



The field of GOLD

In the heart of Rangunia upazila in Chattogram lies a field of gold, where the shining sun illuminates the vast expanse of Aman or Boro paddy, depending on the season. Hardworking farmers and labourers toil from dawn to dusk to reap its bounty. Known as Gumai Beel, this is one of the largest paddy fields in the country. Here, after a hard day's work farmers share meals together while birds perch on paddy sheafs or trees. With harvest almost coming to an end, farmers are now busy planting seedlings. The photos were taken recently.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN



HUMANITARIAN FOUNDATION Spreading education to Bandarban hills

MONG SING HAI MARMA

Hundreds of children belonging to different indigenous communities along the Myanmar border in Bandarban's Thanchi upazila are largely deprived of education, as civic facilities are yet to reach the remote area.

However, every cloud has a silver lining.

Humanitarian Foundation, under its Rowa Kyang project, runs 23 schools with 46 teachers and thereby provides education to 948 children belonging to the indigenous communities, including Khumis, Tripuras, Bawms, Mrus and Marmas.

Each school is run by two teachers.

"There was no primary school in my village during my childhood. I had to walk 10 kilometres every day to go to the closest school in Thanchi Bazar area," said Mang Mang Singh Marma, founder of Humanitarian Foundation.

The foundation initiated the schools in 2004, aiming to ensure free education for all children till grade five. After finishing primary school, the students are brought to the district town where they finish their Secondary School Certification by staying at different hostels.

"After completing SSC, we consult with students regarding their career choices,

and facilitate their higher education, be it at public or private universities, medical colleges or diploma institutes," Mang Singh said.

Around 18 students are currently pursuing higher education at different institutions, including Buet, Dhaka University, and Jahangirnagar University, among others.

"They all receive a monthly stipend under our scholarship programme," Mang Singh added.

Mue Shai Thui Marma, Ruma union parishad chairman, said, "This foundation is providing education in these remote villages. The government should step up to support them."

Contacted, Abdul Mannan, primary education officer in Bandarban, said the government builds schools if locals donate land for it.

Privately run primary schools, if approved by the government, will receive textbooks for the national curriculum and training for teachers, following inspections, he added.

Keeping their LANGUAGE ALIVE

Residents of Uttar Bandar village still use
Khotta language to communicate

SIFAYET ULLAH

"Tu dopahar ke khana kha lenhi kii?" (Did you have lunch?)

This correspondent heard Nitai Kumar Sing, 70, asking his grandson this when he arrived at Uttar Bandar village in Chattogram's Anwara upazila.

In this small hamlet nestled on the bank of Karnaphuli river, a rare mother tongue is clinging to life.

History of Deyang Pargana, written by historian Md Jamal Uddin.

At present, the community has around 8,000 people in 1,000 families, belonging to both Hindu and Muslim religions, according to data of local union parishad.

According to researchers, Khotta language originated from Khortha, a language with Devnagari script used predominantly in the Indian state of



Residents of Uttar Bandar village, nestled on the bank of Karnaphuli river, engage conversing in Khotta language at a tea stall.

PHOTO: STAR

This is the Khotta language, which can be heard in every home of this village, which stands under the shade of the Deyang Hill.

Dwellers there, from children to the elderly, commonly use phrases like "Tu kaisan hain (How are you?), Hume thik hain (I am fine)" to communicate among themselves.

However, Khotta faces an uncertain future.

While the village elders try their best to keep the language alive, the little ones are growing up without learning the language for the absence of a written script and education in the dominant tongue.

"Khotta is our root and culture, not only a language," Nitai said, adding, "We still speak this language to keep our mother tongue alive."

WHO ARE THE KHOTTAS?

At this point, one might be wondering why the dialect sounds similar to Hindi. It's because the Khotta community's people came to Chattogram from Varanasi of India as soldiers during the Mughal reign in 1666, according to

Jharkhand.

AN ENDANGERED LANGUAGE

Khortha is an endangered language and is on the verge of losing its identity, according to a study.

The study, titled "Khortha, a Dying Language and Urgency to Retain its Pure Variety", published in 2018, was conducted by two researchers of Indian Institute of Technology (ISM), Jharkhand.

"Despite challenges, we kept communicating with each other through our mother tongue," said Moriom Begum, a Khotta speaker and vice chairman of Anwara upazila parishad.

However, most children are reluctant to speak in the language as they need to use a second language for their daily communication and studies, she added.

Historian Md Jamal Uddin said, "The people of this community learn Khotta verbally from family members as they have no written script."

Nur Mohammed, a Khotta speaker, said, "As a language, Khotta already lost relevance in the social and cultural spheres. We need government's support to save the language from fading away."

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PHOTO: STAR

