

## **Globalization and Multilingualism: Case Studies of Indigenous Culture-based Education from the Indian Sub-continent and Their Implications**

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This paper presents some of the major program initiatives honoring Indigenous knowledge, culture, heritage, arts, and skills through curricular reforms and culturally appropriate educational practices on the Indian sub-continent. It presents case studies of Indigenous culture-based education, with reference to mother tongue and multicultural education practices and discusses their implications.

**Need for Culture-based Education to Honor Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage**

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*“A society that cannot remember and honor its past  
is in peril of losing its soul” (Deloria, 2003, p. 276)*

In the past few decades, significant economic and political changes have occurred all across the globe. In her foreword to *The Concept of Indigenous Peoples in Asia*, Jannie Lasimbang notes, “The global Indigenous peoples’ movement achieved a major success in its decade long struggle for international recognition of their rights when the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples” (Erni, 2008, p. 9).

Some scholars have given credit to colonialism, modernization, and the expansion of media and communication technology leading to the movements of Indigenous peoples all over the world for their self-determination, land, and distinct identity (Kingsbury, 2008). With the advent of new trends of globalization, there has been a dramatic increase in interest in the role that Indigenous knowledge can play in truly participatory approaches to sustainable development. This interest is being reflected in countless activities generated within communities, which are recording their knowledge for use in their school systems, and in national planning, where Indigenous knowledge systems are now being regarded as an invaluable national resource. In addition, indigenous knowledge is utilized within the development community, where development projects emerge from priority problems identified within a community and build

upon and strengthen community-level knowledge systems and organizations (IDRC, 2011).

There is no doubt that an awakening has been created for the rights of Indigenous people all over the world. But Indigenous people also feel in danger of losing their cultural heritage and distinct identity in the race towards cultural homogenization by the global dominant forces. The problems, issues, and challenges of the Indigenous peoples are common all over the world, but the most alarming thing is the denial by the nation states of the recognition of Indigenous people and their rights to self-determination (Verma, 2010). Referring to the challenges of the Indigenous peoples of Asia, Stavenhagen (2008) states, "Some of the most serious forms of human rights violations that Indigenous peoples experience all over Asia are directly related to the rapid loss of Indigenous lands and territories" (p. 309).

This paper presents some of the major program initiatives honoring Indigenous knowledge, culture, heritage, arts, and skills through curricular reforms and culturally appropriate education practices globally, with reference to educational initiatives of some South Asian countries. It presents case studies of Indigenous culture-based education from the Indian-sub-continent and suggests implications for similar multicultural and diverse contexts.

### **Need for Culture-based Education to Honor Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage**

In recent times, Barnhardt and Kawagley (2005), well known Indigenous scholars for Culture Based Education (CBE), have reiterated the concern over the mismatch between the processes of mainstream schooling and the educational needs of Indigenous children. They note that the teaching methods of mainstream schools have not recognized or appreciated Indigenous knowledge systems that focus on inter-relationships and interconnectivity. For Barnhardt and Kawagley (2005), Indigenous knowledge is distinct in itself: "Indigenous knowledge is not static; an unchanging artifact of a former life way. It has been adapting to the contemporary world since contact with 'others' began, and it will continue to change" (p. 12). Similarly, referring to the gap between the worldview of Native Alaskans and Western science, Kawagley, Norris-Tull, and Norris-Tull (2010) note:

Yupiaq people view the world as being composed of five elements: earth, air, fire, water, and spirit. Aristotle spoke of four elements: earth, air, fire, and water. However, spirit has been missing from Western science. The incorporation of spirit in the Yupiaq worldview resulted in an awareness of the interdependence of humanity with environment, a reverence for and a sense of responsibility for protecting the environment. (p. 227)

As the above statements of Indigenous scholars show, the Indigenous worldview is different from the mainstream, dominant Western worldview. This means that children of Indigenous communities may not perceive the things exactly the same way as their counterparts do, so "one size fits all" does not work

in education, especially for children of Indigenous communities. Kawagley, Norris-Tull, and Norris-Tull (2010) further contend that the worldview of Native Alaskans is unique:

They have their own terminology for constellations and have an understanding of the seasonal positioning of the constellations and have developed a large body of knowledge about climatic and seasonal changes—knowledge about temperature changes, the behavior of ice and snow, the meaning of different cloud formations, the significance of changes in wind direction and speed, and knowledge of air pressure. (pp. 224-225)

In considering CBE, attention should be given to the “cultural difference theory” (Demmert & Towner, 2003; Phuntsog, 1999), which posits that one source of learning difficulties for minority students emanates from a cultural mismatch between students’ home culture and the culture of the school. However, Bartolomé (1994) argues that an alternative explanation for the success of “cultural difference” approaches to education—the negotiation of acceptable communication patterns—also unintentionally raises concerns of power and control over those whose voices are heard and validated. In this regard, O’Sullivan (1999) emphasizes the importance of CBE for sustaining Indigenous knowledge: “Indigenous worldviews suggest a cosmology very different from our traditional western scientific perspective....there is much to be learned about a proper orientation to the earth community from the traditional wisdoms of the native peoples of the Americas” (p. 67). The International Council for Science reports:

Universal education programs provide important tools for human development, but they may also compromise the transmission of Indigenous language and knowledge. Inadvertently, they may contribute to the erosion of cultural diversity, a loss of social cohesion and the alienation and disorientation of youth.... Actions are urgently needed to enhance the intergenerational transmission of local and Indigenous knowledge. (2002, pp. 16-17)

On the other hand, Wright (2010) underscores the problems of Indigenous children in terms of their Native values clashing with those represented in the Western educational system: “Perhaps the Western educational system has had such a dramatic impact on our Native population that our youth do not know how to frame their inquiries from an Indigenous perspective” (p. 128). Similarly, highlighting Tlingit education as a pleasant experience for the family and the whole clan, Soboleff (2010) writes:

It was important for parents to be role models as well as devoted to the family. It is pleasing to know how the clan thought of their greatest resource: their children. The matriarchal society was the school of learning, all joining willingly as volunteer teachers. (p. 140)

In their extensive review of educational research on CBE for Indigenous youth, emphasizing Tribal Critical Race Theory, sovereignty, and human rights,

Castagno and Brayboy (2008) argue that “the increased emphasis on standardization and high-stakes accountability under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 seems to have resulted in less, rather than more, CBE efforts and more, rather than no, Indigenous children left behind in our school systems” (p. 942). In another article they further note that the two dominant models of Indigenous education in the USA are “the assimilative model and the culturally responsive model” (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009, p. 31).

Referring to research studies on the assimilative model, they conclude that “there is no evidence that the assimilative model improves academic success; there is growing evidence that CBE does, in fact, improve academic success for American Indian/Alaska Native children” (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009, p. 131). They further note that “there is no evidence that in Indian country that parents and communities do not want their children to be able to read and write or do mathematics, science, etc.” (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009, p. 31). In other words, a “both/and” approach (“if you want to succeed, you need to fit in the dominant culture, and if you do not fit in the dominant culture, you fail”) is generally advocated in the US education that supports a bicultural and often bilingual approach to teaching (see Singh, 2011).

Kaiwi and Kahumoku (2006) reported that use of a Native Hawaiian approach, by acknowledging and validating students’ perspectives for reviewing literature, empowers them in demonstrating a sustained connection to their ancestors, greater appreciation for parents and grandparents, and an increased desire for learning (Singh & Reyhner, 2013). Likewise, Gilbert (2011) contends that cultural knowledge not only fosters order and understanding to the individual within the community, but it also sustains order and survival within the larger context of the natural environment, while for others, CBE is also emancipatory; it guides students in understanding that no single version of “truth” is total and permanent (Banks & Banks, 2010; Demmert, 2011; Gay, 2010). However, to use CBE as an emancipatory tool, teachers should make authentic knowledge about different ethnic groups accessible to students, including increased concentration on academic learning tasks; insightful thinking; more caring, concerned, and humane interpersonal skills; better understanding of interconnections among individual, local, national, ethnic, global, and human identities; and acceptance of knowledge as something to be continuously shared, critiqued, revised, and renewed (Gay, 2010, p. 37).

Hence, it can be inferred that CBE is an approach to teaching and learning that facilitates critical consciousness, engenders respect for diversity, and acknowledges the importance of relationships, while honoring, building on, and drawing from the culture, knowledge, and language of students, teachers, and local community. It is both a means of attending to prominent educational issues and a pledge to respond to the specific needs of students, their families, and their communities (Demmert, 2011; Demmert & Towner, 2003; Garcia, Skutnabb-Kangas, & Torres-Guzman, 2005; Lindsey, Roberts, & Campbelljones, 2005; McCarty, 2005).

## Challenges of Indigenous Culture-based Education Practices

The *Transformative Education for Aboriginal Math and Science Learning* (TEAMS-Learning) research has highlighted the under-representation of Indigenous people in math and science careers, declining rates of participation in school math and science, and the fact that Aboriginal children's scores are worsening over time (Canadian Council, 2007; Ezeife, 2002). Similarly, Demmert (2011) argues for early childhood education; health and wellbeing of prospective mothers; development of language and other cognitive skills; the inclusion of a culturally-based education; the need to train, hire and maintain highly qualified educators that understand and support the social and cultural mores of First Nation peoples; adequate financial support for schools; and the importance of ownership of schools. As Demmert notes: "For Aboriginal students, the issues of identity, motivation, traditional knowledge, development of modern skills, and self-worth are all important elements leading to academic success" (Demmert, 2011, p. 6)

What is worth noting is that despite the diversity of student population in today's schools, students from non-mainstream communities are still expected to adapt to the monolithic culture in which the processes and knowledge base of the schools are embedded. These students operate from two worldviews and often have two or more cultures to contend with (Banks & Banks, 2010; Gay, 2010; Irvine, 1992; Kottak & Kozaitis, 2012; Nieto, 2010; Richards, Brown & Forde, 2006; Saifer, Edwards, Ellis, Ko, & Stuczynski, 2011; Sapon-Shevin, 2010; Singh, 2011). Thus, incorporation of discourse and cultural learning styles is an empowering and practical strategy for teachers to show that all their students are equally valued and treated (Corson, 2001).

The main strength of CBE, therefore, is its attention to students' culture and experience, as it provides a framework for transforming education for Aboriginal students and their teachers (Banks & Banks, 2010; Cushner, McClelland, & Safford, 2012; Gay, 2010; Garcia, Skutnabb-Kangas, & Torres-Guzman, 2005; Gutstein, Lipman, Hernandez & de los Reyes, 1997; Lindsey, Roberts, & Campbelljones, 2005). Likewise, McAlpine and Crago (1995) argue that conflict between classroom culture and home culture may make it difficult for children to participate in class or force children to deny their family and heritage in order to succeed in a culturally alien school. According to Erickson (2010):

Students, whose lives are not affirmed by the establishment, seem intuitively not to accept hegemonic content and methods of instruction. They often resist, consciously or unconsciously, covertly as well as overtly. Marginalization is alienating, one response to alienation is resistance—the very thing that makes teaching and learning more difficult for students and their teachers. (p. 46)

Thus, to increase student success, it is imperative for teachers help student to bridge the discontinuity between home and school cultures and contexts (Allen & Boykin, 1992). In other words, a CBE environment minimizes

the students' alienation as they attempt to adjust to the different "world" of school (Heath, 1983; Ladson-Billings, 1994). A similar view is also expressed by Skutnabb-Kangas et al. (2009), "Marginalized peoples who undergo culturally and linguistically appropriate education are better equipped both to maintain and develop their cultures and to participate in the wider society" (p. xvii). This means that CBE is not only empowering but it also enables students of marginal communities, including Indigenous children, to be better human beings and more successful learners. Thus, teachers should demonstrate high and appropriate expectations and provide support for students in their efforts toward academic achievement so that students believe that they can succeed in learning tasks and have motivation to persevere (Gay, 2010). In other words, by taking into account of the sociocultural contexts of their students, teachers must avoid resorting to a stereotyped and essentialist notion of group identity. However, Banks and Banks (2010) argue that if education is to empower marginalized groups, it must be transformative. For education to be transformative, it must help students to develop the knowledge, skills, and values needed to become social critics who can make reflective decisions and implement their decisions in effective personal, social, political, and economic action.

In other words, alienating students from their ethnicities and cultural practices diminishes the chances of their ever fully realizing their achievement potential. Gay (2010) emphasizes the need for respecting students' diverse cultural backgrounds and ethnic identities, along with academic success in responsive pedagogy, so that students could be productive members of society and render service to their respective ethnic communities as well as to the national society. Villegas and Lucas (2002) argue that teachers' values impact relationships with students and their families, so teachers must reconcile negative feelings towards any cultural, linguistic, or ethnic group. Likewise, Santoro and Allard (2005) emphasize the need for teachers to consider students' ethnicity and culture when planning for their teaching. However, Cajete (1999) contends that there are few schools that have integrated Native cultural content into their instruction. A similar argument is also made by Demmert (2011) who contends that public schooling systems in the United States are generic and for middle-class American children:

The public school systems in each state may be defined as Generic because they are designed to meet the academic needs of all students without regard to the racial or ethnic mix of students served by each local school. In many cases it may be appropriate to define the public schools as Culture Specific because many believe public schools reflect the cultural mores and priorities of middle class America. (p. 2)

In this respect, Gilbert (2011) argues that CBE is mostly absent from the curriculum and pedagogy because it has been assumed that if native language and culture is incorporated then it must be delivered separately from other content areas, which would require additional time and money. It is important to note that sometimes teachers develop their own ethnocentric attitude towards students of a particular ethnic group and treat them differently, based on

preoccupied notion of stereotyping. Pai and Adler (2001) emphasize the need for educators to be cognizant about other cultural beliefs and practices:

It is essential for educators to know how or at what point the values held by the various ethnic groups may come into conflict with school goals...Navajos are said to prize group harmony and hence conformity to the group norm...a Navajo child may be helped to learn function differently in school and in the Navajo community. (p. 171)

### **Effectiveness and Implications of Culture-based Education**

Although most Western scholars and researchers have interpreted implications of culture-based education solely with the changes in education system of the Western world, two major success stories of culture-based education that are very often ignored in Western literature came from the non-Western world. In 1920s, it was Mahatma Gandhi who used culture-based education, also known as "basic education," in which he emphasized the use of local and Indigenous languages (Hindi and other Indian languages) along with the traditional and Indigenous knowledge and skills, also known as (*Charkha Andolan*), in his "cotton weaving" movement to replace the British education system and to free India from British colony. Later in 1960s, the same model of Gandhi's culture-based education was adopted by Julius Nyerere of Tanzania with his "Ujamma Village" program, in which the local Indigenous language, Kishwahili was used in the place of English along with local/Indigenous knowledge and skills. With the "Ujamma" program in 1967, Kishwahili, which was on the verge of extinction because of the domination of English in the colonial period, not only revived but also flourished even beyond Tanzania in Africa. It is worthy of noting that Julius Nyerere is famous throughout the world for his "Education for Self Reliance" model (see also Singh, 2011).

In recent times, some Indigenous scholars and activists have also reiterated the fact that one key to the regeneration of the political power of their people and culture lies in a reorganization of political structures and educational systems to reflect Indigenous knowledge, ways of learning, and ways of being (Alfred, 1999, 2005; Demmert, 2011). Referring to the success stories of CBE with reference to American Indian education, Ngai and Allen (2007) state, "Indian education not only increases students' understanding of Montana tribes; it also lays the foundation for continuous development of the intercultural competence required for effective and meaningful participation in our increasingly diverse society and the interconnected world" (p. 12). Similarly, Klump and McNeir (2005) have given some exemplary CBE programs for Indigenous youth in the United States. According to them, the Russian Mission School in rural Alaska integrates Native knowledge with academic standards through a hands-on curriculum centered around subsistence activities Indigenous to the local community. They advocate for students being engaged in learning from experiences related to real activities that are of high interest to the community

and draw on the local resources, materials, and traditional knowledge of indigenous communities. As Klump and McNeir (2005) wrote:

Traditional knowledge is carefully integrated with academic standards. A unit on berry picking, for example, asks students to study and identify five types of berries, learn where those berries are traditionally harvested, and then use the berries to create traditional Yupik foods. The berry picking activity incorporates benchmarks from science, health, and personal/social skills standards. Students then demonstrate what they have learned through writing assignments and using technology to create a PowerPoint presentation about making traditional foods. (p. 12)

In this respect, Castagno and Brayboy (2008) contend that the results of the Russian Mission School's efforts have been positive. As they state, "Enrollment rates have gone up; crime in the community has gone down; stronger connections between students, teachers, and elders have resulted; students are rediscovering aspects of their cultural heritage; and subsistence activities have increased throughout the community" (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, p. 980).

Therefore, there is an urgent need for accommodating discourse and cultural learning styles; it is an empowering and practical strategy for teachers to demonstrate that all their students are equally valued (Cushner, McClelland, & Safford, 2012; Egbo, 2001; Erickson, 2001; Garcia, Skutnabb-Kangas, & Torres-Guzman, 2005; Lindsey, Roberts, & Campbelljones, 2005; Ogbu, 1992; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). However, in their study of "Global Cultural Flows and Pedagogic Dilemmas of Australian teachers," Singh and Doherty (2004, p. 15) reported that while most teachers expressed a need to be culturally sensitive or culturally appropriate, the pedagogic strategies articulated in their talk and enacted in classroom practices ranged from a cultural technocratic, bald cultural assimilationist approach to more tempered compromising approaches.

So, it is imperative for teachers to understand not only how student's ethnicity shapes students' learning experiences, but also how the teachers' own ethnicity shapes and determines how they categorize children as well as their classroom practices. In other words, culture-based education is not only means of attending to prominent educational issues, but it is also a pledge to respond to the specific needs of students, their families, and their communities (Allard & Santoro, 2005).

### **Examples of Indigenous Culture-based Education Practices from the SAARC Nations**

In the changed national, regional and global contexts, Indigenous knowledge and heritage have gained priority in the national education practices of the Indian sub-continent nations. In this regard, the forum of South Asian nations, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), has recognized the need for preserving the Indigenous knowledge and heritage in the

region by adopting the SAARC Agenda for Culture, 2005. With reference to honoring and preserving Indigenous knowledge and heritage, one of the major declarations came on March 25, 2007, in the People's SAARC Declaration, "Respect and recognize the identity of South Asian Indigenous Peoples and ensure their social, political, economic and cultural rights in the constitution." Since then, major program initiatives for culturally appropriate education for the children of Indigenous communities are top priorities of education and curricular reforms of the member states in the region. Basically, two major approaches have been adopted by the nation states: (a) Infusing Indigenous and tribal cultural heritage and traditions into mainstream curricula; and (b) Promoting Indigenous and tribal languages and cultures through mother-tongue education and multicultural education.

It is also important to consider the historically multi-ethnic and diverse contexts of South Asian region, when we discuss their culture-based education practices in general and Indigenous culture-based education in particular. Referring to the multiethnic diversity of the South Asian or Himalayan region of South Asia, Turin (2007) writes:

The greater Himalayan region, which extends for 3,500 km from Afghanistan in the west to Myanmar in the east, sustains over 150 million people and is home to great linguistic diversity and many of Asia's most endangered languages. Moving across the region in alphabetical order, Afghanistan boasts 47 living languages, Bangladesh is home to 39, Bhutan has 24, China 235, India 415, Myanmar 108, Nepal 123, and Pakistan 72. The entire Himalayan region is often described as one of the ten biodiversity 'mega centers' of the world. This stretch of mountainous Asia is also home to one-sixth of all human languages, so the area should be thought of as a linguistic and cultural 'mega centre' as well, and an important site for the common heritage of humanity. (p. 1)

## Nepal

Nepal is a multilingual nation. Despite its small size, it is linguistically diverse. According to the 2001 census, there are 92 languages spoken as mother tongues in Nepal. In this respect, it is worthwhile to refer to Turin (2007) who notes:

In Nepal, linguistic and cultural identities are closely interwoven, and many of the country's Indigenous peoples define themselves in large part according to the language they speak. Language is often used as a symbolic badge of membership in a particular community, and is a prominent emblem of pride in one's social or ethnic identity. (p. 27)

It is important to note that since the restoration of democracy in 1990, the government of Nepal has realized the importance of Mother Tongue (MT) education in consonance with the UN declaration of 1951. Some of the steps the government has taken in this connection are reflected in its laws and acts. For

the first time, the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal (1990) has made provision for the right to gain primary education through mother tongues. Accordingly, the National Commission for Language Policy (1992) strongly recommended the use of mother tongues as mediums of instruction at the primary level of education. It was followed by the seventh amendment of the Education Act (2001), and different policy documents envisaged under the 10th National Plan, such as the Education for All (EFA), Vulnerable Community Development Plan 2004, have opened up the venues for setting up schools which encourage inclusive modalities by way of MT education (NCF, 2007).

Later, in consonance with the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal (1990) and Education for All (EFA) National Program, the Government of Nepal adopted a policy to introduce different mother tongues as medium of instruction at primary level of education. It is believed that the use of the child's mother tongue in school will develop a good home-school relationship and relieve him/her from psychological shock as the child can express his/her ideas well and communicate well if the classroom environment in his/her mother tongue and the subjects taught in class are dealt in his/her mother tongue (Cummins, 2000). In this context it is relevant to refer to Anders-Baer et al.(2008) who state:

The dominant language medium of education prevents access to education because of the linguistic, pedagogical and psychological barriers it creates...most Indigenous peoples and minorities have to accept subtractive education where they learn a dominant language at the cost of the mother tongue which is displaced, and later often replaced by the dominant language. (p. 3)

Hence, it is important to promote mother-tongue education at primary level in Nepal. It is also important to note that a large number of children drop out of school in Nepal, due to various factors, one of them being the language of instruction. Referring to the gap between home languages of children and the language of instruction in Nepal, Skutnabb-Kangas and Dunbar (2010) argue that "it would therefore be appropriate to educate the children in their mother tongue in order to make the break between home and school as small as possible" (p. 51).

Although the existence of multiple languages in Nepal has long been recognized, there have been many shifts of policy concerning their recognition and usage within the education system. For example, the first education plan (NNEPC, 1956) adopted a policy of language transfer, whereas the second education plan (ARNEC, 1962) proposed Nepali as the medium of instruction in public schools, as did subsequent education plans (NESP, 1970). It was only after the advent of democracy in 1990 that language issues in education came to the forefront. Consequently, the constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal (1990; article 3:18:2) and the subsequent education plans (NEC, 1992; HEC, 2000) advocated mother tongue education.

With the Jomtein declaration (1990) and Dakar Framework for Action (2000), the Government of Nepal endorsed the Education For All (EFA) program

(2004-09) to ensure equity in quality basic education for all Nepalese children. As a strategy, the EFA program adopted a strategy for transitional bilingual education that uses the students' mother tongue as the medium of instruction from grades 1 to 3 in a monolingual situation; from the grade 4 onward, the medium is Nepali. In consequence of the stated new provisions of mother-tongue instruction, primary level textbooks for social studies and arithmetic were translated into five local and Indigenous languages of the country: Maithili, Newari, Awadhi, Limbu, and Tamang (National Curriculum Framework, 2007).

Prior to that, some of the important steps have already been initiated for mother tongue education during the Basic and Primary Education Project, Phase I (BPEP- I, 1991-2001). In the first phase of BPEP, seven local and Indigenous languages, Newari, Maithili, Tharu, Awadhi, Limbu, Tamang, and Bhojpuri were introduced at primary level education as optional subjects. It is important to note that this initiation of mother-tongue education in the form of optional subjects proved to be a landmark achievement for mother-tongue education in Nepal. In the following years, curricula, textbooks, and teaching/learning materials were also prepared in local and Indigenous languages for the first time in Nepal. Later, five more local and Indigenous languages, Sherpa, Chamling, Bantawa, Magar, and Gurung, were added to the list of mother-tongue education. As a result of all these measures, there are altogether 19 languages that have so far been introduced as optional subjects in the different primary schools of more than 17 districts in the country.

The provision of mother-tongue education at primary levels gave impetus to efforts at revitalizing and sustaining many local and Indigenous languages. Tharu is one of these languages that became revitalized, especially in the forms of their scripts, textbooks, and teaching materials, as a result of the provision of mother-tongue education in Nepal.

The Tharus are one of the most illiterate and underdeveloped Indigenous communities of the Indian sub-continent, as they have been oppressed, marginalized, and exploited by colonial powers in the past and by the dominant communities (those in power) of the region in the present. The Tharu communities are basically located in the plains, in the southern part of Nepal and the northern part of India. According to the latest census of Nepal (2011), "There are 125 caste/ethnic groups in which Tharus are 6.6 percent (1,737,470) of the total population in Nepal" (Census Puts, 2012). On the other hand, Verma (2010) reports that there are about 1,69,209 Tharus in India (p. 177). Tharu communities are also believed to exist in small numbers in Bangladesh, but their population is not known there yet.

Some scholars have given credit to the colonialism, modernization, and the expansion of media and communication technology for the movements of Indigenous peoples calling for their rights of self-determination, land and territorial ownership, and distinct identity across the globe (Kingsbury, 2008). However, the Tharu communities are known for their resilience. They have always lived by their Indigenous roots of hard work and self-reliance, despite all sorts of persecutions by colonial and post-colonial political powers of the region.

In this regard, Tharus took a major step for the literacy of the communities when they set up the organization, Backward Society Education (BASE) in January 1985. They founded it as a pioneering movement (*Charpate Club*) to fight against human exploitations within some of Nepal's poorest communities. It is worthwhile but inspiring to note that BASE emerged under the leadership of Mr. Dilli Bahadur Chaudhary, a social activist and member of the Tharu community, when a group of 34 youths raised NRS.735 (less than \$11) through their cultural shows during the period of a festival, Maghi (Tharus' New Year). BASE is determined to fight against the exploitation of bonded labor and slavery, social and political discriminations, illiteracy and poverty of the Tharu people, and other marginalized communities of Nepal (Backward Society Education, n.d.).

With the provision of mother-tongue education in local and Indigenous languages in the Nepalese Interim Constitution, Tharus have succeeded in educating their children in their own language and culture, one of the long cherished demands of Tharu communities with the colonial and post-colonial authorities. As one of Tharu language textbook writers, Laxman Tharu, observes:

Tharu communities tried to introduce education in their own language from long time and this time their efforts yield result after the education authority worked jointly, and since 2009, 23 primary schools in Tharu settlements in Chitwan district of Nepal, have been providing education to Indigenous Tharu children in their own language.

So it is evident that this Tharu success story is a very important development for the inclusion of marginalized linguistic and ethnic communities like Tharus into the basic education system of Nepal.

## India

In India, the concept of culturally appropriate education practices came into vogue along with its independence movement in the early 1930s, when Mahatma Gandhi emphasized the inclusion of local knowledge and skills in place of the then British education system, also known as the Macaulay education system (Khuchandani, 2008; Singh, 2011). With reference to the plight of Indian traditional and Indigenous education system during the colonial era, addressing a group of audience at Chatham House, London, on October 20, 1931, Mahatma Gandhi had said:

I say without fear of my figures being successfully challenged that India today is more illiterate than it was before a fifty or hundred [sic] years ago, and so is Burma, because the British administrators when they came to India, instead of taking hold of things as they were, began to root them out. They scratched the soil and began to look at the root and left the root like that and the beautiful tree perished.... I defy anybody to fulfill a programme of compulsory primary education of these masses inside of a century. This very poor country of mine is ill able to sustain such an expensive method of education. Our state would revive the old village

schoolmaster and dot every village with a school both for boys and girls.  
(cited in Dharampal, 1983/2000)

After its independence, The Centre for Cultural Resources and Training (CCRT) was established in India in 1979, for sustaining the country's diverse linguistic and cultural heritage through culture-based education practices. Nonetheless, culture-based education did not get a real push until the 1980s, when the National Policy of Education (1986) recognized the need of education to be culture-based, given India's multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and diverse socio-cultural contexts (Singh, 2011).

Now, the CCRT functions as an autonomous organization under the aegis of the Ministry of Culture, Government of India. Its main thrust is to make students aware of the importance of culture in all development programs by conducting a variety of training programs for in-service teachers, teacher educators, educational administrators, and students throughout the country. It conducts a variety of in-service teacher training programs by covering broad areas of interlinking education with culture, for development of the child's personality—particularly in terms of helping the child to discover his/her latent talent—and to express it creatively. It also conducts various academic programs on Indian art and culture for foreign teachers and students. The center has adopted a motto of developing consciousness of the "Indian Cultural Heritage" through the utilization of local resources and community interaction. As it is stated, "For education to be effective and result-oriented, it has to be culture based, and it must take into account the cognitive, emotional and spiritual needs of the student." Furthermore, "Knowledge of culture plays a prominent role in democratic thinking: a democratic citizen is known for his ability to sift truth from false and he/she is more receptive to new ideas" (The Centre for Cultural Resources and Training, India, 2010).

A local tribal culture-based education project, *Janshala*, was launched in nine Indian states as a joint program of the Government of India and five UN agencies (UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNESCO and ILO) for the universalization of primary education among educationally underserved communities in 1998. The program covered nearly three million children, and 58,000 teachers in 18,000 schools. Out of 139 city blocks more than 75 blocks had substantial tribal population. The proportion of tribal children was 33% of the total target group children in the project area. However, in a survey study, records collected in schools in the *Janshala* program areas indicated continuing high "dropout" rates among tribal children. A major reason for that was that in most states the medium of instruction was the regional language. Most tribal children did not understand the textbooks generally written in the regional language. The appointment of non-tribal teachers in tribal children's schools was another problem: the teachers did not know the language the children speak and children did not understand the teacher's language (Gautam, 2003; Paliwar & Mahajan, 2005).

Likewise, in July 2007, a project started in Indian state, Orissa. Under that project, in 200 schools, Indigenous (tribal) children from 10 language groups are being taught through their mother tongues in the first grades, with materials

collected from children, parents and teachers. Later 16 more languages were added in 2008 (Muthukumaraswamy, 2009, p. 5).

## Bangladesh

In 2001, the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), a large NGO in Bangladesh, initiated a program of "Education for Indigenous Children" as Non-Formal Education Program (NFEP) in Bangladesh (over 30,000 classes). BRAC's non-formal primary education program provides 5-year primary education courses in four years to poor, rural, disadvantaged children and dropouts who cannot access formal schooling. Local and Indigenous mother tongues are used as the medium of instruction in the classroom (SIL International, Institute of Language and Culture for Rural Development- Mahidol University, and UNESCO Bangkok, n.d.). The program begins with a 4-month preparatory phase in which mother tongue is used and all activities are oral. In the last 15 days of the preparatory phase Bangla, the second language, is introduced using the total physical response (TPR) approach. In Grade 1 approximately 80% of the activities are conducted in the children's mother tongue and 20% in Bangla (Ryan, Jennings, & White, 2007, Aldeen, 2009).

Moreover, teaching and reading materials are locally produced by focusing on the children's heritage culture and their everyday experiences. Indigenous teachers receive pre-service and regular in-service training as well as stipends, which enable them to continue their own post-primary education. By the end of 2006, there were 2,139 schools for Indigenous and/or linguistic minority children in which 52,940 children were enrolled including children with special needs (Ryan, Jennings, & White, 2007).

Bangladesh Adivashi Forum has recently translated some primary grade books (from grade 1 and 2) into five languages of small ethnic communities with the help of Action Aid supported by the Commonwealth Education Fund (CEF) (Aldeen, 2009). Prior to this, a local non-government organization ASHRAI was created in 1991. Since then it has been working with the Adivashis of Bangladesh aiming at developing their self-help structures. It is concentrated in the Barind Tract in the north-west of Bangladesh where there are more than 700,000 Adivashi people comprising of as many as 18 ethnic groups. It provides basic primary education up to grade three and training (survival, development, participation and protection) in 70 Adivashi villages where there are no such facilities. The schools are bilingual, with both Bangla and the major local dialects used together for instructions (Aldeen, 2009).

## Conclusion

There is no doubt about fact that there has been a worldwide awakening concerning the rights of Indigenous people. However, Indigenous people also feel in danger of losing their cultural heritage and distinct identity, in the race of

cultural homogenization by the global dominant forces. The problems, issues and challenges of the Indigenous peoples are common all over the world. Moreover, educational systems have failed Indigenous students by undermining their human rights and academic equity globally. Indigenous students around the world suffer a lack of academic achievement and lose their innate enthusiasm for learning when subjected to schooling in its conventional colonial form (Battiste, 2008; Cooper, Batura, Warren & Grant, 2006; Cushner, McClelland, & Safford, 2012; Ezeife, 2002). The failure of Indigenous students in colonized circumstances is manifested in high dropout rates and an abiding sense of mistrust concerning the assimilationist and culturally insensitive educational systems to which they are been subjected (Reyhner, 2010; Reyhner & Singh, 2010; Singh & Reyhner, 2013).

UNESCO has repeatedly called for incorporation of Indigenous knowledge, skills, and cultural heritage into the mainstream education system worldwide for broader participation of Indigenous and marginalized communities. It has reiterated this call in its education position paper, *Education in a Multilingual World* (2003), stating, "Education should raise awareness of the positive value of cultural [and linguistic] diversity, and to this end: curriculum [should be reformed] to promote a realistic and positive inclusion of the minority [or Indigenous] history, culture, language and identity" (p. 33).

In an era of globalization, a society that has access to multilingual and multicultural resources is advantaged socially and economically on the world stage. Hence, educators and policy-makers must reframe the educational agenda in such a way that the inherently rich Indigenous culture and heritage of every society is preserved and honored nationally and globally.

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