

## **CHAPTER-5**

### **Religious Practices, Fairs and Festivals in the Villages Under Study- Social Interaction Among The Villagers and The People of Either Sides of The Border**

This chapter is devoted to know the fairs and festivals observed by the people living in two border villages under study. It is found that the Rajbanshis and the Nepalese are the major communities in Chhoto Dilsaram Jote and Dulal Jote respectively. Here the religious practices of these communities are discussed to understand the religious interaction among the people living in the border villages.

#### **5.1: The Rajbanshis and Their Religious Practices**

Religious structure of the Rajbanshis is manifested by the observance of several festivals and puja of several gods and goddesses. In this connection Sanyal (1965) mentioned several gods and goddesses. These are Baruni Sinan, Bhandani Puja, Bisua, Bisuba, Charak puja, Dharam Thakur Puja, Dham, Dhan Kata puja, Devi Puja, Gorakhanath Puja, Hudum Deo Puja, Jaganath Puja, Jitua Puja, Kali Puja, Lokhi Puja, Madam Kam Ouja, Mecheni Puja, Monasa Puja, Naya Khawa, Othai-Pothai Puja, Royagara puja, Satya Narayan Puja, Shiva Ratri, Silua, and Utthan Ekadoshi. The Rajbanshis living in Chhoto Dilsaram Jote show their respect to almost all the above mentioned gods and goddesses but they do not observe all the fairs and festivals. Here most of the times they take part in some fairs and festivals observed in the houses of their relatives living in Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Uttar Dinajpur districts. It is found that the Rajbanshis traditionally believed in many gods and goddesses and observed several festivals. But presently the number of the festivals and the importance of the festivals are decreasing gradually. Even the changes of names of the traditional festivals are observed. At the same time the acceptance of regional festival is also observed. Some of the important fairs and festivals observed by the Rajbanshis and some of the gods and goddesses believed by them are discussed here.

### 5.1.1: *Ashari -Ghasari*

The festival of Ashari-Ghasari falls in the month of June or Ashar in Hindu calendar. Here, the Ashari-Ghasari is an agricultural goddess. It has no idol. The goddess is symbolized by a banana plant, jute plant and arum. The festival is observed at the beginning of agricultural activity when land is prepared for paddy plantation. At the time of worship of the goddess Ashari-Ghasari, some other gods and goddesses are also worshipped. They worship Kali, Mahadeva, Chaitanya or Nityananda (household gods), Bishahari etc. The goddess Ashari-Ghasari is worshipped in a corner of a prepared land for paddy plantation. Here, a banana plant with jute plant, arum and some paddy saplings are placed in the corner and vermilion is pasted on the body of the plants and saplings. Special food items like banana, milk, khai (fried rice), chira (flat rice) with insence strict are also put in the corner. The goddess is worshipped by the male head mainly. The land holding Rajbanshi families living in the villages observe the festival. It is also found that some families worship some other gods and goddesses inside their house and some other worship those gods and goddesses at Gram than (i.e. living place of village gods and goddesses). The villagers mainly children and old persons without any caste and community distinctions come to the house or the Gramthan and take prasad (i.e. the food-items offered to the gods and goddesses). It can be stated that the festival of Ashani-Ghasan is similar to the festival of Roa-gara puja or Gotsu Pana Puja which was observed by the Rajbanshis elsewhere.

### 5.1.2: *Bisua, Bisuba*

On the last day of the month of Chaitra (March - April) a spring hunt is arranged by the Rajbanshis. It is called Bisua or Bisuba. During the whole month of Chaitra the Rajbanshis eat or drink decoction of some bitters (e.g. Brihati, Basak (Adhatoda Vasica) etc. On the last day of Chaitra none will eat rice. They eat fries Bhadza Bhudza (fries) which contains chura (flattened rice) curds, fried dal (lentils), while eating fries it is a custom to spit out the first morsel without swallowing it. This means that an enemy is to be killed. On the Bisua day some able bodied Rajbanshi males especially some young boys go out

for a hunt with any weapon, bamboo pole, spear, sword, Katari, etc. They must kill an edible animal and eat its meat either roasted or cooked in the forest area. If they fail to kill an animal the Rajbanshis believe that the coming year would be bad. In the same night of the hunt a Gram puja is held. The Mahadev, the presiding deity of the village residing in the nearby bamboo grove on a hut is worshipped in order to drive away evil spirit that may cause disease in the village and bless the villagers with good crop in the field. No woman is allowed to attend this ceremony.

### **5.1.3: Biswakarma**

Belief on Biswakarma is not new to the Rajbanshis but the importance on the puja is not given equally by all the Rajbanshis. All the families of the Rajbanshis living in the villages do not worship the god Biswakarma at a same time. It is said that Biswakarma is worshipped as a creator of instruments. Here the cultivating families worship the god to keep their agricultural implements well during whole year. Most of the Rajbanshi families worship it during the Durga puja. They wash their plough, yoke, some other iron and bamboo made implements. They use vermilion on those washed implements. The male members mainly the head of a family with the help of an *Odhikari* (i.e. local Rajbanshi priest) worship the god. These villagers believe that if the god Biswakarma is pleased, they will continue agricultural activities successfully whole year and will produce enough. Very few Rajbanshis living in these villages under study worship the god in the month of September or Ashwin in Hindu calendar. They are the Rickshaw pullers. They worship the god to keep the rickshaws very well and to earn expectantly. On the day of puja a special item of foods made by banana, curd or milk, khai (fried paddy); chira (flattened rice) is offered to the god. Nobody is invited for this puja. But the children of most of the families come and take the special food items and enjoy it.

### **5.1.4: Buraburi**

The Rajbanshis living in these villages believe on the goddess Buraburi. This goddess is worshipped by the Rajbanshis mainly. They worship the goddess for the well being of new born baby. The goddess is worshipped within few months after the birth of the baby. The goddess has not particular idol.

During the puja, a small part of courtyard is used for this purpose. It is covered by temporary tent made by bamboo and jute sticks within the boundary of the house. A Deosi (i.e. a local Rajbanshi priest) is needed to worship it. On the day of Puja, the parents of the new-born baby remain starved before the puja is over. At the time of puja, a full bunch of banana with other food items like *Khai* (fried paddy) chura (flattened rice), sugar etc. are offered. The sacrifice of pigeon and male goat is done. The Deosi worships the goddess performing many activities. He takes the baby in his lap and dances in the courtyard. Finally, he in the name of the goddess blesses the baby. At the end of the puja the Deosi requires a new saree for him by the name of the goddess. It is stated that the well being of the new baby depends on the happiness of the goddess. In this puja, the Deosi is assisted by a drum-beating. Not a single person is invited for the occasion, but after starting of drum-beating, many villagers like children, women and others come and enjoy the occasion.

#### **5.1.5: Chorok Puja**

In the month of Chaitra (March-April) the puja of Mahadeva is performed in an open field. Gomira songs are sung and subscriptions rose from every house. Men dressed as Hara and Parvati and Yoginis sing and dance with music of dhol and Kanshi. The villagers normally go to Batasi market to enjoy the Chorok Puja. This puja is arranged by a puja committee. This committee collects subscriptions from the local peoples of all the communities living in nearby villages.

#### **5.1.6: Dhan Kata Puja**

This is the first paddy-cutting ceremony generally held on the first day of Agrahayan (Nov. – Dec.). When the paddy is ripe in the field, the Githani, the wife of the owner of the field takes an earthenware lamp, a scythe, a little vermilion on a plantain leaf and goes to the field. She cuts a few ears of the paddy, sprinkles some vermilion on them, moves the lamp in front of the cut ears several times and comes back with the paddy branches and fixes them over the doorway of the sleeping hut. After this ceremony, regular harvesting of paddy begins. The sheaves are kept in the field for two days and then brought home and stacked on the Kholan, the thrashing floor in the outer yard of the

house. After reaping the winter paddy, there is Khet Uttam puja where a cow or buffalo horn is mounted on a stick. The pointed end of the stick is driven into earth. The other end holding the horn remains above. The horn is covered with paddy straw tied to the horn. The structure is allowed to remain in the field.

#### **5.1.7: Dharam Thakur Puja**

It is the puja of the sun-god and sometimes it is called that this puja is of Shiva. It is celebrated in the month of Baisakh. It is the puja performed by the women. They do not eat fish, meat, or egg in the month of Baisakh and do not take any food on the day of celebration until it is completed. Throughout the month of Baisakh the women bathe every morning before the sun rises. This is called Uchron. The puja is performed on any Sunday, as it is considered to be the day of the sun. The votaries must also remain without food on the previous Sunday. The priest is an Odhikary. A goat preferably of white colour is brought to the spot; some vermilion is smeared on its horns. It is then offered to Dhoram Thakur and let off without killing. Ducks if offered are also similarly let off. Eggs, ripe plantains are also offered.

#### **5.1.8: Durga Puja**

The festival of Durga falls in the month of October or Ashwin in Hindu calendar. It is found that the Rajbanshis traditionally worshipped a goddess named Devi. The goddess, the Devi is similar to the goddess Durga. At present days, most of the Rajbanshis use the term Durga for Devi. During the festival, the Rajbanshi families worship many other gods and goddesses with Durga. They worship Kali, Bishahari, Chaitanya, Nityananda, Biswakarma etc. on the Bijaya Dashami. In this village not a single Rajbanshi family worships Durga making an idol of the goddess. They worship the goddess on the mud floor in a corner of their house. Special food items (i.e. prasad) with Dhup (i.e. incense stick) etc are required for the purpose. And in this connection an Odhikari is also called for. Another special occasion is performed on the day also. The Rajbanshis, whose parents were died, observe the occasion of pindadan. The Rajbanshis worship their dead parents through pindadan ceremony. The Rajbanshis believe that during the festival, the soul of the dead parents and

grand parents come in earth and take departure after getting respect through Pindadan. They also believe that if they are not worshipped, they feel sad, and may cause unwanted results upon family. During the festival, some of the Rajbanshis purchase new dresses and distribute the dresses among the near relatives. On the day of puja, nobody goes to another house, because all the families worship the goddess in the same day. But the children enjoy it by going house to house.

#### **5.1.9: Ganga Puja**

Belief on the goddess Ganga is very old. But the Rajbanshis did not worship the goddess by the name Ganga previously. Some of the Rajbanshis worshipped it as Tistaburi elsewhere. The Rajbanshis in this areas worship this goddess due to fear of land encroachment made by the Mechi River located very near to these villages. It is already mentioned that many families have migrated to this villages from some nearby villages due to land encroachment of the Mechi River. The Rajbanshis begin the worship of the goddess to get rid off from that type of natural calamity. The family members mainly the women worship it every evening. No idol is established in their houses. They worship it by offering a pair of Dhup (incense sticks). Besides this, the female worship it annually with festive mode at the last day of Chaitra month (i.e. April) in Hindu calendar. On the day some women making a group go to the Mechi River with some special food-items like banana, curd, sugar etc and flowers with a Bhura (i.e. a boat made with banana plants). They worship the goddess in the bank of the river and then sail the Bhura in the water of the Mechi River. Here the women and children of all communities take part in it.

#### **5.1.10: Hanuman Puja**

Worship of Hanuman is new to the Rajbanshis living in this village. Many Rajbanshis living in these villages worship it as god. They worship it as the king of monkeys. It is found that once upon a time, these areas were covered with jungles, forests. The forests, and jungles were the living place of several animals like monkey, snakes etc. Some animals were very fearful and dangerous for human life and property. Some of the animals entered into the houses and wasted the property and human beings also. It is already mentioned

that the villages are located nearby to the Naxalbari forest. In this situation, the villagers began the worship of Hanuman. The village has no idol of the Hanuman made of mudball. Some villagers keep the photos of Hanuman in their houses. They worship it at every evening when they worship other gods and goddesses in their houses. The females mainly worship it.

#### **5.1.11: *Hudum Deo Puja: Hudma***

It is special puja .When there is protracted drought, the women in the village each with a sharp knife in hand, as a protection against 'bhuts (ghosts), go in dark night, into a distant paddy field. They make a small image of the rain-god with plantain leaf stalk and install him on the field. As some places, a plantain tree is planted. Then the women stip off their cloths, untie the hair of the head allowing the hair to hang freely on the back. Thus being completely nude they dance and sing (mostly obscene songs) to abuse the rain god. Two women kneel on the ground like cows and draw a plough to scratch a few feet of the land and they spread some paddy seeds or plants or a few paddy seedlings. They then put on their cloths, tie the hair and come back. It is the general belief that rain invariably falls shortly after this puja is done. No men are allowed to go near the dancing place. If somebody ventures to go there, no one will abuse the women if they attack the man with the daos (knives) they possess or even kill him. Presently this festival is rarely observed in this village.

#### **5.1.12: Kali Puja**

The Kali puja is common to all the villagers. The goddess Kali is worshipped by the Rajbanshis from very past. It is believed that the Kali is a goddess of energy. It provides individuals energy to fight against evil aspects and it saves them from any kind of evil aspects or it saves them from the attack of other unwanted incidences. It is already mentioned that there are three Kali temples located in these villages. The puja of the two temples are organized by villagers collectively and another one is organized by a Bengalese family individually. It is informed that the first two temples were founded by two Rajbanshi jotedar families and initially they maintained all the expenditures of the puja. They established these temples for the goddess to drive away the fear

of ghosts, from the mind of the tenants or landless people who were used to work in the agricultural lands. But, presently the organization of the puja is not in the hands of the Rajbanshi families only. The villagers now manage the puja collectively. Here, the landowning Rajbanshi families have left their authority to others to organize the puja, due to lessening of the amount of their lands or shifting of their houses from this village to other villages. During the Kali puja in the month of October, this goddess is worshipped by the villagers with great enthusiasm. A Brahman priest is called for the purpose. The puja is normally performed at night. The sacrifice of goats and pigeons is an important feature of the worship of the Kali. At the end of worship, hospos is distributed among the villagers. People of all castes, tribes come to enjoy the puja.

Beside it, the Rajbanshis of these villages worship some other household gods and goddesses with lighting of candles or deeps (i.e. earthen lamps). The deeps show light with help of mustard oil and wick. Sometimes the deeps are kept on some banana plants with the help of bamboo sticks. They believe that this lighting helps the souls of their dead parents and ancestors to reach heaven safely. Some of the Rajbanshis call it the festival of Dewali. Next day of the puja, the Rajbanshis worship their household animals – like cows and bullocks. They fed Bhakhar (i.e. a special item of fodder made of a local plant named pundy). The males of the families wash the body of the animals with water and use white vermilion for bullocks and red vermilion for cows.

#### **5.1.13: Lokhi Dak: Gochor Pana**

This puja is held in the evening on the month of Aswin (Sept- Oct) .This puja is held in the paddy field when the paddy is flowering and ears are opened. A small hut about three feet high is erected with jute stricks. Two small earthen balls are placed on the roof. The balls are then worshipped with milk and ripe plantain but without incantations. There is no priest. The owner (i.e. headman) of the field takes khoil ( powder containing mustard cake) and dzomura (dried leaves of pumolo) in a small basket and lights a torch made at *sinja* (dried jute sticks) and then moves about in the paddy field holding up the burning torch and shouting the following-‘Sor-ha’ Sogare dhan tona mona, mor dhan motha

tsaul'. It means if the paddy of other does not fruit properly; let me have in bomber crop. Most of the cultivators do this puja.

#### **5.1.14: Laxmi Puja**

Laxmi puja is common to all the communities living in the villages. They believe that the Laxmi is the goddess of wealth and prosperity. The Rajbanshis living elsewhere celebrate the festival by the name as Lokhai dak. The Rajbanshis of these villages say it as Laxmi puja. The worship of Laxmi is held few days after the festival of the Durga. In these villages, the goddess Laxmi is worshipped by two ways— firstly, the females worship the goddess every Thursday in their houses. In this regard, no priest is required and nobody is invited for this purpose. Secondly, the goddess is worshipped in October or in the month of Ashwin in Hindu calendar, just few days after the festival of Durga puja. In this connection, an Odhikari is called and the villagers of other castes, tribes, are invited. In these villages two Rajbanshi families observe this worship in this way. On the day of puja, the females worship the goddess after fasting whole day. At night after completing the worship, hospos is distributed among the people attended there.

#### **5.1.15: Manosa Puja: Manosa Pudza**

This is a puja for the snake goddess. The puja is usually performed in the month of Kartick (Oct-Nov). An Odhikary is engaged for the puja. Milk and ripe plantains are the main items of the offering as it is believed that the snakes are very fond of those articles of food. Songs and dances in honour of the goddess are held and enjoyed. A special type of bamboo flute is played. This flute is called mokha or mukha Basi. It has a separate wider mouth piece of bamboo called Kupa. It produces a moaning monotonous sound which is liked most by the snakes. This is the puja to save men from the attack of snakes. Manosa and Bisahari are synonymous. Beside this, Manosa or Bisahari is worshipped at the time of marriage of any member of a family.

#### **5.1.16: Mechini Khela: Bhedei Kheli**

This puja starts from the first day of Baisakh. Though the term khela is used, it is essentially the puja of the goddess of the river Tista called "Tista

Buri' or Mechini. It is said that the worship had its origin from the Mech who inhabited in this part of the country before the Rajbanshis settled in this area. The river Tista is held in high esteem by the local people and is as sacred as the Ganga. In the month of the Baisakh, when the snows of the hills melt and flow into the river Tista, the water becomes holy due to admixture with the water of the heaven. This is the time when the monsoon is about to start and the presiding deity of the Tista, must be propitiated to save the lands from disasterious floods. Only the women take part in this worship. On the first day of Baisakh the women take a bamboo basket, wrapping it in red cloth, place it on the crossing of a road under an open umbrella and worship the Tista Buri with flowers and vermilion without any incantation. The basket is then taken to the house of Maroani (the head of the party) and places it in the Bastu ghar or under the basil plant of the house. From the second day, the women move from house to house in a party with the bamboo basket holding an umbrella over it. They sing, dance and collect subscriptions. On the last day of the month they come to the side of a tank or river and perform the Tista Buri puja with the help of a priest. The priest is an Odhikary by Rajbanshi caste. After the worship the flowers are thrown into the water, the basket is washed and brought house for the next year. It is also mentioned that it is the worship to prevent an attack of small pox and so the goddess is placed on the first day on the crossing of road so that the evil spirit causing the disease can not enter the village. This festival is very popular in this village. In Chhoto Dilsaram Jote, Renuka Singha, a 55 years old widow, acts as a Maroani (i.e. the head of the party).

#### **5.1.17: *Naya Khawa***

On an auspicious day in the month of Agrahayana (Nov-Dec), some new paddy is husked and the new rice is boiled with milk and offered to the sacred basil, and then all the members of the house eat the new rice. An Odhikary is called to act as a priest for the offering. He is also invited to dine. Beside these cows, birds, dogs are also fed with some respects.

#### **5.1.18: *Pitha Bechi Puja***

Pitha Bechi is a new goddess of the Rajbanshis living in the villages. This goddess is worshipped in the month of February or Falgun in Hindu

calendar. The goddess is introduced in the religious structure of the Rajbanshis by a Rajbanshi family living in Chhoto-Dilsaram Jote. In this village Renuka Singha, a widow acts as a Maroani (i.e. head worshipper) who keeps fasting on the day of worship. The goddess is worshipped to save the villagers from the suffering of Kalajar (i.e. Black fever) and from the encroachment of lands by the Mechi River. It is stated that the family had lands in a larger amount and some tenants also. Once when a portion of lands was under the encroachment of the Mechi River and the tenants were leaving the place then the widow began to worship the goddess. Afterwards gradually the encroachment lessened. From this time, the villagers believe on the goddess and they also began to worship. The goddess has no idol. Many gods and goddesses are worshipped under a Banian tree. They put some stones and flags to represent the gods and goddesses. Though the worship of the goddess begun by a Rajbanshi family, but gradually it influences all the caste, tribes living in these villages, and some other nearby villages.

#### **5.1.19: *Roa Gara Puja or Gotsu Puna***

In the first week of the month of Jaistha (May-June) the cultivators celebrate the first transplantation of paddy if there is sufficient rain for the purpose. Otherwise it is delayed. This ceremony is called Roa gara puja or gotsu puna puja or Maodhotir puja (i.e. the puja of Mother Earth). The owner of the field carries a small plantain tree, five paddy seedling and some weeds to the sacred basil plant in the house. Some vermilion is sprinkled on the plants. They are then carried to the field. The five paddy seedlings are planted in the field. The plantain tree is sown in one corner of the plot and the weeds are thrown away with the prayer that they should spare the field from their ravages. Prayer is also offered to plantain tree to be on guard over the land. Then some milk and a few ripe plantains are thrown in the field for appeasement of the mother earth.

#### **5.20: Shiva Ratri**

The puja of Mahakal or Mahadev is performed throughout the month of Magh (Jan-Feb). The women bathe before the sun rises and abstain from meat, fish and eggs for the whole month. On the shiva ratri day, Mahadev or Mahakal

is worshipped through the whole night. Both men and women bathe four times at night and make offerings after each bath.

Beside the above important festivals and fairs, the Rajbanshis observe some other festivals with less importance. Some of these festivals are Rath-yatra, Saraswati puja etc. In this regard they do not arrange any worship in their house, but participate in those festivals organized in other places like schools, markets, etc. They also believe on those gods and goddesses. Even some of the Rajbanshi families observe the festivals of Rakhi Bandhan, Bijay Dashami, Holi, etc. The religious practices of the Rajbanshis can be easily understood from the following table.

**Table No. 5.1 : Calender of Religious Practices of the Rajbanshis.**

Duration	Religious Practices
Daily	Hanuman Puja, Kali Puja, Laxmi Puja.
Weekly	-
Monthly	-
Yearly	Biswakarma puja, Charak puja, Durga puja, Ganga Puja, Kali puja, Manasa puja, Pitha Bechi puja, Shiva Ratri
Occasional	Ashari Ghasari, Bisua, Bura Buri, Dhan Kata puja, Ganga puja, Hanuman puja, Lakshi Dhak, Mechini Khela, Nayakhawa, Roagara puja,

## 5.2: The Nepalese and Their Religious Practices

Nepali people observe many fairs and festivals in the Nepali dominated areas in India and Nepal. Their belief on gods and goddess is similar among the Nepali people of both the countries. Regmi (1999) in his study says that the entire year is a series of festival in Nepal. The celebrations mark religious events, life cycle ceremonies and the marking of historical events and seasons. Time is divided between work and worship and hardly a week passes without some festivals being celebrated somewhere in the country. Festivals are the

main attraction of Nepali life. They preserve their religious beliefs, the social customs and the economic well-being of the people of Nepal. He also says that the festivals represent various phases and outlooks of the life to the Nepalese. Festivals as a whole are the outcome of the three Rina Philosophy of Hindu life- the Deva Rina, the Rishi Rina and the Pitri Rina. During the festivals the people of Nepal pay the debts of their gods and preachers. According to his study some important festivals observed in Nepal are the Maha Shivaratri, Holi festival, Teej, Gai Jatra (the festival of cows), Dasain (the festival of joy), Tihar, Bhai Tika and the festival of light. Shrestha (1997) in his study mentions some more festivals. These are the festival of new year and Bisket Jatra, Red Mchchhendranath Jatra, Sithinakha or Sithijatra, Ghantakarna Jatra or Gathamuga, Nagapanchami – the day of the Snakes gods, Pnachadana, Janai Purnima, Gai Jatra (the cow festival), Krishnasthmi or Krishna Jayanti, Teej or Haritalika, Rishipanchami, Indra Jatra and Kumari Jatra, Dasain or Durga puja, Deepavali or Tihar, Makar Sankranti, Shree Panchami or Basanta Panchami, Shivaratri (the sacred Night of Lord Shiva), Holi, Ghode Jatra and Pisacha Chaturdasi, Chaitra Dasain, Ramnawami and Lhuti Pooni or Balaju Jatra. He also stated that all the above mentioned festivals are still observed in Nepal with the same rituals and customs. The Nepali people living in this village know almost all the festivals and gods and goddesses mentioned above. But in this village they do not observe all the festivals. Here some popular festivals observed by the Nepali people living in this village are discussed.

### **5.2.1: Dasain or Durga Puja**

The most popular festival of the Nepali people is the Dasain. It starts from the first day of bright moon fortnight of Aswain i.e. Sept-Oct. and it continues for ten days. The festival is also called Dusahara, Durga Puja, Navaratri, Bijaya Dasami etc. During the whole period of the Dasain, the Shakti or Goddess Durga, otherwise known as Bhawani or Bhagabati is worshipped. The Navaratri is commenced from the first day of worshipping the goddess and it means worship of nine nights, each of which is very special to the devotees of Devi. The tradition of nine days bathing in the holy rivers bore the same significance, as to emphasize the importance of nine long days of devotion to the Devi, known to the entire Hindu community as Navaratri Vrata.

Dasain or Bijaya Dasami during its entire period of glorifying the triumph of good over evil commemorates Goddess Durga's slaying of the terrible demon Mahisasura. Therefore, in the eyes of the Hindus, Dasain recalls essentially the victory of Rama over the evil demon king Ravana, who according to the epic poem called Ramayana kidnapped Rama's wife, Sita and imprisoned her in the island of Srilanka. Another important feature of the festival is sacrifice of animals. They sacrificed different animals like chickens, ducks, and goats mainly at the eight and ninth days of the festival.

### **5.2.2: Deepavali/Tihara**

One of the most enjoyable festivals next to Dasain is the Deepavali, which meant the festival of lights. This festival is also known as Tihara and it is celebrated every year throughout the kingdom with great pomp and grandeur. The festival of light is commenced on and from thirteenth of the dark half of Kartik and ended of the 2nd of the bright half of the same month. This festival is celebrated continuously for five days. Because of this unbroken chain of celebration, it is also known by the name of Panchak meaning thereby five days. The first day of Tihara is dedicated to the crows. The homage is paid to the birds by spreading rice-grains at the street crossing and corners. The second day is the 'day of the dogs' (kukur Tihar). To celebrate the dogs, a garland of flowers is put around the neck of each domestic dog. Third day of Tihara i.e. Laksmi Puja is of vital importance, for on this day the sacred cow is worshipped in the morning and the goddess of wealth is worshipped in evening. From the very early morning of Lakshmi puja ceremony the doors and windows of every house are thoroughly cleaned and are decorated with garlands of flowers. Throughout the night, every house is graced by rows of lights, the traditional Nepalese lamp of twisted cotton wick in a small bowl of mustard oil as well as candles. The fourth day of Tihara is celebrated in many ways and it varied from community to community. Many families also worship their bullocks. This day is known as Gobardhana puja. The fifth day called Bhai Tihar or Kija puja is the day of brothers and sisters. On this day sisters worship their brother and put teeka on their forehead. They are also garlanded them as well as fed them with delicious dishes. The brothers in return give some presents like money, clothes and ornaments.

### **5.2.3: Ghode Jatra and Pisacha Chaturdashi**

This festival takes place on the fourteenth of dark half of Chaitra. In this festival, the people worship the gods and goddess and eat and drink happily for three days. On the first day, the Nepali people worship Bhadrakali, Raktakali, Swetakali, Kankeswari, Indrani, Bhairaba and Ganesha. On Pisacha Chaturdashi, the lord Shiva himself becomes a Pisach (evil spirit) and he is worshipped as Luku Mahadeva, the Hidding Shiva, depicted in the usual form of a small linga curiously kept hidden in filthy, unclean place such as the neighbourhood's garbage dump. Luka Mehadeva is worshipped by the Hindu and Buddhists alike.

### **5.2.4: Krishnashtami or Krishna Jayanti**

This festival is celebrated on the 8<sup>th</sup> day of the dark lunar fortnight in the month of Bhadra, and it is observed to commemorate the birthday of lord Krishna, who is the eight incarnation of Vishnu, the deitified hero of the great Hindu epic Mahabharata. On the mid night of this day Lord Krishna was born from the womb of Devaki, the sister of the Demon King, Kansa and wife of Vasudeva. The birth of Krishna heralded the death of Kansa, who planned in various ways to slay him. But the attempt of Kansa failed on all occasions. At last, Krishna dragged the King by his hair and killed him then and there. The Nepalis also observe fast on the birthday of Krishna and worship Lord Krishna at home and in the temples.

### **5.2.5: Makar Sankranti**

According to the Nepalese solar calendar, Makar Sankranti is celebrated in the month of Magh first and it is also known as Magha Sankranti. This Sankranti is observed by all the Hindus and Buddhists of Nepal. On this day, the Nepalese visit the holy places in and outside Nepal and took bath in the holy rivers. All the Nepalese give dan to the Brahmans and men ate ghee, molasses; balls made of seasome, meat and flattened fish. The elderly member of the family are given a simple massage of mustard oil on the head of the junior member of the family and give blessings to them. On this day also, a married daughter comes to the house of her parents, and the mother blesses her by patting the head with mustard oil.

### **5.2.6: Nag Panchami**

Nagpanchami is the annual day set aside for the worship of snakes, but many people perform small pujas throughout the year at places where the snake gods lived. This special festival is held all over Nepal on the fifth day of the increasing moon fortnight of the month of shrawan (July). On this particular day the serpent is worshipped by posting colourful portraits of the serpent deity on the door-frames of the house. Sweets, cereals, and cows' milk are offered to the Nagas for the bestowal of peace and prosperity to the people.

### **5.2.7: Ramnavami**

Ramnavami is a great festival which falls generally on the 9<sup>th</sup> day of the bright fortnight of Chaitra. This is celebrated by all the Nepalese with great enthusiasm and devotion. The religious minded people undertake fast on the occasion of the birth day of Lord Rama and worship Him in the temple. In this festival, the people from different parts of Nepal and India go to Janakpur, the birth place of Sita, in order to pay homage to Ramachandra, the symbol of perfection. Many people of this village worship the image of the Lord Rama in their houses.

### **5.2.8: Rishi Panchami**

The fifth of the bright fortnight of Bhadon is normally declared as the day of Rishi Panchami. This is the day when all married women except those who cross the age of motherhood observe the ritual of bathing and cleaning or taking 'Brata' of Rishi Panchami. The married girls, who have not yet reached puberty, do not celebrate this festival of Panchami. The women rise very early in the morning of Panchami, and while still it is dark, as they do not want to be seen the performing of the rituals of bathing by the passersby, they take bath to worship the saints. Here fasting is also essential. The worship of Rishi Panchami purifies the women from all sins.

### **5.2.9: Shivaratri, the Sacred Night of Lord Shiva**

The festival of Shivaratri is observed in honour of Lord Shiva or Mahadeva. It occurs on the fourteenth day of the dark half of the month of Falgun. It lasts only for one day, and it is a festival of fasting and not a feast.

The millions of Hindus and Buddhists of Nepal worship Lord Mahadeva as their guardian deity. A big fair is also held at Pashupati. Pashupatinatha is one of the most sacred bathing places as well as important pilgrimage centres, where the saints, rishis and ascetics make pilgrimages. Many pilgrims from outside Nepal visit the Pashupatinatha temple on the day of the festival. Many people of this village go to Nepal to enjoy the fair.

#### **5.2.10: *Sithinakha or Sithji Jatra***

The Sithinakha day is celebrated on the sixth day of the birth of Kumar, who is the son of Mahadeva and god of warfare. In this festival the Kumar is a symbol of God Sithi, Son of Mahadeva. On the occasion of the festival a red circle is drawn on the threshold of the house and inside the circle offerings are placed in the shape of flowers, sweets, seeds, eatable cereals, such as Nepali dish made of 'mass' (a kind of black beans), mugi (Kidney beans) and Bodi (a kind of beans). After worship, the offerings were distributed among the inmates of the house and those are relished by all.

#### **5.2.11: *Teej or Haritalika***

Every year on the third day of the bright fortnight of Bhadon is observed the festival of Teej or Haritalika, a festival celebrated by only women. Actually the festival is observed by all married women and even by the girls who do not attain puberty. It is compulsorily observed by the Brahman and Chhetri ladies. The women, who observe festival, put on their beautiful and costly dresses, especially red colour. They decorate themselves with ornaments. Fasting is essential part of the festival. Some women set up a small Siva shrine in the house and worship the deity whole night with the help of a Brahman. The object of observing the festival is to bring prosperity to their husbands. On the next day, they give up the fast by worshipping Lord Ganesh and offer charities to Brahmans who conduct the rituals and worship.

The religio-festive structure of the Nepali people living in this village under study is characterized by several practices and beliefs on many gods and goddesses. These are the Dasain or Durga, Dushara, Diwali, Krishna Astami, Laxmi, Nagpanchami, Ganesh, Shiva, Sithinakha, and Rath Jatra. Besides, their belief on the above gods and goddesses they worship some of new local

gods and goddesses. These are Hanuman, Pitha Bechi, and Ganga. And many people of Nepali and Non-Nepali communities of these villages take part in several fairs held in Jhapa district of Nepal. These fairs are Devi Mela at Garamani, Shiva mela at Mykhola, Kechak Badh Mela and Ramdhanu Mela etc. Huge number of Nepali and non-Nepali people of these villages go to Nepal and take part in these fairs. The religious practices of the Nepalese can be easily understood through the following table.

**Table No. 5.2 : The Calendar of Religious Practices of the Nepalese.**

Duration	Religious Practices
Daily	Hanuman Puja, Laxmi Puja
Weekly	-
Monthly	-
Yearly	Dosain, Diwali, Pichasachaturdashi, Nagpanchami, Krishna Asthami or Krishna Jayanti, Makarsankranti, Ram Navami, Shiva Ratri, Sithi noka, Tej or Hari talika, Pitha Bechi puja,
Occasional	Gode Yatra,

### 5.3: Fairs (*Mela*) and Festivals

It is found that the fairs held on the occasions like Durga puja, Kali puja and Pitha Bechi Puja etc. are organized collectively. Previously these were organized by the Rajbanshis mainly. Though these fairs are held in small areas but the participation of the people is very wide. The people from other countries like Nepal also participate in these fairs. To understand the situation, some fairs are discussed here.

#### 5.3.1: *Mela* (Fair) on the Occasion of Durga Puja

Though the size of the fair is not large, but a pleasing fair is organized at Batasi Hat (weekly market). The market is located very near to the villages under study. The fair is organized in October in every year. It is found that Shamlal Singh, a local jotedar established the fair few years back. By his name the fair is known as Shamlal Singh Mela. The fair continues for more than three days. It is stated that at the beginning of the fair all the expenditures were

managed by the family-members of Shamlal Singh. But now, the fair is organized collectively. The remarkable feature of the fair is that though the fair was established by a Rajbanshi family in a Rajbanshi dominated area, but presently, the management, organization of the fair is not limited within them only. The people of other communities are also the members of the fair organizing committee. Even the participation-structure is also not limited within the community people only. The people of different communities like the Santals, the Nepalis, the Lepchas, the Bengalees and others assemble in the fair and enjoy it. It is also found that the participants are not inhabitants of India only. With the people of some nearby villages, some of the Nepalese, the Rajbanshis and the Santals take part in the fair coming from Nepal also. Many stalls like foodstalls, cloth-stall, stall of foreign goods, stall of utensils, etc are available in the fair. The stall owners are not the Indians only; many of them come from Nepal also. During the time, people forget the bindings of the border and the concept of our country and their country become valueless to them. The people of India and Nepal enjoy the festival equally. It is stated that one third participants comes from Nepal.

### **5.3.2: *Paitrish Hat Kalibari Mela***

In these areas, the worship of the goddess Kali is not limited within the families or within the village. It gets regional importance. A fair is held at Kalibari nearby Batasir Hat. This fair is known as Paitrish Hat Kalibari Mela. This fair is very popular among the people in this region. It is said that when the worship is began, the length of the image was 35 hands or feets. For this reason this fair is known as Paitrish Hat Kalibari Mela. It is informed that the fair is begun by a Rajbanshi family. The family was a local jotedar or big landowner. But presently, the fair is organized by the villagers collectively. According to a saying, it is found that the head of the Rajbanshi family once faced a problem of losing lands. A large number of lands of the family were under the encroachment of the Mechi River and the economic condition of the family was deteriorated gradually. The head of the family thought the cause of deterioration deeply. Finally he got the answer of his deterioration of economic condition in a dreamy night. The goddess, Kali told him to worship the kali establishing a temple beside the road. For this reason, the man established the temple and began the worship. Presently the length of the image has been curtailed largely. The length of the present image is 18 feet. From other source, it is found that once, the area was disturbed very much by the criminal activities. The people mainly the agricultural labourers, tenants did not like to stay for long time. Due to this reason, the lands were not cultivated properly. Keeping these aspects in mind, one of the local jotedar families established the temple and began the worship of the goddess Kali.

The fair continues more than three days. The shopkeepers come to the fair from different parts of India and elsewhere. Some shopkeepers come from Bihar, Uttar Dinajpur, and Nepal also. Even the people of different caste, tribes, come to the fair and enjoy it. Some of the people worship the goddess and pray blessing. Arrangement of singing local songs and showing dance is also made at night. Beside this, the gambling and some other forms of games like Ghatghatia (i.e. one kind of lottery) are held. In the fair, at the time of

worship, many goats, pigeons are sacrificed and at the last day hospos is distributed among the people who are assembled in the fair.

### 5.3.3: *Mela on the Occasion of Pitha Bechi Puja*

Pitha Bechi puja was started by a Rajbanshi family living in Chhoto Dilsaram jote. But gradually it has been very popular in this area. To celebrate the puja, a fair is held every year in the month of March-April under a banyan tree. Here though the puja was started by a Rajbanshi family living in Chhoto Dilsaram jote but *pujathan* (place where gods and goddesses of Pitha Bechi are located) had been chosen at Dulal jote. Actually this pujasthan is located in the middle portion of the villages of these two jotes. The fair continues for two days. The fair is enthusiastically organised by the villagers of these villages. Even the people from Nepal, participate in this fair. Here the shopkeepers come from different parts of the district. In the fair, pigeons and goats are devoted in the name of the goddess.

### 5.4 : Comparison of Two Villages

The following table may help us to understand the similarities as well as differences between the two communities living in two villages under study in respect to their religious practices.

**Table no. 5.3 : Comparison of Religious Practices of Two Communities Living in the Border Villages.**

The Rajbanshis	The Nepalese
<b>Similarities -</b>	
1. The female folk perform the religious activities and the males are less attentive to religious activities.	1. The female folk perform the religious activities and the males are less attentive to religious activities also.
2. The Rajbanshis take part in different fairs and festivals held in India and Nepal.	2. The Nepalese take part in different fairs and festivals held in India and Nepal also.
3. The acceptance of new gods and goddesses is noticed among the Rajbanshis.	3. The acceptance of new gods and goddesses is noticed among the Nepalese also.
<b>Differences</b>	
1. The Rajbanshis mainly take part in the fairs and festivals in Indian territory.	1. The Nepalese take part mainly in the fairs and festivals in Nepal.
2. The number of gods and goddesses worshiped by the Rajbanshis larger.	The number of gods and goddesses worshiped by the Nepalese is fewer .

## 5: Findings

From the above discussion it is found that both the Rajbanshis and the Nepalese observe several religious practices and believe on several gods and goddesses. Both the communities have left some of their previous religious practices and the number of gods and goddesses have also decreased. But the decreasing number of the religious practices is higher among the Rajbanshis than the Nepalese living in these villages. Here Hanuman puja, Ganesh puja and Pitha Bechi puja are new to both the communities. The worship of gods and goddesses during whole month and week is in gradual decrease in both the communities. The worship of gods and goddesses held occasionally and yearly is mainly noticed in these villages. The devotion of goats and pigeons is very common in their religious practices. Initially the fairs were organized by the Rajbanshis mainly but presently these are organized collectively. Adoption of some new local gods and goddesses in their religio-festive structure is also common to both the communities. More interesting thing is that during any festival organized and celebrated by any of the communities, the participation of some persons of other community is unrestricted and even no restriction is maintained by the Nepali people of Nepal at the time of observance of any fair held in India. Similarly, non-Nepali and Nepali people of these villages go to fairs held in Nepal mainly in the fairs held in Jhapa district without any restriction. In case of religious field, acculturation and assimilation of cultural traits are observed among the people living in these frontier villages. In short, a new type of cultural situation (i.e. syncretic tradition of culture) is emerged in these villages of the frontier area. It is found that the people living in frontier villages are not free from tension, suspicion, and quarrelsome relation but due to religious factor mainly at the time of observance of fairs and festivals at the frontier villages of India and Nepal, not a single incidence of the above mentioned behaviour is found among the people of different communities.