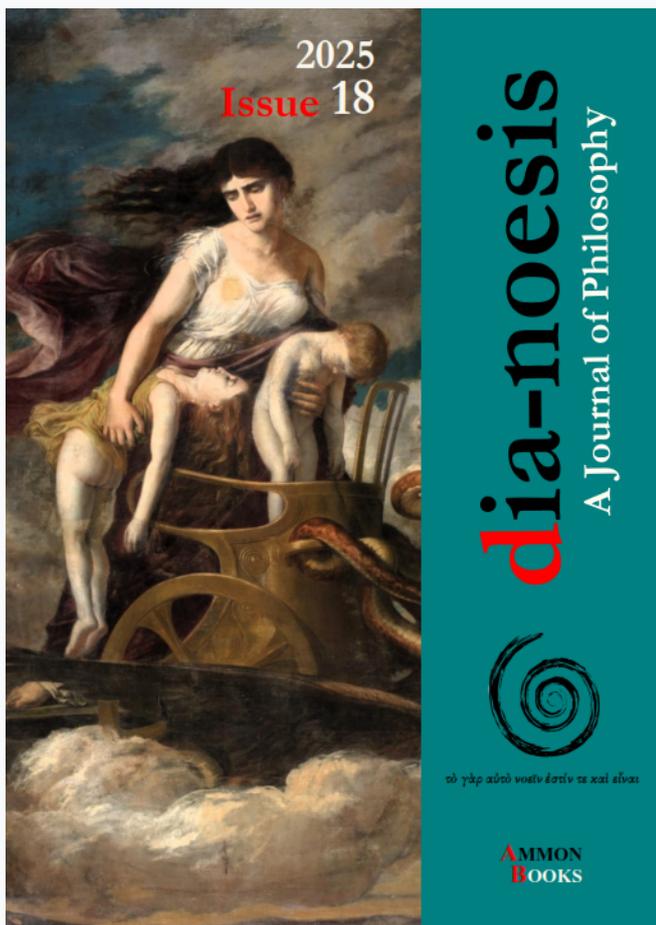


## Dia-noesis: A Journal of Philosophy

Vol 18, No 2 (2025)

Trauma, Exile, and Cultural Displacement



### Indigenous Exile from Cosmopolitan Nar-rative:

*Aroop Saha*

doi: [10.12681/dia.43468](https://doi.org/10.12681/dia.43468)

#### To cite this article:

Saha, A. (2025). Indigenous Exile from Cosmopolitan Nar-rative: : Fight/Resistance of Indigenous Self against Historic Trauma in Bangladesh. *Dia-Noesis: A Journal of Philosophy*, 18(2), 363–386. <https://doi.org/10.12681/dia.43468>

## Indigenous Exile from Cosmopolitan Narrative: Fight/Resistance of Indigenous Self against Historic Trauma in Bangladesh

Aroop Saha,  
Associate Professor  
Department of English  
University of Information Technology  
and Sciences (UITS), Dhaka, Bangladesh  
dr.aroopsaha@gmail.com

### Abstract

This article aims to discover a new strategy for the indigenous subjects of Bangladesh to encounter the memories of the indigenous exile and trauma in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As the indigenous people of Bangladesh are struggling to overcome the bitter experiences of the historical exile and the multifaceted trauma received during the British Raj, East Pakistan, and Bangladesh, they are becoming the double-victims of history and reality. This complex situation constrains the indigenous psyche to restrain the indigenous self and society from composing the indigenous story. The limit surfaces as the inability to represent the indigenous self before the national narrative. This inability restricts the indigenous meaning-making process, making constructing an indigenous identity difficult. Consequently, the indigenous self and society cannot formulate the indigenous perspective and voice beyond its sphere. This situation excludes the indigenous self from the national narrative.

**Keywords:** *Exile, Trauma, Displacement, Indigenous Self, Bangladesh*

## Introduction

In Bangladesh, the voices of indigenous communities are largely absent from the national cosmopolitan narrative. Since independence, groups in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (such as the Manipuri, Garo, Kuki, Tripura, Chakma, Rakhain, Marma, Khasi, Mro, and Munda) have struggled to secure a place within the broader national discourse. Historical traumas have further impeded the development of indigenous narratives, preventing their meaningful integration into the nation's collective story. The process of state-marginalization by the Bangladesh government has made the situation more complex and compelled the Indigenous people to remain invisible in the national sphere. The indigenous communities have inherited the historical detachment from British India. Before the British Indian period, those communities lived in their land as separate, distinguishable kingdoms or states. Unfortunately, the British Raj destroyed those indigenous kingdoms and converted them into tiny groups. Although the indigenous communities existed under various peace treaties with the British Raj and the local landlords, they maintained a separate existence. That created a situation of exile for the indigenous people. This separation remained even after the partition/independent Pakistan. Because of power play, social hierarchy, religious difference, cultural domination, foreign educational aggressiveness, and territorial distance, the indigenous communities could not get the benefits of the country's independence. In addition, they were forced to undergo massive displacement as a dam for the hydro-powerplant was built and a large area was submerged under the water. This resulted in the irreparable loss of their houses, agricultural lands, and natural resources. They did not receive adequate compensation. These displacements and sufferings created an intensive trauma to the indigenous communities, indigenous people, and indigenous subject/self. A large number of indigenous populations had to leave and find shelter in other places, and even in different countries. The indigenous self can never forget that devastating memory. The experience created an unhealed trauma to the indigenous self who carried out that trauma in independent Bangladesh. Although independ-

ent Bangladesh was the hope for changing the existing fate of the indigenous life and reality, the indigenous people discovered new challenges as citizens of the new country. From the early years of post-independent Bangladesh, the indigenous people attempted to establish their identity and existence nationally. As the Bengalis, along with Bengali nationalism, were dominant and their Bengali narrative became the mainstream narrative in the national sphere, the indigenous communities were under suppression. The political marginalization and the constitutional unrecognition transformed the indigenous self into a socially and nationally outcaste. Facing the force to be part of the Bengali nationalism, the indigenous self became traumatized. In fear of an identity crisis, the indigenous people started to revolt. They desired to earn the citizens' freedom and administrative autonomy. When the leaders and government officials refused to meet the indigenous demand, the indigenous communities formed a political party and military wings. This military conflict between the army and the indigenous revolutionists caused a grievous crisis. It created further displacement of many indigenous people from their homes and compelled them to escape. In 1997, a peace treaty eased the situation, and a peaceful environment was established. Unfortunately, the trauma that the indigenous people experienced could never be erased. Since then, indigenous communities have been fighting for control over language (Cf. Castro, 2025), education, literature, discourse, ideology, culture, land, economy, and freedom against the mainstream-led national invisible dominations. Apart from the indigenous scenario, the government of Bangladesh and the mainstream Bengali society have been assisting the indigenous communities by providing special quotas for the indigenous community-based qualified people in almost every sector, such as education, administration, government, parliament, etc. Even after this exceptional support, the indigenous communities are not surfacing in the national sphere. The indigenous people's contributions are not noticeably found in the national realm. In this tense environment, the indigenous self and its voice have not emerged in the national narrative. They remain invisible in the national existence. This anxious situation compels the indigenous self to be in exile. This article will examine the primary reasons for indigenous exile from the cosmopolitan narrative in Bangladesh. In addition, it will aim to discover a new

strategy by investigating the existing forms of indigenous self and narrative to fight against or resist the legacy of historical trauma in Bangladesh.

### Theoretical Background / Review

Exile and trauma are two closely related concepts that often coexist. Exile occurs in a subject's life when s/he is forced to leave his/her native-land after encountering extreme difficulties in living. It is produced from volatile situations about the security of the native land, irreparable discrimination between the major and minor races, land conflict, lack of educational facilities, linguistic incomprehensibility, social disparity, religious domination, ethnocentric oppression against the xenocentric resistance, unequal employment, partial administrative treatment, biased government policy, politicized judicial system, corruption, etc. Theoretically, it has become a significant factor, produced mainly from displacement and hostility. It uproots a person from their native land and places them in a foreign land. It causes a tremendous psychological conflict that arouses a sense of detachment with self-denial. It places the individual self into the in-betweenness. It emerges from the unhappiness with bitter recycling memories, which conjures up a sense of lostness. In *Reflections on Exile: Other Literary and Cultural Essays*, Edward Said defines – '[e]xile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted' (180). Consequently, it makes the subject suffer a sense of loss of homeland and identity. It compels the subject to suffer from the search for belonging. In addition, it leads the subject to experience a double vision – a critical view of both the native land and the host land. However, it assists the subject in reconstructing its fragmented self. It helps the subject to become independent from the domination of the mainstream dogma. It also permits the human being to develop a particular new tale from the national history. Said refers:

*... exile ... is fundamentally a discontinuous state of being. Exiles are cut off from their roots, their*

*land, their past ... Exiles feel, therefore, an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives, usually by choosing to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people. The crucial thing is that a state of exile free from this triumphant ideology—designed to reassemble an exile's broken history into a new whole—is virtually unbearable, and virtually impossible in today's world.* (Said, 183)

Said's remark- 'exile's broken history into a new whole' (Said 183) reflects the example of the diasporic literature originating from the exiled writers. The diasporic writers and their literatures are now well-recognized and well-valued worldwide. The exiled subjects can develop their new literature compared to the homeland's literature. Still, the debate, which Said has highlighted, is to keep the exiled subject from the 'triumphant ideology' (Said 183). The exiled subject escapes from the domination of the homeland's 'triumphant ideology' (Said, 183), but s/he is motivated to adopt the dominant world's 'triumphant ideology' (Said 183). Moreover, s/he tries to build up the exiled literature/narrative mirroring the dominant world/homeland's narrative. In most cases, this process turns the exiled subject's voice, perspective, discourse, ideology, culture, and narrative into another wing of the triumphant ideology. The exiled subject is in a continuous endeavor to be an opposite entity compared to the triumphant ideology/mainstream narrative, so that s/he can construct his/her own identity and vision. Notably, the attempt to build the exiled subject's identity and narrative struggles as the exiled subject fights to manage his/her trauma about his/her previous horrific memories. Trauma is a paranoid experience that cultivates severe complex psychological sufferings along with physical disorientation. It recalls the history, terrifies the contemporary, and unsettles the upcoming. It spreads one's trauma to the societal agony and becomes national mourning. 'Trauma is not the result of a group experiencing pain. It is the result of this acute discomfort entering into the core of the collectivity's sense of its own identity. Collective actors "decide" to represent social pain as a fundamental threat to their sense of who they are, where they come from, and where they want to go (Alexander 10). '[T]he collectivity's sense of ... identity' (Alexander, 10) and

‘[c]ollective actors’ (Alexander, 10) start ‘a process of “we” formation, a process both historically rooted and rooted in history’ (Eyerman, 74). Although this history is considered a ‘common history’ (Eyerman, 74), it refers to memory in the form of narrative/literature. The history, the memory, and the narrative develop a common ground through which ‘trauma refers to an event or an experience, a primal scene, that defines one’s identity because it has left scars and thus must be dealt with by later generations who have had no experience of the original event’ (Eyerman 75). In this process, trauma contributes to the formation of identity in both individual and collective senses, which results in a cultural trauma [which] is ... a threat to a culture ... arouses negative affects’ (Smelser, 40). Significantly, the cultural trauma and the process of constructing our identity through trauma unsettle ‘the structures of meaning’ (Alexander 10), producing ‘the sense of shock and fear’ (Alexander 10). These circulate through ‘an exercise of human agency’ (Alexander 10) and the ‘power structures’ which bring the consequence in ‘sociocultural process’ (Alexander, 10) and cultivate the ‘reflexive social agents’ (Alexander, 10). As a result, trauma lies in ‘[t]he gap between event and representation’ (Alexander 12), and it demands ‘claims’ (Alexander 12). Through claim, trauma refers to some fundamental injury, an exclamation of the terrifying profanation of some sacred value, a narrative about a horrible, destructive social process, and a demand for emotional, institutional, and symbolic reparation and reconstitution’ (Alexander 12). In this process, trauma gives a new story. Yet this storytelling is... a complex and multi-valent symbolic process that is contingent, highly contested, and sometimes highly polarizing’ (Alexander, 12). It remakes the meaning-making process. The new story and storytelling process develop ‘a new master narrative’ (Alexander, 15). Through this new master narrative, trauma renews the representation of memory, history, and identity, thereby recreating the national identity.

During the construction of the national identity of Bangladesh, exile as well as trauma played significant roles. Because of the successful interpretation of exile and trauma, Bengali people have been able to recreate Bengali memory, history, and identity, and remake the Bengali story, which has gradually become the new master narrative. In the journey to earn an independent Bangla-

desh, the Bengali people have relied on the traumatic experiences derived from disastrous events/incidents. Among the devastating events, the sacrifice of the Bengalis to have the native tongue, the death of Bengalis against the oppressive autocratic rule of Pakistan government, the mass murder done by the soldiers of Pakistan on innocent Bengali people, the sacrifice of the Bengali freedom fighters, the enormous sufferings, bloodsheds, rapes and deaths of Bengali people done by the Pakistani army, and the Pakistan army's destruction to the Bengali houses, offices, factories, roads, bridges, power-stations etc. have made the claims towards trauma. Moreover, the massive displacement of more than one crore Bengali people in the form of exile during the liberation war has made the trauma intensive. These events have been transformed into historical signposts when the Bengali people, along with the Bengali society, have converted the individual Bengali subject's exile and trauma into the stories of the Bengali society's collective we. Through these Bengali societal stories, the Bengali writers have renewed the exile and trauma into new stories with new meaning, producing structure. They have searched for the Bengali identity and attempted to represent the trauma in Bengali cultural trauma. By significant largeness in population, noticeable territorial existence having administrative authority, and the new stories with new meaning from exile and trauma, Bengali writers have been able to construct a powerful Bengali narrative to represent Bengali memories, experiences, and stories in a unified voice. Because of this Bengali narrative, the Bengali population has been thriving in integrating the Bengali narrative as a mainstream narrative in the national narrative. This integration has empowered the Bengali narrative to take the driving position compared to the other narratives in Bangladesh. In this cycle of becoming the mainstream narrative in Bangladesh over the past fifty years, the Bengali narrative is now synonymous with the Bangladeshi national narrative. Thus, the Bangladeshi national narrative has recognized the Bengali stories / representations through the lens of exile and trauma stemming from historical events. In the way the national narrative of Bangladesh has recognized the Bengali exile and trauma in the form of a new story, new meaning, new identity, new cultural representation, and new narrative, it is not endorsing the indigenous exile and trauma and not accepting the indigenous saga, discourse, posi-

tion, portrayal, and narrative. The indigenous people are still struggling to transform their exile and trauma into a powerful story. They have encountered exile and trauma, similar to the Bengali people in East Pakistan, the liberation war of Bangladesh, and the post-independent Bangladesh. However, they have kept their experiences of exile and trauma in the preliminary stage. They cannot materialize the incidents of the exile and trauma into a collective force. The process of constructing the collective and formulating the indigenous identity has been obstructed. The government evacuated the Chakma population to build the Kaptai Dam during the 1960s. This evacuation triggered an armed conflict in 1978. These displacements caused the indigenous people to be exiled from their homeland. These exiles conjured up the traumas in the indigenous self. Instead of being expressive about the trauma, the indigenous self restricts his/her self in sharing the stories in the national sphere. The introvert nature in raising the indigenous voice discourages the indigenous writers from representing the indigenous experience of indigenous exile and trauma through the different writing formats, especially novels. In consequence, the indigenous self, story, and society are not recognized in the national narrative and do not get the opportunity to construct an indigenous narrative for 'conversion disorder' (Mandal and Singh, 10258). The lack of the indigenous narrative imprisons the indigenous self and story within the indigene. The indigenous narrative is not able to break the indigenous self's traumatic situation and remain in traumatic captivity. The article aims to investigate the causes of the indigenous exile from the cosmopolitan narrative in Bangladesh. In addition, the article will endeavor to discover a strategy for the indigenous self, society, and narrative to deal with the historical traumas.

### **British Raj and Pakistan: Exile and Trauma in a Lost Indigenous Nation**

From the British Raj to Pakistan, the Chittagong Hill Tracts' aboriginal population experienced the breakup of their indigenous/tribal kingdoms. The indigenous kingdoms/states had to negotiate with the British colonial government through economic

exchange to avoid territorial oppression. Although they were under British rule, they could continue their autonomy. In the case of the Chakma kingdom, Chakma King Jan Bux Kha had to fight twice against the British company in 1777 and 1780. After that, the British company went to have a peace treaty with the Chakma King on the condition of not infringing on the Chakma Kingdom's authority and administration. This autonomy continued. 'During the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857' (Debsarkar, 21), the Chakma Queen Kalindi Rani stood side by side with the British when the whole Indian Subcontinent was in armed rebellion. She had allocated the Chakma guards alongside the border to help and support the British and to ensure the mutiny did not reach the barracks of Chittagong' (Debsarkar, 21). Under the rule of the Chakma Queen Kalindi Rani, the Chakma Kingdom was able to present itself as a friendly buffer state' (Debsarkar, 21) before the British and to ensure its authority on a vast territory 'between the Feni River in the North and Naf River in the south' (Debsarkar, 21). The harmonious relation was sustained for the next generations. To protect the indigenous people and territory, the British colonial government enforced laws such as 'Raids of Frontier Tribe Act 22 of 1860, Regulation 5 of 1873, Regulation 3 of 1881, and Act 4 of 1863' (Chakma, 1997, 9). In 1900, it canceled all the previous laws and implemented the 'Chittagong Hill Tracts Manual' (Chakma, 1997, 9) to make an excluded territory from the mainland. That manual was amended into 'Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation, 1900' (Chakma, 1997, 9). Along with this, 'Chittagong Hill Tracts Police Regulation 1881' (Chakma, 1997, 9) was enforced to provide security. The significant factors include the wars against the British colonial government, the enactment of inconsequential laws for regulation, and the continuous indigenous support for the British rulers, which went against the mainstream political and social forces of the Indian Subcontinent, ultimately transforming the indigenous Kingdoms into dependent entities. Even after being allied with kingdoms/states like the Chakma Kingdom and receiving support from the British government, the indigenous people could not establish themselves as prominent entities because they centered their contribution in the indigenous territory. This self-centeredness made the indigenous people, society, and culture self-restricted. It turned them to be detached from the rest of the mainland/the plainland. This led

them to be in isolation, which created an alienated identity for the indigenous people. These self-centeredness, self-restriction, detachment, isolation, and alienation limited the indigenous participation in the Indian Subcontinent's power and politics. In consequence, the indigenous people, societies, and states were not considered during the partition of the Indian Subcontinent. To give independence to the Indian Subcontinent, the British colonial government used the two religions- Hinduism and Islam to create two separate countries, India and Pakistan. However, it did not recognize the necessity to ensure the existence of the indigenous states, kingdoms, communities, and people of different identities, cultures, and religions. It ignored the indigenous desire, choice, and necessity. Focusing on the Chittagong Hill Tracts' historical fate, Priyajit Debsarkar said:

*On 12<sup>th</sup> August 1947, Sir Cyril Radcliffe, responsible for the partition of Bengal, awarded the Chittagong Hill Tracts to the newly formed state of Pakistan. The decision to award the Chittagong Hill Tracts to East Pakistan took the Chakma King by surprise, but was accepted gratefully. 97% of the Chakma population was Buddhist. The award of the Chakma-excluded territories to East Pakistan might have been negotiated in exchange for Sikh areas of Sira and Ferozpur in favor of India ... in spite of not being a Muslim majority province, Chittagong Hill Tracts became a part of East Pakistan, and the fate of the Chakma people was about to change. (28-29)*

King Nalinaksha Roy of the Chakma was concerned with securing his kingship and kingdom. His strategic relationship with Jinnah's Muslim League resisted any strong opposition to the inclusion in Pakistan. Sneha Kumar Chakma, the general secretary of Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samity (PCJS), along with PCJS, opposed the integration of the Chittagong Hill Tracts to Pakistan and wished to join India, but 'no direct assistance was available from Delhi' (Sarkar 30) till 19<sup>th</sup> August 1947 whereas 'Radio Pakistan Dhaka announced that the Chairman Sir Cyril Radcliffe had awarded Chittagong Hill Tracts to Pakistan' (Sarkar, 30) in

‘the evening of 17<sup>th</sup> August 1947’ (Sarkar 30). To comment on the fate of Chakmas, D. K. Chakma said, ‘Chakmas were the worst victims of the Partition’ (ix). This breach of desire and dream created a deep dissatisfaction that led to trauma. It made the Chakmas and other indigenous communities feel threatened in their sense of ownership, belongingness, and securing identity. The most important thing that the indigenous people lost was their nation/country. The transformation of the indigenous identity from the independent state/nation/country to the unimportant minor community made the indigenous people vulnerable and traumatized. The indigenous people discovered a sudden change in their lives where they were positioned in otherness/others’ other in newly independent Pakistan’s national hierarchy. This partition compelled a large number of indigenous people to flee from the Chittagong Hill Tracts. This exile from the homeland created an intense sense of physical and psychological displacement. The loss of homeland echoed the crisis of self, memory, existence, identity, culture, etc. The crisis about the past (homeland), along with the acceptance of the present (new country), traumatized the indigenous subject and forced them to be in a situation of in-betweenness/doubleness. Similarly, those indigenous people who chose to stay back in their homeland, accepting the partition they discovered the same trauma for being in-betweenness/doubleness. Although the indigenous population was willing to continue the British Raj’s facilities, such as the autonomy in identity, economy, and administration, along with the Regulations, they revealed the conflict between appearance and reality. In Pakistan, they observed the gradual erosion of laws that had protected them from external intervention during the British Raj. The voids of the Regulations endangered the linguistic, social, economic, cultural, and territorial stability. Moreover, the state-sponsored injection of hundreds of non-indigenous Muslim families to reside in the indigenous territory further mounted the trauma. The worst trauma that the indigenous people, especially the Chakma people, experienced was building a dam for a hydroelectric water power plant in Kaptai, Rangamati. ‘[M]ore than 87,000 people were directly affected’ (Debsarkar, 42) and displaced by the Kaptai dam, which flooded ‘premium quality land (approximately 54,000 acres of land)’ (Debsarkar, 42). The irony is – ‘[t]he historic royal palace (Rajbari) of the

Chakma Kings was finally submerged ... the palace was lost forever, and maybe it was the mark of the beginning of the end of the glorious history of the Chakma Kings ...' (Debsarkar, 43). The displacement of the common Chakma people and the destruction of the palace annihilated the last hope of being a Chakma nation/country. In this regard, the Chakma King Raja Tridip Roy played a mysterious role as he supported constructing the dam and accepted the displacement and destruction. According to Debsarkar, 'The Raja practically did nothing to secure his people, rather he played a passive role in dealing with the so-called sugar-coated promise of development. He did not stand up for the affected locals ...' (43). Raja Tridip Roy was silent regarding the Kaptai Dam and the suffering of the Chakma people, purposefully because he wanted to be close to the Pakistan government and to discard Bengali nationalism. Construction of the Kaptai Dam, silence of Raja Tridip Roy, and displacement of common Chakma people triggered the process of being traumatized and unsettled the indigenous psyche, indigenous self, and indigenous mind. 'For the Chakma people, the building of the dam marked the beginning of the end of a Chakma autonomous kingdom based on their demography and their unique linguistic/cultural identity in the region' (Debsarkar, 44). Consequently, '[t]he mass migration of the Chakma people led to a drastic drop in the population ...' (Debsarkar, 44). The Chakma King's approach and the Pakistan government's treatment of the Chakma people and society reflected the lost indigenous nation in Pakistan. The displacement, exile, and trauma provoked the indigenous/Chakma people to be victims of history, which made them self-restricted in representing the indigenous self and story in the indigenous narrative. They could not produce any significant piece of literary work that would represent the indigenous/Chakma community, culture, and self, not only in the Chakma narrative but also in the national narrative of Pakistan.

### **Bangladesh: Exile and Trauma in Indigenous Dilemma**

The indigenous population of Bengal was hopeful to change the scenario of exile and trauma that they experienced in Pakistan. The indigenous expectation of restoring the citizen rights

with equality and equity encountered inaugural trauma from the Constitution of Bangladesh, 1972 in which Section 6 declared 'Citizenship of Bangladesh shall be determined and regulated by law; citizens of Bangladesh shall be known as Bangalees' and Section 9 confirmed 'The unity of solidarity of the Bangalee nation, which, deriving its identity from its language and culture, attained sovereign and independent Bangladesh through a united and determined struggle in the war of independence, shall be the basis of Bangalee nationalism'. Citizenship of Section 6 and Bangalee nationalism of Section 9 validated Bangladesh as a single racial nation, denying over thirty-five indigenous communities in Bangladesh. Through constitutional denial, the indigenous communities experienced a state-sponsored structural trauma. This constitutional denial through executive, legislative, and judicial institutions disseminated the trauma into indigenous communities, individuals, and stories. The state apparatus's establishment of the concepts of Bengali citizen and nationalism broadcast the Bengali meaning-making process and the Bengali representation. The state-apparatus, in other words, 'collective agents' (Alexander 11), performed 'institutional, representing one particular social sector or organization against others in a fragmented and polarized social order' (Alexander 11). The indigenous people protested against this state-patronized eradication. Just after the independence of Bangladesh, Charu Bikash Chakma (indigenous leader) and Manabendra Narayan Larma (Member of Parliament) appealed for ensuring the indigenous citizen rights, autonomy, equality based on equity, and no administrative change to the head of the government. Later, Manabendra Narayan Larma constituted a regional political party to defend the interests of the indigenous population in Chittagong Hill Tracts. While the indigenous leaders were in demand for indigenous people, the prime minister declared, 'From today, there will be no tribe in Bangladesh, all are Bengalee' (Translated by me) (Chakma, 1997, 15). This call increased the indigenous people's frustration. Even after the government's denial to accept the indigenous identity in Bangladesh, the indigenous leaders wanted to believe in the prime minister. In the meantime, the indigenous communities got another trauma when they observed the resettlement of Bengalis in their land. This resettlement number mounted rapidly after 1975. Opposing the state decision of Bengali resettlement in Chit-

tagong Hill Tracts, Shanti Bahini launched attacks against the Bangladesh government and army from 1977. The Bangladesh army was deployed to defuse the conflict. Severe arm conflict broke out on a massive scale. For this conflict, the indigenous people had to go into exile from their homeland once again and became the victim of trauma. In 1980, President Ziaur Rahman attempted to negotiate an end to the armed conflict, as revealed in an interview with *The Guardian*. He said, 'We are doing some wrong there. We are being unfair to the tribes. It is a political problem being addressed through police and Army action. Yet it can be settled politically very easily ... We should at least call a meeting of these tribal leaders and ask them their demands' (Chakma, 1997, 19). The intensity of the armed conflict was drastically increased, and lots of people were killed and injured. Many of the indigenous people were displaced and exiled in Tripura, India. In 1997, the fight ended through a peace accord. Although the peace accord halted the insurgency, several key issues persisted, including land conflict, administrative control, cultural management, rehabilitation of exiled indigenous people, protection of indigenous rights, the Bengali resettlement, and constitutional recognition of the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Significantly, the historical exile and trauma that the indigenous population experienced could not be forgotten; instead, the indigenous people carried those memories and emotions within themselves. The indigenous memories and emotions of historical exile and trauma had a tremendous impact on the interpretation-producing method, along with the developing indigenous self. As constitutional, judicial, administrative, social, political, and cultural denials to the indigenous subject and society were integrated in the national and mainstream consciousness, a spontaneous rejection with misunderstanding, mistrust, and misconception was infiltrated in the subconscious/unconscious psyche of the institutionalized approaches and treatments towards the indigenous people and communities. Thus, the indigenous self and society got involved in '[t]he social process of cultural trauma' (Alexander, 10). The indigenous historical exile and trauma encountered disruption in 'the trauma process' (Alexander, 11) because the indigenous self and society were deprived of getting the state-agents' support. The state-agents were supposed to 'compose collectivities broadcast symbolic representations—characterizations—

of ongoing social events, past, present, future ... as “claims” about the shape of the social reality, its causes, and the responsibilities for action’ (Alexander, 11). Due to the state-agents’ non-cooperation, the indigenous self and society were unable to emerge as a collective force to share their claims through stories of exile and trauma in the public/national spheres. The gap between claims of trauma and representation of experience restrained the indigenous self and society from constructing a new indigenous master/grand narrative. Even after the massive displacement and exile, the killing of numerous people, the full-scale escalation of armed conflict, the widespread destruction of houses, institutions, wealth, and resources, and the all-out oppression, the indigenous self and society could not determine the nature of traumatized pain to develop the collective memory and experience. This difficulty in tracing the nature of traumatized pain made it problematic for the indigenous self and society to figure out the prominent victims who might lead the representation of the iconic indigenous victim. For this, the indigenous self and society had to set up a ‘relation to the trauma victim to the wider audience’ (Alexander 14). Because of this failure to build up the relation, the indigenous self and society could not connect the indigenous trauma either to the indigenous realm or to the national/mainstream sphere. Moreover, they could not convince the institutions of religion, aesthetics, law, mass media, state bureaucracy, etc., to represent the indigenous trauma. This catastrophe prevented utilizing trauma in order to construct ‘a new master narrative’ (Alexander, 12). As the indigenous people could not use trauma through ‘a sociological process that defines a painful injury to the collectivity, establishes the victim, attributes responsibility, and distributes the ideal and material consequences’ (Alexander, 22), the indigenous identity could not be revised to develop ‘the contemporary sense of the self’ (Alexander, 22). This fiasco, which connects ‘identity revision, memory and routinization’ (Alexander, 22), became part of national identity.

‘[F]ailures to recognize collective traumas’ (Alexander, 26) and ‘inability to carry ... the trauma process’ (Alexander, 26-27) forced the indigenous people of Bangladesh to fall into a cycle of traumas. The historical trauma, the political trauma, the cultural trauma, and the representational trauma gave a repressive experience to the indigenous self and society and positioned them in

a dilemma. Because of the failure to capitalize on the trauma, the indigenous self and society could not produce the indigenous narrative and become a part of the national narrative of Bangladesh successfully. After the Peace Accord of 1997, both Bengali writers and indigenous writers initiated a re-evaluation of the position of the indigenous narrative. They began to re-present their traumatic memories and experiences through various forms of art, including poems, dramas, essays, and stories. However, the inherited indigenous challenges, such as conflicts over land/forest rights, language/education rights, economic rights, and human rights, made it difficult to convert traumas into tales. Apart from the challenges, the prominent Bengali writers like Akterruzaman Elias and Salina Hossain invited the indigenous writers to write literary works, especially novels, on the indigenous self, struggle, memory, life, and reality. Many indigenous writers, such as K. V. Debashis Chakma, Bipom Chakma, Mrittika Chakma, etc., came forward with their writings on the indigenous trauma. They attempted to transform the indigenous/Chakma memories of traumas into an indigenous narrative, but they struggled to connect the indigenous stories of traumas to the mass audience. The present unresolved issues on the indigenous identity, land, forest, education, language, economy, human rights, etc., hinder traumas, writers, stories, and readers, producing a psychic violence. Because of not recognizing and resolving the indigenous problems, the indigenous self is in trauma once again. In addition, the invisible state-sponsored process of erasing the indigenous stories of exile and trauma, and the state-patronized injection process of celebrating the Bengali stories of exile and trauma, compels the indigenous self to be in a double-dilemma with double-trauma.

### **Escaping the Exile and Healing the Trauma: Indigenous Scenario in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Bangladesh**

In early 21st-century Bangladesh, the indigenous people are fighting to escape exile and heal trauma. They are endeavoring to construct a new Bangladeshi indigenous identity depending on indigenous memory of exile and indigenous experience of trauma. Unfortunately, the Bangladeshi indigenous self and society are struggling to construct the Bangladeshi indigenous identity

because of the Bengali ethnocentric superiority complex and the Bengali unwillingness to recognize the indigenous. Moreover, the attitude of denial in the Bengali self, society, and narrative creates obstacles to the indigenous identity construction process. In addition, the Bengali self and society are also in a trauma that originated from the demand for indigenous autonomy or self-governance and the revolution for political, economic, and cultural freedom. The memory of the armed conflict conjures up a sense of fear of the disintegration of the country in the mind of Bengali nationalism. This fear of disintegration produces the trauma that Bengali nurtures through the collective we and incorporate in the national sphere. Mirroring that, the Bengali self and society interpret the relationship between the Bengali and the indigenous through the stories in the Bengali narrative/literature. As the stories are reflected in the national narrative/literature, they influence the administration, bureaucracy, judiciary, media, education, politics, policies, economies, ideologies, cultures, agencies, etc. In conclusion, as the country's sole representative, the government gets provoked and converts the stories into Bengali and national faith. The traumas of Bengalis and the indigenous population in Bangladesh are confronting each other, which evokes hostility. The conflict of opposite traumas, the reverse process of meaning-making/interpretations, and the contradictory representation of the stories situates the Bengali and the indigenous into an envious relation. Because of this, the Bengali consciousness cannot explore the indigenous realm, and the indigenous voice of Bangladesh cannot cross its territory to reach the national sphere. Bengali and indigenous writers, intellectuals, policy makers, and conscious people are trying to reduce the distance and cultivate harmony. As Bengali society is comparably large to the indigenous communities, the prime responsibility lies on the Bengali self, society, and narrative to take the initiatives and mitigate the problems of the indigenous self and societies. The Bengali writers can assist the indigenous self, society, and narrative/literature to escape the disgruntled indigenous experience of exile and heal the indigenous traumatic excruciation. Besides, the indigenous writers can also contribute to escaping exile and healing the trauma by connecting the indigenous self, society, and narrative/literature to the nation. In this regard, indigenous writers like Pranshanta Tripura and Sanjeeb Drong have

started to address indigenous necessities and desires in their writings. Both Tripura and Drong echo the indigenous anguish in their writings. In *Bohujatir Bangladesh: Essays of Prashanta Tripura*, Prashanta Tripura surfaces several crucial issues on indigenous sufferings with critical insights. Firstly, he demands to reconstruct the indigenous identity as there is a debate about whether Chakma, Marma, Khiyang, Tripura, etc. will be called indigenous or ethnic. The government, as well as the country, needs to solve that matter. Secondly, Tripura emphasizes protecting the indigenous lands. He opposes the state-sponsored outsider/Bengali settlement on the indigenous territories. Along with these, he wants to take action against those people/agents who are opposing the Jhum/shifting cultivation. Thirdly, he seeks to develop the indigenous lifestyle in light of modernity. Fourthly, he requests the government/state to address the struggles of the indigenous women and solve those (Cf. Tripoula, 2025). Fifthly, he urges the government/state to secure the status of the indigenous languages, so that the indigenous languages do not get lost over time. Sixthly, he appeals to the country to facilitate the indigenous children/students to be educated in the indigenous education system, where they will earn the indigenous knowledge, life, culture, and narrative in the indigenous signs, words, and sentences with the indigenous meaning producing process. Seventhly, he desires that the state should withdraw itself from the constant endeavor to erase the indigenous existence, omitting the indigenous representation in the national narrative/literature. He raises the question regarding the selection of the national poet in Bangladesh and shows the process of ignoring the rich indigenous poetry and the remarkable indigenous poets. Finally, he suggests that the indigenous self, society, and culture should search for the indigenous consciousness. As the state is aloof and unwilling to establish the indigenous rights, the indigenous self and society have to activate the indigenous consciousness. Like Tripura, Sanjeeb Drong, in his two books – *Desheen Manusher Katha (Words of Stateless Human Being)* and *Eeshwar Sanwtalder Bhule Gecche (God Has Forgotten Santals)*, also identifies the indigenous struggles which the government/state should address and resolve. Among those, he demands the constitutional acknowledgment of the indigenous population. As indigenous communities are not recognized constitutionally, the indigenous

languages are not recognized nationally and internationally. Besides this, he expresses his fear about whether the hills will become the death valleys or not. He tells the indigenous people to search for ways to get out of the darkness of the hills, as well as the darkness of the indigenous people. With that, he is concerned about the security of the indigenous women who are in constant fear of being physically abused or killed. The humiliation of the indigenous women destroys the indigenous psyche of self and society. Drong calls for building the psychological strength to fight back and ensure the indigenous sustenance. In addition, he is worried about the violation of the indigenous human rights. He tells the government and the indigenous communities to work on the indigenous human rights because the continuous violence on land, residence, Jhum cultivation, religion, gender, education, language, citizen rights, cultural rituals, representation, etc., is deteriorating. Along with these, he expresses his dissatisfaction about the unchanged situation of the indigenous people and societies in 21<sup>st</sup>-century Bangladesh, as the government of Bangladesh and the indigenous political parties are yet to fulfill the conditions of the peace accord. Drong raises the question – ‘Why does the state make the indigenous suffer?’ (Drong, 2019, 64). He advises the government to listen to the cry of the indigenous people and understand the sufferings of the indigenous people. He recommends being aware of indigenous suffering and taking action to improve the situation. From *Bohujatir Bangladesh: Essays of Prashanta Tripura, Desheen Manusher Katha (Words of Stateless Human Being)*, and *Eeshwar Sanwtalder Bhule Gecche (God Has Forgotten Santals)*, it is found that the indigenous self, society, culture, and representation/narrative are still struggling to overcome the indigenous difficulties even after more than 50 years of the independence of Bangladesh. Bangladesh as a nation does not distinguish the voice of the indigenous population. The indigenous population has failed to develop the power to narrate the stories of their struggles and sufferings. As the indigenous struggles and sufferings are compiled over the years, the indigenous people are traumatized and impose self-restriction. When the indigenous trauma turns into an unbearable condition, the indigenous subjects endeavor to escape from their indigenous society, territory, and culture. This exile occurs in the life of indigenous subjects in several ways – linguistic and educational exile,

social and cultural exile, physical and territorial exile, psychological and psychic exile, etc. In linguistic and educational exile, the indigenous people of Bangladesh are forced to be interested to learn Bengali and English instead of their indigenous mother tongues and take Bengali and English education instead of their indigenous education. This language and education diversion develops hybrid indigenous subjects. Being victims of the hegemony of hybridity, isolation, and alienation, the indigenous subjects lose interest in becoming indigenous subjects; rather, they are keener to be mainstream subjects. In social and cultural exile, the indigenous people are no longer willing to be in the indigenous society and culture. In terms of economic and population power, the indigenous people are encountering a drastic decline over time. Out of the fear of being an invisible entity, they are curious to join the mainstream society and culture to enjoy the superior power and position. This situation compels the indigenous people to leave the indigenous social bondage and cultural integrity. The indigenous subjects' social and cultural transitions compel the indigenous psyche unknowingly to themselves and welcome the mainstream social and cultural domination. In physical and territorial exile, the indigenous people are desperate to be displaced from their homeland as the indigenous territory misses the blessings of modernity. The absence of modern knowledge, technology, and facilities attracts the indigenous people to migrate to the modern cities within the country or abroad. As the indigenous people, society, culture, and knowledge are not honored or celebrated in the country and abroad, many indigenous subjects are leaving their homeland willingly. Moreover, insecurity, violence, instability, domination, fear, torment, and bloodshed are forcing the indigenous people to go into exile in the country and abroad. Significantly, these exiles scatter the indigenous subjects and their perspectives. For this, both (physical/territorial) exiled indigenous subjects in the city/abroad and left exiled (psychologically) exiled indigenous subjects in the homeland are double-traumatized, which prevents the indigenous subjects from representing their memories in the stories. In this relation, the indigenous self fails to construct an indigenous meaning-making process and an indigenous authority. S/he is unable to form the collective indigenous we. Because of the failure, the indigenous narrative cannot be constructed correctly in Bangladesh. Bangla-

deshi indigenous narrative cannot flourish with its deep understanding and magnanimous beauty. It struggles to compete against the historical trauma, the cultural displacement, and the mainstream cosmopolitan Bengali narrative. Consequently, it fights to gain an esteemed position in Bangladesh's national narrative.

### Conclusion

In Bangladesh, the mainstream Bengali narrative is converting into a cosmopolitan narrative, whereas the peripheral indigenous narrative is becoming parochial. Although the Bengali narrative, being a cosmopolitan narrative, adopts cultural hybridity, worldwide humanistic principles, multinational struggles, and diasporic lexes, it endeavors to align the notion, discourse, ideology, and perspective into a specific structure to limit the sense-making process and celebrate the boundary of thoughts. It compels people to think in the same manner. This manner is also reflected in the cosmopolitan Bengali narrative's treatment of the indigenous narrative. Being the parochial narrative, the indigenous narrative restricts itself within its range as part of resistance. In response to the cosmopolitan Bengali narrative's limited openness and manner in increasing the number of followers, the indigenous narrative is exiled from the Bengali narrative, as the indigenous narrative does not want to be part of the Bengali narrative. It desires to keep its identity, position, and nature unique. Unfortunately, the desire of the indigenous narrative is challenged as the indigenous self in the face of the writers is encountering a crisis about the successful connection of the indigenous exile and trauma to the forms of representations such as poems, stories, essays, dramas, and novels. Like the Bengali transformation of trauma into story/narrative, the Bangladeshi indigenous narrative should focus on the indigenous traumas and start to produce the indigenous trauma literature. The indigenous writers should utilize 'explain(s) the effects of traumatization on the individual and collective psyche' (Mandal and Singh, 10256). They must delineate the 'psychic wound' caused by undesired events through some's unpleasant thoughts, words, and actions' (Mandal and Singh 10256). They have to manipulate the 'fragmentation of the

psyche “hypnoid hysteria” (Mandal and Singh, 10257) to transform the ‘state of panic ... the form of horrible interruptions and traumatic nightmares’ (Mandal and Singh, 10257) into ‘a symbolic level’ (Mandal and Singh 10257) to ‘provide(s) meaning to the traumatizing experience’ (Mandal and Singh, 10257). They need to entail ‘post-traumatic stress disorder’ (Mandal and Singh 10257) into ‘a new context’ (Mandal and Singh, 10257). They necessitate creating ‘a complex network of associations, dissociations, and representations’ (Mandal and Singh, 10258) to surface the suppressed trauma to earn the acknowledgment and authority of the national narrative. This process of converting the indigenous trauma into the indigenous story/literature/narrative can empower the indigenous writers in constructing the indigenous voice and identity. Moreover, the indigenous writers can morph the exile into ‘an alternative to the mass institutions that dominate modern life’ (Said 189). If they become accustomed to the exile’s ‘nomadic, decentered, contrapuntal’ (Said, 192), they can come out from ‘unsettling force’ (Said, 192) and construct a new indigenous story/literature/narrative. They should take a strategy to re-identify the Bangladeshi indigenous self/hero/symbol who will be the equilibrium between fight and resistance, refining the memories of indigenous exiles and traumas. They can transmute the historic indigenous events of exiles and the horrific indigenous experiences of traumas into an exponential indigenous image. Through the newly created Bangladeshi indigenous image, the indigenous writers can rewrite the indigenous story/literature/narrative to bring out the indigenous self from the sense of self-restriction and create a momentous position in the national and global literary sphere. The indigenous writers must build up the indigenous agencies and power structures to broadcast the indigenous collective we, focusing on the fundamental indigenous injury. That broadcast should cultivate the new indigenous story and meaning-making process from traumas. Based on these, the indigenous writers have to develop a new master narrative for the indigenous population. This new master narrative will renew the representation of indigenous memory, history, and identity based on the events that originated the exile and trauma. It will create the historical signposts that will strengthen the indigenous discourse, sense, ideology, and culture to fight or resist against the state-sponsored structural process of

traumatization. Through the new master narrative and the historical signposts, the indigenous writers can challenge the domination of the Bengali narrative/national narrative and construct the indigenous narrative agencies to transform the historic, political, economic, social, and cultural traumas into a powerful indigenous identity. Although the strategy is complex to comply with in Bangladesh due to many unfavorable conditions, it will help the indigenous people and society escape from the indigenous exile. It will favor the indigenous self to fight/resist against the historical (Cf. Demetriou, 2024), contemporary, and forthcoming traumas, as well as the cosmopolitan Bengali/national narrative. If the indigenous writers can utilize the strategy to produce a relationality among the indigenous image, story, master narrative, representational signposts, meaning-making process, and identity converting the memories of indigenous exile and traumas into a forceful literary representation, they will be able to bring out the indigenous self and society from the self-restricted isolation and integrate the indigenous self, society and story into the national narrative of Bangladesh.

## References

- Alexander J. C., "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma", in: Alexander J. C., Eyerman R., Giesen B., Smelser N. J., Sztompka P., (ed.) *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, University of California Press, California 2004.
- Castro P. A. e. "The Forgotten View of the Origin of Language: The Legacy of Herder's Philosophy", *Conatus - Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2025, pp. 73-85, <https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.37087>.
- Chakma B., *Parbaytta Chattogram: Sayattashasan O Sadhikarer Sandhane*. Dhaka 1997: Chittagong Hill Tracts Study and Research Center.
- Chakma D. K., "Editor's Note", in: Chakma, D. K., (ed.) *The Partition and The Chakmas & Other Essays of Sneha Kumar Chakma*, Pothi.com, India 2013.
- Chakma D. P., *Chakma Jati: Songram, Songgharsha o Bijoy (The Chakma Nation: Resistance Movement, Conflict & Victory)*. Dhaka 2022: Ittadi Grantho Prokash.
- Debsarkar P., *The Last Raja of West Pakistan*. London 2015: Quintus.
- The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh*. Dhaka 1972: bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd.
- Demetriou K. "The Logical Status of History and the Paradoxes of Historicism", *Dia-noesis*, vol. 12, 2024, pp. 145-62, <https://doi.org/10.12681/dia.37800>.

- Drong S., *Eeshwar Sanwtalder Bhule Gecche (God Has Forgotten Santals)*. Dhaka 2019: Sucheepatra.
- Drong S. *Desheen Manusher Katha (Words of Stateless Human Being)*. Dhaka 2006: Sucheepatra.
- Eyerman R., “Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity”, in: Alexander J. C., Eyerman R., Giesen B., Smelser N. J., Sztompka P., (ed.) *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, University of California Press, California 2004.
- Eyerman R., “Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity”, in: Alexander J. C., Eyerman R., Giesen B., Smelser N. J., Sztompka P., (ed.) *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, University of California Press, California 2004.
- Giesen B., Smelser N. J., Sztompka P., (ed.) *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, University of California Press, California 2004.
- Mandal D. K. and Singh, S., “Sigmund Freud’s Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Trauma Theory with Special Reference to Hysteria”, *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 6:2, 2022, pp. 10256-10260.
- Said E., “Reflections on Exile”, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2000.
- Smelser N. J., “Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma”, in: Alexander J. C. Eyerman R., Giesen B., Smelser N. J., Sztompka P., (ed.) *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, University of California Press, California 2004.
- Tripoula I., “The Status of Women in Ancient Greek Philosophy: From Plato to Plotinus”. *Dia-noesis* 17 (1), 2025, 191-214. <https://doi.org/10.12681/dia.41711>.
- Tripura P., *Bohujatir Bangladesh: Essays of Prashanta Tripura*. Dhaka 2015: Sangbed.

