove themselves in every sector. As a result, saree has become an occasional dress instead of a regular outfit because of its inconvenience. Same things are taking place in our culture. It is not really necessary to keep the cultural practice in motion while it keeps you in shackles.”*

Another Chakma female participant mentioned:

*“Dress is a part of my culture; it is not anything offensive if I wear my traditional dress in Dhaka. But if I wear it, people may notice me from a different angle. It is not like they are teasing me, rather they do it out of curiosity as it is unusual. So, when I used to live in Dhaka, I preferred to wear salwar-kamiz (a Bangali woman wear) though no one forced me to do that. Because of my own comfortability, I did it. My traditional dresses are not for Dhaka, they are for CHT.”*

But this situation is not same everywhere. There are also some people who try to maintain a proper balance between their culture and the demand of modern time. A person who is closely connected to his/her ethnic norms and values always carries the sentiment even though s/he is culturally challenged (Chin, Mansori, Rezaee, & Homayoun, 2021). We found two families who were struggling to stick to their cultural values, yet they did not give up. The head-person from one of the Chakma families claimed:

*“Now-a-days it is difficult to carry on everyday rituals. For example, we always want our kids participate in different sporting events, singing, dancing etc. organized in the occasion of cultural celebrations like Bizu, Alphaloni etc. which is ultimately a part of our rituals. But the youths in these days are very reluctant to attend these rituals because they feel more attracted towards using digital platforms like visiting social networking sites or playing video games etc.”*

This is certainly an unwanted impression created by globalization in terms of preserving cultural identity

The effect of globalization has also reached in the remote villages. We found that children were playing with cheap plastic toys; men were wearing pants and t-shirts. Only women were wearing the traditional dresses, especially the old women. An interesting fact that we noticed during our visit was that culture is mainly alive by the unprivileged people. Most of the times, they do not even know that they are taking part in the process of preserving their culture as they are more concerned about meeting their daily necessities. While we visited a farmer’s house, we saw that different and more difficult reality. The man and woman both of them used to keep themselves busy with Jum cultivation; even they knit their own traditional cloth. One Chakma participant shared:

*“The cost will be lower, if you buy your cloths. We knit clothe specially for the tourists because it is tourist spot, and the traditional dress is demandable to the tourist. Most of the knitted fabrics are for sale; we use them if there is any defect.”*

Here they do not knit traditional wear for preserving culture, rather they do it to address their economic demands.

#### **4.2 Cultural Rights of Minority People**

Equality always eyes at maintaining perfect balance among diversities. State authority should be liable to ensure equal rights in terms of treating people of all caste, race, ethnicity and identity though this process of upholding equalities might have some limitations under certain circumstances. According to Will Kymlicka (2002), promoting minority rights can abolish discrepancies in respect of unequal treatment instead of fostering it. For example, there are cultural heritage institutes in CHT, who are supposed to preserve and keep researching on ethnic languages, literatures, rituals etc. whereas, in national curriculum, there is no significant space for ethnic languages, literatures or rituals. The national curriculums broadly cover the history, literature, language or culture of the mainstream Bangali. So those cultural heritages do not have any vital role to preserve their cultural identity as well as cultural right. Similar issues can be found in case of language rights, land claims, political freedom etc. where ethnic identities are supposed to get more space and a better treatment. But the reality is different. One Marma participant was explaining his condition:

*“I have been struggling to restore my control over my ancestral land. With sovereignty, we have also lost our land and resource rights. The government propositions regarding this issue are not clear to us and we are left with no exact solution.”*

#### **4.3 Significance of Territorial Identity**

Cultural identity refers to one’s language, dress, food, festivals, norms, values, but what about geography or the effect of one’s living land? Isn’t there any effect of land on a person where he belongs to? What is relation between land and culture? Among ten indigenous participants being interviewed at the data collection phase, we noticed that two of them completed their graduation from public

university. They are already familiar with urban lifestyle and comfortability; still they preferred to come back to their land. One Chakma participant stated:

*“While I was a university student, the Chakma community of our university was strong enough. We used to celebrate our Bizu festival together. All the hilly foods were there, so we didn’t face any difficulties. Still I preferred to come back here. Because food and clothes were not sufficient enough to define my identity. We may not have all the state facilities in CHT, but we have minimum opportunities to live life. Like, I can go for fishing, tracking and experience many other trivial yet soothing things which is not possible in capital. There is no other place which can make me feel myself except this land. This is my land. If I am evicted from this land, whatever facilities you may give me (like hilly food, cloths, holiday, urban privatization etc.), that may not define a complete ‘I.’”*

There are a number of countries who promote cultural diversity and even, the citizens of these countries respect the beliefs and customs of other culture as well but this support and appreciation does not satisfy everyone because everyone, even the marginalized population, wants to have their own territory where they may not only enjoy the privilege of cultural equality but also achieve territorial equality. Besides, having an own territory is thought to be a part of their identity and seemingly nobody likes to be deprived of this right. This love towards own land is commonly noticed in different corners in the world which ultimately results in places like China Town, India Square (or Little India), African Village etc. where those minorities are not satisfied just by food, dress, religious practice, rituality etc. They have urged to have a piece of free land which they can call something of their own. This feeling, the feeling of belongingness to a certain territory where their culture may open up completely, may be coined as geo-cultural identity (Talukder, 2013). The geo-cultural identity theory focused on territorial rights and cultural acknowledgement of people, and it assumed that each person has their own individual self. This theory declared that both geographical and cultural identities need to be recognized as basic human rights of each individual self (Ullah, 2022).

Even in this era of globalization, preservation of culture is easier for Bangali as they are the mainstream of Bangladesh. In case of CHT, as it is already mentioned, Bangali people are also merged with indigenous people. In this process, their accent often gets heavily influenced by the Pahari people causing a great deviation from standard Bengali accent. The body-language and way of speaking Bangali is almost same between an indigenous and a Bangali, though it is mother language to Bangali and state language to indigenous. One of the families, we visited, was living there for first generation and got their children born and grown up in CHT. Though the parents had their origin at Barisal, the tone and body language of their children was similar to other indigenous children, not like any typical Bangali child.

Again, there is a basic difference between the Bangali people who have been living in CHT for a period of time, and who are born and brought up there. The people who have migrated there because of professional or any other reason, still consider it as a place where they have to live to fulfill their economical, professional or any other demands though they have been staying there for a good number of years. Somehow, they sense a lack of belongingness to this hilly land. They feel more attached to their own birthplace. One of the parents from Barisal, currently living in CHT, was sharing his feeling:

*“It has been quite a long time I have been living here but I know I am here because of my job. I don’t know why I don’t feel any bonding towards this place or community. I always miss my root.”*

But the people who have been living there for a few generations feels CHT as a part of their identity. They do not belong to the land from where their parents come from. Their lifestyle, food habit, religion, language etc. are obviously like other Bangalis as it is their ethnic identity; at the same time there is a huge influence of hilly land on their food taste, body language, accent etc. One of such participants who has been living in CHT for three generations accepted this truth saying:



*“I feel comfortable with my indigenous friends. I visit their home, taste their food and attend their rituals at the same way I visit my Bangali friends here. I think this place and its culture has become a part of my identity.”*

This is because culture does not only depend on ethnicity, food habit, cloth, religion, gender, economic condition etc. but also it largely depends on geography. Not only in CHT but also all over the world people experience more or less the same thing. People who follow the lifestyle of Bangali culture is thought to be a part of Bangali ethnicity though they may belong to diverse geographical location. If we take the example of the Bangali community residing in Europe, Australia, USA, Canada etc., we will notice that they are either from Bangladesh or India that means their ethnic identity may remain same that they are Bangali but their geographical identity varies. In that sense, cultural identity should be a perfect blend of ethnic identity and geographical identity. For example, Indian Bangali ethnically carries Bangali culture but they geographically belong to India, ultimately resulting in an identity of being Indian Bangali. Geography offers a person a complete identity; besides it has an impact in building up one’s own culture. Indian Bangali and Bangladeshi Bangali may not represent same cultural values. However, in the context of Bangladesh, the Bangali population who live in CHT, hold their ethnic identity as Bangali, but geographically their identity is Pahari like an indigenous person. So, cultural membership alone is not enough to establish an individual’s identity. An individual requires geo-cultural identity, that is a combination of geographical and cultural identity, to unlock his self in his own environment which would ultimately help him preserve his individuality as a member of particular ethnicity.

#### 4.4 Redefining Culture

What can be the standard definition of culture? According to Cristina De Rossi, an anthropologist at Barnet and Southgate College in London, "Culture encompasses religion, food, what we wear, how we wear it, our language, marriage, music, what we believe is right or wrong, how we sit at the table, how we greet visitors, how we behave with loved ones, and a million other things," (*Live Science*). According to Samovar and Porter (1994), "Culture refers to the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving". Culture in the social sciences refers to the manner of life of an individual or a group within a community. It covers their manner of dressing, marital traditions, language, and family life, as well as their work habits, participation in religious rituals, and leisure activities (Giddens, 2005). So commonly culture is representing social norm, beliefs, values, customs, art, religion, food habit, language, literature, lifestyles etc. Here somehow most of the standards are connected to geography. Food habit can be taken as an example. A very common food in CHT is Bansh-Koral (a special type of Bamboo Shoots), and a good variety of recipes made of Bansh-Koral is a part of their culture and rituals. As CHT is a hilly area and a lot of bamboo plants are very available there, eating the young bamboo shoots has become part of their culture. Not only food but also many other standards of culture are related to geography in a way or other. In literature review section, we discussed about celebrating Durga-Puza in Canada. In Durga-Puza, many rituals are directly related to the geography, like the Shiuliful (Night/Coral Jasmine), Kashful (*Saccharum spontaneum*) which may not available in Canada! So, culture might be defined as a way of living our life by combining our tradition, customs, religions, ethnicity, language along with our geography (current living territory), and it impacts on our daily life (like how we dress, food, prayers etc.) to social life (marriage ceremony, religious celebration etc.).

#### 4.5 Justifying Kymlicka’s Multiculturalism

Now it is high time to ask whether cultural identity should be complete within itself in the same way Kymlicka asserted. During our field visits, we noticed a good number of indigenous people, who were relatively poor, migrated to other religion because of some worldly benefits like the missionaries might

give them money, or helped them to reconstruct their house etc. though nobody interviewed acknowledged this fact because may be they were afraid of spoiling their family names but we crosschecked this information with some locals there who accepted the truth. So, we can see, sometimes the standard of living has more influence on the individual or a group of people than the culture itself. At the same time, it is also true, they are not very aware about the religious practice. But as they are now leveled as Christian, Buddhist and so, after one or two generation, they might get used to perform the religious activities and that would be a part of their identity.

Kymlicka’s stand of minority rights is based on maintaining a proper balance between cultural membership and equality but it worths thinking whether cultural membership, and justice and equality have got any connection to go side by side. Usually, it is true that culture influences our beliefs, lifestyle and thinking process etc. but it cannot be denied that sometimes observing a different culture closely can facilitate us with a new perspective of looking at things, and help us elevate our norms and values. For example, most of the educated indigenous people who are in private or government services are almost merged with mainstream Bangali. No one may have forced them to do this, but they themselves may have felt comfortable with this culture. Even in case of festivities, their way of celebration (festivals, marriage ceremony etc.) is very alike to the mainstream. We were lucky to join a Chakma marriage ceremony during our field visit, where it was surprising that the way the bride and groom were adorned, the food items that were served there, the body-language the guests were carrying was almost identical to the mainstream Bangali marriage celebration.

In addition to what Kymlicka proposes, we believe that cultural membership may not always “secure” an individual’s identity. It is believed that cultural membership may secure or give comfortability to an individual. Individuals are supposed to be contented with the customs and practices of their own culture but the reality does not always turn out to be as expected. Sometimes they sense inferiority in their own culture when their cultural standards create impediment in their way to fulfill their demands and make it difficult to stick to their personal thoughts and ideologies. Consequently, they may get attracted to another culture where they expect more comfortability and ideological resemblance. One of our Chakma interviewees said,

*“My uncle lives in Dhaka along with his Bangali wife. After completing his graduation, he came back here and sought permission to marry a Bangali girl whom he liked, but our leader didn’t give permission. He went back to Dhaka and never came back here. While we get time, we used to visit him. He is always being very nice and kind to us. He may meet all of his relatives in Dhaka, but he misses this land.”*

Though deciding to marry a Bangali person may have made him feel uncomfortable to live with his own people, he would obviously have a soft-corner for his own culture and he will keep missing it. Therefore, a sense of feasibility might get its foundation in cultural identity but there remains a big gap in the sense of comfortability and security. Having a complete identity requires something more than cultural identity, something stronger than that.

## 5. Conclusion

Diversity in cultural perspectives around the world is a significant phenomenon today. Many countries now include diverse languages, religions, and cultures, as well as substantial migratory movement from other countries. To Kymlicka, leading a life with suitable and strategic adjustments between the cultural diversity and the conventional ideologies of freedom, justice and democracy is the ultimate option left to us. He believes that individual's freedom is dependent on cultural membership. People want to maintain their own culture, and hence, access to a societal culture is the legitimate claim for individual freedom. To Kymlicka, culture creates one's identity; no doubt it is. But the question arises if only cultural membership is enough to establish a complete identity. The purpose of this study is to determine whether people consider only their cultural background when constructing their 'self' or they consider both their geographical and cultural identities, named 'geo-cultural identity.' The analysis of the themes has made it clear that in today’s globalized world, multiculturalism is celebrated by all

means. To preserve the identity of the marginalized population, cultural rights of the people have to be accompanied by their geographical rights.

Cultural tolerance and promoting cultural differences are the preconditions to live a deserving life where admiring other cultures and their cultural norms, etiquettes, beliefs, customs etc. does not rely on the standard of living, ideologies or religion of any individual. We need to train ourselves in a way that we can endure and accept the criticisms on ourselves and others being open to the possible cultural ideologies, necessary decision making and required rejections. The truth is, for the sake of our own existence, we need to accept others. In addition, geographical rights assist a person achieve his identity which ultimately influences his cultural thoughts and ideologies. Without native land, culture is almost dispossessed. A person requires to lead through a complicated adjustment process which is mandatory to put up with the new experiences as a migrant (Rahim, 2021). We may try to give an artificial essence of culture in foreign land, but definitely it cannot be compared to the cultural practice performed in our native land. So, when people decide to migrate to a foreign land, they almost decide to sacrifice one portion of their identity.

The notion of multiculturalism requires a perfect combination of cultural diversity and geo-cultural identity to develop it as a more interesting and worthwhile concept (Talukder, 2013). We should protect and promote geo-cultural identity to keep the cultural diversity alive and intact. The geo-cultural identity seems to be a source of cultural diversity. Suppose, capital Dhaka may fail to preserve Chakma culture in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Will the Chakma culture vanish? As long as Chakma, along with other indigenous group of people, has their own land in CHT, they will preserve their own culture. Similarly, if CHT fails to preserve Bangali culture there, entire Bangladesh may preserve their culture. But still the new generation Bangali in CHT, who call themselves as Pahari will feel a sense of belongingness to CHT more than any other land of Bangladesh and in the process, may develop a new cultural approach what might be a blend of typical Bangali culture and hilly territorial identity (Pahari culture). This is true for the migrated people all over the world. The Chinese, who is now Canadian Chinese, may create a new Chinese culture by combining the typical Chinese culture and Canadian territory. Human being has an intense right to his/her native land, and geography has a huge impact to complete his/her cultural identity which is geo-cultural identity.

This study is subject to some potential limitations. Firstly, there was time constraints in terms of collecting data. Three field visits were made to collect data which would require a few more additional visits. Secondly, the sample population was limited in number for the sake of qualitative data analysis procedure. A bigger sample size might give a better picture. Thirdly, people, both indigenous and Bangali, residing in CHT was considered as the participants only whereas the CHT people residing in Dhaka could also be the participants of the research. Moreover, the underprivileged people were less focused. Finally, Chakma people was at the core concentration of the research as they are the largest indigenous group in CHT, but other ethnic groups like Mru, Tangchangya, Khumi, Pankho, Lusai etc. could be more prioritized. Further studies on this subject is always appreciated to contribute more to the cultural and geo-cultural identity of the marginalized people keeping the limitations of this study into consideration.

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