

Theravadi Buddhists of Siliguri: A Study of Socio-Cultural Distinctiveness and Exchange.

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CERTIFICATE

I certify that the dissertation entitled "Theravadi Buddhists of Siliguri: A Study of Socio-Cultural Distinctiveness and Exchange" submitted by Smt. Aparna Chatterjee in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of North Bengal has not been published previously, nor submitted for any degree of this University or any other University. She has fulfilled all the requirements of Ph.D regulation of this University for the submission of this dissertation. The paper is a product of the candidate's own investigation. She has completed the work under my guidance and supervision.


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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled '**Theravadi Buddhists of Siliguri: A Study of Socio-Cultural Distinctiveness and Exchange**' has been prepared by me under the guidance of Dr. Saswati Biswas, Professor, Department of Sociology, North Bengal University. No part of this thesis has formed the basis for the award of any degree or fellowship previously.

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PREFACE

The journey from the centre to the margins, for a religious, ethnic or cultural group remains accentuated with shifts in historical currency. And the verity of such phenomenon is deep-seated in the long stories of migration and relative minority status of Theravadi Buddhists as they had relocated themselves in North Bengal way back in the middle of 20th century.

Economics and geography apart, the matrix of marginalisation marks further the minority status of the Magh-Barua group while seen against the more palpable presence of Mahayani Buddhists, spread along the spine of the entire East and South-East Asia vis-à-vis the hegemonic superiority of majoritarian Hindu community and its chores.

My forays into this aspect of marginalisation would also be to explore the quantum of 'othering' as perceived by the power that be in relegating this community to the very minority status of 'Scheduled Tribe'. Even with these specificities, my efforts lie in showing how the Bengali Buddhists existence remains underscored by abounding crises and estrangements.

Therefore, this thesis is a modest and curious attempt to understand the level of similarities or distinctiveness, diffusion or boundary maintenance of the community on the one hand and notions of prescription or prohibition, tradition or modernity through community interface on the other.

ABSTRACT

Theravadi Buddhists of Siliguri: A Study of Socio-Cultural Distinctiveness and Exchange.

Theravada is a branch of Buddhism that uses the teaching of the Pāli Canon, a collection of the oldest recorded Buddhist texts, as its doctrinal core; but it also includes a rich diversity of traditions and practices that have developed over its long history of interactions with various other cultures and communities. South and South-East Asia regions have a profoundly large segment of population that is found to be in active practice of this theistic faith. The same stream of Buddhists in Bangladesh is Theravadi Bengali Buddhists known as Baruas. Our project encompasses an effort to trace the historical trajectory of their phases of migration. Especially, the post- partition India had witnessed a large number of these Theravadi Bengali Buddhists migrating from Chittagong (Bangladesh) into India and settling mostly in West Bengal, Tripura, Assam and in the neighbouring states.

During the Bangladesh War of Liberation in 1971 there had been a large influx of Barua Buddhists in Siliguri and such migration continued afterwards as an aftermath of the war. Our quest here seeks to unravel the context of their (Mog tribes) migration, and the consequences that warranted their amalgamation in the non-Buddhists society. This thesis posits an assessment of the degree of their cultural assimilation and the scale of adoption of non-Buddhist practices in the post settlement days. Our research delves into the details of this settlement, adoption and assimilation process. This probe also holds a sincere effort to find out the nature of syncretism as well as the pattern of boundary maintenance through their culture, custom, costume, rites and rituals in the course of their intermingling with other communities.

Chapter 1

Introduction

- Prologue
- Specifying the Problems and Objectives
- Theoretical Framework
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- Review of Literature
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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Prologue

The most widely spread religion in Asia today is Buddhism, but it is a minority religion in India, the country of its origin. A new philosophy made its appearance in Indian history in the 6th century BCE. It discarded the principle of social immobility, inequality and injustice and upheld the sanctity of human intellect and its freedom. This spirit manifested itself in the form of two religious movements- Jainism and Buddhism and later spread out to many parts of the world, gaining the acceptance of the rulers of the time.

According to R.C Majumdar (Majumdar 1943) there is no definite evidence as to the time when Buddhism first gained influence in Bengal. Buddhism had probably obtained a footing in North Bengal even before Ashoka's time (268- 232 BCE). And it was in a flourishing state during the Gupta (319-467 CE) and Pala period (8th – 12th CE). A number of Chinese records of the 7th century contain information on the condition of Buddhism in Bengal. Amongst all these records the account of H'uen Tsang is of course the most important. According to this, at *Pundravardhana* (NorthBengal) there were twenty (20) Buddhist monasteries and above three thousand (3000) brethren who followed the Mahayana and Hinayana.

But the Sena kings do not seem to have had any special leaning towards Buddhism and Buddhism does not seem to have had any patronage from them. From this period Brahmanism became more dominant over Buddhism. However, Buddhism continued to be the religion of a sizeable section of people in Bengal and their presence in the ever changing social, economic and political situation is evident even today.

Buddhism is still a living religion in the south and east of Chittagong among the Magh Baruas. They also call themselves Rajbansis or scions of the royal race because they claim to have descendance from the kings of Arakan who migrated from Magadha, the modern south Bihar.

Barua Maghs of Siliguri and the adjoining areas, the community of our study, are basically migrated people from the Chittagong district of Bangladesh, and some of their ancestors had migrated there from the present Bihar state and other parts of Northern India during the period of Bramhanical resurgence in India.

O'Malley (O'Malley 1908) furnished graphical details on the community of Barua group of Maghs in his works. The narration includes their origin and other cultural aspect of the community which suggests that the community came into existence in Bengal in the 17th century and made Chittagong its permanent home. A fraction of the community migrated to other parts of Bengal and nearby district, including Chittagong Hill Tract.

Barua Buddhists are the followers of Theravada Buddhism. Theravada, 'teaching of the elders' is the major and only surviving sect of early Buddhism and the composer of the Pali canon. The followers of Theravada Buddhism of Siliguri also belong to *Mahasthabir Nikaya*. The word *Nikaya* is Pali and literally means 'volume'. It refers to the section of the Tripitaka. However, an alternate usage is practiced in south-east Asia, in which the word *Nikaya* is a respectful term for a monastic community. The *Mahasthabir Nikaya* is a Bengali order of Buddhist monks. However, the Bengali Buddhist under study having adopted many elements of Hinduism in their lives, do not maintain the puritan Buddhist traits established through the reform movement.

1.2 Specifying the Problems and Objectives

Heterogeneity and integrity within poly-ethnic cultural environment is the basic feature of India. Under such a situation there is an urgent need of community studies at micro and macro levels to understand the nature and extent of social processes in different eco-cultural area and regional set-up of this country.

Due to geographical location, political implication and commercial importance as well as the cultural history of Siliguri, rapid increase of population happened in a quick flux into this place. The population of this area comprises mostly the migrants of diverse origin which led to the emergence of heterogeneity and cultural plurality. According to the sociologists (Young & Schmid 1994), culture group is a union of persons who have a common material and social heritage, common beliefs, habits, activities and interests and who live in the same social

environment, whether urban or rural, foreign or native any social group which maintains social cohesion and expresses and attains common interests in its own unique manner is a culture group. From this point of view the present study aims at understanding the Theravadi Barua Buddhist of Siliguri as a culture group as the community under consideration conforms to most of the features of a culture group.

The bank of Karotoya is mentioned in different texts and other sources as an important site of early settlement of Buddhist. But now it is difficult to distinguish the Bengali speaking Buddhist from Hindus by their external features and culturally this group is also assimilated with the majority of the society, even their surname is not the reflection of their religion and interestingly enough they have a multi-dimensional history of migration. In Chittagong they were numerically strong but now they are existing here as a marginal group, so their migration pattern, nature of boundary maintenance as well as the characteristic features of minority deserves a detailed study.

Several communities in India use the title 'Barua'. The designation 'Barua' was created by Ahom kings to defend themselves from outside forces. The Tripura royal dynasty also created the designation 'Barua' for use in their forces. Thus from these references it is clear that the term 'Barua' is not only applicable to the Bengali Buddhist group of Chittagong. The amount of work which is done on this particular group is so small that it is not possible to satisfy the queries on their community life, socio-cultural identity and so on. Unknown fact is a problem in itself which incorporate the imminence of the concerned studies.

Thus the focus will be on the community life of Bengali Buddhist with special reference to people's perception about their minority-identity. The study will proceed with the hypothesis that they maintain a distinct cultural boundary at least to some extent and have their own preferences in the socio-religious matters, the following are the specific **objectives** of the study-

- To find out the historical root, population, pattern of migration and settlement of Bengali Buddhists of Siliguri.

- To enquire about their general conditions and crisis of life in a new setting, with reference to education, economy, emerging political preferences and institutional life of the community.
- To study the culture of the community in the light of syncretism and distinctiveness that is the study of eating behaviour, wearing apparel, traditions and changes including festivals, everyday rites - rituals, beliefs practices and monastic life.
- To analyse the boundary maintenance of the community and exchange with others with a focus on inter- community interactions.
- To generate some findings and general observations about their conflict and accommodation, change and integrity or in other words their process of maintaining community life.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

Evolutionist such as Taylor and Muller attempted to explain religion in terms of human needs. Taylor saw it as a response to men's intellectual needs. Muller saw it as a means for satisfying man's emotional needs. The functionalist perspective changes the emphasis from human needs to societal needs. From this perspective, society requires a certain degree of social solidarity, value consensus, harmony and integration between its parts. The function of religion is the contribution it makes to meet such functional prerequisites, for example, its contribution to social solidarity. Marxists on the other hand are concerned with change and emphasize upon the role of religion in the establishment and continuation of an unequal social order. Marxists however, also look upon religion as means of expressing dissatisfaction with existing order as reflected in millenarian movements which Engels referred to as an expression of proletarian consciousness.

In the Indian context sociological writing began with Max Weber's analysis of the relations between religious ethics and economic behaviour. Weber's analysis of the social structure of India was a background to his understanding of both the orthodox doctrines of Hinduism and the heterodox doctrines of Buddhism together with the influence of popular religion on them.

Caste and religious beliefs were therefore linked and ultimately he was concerned with the impact of religious beliefs on the secular ethic of Indian society. (Clarke 2011)

1.3.1 Study of a Community from an Ethnographic Perspective

Sociologists find the study of a community attractive because it provides them a broad enough study area within the context of the community. Community is a place where people 'live and work' but in broad use 'social bond' is more important than territorial basis. There are different sociological perspectives in the study of the community. Ethnographic perspective is one of the very important schools of thought that provides a descriptive and holistic account of a community.

Sociology and Anthropology are disciplines that born out of concern to understand the 'other' are nevertheless also committed to an understanding of the 'self'. 'Ethnos', a Greek term, denotes a people, a race or a cultural group. Ethnography then in its broadest sense is the science devoted to describing ways of life of humankind or refers to a social scientific description of a people and the cultural basis of their people hood. Qualitative ethnographic social research then entails an attitude of detachment towards society that permits the Sociologists to observe the conduct of the self and others, to understand the mechanisms of social processes and to comprehend and explain why both actors and processes are as they are.

Ethnographers view the community as a whole using concepts implicitly and explicitly referring to the wholeness. And a community does not exist in isolation and often constitutes a part of a next higher order of organization, 'a community within communities'. Here the 'barua' community of Siliguri is often enclosed within other communities with which its fortunes are bound.

Again if we see from another angle then the social system perspective to community studies shares a basic similarity with the ethnographic perspective in that it also emphasises the study of interrelations among different institutional or structural units in a community and its holistic nature. The community as a social system consists of a number of subsystems like economy, education, polity, religion, kinship etc. Each of these subsystems is composed of a variety of

associational groups. The building blocks of each of these groups are statuses and roles which are held and played by individual actor.

1.3.2 Exchange and Sharing of Traits: A Study on Syncretism

Interculturalism and blending of different religious traditions in vast parts of the world have given rise to transcultural syncretism. The sociologists and social anthropologists have thrown much light on the variety of religious forms through their studies of belief systems, rituals, symbols and meanings all over the world but the concept of syncretism uncovers a remarkable dimension in the exploration of cultural reciprocation.

Exchange and sharing of traits, thought and ethos contributed to cultural synthesis. Indian society is perceived as a 'honeycomb' in which communities are engaged in vibrant interaction, sharing space, ethos and cultural traits. Between themselves the communities look more at communalities than differences and they easily establish rapport. There is also a high correlation between Hindus and Buddhists at a wider level.

According to David Levinson (Levinson 1998) syncretism is also found in the economic system, in the diet, in kinship and in politics. Of all elements of culture, religion and language are more open to syncretisation. In anthropological literature the Cargo Cult has been described as a form of syncretism. Cargo Cults are essentially syncretistic, blending the Christian doctrine with aboriginal belief systems. In syncretic religions the elements do not simply exist side by side but are often merged in various ways. It may be argued that few religions are wholly immune from some degree of syncretism even Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism and other major religions from their beginning combined many different religious ideas and rituals. Syncretism is to be found in all places where there has been contact between religions. The term syncretism was originally used by Plutarch for 'fusion of religious cults'.

Other forms of traditional linkages are participation in each other's religious ceremonies and festivals. Such sharing includes performing actual roles in religious ceremonies and festivals such as making images, dresses and ornaments for deities, organising worship and processions etc. as well as visiting celebrations (Das, 2003). These facts explain that despite contradictions and diversities, there exists vibrant sharing of cultural and religious traits. A basic sense of

harmony prevails which dissolves our animosity and ultimately contributes towards shaping our unique homogenization. The present study is also a modest attempt to analyse the co-relation between Mahayani Buddhist (non-bengali), Bengali Hindus and Theravadi Bengali Buddhists of Siliguri town by exploring the exchange and sharing of traits, thoughts and ethos that contribute to cultural syncretism.

1.3.3 In Search of Distinctiveness, Ethnic Affinity, Boundary Maintenance and Identity Formation with Minority Issue

According to Barth, (Barth 1969) each ethnic group develops its cultural and social form in relative isolation. Ethnic group as culture bearing units characterised by racial difference, cultural difference and social separation. This history has produced a world of separate people each with their culture and organized form. Generally, the sharing of a common culture is the most important feature of a community or an ethnic group. But when a group is spread over a territory with varying ecological circumstances then it exhibits regional diversities of overt institutionalised behaviour and do not reflect much differences in cultural orientation. The same group of people, 'Buddhist Barua' for example, pursue different pattern of life in Chittagong and institutionalise different forms of behaviour when faced with the different opportunities offered in different environments of India. The cultural features of a group are determined by ecology as well as by transmitted culture. Like other documented ethnic group Magh Baruas are also retaining basic culture and ethnic identity despite of their participation and self-evaluation in terms of larger local society. Here identification of non-ecological socio-cultural components and effects of ecological circumstances on behaviour in creating diversity is important.

In Anthropological literature as comprehended by Barth, the term ethnic group is generally understood to designate a population which has fundamental cultural values and overt unity in cultural forms, a field of communication and interaction, a membership which identifies itself and as identified by others as constituting a category distinguishable from others and is largely self-perpetuating. The rate of inter marriage is high among the Magh-Baruas of Siliguri and they are more or less flexible in this matter thus biological self-perpetuation is not applicable in their

case but presently they have scheduled tribe status here and a socio-cultural bond exists specially through their common religious beliefs and practices.

Therefore, if we want to classify a person of this group in terms of his basic, most general identity, determined by his origin and background as well as if we want to examine to what extent the actor is using ethnic identities to categorise himself and others for the purpose of interaction or in other words whether they are forming ethnic group in organizational sense or not, then we will get a multi-dimensional picture.

It is said that, in recognizing cultural identity two orders are most important – i) overt signals or signs- such as dress, language, food, house pattern or general style of life and ii) basic value orientation ; the standard of morality. Since an ethnic category implies being a certain kind of person, having that basic identity, it also implies a claim to be judged, and to judge oneself, by those standards that are relevant to that identity thus the nature of continuity of ethnic units depends on the maintenance of a boundary. Though the cultural characteristics of the members may transform and likewise boundary may change, yet the fact of continuing dichotomization between members and outsiders allows us to specify the nature of continuity and investigate the changing cultural form and content.

In case of ethnic boundary maintenance and identity formation consciousness and the allegiance of the members to the shared culture of their own group is important. The boundaries to which generally attention is given are social boundaries. To understand the form of boundary maintenance it is important to analyse two factors – a) to what extent social relationship between two different groups is covering eventually all different sectors and domain of activity and b) a dichotomization of others as strangers and a restriction of interaction to different sectors.

Magh-Baruas of Siliguri are in a minority position, illustrating some but not all features of minorities. The general feature of all minority situations lies in the total social system, all sectors of activity are organized by statuses open to members of the majority group while the status system of the minority has only relevance to relations within the minority and only to some sectors of activity. But in urban context commonly we can notice a steady reduction of

cultural differences between ethnic groups or a break-down in boundary maintaining process. In new industrialised society people have greater contact, more dependence on the goods and organizations and new elites are emerging, in this condition if we want to see the situation of Magh-Baruas, perhaps we will see "...they may accept a 'minority' status but seek to reduce their minority disabilities and probably leads to an eventual assimilation with the larger society." (Barth 1969)

1.4 The Universe of the Study

Keeping the objectives in view Siliguri has been taken as the universe of the study. Selection of the area has been done on the basis of its geographical location, accessibility, importance, considerable presence of Buddhist people and cultural background. Siliguri is considered as the second most important commercial centre of the state of West Bengal. It is also considered as the gateway of North-East India. It is a fast growing city with an area of 15.54 sq.km located in Terai range of dist. Darjeeling, the northern most district of the said state. It is bounded by Kurseong sub-division on the north, Bihar and Bangladesh on the south, Jalpaiguri district and Bhutan on the east and Nepal on the west. The place is connected with the universe by road, rail and airways. Tea, timber and tourism are considered as the economic basis of this growing city. According to the census survey report (2011) the total number of Buddhist in Siliguri was 3,337 (0.65%). Among them 1696 were male and 1641 were female and presently the number of Bengali Buddhist family in Siliguri is near about 300 and almost all of them are directly or indirectly migrated from Chittagong, Bangladesh.

1.5 Review of Literature

Review of available literature involves a secondary analysis of available information already published in some form. The available information about structure, process and relationships of the particular phenomenon with varied factors, can help in linking it with the study currently planned. It may also help in a historical or comparative analysis of the issue or in reviewing a theory simply by looking at the ways other researchers have approached the topic.

For the purpose of the study I have taken help from the **three basic types of materials**. First category provides **information about Buddhism and Bengal**, the origin, history and principles of Buddhism. In this category I have also included few important books of history to know the cultural history of Bengal, its boundary and growth of Buddhism here. The second category depicts the **theoretical analysis** of religion, concepts of ethnographic study, syncretism, otherization, minority etc. **Indigenous literature** available on the Bengali Buddhist itself is not very vast. The third one is about the early settlement of Bengali Buddhist, history of migration, identity formation, rites-rituals, practices etc.

Gail Omvedt in her book, '**Buddhism in India**' discussed about the role of Buddhism in challenging Brahmanism and caste in India. As a background of Buddhism she critically analyzed the disputes of traditional Buddhism and discussed about the defeat of Buddhism in India. In colonial period elite responses towards Hinduism and re-construction of Hinduism was appeared as a major challenge towards Buddhism. She discussed about the Buddhism in Orissa and Tamil Nadu that helped me to get an idea about the other states in the time of studying Buddhism in North Bengal.

Peter Harvey in his book '**An introduction to Buddhism—Teaching, History and Practices**' discussed briefly and analytically the life of Buddha, the nature, role and the style of Buddha's teaching. Author expressed his views on the economic base of the monastic code of disciplines, obligation and special rules for nuns etc. and all these things are quite relevant with one of my prime objective i.e., 'Sangha life' of Bengali Buddhist.

Bimal Chandra Mahapatra in his book '**Buddhism and Socio-Economic Life of Eastern India**' showed the position of Buddhism in Bengal and Orissa prior to the 8th century AD and at the 'Pala Age'. This text mentioned that Bengal consisted of the present West Bengal, Bangladesh and the province of Magadha in Bihar. Two main geographical divisions called Gauda and Banga were under the Palas of Bengal. Gauda had many sub-divisions like Pundrabardhana (N.B), Varendri, Radha, Tamralipta and Suhma and similarly Vanga had Harikela, Samatata etc. Buddhism was flourished along with Jainism in Pundravardhana during Ashoka's period but it

was existed even prior to that. In this book author mentioned most important Buddhist centers of that time Bengal.

Sukomol Chaudhuri in his book '**Contemporary Buddhism in Bengal**' has written about the history of Buddhism in Bangladesh with a special focus on revival of Theravada Buddhism. He has given a detailed picture on contemporary Buddhist of Bangladesh among which 'Buddhist of Chittagong' is very directly related with my study. This text provides a better understanding of life cycle rites rituals and festivals of Bengali Buddhist as well as their religious and social life. Among the Bengali Buddhists Baruas are majority in Chittagong and after partition a good number of them migrated to North Bengal, Assam, Tripura and neighboring provinces, Bengali Buddhists of Siliguri are basically belong to this 'Barua' section and Appendix I (Part of Eastern Bengal District Gazetteers, Chittagong.1908) of this book gave me a brief but clear conception about the life of Baruas in Bangladesh.

Sri Sukumar Das in his book '**Uttar Banger Itihas**' discussed about the boundary of north Bengal and its history of administration. On the other hand, **Smt. Annapurna Chattopadhyaya** in her book '**The People and Culture of Bengal**' and **R.C Majumdar** in his book '**History of Bengal**' (vol.1) discussed about the society, culture and religion of Bengal. As a protest movement Buddhism flourished in Bengal especially in the Gupta and Pala period. Dr. Majumdar gave social background of Buddhism as well as the other dominant religions of ancient Bengal.

In **Ichhamuddin Sarkar's** edited book '**Bangladesher Itihas**' Mehrab Ali wrote an article, named, 'Prachin Bouddhajati O Barendra Bhumi' and here he tries to establish the relations between Bengal and ancient Buddhist people. **Rahul Sankrityan's** book '**Darshan-Digdarshan**' analyzed the Buddhist religious philosophy and included the part of conversations between Buddha and his vikshus.

M.G. Chitkara in his '**Encyclopedia of Buddhism; A World Faith**' analysed Buddhism from different point of view. It is a sixteen volume set in which vol.1 defined religion as social tradition. Sociologically it is a social phenomenon which is essentially institutional and practice oriented. The whole material and moral universe is classified by the three big realms- dharma, artha and kama – the moral, material and sensual needs of man. The management and conduct

of his social and individual life is conceived and formulated in terms of these three with reference to the ultimate end of life, moksha – ‘nirvana’ which is considered religion as essentially moral and what is moral is social in nature. Author explained the Buddhist social philosophy as ethics without religion and ultimately the synthesis for attaining the social harmony.

In **volume 3** authors explained the advent of socialism in India. While Buddhism was flourishing the caste ideology was being sharpened by a section of Brahmins and the result was Manu Suttas. The untouchables were virtually a fifth caste and the earlier movements like the one led by Buddha especially seriously questioned the hereditary supremacy of Brahmins.

In Buddhism all actions have to be evaluated in relation to society. He analysed the important concepts of Buddhist philosophy like social cohesion, interdependence, feeling of common participation and living, harmony, universal brotherhood, social existence and liberation which is very much social in nature.

In **volume 4** authors explained that, sociology is the study of societies, both the observation and description of social phenomena and the articulation and application of these phenomena. He analyzed different sociological theories of religion and defined socialization as a process to attain the full enlightenment or Nirvana, on the other hand democracy as a total way of life. Here author summarized the instructions for the by-followers and 12 commitments applicable to Bouddha Dhamma and Sangha.

Volume 7 explained Buddhism as a system of socio-political change. **Volume 8** is about social interaction and self development. The capacity to work at your self is a distinctly human one and it developed through social experiences. In this chapter, author showed how the principle of ‘live and let live’ is applicable in Buddhism as well as its role to develop social cohesion, harmony and social change with special reference to women.

Bryan Turner in his book ‘**Religion and Social theory**’ gave the religious theories of Emile Durkheim, Max Weber and also the functionalist approach as well as the Marxian perspective of religion. Author discussed the relationship between religion and society from various angels

and it helps to co-relate the reasons behind the growth and spread of Buddhism and its institutional nature.

Dr. N.K. Das in the introduction of his edited book '**Culture Religion and Philosophy: Critical Studies in Syncretism and Inter Faith Harmony**' and in his article "Perspectives on religious syncretism, a critic of conception of culture" defined syncretism as a blend of multiple religious believes, in variegated degrees. It uncovers a remarkable dimension in the exploration of cultural reciprocation the term was originally used for 'fusion of religious cults' for example, in anthropological literature the Cargo cult has been described as a form of syncretism. In both of his writings he stated very clearly that 'of all elements of culture, religion and language are more open to syncretization.'

Fredrik Barth in the introduction of his edited book '**Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: the social organization of culture difference**' and in his article "Pathan identity and its Maintenance" discussed about the identity formation and boundary maintenance of ethnic groups. According to him, the term ethnic group as culture bearing units characterised by racial difference, cultural difference and social separation. This history has produced a world of separate people each with their culture and organized form. Generally, the sharing of a common culture is the most important feature of a community or an ethnic group. But when a group spread over a territory with varying ecological circumstances then it exhibits regional diversities of overt institutionalised behaviour and do not reflect much differences in cultural orientation. The same group of people pursue different pattern of life at one place and institutionalise different forms of behaviour when faced with the different opportunities offered in different environments. The cultural features of a group are determined by ecology as well as by transmitted culture.

In case of ethnic boundary maintenance and identity formation consciousness and the allegiance of the members to the shared culture of their own group is important (Blom ; Ethnic and Cultural Differentiation). The boundaries to which generally attention is given are social boundaries. To understand the form of boundary maintenance it is important to analyse two factors – a) to what extent social relationship between two different groups is covering

eventually all different sectors and domain of activity and b) a dichotomization of others as strangers and a restriction of interaction to different sectors.

Satadal Dasgupta (Dasgupta 1993), in his edited work expressed his view on ethnographic perspective. According to him, a holistic account includes a description of every aspect of the lifeway of a given localized population and their inter relationships. It is important to understand and describe various elements of its socio-cultural organization and the ways they influence each other. The members of a community share a set of institutionalized norms and associated values in terms of which they relate to and interact with each other. Such communities constitute a total pattern of living and they assume that the community mirrors the larger society in a microcosm.

Natun Chandra Barua in his book **Chattagramer Bouddha Jatir Itihaas** talked about different ethnic groups of Chittagong like Chakma, Magh-Barua etc. He also discussed about Pali language, different surnames of the group, socio-religious features and history of Chattagram in his own words. This indigenous literature helped me to get an insider's view and provided some **valuable information**.

Brahmanda Pratap Barua edited bilingual book **Buddhism in Bengal/Banglay Bouddha Dharma** is another important literature. This book is published by All India Federation of Bengali Buddhist in 2007. Articles like 'Paschimbanger Bangali Bouddha' by Sujit Kr. Barua and 'A Brief Sketch of Maghs: As depicted in old records' by Jay Datta Barua helped me to trace the origin of Barua Buddhist of North Bengal. 'Bangali Bouddhader Samajik o Sanskritik Itihaas' and other articles of this book provide socio-cultural traditions which helped me to compare and analyse the condition of a migrant minority.

Contemporary Buddhism in Bangladesh by **Sukomal Chaudhuri** gives us an outline of Theravada religious festivals, monastic life, Buddhist marriage and funeral rites which are meaningfully connected to my study and worked as an important secondary source of data. Two important indigenous literatures, **Paschimbanger Bouddha Dharma o Sanskriti** and **Barua Jati** written by two monks, **Pragyanandashree Sthabir** and **Banashree Mahasthabir** respectively talk about the origin, history of migration, early settlement and the culture of Bengali Buddhist.

1.6 Methodology

Modern sociology has taken as its mission the analysis and understanding of the patterned conduct and social processes of society and of the bases in values and attitudes on which individual and collective participation in social life rests. Thus the sociologist requires sensitivity to and a curiosity about both what is visible and what is not visible to immediate perception. Moreover, for every individual and group, ideologies and faiths define the distinction between good and evil and are involved in everyday judging and decision making. Therefore, the ability to detach himself or herself from the particular values and special interests of organized groups is quite an important one. For this purpose methodology is the most important part of any research work.

Every research project has to start somewhere. Typically, this starting point is an 'idea'. Sometimes this idea originates because of a particular problem or situation one actually experiences or ideas move from information we hear but may not actually experience. For example, I am not the member of my study group but I became interested about the life and existence of Bengali Buddhists of Siliguri, my own town.

Now the next point is that how to relate idea with theories? Generally there are two types of approach –

- idea → theory → design → data collection → analysis → findings
- idea → design → data collection → theory → analysis → findings

But in my work I have used a model that encompasses both the 'research before theory' and 'theory before research' models. In this proposed approach I have begun with an idea, gathered theoretical information, reconsidered and refined my idea, examined possible design, collected data, re examined theoretical assumptions then analysed and prepared findings. Thus my model would be like-

Idea → theory → design → data collection → theory → analysis → findings

To ensure that everyone is working with the same definition and understanding, we need to conceptualise and operationalise the term. This operationally defining of concepts is important in the concept of minority, scheduled tribe or ethnicity for example. The design stage of research is concerned with what types of information or data will be gathered and through what forms. Multiple data collection technologies designed to measure a single concept or construct is data triangulation. Denzin introduced an additional metaphor, which characterizes the use of multiple data (qualitative and quantitative), methodologies, multiple theories and multiple researchers. It is said that the important feature of triangulation is not the simple combination of different kinds but the attempt to relate them so as to counteract the threats to validity identified in the each. (Young & Schmid 1994)

After collection of data, organization is the main task which is most critical part of research. I have tried to collect data in such a way that they could be systematically organized, coded or indexed properly.

1.6.1 The Sample Frame and Sampling Procedures

The data for this study was collected through a sample survey. To identify the area of this community I have identified four religious centers or Buddha mandirs with whom they are closely related. I have applied the neighborhood cluster method in this case. This is basically choosing of few pockets where a group of people live within easy reach of each other and because of the smallness of its size, relationships among its residents are close and intimate. Knowledgeable informants from the neighborhood are asked for information. The sample size is large enough from the statistical perspective to give the meaningful representation of the population whereby the interpretation of the findings can be expected.

1.6.2 Sources of Data

The research task requires both the act of observation and the act of communicating the analysis these observations to others. The data gathering process can never be described in its totality because these “tales of the field” are themselves part of an ongoing social process. For the collection of empirical data. I have done fieldwork with the help of conventional sociological tools and techniques (viz., observation, use of census schedule, interviews, case studies, group

discussions and content analysis) because there was not sufficient information available about the issue to be studied.

Observation is also defined as “a planned methodical watching that involves constraints to improve accuracy” (Young & Schmid 1994). Observation in this study differs from other methods of data collection specifically in four ways: i) Observation is always direct. ii) Field observation takes place in a natural setting. iii) Observations tend to be less structured and iv) It makes only the qualitative study which aims at discovering subjects’ experiences. Generally in this work uncontrolled, non-participant observation is followed. I kept an eye on the events that took place but did not try to influence the activity in any manner.

As a comprehensive study of a social unit I have taken the case studies of 4 Buddha mandirs of this place as well as the case study of ‘vante’ or religious head among them. Few more notable figures are studied as important cases in detail.

Another important method of data collection is interview including both the structured and unstructured pattern. Questions are mostly predetermined and standardized techniques of recording are used with some amount of flexibility. According to P.V. Young, “interviewing is not a simple way to conversation between an interrogator and informant. Gestures, glances, facial expressions, pause often reveal subtle feelings, it is perhaps the most ubiquitous method of obtaining information from people. It has been and is still being used in all kinds of practical situations” (Young & Schmid 1994). To get speedy results and to explore unanticipated issues and to encourage interaction among participants a focus group interview method is followed. In this all respondents of the group are subjected to the same experience. For example, relevant religious and other literatures are used and utilized as secondary source of information.

Social researchers may choose to use different kinds of material as their data, like documents, quantified reports or direct perceptions. This study is based on both primary and secondary sources of data. Some published and unpublished materials are consulted for understanding the history and culture of Bengali Buddhist as a background.

Data obtained from the field are edited, compiled, categorized and in accordance with objective of the study. Qualitative and simple statistical measures are used as and when necessary. The analyses of qualitative data are done through systematic description and analysis of the collected facts. The data are finally organized into relevant chapters.

1.7 Organization of the Thesis

On the basis of following four basic areas the dissertation has **six chapters** including introductory discussion and culmination of facts and findings---

History, tradition and cultural changes

Every community has its history- its origin, development, migrations, conflicts, adjustments. Every social group develops a certain fund of social values and a set of social attitudes towards these values. These social heritages generally condition the life of the group in its new cultural settings.

Social organization

Mallinowski says that “social organization is the standardized manner in which groups behave”. It is an organized activity through which human beings are bound together by their connection with a definite pattern of environment.

Conflict, accommodation and cultural syncretism

In many culture groups of different patterns, especially in modern urban centers – the young people are exposed to divergent social environments and consequently tend to create hybrid social attitudes and values. They live in two or more cultural worlds without being completely adjusted to any one world.

Social change and the integrity of the group

Social reform consciously brings improvement in the group, chiefly through social legislation, propaganda and education of the group. Social recognition is a process occurring because of adequate social change in the course of social evolution.

Chapter I contains **introduction** which outlines the statement of the problems, objectives and theoretical framework of the study, review of literature, research area and research design, references.

Chapter II is about **historical settings and physical configuration of the Theravadi Buddhists** which covers the origin, identity, history of migration and settlement pattern of the group. First part of this chapter is based on the secondary sources but the information related to present demographic and settlement pattern are based on the primary sources of data collection.

Chapter III is about **general conditions and institutions of the community in a new setting**. This chapter discusses the nature of education, economy of the community, emerging political preferences and religious institutional life of the community.

Chapter IV focuses on **culture of the community in the light of syncretism and distinctiveness**. Eating behaviour, wearing apparel, language, traditions and changes including festivals, everyday rites - rituals, beliefs practices and monastic life are some important areas of concern of this chapter.

Chapter V includes the **boundary maintenance of the community and exchange with 'others'**. Participation of Bengali Buddhist in socio-religious occasions of other communities, crisis and adjustment in case of inter-marriages and the reception of recognition or rejection by others are some major areas of concern of this chapter.

Chapter VI **culminates** some findings and general observations about their conflict and accommodation, change and integrity or in other words their process of maintaining community life.

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Chapter 2

Historical Settings and Physical Configuration of the Community

- History
- Identity
- Migration
- Demography and Settlement Pattern

Chapter 2

Historical Settings and Physical Configuration of the Community

A study of a community encompasses the history, identity, patterns of migration, demographic variations and settlement scores. Communitarian living remains fraught with socio-cultural leanings both imbibed and inherent. In this initial chapter I seek and presuppose a variation of basic pointers of an ethnographic study and try to explore its variegated format for a migrated community.

The local community is in an organic and psychical relationship as well as a physical configuration. In a study of a community we assume that:

- It is possible to identify the history and trends of community life and changes.
- It is possible to study the migratory forces that direct, organize and control community change.
- Generally, the student of social life is concerned with the distribution of the population not only from the standpoint of a demographer, furthermore, the facts relative to the population should be correlated with other social data such as migration, economic opportunities, political and religious affiliation and other characteristics of population groups.

The Theravadi Buddhists residing in Siliguri and some other places of North Bengal are mostly known as a Bengali speaking Buddhist community. With few exceptions like *Talukdar, Chaudhuri* or *Mutsuddi*; (Surname of Bengali Buddhists) most of them use *Barua* (explained in 2.2) as their common surname. And all of them had migrated from Chittagong (presently in Bangladesh) and are genealogically included in *Magh* (explained in 2.2) tribal group.

Apart from these common (obviously generalized) characteristics, the exact historical trajectory of their origin and homeland remains in the domain of obscurity so far. Lack of related written documents, and an elaborate, yet disjointed history of migration

necessitating socialization with varied races, natives of different lands and interactions with several language communities must have contributed to confuse the efforts of unraveling their roots. (Young & Schmid 1994)

Therefore, in the present scenario, I have tried to introspect the following:

2.1 The history of Buddhism and 'Barua Buddhist' of Bengal

While considering the history of Buddhism, a number of queries are posted before us like what is the tradition of Buddhism in the area of their present settlement and what is the history of Buddhism in Chittagong, the place where they migrated from? Can the history of the community be divided into periods? If so, what are the characteristics and influence of each period?

2.2 The identity of 'Magh' tribe and meaning and use of the 'Barua' title.

Similarly, to what extent has the population preserved its social and cultural identity? To what extent has it adopted new traits? What is the effect of a multiplicity of culture traits and intermixing with several groups upon solidarity of the community?

2.3 The period and reasons of migration of the Barua Community domiciled in North Bengal from Chittagong.

What is the extent of minority group migration? What are the reasons for migration? What are the population trends in the community? Is there any back to the land movements?

2.4 Demography and Settlement Pattern in Siliguri

Along what focal points do newcomers settle in Siliguri: areas of urban facilities, presence of relatives or members of the same community, existence of monasteries etc.? What influences have the new comers exerted on these points? What influence have these points exerted on new comers? Where do the different income groups live? What contacts are maintained among them?

The above mentioned issues can be dealt with one after the other.

2.1 Tracking the Historical Trajectory of Buddhism and Barua Buddhist of Bengal

The main focus of this section is to identify the roots of Barua Buddhists who have migrated from Chittagong district of Bangladesh and at present settled in Siliguri town but history has its own width and depth and geographical boundary is an ever changing phenomenon. Therefore, if we want to see the life and culture of Barua Buddhist people of Siliguri town, we have to start from its origin and thus, here we will try to draw a comprehensive background of our study by including the history of Buddhist settlements in Chittagong.

When Goutam Buddha started preaching his philosophy in the 6th century B.C, his centre was the kingdom of Magadha or southern Bihar. Thereafter, Buddhism remained established as an influential religion and gained popularity in various parts of India for several centuries. Among them the historical and geographical significance of Chittagong's Buddhist settlements merits a special mention.

From historical sources, it can be gathered that Northeast Bangladesh was under the control of Arakanese from 10th Century AD. The descriptions in the Chittagong District Gazetteer, (1908) state that in AD 953, an Arakanese King, Sulting Chandra conquered Chittagong and had inscribed at a site "Tsit-Ta-Gong" which means "To make war is improper". The name Chittagong or Chattagram has been derived from these words. Several others feel that an increase in the number of Buddhist *Chaityas* (*Chaitya* refers to a shrine or prayer hall. The term is most common in Buddhism) has given the place its name *Chaityagram* or *Chattagram*.

In the 11th Century AD (AD 1010 - AD 1044or AD 1044- AD 1077), Pangaraj Anoharta of Brahmadesh or Anorath or Aniruddha conquered a large expanse of territory including Arakan and Chittagong. (O'Malley 1908) The contribution of Anoharta in the reformation of Buddhism is worthy of being mentioned. It is around this time that the preaching and spread of Theravadi Buddhism began in Chittagong. Anoharta's son, Kanjitha's reign is considered the Golden Age of Pali literature.

The religion that once dominated the entire Indian subcontinent, Buddhism, started disappearing from various parts of the country with the passage of time. Bengal too was not spared of this fate. However, Muslim Rule did not begin in Chittagong till AD 1340ⁱ and from the time of Sultan Ghiyasuddin Azam, the ties between Muslim rulers and Arakanese kings were strengthenedⁱⁱ. This period marked the increase in settlements of Chittagong Muslims in Arakan. Arakanese kings were tolerant of them as well. Several important positions such as *Wazir* ('Minister' in Arabic language) were held by Muslims in Arakan-controlled Chittagong.

The historical records of the period of 15th Century AD reveals that Chittagong was under the control of Bengal, Tripura and Arakan for multiple times. Bound between the 'Magh' Kingdom of Arakan and Bengal in the northwest, the hill state of Chittagong has had to combat attacks from them both, time and again. At times, the state of Chittagong and its northeast territory was controlled by Bengal while the south i. e. Burma by the Arakanese. When the control of Bengal over Chittagong weakened, clashes with the neighbouring state of Tripura would arise.

According to Colonel Wilford, the combination of three cities or *pur* has lent Tripura its name, Chittagong being the foremost of them. Therefore, it can be deduced that Chittagong was not under the control of any one king or dynasty for a prolonged period initially. However, prior to being subjected to Mughal rule in AD 1665, Chittagong was mostly controlled by the Arakanese. In fact, the area of Chittagong to the south of River Shankha, was under the Arakanese kings till AD 1756. Over time, the British became undefeatable in India. In AD 1760, the East India Company crowned Mir Qasim as the *Nawab* of Bengal. In order to expand their territory, the British conquered Chittagong and brought it under the rule of Bengal. (Ray 1994)

Baruas of Siliguri have a connection with Arakan and Burma as well. Therefore, it is important to know that in AD 1795, Burmese king Bodawpaya (AD 1782-1819) conquered the Arakan. A majority of the population lived in a panicked state and several of them migrated to Chittagong. A few Arakanese revolted against Burmese occupation. Their

feeble leadership skills caused them to flee from the Burmese forces and take asylum in British-controlled Chittagong. Therefore, in AD 1798, several Buddhist clans from the Arakan arrived in Chittagong. This issue led to several clashes between Burma and the British that culminated into the Anglo-Burmese War of 1824. Prior to the war, numerous Arakanese moved to Chittagong. The Burmese were defeated in the war and the policy of tolerance among the British for different religions, led to the settlement of people belonging to varying linguistic and religious groups. (Ray 1946)

2.2 The Identity of 'Magh' Tribe and Meaning and Use of the 'Barua' Title.

In present times, the primary identity that the North Bengal Theravadi Buddhists introduce themselves by is Bengali Buddhists or Barua Buddhists. However, the use of 'Barua' as a title or surname can be found among many communities in India. Apart from Assam and Tripura, the Santhals, Munda and Chakma tribes use 'Barua' as their clan name. Their linguistic, religious, cultural, historical and racial identities are diverse. Therefore, the 'Barua' surname cannot be considered representing the complete identity of any group.

The search for a clearer beginning has led to the conclusion that these Bengali-speaking Baruas are descended from the 'Magh' community. Therefore, it is possible to untangle their complex identity through the deconstruction of the two words- 'Magh' and 'Barua'.

From the ancient history of Arakan, Rajowang, we have come to know that towards the middle of second century AD (AD 146), a vassal of Magadh's Chandra Surya Kingdom established a territory in Arakan and Chittagong. With his subjects and soldiers, he established his capital in Dhanyabati. These settlers were integral to the preaching of Buddhism and its culture in Chittagong and Arakan. Those arriving from *Magadh* (Ancient Indian kingdom in Southern Bihar) as well as locals, who embraced Buddhism, came to be known as 'Mag' or 'Magh' (Chaudhuri 1982).

Descriptions of European writers like Risley (1891), Hunter and O'Malley (O'Malley 1908) and present day discussions of Sukomal Chaudhuri (Chaudhuri 1982), Ram Chandra Barua (Barua 2010) reveal that, 'Magh' and 'Buddhism' are synonymously treated in Chittagong.

In present day, non-Buddhists of Chittagong consider the word 'Magh' and Buddhists to be identical in the usual settings. However, it is unanimously agreed upon by all that those belonging to the 'Magh' community are divided into several groups. The divisions are:

- *Mamragri/Rajbangshi/Barua Magh*- The Raja from Magadh and his followers married local Arakanese women which begat the *Mamragri* community. In later years, the marital bonding with Chittagong's Bengali women led to the rise of the mixed race tribes.
- *Jumiya Magh*- The Marma or Arakanese living in the south of the hills of Chittagong were *Jhum* (Step and/or Shifting cultivation) cultivators. After Chittagong was brought under the purview of Muslim rule, many Arakanese left Chittagong. Despite their departure, several Arakanese Buddhists continued living in the hilly tracts of Chittagong. They continued to live there particularly after the Burmese conquest of Arakan.
- *Royang/Rakhine Magh*- After Arakan was conquered by Burma in AD 1785, The *Rakhine Maghs* refused to recognize Burmese authority and declared rebellion against them. However, they were unsuccessful and to elude capture at the hands of the Burmese, sought asylum in British-controlled Chittagong and Patuakhali.

The latter two communities speak the Arakanese language and are influenced by Burmese and Arakanese culture. However, the Rajbangshi or Barua Maghwas influenced by Bengali culture and language. (Chaudhuri 1982)

In this context, it is worth mentioning that a section of the caste conscious Barua community of Bangladesh and the Baruas educated and entrenched in North Bengal believe that the Barua Buddhists and Arakan Buddhists have descended differently and are two completely separate communities. Arakanese Buddhists call themselves Rakhincha or Marma as the erstwhile name of Arakan is 'Rakhine'. Barua Maghs hail from Magadh,

hence form the 'Magh' Community. They are hailed by the Arakanese Buddhists as *Mamragri* (those superior to Marma) or Chief *Kshatriyas* (administrators).

In reality, it has been observed that when many communities assemble and live together in a region, then they are addressed by two names- one that they use as their own identity and another that is used by other communities to identify them. The later name is often used in a derogatory or complimentary sense. This is how all Buddhists living in Chittagong came to be identified by the British and non-Buddhists as 'Magh'. Arthur Phayre, Commissioner of Arakan had concurred with this argument and had written that '...the name Magh or Mag applied to the Arakanese given to them by the people of Bengal. They do not know the term.' (Barua 1986)

Sukomol Chaudhuri (Chaudhuri 1982) has mentioned a difference between Burma-controlled Arakan and Arakanese and the period before it. According to him, even though it cannot be said that Arakanese Buddhists and Barua Buddhists are completely different groups, Barua Buddhists essentially are related to ancient Arakanese whose racial identity is different from present day Arakanese. It would be a great mistake on our part if we mix up Arakanese of the present (now in Burma) generation with those of the past. They had a distinctive physiognomy, which was not Mongolian. Most of the Baruas belong to this old Arakanese group. For this reason, Arakanese of the present day call these Baruas as *Maramma-gri*, meaning superior to *Maramma* and show their respect as they were descendants of the original Arakanese Royal Buddhist family which came from Bihar (Magadh).

We will now take a look at the texts that attest the genesis of the Barua surname and its use. According to the Bengali Ethnographic Glossary, 'Baruas are the descendants of a powerful dynasty of Buddhist Kings. In 1891, the Census Superintendent Mr. Hunter also conformed to the above facts' (Risley 1891). As per the late scholar Benimadhab Barua, when Ikhtiyaruddin Bakhtiyar Khilji attacked and conquered Magadh in 12th Century AD, the *Vrijji* or *Vajji* (A royal race/clan) prince fled to Chittagong with seven hundred residents of *Vajji* to save themselves and hide from Ikhtiyaruddin Bakhtiyar Khilji. They are regarded as forefathers of the Barua

community. Prior to Mughal annexation, the Baruas were the supreme vassals of Chittagong (Barua 1974).

Present day research has revealed that the use of Barua as a surname is a recent phenomenon. According to Sukomol Chaudhuri, 'Previously the title Barua was not used by the community. It is a recent adoption among them, the title 'Barua' means 'Army Chief'. The word was formed of Arakanese words *Bo* (meaning Army Chief) and *Yoya* (meaning locality, village). As the Bengali people cannot properly pronounce the Burmese or Arakanese words, they say 'Barua' instead of *Boyoya*. Literally, Barua means the place where an army chief resides. Later on, the people who lived in such locality or village also gradually came to be known as Barua (Chaudhuri 1982).

Joydutta Barua (Barua 2007) in a publication of the A I F B B provides a description of Maghs and states that even much before the use of the names Rajbanshi and Barua, people of this community were using different names. For example, among the forefathers of renowned Dr. Arabinda Barua (1907-1982) was one Phule Tangya. In this family following names are found in the genealogy for last 250 years or so:

- Phul Tangya
- Pushka Chand
- Nayan Chand Talukdar
- Kirti Chand (Jamadar)
- Joylaal Munshi (Barua)
- Gagan Chandra Barua
- Dr. Arabinda Barua

This family adopted surname Barua sometimes in the first half of the 19th Century.

He also mentioned about the use of a name 'Mang' or 'Meng' that was widely prevalent in Chittagong among the ancestors of Buddhist communities now using the name Barua. Appellation 'Mang' was generally used to signify royal or aristocratic descent. They were mostly Arakanese in origin. By the end of the 17th Century, these people dropped name

'Mang' or 'Meng' and did not prefer to use any appellation. They started asserting themselves as Rajbanshis. (Barua 2007)

Even in later years, Baruas were known as Maghs for a long time. By going back four to five generations from the present one, names like Mamapru Barua, Chailapru Barua, Hoyapru Barua, Chhadpru Barua and similar others can be found.

According to Sukomol Chaudhuri, (Chaudhuri 1982) most probably they started to use the title Barua from the last quarter of the 18th Century perhaps in order to conceal their identity that they are not Arakanese but Bengalis, otherwise they would be handed over to King Bodopaya of Burma who destroyed the Kingdom of Arakan in 1785 and reportedly threatened the British Government of Bengal to hand over to him all the Arakanese settled in Bengal.

From the above discussion, we can come to the conclusion that:

i) The Arakanese Buddhists are not Maghs- Despite there being theoretical and empirical evidence of this argument, in the present context, this inference cannot be accepted. There are several annals especially those by non-Buddhists, which state that in Chittagong, Magh and Buddhists are synonymous. The Arakan is known as *Magh Rajya* (Magh State) to other areas.ⁱⁱⁱ However, it has been accepted that every 'Magh' does not bear the same characteristics.

ii) The history of the Magh Barua Community that we have discussed is linked to the event of migration from Magadh.^{iv} They are known to other communities as Mamragri or Rajbangshian and there is no discrepancy in this regard.

iii) The conjecture that the Arakanese Buddhists and Barua Buddhists are completely different sects and there has been no intermingling between the two is unrealistic. In this context, Herbert Risley (Risley 1891), Hunter and in the recent past, Sukomol Chaudhuri (Chaudhuri 1982), and Natun Chandra Barua (Barua, 1986) can be cited and it can be said that a prolonged history of migration along with a change in ruling powers, Chittagong's changed circumstances, the fight for capturing border lands of

Arakan and Burma, the rise of Theravada Buddhism, colonization and Partition etc. have caused much change in the identity of Chittagong's Buddhist community. In a prolonged phase of migration this community has crossed many borders and inter-coursed with many varied languages, races, religion and cultures. Thus myriad layers of relationship got unfurled through spontaneous intermingling.

Shri Suniti Bhusan Qanungo has written (Qanungo, 1988) that the Baruas are acknowledged as a mixed race. They have hilly as well as Portuguese blood in them. In the truest sense, as the ties between Chittagong and Bengal strengthened, the influence of Burma and Arakan diminished and in turn, the Baruas came closer to Bengal. It has been learnt from autobiographical writings that several Baruas of Chittagong stayed in Burma to earn a living. However, the bombings in Rangoon and its surroundings during the Second World War made travel and living unsafe. Everyone promptly left after becoming disenchanted by the indomitable and tough lifestyle of Arakan-Burma. They were attracted to the serene, peace-loving life of Bengalis.

It is worth mentioning in this context that in some cases, intermingling and in the case of the others to protect their individuality, the Barua community of North Bengal has kept alive a streak of their changing identity. It has been illustrated as:

Mamragri (Rajbangshi Magh)->Magh Barua->Bengali Barua Buddhist-> Bengali Buddhist

Therefore, to escape the Burmese aggression towards the latter half of the 18th Century AD (AD 1785 onwards), they chose to conceal their 'Magh' identity and instead uphold their 'Bengali' identity. This continues to be relevant in present times as well for the word started denoting Arakanese pirates. This made the Baruas slightly uncomfortable. However, this community is enlisted as Scheduled Tribe in West Bengal and mentioned 'Magh' as their community name in the ST certificate. To enjoy the benefits of reservation, they refer to themselves as 'Barua Buddhists' in their day-to-day lives, in case of other matters, they even support using the term 'Bengali Buddhists' to be more practical. Some families do not use Barua as a surname; use *Chaudhuri*, *Talukdar* and *Mutsuddi* titles as surnames to bring them under mainstream ambit.^v

2.3 The Period and Reasons of Migration of the Barua Community Domiciled in North Bengal from Chittagong.

The editor's report presented at the North Bengal Buddhist Convention of 1990 stated that the displaced Bengali speaking Baruas had started abandoning their native land Chittagong from 1894 onwards, as many of them were affected by a terrible cyclone that year. The cyclone is known as *Maghi Toofan*.

From the accounts of the elderly, it is known that after the expansion of the British Empire, the Baruas started moving from Chittagong to the different tea estates of North Bengal with the *sahibs* (British officers) as their cooks. Their expertise in the culinary arts brought them fame. Gradually they started looking after their cars and became chauffeurs in some instances. The work of car repairing or mechanics was handed down the generations, which is why quite a few Baruas are involved in the occupation of car repairing and have their own workshops in North Bengal.

Apart from this, it has come to light that the British Railway Headquarters was situated in Chittagong. Hence recruitment in the railways from the area was high. From there on, the employees were posted in different areas. Many people from Chittagong took up jobs in the railways and settled in different parts of India.

During the British Rule, a special paltoon was created in the army called *Magh Paltan*.^{vi} Later on, many soldiers from the *Magh Paltan* were deployed in the police division, as they were rendered redundant. In Siliguri as well, a few families can be found who moved to the area for their jobs in defense services.

Several Chittagong Barua families resided in Burma for work as well. However, during the Second World War, Burma was under duress which is why they sought opportunities to migrate to Assam, Tripura and North Bengal. Therefore, the Baruas migrated primarily to earn a living in their quest for security during the Second World War, Partition of Bengal and the Bangladesh Liberation War.

At present, the Barua community is classified as a Scheduled Tribe in West Bengal and hence can avail the benefits of reservation. They are not entitled to these benefits in Bangladesh and they are not treated as a Scheduled Tribe in Tripura either. This issue too plays a pivotal role in their reason to live in West Bengal. Prior to settling in Siliguri, they lived in Assam, Shillong and the tea gardens of Dooars. Quite a few of the families had migrated from Kolkata while others had moved from Bangladesh to settle in Siliguri. Several senior citizens were born in Bangladesh and Burma. However, most of the families maintain ties with and travel to Bangladesh. Table: 2.3A shows the distribution below -

Table: 2.3A - Distribution of the Families (sample) according to their Time of Migration and Connection with Bangladesh (Chittagong)

Time of Migration	Frequency of Interaction					
	Regular	Often	Sometimes	Over Phone	Never	Total
Before 1945		3	3	2	8	16 (27%)
1945-1960		7	5	3	8	23 (38%)
1961-1980	2	5		2	5	14 (23%)
After 1980	2			2		4 (7%)
Do Not Know				1	2	3 (5%)
Total	4 (7%)	15 (25%)	8 (14%)	10 (16%)	23 (38%)	60 (100%)

Table Analysis - Table: 2.3A shows us that the number of families migrated from Bangladesh (Chittagong) before independence and partition is sixteen (27%). Actually at that period, Chittagong was a part of British India and most of these families (generally male member came earlier) came to this place to serve their British masters as a cook or driver and settled in tea gardens. Few of them were employee of Rail and Police department. Highest number of families (23 i.e. 38%) migrated during the partition of India and Pakistan. At this time, some families were in Burma for economic reasons and engaged

in different jobs. But at the time of Second World War, the whole situation became much disturbed and due to that turmoil, they left Burma and moved towards Assam or North Bengal.

Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 was another sensitive period where minorities (Barua Buddhists) felt insecure and preferred to migrate to India and settle among their Bengali Hindu neighbours (23%). Only four families came recently from Bangladesh and three families do not know the time when their forefathers came to India (7% and 5%).

Now if we look at the frequency of their interaction with Chittagong in terms of visit to relatives' place and regular conversation, then only four (7%) families visited Bangladesh almost every year without any special reason. Fifteen (25%) families go occasionally to attend some family programmes. Sometimes visit to Chattagram is reported by eight (15%) families. This information shows that 46% of the same have physical connection between countries whereas 16% of them maintain connection over phone only and 38% reported that they have no communication with Bangladesh.

Now if we compare and try to find out the correlation between the time of migration and frequency of interaction then we can see - The four families sharing deep ties with Bangladesh migrated comparatively later (after 1970). Of the sixteen families that migrated before 1945, eight of them (50%) do not have any link with Bangladesh while two families communicate only over the phone. The remaining six families communicate infrequently. The three families that were unable to comment on their history of migration quite obviously do not maintain ties with Bangladesh.

Of the twenty three families that do not have any ties with Bangladesh, eight migrated prior to 1945, eight migrated post partition, between 1947 and 1955, five moved at the time of Bangladesh Liberation War and two were unable to account for their time of migration.

Data revealed that out of these sixty families, the number of first generation migrated families is 44%, meaning that the elderly members of these families were born in Chittagong or Burma (10% or five heads of the families were born in Burma). After living

there for some time, they moved to this region. On the other hand, the number of second generation migrated families is 56%, meaning every member of these families was born in India (mainly in Assam and West Bengal). Their previous generation migrated from Chittagong for various reasons.

Moreover, from this survey, it can also be understood that of the sixty families surveyed, 22% had chosen Assam as their first place of residence. 64% settled in different parts of North Bengal and afterwards moved to Siliguri from the tea estates of Alipurduar, Birpara, Bagrakot, Kalchini, Nagrakata, Damdim and elsewhere. 14% chose Siliguri as their place of settlement. The presence of friends and family is a significant factor for minority communities to consider while choosing a place of settlement.

2.4 Demography and Settlement Pattern in Siliguri

From the essay entitled 'West Bengal's Bengali Buddhists: A Survey' (Barua 2007) we come to know that the highest number of Buddhist settlements in Bengal is in the district of Darjeeling (72% of the entire Buddhist population in the state). However, most of these settlers are Nepali or Tibetan Buddhists. The number of Bengali Buddhists in Darjeeling Town was only 32 at that time. Quite a few Bengali Buddhists reside now in the town of Siliguri in the district of Darjeeling, and in the areas of Domhani, Goyerkata, Bagrakot, Nagrakata, Kalchini, Binnaguri, Odlabari, Damdim, Falakata, Jaigaon, Moynaguri and Malbazaar. Malbazaar, Binnaguri and Moynaguri have a comparatively higher number of Buddhist settlements. A few Bengali Buddhists reside in the district of Cooch Behar.

According to the author (Barua, 2007), the population of Bengali Buddhists in Bengal number 11,395 (R=f). Apart from them, a number of Buddhists reside in all the corners of West Bengal. They number around 3,000. Combining the two, the Bengali Buddhist populace in West Bengal numbers around 14,315, which is around 0.02% of the total population of West Bengal. (The Census reports do not separately mention the headcount of Bengali Buddhists hence their exact number is unknown).

The handful of Bengali Buddhists has mingled with the majority Hindu populace in such a way that they cannot be distinguished from the later. Their distinctive characteristics can be noted only in those Buddhist hamlets where they reside as a community. Even though there are no specific neighborhoods demarcated as Bengali Buddhist settlements in Siliguri town, it can be said in general that while choosing an area to settle in they prefer to stay nearby *Buddhamandir* (Buddhist Temple) and are actively engaged with the activities related to the Buddhamandir.

An organized religion and its monks, whose livelihood solely depends on the alms of benefactors, are the reasons why Buddhists consider donating to the Buddhist temples an imperative duty. This is why every Buddhist temple bears a list of its earning devotees. From the list of donors obtained from the four Buddhist temples in the town of Siliguri (Vidarshan Dhyana Ashram, Haiderpara, Antorjatik Bouddho Shikkha Ebong Gobeshona Kendra /International Buddhist Education and Research Centre, GurungBasti, Siliguri Salugara Humanistic Buddhist Mission and Buddha Bharati, Mahakalpalli), we can estimate that there are 200 Bengali Buddhist families that live in the town. Several families which live nearby do not donate to the Buddhist temples regularly although they participate in festivities and ceremonies. Such families number 100 more and the total population of Bengali Buddhists living in Siliguri Town rounds off to 1200 to 1500. As a part of sample selection, we have collected data from approximately 60 (20%) families. Personal interactions were used for collecting further facts in an attempt to substantiate the study and make it robust and significant.

From the available data, it can also be said on the whole that Buddhist settlements in Siliguri prior to 1949 were sparse. From the article 'Uttarbanga Bouddho Sanghashramer 50 Bochorer Itikotha' (Barua 2006) we find that towards the end of the month of December in 1949, the revered monk Atulsen had arrived in Siliguri from Darjeeling in search of Barua Buddhists living in Dooars. The revered Bhante was unaware that at that time, a handful of Barua families lived in Siliguri.

From 1950 onwards, the numbers of Bengali Buddhists increased. Even though in the present day, the Barua Buddhist families of Siliguri are scattered, a majority of them can be found in

Haiderpara. The Bidarshan Dhyana Ashram, Haiderpara located in the neighbourhood is one of the most revered Buddhist temples in the town of Siliguri. The road adjacent to the temple is known as 'Buddha Mandir Road' and quite a few Barua Buddhists live here. Apart from Haiderpara, localities such as Ashrampara, Milanpalli, Bharat Nagar, Mahanandapara, Deshbandhu Para and Sevoke Road etc. are home to dwellings of numerous Bengali Buddhists.

In this context, it is worth mentioning that, the Barua families of North Bengal have built settlements after migration which is why they are mostly urban dwellers and do not earn a living through farming. Commonality apart, these families are, at times, diversified in social and political leanings. Unlike the Baruas of Bangladesh the communitarian control is not as pronounced as their numbers are few, dwellings are scattered and there is a practice of religious tolerance and prevalence of urban culture among them. Yet their religious moorings maintain a communitarian cringe, bordered on religious minority status remaining within the predominant Hindu community.

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Chapter 3

General Conditions and Institutions of the Community in a New Setting

- Religious Institutions: Theravadi Buddhist Monasteries (Buddhist Temple) of Siliguri Town
- Nature of Education in Community Life
- Economy of the Community
- Polity and Policy of the Community
- Social Welfare

Chapter 3

General Conditions and Institutions of the Community in a New Setting

Social institutions of a community not only include such formal and established social structures as schools, religious centers, business houses and settlements, but also such phenomena as political ideas, newsletters, recreation centers and social welfare agencies. The use, development, integration and coordination of all these institutions depend largely on the consciousness of common objectives, on mutual confidence and on the formulation of a philosophy of social organization and social welfare. (Young and Schmid 1994) Therefore, in this chapter we will discuss on:

3.1 Religious Institutions: Theravadi Buddhist Monasteries (Buddhist Temple) of the Community

While considering the importance of monasteries in the social and religious life of Theravadi Buddhists, a number of queries are posited before us like what was the process of growth and development of the monasteries? To what extent is the monastery a structured form of social control? To what extent is the monastery an instrument in power politics? What changes has the monastery undergone? What forms of social service and mutual aid has the monastery developed?

3.2 Nature of Education in Community Life

Regarding education questions would be what is the basic approach to education? Do they have any educational centre of their own (managed and/or operated by 'Barua Buddhists')? Is there any special feature or issue of their education? What is the role and educational status of the Monks of the town? Is there any new trend or change of choice in regard to education among young generation?

3.3 Economic Participation of the Community

Regarding economy we would ask what is the economic base of the group? What are the major occupational pursuits? How stable are they? What factors stimulate economic development?

How is economic condition related to education and gender factors? How extensive is dependency?

3.4 Polity and Policy of the Community

About political discourse, what is the voting behaviour in the area? Is there any 'political boss' in the area? How far they are politically influenced and what are the approaches of different political parties to them? What is the extent of involvement of lay people and monasteries in the politics? Is there any new trend developing in their perspective?

Who has taken up the cause of the minorities? How intense was the struggle for ST status?

3.5 Social Welfare

About duties to the society, what are the objectives and philosophies of social work? What are the types of social activities carried on by the different organizations and what specialized services are available? What are the sources of financial support and the level of involvement of group members?

3.1 Religious Institutions: Theravadi Buddhist Monasteries (Buddhist Temples) of Siliguri Town

A monastery in its wider term is not only a place of worship for the Buddhist but a workplace of monastics. A monastery complex typically comprises a number of activities and infrastructure which includes a dormitory, cloister, refectory, library and infirmary. The monastic order and its structural-functional set-up may also include a wide range of self-sufficiency and service to the community. This may include a hospice, a school and a range of agricultural and manufacturing units. From this point of view Theravadi religious centres of Siliguri do not satisfy the term and most of the Baruas refer the institution as *Buddha Mandir* (Buddhist Temple). But here genially one senior and two or three junior monks stay in the place by maintaining the monastic order and they perform all the major festivals and religious practices. They have their own kitchen also. Apart from the residence of monks the major portion of the building is used to place Buddha statue and used as a place of worship. Therefore, religious institutions of this area are

mentioned in the text as Buddha Mandir. Therefore, we will use these two terms interchangeably as per the demand of the explanation. Sometimes, it is also known as Bouddha Vihar.

Since the monastery or Buddhist temple is a primary group organization, it will be considered in relation to the study of beliefs and practices and rites and rituals of the community in chapter 4. Here we will emphasize on structural-functional part of all the Theravadi religious centres of Siliguri town, the major role played by the monks in the society and a profile of monastic life. In order to make an attempt to find out the history of North Bengal Buddha temples, it is observed that around sixty years of activities is associated with the ideation, fund collection, construction and operations. In the initial periods of the 20th Century the migration of Theravadi Buddhist of Chittagong got initiated and they resettled themselves in various parts of North Bengal especially in Siliguri. During last week of December of the year 1949 Atul Sen *Bhikshu* (Monk) from Darjeeling began exploring to bring into contact the various Baruas and subsequently arrived at Siliguri. At that time, only Bouddha Bihar was in Gandhamadan in entire North Bengal and no evidence of prior existence of Buddhists monk was found during that period. It is known from Barun Bikash Barua, (Barua 2006) that Respected Vante Atul Sen Bhikshu and Mankishore Barua the workers of Betaguri Tea Garden, both planned and agreed to build a Buddha temple in North Bengal region, specifically in Siliguri.

In order to make the dream true for their community, they started campaigning about the idea of constructing a Bouddha temple with Barua communities, located in the tea gardens at Damdim, Malbazar, Meteli, Nagrakata, Banarhat, Binnaguri, Birpara, Hasimara, Kalchini, Alipurduar, Coochbehar, Jalpaiguri, Siliguri and various tea estates of Dooars. All the Baruas responded with alacrity to this holy idea and came forward with commitment to extend their help in this regard, depending on their personal capacity.

As a matter of fact, on the 7th of January 1950 in Surendra Barua's house in Bhagatpur tea estate of Nagrakata, a meeting was arranged with the Barua community living in Dooars, which perhaps, had been the first congregation with an attempt to unite all the Baruas in North Bengal. Respected Atul Sen Bhikshu served as the Chariman of the meeting. After

prolonged discussion and deliberation, it was decided to form a forum called 'Dooras Boudhya Samiti' with initial members of twenty - five Baruas. During the same day it was agreed and decided unanimously that a Buddha temple would be built in Malbazar, which was inaugurated later in 1952 with the help of entire Barua community, by sincere support and initiative of the vante.

Gradually 4 (four) Theravadi Bouddha Bihar or Barua temples came into existence in Siliguri and interesting fact behind the establishment of these temples is that the help and contribution of other communities, specially Nepali (Mahayani) Buddhist community was quite substantial. From the account of information collected so far it has been observed that this area was populated by the Nepali Buddhists. This community had handful plots of land and property in the region. With urbanization in full spate, they were losing control over their landholdings. As a consequence, they had donated some portion of their land to construct the Buddhamandir for a lump sum amount of money, much lower than the market value. This deal got secured with a rider that the land in question can only be used for the construction of a Buddha Mandir or else it would be handed back to the owner who voluntarily donated the piece of land. To cite a similar example, we showcase the ownership of land related to the Buddha Research Center in Gurung Basti which was donated by one Indra Sekhar Lama. As of now, this Lama family is currently running a guest house, citing a breach of contract of not operating the Buddhamandir, which also had an orphanage and Library to boast of. This has been under litigation due to the lack of organizing capability, limited administrative power and back up resources of the Baruas (Barua 2006).

3.1.1 Buddhabharati, Mahananda Para (1963)

As of now four Buddhist temples are there in Siliguri at various locations and the oldest of this is Budhhabharati, which was constructed in the year 1963. Before Budhhabharti was constructed and became operational, the Buddhists of Siliguri used to visit North Bengal Buddha temple at Malbazar (in Jalpaiguri district) in order to perform their various rituals and prayers. Apart from Baruas and Buddhists, a set of people from the entire region, used to visit it during *Baishakhi Purnima* or *Buddha Purnima* (first full moon day of Baisakh month which is

the birthday of Lord Buddha) with individual arrangement and initiative to perform various rituals. Later in Ashrampara the Baruas arranged to have a land or small field to organise the annual observance of Baishakhi Purnima. It is a known fact, that Sri Jamini Ranjan Roy, a sincere devotee of Buddhism was well connected with Sri Bnashi Pal, the then chairman of Siliguri Municipality. They used to share a very friendly relation between them. Based on this friendship, Jaminiranjan convinced Bnashi Pal and made arrangement to get donation of *tenkatha* (1 katha =1.65 decimal in West Bengal) of land belonging to Bnashi Pal in order to construct the Boudhha Temple and a school. In the year 1963, on the auspicious day of Buddha Purnima, respected Dharmadhar Mahasthabir performed the foundation stone laying ceremony on the same land donated by Bnashi pal. Initially, the administration was being steered by Gyanananda Bhikkhu who was assigned with authority by Dharmadhar Mahasthabir. Later he was replaced by Rastrapal Vikshu. In 1966 the full body executive committee was formed and got officially registered.

As per the available information with respect to Siliguri Budhhabharati it can be derived that respected Rastrapal Vante was the cardinal man behind its function and operation. In the year 1964 he established the Buddhabharati School and joined the office as the Head Master. He also established the Budhhabharati Library. Under his patronage the statue of Budhha received from Thailand was installed in Buddhabharati, Siliguri. During his tenure, Budhhabharati flourished and established its respectful stature in the people's mind by setting up a school, named *Palitol* (School of Pali) which was attended by Buddhists of all sects and the principal of this Pali school was Debapriya Barua. In the year 1970 the 'Budhhabharati Junior High School' was established through the initiative of Budhhabharati Temple Trust which was shifted to Haidar Para in the year 1982 and converted to government school with higher secondary education facilities.

As it is mentioned earlier, at the time of establishment of Barua Buddhist temple, local Nepali Buddhists (Mahayani) people helped in many ways. Shri Kripa Lama had personally spent money to build a house where Monks could stay for a short stint to make his contribution to the greater cause of Buddhabharati. During Atish Dipankar's millennium Birthday celebration in

the year 1981, Dalai Lama was invited by respected Praggyananda Bhikshu while he was in charge of the Budhabharati Office administration (*Biharadhhaksha*). At present the office administration is headed by Arunjyoti Vante who is an active and young monk and currently pursuing research at Delhi University. Various festivals like *Kathin Chivar Daan* (Major Buddhist festival which comes at the end of the three-month rainy season retreat for Theravadi Buddhist. It is a time of giving, especially new robes for the monks) etc. are meticulously organised and arranged by Budhabharati which are generally attended by various Buddhists living nearby. A handful of eighty to eighty-two families are affiliated directly with this temple and their monthly donation is the prime financial resource for running the day to day activity of the temple trust.

3.1.2 Bidarshan Dhyan Ashram, Haider Para (1981)

In the year 1979, respected Gyanjyoti Mahasthabir had assumed the office as head of Budhabharati upon his arrival in Siliguri. In social circle, Gyanjyoti Mahasthabir came in contact with Ghanshyam Rai, who was interested in teachings of Buddhism. During their discussion on various theological topics, one day Gyanjyoti Mahasthabir hinted at the need of 'Bidarshan Dhyan Ashram' and the importance of Buddhist meditation activities. Ghanshyam Rai expressed his interest in the idea mooted by Gyanjyoti Mahasthabir in this regard. Following Gyanjyoti's thought and wishes, Ghanshyam took initiative to donate his ten katha land in Haider Para for the Buddhist ashram. Also Kripa Lamaji, who was the owner of the adjacent land of Ghanshyam, donated another ten katha land to *Vante* (senior monk) apart from his donation in Budhabharati to build a guest house for short term stay of monks.

Gyanjyoti Mahasthabir shifted his residence to Bidarshan Dhyan Ashram in the year 1981 after his earlier stint in Budhabharati during 1979-1980. From old archives, we come to know that the then Secretary Debapriya Barua has played a pivotal role in reconstructing the Bidarshan Dhyan Ashram, adding second floor accommodating Meditation Room, Prayer Room, Library, Free Medical Check-Up Room, Kitchen, Guest House etc. In the year 1981 with the help of Respected Karuna Shashtri Vante of Dibrugar in Assam, a Buddha statue was installed in Bidarshan Dhyan Ashram. Gyanjyoti Mahasthabir was a cult figure amongst North Bengal Buddhist monks and a memorial statue in Bidarshan Dhyan Ashram has been erected in

eneration of his contribution to the community. Debapriya Barua, the President of 'Dhyan Ashram' has instituted a process of meditation for one hour three days per week and he presides over the event himself. Gyanjyoti Vante was instrumental in spreading Buddhism and its associated moral practice by leveraging the power of poetry, song, play etc. After his demise in 2010, respected Amitananda Mahathero has been assigned to act as the head of the Bidarshan Dhyan Ashram and is spearheading the temple's day to day function and administration.

3.1.3 International Buddhist Education and Research Centre and Bouddha Society, Gurung Basti (1983)

Upon his arrival in Siliguri in the year 1981 respected monk Pragyananda had taken over the charge of Buddhabharati as an operational head. During the same time, Dalai Lama attended the Atish Dipankar Millenium Birth Celebrations and inaugurated the 'International Buddha Education and Research centre' for which Monk Pragyananda played a pivotal role for setting it up. In a similar way, respected vante was also setting up the 'Buddha Samaj Bihar'. Interestingly, these two organizations were operating in the same building but under different executive committees. First executive committee comprised President Haren Ghosh, Executive President Dr Kailashnath Ojha (a distinguished educationist), Vice president Mr. Indra Shekhar Lama, Mrs. Mahananda Roy, General secretary Pragyananda Mahathero along with members Chittaranjan Barua, Dilip Barua, Mrs. Lakshmi Barua, Mahendra Das, Prabhas Sikdar, along with invitee- member Dr Raghunath Ghosh from North Bengal University and Debendra Shukla from Kolkata as resource persons. It is implied from the above attendees that there were a mix of various people not only representing the Buddhists, but from other communities as well including Mahayani and Theravadi believers. This prestigious research organisation was also founded on the land which was donated by a Mahayani family and the organisation is comprised of Theravadi and Mahayani Boudhyas as members. An orphanage was also established in the name of Dr B.R. Ambedkar, where a number of orphan children are being sheltered with schooling facility. Some form of aid from government was also arranged along with support from individual donors. Everyone had various opportunities to pursue their

research work in this centre, based on the interest and merit, irrespective of their religion, caste and creed.

In the year 2003 the founder of this centre respected Pragyanda Mahasthabir passed away and the centre saw a degree of depletion in its operational efficiency. Ineffective management and adoption of erroneous accounting practice triggered off various issues in the organization, resulting in frequent occasions of altercation and dispute over the possession of the landed property between various group members who might have planned for their self-advancement or had vested interest. The entire issue aggravated when feuding groups got into litigation while the maintenance staff of the centre were denied of their wages and salary. This situation brought into a stalemate condition with respect to important activities in the orphanage, the school and other related auxiliary units which were functioning in the research centre.

Presently, this temple in Gurungbasti is rendered non-functional and no religious event has been organised during the last few years. The intervention from higher management based at Kolkata was solicited which was facilitated by Shri Buddhapriya Bhikkhu as president by conducting various meetings with members to draw up a plan to achieve the goal of how the entire organisation can function to retrieve its earlier venerated status. All associated members and locals are eagerly waiting for the amicable resolution of the disputes and waiting for the moment when this prestigious research institute will be fully functional. But the present situation is not working in favour of the Baruas and it is not even in their possession now. At a particular time, there was a proposal of donating the disputed land to missionaries as a dispute resolution mechanism, but the local lower - middle class Bihari society was very much against the proposal. Shri Indra Sekhar Lama and family, the donor of the land, has reclaimed the place in their possession and presently they are running a guest house over there.

3.1.4 Siliguri Humanistic Boudhya Mission, Shalugara (2005)

Apart from above mentioned three religious Buddhists institutions in Siliguri, in the year 2005 the count reached to four with the inclusion of 'Siliguri Salugara Humanistic Boudhya Mission'. Currently, religious life with respect to performing rituals, offering prayer and other related activities of Bengali Buddhists of Siliguri are centred on these four temples. The location of Siliguri Salugara Humanistic Boudhya Mission temple is quite convenient to reach by walking or

by a rickshaw ride from the bus stop of Salugara on 31 National Highway towards Assam which cuts through Siliguri Town. The campus is surrounded by Salugara forest towards the east and in its north BSF camp is situated. Nearby to the temple affluent Mahayani Buddhist residences are located.

Respected Bigyananda Thero initiated the collection of donation to arrange necessary finance and Customs officer Jambu Lama's initiative has resulted in the construction of the temple on thirteen katha land in a peaceful and tranquil location, free from commotion. Many distinguished residents of Siliguri belonging to both Baruas and non-Baruas also extended their support in the construction process as well. In 2011 Kathin Chivar Daan occasion was hosted in this new temple. It was observed that both Theravadi and Mahayani Buddhists attended the ceremony in large numbers.

To conclude, we may say that there are many differences and distinctions observed with respect to the characteristics, activities, power and influence of the above mentioned Bouddha Bihars. The capability and excellent public relations of the Bihara's Head Monk (Baro Bhante) remained pivotal for the growth and development of that particular Bihar even in the near past. But presently the cardinal factors like the initiative of the governing body, the number of devotees and administrative support are more urgently considered to be an evaluation criterion of the Bihar's reputation. This can be eminently observed in two influential Barua Bouddha Mandirs of Siliguri town.

Though the number of Barua Buddhists in Siliguri is not high and the number of religious centres or Bouddha Bihar is very limited, that does not mean that the participation of the Baruas in all the festivals and occasions is uniform in nature. The in-depth discussion reveals that the main organization of the Barua Buddhist is 'Bharatiya Sangharaj Bhikkhu Mahasabha' and there are many Bhikshu organizations of various states which are governed by this organization. The Buddhabharati, one of the two important Bouddha Bihars in Siliguri, has been registered in West Bengal. Thus all its administrative decisions, appointment of Bhanter, and all other managerial activities are directed and monitored by Kolkata management team.

On the contrary, the Haiderpara Bidarshan Dhyana Ashram is affiliated with Bihar state and is more Buddhagaya centric. Principally, these two Buddha Mandirs have no conflicts and differences and they do not want to bring to the surface any matter related to any variances purposefully. A close observation reveals the latent desire for competitiveness in organizing festivals or the inclusion of the participants in the various seminars or any other events. It is promoted by the organizers affiliated to particular group.

In all practicalities, it is observed that in the area of construction of infrastructure, the Haiderpara Mandir has out-performed others with respect to improvements. The General Secretary of the mandir Mr. Raju Barua shared a view that how with everyone's contribution, the mandir gate has been transformed into an aesthetic delight and a two- storied building with a prayer hall has been constructed, which is generally rented out at a small sum to groups of poor people to arrange their festivities or family celebrations. On the other hand, in the Buddhabharati Mandir the focus remains on the religious teachings and discussions. However, for both the cases motivating youths or students, organising blood donation camps, conducting seminar or discussions are seen as initiatives of the managements of Buddha mandir throughout the year.

Apart from the above mentioned features, another interesting fact to be considered is that the Buddhabharati Bouddha Mandir and adjacent *Bidyachakra Kali Mandir* (Temple of Hindu Goddess 'Kali', image of power and destruction) share the same wall and no serious conflict has ever been observed as both the institutions have run amicably for years, neither have they had any conflict nor much interaction in their day to day activities. The only striking interaction pattern here is that during important auspicious days of Buddhist celebrations sometimes Nepali Mahayani families visit and offer their respect to Lord Buddha. But Haiderpara Buddha Mandir has altogether different characteristics vis-à-vis social interaction with other communities. In this locality, apart from some Hindu families, some lower middle class Muslims also reside. During celebration days like Buddha Jayanti and Kathin Chibar Daan they are also invited and they joyfully participate. Some of them voluntarily contribute as per their financial ability and this has been a long standing tradition here. We will have a detailed deliberation on the various dimensions of this inter-community connection and relation in the last chapter.

3.2 Nature of Education in Community Life

Education is a hallmark of every civilized society. However, its forms may vary from one society to another society. There are two common functions of education in every society. First universal function of education is to socialize the members of society and transmit the culture to the next generation. Second is to fulfill society's needs pertaining to human resource. Self-realization or self-recognition is the cardinal aim of education ethos. Major socializing agencies are community, family, peer group and formal educational institutions. Besides this, there are many other functions of education initiating social mobility and intergenerational change. Education is a process of development or enlightenment. Just as a plant develops out of a seed, so does the personality of a child develop into a grown up man. Just as a seed grows into a big tree in due course of time so does the child grow into a man or a woman over the period of time. The prime element for determining self-respect and self-recognition for an individual or a community depends on the nature of educational exposure it has experienced and the financial capacity to sponsor the same. In Siliguri and its adjacent areas Baruas as a community are no exception to this phenomenon. As a marginalized and migrant community in North Bengal, it was not easy for Baruas to attend the educational institutes to gain educational qualification and raise their financial status subsequently by securing jobs or setting up middle or large scale business. In their post migration period, during their regular struggle for existence in formative days while in migration, both men and women of the Barua community had been deprived of the essential formal educational facilities. This very first generation of Barua community had been extremely busy and remained occupied in settling down in a new environment and by some means managed to make ends meet.

On the anvil of awareness and comfort achieved by the present Barua generation and their parents, after settlement and achieving little stability in social frame over a period of time, they have realized the potential benefit of the formal education process. They realized how essential an element formal education is in individual or community life. To bolster the above facts, while studying a group of 200 people and conducting a sample survey within the community, it has

been observed that the dropout rates are insignificant presently. The age group of 15/16 of is presently studying either at Secondary or Higher Secondary level.

In order to gain further insight into their educational matrix and analyze the educational accomplishment of Baruas in Siliguri or its adjacent areas, we will list out three main categories:

- First, the Educational situation of the Barua men and women in Siliguri.
- Secondly, the role of monks and Sangha in spreading education and their contribution.
- Thirdly, Buddha establishments and culture versus the modern western education.

In the next stage, we will try to understand the association of education and economics in detail and evaluate whether the Baruas had been able to eradicate the gender differences and made women members of their society self-sufficient.

Table 3.2A

Dropout scenario of Barua pupils (sample) of Siliguri according to their gender and age

Age Group	Pursuing (M)	Pursuing (F)	Dropout (M)	Dropout (F)	Total (M)	Total (F)	Grand Total
6 - 10 (Primary age group)	9	14	0	0	9	14	23(21.30)
11-16 (Secondary age group)	18	19	0	3	18	22	40(37.03)
17-21 (HS - Graduation age group)	22	21	2	0	24	21	45(41.67)
Total	49 (45.38%)	54 (50%)	2(1.85%)	3(2.77%)	51 (47.22%)	57 (52.78%)	108 (100%)

*Source: Primary Source

Table Analysis: Table 3.2A

In present day situation, the new generation of Baruas is pursuing their academic and formal education. The sample survey has been conducted among more than 200 men and women in Siliguri. Out of this within the category of 6 years to 22 years age group there are 54 female and 49 male currently studying in various grade. **The dropout percentage is 4.63%** in the age group of 6-22 in the Barua community. For girls in the Secondary level it is 2.77% and in Higher Secondary level for boys the dropout rate stands at 1.86%. **There is no reported incident of dropout at primary level in the present generation of the Barua community.**

Table 3.2B

Educational status of Barua population (sample) of Siliguri according to their gender and age

Age Group	Primary		Secondary		Higher secondary		Graduation		PG/Tech		Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
22 – 30 years of age			5	11	4	4	4	7		3	38 (19.57.00%)
31 – 40 years of age		1	14	19	8	4	18	8	5	4	61 (29.04%)
41 – 50 years of age	1		11	7	8	0	5	3	3	1	39 (19.05%)
51 -60 years of age		2	6	6		1	6	3	1	1	26 (12.34%)
61 + years of age	3	4	12	12	2	2	4	2	1		42 (20.00%)
Total	4 1.89%	7 3.32%	45 21.34%	55 26.06%	20 9.48%	8 3.79%	35 16.58%	20 9.48%	10 4.74%	7 3.32%	211 (100%)

*Source: Primary Source

Table 3.2B- Table Analysis

From the above table and the data collected from sample survey it can be inferred that the educational attainment in Barua community is increasing over the period of time which was considered almost a luxury 40/45 years ago. Most of the families could not afford to support their wards to complete formal education. In the age group of 61+ the educational attainment is quite low as expected.

But it is evident that over a period of time the academic interest and awareness are spreading across the community steadily. However, the dropout number is high at Secondary level. Rest number at Higher Secondary level and number of graduates are increasing as a matter of fact. Though in case of dropped out pupils most of them are females but another observation which remains worth mentioning is that only 3 candidates are pursuing their post-graduation and all of them are females. In this case the positive evolution of the community mindset and hard work of girl students has been instrumental in acquiring this well-deserved success.

In the present days, in the age group of 6 – 21, no incident of dropout has been reported which is the 3rd generation of the Baruas who migrated in. The parents and grandparents left their home in Bangladesh to find out a suitable place for living. Due to migration and other related factors, their education process got disrupted. However, the 2nd generation of the community recognized the importance of education or academic qualification, but could not elevate the academic standard in the community due to the various factors like financial burden at an early age, family pressure etc. They failed to complete their formal education and got engaged in petty jobs.

However, the portion of the community which enjoyed better financial situation and stability could afford to attend School, College or University to complete their regular education. This section is mostly in service and middle class in nature. But presently everyone from all sphere of the Barua society is pretty much aware of the importance of academic qualification of their child and they certainly ensure the forward planning for the same.

3.2.1 Role of Monks and Sangha in Spreading Education in Siliguri Town

In Buddhist community of Siliguri area, there is no major contribution of the monks and Sangha in facilitating the general educational practice. However, with limited resource and lesser financial ability, some involvement at individual capacity can be observed. In Siliguri Town or in entire North Bengal, Shree Praggananda Bhikshu, Shree Rastrapal Bhante, Dr Satyapal Bhikshu contributed as education enthusiasts while educationist Shri Debapriya Barua, Barun Bikash Barua have been instrumental in spreading the idea of embracing education and conserving the Bouddha culture. They published various small books to inculcate various rituals, culture and history so that it can sustain over generation and become readymade source of information on Buddhism in concise form. As an example, in Mahanandapara of Siliguri, in the premises of Budhhabharati Bihar, a primary school was established as 'Budhhabharati Bhubanmohan Bidyamandir'. The initial planning was to have it upgraded to a Higher Secondary school. On the 5th of January 1970 'Budhhabharati High School' began its journey with 13 pupils in 5th Grade. During 1970 to 1978 the school was premised at and administered by the 'Budhhabharati Bihar Dharmasala'. After starting 8th grade in the year 1975, the process for obtaining government support and approval was initiated, but it got halted due to the affiliation of the school with a religious institution.

In order to acquire government fund and approval the school had to be established on its own land. A businessman named Hemendubikash Barua of Shillong had 7 katha lands in Mahanandapara. He was a close affiliate of Shri Debapriya Barua who was the Head Master and the founder of the Budhhabharati High School. Hemendubikash Barua donated the land on the request of Debapriya Barua. In early 1979 the school got transferred from Budhhabharati Bihar to newly constructed facility. Later in 1981 the Budhhabharati BM Bidyamandir (Primary School) got transferred to the high school premises temporarily.

However, continuous entry of students in greater number led to space constraint and with limited area the government approval for grant seemed challenging which took the problem to a greater magnitude. In the year 1981 / 1982 the local leadership, keen on spreading education was planning to establish a Junior high school. The entire thread was steered by Shri

Kailashnath Ojha who was the Head Master of local Shiumangal Memorial High School. With a lot of deliberation and planning Shri Debapriya Barua and Shri Kailashnath Ojha joined hands to start a school in a collaborative manner.

It was decided bilaterally, that

- The Head Master, the Assistant Head Master and the teachers of Budhhabharati High School will be inducted in the same post and occupy the same position corresponding to their seniority status.
- The word 'Haiderpara' will be added in the name so it should be 'Haiderpara Buddha Bharati High school'.
- The newly established school will have 3 members from Budhha Bharati Executive Committee.
- There will be a new block constructed with the money collected by selling the plot in Mahanandapara and there will be a marble memorial in the name of Hemendubikash Barua and Latika Barua.

The new school commenced its journey in the year 1982 and Shri Debapriya Barua joined as the Head Master. As established under a collaborative effort, the school received approval from the School Board as a junior high school under West Bengal Government. Apart from Shri Debapriya Barua (Head Master) and Shri Kailashnath Ojha (Secretary, Executive Committee) there was contributory role played by Bhante Praggananda Mahathera, Sri. B D Singh, Sri. Mantu Bikash Barua, Sri. Satyaranjan Bhattacharya, Dr. Anil Sarkhel etc.

Later Mr. Atendup Sherpa donated twenty-four katha land to the school at a nominal fee. From 1st May, 1992 the school was promoted to secondary level (Barua 2002). In 2002, to commemorate 32 years of its successful existence, the magazine 'Srijan' got published which remains the source of the above information. We also come across with the following fact that in the Executive Committee of 2002-2003, apart from Debapriya Barua there was another barua member named Shri Biswajit Barua who was the representative of the parents. After retirement of Shri Debapriya Barua in the year 2003, Shri Swapnendu Nandi joined as the Head Master. From him it is known that there are very few number of Barua students currently

attending the school curriculum. But, however, if any *Shraman* (trainee Bhikkhu) requires formal education they currently apply in Budhhabharati School. We come across two such incidents where it was requested for approval to wear Chivar while attending the school. The approval was put aside due to lack of proper paper work in the first place. But, however, allowed for the later one.

The Head Master revealed that earlier there was an inscribed image of Lord Buddha in the school uniform and in the school logo. The students were made to offer prayer every day before the commencement of classes. However, the school once converted to a Government Higher Secondary school, its nature had to be promoted and maintained as secular as proposed by the Governing Body and regulating Higher Secondary Council. Sri Kailshnath Ojha, the Secretary of the governing body in 2008-09 arrived at a collective decision to use *pradip* (lamp/mystic light) in the school badge/logo, which stirred strong reactions among the local Barua people. They tried to convince the school authority to use a picture of Buddha instead of *pradip*. The former Head Master Shri Debapriya Barua also acted to create a mass awareness in this sensitive matter, but due to various technical reasons the badge/logo could not be brought back.

However, it was agreed by and between the parties that if the Barua community might arrange to donate a statue of Buddha, it could be installed in the school premises. The statue donated by Shri Debapriyo Barua got installed in the auspicious day of *Rabindra Jayanti* (Birthday of Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore) on 9th May. This event was attended by various Buddha Bhikshus, shramans hailing from Delhi, Kolkata and North Bengal and local people along with journalists in large numbers. The local Bhikshus who were involved in the early stages of this high school remained conspicuous by their absence.

The statue was inaugurated by Dr. Satyapal Bhikshu who was the Head Master of 'Budhhabharati Bhuwanmohan Bidyamandir' during 1968-1971 and greatly involved in establishing 'Budhhabharati High school'. Later he became a lecturer of the Pali Department of Delhi University and became the Principal of Buddhist Study Centre. He also had been the

Secretary of the 'Bharatiya Sangharaj Bhikkhu Mahasabha' for a couple of years. He is known to have contributed actively in spreading Buddhism and its culture in North Bengal.

This Budhhabharati School has remained as an integral part of Baruas of Siliguri so far as the educational activities and academic interests of the community is concerned. The local Barua community has been instrumental in land acquisition for the school as well as other organized events. The school has been promoted to Higher Secondary level but Barua representation among the students is merely three to four. They receive the available facilities as being a part of scheduled tribe community, but not specifically as Baruas. Nowadays, the school has got a unique mark of recognition owing to the Buddha statue which can be seen from the main road and several passersby pay respect to it while crossing the school from both directions.

3.2.2 Theravadi Educational Establishments: Exploring the Trajectory from Traditional to Modern Western Education.

The ancient Indian Bouddha Bihar was serving as a center of learning, not only for the Buddhist monks but for the general pupils as well, who wanted to embrace the path of upgrading themselves in academics. Nalanda, Bikramshila, Takkhashila Bouddhabihar over the period of time were transformed into full-fledged universities of India. All these learning centers par excellence were considered to be the hub of spiritual and secular rational thinking during their heydays. Bouddha Bikshus were involved in comparative study of the other religions to fathom the depth of various other theologies and were also curious about current affairs and general knowledge, apart from their Bouddha religious teachings and philosophy. The framework of the teachings had bearing on the community, rather than on an individual. During Buddha's lifetime he crafted *Gatha* (song), *Jataka Katha* (short moral stories) and *Sutta* (a discourse or sermon by the Buddha or his contemporary disciples) to inculcate the understanding of nature's importance, leading balanced life, embracing social responsibility. The regular discussion and studies were of prime importance in the Bouddha Bihar as part of educational activities.

In this context, today any critical take on Theravadi Buddhists education and contribution of Sangha and Bhikshu has a special importance. This minority sect is having social life centering on all these Buddhist temples in Siliguri or adjacent areas. For discussion on various topics like

spiritual enlightenment, seeking solution to the practical problems et cetera, Baruas are largely dependent on these Boudhha Mandirs and resident Bhantes. Apart from this, practicing *Prabajya* (when a layperson leaves home to live the life of a Buddhist monk) by Barua Bouddha family men for seven days to adopt religious teachings and instructions is also prevailing. So, holistically it can be observed that the Boudhha Bihar of Siliguri or North Bengal has definite role to play in social, cultural and regular teachings apart from religious education. The Boudhha Bihar serves as a fulcrum for cultural exchange within community and interweaves the community together as well as spreads formal education by Sangha and Bhikshu which is worth mentioning for their roles and contribution.

In Siliguri town, we found Dharmadhar Pali College which was approved by the Higher Education Council of West Bengal Government and situated in Mahanandapara. Dr. Rashtrapal Mahathera was its main architect and the Principal. In the year 1969 -1970 Shri Debapriya Barua took the responsibility of the Principal and it was running with lesser number of students for 20 years. Despite being the only college in North Bengal to award 'Pali Sutra Bisharad' title during its operative days, it was closed in 1984 when Debapriya Barua got engaged in establishing Budhhamandir School, and could not spare enough time for it. Severe decline in the number of students also took away the steam from the college.

The International Buddhist Study and Research Centre at Gurungbasti, Siliguri along with 'Boudhha Samaj Bihar' managed Child Education Centre had also been established by Dr. Rashtrapal Mahathera with his relentless efforts. The center had been running with very efficient management skill as far as operations were concerned for a long period of time. This facility also received Dr. B.R. Ambedkar grant which had enabled it with a library with great collection of books and study materials which contributed to its reputation. By attuning the centre's association with NBU various seminars, lectures, workshops were conducted time to time. The Center used to have residential facility for its students and quite a few children were enrolled in the school as residential students. As mentioned earlier, due to some internal glitches the Barua community has lost its controlling authority and the facility remained shut from 2010 onwards with respect to all educational activities.

In the earlier discussion we have observed that in Haidarpara of Siliguri town, the 'Budhhabharati High School' and 'Budhhabharati Bhuwanmohan Bidyamandir' had been established primarily with the unstinted generous contribution from education enthusiast Barua community and Bouddha Bhikshus. In Buddhamandir there was a programme of providing education at pre-primary and primary level for the common students. A substantial percentage of the students enjoyed the residential facilities. Nowadays, this important role of the Buddhamandir is greatly curbed, dwindling into almost a nonexistent state and all the educational activities are barred due to lack of initiative and absence of collective responsibility from both the feuding sides.

The growing financial status of the family of the students of Siliguri Town in present generation, in an indirect way, determines the selection of the medium of education. Now, it has become almost an imperative to select English medium school for upwardly mobile middle class family children. Whereas, the lower- middleclass and middleclass band mostly rely on the Bengali medium schools. However, they sometimes go extra mile to enroll their kids in English medium school by sacrificing some of their other priorities in material life. The cardinal impulse for the same is to establish their children in social circuit with decent jobs and social recognition.

The North Bengal Barua community is mainly urban in nature and always count on institutional employment as a natural career of choice. In order to accomplish their goal, they are keen to get educated in English medium institutes to facilitate greater chances in working life and also to be in sync with the modern time as well. It can be observed in current days that both 'Buddha Bharati High School' and 'Buddha Bharati Bhubanmohini Bidyamandir' could enroll very minimal number of Barua community students and which is becoming almost nil. The predominant features of these schools are that they are mostly populated by students hailing from low-income group Hindu families.

In modern times, apart from formal educational process and practice, the media plays a quite important defining role in shaping the vision of youth and their cultural orientation. In discussion with Barua community youths it has been learnt that they are quite inclined to listen to band music performances, watch fashion shows, reality shows and feel delighted in watching

Hollywood and Hindi movies which also impregnates an impression in their mind as well. On the contrary, they are not cognizant of availability of Bouddha plays, songs/gaathas or Jataka stories. Many of elderly members of Barua families believe in the need of a televised program on Buddha's life and teachings which will fulfill the desire of Buddha community, as well as it will inspire mass consciousness and tolerance. However, unfortunately, there is no available programme in motion as such.

Now, this is certain that in present day Siliguri or in North Bengal there remains no existence of Bouddha religious education process in force; whereas, all the students from Barua community are currently enrolled in mainstream educational institutions like schools or colleges. English medium education has greater desirability and it is important as its demand keeps growing vis-à-vis the job market. So, with respect to selection, the English medium schools are natural choice and popular amongst the present generation Barua students and their parents.

It is worth mentioning that Shraman Kacchayan travelled from Delhi and attended the installation ceremony of Buddha statue in Haiderpara Buddha Bharati High School. He shared that the 'Bouddha Sashan Trust' was registered in Delhi in 2015 with a view to spread Pan-Indian Educational activities. One of the activity plans is to have a school established in an adjacent area of Siliguri, and for that very purpose efforts were initiated. The body of the trust is comprised of five monks from Delhi and Kolkata. Apart from them, the trust also required to have ten additional members who will monitor the progress of the job. The shraman also jubilantly conveyed that they had received supportive vibes from various administrative houses of the government bodies and they would soon approach the HRD Ministry for the required funds and they also expected to receive some funds from Ambedkar Foundation.

3.3 The Economy of Barua Community

From the pages of history it has been observed that the Baruas were mainly agriculturalists or craftsmen. The Barua settlers from the mountainous region were engaged in farming and they adopted the process of cultivation called *Jhum* (shifting cultivation). The regular cultivation or farming of various polyculture crops used to be done by the people from the plain land. Apart from harvesting and producing cotton they were also engaged in cultivating tobacco. Risley

(Risley 1891) uncovered the geography, history, and economics of 'Mamagri', the other version of 'Magh'. They were involved in fishing, in the collection of forest resources, making of mats, rugs, basket, hampers etc as well. Rajbanshi or Baruas are naturally skilled and trained in culinary arts, which facilitated them in acquiring jobs as chef or cook in the service of European lords or settlements. It is worth mentioning that many of the Maghs and Baruas were engaged as cook in various tea gardens in Jalpaiguri district. The Coochbehar royal family also inducted Baruas as their chef or cook. (Sthabir 1982)

Here, we have to be cognizant of the fact that the engagement in culinary jobs was not only important from the economic perspective, but also important from social perspective. Buddhist 'Magh' tribe did not follow the hierarchical structure of Hindu religion. However, there were some sort of restrictions imposed and boundaries laid down by Hindu Brahmanical society. For example, it was prohibited for a caste Hindu to drink water or receive food from a 'Magh' tribal. Under this circumstance of religious resistance and restrictions imposed by Hindus, the Baruas felt far more comfortable while being engaged as cook with European masters. These opportunities of interaction with Europeans brought in fair amount of dignity and higher degree of convenience to the entire Magh tribe. During this phase many of the members of the tribe engaged as a chef and driver had learnt or acquired the skill of driving and repairing cars. As a result of these on and off involvements, it has been observed in the later stage that many of them were involved extensively in automobile repairing jobs or started garage business by leveraging their knowledge.

Before the partition of India many Baruas of Chhattagram, involved in service or employment, got scattered as expatriates in various places of India and Burma. In the early 19th Century due to financial hitches they started drifting to *Akyab* (Capital of Rakhine state, Myanmar), then Rangoon and Mandalay. Some of them resettled in Kolkata and various other places of India for a better job. Some of them were frequent visitors and considered to be an expatriate. Since Burma was replete with signs of Buddhist culture, it was a natural inclination for a Barua jobseeker to work in Burma. As of today, there are many Baruas settled and living in Burma.

From the account of the elderly Baruas, it is learnt that the new entrants were facing various challenges of many dimensions. For example, Barua people were living in a small rented house with financial difficulties, yet for them education and jobs were of prime importance. The section which migrated before partition had already secured some jobs and got engaged in small factories or in government or private sector offices. However, their wages were not enough to support their day to day expenses. This inclement economic disadvantage pushed them to take various tough decisions. Many of them stopped their children from attending schools, some of them began searching for new jobs, and many of them got involved in small trading along with a yet smaller section that could develop their business towards better functioning.

During the year 1950, few Barua families had migrated to Siliguri and started earning their bread as mechanics. Within a short span of time, Barua Motor Works, Bengal Automobiles, North Bengal Automobiles, Hindusthan Automobiles, Lilu Motors, Ganesh Automobiles, Barua Electricals, Jahar Engineering, Rabi Engineering et cetera mushroomed along with many other enterprises which bolstered the foundation of financial capacity of the Barua community.

Generally, it can be inferred that in North Bengal, Siliguri has the maximum representation of Baruas with raised per capita income band. In present day changed perspective, the Baruas have understood the importance of Education and began inculcating the culture of education in their families or children. It can be seen that they are becoming doctors, engineers, lawyers, completing masters and getting engaged in various government or semi government organisations as well as in private sector. Some of the members are engaging themselves in vocational training courses to acquire professional skills to get employed or to start their own trade. Apart from these, Baruas are there and will be in Tea Gardens as Managers, Head Clerks, Fitter et cetera. And there are teachers, clerks, high ranking officers as well.

Bouddha sect believes in hard work and they earn their bread through their hard work. As a mechanic or a machine worker, we see Baruas are either employed or they have their own business or trading units. Some important Barua personalities of Siliguri area are – Dr. Kshirodprasad Barua of Jalpaiguri District Hospital, Civil surgeon Dr. Manindrapriyo Talukdar of

Coochbehar Hospital, the Principal of Sanskrit College Shri. Sukomal Choudhuri, the retired Head Master and founder of Buddha Bharati School of Haiderpara- Shri Debapriyo Barua, the revered Head of Pali Department of Delhi University Shri Satyapal Mahathera.

Below is the table which has been created by studying sample data in Siliguri urban area.

Table: 3.3A - Distribution of population (sample) according to the gender and occupation

	unemplo yed	Business	Govt. Service	Pvt. Sector	Self- Employed	Retired	Student	Total
Male	6	34	22	23	16	15	49	165 (51.72%)
Female	84	4	5	2	3	2	54	154 (48.28%)
Total	90 (28.21%)	38 (11.92%)	27 (8.46%)	25 (7.84%)	19 (5.95%)	17 (5.33%)	103 (32.28%)	319 (100)

*Source: Primary Source

Table analysis: Table: 3.3A - It can be observed that there are 165 (51.72%) male and 154(48.28%) female out of 319 Barua members. By following the pattern of distribution of sample population according to their gender and occupation, we draw various inferences about the community.

Amongst male members there are 49 and of the female members 54 are students. So out of total population surveyed (319) we see 15.36% male student and 16.92% female student proportions of those who are financially dependent.

Unemployed -- means those adult members who have completed formal education process but could not engage themselves in a job as an earning member. This number is 90 which is 28.21%

of the total population. Out of 90, there are 84 females or 93.33% of the population. All of them are home makers and since they do not have any earnings, so considered to be dependent.

So if we deduct the non-earning members (103+90=193) 60.50% from the 319 then we get only 39.50% who are earning members. Very few (4) retired persons are pension holders and others (13) have some sort of savings. So they consider themselves as partially dependent. Out of total (109) Earning members 95 (87.16%) are male and 14 (12.84%) are female.

With regard to their occupations, the Baruas of Siliguri are involved in running motor Garages, automobile business, shop keeping, etc. In government service sector we see occupying teaching, Railways, Public Works Department (PWD), Military Engineering Services etc. In the private sector they are engaged in insurance agency, bank jobs, as shop assistants etc. Some of them are having their self-sustaining businesses like mobile repairing, working as electricians, car mechanics etc. Some retired Baruas are living on their pension, but rest of the aged members had already reassigned the business to their descendants.

It has been observed that the dependence of female Barua members are mostly due to their non-earning mode and they are less accustomed to cope with the outer world. Only 14 (12.84%) of them are self-sufficient with respect to financial solidity. Barua women are employed as teacher, doctor, receptionist etc. Few of them are involved in business.

As we have observed before from sample survey that out of selected 55 graduates of Siliguri town, there are 20 female candidates which is 36.36% and out of selected 17 post graduates or similar of Siliguri town, there are 7 female candidates which is 41.18%. **A large section of educated women are not involved in any income generating occupation.**

But the promising aspect is that among school children hailing from Barua families, the male – female ratio is almost equivalent in respect of their age group.

3.3B

Educational Status and Economic Reality: Observation Table

Dimension	F	M	Total	Remarks
Gender Composition	154 48.27%	165 51.73%	319	Surveyed data shows the numbers of male are more than females.
Business	4 10.53%	34 89.47%	38	The 18 head of the family are still in the same business of Car and car maintenance as their ancestor did when migrated from the tea gardens to settle in Siliguri area. Total 20-25 of them are into conventional business and 11 of them are graduate / post graduate.
Service	7 13.46%	45 86.54%	52	Total 52 members of the surveyed community are employees in government or private jobs. The female's representation is more in service rather than in business. The 46% of the Service holders are Graduate or post graduate, but female representation is only 13% of the service community. However, all of them have minimal education till Madhyamik level and onwards.
Non working members	121 69.71%	54 30.86%	175	The non - working women population is around 90% of the female Barua community. And 16% of the female are students up to the age of 18. The age - range between 18 to 30 are mostly graduate and educated. Student strength is 60% amongst male non-working segment and all of them are below 18. The male-female ratio in the student segment is almost 50:50. This denotes that the present generation Baruas are coping with the educational attainment of the community irrespective of gender divide.

Head of the Family	14	46
	23.33%	76.67%

60 The female Head of the family of the community is 23% (14 out of 60) and most of them could not achieve the basic educational qualifications. However, in this category male representation is 77%. This clearly indicates that the male members are privileged in continuing their study.

Educational inclination

Male students adopt commerce-stream predominantly and female students are interested in humanities. However, female representation in Masters is greater than the male counterpart.

While discussing the economic framework and condition of Baruas as a community, it draws attention towards the fact that the Baruas do not believe themselves to be limited or constrained by the idea of the religious community alone. If need be, they accept the choice of serving some requirements of Hindu community without malice. As an example, Sri Raju Barua of Haiderpara and Sri Debu Barua of Mahanandapara both are practicing singers of *Bouddha Kirtan* (narrating, reciting and singing of an idea or story of Buddha) who seem to be regular in performances on various occasions. Both of them are actively involved in participation of various administrative engagements in two different Buddha mandirs in Siliguri and quite wellknown in Barua community as per their merits. Both of them maintain to have a kirtan band each comprising singers or performers who are Hindu *Vaishnavas* (followers of Vaishnavism, the largest Hindu denominations). These Kirtan bands actively perform in *Harisabha*, *Namsankirtan* (form of song or chanting that praises God and is performed in a public setting) which are mostly steered and organised by Hindu community as religious initiatives. These kirtan bands, apart from performing in *Budhhajayanti* (the birth anniversary of Gautam Buddha) or in *Shraddhabasar* (performance of funeral rites) of the Barua community, also maintain a useful collection of Hindu Vaishnava Kirtan of *Radhakrishna* (Hindu deities) including other folk genres.

Another Barua businessman has christened his catering business in the name of Goddess Durga which is *Mahamaya* Caterer to allure and be relevant to majority Hindu population for wider social acceptance.

So, it can be observed in generic terms that on the one hand, Barua community of Siliguri is absolutely aware of the necessity of possessing the schedule tribe certificates and on the other, they do not feel much compulsion to adhere to the specific ethos of the Barua community while doing business or involving themselves in any economic affairs which is beneficial for them.

3.4 Polity and Policy of the Community

3.4.1 Political Ideas and Inclination of the Community

In present days, we can simply make out that the religious polarisation of politics is an extremely important phenomenon from the perspective of social science. The empowerment of religion is one of the most important terminologies of modern Indian politics, where empowered religious concept, symbol, establishment or community act as catalysts or strong pointers that leave marks of influence in various affairs of the state at every level from top down to the bottom. The shaping of a political identity and ensuring political victory of various political parties lie in the various programs organised and pursued to incorporate various communities' demand, the fulfillment of their necessities, showing supportive attitude towards the religious communities and assuring safety and security. These are the prime indicators of their success. As such, the relation between religion and politics is a matter of serious academic concern.

In fact, the relation between religion and politics is not something novel. Whenever a particular religious community seeks and presupposes unity among their members and aspires for recognition, it looks for political shelter and makes incessant attempt to achieve independence. So, the nexus between the political power and the religious denomination has always been observed at every stage of the history of the human society since its very inception. In present days, the dimension and colour of this nexus is evident in various forms.

Now if we take a look at Buddhism, it also has a long history of close entanglements with the political sphere. Buddha himself was a political leader from Northern India and might have, due to his political and administrative affiliation, attracted a group of followers and afterwards Buddhism had established itself as an institutional religion or 'Sangha' centric religion. Religion has generally an immense effect on a particular community's identity, values, and interaction patterns. In today's society the relationship between the religion and politics is quite complex in nature and dynamic too. Religious leaders and institutions seek to exert political influence as a means of furthering their religious mission, while political leaders try to rely on religious institutions and leaders to buttress and legitimate their political authority. (Moyser 2006)

It is worth mentioning, for day to day living Bouddha Bhikshus are absolutely dependent on their community due to the restrictions imposed on amassing materialistic items. It is extremely important as they are also dependent, like in most of other religions, on the political regime in order to facilitate their campaign to expand their religious reach. We understand that in such countries like Srilanka, Burma, Thailand or Tibet, the political and religious history are intermingled to a great extent. At this phase, on the one hand, we will observe the political consciousness, demands of Barua Buddhists as a minority community; on the other hand, we will try to discuss the reactions and associated suspicion of Barua community vis-à-vis the position of Central and State governments towards them. Amidst parliamentary election of 2019 activities, we had conducted a survey among the general members of this community. Apart from that, we had detailed deliberation with the Executive members, the abbots of the two renowned Buddha Mandirs of Siliguri with a view to understand the political inclination of the representatives of this community. Also we made an effort to capture their points of view on various political parties pertaining to the aspirations this community.

Case Study 1

Dr Arunjyoti Bhikshu

Abbot (*Mathadhyakkha*), *Buddhabharati*, *Mahakalpalli*, Siliguri.

One of the oldest Buddhist religious shrines in Siliguri town, Buddhamandir's new abbot is Dr. Arunjyoti Bhikkhu. He arrived from Bangladesh with student visa to complete his education in

Calcutta University. After having conducted research on human rights, he is now actively involved in religious and political undertakings. In Siliguri town and while in some other parts of West Bengal he is closely affiliated with Trinamul Congress and shares a close bonding with the Chief Minister of West Bengal, Ms. Mamata Banerjee. He not only showcased Bouddha community in *Sarva Dharma Samannoy* (a concept embodying the equality of the destination of the paths followed by all religions) event as representative of Baruas, but he can be spotted in being active in extending his support in various activities of Trinamul Congress. In order to collect data we wanted to discuss on three topics with him to understand the reactions of the general public and other monks, based on the following questionnaire.

- 1) To what extent a monk can be involved in politics.
- 2) What is the view of other Monks, Monastery association and general public on the idea of political involvement?
- 3) Any convenience or improvements achieved by the community in any sphere of life.

It is generally observed that the participation of the monk in political framework or their connections with any political leader is not well received and viewed as a matter of pursuit for personal advancement, not for an overall improvement of the community. But the recent addition of Buddha Jayanti holiday in the state calendar by the Chief Minister is regarded as the product of the sole initiative of Arunjyoti Bhikkhu by many people. Most of them believe that the initiative has been taken mostly to appease the residents of the hills. Not being commensurate with their basic demands, rather it is considered to be the long standing demand of the Barua community. In this context, we can very well notice that the representation made by Arunjyoti Bhikkhu has made the state government cognizant about the substantial presence of Bouddha community in West Bengal.

Dr. Arunjyoti Bhikkhu briefed media about the existence of many Baruas living in this state and as a result we have a few monasteries. Buddhists are a peace loving community for centuries and Buddhist Monks are always known for their ethos of embracing non-violence in conduct with anyone. However, during parliamentary election, occurrences of various unpleasant incidents are very common which turns into violent overtures in some places as a regular

feature. The Assistant General Secretary of the *Bharatiya Sangharaj Bhikkhu Mahasabha*, Dr Arunjyoti Bhikku commented that they also participate in election process like other communities and quite satisfied with the attitude of the state government of West Bengal. They are also happy about the enlistment of Buddha purnima as a holiday, declared by the West Bengal Government. Arunjyoti Bhikkhu reminded that the teachings of Buddha is founded on non-violence and one should embrace it from the very core of her/his heart. Buddhists should build up brotherhood filled with love and affection with all the other communities or religions. He mentioned that participation in election which was due in a couple of months is an essential conduct in saving democratic rights. Buddhist Baruas do not want to get involved in specific party faction, rather want to exercise the freedom of choice within the community in order to select their own government by themselves. However, on an appreciative note, they are highly obliged to the West Bengal government for declaring Buddha Purnima a holiday in the state. (Reference: www.kolkata24x7.com)

Case Study 2

Raju Barua,

General Secretary

Haidarpara Bidarshan Dhaynmandir, Haidarpara, Siliguri

A well-known local resident of Haidarpara Shri Raju Barua currently is the General Secretary of the *Haidarpara Bidarshan Dhaynmandir* and the Assistant Secretary of North Bengal Buddhist Forum. Those who migrated from Chattagram have formed an organisation called *Siliguri Masterda Smriti Sangha*. As a cultural secretary Shri Raju Barua is actively involved with this organisation. As a professional he owns his own catering business and is quite renowned as a *Kirtan* singer as well. Shri Barua associates and socialises with every other community both on personal and professional level. He is involved in various social work activities and involved in politics, Shri Barua voices his personal and collective view points on various affairs which is quite important to reckon with. He told us that the Barua community generally shuns politics and stays away from its nuances. As a community Barua Buddhists do not correspond to any polity or doctrine. Casting vote is absolutely a personal preference and freedom specified by the constitution of India for any individual citizen. Sometimes various party representatives

make propositions for a political conversation mostly during elections, but Baruas do not approve of such efforts.

He personally got involved in the parliamentary election process. By the influence of a known Hindu senior person from Chattagram, he primarily got attracted to BJP, especially to Narendra Modi. Before election he was involved in some activities but did not have any experience and lacked basic understanding of parliamentary election process. After the declaration of the results, he was made the president of the Municipal Ward no. 40, when Shri. Rathin Basu was serving as Darjeeling District President of BJP. After acquiring an official post in the party he began his political journey unleashing lots of initiatives and in a short while everywhere his presence became prominent. Everybody was under the impression that Shri. Raju Barua would participate in the forthcoming Siliguri Municipal Corporation Election and will taste the victory. He used to arrange large gathering with a crowd filled in 4/5 buses in short notice leveraging his contacts. Being involved in social welfare activities Shri. Raju Barua is well-known in ward no. 40 and many local residents willingly played a part in his election campaign staying in the forefront. Before election he received the party ticket from Kolkata, signed by the then state president of BJP Shri. Rahul Sinha. However, he was made aware in the very last minute that he had personally to contribute a sum of three lakhs rupees to BJP party fund to have assured ticket to compete in the forthcoming election. He was not ready to spend his fortune and was not in agreement with his party. He thought, if he would transfer the said amount of money to the party election fund, he would obviously be more interested to get the amount reimbursed post-election once he had won. He thinks if he could garner popular support, there is no need to raise a large propaganda by exhausting money power. So he did not want to get involved in anything against his principle and as a result somebody else was given ticket which created some sort of ruckus in the ward and many local residents opposed this turn around vehemently. Some of them lost their initiatives to take active part in poll campaign.

Shri. Raju Barua also abstained from any party related events following this undesirable fallout. But this district level decision was denied by the party members and a majority of them campaigned with a demand to reconsider Shri Raju Barua as the candidate. But he was reluctant and he thought, this would do more damage to the relationship of the already

selected candidate with him, if the declared candidate was withdrawn that would have left some adverse imprint in public perception as well. Following this incident he had lost his initiative and interest.

Afterwards, he was also offered several times with the post of the General Secretary for a *Mondal* which is constituted of five municipal wards. But he refused benignly and decided to stay away from all these internal party wrangling.

He believes that he can contribute to society remaining outside of party or political framework. The prime reason for his aspiration to become a councilor was to do a bit for his ward in some way. He has observed that the councilors of all other political parties like CPM, Congress, and TMC fail to deliver anything for their wards. He explained he does not patronise any idea of communal disharmony. India is a secular country and it is a country for everyone to live the way one wishes to conduct her life without disturbing or being disrespectful to anything or anyone. Its identity was never to become a Hindu State and will never be so in forthcoming days. He explained that the post of councilor and the essence of Municipal Corporation election is a different ball game from other elections. Here one has to work closely with the people which necessitate projecting the integrity of the person before the party with respect to importance. To put forward his argument, he posits the case of the Councilor from Municipal Ward no. 13 who remains very popular due to his devotion towards his assigned duties and is hugely respected by the residents. He joined TMC from CPM and won the election. However, he considers this person will win repeatedly, irrespective of the party tag associated with him.

Gautam Deb, Hon'ble Minister-in-charge, Department of Tourism, West Bengal also proposed to be associated with him but he avoided minister due to various altercation and dispute that surfaced within TMC rank and file. Shri. Raju Barua is well known to the TMC Tourism Minister as he is from Chattagram. Finally, he declared that he is still associated with BJP and remained a party member but resigned from the post of the party president from the ward. As electoral tactics, he devised some programmes within the municipal ward during the corporation election like splitting the ward into two segments, ensuring grants per voter, establishing ward committee, establishing Nagarik Committee etc.

He recognised that had he been the chosen candidate of his party he would have bagged the Barua votes (around 53 headcounts) who lived in the locality, as well as the community which came from Chattagram, Hindi speaking individuals, a few Left-front supporters and many Muslim voters had confided in him. But being very fresh to election process he was not well conversant with the indecorous electoral culture that involves running around with the leaders, yelling at the opponent and digging out any scam in his favour. He had some idea about foretelling the result of the election in 2019. He was convinced that the main fight in North Bengal will be staged between TMC and BJP. The people in the hilly region of Darjeeling district were not pleased with the TMC. BJP was expected to do very well in 2019 parliament election, he had commented.

When the current Bangladesh election surfaced during our discussion, he said that under present prime minister's regime elections were never held in a democratic way as she had the huge majority mandate. However, he opined that the minorities living in Bangladesh enjoy some semblance of security due to present prime minister only.

3.4.2 General view of the Barua Buddhists of Siliguri Town

After conducting a survey among the Barua community of Siliguri we come across with some important facts and data. It is observed during the discussion that:

- Approximately, 80% voters are not definitive and consistent supporters of a particular political party. The corporation vote is individual- driven and assembly or parliamentary election has pro- incumbency attitude and disposition.
- Remaining 20% voters are comparatively conscious to a higher degree and some of them are actively involved in election process. However, as a religious community Baruas do not have any particular political position though majority of them are influenced by the appeal of PM Modi's charisma. They think BJP is going to come back to power. If they could secure few representatives in the state, this will facilitate their growth and prosperity.
- Lord Buddha is appreciated and respected in a special way all over the world. So, it does not make much sense to feel apprehensive of being the minority Indian Buddhist.

- Till now the social benefits earmarked for a minority community have been passed on to only Muslims and all the political parties appease them frivolously in excess to secure their vote in their favour. They believe that all over the world Muslims are involved in allsorts of terrorist activities (bomb blast in Buddhist temple in Ramu of Bangladesh and *Rohingya* issue). No one except Modi has taken corrective actions rather than bluffing around like other big mouths.
- Many of them diluted the communal stance of the BJP and focused on their policy of governance contributing to overall GDP growth, firm decision making capacity and weaknesses of the coalition government. As per their opinion BJP has never declared India to be a Hindu nation. However, as Bajrang Dal and RSS being associates of BJP, they have more affinity with Hindu community. But Buddhist or non- Muslim people should not worry about the issue. As an example, a person said the Nepali-Bengali issue which occurred in the hills had infused some apprehensions of grave danger in the mind of the old Nepali residents in Siliguri. But these are all temporary phenomena, not all the minority members of the society are of the same disposition. So, there is no need to worry about NRC. (National Register of Citizens) During left-front rule, thousands of people from Bangladesh crossed the border and acquired voter cards, ration cards in the first place. So there is a need of keeping constant vigil and tracking the movements of the foreign residents.
- Apart from this, Modi Govt. should be given ample opportunity with respect to time because the task he has is enormous and colossal. The greater transportation facility, implementation of GST, termination of fake ration cards, assurance for job creation and ban on the irregularities of some companies will bring prosperity in people's lives in the long run. There will be always some operational issues that may come up during the correction period like inflation due to GST implementation. But such shortcomings will be overcome in due course of time.
- It is not true that everyone possesses the same mind set. Some of them believe that BJP will indulge in creating more communal division across the population, if they attain power. During Vajpayee government they have witnessed the *Babri Masjid* demolition

which had consequences in Bangladesh. There are many people from Bangladesh who entered Indian territory and currently are enjoying domicile status. This is a live issue for Modi government. The fear still prevails that how safe it would be for minorities of India in the coming days.

- While discussing with general community members it is revealed that the earlier generation was inclined towards the Congress. The bold steps taken by Srimati. Indira Gandhi during Bangladesh Liberation War, providing shelter to the Buddhist community as a favourable gesture made her very special and popular amidst the community. Likewise during Left-Front regime Jyoti Basu used to get fulsome support from the community. Especially most of them commented that there is a similarity in the ideals of both communism and Buddhism. But the common people do not override the party in power as they need to maintain job, stay in the locality and most importantly to make sure the protection of the minority. So, whatever may be the ideals in their mind, the casting of vote is done in quite a pragmatic way. One of the Barua voters revealed that during his stay in Bangladesh he was not at all interested in politics. But after entering India he was fascinated by the leftist ideals. Notwithstanding the benefits that may come his way in supporting the left regime, he genuinely believed and respected the leftist principles. However, he feels it is safe to support TMC as he had very bad experience during Vajpayee tenure where he experienced various communal tensions. Apart from this, the false propaganda regarding the recovery of black money from foreign country, rising inflation, hassles pertaining to demonetization and GST implementation had aggravated the struggle of the day to day life of the middle-class people.
- The new generation of the Baruas is quite disappointed due to the grave economic situation and rising unemployment issue in the state. The peaceful cohabitation and employment opportunities are the two most important crucial issues for them, which is not being addressed by any political party whether being in power or not. The youth of this community believe, that the absence of educated people in politics, lack of depth and deficiency in the ideology for sacrifice have brought down politics into such a

morass that they do not want to get into the same. All the political parties are seen to be power-hungry, loaded with ineligible leaders with crooked mindset, who are devoid of vision and remain busy only for short-term gains. This abstention from politics has made them to opt for NOTA voting as a matter of refusal and instrument of protest. On the contrary, a small segment of them have some affinity with communist ideology through familial upbringing. However, the students and the young population of Barua community seem to have lost their direction having a definitive political identity.

The most interesting point worth mentioning is that the Barua Buddhists despite being minority of minorities by count, their political orientation cannot be judged from minority perspective. The Barua community does not have any experience of communal violence and social abhorrence like Muslims. Even having migrated from Bangladesh they do not have any problem in obtaining citizenship or habitation which in turn defused the idea of community voting. However, there are certain affinities with Muslim community. One of the important examples that can be cited is the consumption of beef by the Baruas. It is a dish which the Baruas enjoy like Muslims, but having BJP in power this may be construed as a sacrilege and they may be branded anti-nationals. However, for the Baruas to support BJP has larger connotations than this minor hindrance in culinary aspect. Firstly, the attack on Buddhamandir in Bangladesh, and the Buddhist-Muslim tension in Arakan-Burma region pertaining to the *Rohingya* issue have left immense imprint on the Buddhist community in Siliguri. Secondly, the large population of the Mahayani Buddhists living in peaceful co-habitation in Siliguri without much hassle gives them a sense of security. On top of that, the Tibetan Buddhists receive some financial grant from the centre as well. So, the Buddhist community of North Bengal is enjoying a non-combative tolerant status under the prevailing *Hindutva* ascendancy which provides them a peaceful and convenient option.

May be due to these reasons, Dr Arunjyoti Bhikshu's political activities and his supporting TMC is a matter of dispute. One of the members of the Barua community has clearly stated that it is not desirable for a monk to be involved in day to day politics. Moreover, it creates a false impression that the Barua community in its entirety is supporting the TMC through him. Some religious gurus promote such culture as a part of their self-advancement agenda for securing

power and short-term gain, which does not fetch any benefit for the community, but rather denigrates it. It is well-known that one Bhikshu got engaged in politics and became one of the members of the Council of Bihar State (Rajyasabha) which triggered his dismissal from the Bhikshu Sangha. He was not being invited to any religious programme. But in present days the situation is different, as this religious guru or Monk or abbot is the executive official of 'Bharatiya Sangharaj Mahasabha'. So, the relationship with political party in power and the role of the religious institution and their inter dependency is a matter of special significance. It once again proves that the interdependence between religious institutions and political power is prominent and inevitable.

3.4.3 Issues Related to ST status and present Condition

At present, the Barua Buddhists residing in West Bengal are counted as 'Magh' under the list of Scheduled Tribes. Therefore, quite naturally, the Buddhist Baruas of Siliguri are included in the reservation quota and enjoys constitutional provisions.

In general, it is observed that when a community wants to avail the benefits of reservation or feels the need to do so, they present their case for reservation with adequate justification and they even start a movement, if necessary. However, the scenario remained different for the Buddhist Baruas of West Bengal. From various facts received, we come to know that in the 1990s, when factual details were being collected and presented for recognizing and including the Barua Buddhists as 'Magh' in the list of Scheduled Tribes in states such as Assam, Delhi, Punjab and Chandigarh, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra, it was observed that the 'Magh' community was already enlisted as a Scheduled Tribe in the states of West Bengal and Tripura. However, a lacuna in awareness and active participation essentially led to Bengali Buddhists of West Bengal getting deprived of enjoying the opportunities presented to them through this enlistment. Some of them say that they consciously did not make use of their reservation status as they did not consider themselves as an Aboriginal Tribe.

The situation changed due to an interference of the Mahabodhi Society in Delhi. On 17th August, 1990, the Vice President of the Mahabodhi Society and the leader of the North Indian monastic order H. Aryawansa Nayakar Mahathero requested the central Minister for Labour

and Welfare, Shri Ramvilas Paswan to include the Barua Buddhists residing in the states of Delhi, Punjab and Chandigarh, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Assam in the list of Scheduled Tribes.

According to the arguments presented in the petition, Buddhist Baruas are a part of the 'Magh' tribes living in Chittagong and the hills surrounding it and at present they are mainly inhabitants of Bangladesh. These Barua Buddhists of Bangladesh belong to one of the three primary clans of the 'Magh' community (Jumiya Magh, Royang or Rakhiyang Magh and Magh Barua).

The first argument presented in the petition quotes from the 'Eastern Bengal District Gazette' composed by LSS O'Malley, ICS and published by Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta in 1908. The pages numbered 58, 60 and 61 of the Chapter II (the People) were referred to in the argument, where the blood relation between 'Rajbangshi' of Bangladesh or the 'Magh' Baruas and the Arakanese Buddhists has been established. (Descendants of Magh or Arakanese Mother by Bengali Father).

Secondly, he has mentioned that the Buddhist Baruas living in India have low levels of education and income and more than fifty percent of them are involved in traditional occupations viz. are engaged as cooks.

He has further mentioned that even though the Buddhist Baruas are included in the list of Scheduled Tribes as 'Magh' aborigines, most of them are deprived of the benefits of reservation due to a lack of awareness and education. Apart from them, many Buddhist Baruas bearing the same characteristics but living outside West Bengal and Tripura in different parts of the country (such as Assam, Delhi, Bihar, Punjab and Chandigarh and Uttar Pradesh etc) should be incorporated in the list of Scheduled Tribes of their respective states.

Above all, in this petition it has been requested that because only the 'Magh' Baruas are present of the three aforementioned clans, they be included in the list of Scheduled Tribes with due respect and instead of the name 'Magh', Buddhist Baruas should be used and titles that are used by the Barua community, such as Chowdhury, Talukdar, Sinha and Mutsuddi be included in the list.

Apart from the Chittagong Issue of the Eastern Bengal District Gazette, the references provided in the annexure of this petition include:

Final Report of the Survey and Settlement of the District of Chittagong (1885 to 1898) by C.G.H. Allens, ICS, Calcutta, Bengal Secretariat Press, 1990

Census of India 1921, Vol V, Bengal Part I, Report by W.H. Thompson, ICS, Calcutta, BS Press (1928).

The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and Dwelling Therein, Capt. T.H. Lewin, (B.C. of Hill Tracts), Calcutta, Bengal Printing Ltd, 1869.

(Letter to the Hon'ble Minister for Labour and Minister, Shri Ram Vilas Paswan, 1990)

This step adopted by the 'Mahabodhi Society' of Delhi influenced most of the powerful Buddhist organizations of Calcutta as well as various organizations of North Bengal such as 'Uttar Banga Bouddho Kalyan Parishad', 'North Bengal Buddhist Forum' and 'Uttar Banga Bouddho Sanghashram'- to become active in the issue of procuring the rights of Buddhist Baruas as a Scheduled Tribe. According to those in support of this movement, the culture of Baruas despite being influenced by Bengalis and despite speaking Bengali, ties and intermixing between Arakanese Buddhists and Barua Buddhists are undeniable. Therefore, it can be quite effortlessly established that the Barua Buddhists living in North Bengal have migrated from Chittagong and are related to the 'Magh' aborigines residing in Chittagong and the surrounding hills which is why they are known as 'Magh Barua'.

When the enquiry team visited for an inspection regarding the questions raised on the names of their ancestors, language, food habits and ways of life, they found that the language of the 'Magh Baruas' from Chittagong included Arakanese words. They found a direct linkage to the food habits (including consumption of pork and other meats), practices related to birth and death and names of ancestors with those of the Arakanese and hence included the Baruas as 'Magh' aborigines in the list of Scheduled Tribes without hesitation. The presence of a Burmese lady residing in Malbazar simplified the issue in this case.

However, the Baruas were denied of their ST status in 1996-97 and all related benefits were withdrawn. In protest, the Barua Buddhists of West Bengal united once again and filed a case in court. In this instance too, the High Court ruled in their favour.

In this context, it is worth mentioning that, the 'Bouddho Kalyan Parishad' played a pivotal role in increasing awareness among the North Bengal Baruas about their Scheduled Tribes identity back in the 1990s. Through the Buddhist Conference of 1994, the 'Bouddho Kalyan Parishad' was formed for accomplishing the tasks of determining the population of Buddhists, their education, their constitutional rights, their certification as a Scheduled Tribe, declaration of government holiday on Buddha Purnima and elimination of vices from the Buddhist community. The first registered Chairman of the Parishad was Shri Gouranga Mohan Barua while the Vice Chairman was Barun Bikash Barua. Shri Paresh Kanti Barua was elected as the general secretary while the treasurer was Shri Debopriyo Barua. Apart from them, regular members were included in the Parishad. Even though this Parishad administered over the whole of North Bengal, the control exerted by Siliguri was the highest and most members hailed from here.

The Parishad was recast in the year 2005. In that phase, the monastic order and the Bouddhya Kalyan Parishad deliberated over several issues together. The prime ones being:

- Convincing and encouraging Baruas in adopting the administrative route for developing the society.
- Taking up the cause of ensuring the rights of minority communities.
- Removing roadblocks that come in the way of the community getting Scheduled Tribe certification.
- Ensuring that every birth, death and marriage ceremony in the family getting reported by the members of Buddhist temples to the Secretary on their own accord.
- Enlistment of the details of age and education level etc. with the Secretary by the families of marriageable boys and girls.
- Collecting monthly subscriptions and donation to aid services rendered etc.

(Memorandum, 2012)

Therefore, it can be said with certainty that there has been an increase in awareness among the present Buddhist inhabitants of North Bengal regarding their minority and Scheduled Tribe status compared to the past. As an example, it can be stated that the first conference of SC/ST/Buddhist Employees' Association under the Welfare Association of Life Insurance Corporation was held on 21st August 2012 here in Siliguri. The Welfare Association was formed shortly after the nationalization of Life Insurance Corporation in 1956. However, nothing worth mentioning was accomplished by the Eastern Zone till 1983-84. Nonetheless, their work has gone up in Kolkata. The members of the Kolkata Division visited Jalpaiguri and Siliguri and encouraged the SC/ST employees to form their own association. Even though it was not possible to form association units in all the branches under this division, nonetheless all the tasks of the associations are accomplished through ad-hoc committees. It has been learnt from the President of the Committee that there are 22 Class I officers under the Jalpaiguri Division of LIC, 56 Class II officers are there while there is only 1 Class IV staff. Even though most of these ST Officers follow Christianity, there are 5-7 Buddhist Barua officers and they are spread across different posts. From those present, two members (Subal Barua and Pannalal Barua) revealed through a discussion, the agenda of the organization and the list of its future tasks, that the main aim of the organization is to put into force the constitutional benefits offered, making people aware about their rights and ensuring that the rules of reservation are observed strictly while recruiting new people. Even though the Buddhist employee's name has been separately added to this SC and ST Association, there is no clear evidence as to why that was done. However, with regard to this issue, a majority expresses the opinion that as not all Buddhists are STs, a separate extension has been included for them. It can be inferred that an influential Buddhist played an instrumental role in regard to the establishment of this organization, where more than the question of Religious Minority, intention was to prioritize the acknowledgement of Buddhists as a distinct group and their inclusion in all aspects.

Even though there is a general consensus regarding the enlistment of the Barua Buddhists as a Scheduled Tribe and their identity as aborigines, it cannot be said that everyone in the community is in agreement regarding their own identity. Much like other crises, this identity crisis with its related two-sided opinions has become an inseparable part of life in the Barua

community. Socio-economic position is undoubtedly an important issue in the formation of opinions.

It has been mentioned before that, the established and well-rounded Barua community living presently in North Bengal is reluctant to enlist itself as a 'Magh' tribe. According to them, the name 'Magh' is associated with their identity as their ancestors hail from Magadh. Though there remained a trajectory of cultural intermixing, yet they do not have any kinship ties with Arakanese inhabitants. Therefore, their enlistment as a Scheduled Tribe is undesirable.

As per another set of prevailing opinions, the Baruas are a hybrid community born through the intermingling of Bengalis with Arakanese and there are clear traces of tribal ways of life in them which is why it is not at all illogical for them to demand a position in the list of Scheduled Tribes and subsequently enjoy reservation status. Moreover, the Baruas are the single representative of the 'Magh' community residing in West Bengal. Those harboring these opinions are weak economically and continue to be associated with traditional occupations.

Apart from these two opinions, a third category is observed in reality, who do not think themselves to be aborigines essentially or feel hesitant to uphold their Arakanese heritage but feel a need to establish their demands for reservation. So much so that the logic behind this demand remains questionable to a great many who led the movement for the enlistment of Barua Buddhists as a Scheduled Tribe.

The divided opinion and hesitation regarding the Arakanese origins and 'Magh' identity were clearly present in the petition put forward by the 'Mahabodhi Society' of Delhi. Not only was the demand to include 'Magh' Baruas in the list of Scheduled Tribes present in the petition, but it was also clearly mentioned that their names be changed to 'Barua Buddhists'. Quite obviously, Buddhist Barua cannot be an identity for a tribe.

We have come to know contextually that apart from West Bengal, the 'Magh' community is included in the list of Scheduled Tribes of Tripura. However, the Baruas do not enjoy the rights of reservation in the later. They are more comfortable to posit themselves as urban inhabitants who had migrated long back.

3.5 Welfare Organizations of Barua Buddhists

The prime importance of Siliguri that it is the entry to North- East and also progressive in nature with respect to business and trade. Migration from East Bengal to Siliguri has been a key incident for Baruas which resulted in their long term settlement in Siliguri and its adjacent areas. Apart from the temple or institutions discussed before, there is another set of organisations (*Sangha* or *Samiti*) currently operational and adding value to the society in particular with Baruas. Some of the distinguished organisations are-

Siliguri Boudhya Jubak Maitri Sangha

Uttarbanga Boudhya Bhikshu Parishad

Uttarbanga Boudhya Kalyan Parishad

North Bengal Buddhists Forum

Siliguri Boudhya Jubak Maitri Sangha's members are very much involved in social welfare activities and events. This organisation extended its various set of help in supporting medical exigencies, marriage, death or cremation service etc to the needy and those they deemed appropriate. Currently, they are trying to launch ambulance service by acquiring an appropriate vehicle.

Uttarbanga Boudhya Bhikshu Parishad was established after the demise of respected Atul Sen Mahastabir and its members and executive members are based out of Siliguri City. The Bengali Buddhists of North Bengal currently seek help from this organisation to engage a Bhikkhu with respect to various rituals to be performed in case of Pinda daan, Sangha daan, Chivar daan, Sibali Puja etc. Uttarbanga Boudhya Bhikkhu Parishad is the most important organisation in numerous activities, not limited to only North Bengal but spread over the entire state of West Bengal.

There had been various activities invoked to protect, campaign and expand Theravadi Buddhism by establishing international Buddhist Study and Research Centre, publishing various magazines, organising seminar, publishing books, being the custodian of rituals and engaging Bhikshu to perform the ritual in Barua society etc. In order to unite the Baruas in North Bengal

in the year 1994, a Boudhya Seminar was organised which resulted in establishment of the society Boudhya Kalyan Parishad comprising distinguished members of the society embarked on a journey, to not only unite, but to conduct census to chart the population of Baruas. They are also involved in the expansion of formal education amongst Baruas, practicing and obtaining constitutional rights and facilities, supporting Baruas in obtaining ST certificates, declaring Buddha Purnima as a public holiday and removing blind faith in certain customs or occultism and replacing them by appropriate culture and scientific practices.

In 1994 Uttarbanga Boudhya Kalyan Parishad came into existence and after it got registered for the first time, a committee was formed having Shri Gorangamohan Barua as the Chairman, Sri. Barun Bikash Barua as the Vice Chairman, Shri Pareshkanti Barua as the General Secretary, and Shri Debapriya Barua as being the Treasurer.

The key agenda or activities identified were:

- To find out the exact count of Theravadi Buddhist
- Apart from Theravadi Buddhists head count – collection of demographic data like age, sex, education, economic status, profession etc.
- Identification of help required by the below poverty level or low income families and institute appropriate help.
- To provide medical help.
- For students and young male & female - organising mock competitive exams and mentoring on selection of professions or vocational training programmes etc.
- To appraise successful students and donate religious books and magazine to make them familiar with Buddhism and related culture.
- It is worth mentioning in this context that in 2005 the organization was re-established as Boudhya Kalyan Parisheba by amalgamating Bhikkhu Parishad and Kalyan Parishad with prime importance.
- To encourage to join administrative services to develop and shape the society.
- To fight legal battle for constitutional rights for the deprived and minorities and render services to the needy in this context.

- To render help in obtaining the ST certificates issued by the government authority.
- Encouragement to the Existing and upcoming next generations to practice Pali language (*Tripitaka*- the doctrine of Theravada Buddhism is written in Pali).
- To liaise with the state government to include and declare Buddha Purnima as a public holiday.
- Encouragement to become a custodian of the Buddhist religion.
- To maintain the records of the associates and donors of various Buddha mandirs in case of marriage, birth and death.
- Keeping a data bank of young unmarried man and woman belonging to Theravada Buddhists group corresponding to their age, education, profession with greater details.
- Collection of the monthly subscription to run the services seamlessly with proper accounting.

(Meeting Minutes, 2015)

In later years, Monks and distinguished intellectuals of North Bengal have been associated with Uttarbanga Boudhya Kalyan Parishad and worked together to participate in various auspicious and religious events like marriages etc. as advisors.

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Chapter – 4

Community as a Culture Group

- Linguistic Features
- Eating Behaviour
- Material Outfit
- Religious Traditions and Changes: Festivals, Life Cycle Rites-
Rituals, Everyday Beliefs-Practices and Monastic Life

Chapter - 4

Community as a Culture Group

A community as a culture group is a union of persons who have a common material and social heritage, common beliefs, habits, activities and interests and who live in the same social environment, whether urban or rural, foreign or native, civilized or primitive. In a more general sense, any community which maintains social cohesion and expresses and attains common interests in its own unique manner is a culture group. Every culture group has its history, origin, development, migrations, conflicts and adjustments. There was a time when the group did not exist, or at least not in the particular habitat in which it is living at present. The accounts of its origin may have been lost in the long development of the social forces which unify as well as isolate groups and institutions. (Young & Schmid 1994)

In this context it is important to know about various life activities as mentioned below and which will be discussed in this chapter.

4.1 Linguistic Features

Linguistic identity of a community including its distinctiveness and social exchange focuses on the basic cultural and social life of that group. The language of religious scriptures, hymns and couplets on the one hand and the communicative language of everyday life on the other reflect their origin, socialization and transformation.

4.2 Eating Behaviour

Food culture including eating behaviour, choices, norms and practices shows assimilation, gender socialization and boundary maintenance as well. Eating behavior of monks and lay persons demands a comparative analysis as a whole.

4.3 Material Outfit

Each group has some unique artifacts and principles of utilizing them. Material outfit most of the times acts as a symbol or cultural trait. It is important to study the social meaning of dress pattern.

4.4 Religious Traditions and Changes

There are some unique ceremonials and rituals practiced among all the groups. These have some different effects upon the older and younger generation. All members of a group do not participate in these ceremonials and rituals in the same manner. Causes and effects of participation and exclusion are also very different from one to another. Festivals, everyday rites-rituals, beliefs- practices and monastic life are some important keys to reveal the identity of a group.

4.1 Linguistic Features: Distinctiveness and Exchange

Language is the most powerful and versatile medium of communication. According to John J. Gumpertz, verbal interaction is a social process in which utterances are selected in accordance with socially recognized norms and expectations. It follows that linguistic phenomena are analysable both within the context of language itself and within the broader context of social behaviour. Most groups of any permanence may be treated as speech communities, provided they show linguistic peculiarities that warrant special study. The verbal behaviour of such group always constitutes a system. (Gumpertz 2001)

In this part, to find out the linguistic peculiarities of Bengali Buddhist Community of North Bengal is the main objective of study. When language expresses itself as a medium of communication in the society and bearer of literature and culture, it takes on several forms. All these languages have cultural and natural side to it. It has been observed that a linguistic structure has taken shape in the Bengali Buddhist society of Siliguri and other parts of North Bengal with two modes.

Community's mode of religious communication: This language is a symbol of purity- it is the language of chanting *shloka* (verse), *mantra* (hymn) and reading the scripture. It is not a language that is used for everyday communication and is not within the grasp of the general masses. The refined version of it can be termed as the language for the *Tripitaka* or *Pali*.

Communicative language of everyday life: The mix of Arakanese words in the spoken language is undoubtedly a characteristic trait of the Bengali Baruas. From an anthropological point of view it can be said that the Chittagong dialect was used by their ancestors prior to migrating to urban areas. This along with signs and symbols make up the language of the village. A prolonged history of migration is associated with the Baruas of North Bengal and though there are many debates regarding the history of their ancestors, most scholars contended with the fact that Magh Baruas had arrived from Magadh. Therefore, on a primary level, it is natural that their language would be half Magadhi or a form of it. Later on, the language mingled with others and formed the present day Chittagong dialect.

Therefore, it can be seen that the language of Magh Baruas is a broad subject and needs to be discussed chronologically. We will continue this discussion in two sections:

4.1.1 Barua Community's Mode of Religious Communication

- **The language of religious scripture**

The primary scripture of Buddhists or Magh Baruas, the Tripitaka, was written in the Pali language. In the context of the language used in his religious prescription, Shri Haraprasad Shastri (Shastri 1923) opines that Lord Buddha was born in Nepal and he became enlightened in Bodh Gaya and he passed away in Kushinagar (Kushi Nara). His sermons contain eight *Bihari* languages, along with several others spoken in *Mithila* and *Ayodhya*. It exists now and was used even in the time of antiquity.

The central states may have been the birthplace of the Pali language but the influence of other languages and dialects over time led to the formation of Pali as it is known now (Jana1985). Scholars have expressed several opinions regarding the meaning of the word *Pali*. According to T.W. Rhys Davids, it was a dialect of Kosala. According to many, it is said to have been derived from *palli bhasha* (local language) while others feel it has been derived from *Patli* (language of Pataliputra /Patna, Capital of Magadha). However, in present times, several differences have been highlighted between *Magadhi* (language of

Magadh) and *Pali*. Thus, following the dictionary of Buddhism we may come to the conclusion that 'Pali' is the language of canonical texts of Buddhism (Thervada) which was preserved in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) originally and now in Burma, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia also.

The Buddhist monks recite their scriptures in the Pali language. For householder Buddhists, some Bengali books have been made available for the Buddhist chants. As examples, the 'Bodhi Bandana' (2005) published by the Bengal Buddhist Association can be cited. Apart from this, there are also 'Bouddha Montrabali' (2011), curated by Barun Bikash Barua and published by Parulbala Barua for free to distribute among all and 'Upasana Bratakatha' (2009) curated by Dr. Arunjyoti Vante. In these booklets, the Pali chants are converted and printed in the Bengali language.

- **Buddhist Hymns and Couplets**

This study demands special attention as our discussed group, the Magh Baruas of North Bengal, is a Bengali community following Theravada Buddhism. In several instances of their everyday life it has been observed that their Bengali identity has superseded their identity as Theravada Buddhists. One such instance is Buddhist Hymns.

Earlier, we have seen while discussing the language of their religious practice that the script used to write the *Tripitaka* (Buddhist scripture) was Pali and their reading and chanting was limited to Buddhist monks. For various social occasions and festivals of the Buddhist monastic order, the chanting of these scripts is a necessary duty. But many common followers have adopted Bengali as the language for these Buddhist hymns and sermons (*Sibali Brata*).

In Siliguri, two individuals named Debu Barua and Raju Barua have been found who compose, collect and distribute Buddhist hymns (*Kirtan*). Both their families have migrated from Chittagong and they have familial ties at present.

Shri Debu Barua was born in Chittagong and is around 60 years old. He migrated to Kolkata at the age of 11 with his father. His father was employed as a cook for a British officer and

his older brother was in the army. He had studied till the third standard in Chittagong and could not study any further because of family and financial issues. Even though he was interested in music from an early age, he was unable to enrol for formal training due to financial crunches. However, he had heard his father and uncle sing Buddhist hymns with the *khol* and *kartal* as accompaniment. Sometimes, he would join them too. After coming to Siliguri, he saw that there were no similar arrangements. Feeling the absence of such familiar chores, he formed the group '*Shakya Singh Bouddho Kirtan*'. However, apart from him none of his group members are Buddhists.

As there are no books available on Buddhist songs, he has collected a few hymns or *kirtans* from Chittagong and has written some himself. By profession he is a car mechanic. However, he wants to continue with this streak of Buddhist songs simultaneously with the encouragement and contributions of a few individuals of the local Barua community.

The subject of his hymns or *kirtans* is the birth and life of Siddhartha and his subsequent attainment of enlightenment, the magnificent tale of the supreme *labhi Sibli Mahasthabir* and the life of the philanthropic Raja Bishwantar. The language he uses for his songs is simple and undecorated. His songs are often sung on Buddha Purnima, Madhu Purnima, and other ceremonies being conducted at the temple like inauguration of a new temple or placing of a new idol, housewarming and funerals and memorial services. The tunes of these hymns resemble those of popular Hindu hymns and chants. However, the words *Hari Bol* (uttering the name of Lord Krishna) are replaced by *Buddha Bol* (Uttering the name of Lord Buddha). Prior to singing the hymns, the *Trisharan* (remembering Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha for three times) prayer in Pali is sung. The hymns that he has composed himself preach of the greatness of the Buddha mainly, in the tunes of the hymns dedicated to Krishna. Apart from them, a few hymns have been collected from Chittagong, which are mainly enjoyed by the elderly. His collection also includes a few social songs in the Chittagong dialect which impart life lessons in a light-hearted manner.

Debu Barua has translated a few of his songs to Nepali and he also sings at the local Mahayana temples. These songs are mainly prayers to the Buddha, tolerance towards other communities, love and affection and mercy is preached in these songs.

Raju Barua or Khokan was born in 1969 in the state of Assam. He completed his Higher Secondary from *Bongaigaon* (Assam). His father, Bidhu Bhushan Barua, had arrived in Assam in 1943 for his job in the Indian Railways. Since the end of his work life in 1993, they have been living in Siliguri. By profession, Mr. Raju is a wholesaler of medicines and he simultaneously holds the position of general secretary in the Buddhist temple of Haiderpara.

While growing up in Assam, he was exposed to the chants and hymns from *Padmapuran* and *Mansha r Geet*, which led to an increase in his affinity towards traditional Hindu tune. Thereafter, he concentrated on collecting, composing and singing Buddhist songs and hymns. The language used in his songs is sweet and he is known to use *shadhu bhasha* (classical form of Bengali). Shri Raju Barua's collection is essentially divided into two- songs about the Buddha's life in the style of *Kirtan* (Hindu chants and hymns) and songs about the essence of life in the style of *baul* (Bengali folk music), the teachings of the Buddha and the necessity of the *Panchashila* and *Ashtashila* etc.

He acknowledges that in the present days, listeners are more interested in modern *baul* music and folk songs compared to hymns about life. Even though the Buddha's teachings or greatness are not directly preached through them, philosophy of an elevated level is there which is comparable with Buddhist philosophy. The core philosophy of these songs is to propagate the idea that one has to go beyond the realms of worldly affairs and find the path to salvation.

When these songs are sung, instruments such as harmonium, flute, *dotara*, *khol* and *kartal* are used as accompaniments. None of the instrumentalists or those keeping beats belongs to the Barua community. The artistes wear a white Punjabi *Kurta* or an orange dhoti when they perform. The singer wears white. Depending on the duration of the programme and its timing, a nominal fee is charged as commutation and for meeting other expenses.

Usually it amounts to Rupees Three or Four Thousand. Another subject that Mr Raju's music deals with is the social life described in the Chittagong dialect. For these kinds of song, he relies solely on the records and cassettes collected from Chittagong, he performs these songs after making a few changes here and there. Most of them are sung in the tunes of the *Kirtan* and *Baul*, the use of *Mahalaya* and *Rabindra Sangeet* tunes has been observed in some places.

Some observable Features of Buddhists Songs available in Siliguri

- Modern Buddhist songs and *kirtans* (hymns) have a mention of Hindu deities (*Brahma, Vishnu, Indra* etc.) They acknowledge the greatness of the Buddha, which highlights the importance of acceptance of *Brahminism*.
- These songs are written in simple language however, there is a message of love for humans and good will for the world.
- Present day Bengali Buddhist songs talk of the society and the ardor of the human mind.

In the present day context, the Buddhist songs and hymns (*kirtans*) have adapted to newer forms, just like the followers of Buddhism, through intermingling. Hindu *kirtans* (hymns), tunes of Rabindra Sangeet, the chants of Mahalaya, the memories of Mansa sangeet, the connection with the Mahayana temples and monetary needs have influenced the composition of Buddhist songs and singers.

The present day exchange and mingling have led to the image of Buddhist songs being that:

The songs begin with a prayer in the Pali language. The prayer is dedicated to the parents, the *Trisharan*, the Buddha and the monks etc.

The subjects of these songs:

- The life of the Buddha (in the tunes of *Kirtans*)
- The message of the Buddha, the impermanence of life and the path to salvation (enlightenment) etc. (in the tunes of *Baul* music)

- Satirical songs with a message for society in the Chittagong dialect (in popular tunes)
- Core ceremonies- Birth, Death, initiation (*diksha*), house warming, Buddha Purnima, founding of a temple etc.
- Exchanges with other communities- These singers perform at Mahayana temples and in the Nepali language as well.

Depending on the demand, they have no issues with participating in Hindu *kirtans*. None of the instrumentalists backing them are followers of Buddhism.

Therefore, the existence of Buddhist songs in North Bengal is undoubtedly endangered. The handful of singers and lack of practice has made these songs a dying trend, nevertheless, the difficulty in understanding the chants has made these songs an easier way of worship for the homebound Buddhist.

4.1.2 The Communicative Language of Everyday Life

The Baruas living in North Bengal have naturally adopted Bengali as their language and their primary spoken and written language is Bengali. They introduce themselves as Bengali Buddhists as well. However, in this context, there are a few specifics that demand to be discussed.

Firstly, because the Buddhist Baruas of North Bengal are migrants from Chittagong, most of them speak the dialect of Chittagong and almost everyone understands it. The language of Chittagong is a variant of the Bengali spoken dialect and there is no separate script for it. Even though the pronunciations differ from regular Bengali and has an addition of different words, this language has taken shape that is much different from pure Bengali.

In an essay Barua (2010) elaborates that the Maghs may have adopted the hybrid language of Chittagong instead of Pali language, after migrating from Magadh to Chittagong and mingling with other races. He has elaborated that a lack of native Pali speaking teachers led him to learn the pronunciations of the word *Buttha* (Buddha), *Thamma* (Dharma) and *Sankha* (Sangha) from Rakhine or Arakanese scholars. The womenfolk among the Maghs

still make use of a few Pali words. The Maghs have married Burmese women which is why Magh women have learnt a few Burmese words at congregations of Burmese womenfolk.

Therefore, from the above mentioned statement, we can conclude that the language of the Magh Barua race is intimately associated with Pali, Arakanese and Burmese languages. Even though linguists such as Shri Suniti Kumar Chatterjee (Chatterjee 1926) and Shri Haraprasad Shastri (Shastri 1923) opine that Pali is not a spoken language. According to them, this language was mostly used in scripts and books. In this context, Shri Umesh Chandra Mutsuddi (Mutsuddi 2010) says that *Magadhi Prakrit* (local language of Magadh) was the spoken language in Chittagong. During the reign of Muslim rulers, the influx of Hindu and Muslim workers and embedded linguistic variations brought Bengali, Farsi, Urdu and Arakanese languages which led to the confluence and genesis of the Chittagong language. This is also a cardinal part of the cultural lives of the Baruas living in North Bengal.

It is necessary to take note of the fact that religion plays an important role in the history of language. In several cases, it has been observed that the exchanges of two communities belonging to the same religion but of different linguistic identity have led to the usage of several words. These differences can be observed in the Bengali spoken by Hindus and that spoken by Muslims. An independent flow has developed in Muslim or Islamic Bengali by the inclusion of a few Hindi and/or Urdu words. Similarly, the rudiments of Buddhist Bengali in North Bengal were shaped by the inclusion of a few Arakanese words.

Below is a list of Arakanese words along with their meanings that are still used in this region:

Arakanese Words	General Meaning	Arakanese Words	General Meaning
Keyang	Residence of Monks (Vihar)	Phungi	Monk
Fang	Invitation	Choyaing	Rice (Pindadan)
Phara	Buddha	Tara	Dharma
Chanka	Monastic Order	Thaga	Householder Worshipper
Karenga	Caregiver	Rachi	Female Monk
Chauli	Householder Priest	Chhadang	The starting and ending day of the trimonthly monsoon chants
Pharadang	Altar	Chhabaik	Begging Bowl
Chnai	Robe (Chivara)	Nang	Namaskar (a form of greeting)
Ekajik	Outer Robe (Uttarasanga)	Doyajik	Sanghati
Taya	A collection of monsoon months		
Pharik	Reading the Scriptures	Bhang	Big Bell
Lothak	Householder who has renounced ascetic life		
Mathechara	Senior Monk (Mahasthabir)		

Source: Primary Source

These words are intermingled in the language spoken by the Bengali Buddhists of North Bengal. They are particularly used frequently by the elderly of the community. It is worth mentioning that these words bear their religious cultural identity.

Apart from this, it has been mentioned earlier that the elderly, the monks who have migrated from Chittagong in the recent past and other individuals feel comfortable in speaking the local Chittagong dialect among them. They consider this to be their native language. However, those belonging to the present generation, who were born here, are used to the Bengali spoken in West Bengal. Nonetheless, they are not unfamiliar with the aforementioned language and words.

Gumperz (Gumperz 2001) has rightly said that, wherever two or more speech communities maintain prolonged contact within a broad field of communication, there are cross currents of diffusion. The result is the formation of a group which co-exists in social space or dialects distinct neighbouring languages or special parlances. Persistent borrowing over long periods creates within such group similarities in linguistic structure which tend to observe pre-existing genetic distinctions. For example, on the one hand, Barua Buddhists of North Bengal are still using some Arakani and few Pali words in their regular communication as well as 'Chittagong Dialect' which is very much a part of their culture though on the other hand this distinctiveness is losing its depth in the course of time at this new place.

4.2 Eating Behaviour

Despite the incorporation of clothing and shelter within the folds of basic needs since the birth of civilization, we need to intake food for survival. The concerns of food go beyond production, distribution and consumption. This is an integral part of our cultural and societal life. The culture of food develops through food habits and a combination of various kinds of likes and dislikes which are mostly dependent on the environment of the area, crop availability, awareness, religious and societal bindings, tradition and above all, financial stability.

Apart from keeping the body functional and nourished, food plays an important role in establishing and determining family order. This issue is associated with our history as well as present day foundation. Especially for migrant communities, it has been observed that when they migrate from their birthplace or homeland then some special or favourite food

is associated with a lot of memories. When living elsewhere, these kinds of dishes apparently serve as comfort food for them. They derive a different kind of satiation and joy from them.

Therefore, it can be surmised that the discussion of food for any community would be to understand its cultural identity. What we eat, who or who all present them, who all eat together and the order of taking meals serve as mirrors of a society.

The society of Buddhist Baruas is essentially divided into two - Buddhist monks living in monasteries and the Barua family persons. Therefore, it is quite natural to observe two kinds of food practice in the Barua community. Usually, restrictions regarding food are not stringent among Buddhists.

Following *Majjhim* or middle path, Lord Buddha advised his followers to eat without gusto or scrumptiousness. He did not prohibit the consumption of meat, however, he was against violence, but acknowledged the plinths of reality. Consumption of meat was not prohibited for householders, let alone monks. However, certain meats such as humans, elephants, horses, dogs, snakes, lions, tigers, bears and hyenas were prohibited. Undoubtedly, the Buddha's teachings were close to reality and logical. In this case, his three main viewpoints were:

- The boundary between violence and non-violence
- Addiction or abstinence from any particular food and importance of easy availability within the area
- Inclusion of people belonging to the lower strata

Against the backdrop of North Bengal, we shall discuss these abovementioned views.

4.2.1 Food Habits of Buddhist Monks Living in Monasteries

In effect, the only way a monk can gather food for himself is through begging. The begged food may be cooked or of the type that needs no preparation before consumption.

However, when out begging the monks have to be conscious about their attire and conduct.

Generally, they are not supposed to look inside and should accept the alms with contentment. In order to avoid acquiring a taste for certain food stuffs, the monks are expected to have all the begged food together so that they cannot differentiate the taste of any particular item.

It is deemed for monks to have their lunch prior to noon. Post lunch, they are not permitted to have solid food although liquids and fruits are allowed.

The food items consumed by monks can be divided into four parts:

- All those kinds of food and drink which a *Bhikshu* (monk) may take before noon.
- Types of fruits the juice of which a Bhikshu may take in the afternoon.
- Medicinal food like honey, ghee, butter, oil and molasses.
- Spices (herbs) like ginger, turmeric, chilli etc.

When the monastic order started developing, collection and storage of food was prohibited. However, when the orders began swelling in numbers and size, gathering suitable food for monks became challenging. For this reason, the Buddhist Chaityas altered the rules and made provisions for storing food. These storehouses came to be known as *Kappiyabhumi*.

The Buddhist Bhikshus however have no strong notion about purity and impurity of food. Pure food is that which is earned by noble means and which protects and nourishes the body. The Bhikshus do not refuse food from outcastes or untouchables. Unlike other ascetics they have no bar about accepting and eating meat, fish etc. but they are expected to maintain certain code of conduct in this matter. They said they are allowed to eat animal food with the restriction that firstly, the fish or meat is not prepared for them and they have no doubt in it (*Aparisankita*). Secondly, they have not seen it being killed (*Adrasta*) and thirdly, they have not heard to have prepared for them (*Asruta*).

Buddhist monks mainly have to depend on public charity. This charity assumes two forms—donating food and invitations. The Bangladeshi and North Bengal monks rarely visit homes to collect food. At present, the Buddhist monasteries in North Bengal maintain a list of Buddhist locals and donors who usually provide a monthly compensation. A representative of the order collects this grant and this money is used for fulfilling the needs of monks. Generally, Buddhist temples have provisions for cooking.

However, the arrangement is a little different in Bangladesh. The donors there take it upon themselves in turn to cook and supply food to Buddhist temples. If there is an economically disadvantaged family in particular, this duty is not passed on to them. However, there is no kitchen in these Buddhist temples. The monks usually eat twice in a day, once in the morning and lunch before twelve noon.

In case of giving and accepting invitations, usually two kinds of arrangements are observed. Firstly, any one monk can be invited to a family. Secondly, any family event, such as weddings, rice-eating ceremony, funerals, housewarming etc. requires extending invitations to at least five monks. This is known as *Sanghadan*. Any individual, if s/he wishes can perform *Sanghadanat* at any Buddhist temple. Apart from this, Buddhists donate food along with the *Chivara* (Robe) on *Kathin Chivara Daan* (festival of Theravada Buddhists) and on *Buddha Jayanti* (Birth day of Lord Buddha).

Prior to eating, the Buddhists follow a strict regime of prayer. Through this prayer, they take an oath that translates as:

'I am consciously taking these alms: this is not for the purposes of sport, sensual excess, personal charm or adornment: this is just to protect my body, to satisfy a want of nature, to save my celibacy. Thus, I appease my past feeling of appetite and do not allow appearance of new feelings of appetite. And my movement will be free and I shall feel at ease.' (Chaudhuri 1982)

4.2.2 Food Habits of Buddhist Householders

The influence of Chittagong on the food habits of Barua Buddhists in North Bengal is primarily noticeable. Their list of favourite foods invariably includes *shnutki machhor* dry fish, sea fish and spicy food prepared with lots of oil and chilli. From the different kinds of *shnutki* an indication of their origin can be identified. For instance, according to multiple respondents the *Siddala* and *Hangor shnutki* (dried sea fish) is liked mainly by Baruas who are closely connected to the tribal Arakanese community.

Their staples include rice and fish mostly. Pork is a favourite food item of Bengali Buddhists. They usually prefer non-vegetarian food. The consumption of beef is not common mainly because of its unavailability in North Bengal and the dominant Hindu population. However, there is no such restriction observed in Bangladesh.

Householder Buddhists usually serve the first portion of their preparations to the Buddha in accordance with their religious customs. Only then do they have their lunch and this meal is attempted to be served before noon. Usually vegetarian delicacies are dedicated to the Buddha, with the exception of the occasional fish preparation. However, they do not prefer serving meat preparations even though there is no decree against meat-eating in Buddhism.

In general it can be said that between Hindus and Buddhists, there is less consciousness among the later regarding purity and pollution. Even if present, it is hardly noticeable. Widows and monks sparingly consume non-vegetarian food and do not follow any separate customs. The food offered to the Buddha is also prepared in the same kitchen as that of householders. Some followers offer the preparations in separate utensils. During celebrations at Buddhist temples, the afternoon meals are eaten within the premises by those carrying them from home. The practice of fasting while worshipping is not a common phenomenon among Buddhist householders. In essence, Buddhist monks observe fasts as a method of purification. Below mentioned is a list of special food items liked by the Barua Buddhists of North Bengal.

- *Shutki*
- *Lachho*
- *Pachan*
- *Fried Aat Karai*
- *Khoi-er Moa*
- *Naru*
- *Pithey*
- *Bashkurul*

These different delicacies are prepared on the occasions of Chaitra Sankranti, Buddha Purnima and Bengali New Year. A specialty of North Bengal Buddhist families is Madhu Bhaat. Apart from this, as Lord Buddha attained enlightenment after consuming *Payesh* (Sweet dish prepared with rice and milk) offered to him by *Sujata* (great devotee of Lord Buddha), it is given a special place in Buddhist celebrations.

Family members are usually reliant on home cooked food and women are its complete providers. For a few economically well-off families, domestic help is employed especially if there are working women in the family. However, the ritual observed by new brides of serving her in-laws with ghee and rice seen among Hindus is found among Bengal's Buddhist families as well. There is little digression observed in it. The responsibility of everyday cooking is entrusted with the womenfolk of the Barua households and they are the prime decision makers. Where there are multiple women belonging to different generations, the division of labour is according to relation, income and age. Therefore, it can be said that a hierarchy exists for kitchen chores and responsibility.

Facts that have risen from case studies allow us to determine the position of women in food culture. The shadow of patriarchy is observed among the Baruas in their practices relating to food. For instance, in the absence of male members, the others become unimportant. This belief is not limited to only one family.

- Urban families with high levels of education and income usually do not discriminate against women regarding food. However, when it comes to dishes and taste, the male child's wishes are prioritized.
- Women have a tendency to be held as caregivers where it is unnatural to be not self-sacrificing. Most of the stale and leftover food is meant for the women of the family.

Thus, from the above discussion we may reach at the conclusion that in the area of food and food culture (food choice, recipes, eating behaviour, norms and practices related to food and all) influence of region is stronger than religion. It is said that language and food are more open to syncretism and that is why 'fusion food' is a common practice across the world. At the same time, Buddhists of different regions or different ethnic groups practice their own food culture. In North Bengal in comparison to their Hindu neighbours, one can notice very few distinguishable features in their everyday food habit but the use of Arakani terms like *Fang* (invitation), *Choyang* (Rice) clearly indicate/reveal the connection between them. As Chittagong became a part of Bengal, the Baruas adopted gradually more and more Bengali food habits and this process is still continuing.

4.3 Material Outfit

A variety of social and emotional needs and features are related with clothing behaviour of a person apart from the general significance of clothing which is related with his physical or utilitarian needs such as need for protection.

The choice of clothing is primarily governed by the society and the culture in which one lives. Sometimes, the influence of society is formal like uniforms and sometimes informal like customs and the fashion. It varies from community to community not only in their social context but in terms of their religious significance as well. As culture is never static or uniform, each age, each generation, each year brings some modifications of custom and accompanying clothing habits. Again, culture is constantly being modified by development in the technical, political, social and economic spheres of societies and such changes are reflected visibly in the clothing of the people. Factors that influence the diversity of

costume design include the effect of the natural environment, the supply of raw materials, the technical skills of the people, image construction and religious values as well as the aesthetic and political ideals of the different parts of the world and in different periods in history. Traditional clothing in India greatly varies across different parts of the country and is influenced by local culture, geographic climate and rural urban settings. It is much heterogeneous in character but modern clothing pattern is comparatively homogeneous in nature.

Continuing with this reference, it can be said that the present generation of Magh Barua Buddhists living in North Bengal, who have descended from a line of migrants and change, are not significantly different from any other ordinary Bengali family in terms of their attires and apparel. Usually men feel comfortable in shirts and trousers while women do so in *saree* (traditional Indian dress for women). Young girls are seen wearing *churidar* (traditional Indian dress for women) and jeans. They adhere to a general yardstick of presentation when it comes to everyday clothing and accessories. The elderly sometimes opt for *dhotis, pyjamas and phatua* (traditional Bengali dress for men) etc.

The differences between living as a minority in a Muslim-dominated area and a Hindu-dominated one are observable through the act of upholding certain traditions. In this regard, their views are flexible.

The married Barua Buddhist women of Chittagong are not seen wearing *sankha, pola* or *sindur* (symbols of married women), but in North Bengal they do so. This is a significant observation to be noted in this context as one of their inherent differences. After a point in time, only a handful of women living in Siliguri at present had stopped wearing *sankha* and *sindur*. In general, it is observed that married women consider these symbols as cultural practices rather than religious ones. They treat them basically as accessories.

Our attires and ornaments are intimately linked to our ceremonies. Normally, the Baruas wear new clothing on Buddha Purnima and also don something new for *Poila Boisakh*. Apart from those, the present generation also stocks up new clothes for participating in the

festivities of *Durga Puja* and *Kali Puja* (Annual Hindu religious festival, greatly observed in Bengal).

For most communities, the colour of a garment is symbolic of something in particular. The Baruas or Bengali Buddhists of North Bengal consider red to be an auspicious colour, symbolic of wealth and happiness while white is considered a sign of purity. Clothes in different shades of saffron, yellow and orange are worn by those who have renounced family life.

This is why their attire for wedding ceremonies is identical to that of Bengali Hindus. The bride drapes a red *Banarasi saree* (traditional bridal dress for Bengali women) while the groom wears white silk clothing for performing the wedding rituals. Earlier, a *shaira* or *sehra* (a veil for men) made of Styrofoam or flowers, was worn by Barua grooms in lieu of the *topor* (a conical headgear traditionally worn by grooms in Bengali Hindu wedding ceremony). However, that practice is not prevalent in present times.

The customs of clothing and food followed by Buddhist widows are less stringent than those followed by Hindus. In other words, changed customs of Hindu families settled in urban areas, brought on by the spread of modernity through urbanization, can be observed in Bengali Buddhist families living in North Bengal. Therefore, in this context, age is a significant factor. Elderly widows usually wear clothes of lighter colour and do not wear ornaments. The sarees they drape do not have thick borders. Even though there is no such compulsion for young widows, they tend to avoid the colour red.

The primary feature of clothing in Buddhism is its simplicity. The only distinctive dress used is that of the 'Bhikshu' or Monk which in India and Ceylon and South East Asia is a saffron coloured cotton robe. This is usually presented to him by relatives or friends at his ordination and renewed by layman at annual ceremony when robes are presented to the Sangha. The materials for these robes are supposed to be spun and woven in the course of one night by lay women of local village or township. The ceremony is a great religious occasion (Kathin Chivar Daan).

The differences between the two groups of the Barua community- the householders and *Bhante* or monks who have forsaken family life can be noted quite easily through their specific garbs. The clothes worn by them are known as *Chivara* or *Kasaya* (Pali *Kasava*). The chivara is fashioned from left over cloth which is then dyed. This is why it has a lot of stitch within its folds. The Buddhist monks of India and Bangladesh usually wear the chivara imported from Sri Lanka, Thailand and Burma etc. The colour of the chivara differs across areas. Usually the Burmese chivara is maroon, Thai bright yellow while the Sri Lankan one is deep yellow. The chivara is worn in a particular fashion and has three parts to it.

The three main pieces of cloth are the *Antarvasa*, the *Uttarasanga* and the *Samghati*.

Antarvasa- The *Antarvasa* is the inner robe covering the lower body. It is the undergarment that flows underneath the other layers of clothing and almost entirely covers the torso. The bottom of the *Antarvasa* usually protrudes and appears in the rough shape of a triangle.

Uttarasanga- This robe covers the upper body. It comes over the undergarment or *Antarvasa*. In representation of the Buddha, the *Uttarasanga* rarely appears as the uppermost garment, since it is often covered by the outer robe *Samghati*.

Samghati- The *Samghati* is an outer robe used for various occasions. It comes over the upper robe (*Uttarasanga*) and the undergarment (*Antarvasa*). In representation of Buddha, the *Samghati* is usually the most visible garment with the undergarment or *Uttarasanga* protruding at the bottom. It is a long piece of cloth about 8ft by 10ft, folded into 12 folds and worn over left shoulder. This is worn at religious ceremonies and by fully ordained monks not novices. Other items that may have been worn are:

- A waist cloth, the *Kushdaka*
- A buckled bell, the *Samakakshika*

(Trevor 1981)

In present times, under the *uttarasnga*, a garment stitched from a single cloth is worn to carry on them articles of daily use such as cell phone and money. The *chivara* indicates the level of seniority in the monastic order and who all are entitled, for instance, the young monks usually wear light coloured *chivara* (from Thailand and Sri Lanka) while fully ordained monks (*Mahasthabira* or *Mahathero*) usually wear dark coloured *chivara* (brought from Myanmar). Householders wear white clothes while observing the *Ashtashila*, meditating or to funerals.

4.4 Religious Traditions and Changes: Festivals, Life Cycle Rites-Rituals, Everyday Beliefs- Practices and Monastic Life

4.4.1 Major Festivals of Communitarian Life

It is normally observed that much like the Hindu community most of the celebratory festivals of the Barua Buddhist community have a religious connotation. The so-called secular festival such as 'New Year' also entails a special religious ritual because religion has an important role to play in our everyday life as it is supposed to protect our purity and give us fulfillment. However, in case of a migrant minority community, the understanding among one another, the influence of neighbours, intermingling with a larger cultural force has led to the creation of a hybrid culture which is a collection of different characteristics and changes according to circumstances.

In this context, we may discuss the observable social and religious occasions and their characteristics performed by the Bengali Buddhists residing in Siliguri and other parts of North Bengal.

- ***Chaitra Sankranti* and Bengali New Year**

From the prominent members of the Barua community residing in Siliguri, we come to know that the last day of *Chaitra* month in the Bengali Calendar is celebrated as *Chaitra Sankranti*. Prior to two days of the festival, hay along with a few medicinal herbs is burnt to keep away ailments and mishaps and welcome wealth and prosperity among Baruas in Bangladesh. At the entrance of every house, a garland is hung along with *neem* and mango leaves. Besides this,

every Buddhist Vihara is cleaned around this time. The idol of Buddha is anointed with milk and coconut water. The young wash the feet of the old and seek their blessings while those in the same age group play with water. Around this time, different kinds of sweets are prepared at home such as *pithe*, *naru* and *aatkorai*.

However, a concise form of this celebration is observed among the city dwelling Buddhist community of North Bengal. The end of Chaitra Sankranti marks the beginning of the Bengali New Year. After the day-long cleansing ritual, the Buddhist Baruas celebrate *Poila Baisakh* (beginning of the Bengali New Year) seemingly with pure mind and body. Many take a shower in the morning, don new clothes and go to pray at the Buddhist temples and make donation to the monks there.

The community assembles to perform a puja, acceptance of the *Shila*, and spends the day remembering their forefathers. The day is considered an auspicious one for commencing anything, apart from it being holy. For instance, *hathey khori* (introducing a child to education and formal system of schooling) and commencement of a business are done on this day. Apart from these, *prabrajya pradan* (ordaining a monk), *upasampada pradan* (ordaining a monk to a beggar/*bhikshu* or monk of higher order), *sanghadan* and donating the *attha parrikhra* (the eight items used by monks in their day to day lives is called *ashta parishkar*. They include three *chivaras*, a begging bowl, thread and needle, a cummerbund, a water strainer and a blade. Donating these eight items is referred to as *attha Parrikhradan*), the first day of the year is believed to be auspicious for performing such activities.

- ***Buddha Purnima (Baisakhi Purnima)***

The birth of the Buddha, His Enlightenment and His departure all took place on the full moon of the *Baisakhi* month (1st month of Bengali calendar), which is why this date is known to all as Buddha Purnima. Processions, practising rituals devoted to the Buddha, *shila*, *Samadhi* and *Pragya* are all observed on this day. The day ends by wishing well for all beings. This celebration has been introduced in all the Buddhist temples. Apart from performing various rituals, cultural events are organized in the afternoon or evening. A few community service programs such as blood donation and distribution of free books are also organized on this day. Even though every

year Buddha's birthday is celebrated in this way, but 2011 being the 2555th birthday of the Buddha, the celebrations were on a grand scale across the world and Siliguri was no exception. Both the Theravadi and Mahayani Buddhists collaborated on a common list of celebrations, which was undoubtedly of much significance

- ***Ashari Purnima***

Much like Baisakhi Purnima or Buddha Purnima, another significant day is *Ashari Purnima*. On this day, Prince *Gautam* had renounced worldly life and had accepted *prabajya* or the life of an ascetic. It was also on this day that he had delivered his first sermon to five disciples after attaining enlightenment, and had started the first *dharmachakra* or the cycle of duties. Another significance of this day is that, it marks the *barshabash* for monks, which means that unless there is a dire emergency, they do not leave their quarters in the *vihars* for three months. It has come to light that the Buddha had introduced this ritual in order to avoid the menace inflicted by snakes and other poisonous insects and from keeping harm caused to harvests by the community of monks.

This time is devoted by monks for gaining wisdom through the *shilas* and meditation. Householder Buddhists usually do not organize celebratory occasions like weddings etc. in this period of *barshabash* Buddhists are advised to lead a pure and virtuous life for these three months of monsoon.

- ***Bhadra Purnima (Madhu Purnima)***

To Buddhists, the full moon in the month of *Bhadra* is referred to as *Madhu Purnima*. It is said that when the Buddha was living in the forest by himself, a monkey brought a beehive as a present for the Buddha but He refused to accept it as it still contained a few live bee eggs. Later on, when the eggs were removed, the Buddha accepted it and drank honey from it contently. On this day, a lot of people perform *sanghadan* (charity to the community of monks) to the Buddhist monasteries. Apart from honey, these packages contain medicinal herbs and fruit juices and this is considered as an act of glory. In this context, it is worth mentioning that on this day, Theravadi Buddhists donate and use different foods with medicinal properties and

worship the Mahayani Buddha as Medicinal Buddha, which is similar to the Mahayani way of worship.

- ***Ashwini Purnima (Prabarana Purnima)***

This day marks the end of the three months isolation period for Buddhist monks. At the end of barshabash, the monks perform penance after accepting their mistakes and profess purity. This is a day of cleansing oneself through confession of the *prabarana*. They refer to this day as *Bara Chadang* also. *Chadang* is a Burmese word that refers to the day of *Uposath* or cleaning the defiled mind to ring in inner joy and peace. Even though *Prabarana* holds significance for ordained monks, householders conceded their mistakes and tried establishing an order of peace, love and unity too. However, at present only elderly Buddhists observe this day and understand its significance.

Even though Buddhists are aware of lighting sky lanterns over their houses and *Bihars* through the month on this occasion, they seldom manage to do so due to the limited availability of sky lanterns around this period. However, in recent years, sky lanterns are lit by other houses on the occasion of Kali Pujawhich is why they have become easily available in the months of *Ashwin* and *Kartik* and many Buddhists participate in this festival, thereby being in solidarity with their neighbours and upkeep their own rituals at the same time. Even though there is no clear evidence available on why these sky lanterns are lit and set off, it may be assumed that it is connected to illuminating the path to heaven.

- ***Donating the Kathin Chivara***

From the end of the ritual of *Prabarana* to the full moon in the month of *kartik*, the period is known as *kathin mash*. In this month, the *chivara* is donated to monks who observed the barshabash. Many Buddhist Baruas of north Bengal assemble for this ritual and it often takes the shape of their biggest festival. Centering this festival, a spiritual, social and cultural awakening takes place and several celebrations are organized for it. This festival was celebrated with much aplomb in all the four *Bouddha Vihars* or Buddhist temples of Siliguri, although at present it is observed in three vihars, with one of them being closed. Three different days are

fixed upon by the three vihars so that all the monks from these vihars can participate in each other's festivities. Apart from the monks of these vihars, monks from other neighbouring vihars and other Buddhists are present in significant numbers.

The *Kathin Chivara Daan* is the biggest festival of the Buddhist Baruas of North Bengal. The Buddhist temples are decorated beautifully and aesthetically on this occasion and special mats are woven for the monks. Special places in front of them are carefully designated for keeping the chivaras and other items of donation. Usually Buddhist Baruas donate to the monks observing the barshabash every year. A few turn up with items of everyday use while others donate a complete set of *kathin chivara*. Usually the women arrange their donation artistically on a platter and bring them to the temple and in some cases it is observed that women hold these platters on their head and go around the temple prior to the commencement of the ceremony. From the Barua women, we come to know that the barshabash is a time of austerity for the monks and to honour them, the householder Buddhists donate them chivaras, which are woven overnight with much difficulty that is why they are referred to as *kathin chivaras*. The chivaras received by the monks after the intense barshabash period of cleansing one's mind from the householder Buddhists, woven with much intricacy is considered honourable for both the giver and receiver and is counted as an act of glory in the Barua community. However, it is redundant to say that nowadays no one weaves a chivara, but buys them.

The items donated include bananas, coconuts, betel leaves and betel nuts, needles and thread, fruits and sweets. At present, these packages include packaged foods like Frooti mango drink, potato chips, biscuits, types of snack and cakes etc. The chanting of the *trisharana* by a senior monk marks the commencement of the ritual. Thereafter, the individuals present are gifted the *panchashila* and the Buddha mantra is chanted. A specific mantra is chanted three times whenever a *chivara* is given.

Arrangements for a vegetarian lunch are made in the *Vihars*, to be served at the end of the event. The monks are served lunch first at 12 noon after which others present are served lunch. In some cases, arrangements are made for a Buddhist *kirtana* or hymns are sung.

- **The Festival of *Kalpataru***

The word *Kalpataru* means 'Wish Yielding Tree'. Usually on the day of the *Kathin Chivara*, a fake tree is erected with colourful papers and bamboo within the premises of the *Vihars*. Treated as a symbol of the *Kalpataru*, devotees tie currency notes or other items of donation to this fake tree. Students usually hang pens and paper from this tree to gain knowledge and wisdom. It is commonly believed that while tying anything on the *Kalpataru* tree, whatever the wisher is thinking will get fulfilled and there is no dearth of the thing being tied in the life of the wisher. At the end of the festival, the items hung on the tree are distributed among the monks. Apart from the Burmese tradition, the influence of Hindu beliefs is observed in this festival.

- ***Maghi Purnima***

On this day, the Buddha announced his enlightenment at the Chapala *Chaitya Vihara* (Capala Cetiya of Vesali). Three months after this event, he left his mortal body at *Kushinagar*. This is also the day of unending thoughts. The consciousness regarding this day is observed among senior members of the community. On this day, they usually assemble within the temple premises and pray or partake in virtuous acts.

- ***Falguni Purnima-***

One year after gaining enlightenment, the Buddha went back to his homeland of *Kapilavastu* on this day. He met his relatives and close ones. This day is also treated as the day of reunion with relatives. The Buddha has said that proximity to relatives has a calming effect. From a social point of view it can be said that for a migrant minority community, the presence of relatives can be comforting and consoling for them to keep their identity alive. The *Falguni Purnima* is treated as the festival of *Holi* or *Dol* by the Hindus. The younger members of the Barua community partake in this festival of colours and enjoy with their friends and family.

- ***MahaSthabir Conferring Ceremony***

MahaSthabir Conferring Ceremony sometimes is a big event in North Bengal. In the tradition of Theravada Buddhism there are several hierarchical steps in monastic order. Depending

upon the seniority and sanity of *Bhikkhu* life this respectful title is given to a monk. For example in 2014 conferring ceremony was arranged by Nagrakata Bouddha Bihar for Fara Buddhashree Sthabir and many people came from the different parts of North Bengal, Kolkata, Bihar, North-East India and Bangladesh to attend the programme.

4.4.2 Life Cycle Rites and Rituals

In this part, we will be discussing the social practices and festivals observed by the Barua community. There are several rites of passage that a man has to go through in his life and each is marked by a significant observance. Being a socially bound creature, man has to pass these stages keeping in line with the rituals and customs of his designated community and society. These significant events are acknowledged through social celebrations.

Then, we would see that these festivals and observable customs can be termed to be of two types- religious and secular. However, in case of a migrant minority community, the understanding among one another, the influence of neighbours, intermingling with a larger cultural force has led to the creation of a hybrid culture which is a collection of different characteristics and changes according to circumstances. In this context, we can discuss the observable social and religious occasions and the characteristics of Bengali Buddhists residing in Siliguri and other parts of North Bengal.

- **Practices Followed at Birth or in Formative Life**

The custom of treating a pregnant woman to her favourite delicacies and showering her with gifts prior to giving birth has been there in the Barua community for long. In the Pali language, the word *Dohala* is used to mean 'longing of a pregnant woman' and it is considered the responsibility of the husband and close relatives of fulfilling her wishes. Usually in the fifth month of the pregnancy, through a family gathering, the expectant mother is fed a concoction of five food elements which are milk, *ghee*, *curd*, *honey* and *sugar* - called *Panchamrita*.

Thereafter, in the ninth month or prior to it (depending on the situation), she is entertained with palatable dishes. In both cases, a few traditions are followed by the womenfolk and these ceremonies are mostly organized and governed by the women. As invited guests,

predominantly women are present. However, through these traditional ceremonies too the desire or preference for a son is clearly expressed.

After the birth of the child, a christening ceremony is celebrated by some families between the first and third month. This ceremony is mostly observed if the child is a first-born. To decide upon the auspicious day on which the ceremony should be held, an almanac is often used and depending on the time of birth of the new born, his/her horoscope is also charted.

After birth, the rice eating ceremony for a baby boy is held between 6 and 8 months while for a baby girl it is between 5 and 7 months. The ceremony is referred to as *Bhaat Chowani*.

These ceremonies are usually held on full moon (*Purnima*) days while being considered auspicious in Buddhism. On the other hand, several families refer to a Hindu almanac while fixing the date for these auspicious ceremonies.

The same process is followed for deciding the date for a *mundan* (shaving the head) ceremony and no separate date is fixed for the christening ceremony. Both these rites of passage are observed on the same day. On the fixed date, rice pudding is offered to Lord Buddha and after that the child is bathed and made to wear new clothes. The first grains of rice are fed to the child by his/her maternal uncle or some close relative and thereafter, the child can have rice as his/her staple food. In some cases, the ceremony is performed at a Buddhist temple, although it is not a popular practice. Usually the ceremony is organized at home. Taking into account affordability, relatives and friends are invited. Buddhist monks are also offered meals at these ceremonies. Donations are made to the Buddhist fold. An evening event is organized for the complete family.

- **The Sacrament of Initiating the Child in Study**

The ceremonies for introducing letters to a child and the piercing of a girl child's ears were earlier celebrated with aplomb in Bangladesh. However, taking into account the busy lives of the Baruas living in Siliguri town, these tasks are accomplished according to personal convenience, rather than as traditional ceremonies. As an example, it can be cited that the initiation into writing is often carried out if there is any special occasion at home or at the

hands of the monks at the Buddhist temple. On the whole, it has been observed that the practice of using *neem* (a tree in the mahogany family Meliaceae) stems or thorns from the *Bael* tree (*Aegle marmelos*, commonly known as *bael* tree) for piercing the ears of little girls and feeding people on the occasion is on the decline. Even though all Barua women wear earrings and piercing being a necessity, the task is mostly performed at parlours and there is no traditional celebration associated with it.

- **Spiritual Initiation of the Child (*Prabajya*)**

The Barua community of North Bengal's Siliguri, pertaining to the religious and social customs that are followed through prior to getting married, sees initiation into the faith or *Prabajya* as the most important one. Once a boy turns seven and before his wedding, the *Prabajya* can be accepted at any time. According to this custom, a boy renounces his household life and accepts monkhood for at least seven days, at this time, he is allowed to keep on him only eight most important items or *Attha Parrikhra*. These are- the *trichivara*, begging bowl, needle, thread, a strainer and a cummerbund. Apart from them, an umbrella, a pair of slippers and a mattress is provided to sleep on.

On the auspicious day, the boy's head is shaved off and is given to wear new clothes after bath. In the evening, he is escorted to a designated vihara in the company of his friends and family. If the vihara is located close by, then a procession is taken out to reach it. At this time, the chivara is neatly tied with the cummerbund and kept in the begging bowl. During the journey to the vihara, this begging bowl has to be borne on the head. Usually the boy is accompanied by his relatives and neighbours. Many of them carry well-arranged items for donation. This occasion is treated as an auspicious one and the Barua Buddhists believe it earns them blessings by participating in it.

After reaching the vihara/temple, everyone prays to the Buddha and take the *Panchsheel* or Five Precepts and the *Trisharana* or Three Refuges in front of the monks present. After that, the boy touches the feet of the monks to seek their blessings for the life of a monk. He also prays for blessings and farewell from the elderly and relatives present there. Thereafter, the boy is asked a few questions and if he is granted monkhood, he chants the prayer:

“Bhante, sabba-dukkha nissarana, nibbana”

Translated as: Reverend Sir, in order to realize Nibbana, wherein lies the end of all worldly sufferings, you please accept these *chivaras* and make me initiated.

The boy now hands over the chivara to the monk and through subsequent prayers he asks for the chivara back from the monk. With the help of the experienced and senior monks at the vihar, he renounces his old clothes and other worldly possessions, to wear the *chivara*. At this time, he has to take an oath from his preceptor,

“Palisanka Yoniso Civaram Patisevami” – Having judiciously considered, I use these robes.

Thereafter, the newly ordained monk has to accept the *Dwadasha Sheela* (12 precepts) and has to follow different customs. Towards the latter half of the ceremony, this newly ordained monk or novice (called *maisang* in Bangladesh), accepts the position in front of those present. Everyone seeks his blessings and passes on the donations.

Traditionally, a monk has to beg from door to door to collect food for himself. However, he does not have to beg if a follower or a donor invites him for a meal to his home. In this stage, the monk has to perform the daily duties of the vihar, pray, meditate, chant Pali mantras and learn their correct pronunciations.

After at least seven days, the novice can decide whether he wants to return to the life of a householder or continue to perform his duties as a monk or can become an ordained monk for life. However, if he wants to lead his life as a monk, then he needs to seek his parents' permission and approval of his preceptor.

- **Different Ceremonial Parts of Marriage-**

Among the life cycle rites and rituals marriage is no doubt the most significant one. The first and foremost part of any marriage is to select the bride and groom. It is generally said that as *Siddhartha* himself married *Yosodhara*, his cousin, so this type of marriage is allowed in the society subject to the rule that cousins are cross cousins. But the present society tries to avoid

marriage between the relatives. Inter-religious marriage' though not encouraged, is not very rare.

Traditionally it was customary among the *Baruas* that the party of the groom must give *daba* (bride-price) to the bride in the form of ornaments, garments and even cash money and for that reason the actual marriage took place in the house of the bride - groom. But now-a-days by the influence of Hindu neighbours Buddhist bride - grooms too go to the bride's house and marriage is held there.

On the day of the Barua marriage ceremony, a good number of social formalities are to be observed. Before the actual marriage is held the *Vikshus (Vantes)* are invited to recite *Mangal-Suttas* in order to bless the couple for their happy and prosperous conjugal life. After that, one non-professional priest (*Mantra-data*) performs the actual rites for the ceremony. The 'mantra's he utters are generally in Pali. Actually in comparison to Hindu form of marriage the Buddhist marriage system is very simple but it has got many ceremonial parts which occur on different days. And to give a satisfactory feast to the neighbours is the vital part in a Barua marriage.

There are two systems of marriage of Barua Buddhists. If the bridegroom goes to the father's house of the bride and the nuptial is performed there, it is called *Chalanta Vivah*. Again, if the bride is brought to the bridegroom's house and nuptial is performed there, it is called *Namanta Vivah*. In Bangladesh, *Namanta Vivah* is much more common whereas in India *Chalanta Vivah* is a regular practice.

Let us discuss about the various ceremonial parts of the Barua Buddhists form of marriage which are prevalent in the contemporary society. Actually all these ceremonies could be categorized into three groups-

- Ceremonies before marriage
- Ceremonies on the day of marriage
- Ceremonies after marriage

Ceremonies before Marriage –

Alankar-Charani – When the final selection of bride and groom has been made the first ceremony that is held in the bride's house is known as *alankar-charani* that is to engage the girl finally by giving her new ornaments and garments from the bride - groom's side. From that day the girl concerned practically becomes betrothed. In the house of the bride - groom both the parties finalize the exact date of marriage and also make a formal agreement on the issue as to what they will give in kind to the boy and the girl (in most cases to the girls only) concerned. People are invited as witness to this and they are given a sumptuous feast. The elders formally bless the girl and give their approval for the marriage. This system is prevalent among the *Baruas* even now but the name of the occasion is commonly referred to as *Ashwirbad* rather than *Alankar Charani*. Another additional part of this occasion these days is exchange of ring and cutting the cake as an engagement celebration.

Pansalla, Nayari and Haala Song- In traditional Barua society these three customs are very much associated with the marriage ceremony. To conduct all the steps of marriage perfectly neighbours are invited for discussion. Name of this social meeting is *Pansalla* where all important decisions regarding marriage are taken. After fixing the date of the marriage many friends and relatives are supposed to visit the house of the bride and groom, they are known as *Nayari*, who are very helpful in domestic affairs.

Actually from the day of *Alankar Charani* or *Ashwirbad* and onwards in the house of the girl and the boy there occurs a regular festival. Among those festivals singing of *Haala* Song is a major one. Generally, the womenfolk sing in a chorus in the days of marriage preparation and on the day of actual marriage. These songs are called *Haala* and contain episodes of some happy historical events, such as *Kaikeyir haala*, *Janakir haala*, *Janak rajar haala*, *Dharmik raajar haala* and the like, though its meaning is very difficult to understand but from the names of these songs we can easily understand the influence of Hinduism over Buddhism. *Kaikeyi*, *Janaki*, *Janak rajar* are characters of Hindu epic *Ramayana*.

In North Bengal all these customs are not in practice now, rather some new trends are entering within the community. Presently young brides are interested to decorate their hands with *mehendi* paste before marriage.

Tel Loani- Actually three days before the marriage another ceremony starts which is called *tel loani*. In both the houses of the boy and the girl this ceremony is held. In that period going to the Buddha temple (*Vihar*) and worshiping the Buddha and taking blessings from the *Vikshus* are some common practices. A sacred thread purified by the *Vikshus* is fastened to their wrists, in order to protect them from the evil eyes of the spirits and ghosts. Then in a decorated winnowing-fan (*aanak kula*) paddy, durba grass, oil lamp, green banana, stone pebble, green turmeric, *ghila* (a seed of *mimosa scandens*) and a painted water jar which is filled with leaves of mango sprouts, bamboo sprouts, *mijri* sprouts (one kind of tree) are placed. All these have a symbolic significance. According to Buddhist beliefs, the green fruits are symbol of good health, green turmeric is the symbol of beauty, stone is the symbol of firmness, earthen light is the symbol of hope, water is symbol of life and quenching thirst, a *ghila* for gravity and leaves within the jar are the symbol of long life. In the boy's house the boy sits in a room surrounded by males and females, especially of young age. One by one they hold that winnowing fan and cause the same to move in front of the boy and touch his forehead. The wives of the boy's elder brothers too participate in it to enhance the pleasure of the company. Widows are not allowed to take part in it, for Buddhists believe like their Hindu neighbour that if any widow takes part in this auspicious ceremony, the couple will also suffer the same fortune. This is done twice in a day – in the morning as well as in the evening. In the girl's house the same thing is done in the same manner. But now-a-days in most of the cases this is done on the day before marriage and on the day the actual marriage is held. As another sub-part of this ceremony, on the morning of the day of marriage both the boy and the girl are anointed with paste of green turmeric and are bathed in ceremonious way. This ceremony (as *Gaye halud* in Bengali Hindu marriage) is gaining more popularity today. After bath they are supposed to wear something made up of iron like a ring, bangle or even it can be a small key which hangs around the waist with the help of a thread. These are used for the

same purpose i.e. to protect them from the evil eyes. Here again we can notice a role of Hindu occupational caste in Buddhist marriage.

The house deity (*ghardevata* in Bengali) is worshipped with un-boiled rice, banana and some molasses in Bangladesh during marriage days. All the residents of the house pay their homage to this deity and pray for the well being of the couples, who are going to be married. This is not a common practice among the Barua settlers of North Bengal, India.

Ceremonies on the Day of Marriage-

According to the original marriage system of Barua Buddhists of Bangladesh before migration, marriage is supposed to be held at the house of the bridegroom (*Namanta Vivah*). So there are two additional steps in the *Namanta Vivah*.

Bridegroom's party goes to bring the bride - On the day of marriage the bride is to be brought from her parent's house to that of the bridegroom in a ceremonious way. So, on the day of marriage the bridegroom party along with sweets, ornaments, dresses and perfumes goes to bring the bride. They are called *Barjatri*. They will not enter the bride's premises so long as they are not properly received by the bride's party. In the courtyard of the bride's house a temporary structure is built where arrangements of seats for the guests are made. The bridegroom's party sits there facing respective persons of the bride family. It is called *kanakani* or *konakoni basa* in the Chittagong language. Good wishes are exchanged between the two parties there. Then they are served with sugar and betel-leaves arranged nicely on a tray. Everybody takes a bit of sugar and puts in their mouth. After refreshment the bridegroom party handover what they have brought for the bride. All the items, put on a tray is shown to all guests present there and the womenfolk adorn the bride with those items. It takes a pretty long time. In the mean time rich diets are served to the guests. After feeding the guests, time comes to bid farewell to the bride. Some distinguished elderly persons of the bridegroom party are taken inside the house. The father or any near elderly relative of the bride hands her over to them and say, "Please accept our daughter and treat her as your own daughter from this day and take care of her. Hope she will lead a happy life in the house where she is going to live."

Rituals for bride reception- When the bride-groom party comes back home with the bride, the female members of the house cordially receive her in a ceremonial way. Generally, the brothers, brothers-in-law follow the bride to the bridegroom's house. The other relatives including her father will join during the actual ceremony. But the bridegroom and the bride cannot see each other before the final ceremony is celebrated. The bride is kept in a particular house and she does not take any food or drinks in the bridegroom's house till she is not a legal wife through Buddhists customs. So at the time of departure from her father's house banana and some other food are sent for the bride. But generally cooked rice and palatable food is supplied from any other neighbouring family for the bride. In the evening the neighbours are fed with delicious food. When the bride party comes in the bridegroom's house, they are welcomed in a ceremonial way and preparation is taken for the actual marriage ceremony.

Marriage ceremony of Barua Buddhists of North Bengal after migration is held at the house of bride (*Chalanta Vivah*) like her any other friend from Hindu or Muslim communities. Actual marriage ceremony of Barua Buddhists (both *Namanta* and *Chalanta*) is divided into three parts but the importance and detailing of last part which has emerged as a strong influence of Hindu community is more prevalent in North Bengal, India.

Religious ritual or *Mangalasu*- A particular space is decorated for the ceremony where the distinguished guests of both sides take their seats. The bride and the bride-groom are brought there and seated side by side. It is a custom that neither of the couple will look at each other until the ceremony comes to an end. Thus on the bride groom's head there will be a turban above which a coronet (*sehra*) should be placed so that his face remains to some extent covered. But in these days boys mostly use topor rather than *sehra*. The seating arrangement is made with mattresses, bed covers and pillows of both the girl's and boy's side. The bride is seated on the left side of the groom. Then invited *Vhikshus* come and have the couple take refuge in the five precepts along with *Trisarana*. The *Vikshus* go on to recite some *suttas* from holy *Pitaka* and give sermons regarding the activity in their new life, especially from *Sigalovada sutta*, *Mangala-sutta*, *Parabhava sutta* etc., those containing the duties of householders and used in *Paritta*. They regard the teachings of Buddha mentioned in this *sutta* as the "code of conduct for householders" or "*Grihi- Vinaya*". This function is called in

Chittagong dialect *mangalasu*. It is the main religious aspect of the marriage as considered by the Buddhist custom. Two auspicious water jars (*Mangalghat*) are placed there then the Vikshus come and tie the jars as well as make a boundary line of the area with the help of seven layers of thread. They fasten the holy thread on the wrist of the bride and spray the holy water on them at the end.

Rituals performed by lay priests - After the religious rituals performed by the Vikshus, a lay priest who is called *Mantradata* is necessary to perform the actual rituals of the marriage ceremony. The lay priest utters all the mantras in Pali and then gives his interpretation in Bengali. The story of the marriage of *Visakha* occupies an important position in the marriage ceremony of Buddhists in Bangladesh and in every marriage ceremony this story is cited. The mantras used in the marriage ceremony are relatively recent collections from different Paritta-suttas. Many scholars published books on this subject and tried to give a systematic form to the system of Buddhist marriage. (Barua 2011)

Mantradata formally gives permission to a couple to lead a conjugal life henceforth. First of all he seeks protection of himself as well as of the couple by the 'Act of truth'. This is followed by the *Metta Bhabna* in which he disseminates love for all living beings of the ten directions and thereby he seeks their help to protect the couple. Then he pays his homage to the three jewels (*Buddha, Dhamma* and *Sangha*). After that he invokes all *devas* from all the world-cycles to be present there and protect the couple from the evil eyes. Then he invites the representative of the bride to handover the bride to the bride-groom this will be followed by some formalities like 'to make the left hand of the groom united with the right hand of the bride', 'to make the left foot of the groom united with the right foot of the bride', 'to make the bride go round the bride-groom keeping her right side towards the bride-groom for seven times' etc. At the time of uniting the hands of the couple generally the little finger of the left hand of the groom is united with the little finger of the right hand of the bride. At this time the priest will say..

Idam dvihattha- sambandham viya tumhe pi sabbakatam samagga bhavaha vasatha annamannam deva devinam viya sahavaso hotu..

Trns: like this union of the two hands you also live in unity for long. Let your conjugal life be as that of the god and goddess.

It is noticeable that though in one of the *mantras* for the couple's benediction, priest says, you have no other refuge, *Buddha* is your only refuge. You have no other refuge; *Sangha* is your only refuge. You have no other refuge; *Dhamma* is your only refuge. The protection, safety and support of the world depend on the power of the *Buddha, Sangha* and *Dhamma*. By this act of truth let victory and prosperity come to you. But at the same time he says, ***Bhavatu sabbamangalam rakkhantu sabba devata*** (May all the gods protect you.) Thus, through the marriage *mantras* priests pray to *Buddha, Dhamma* and *Sangha* along with all Gods and Goddesses not only for knowledge, prosperity and unity but also for protection from the unlucky omen, inauspicious event and unpleasant scream of evil birds, undesirable dreadful planet and miserable nightmare. (Chaudhuri, 1982. pp 135-39).

Then he gives the couple blessings and holds the bunch of sprouts placed on the auspicious pitcher, dips them in the water of the pitchers and sprinkles this water on their heads seven times while uttering mantras seven times. The Priest gives them some advice then for the happiness of their conjugal life.

Stri achar (Womanly conventions)- When the priest finishes his performances the couple is taken to observe some other formalities. In this third part of the marriage they have introduced Hindu marriage customs like *maala badal* (exchanging the couple's garlands), *subha dristi* (to have a first auspicious look at each other), *sindur daan* (putting vermilion) etc. These matters are generally done *asstri achar* (womanly conventions) and no priest is required for that. Therefore, in this way they also follow popular Hindu marriage customs as an additional part of marriage ceremony. Finally, *vikshus* and other guests are offered food.

Ceremonies after Marriage -

Madi-Hondani, Na-Dinna, Phiranya-Bhat- In case of marriage at the house of bride-groom generally one or two days after the marriage the couple goes to the bride's parents' house being accompanied by others. As because the bride-groom touches the soil of his father-in-law's house first time this function is known as *Madi-Hondani* or touching of the soil.

Then on the 9th day after marriage again the couple visits the bride's parents' house. This function is known as *Na Dinna* (concerning the 9th day). This time the bride generally does not return back with her husband. She lives with her parents for some days. After few days the son-in-law will be invited again to bring his wife back home. This function is known as *Phiranya-Bhat* (literally 'returning meal'). the son-in-law stays for a day or two in his father-in-law's house and comes back after that with his wife. After that he can visit his father-in-law's house whenever he likes, no formal invitation is required.

But nowadays, due to economic reason, shortage of time and as influence of greater part of the society (*Astamangala* of Hindus / system of going to bride's parental house and return back within eight days) this elaborate system is mostly combined into a single one. Generally, the couple visit the bride's parents' house on the 9th day after marriage and stay there for two, three days and return back together after that.

- **Funeral Rites**

Post death, cremation is the imperative for Buddhists in case of both men and women. Firstly, the relatives, neighbours and other members of the community need to be notified about the deceased. Thereafter, the Buddhist monk has to be informed and invited. Initially, the local *Vihar* needs to be notified and after that, the ones further away can be informed.

Traditionally, for cremating a Buddhist Barua, raw mango wood needs to be used and for pall-bearing, an *Alang* is made using bamboo. It has come to light that in an *Alang* made of raw or ripe bamboo, a gap of a foot and a half needs to be kept between two bamboos of length seven and a half feet for pall bearing. In the middle, keeping a distance of a quarter of a cubit, a bamboo piece is kept horizontally which is tied with coconut coir ropes so that the deceased can be kept in a lying down position. Seven, nine or eleven bamboo pieces can be laid as long as the distance between them is fixed. There was a practice of placing one four feet long bamboo across in the middle so that six people can bear the deceased. Later on, the use of this four feet long bamboo was dropped.

At present, it is not always possible to make the pyre with raw mango wood hence sal wood and other kinds of timber are used for the purpose of cremation. However, it is mandatory to

include a branch of mango wood. With changing times, the using of electric crematoriums has become acceptable as well. For carrying the deceased's body, hearse vehicles are used more often than the *Alang*.

Much emphasis is laid on the Barua community's ritual of cleansing the body through a bath at the time of death. Three parts of a banana shrub is laid out as preparation for the bathing ritual, on which a net made of bamboo sticks is kept. The dead body is brought out of the room and laid on the net. Thereafter, water needs to be brought in a new *kalshi* (water can) for the ritual. At first, the deceased's son or someone comparable pours water from the opposite, after which the others follow suit. For completing the rituals, things such as a new urn, *handi*, with soap, oil, a comb fashioned from the base of the banana shrub, fragrance extracts, incense sticks, candle sticks, *aatop* rice grains, bananas, *batasha*, *khoi* (popped rice grains), betel leaves, betel nuts, sandalwood, *pathshola*, two pieces of white cloth (one to drape as a dhoti and the other for draping as a shirt) are needed. Once the bathing ritual is completed, a *diya* (light) is lit and flowers are offered and incense sticks are lit and the monk present reads out the message of the Buddha while offering the *Panchsheel*. Thereafter, some of the men carry rice water and go along with the procession. On the way to the crematorium, the words of the Buddha, the words of Dharma and words of the order are chanted and *khoi* (popped rice) is strewn. The dead body is laid on the pyre with the head pointing in the direction of north. From that night onwards, the *Sutta* is chanted for seven days. On the last day, a ritual is followed where a banana shrub is planted and a candle is lit after which a hole is dug and water is poured in it. Thereafter, that banana shrub needs to be cast into the river and after the deed is done, one should not look back. Usually, the *Shraddha* ceremony takes place on the seventh day and donations are made to the monastic order. Thereafter on the 15th day, first month, third month, sixth month and first anniversary, the Buddhist monks are donated *Choyang* with *Fang*.

- **Ancestor Worship** - Much like any other Buddhist community, the Barua Buddhists too regard the fig tree highly. This is the tree under which the Buddha attained enlightenment and on significant days of the year and in the lives of the Barua Buddhists, under this tree they worship their ancestors.

4.4.3 Everyday Beliefs and Practices

Religion has an important role to play in our everyday life, as it is perceived by the custodians of the religion that it protects our purity and gives us fulfillment. The important and main events related to religion or religious rituals play a major role in introducing the group into the society and establish them in socio economic perspective. The performing of daily rituals and customs reveals the various attributes of the group and the religious orientation and beliefs of the member of the group as well. As Baruas lived with Hindus for a long time, intermingling of these two groups resulted in some source of Hindu worship techniques and religious rituals have been inducted into the Barua community's religious practices. In several instances of their everyday life, it has been observed that their Bengali identity has superseded Barua identity as Theravada Buddhists. However, Baruas are able to maintain their individual characteristics as Buddhists by practicing distinguished hymn, words and rituals pertaining to Theravada Buddhism.

In this section, we will continue to discuss the most important and essential rituals as perceived by each individual of the Barua community, in detail and greater depth and analyze the changes inducted by the situation and time.

- ***Buddhapuja (worshiping of Buddha)*** –

In almost every Buddhist or Barua household of North Bengal, it has been observed that a *Buddhasan* (place of Buddha Idol) is separated out consisting of picture of Buddha or an idol and practicing of religious ritual is a part of their daily life. Apart from Buddha idol or picture they also worship other Hindu gods and goddesses based on their preference and inclination. The Buddha Puja (worship) is conducted twice or thrice a day specifically with flower in the morning and candles with incense in the evening. Before starting lunch an apportionment of the cooked food is offered to Buddha by all the members of the family. Basically the usual staple food like rice, lentils, and vegetables prepared for the family members, the top portion of the food, in a tiny amount taken out and offered to Buddha. The common practice is to offer the food to Buddha in a designated plate specifically kept in *buddhasan* area, but the preparation of food is conducted in the kitchen with the utensils used for daily use. However,

compared with Hindu customs of purity of the food like touching the food while eating, mixing the veg. with non-veg. etc. rules are not so stringent for Baruas. From offering food to worshipping in daily life, there is a set of hymn to be followed. Generally, they confess their faith in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha saying

Buddham Saranam Gachchhami

Dhammam Saranam Gachchhami

Sangham Saraman Gachchhami

(to repeat three times saying 'dutyam pi, tatiyam pi')

- ***Sanghadan (Charity to the community of monks) –***

In every religious and social event of the Barua community, it is imperative to conduct Sanghadan as a religious duty. The Vikshu and shramans are generally dependent on the donation by the Barua families. In Bangladesh, there is no kitchen operational in Buddha Bihar and two to three Barua families, by turn prepare and deliver the food to Buddha Bihar, however that is not the tradition in West Bengal. For example, currently in Buddha Bihar in Siliguri, apart from residing bhante and shraman there are some Baruas who actively take part in operations as secretary and run daily administrative activities to support the functioning of the Bihar. This secretary maintains the list of the Baruas with demographic data and collects monthly subscription from these families to run the Vihar and Vikshus daily needs according to the standard set by the Bihar. During all the major events like Kathin Chivar Daan or Buddha Purnima, the Bihar administration collects the donation separately from the Barua or others. Some of them personally visit the Bihar and offer their donation as well. Bhantes play a pivotal role in conducting rituals during birth, death & marriage in the Barua community and their presence in this occasion is absolutely must. So the charity to more than one monk or bhante is called Sanghadan.

- **Obtaining & Performing *Panchasheel, Astasheel and Bidarhshan Dhyan Bhabna***

In their family life Barua Buddhists try to observe principles laid down by the Buddha in the *sigalovada sutta* (Pali *Dighanikaya*, III) to honor and serve parents, teachers, bhikshus and other recluses, to perform husband's duties and responsibilities towards wife and vice versa; to deal with the friends and relatives and neighbors with the spirit of love, compassion, sincerity and faithfulness, to maintain children and to look after the servants and other working people with a friendly eye, but not with a master slave mentality, to work hard, to amass wealth by honest means, to live moderately and to give generously. Also they worship the *Arihant Sivali Mahathero* to get rid of or overcome the mundane sorrow and sufferings, they practice *Sibali Brata*.

Woman and elderly people practice **meditation** under the guidance of competent trainer. As an example counting the beads saying *Anicca Dukkha Anatta* is their regular practice.

4.4.4 Monastic Life and Case Study on a Theravadi Monk (*Bhante*)

While discussing the context of the Barua Buddhists living in North Bengal, it had been noted that this community migrated from Chittagong have been perceived and described as a mixed race in Bangladesh's history. In present time, the families enjoy a cordial relationship with the Baruas residing in Bangladesh and also the monks, most of them are from Bangladesh and a frequent visitor of that place, harbour the religious and cultural unity amongst the Buddhists of North Bengal. It can be effortlessly concluded that the religious practices, rituals of these arriving monks will be directly or indirectly under the influence of Buddhist culture of Bangladesh. From the information collected based on the various surveys, Bangladesh is having a large number of Bouddha vihars and activities in these vihars are widespread with enough administrative control to make sure the monks follow a routine life with proper devotion and pristine lifestyle according to the norms laid by the Theravada doctrine. However, in North Bengal due to limited number of monks and unavailability of proper administrative enforcement, considering the migration and various situations arising out of ever changing dynamics of the society, inclination towards Hindu culture and customs adopted by Monks has been instrumental.

There is a set of complete rules and regulations of monastic life that range from dress code and dietary rules to prohibitions of certain personal conducts in *Vinaypitak* – First Chapter of *Tripitataka*. But due to various compelling situation and status of monks in which they are currently leading their life, a very unique framework of living, meeting their needs have been initiated. The various stages are discussed below:

- ***Prabajya and Upasampada (Recruitment & Training)***

A *Vikshu* is an ordained male monastic (monk) in Buddhism. In North Bengal Bouddha vihar there is a limitation in the number of the *Vikshu* (monks) and shramans'. Every vihar has one monk (*Vikshu*) and two or three shramans as per statistics and information available. There is no report which confirms the presence of any *Vikshuni* (nun) living in any of the vihar in North Bengal. In these Bouddha vihar there are commonly two types of methods with respect to religious conduct. Firstly as Brahmins perform *upananyana* (sacred thread ceremony) to attain the status of *dwija* similarly a Buddhists male of age seven to twenty two has to spend minimum seven days as shraman in the vihar. After performing the various rituals they are allowed to resume their usual life. Secondly, those who have decided to devote their entire life as a monk, shaped to support their spiritual practice to live a simple and meditative life and attain *nirvana* (salvation).

The usual belief of Theravadi Buddhists across various countries, that decision to conduct monastic life, (life in *Sangha*) is a holy and pure attempt, the candidate has to lead a life as a shraman for first few years. As the monastic life requires lot of hardship in both mental and physical aspect, requires a minimum age limit of twenty to start. During shraman period the usual teaching and training will be on wearing chivar, education on Pali, practice of sitting, dietary conduct, rendering respect to elders etc. The attainment of proficiency in Pali language, from the very beginning of entering into monastic lifestyle, is an essential duty of the *Bhikshu* to perform, as *Tripitaka* written in Pali.

As per the terminology coined by Theravadi Buddhist society, the event of the first entry into monastic life or 'primary ordination' is called *Prabajya* and becoming *Vikshu* is *Upasampada*. During *prabajya* ceremony presence of only one *Vikshu* usually is considered enough but in the

case of upasampada it is imperative to have the presence of the entire Sangha (minimum five monks at least). Upasampada event is conducted with an ecclesiastical boundary which does not allow the common public including the shramans' (novice) presence, however during prabajya, no restriction in attending the event is imposed. However, the fabric and texture of the chivar (robe) is different during prabjaya period and post upasampada event. During the period of upasampada there will be two experienced monks who will be engaged with the candidate as trainer or *shikhsaguru* and inductor or *dikhsaguru* for preparatory activities. The candidate has to seek permission and blessings from Sangha to enter into the monastic life. The Sangha settles the right to entry to Sangha as Bhikkhu by conducting interview with the deserving candidate.

- ***Sheel Grahan (Precepts to be observed)***

A precept is a general rule intended to regulate behaviour or thought and it constitutes the basic code of ethics undertaken in monastic life.

Lay Buddhists who are living a family life can undertake the five or eight precepts (*Panchasheel* and *Astasheel*) but these are not mandatory. But monks in Sangha have to undertake at least ten precepts (*Dashsheel*) which in all the traditions are essentially identical and commitments to abstain from harming living beings, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and intoxication, dancing and singing, dietary intake post noon, also abstaining from luxurious places for sitting or sleeping, and overindulging in sleep, accepting money including gold, silver or any costly item etc. and live life in celibacy. Apart from these primary and most important ten precepts a monk has to observe two hundred twenty - seven precepts in totality.

Actually, the essential requisites in a monastic life are four: dress, food, dwelling place and medicine. For all other requisites the vikshus and the shramans have to depend completely on the *dayakas* (donors) as they are forbidden to work for any earning.

The dietary practice and imperatives in Buddhists life have already been discussed in detail in different chapter. In Siliguri all residing bhante and shraman mostly consume the food in the viharor in Buddha temple. Apart from this they accept the invitation outside and eat as well.

The invitation can be personal or Sanghadan which is the custom to treat five monks with food. In general, the monks refrain from expressing their desire for a particular food or type of food they wish to intake. They have to consume the food 'as is' offered by dayakas but if Monks sense that there has been any animal killed for their food preparation then they can refuse to intake the food as per the directives. Before starting the food intake Monks start reciting mantras which basically explains the need of food is only for survival and without any desire. The lunch has to be completed by noon 12 PM and no aberration is allowed on this process.

The vikshu and shramans can easily be identified with feature of their clothing which has already been discussed in detail in earlier chapter. One noticeable practice in this context is, generally vikshu and shramans only use the chivar which has been donated by the *dayak* and *dayikas* (donors) as a rule set by Sangha. For easy identification of seniority it is observed that younger monks use yellow chivar and older ones prefer to wear maroon coloured chivar. Lord Buddha was extremely vigilant on the code of conduct to be observed by monks in Sangha. It is imperative to have not more than three chivar in custody by a monk in single instance and used one can only be changed if it is not usable due to wear and tear.

In earlier days, monks had to follow hardship and were not allowed to live under roof or spend the night in house. But with time it is observed that for the monks it was tough to conduct life by not living in constructed house. The absence of minimum dwelling facility required was not allowing them to maintain their health. The progression in society coupled with macroeconomic changes has brought the monks to be settled in a particular place for easy operations of Sangha and keeping them fresh for work for wider perspective rather than burning their energy by hardship in lifestyle. Also these settlements invoked the proximity of the families who wants to follow and seek advice from monks with regard to their religious life.

As a result, the rapid growth of Buddha vihar can be seen in various places which basically serve the purpose of living and worship for monks. These places which initially started as Buddha vihar have grown to include many social welfare institutes like school, hospital etc. These Buddha vihars and temples are the residences of monks and they are not allowed to stay overnight in any family house or their own house. However, in present days the rule is not

properly observed depending on the prevailing situation. In Siliguri, Theravadi monks stay in local monasteries. Generally, one senior bhante is the monastery in-charge and others are juniors or trainee shramans. At present the total number of monks staying in Siliguri is not more than ten in number.

- **Medicine**

Ayurveda (a type of complementary or alternative medicine nowadays) which had been promoted by Lord Buddha during his time, still believed by the monks as prime remedy and this is a key indication of trust and belief on him, as a *Veshajguru*. But during extreme illness or serious health condition monks are dependent on the available modern curative measures like surgery and medicines in nearby facilities in the form of nursing home or hospital etc.

- **Daily Life**

In everyday life the monks have to leave the bed early while in Sangha, which is rule strictly followed. Gautam Buddha has guided monks on the conduct of daily life with respect to dress and customs to be followed. The monk has to observe the rule of accepting invitation and has to be careful on his conduct, sitting, speech or conversation when he is invited to a home. These behavioural conducts have to be inculcated from the very early stage of shramana by Sangha.

Primarily personal hygiene and care of Sangha and Buddha idol is the prime responsibility of every monk residing in the Sangha premise. Bhante conducts the bathing rituals by cleaning the idol place, putting fresh water, petals and flowers and starts the prayer ceremony with other monks together or alone. Post breakfast bhantes get engaged with the administrative function or meeting with the visitor or guest.

In Bangladesh generally donors carry out the responsibility to feed bhantes and arrange to deliver the cooked food in Bihar or Buddha temple by turn. As a result, the installation of kitchen is not available in most of the Buddhist temples in Bangladesh. In contrary North Bengal Bihar is having fully functional kitchen for day to day food arrangement which is usually operated by younger bhante or shraman otherwise temporary kitchen worker is deployed from

the needy sector (mostly middle aged woman) of the society who does the cooking in exchange of a small fee. As per the dietary rules in Buddhism post 12 PM food intake is prohibited, usually bhante's misses the commitment to lunch invitation to abide by this rule. After sunset bhantes, as a practice, do not intake solid food instead they indulge themselves in consuming milk, paneer, fruit juice, cottage cheese water, tea, coffee or coconut water etc. as these mild food or soft drinks are allowed for survival. Apart from these, though there is no such restriction to chew betel leaves and consume tobacco by monks, but these activities are hardly seen in the public place.

After lunch they rest for a while and get engaged in prayer, meditation and discussion. Bhante's day to day activity is decided by his age, size of the premise of the temple, set of activities and moreover his ability to physically carry out the administrative tasks. As an example in Gurung basti locality, the International Buddhists Education and Research Centre and Buddha Society running an orphanage a school and in parallel were conducting various seminars, round table, discussion etc. which let them to receive accolades from various corner of the society. However, as all these efforts have come to a halt and nowadays bhante's daily work schedule has changed in tandem with the cessation of these activities. During the day time bhante can roam freely in different areas of the locality but usually after sunset they prefer to be in the Buddha temple premises. In every Buddha temple, there are few books available for reading which covers or consists of Buddha's words, Spread of Buddhism and Reason, History, Philosophy etc. For example, in Haiderpara Buddhabharati three days a week, a camp is organised for 'Bidarshan Dhyana Bhabna' or meditation, so the activity is slightly different here for the bhante. Whatever may come with respect to workload bhante's are not allowed to stay outside the Buddha temple in the night. However, these rules can be adjusted based on the condition or situation which was unforeseen or difficult to handle. During monsoon (Barshabaas) generally bhantes keep themselves confined in the temple or city and abstain from travel outside.

Apart from prayer, meditation, etc. the most important task and responsibility of *bhante* is to make sure that donors get enough time and advise on their religious crisis or need, inculcate

teachings of Buddha and attend family functions on auspicious occasion to perform rituals and recite discourse of the Buddha (*Mangalsutta*) etc.

- **Administration in the *Vikshu Sangha***

Vikshu Sangha is organised with more than one *Vikshu*, so it is an absolute requirement, that administrative framework is in place to run the activities by the committee, obeying rules and policy laid out by the governing authority. Due to lesser numbers of Buddha temple and monks in North Bengal there is no administrative framework and is only connected with the authority in Kolkata with two orders of Theravada monks, the *Sangharaj Nikaya* and the *Bouddha Dharmankur Mahasabha*. The *Sangharaj Nikaya* was connected with Burma and *Mahasthabir Nikaya* is its Bangali version. The appointments of the monks in North Bengal Buddha temple is mostly administrated by these two institutions. However internal issue management is taken care of locally by the executive committee of the temple.

The seniority of the monk is not only decided by the age of the person but there are other factors like commitment to perform uposath and barshabaas diligently every year and some other rituals. These routine conduct and post upasampada period are the prime factors to determine seniority of the monk. The monks have to remember and recollect properly the date of uapasampda while interacting with other monks for the first time so that appropriate respect can be offered based on their seniority. The formal or any other kind of educational degree is not to be a considered factor to set the precedence. However, for shramans these are not applicable.

- **Role in society**

The minor Barua community has an important role in the society to play in North Bengal as the Buddhist culture has been enlivened largely by them so far there. In spite of individual differences in mentality, zeal for work, potentiality and religious practice these people as a community hold a commendable contribution.

These Vikshu or Bhantes impart the preliminary teachings of Buddha to the Barua community and guide them to lead a spiritual, aesthetic and social life marked with coherence and progress.

The intimate relationship between the Vikshu Sangha and the house holders in both India and Bangladesh forms a remarkable characteristic of Barua community as the mutual dependence of the two keeps the chord intact. Daan and Sheel are considered the most pious works in Barua community and so the house holders remain open to receive suggestions and religious knowledge from these Vikshus or Bhantes though exceptions are there. The presence of a very few temples and Vikshus hindered the practice of rituals and Pali language but the presence of Bhantes is compulsory in the time of birth, death and marriages, the most important events in one's life. In comparative analysis with Bangladesh, a large number of Baruas believe that people of Bangladesh have loyalty to Sangha, and monks portray devotion and care to commoner in higher degree, compared to North Bengal. Analysing the situation and interpreting the various data we can present the matter in the following way with some important characteristics

- By practicing Daan and Sheel, Vikshu guides and help the community to improve spiritual and mental condition.
- Bhante plays a major role in conducting rituals during birth, death and marriage in the community.
- In various religious and social congregations, the presence of bhantes and recitation of discourse of the Buddha (Mangalsutta) by them creates a positive and happy ambience which is a mark of Barua community and indication of their very existence.
- In Barua community the bhantes also play the pivotal role to share religious advice, explain Pali in local language for easy understanding, family issue resolution and other advisory services depending on the need of the individual or the group.
- Apart from this, by practicing meditation and teaching religious courses bhantes keep close collaboration with the Barua community in this area. However, in Siliguri

only one Buddha temple conducts the meditation camp (Bidarshan Dhyan Shibir) diligently and in a particular frequency.

- Bhantes extend their advisory role to decide on the various auspicious functions planning by selecting date, practicing rituals or like arranging tour of the Buddha temple for the community etc.

While acknowledging the importance of the Theravadi monks or *vikshu* in their life, the residents of the Barua community in Siliguri have also raised some concern against the monks of being reluctant in community festival or occasion, showing lack of devotion and punctuality, engulfed in various issues in running temple administration, harbouring outbound attitude of the Bhikshus etc. In attempt to secure their very existence, it is imperative to have close collaboration between Barua community members and Vikshus, they also need to work together responsibly with a lot of initiative to expand Theravadi Buddhism in the region.

In this context, it is worth mentioning that in the second half of his life as a preacher, Lord Buddha had permitted women to accept the Prabajya to live the life of a monk. However, in present day North Bengal and Bangladesh, there are hardly any female monks. There is no custom of presenting daughters with the Prabajya. Nonetheless, in some cases, older women especially widows stay away from the chores associated with the household and instead spend more time close to the vihars performing odd jobs through the day. However, they are not allowed to stay in the viharsovernight.

In Bangladesh, a few devout women followers dress up in saffron garb, follow the Ashtasheela or Dashasheela, but do not live in their own homes or in viharas. They usually live in a separate place. The locals in Bangladesh refer to them as Sadhu Ma. However, women engaged in daily activities at the vihars in Siliguri town are not conferred such titles. Besides, the number of monks in the vihars located in Siliguri town is minuscule. This practice is not treated as mandatory in families any more. Most lower-middle class families do not follow through with this practice for paucity of finance and absence of proper Vihars and preceptors. On the other hand, well-off families visit Bodh Gaya on Buddha Purnima or other auspicious occasions and

participate in bidarshan meditation and prabajya camps. They treat participation in these camps as a way of spiritual development.

Most of the bhantes around Siliguri have been raised in poverty and deprived of economic assistance in Chittagong during their formative life. Despite formal education they learned Pali and recitation of discourse of the Buddha which helped them to acquire the wisdom. They encountered various sort of experience in the walk of life which has made them more knowledgeable. The life of one of senior most bhante is discussed in detail here.

Case Study:

Bhante Binaypal Mahasthabir

The very respected and senior most *Bhante Binaypal Mahasthabir* is the first disciple of respected *Bhante Rashtrapal Mahasthabir*. He was born in the year 1940 in Howara para of Raujan Thana in Chattagram. His father's name was Kamalapru or Kamalakanto and mother was Snehalata Barua. Initially he was engaged in studies with the religious subjects and while he was in grade seven in the year 1956 he migrated to India. Before his ordination his name was Arabinda Barua. He was admitted to Kalchini school while his father was serving in the European company in Bhatpara tea garden in Jalpaiguri.

In the year 1960, he was ordained to become *Shraman* with a new name *Binoypal Shraman* by the founder of 'Uttarbanga Boudhhya Sanghashram' and the prime face of revival of Boudhya teachings, bhante Atulsen Mahasthabir. He was induced by Atulsen Mahasthabir to get himself immersed in religious study and very much involved in social work. He has studied under late Bipul Sen Mahasthabir of Naagrakata Boudhya Bihar in Buddhists teachings.

The India-Bangladesh subcontinent cum world famous personality Dr Rashtrapal Mahasthabir was personally steering the construction of the *Buddha Bharati Vihar* in the year 1962 by personally residing in Siliguri. In the same time, he was also in pursuit of an appropriate and efficient disciple when he interacted with *Binoypal Shraman*. Eventually in the year 1965, *Binoypal* on the embankment of Mahananda river and in front of many shramans and monks accepted the life of a bhikshu to be known as *Binoypal Bhikshu* by the process of *Upasampada*.

After that he pursued his academic endeavor and secured first class in the 'Shashtri Acharya Pali' exam conducted by Assam Sanskrit Board and Dwarbhanga Kameshwar Singha University. During the same time in Siliguri 'Bhubanmohan Bidyamandir' got established and Binoypal Bhikshu joined as a teacher.

While he was in Nalanda he was diagnosed with health complications and sent to Kolkata for better treatment and nursing. In this period, he joined 'Rishra Jetbon Budhha Bihar' as principal and stayed for consecutive seven years. While he was serving as principal he arranged felicitation for Bhante Tangfulu Kabaye Soad from Burma and internationally renowned chess player Dibyendu Barua.

As per the direction of *Sangharaj*, Pandit Dharmadhar Mahasthabir, he travelled to Sodepur and contributed in religious teachings and performed various social works. He has been instrumental in establishing the 'Budhha Samiti' in Bhadreswar and Bandel while he was in Rishra. He got himself transferred to Siliguri in the year 1995 when Praggananda Mahasthabit made him a special request.

Bhante Binoypal was the principal of Buddha vihar adjacent to Humanistic Research Centre in Gurungbasti of Siliguri town. But later he was confronted with the vihar's management team arising out of some problems culminating to deadlock situation. This Budhha vihar slowly became controlled by Mahayani Lama group over the period of time.

In the year 2014 – 2015 Bhante Binoypal became shelter less and was no longer affiliated with any vihar permanently though he is still invited in many social and religious events of the vihar in Siliguri and adjacent areas. This non affiliation and lack of permanent job with a vihar has led to complications both mental and economical. Currently his health condition has deteriorated with the period of time and he is residing in his sister's place temporarily. No doubt, at the end of the life, which has been conducted on the anvil of religious conduct and teachings, the situation had become complex and worse which is further culminated in the absence of appropriate solution.

In general, it has been observed that the bhantes are children of very poor section of the Bangladesh families when we look closely to their current and previous lifestyles. Despite the

absence of formal academic training they however managed to secure Pali and Religious teachings. In the forum of discussion with Binoypal as well as other bhantes around Siliguri it has been observed and noted that they have certain degree of belief in paganism or idol worshipping; miracles and occultisms in the form of various stories; theory of heavens; existence of god and goddess, fear of ghosts, existence of soul or spirit etc. The same can be observed in the recently written form in Buddha teachings in recitation (mantrabali) and Kirtan or connoting a musical form of narration or shared recitation of Buddha teachings.

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CHAPTER - 5

Boundary Maintenance and Exchange with Other Communities

- Intercommunity Marriages and Other Exchanges
- Syncretism and Boundary Maintenance Reflected in Religious Occasions and Customs of the Barua Buddhists.
- Barua Buddhists: Perception of and Social Exchange with others

CHAPTER - 5

Boundary Maintenance and Exchange with Other Communities

In this final phase we are going to analyze the presence and existence of the Barua group of people, particularly on the basis of their relationship with the other religious and linguistic communities and on their activities and reaction, their intermingling and exchange with the majority community and their mutual interactive communication that lead to the development of such relationship.

We have already observed that Baruas as a minority community is getting constantly acculturated to their social surroundings and are thereby influenced by this in varying degrees and dimensions in different spheres of their existence, but in spite of that they have been able to retain the uniqueness of their identity and many of them maintain their rites and rituals with utmost care and seriousness. Despite the induction of practices from other religion, they are able to uphold and maintain the importance, privacy and originality in their core religious practice and rituals to some extent.

It is significant to note that to discuss the exchanges of the Baruas with the 'other' communities, it becomes highly significant and important to have a distinct concept of that 'other' before any viable discussion commences, and that can only be possible if and only when a community has an immaculate idea of his or its own being and existence. It is generally seen that when a community acquaint itself by using a chain of phonic icons (or leverages conjugate words to describe his identity), it indicates that it associates itself with more than one group even while dissociating itself from those concurrently. That suggests it in spite of being associated with many communities, is not a member of such community exclusively, that is to say, it is attached to and detached from those communities at the same time and wants to create an impression of its own identity on the basis of this simultaneous association and dissociation.

The Barua community of North Bengal is such a community of individuals who identify themselves as Bengali Buddhists and in the light of this acquaintance, they maintain their

unique identity which separates them from the majority of the Hindu Bengalis and also from the non-Bengali Buddhists even as they acknowledge and share partial association with both.

Therefore in this phase we would discuss the mutual exchanges and action/reactions that occur between the Baruas and the Hindu Bengalis as well as between them and the non-Bengali Mahayani Buddhist sect. The instances that we are going to analyze with regard to the issues such as the influence of the Barua community, the attitude towards them, their mutual cooperation, etc. are as follows:

Intercommunity Marriages and Reflection of Exchange through Nomenclature

Syncretism and Boundary Maintenance reflected in Socio-Religious Occasions and Customss of the Barua Buddhist.

- Influence and adoption of Hindu practices in Life-Cycle Rites and Rituals of Barua Community – birth rituals, marital customs and death rites
- Participation in Major Festivals of Other Community – observation

Barua Buddhists: Perception of and Social Exchange with others

- Bengali Buddhists: Insight and Response of Other Religious Sects.
- Participation of the Other Communities in Barua Festival.
- Impact of Social Activities Performed by the Barua Community.

5.1 Intercommunity Marriages and Other Exchanges

This part is divided into two sections. First section deals with the inter-community marriages and many other challenges and exchanges related to that. In a patrilineal society there are situational differences in attitude and acceptance depending on the religious background of the bride or groom. Here, we will try to explore the dimensions of intermarriages between Bengali Hindu - Bengali Barua Buddhist and non-Bengali Barua Buddhist - Bengali Barua Buddhist as well.

Name is the reflection of one's identity, family background and social condition in a given time. In case of a migrated minority it also reveals the extent of interaction and eagerness to be adjusted with the mainstream flow. Our second section will check this point to understand the community in a better way.

5.1.1 Intermarriage: Crisis and Adjustment

According to Atul Sur (Sur 2016), religion has very negligible role in Buddhist marriage. In ancient period the rituals were simple and marriage was nothing more than a social contract. Buddhist marriages took place when the girl was above twenty years of age and in such marriages, there was no need of approval by anyone else other than the boy and the girl. Marriages needed approval of the concerned guardians in the situation where the age of the girl was below twenty years. Polygamy was prevalent in Buddhist society, along with mutual divorce based on the dynamics of the situation. If one partner of the couple was inflicted by serious, debilitating illness, divorce was immediately sanctioned. Mutual distrust between couples too allowed them to be divorced by social sanction.

We have got lots of information regarding the erotic life and practices of that era from the *Therigatha* literature. *Theri* means a Buddhist nun and *gatha* means songs. Thus it was inferred that *Therigatha* literature had been primarily composed by the Buddhist nuns. These nuns joined the *Sangha* (Monasteries) hailing from almost every social tier. These compositions revealed that a woman could get married fortwice or even for a third time too.

In the present times some of these specific characteristics have been rendered extinct. Some had been modified and reformed. If we discuss the issue of inter religious marriages in the context of Siliguri or, even in a larger context, the entire North Bengal, then, after studying fifty (50) barua families we would observe that usually there exist **three diverse inclinations**.

- There are a number of Barua families (10%) who feel that the accomplishments of the boy and the girl are enough to be considered as primary eligibility for marriage; there need not be religious parity between them. Basically this attitude towards marriage is prevailing amongst the affluent and highly educated families.

- At present, the majority of the Barua families (70%) are of the opinion, that it is very important and necessary to establish marital relations between boys and girls within the community itself and that should be of primary consideration and importance, but if the couple is in courtship, belonging to different communities or sect from each other, they are usually accepted, provided that there are no other problem to be found, regarding the other issues related to the marriage.

In this context it is significant that a subtle difference may be observed in certain specific cases /occasion. The middle class Barua community is a part of the patriarchal system of society and the ease with which a marriage between a Barua groom with a Hindu bride is recognized, that between a Hindu groom and a barua bride is not accepted whole heartedly. In patriarchy a lady moves to the family of her Barua husband and is treated as a member of the family where she adjusts and adapts accordingly; that is, in this case with the notion of growing Barua community influence, the socio cultural reputation is also getting enhanced. But in the other way round, when a Barua girl gets married with a Hindu boy the effect is not of the same tenor. Apart from that, non-adjustment between different ideologies and different cultural atmosphere is also apprehended.

- A number of Barua families (20%) feel that marriage should take place within the community itself, otherwise leading a happy married life is not possible. They opine that religion is the foundation stone of the social and familial relationships and it is religion itself, which shapes the human character. An individual grows up according to the norms and rituals of a particular religion and even a small aberration from these practices triggers an imbalance and friction becomes inevitable in that not so desired situation. These Barua families feel that disparity of economic status or gap in education can be bridged but individual's primary and basic outlook or perspective towards life should have equanimity and should be given the utmost importance.

These above mentioned various opinions are as integrally related with education, economic status and socialization as much with the time /period of migration, contact and connectivity

with Bangladesh, the first workplaces during the migratory phases etc. It has been noted that generally those families that had migrated from Bangladesh in a very early period and settled in areas with very little or no religious ethos or concern whatsoever regarding Buddhism have comparatively lesser religious conservatism. The feature and specificity of such group are of a *mélange* of cultural varieties.

Primarily **three types of intercommunity marriages** have been observed to have occurred amongst the Baruas. Marriage between a Theravadi Barua Buddhist bride and Bengali Hindu groom, Theravadi Barua Buddhist groom and Bengali Hindu bride and marriage between a Theravadi Barua Buddhist and Mahayani, Sub-Himalayan Buddhist.

On the basis of the above mentioned conventions, marriage between the Baruas and Hindus remains predominant. Apart from these, observation has been made of a few cases of intercommunity marriages between Barua grooms and a few non-Bengali Hindu (Punjabi and Nepali) brides. Only one instance of an inter-community marriage exists at present – that between a Barua and a Mahayani lama marriage.

Here, we would like to mention that we had earlier discussed in detail the influence of the Hindu Society on the Baruas and their cultural & social exchanges; but in this phase we are going to focus more upon the mutual exchanges between the members of the Barua community and others and that how such exchanges have affected both the communities.

It has already been mentioned in the town of Siliguri and in the entire North Bengal several marriages are taking place between the Buddhist Baruas and the Bengali Hindu. In these cases we find and observe, these marriages are occurring between Barua grooms and Hindu brides as well as Hindu grooms and Barua brides.

But it would be repetitive to mention that in these two instances, vast differences have been observed in their marital life regarding their daily exchanges and influence upon one another.

Although a marriage between a **Barua bride and a Hindu groom** is not always welcomed by the family of such groom, yet such examples are prevalent in Siliguri. In such instances it has been observed that the bride hailing from the Barua community, gradually over the period of time

learns and adapts herself to all kinds of rituals and lifestyle skills of the Hindu family where she has got married; on the contrary, the Hindu family too, eventually learns or gets exposed to the Buddhist culture, at least to some extent.

Since the marriages are solemnized at the bride's place and also according to the conventions followed by the brides' family, therefore here too, they are solemnized at the bride's place in the presence of the Bhantes with recitation of Mangalsutta. In this phase too there is an intermingling of Hindu and Buddhist ritual. The newlywed couples pay a visit to the Buddhist temple to secure the blessings of Bhantes and contribute alms as per their financial capacity. Mutual adaptation begins right from this point onwards.

This mutual cultural exchange gets firmly established after the birth of a child. Usually children are more inclined to be attached with their mothers and they observe the conducts of their mothers – lifestyle, habits, ideology, rituals everything – and thus they gradually but steadily and instinctively learn to internalize those. This helps to form a religious character in the child which plays an important part in associating and linking the child with his/her mother's family and culture.

It may be mentioned that, since the Barua community of North Bengal is primarily a community hailing from Chittagong of Bangladesh have migrated to Siliguri, they do not only have a different religious culture from that of the majority Hindu population, but also possess a distinct linguistic and culinary features. Even when Baruas use the common local language for everyday parlance, yet the elders of the community use the language of Chittagong amongst themselves besides having quite a number of Arakanese words incorporated in their regular 'spoken language'.

Their dishes, delicacy and cuisine are distinct in the use of excessive spices and usually are rich and 'hot' as far as taste is concerned. Their weakness for dried/salted fish (*Shnutkimachh*) is renowned and a well-known fact. In cases of inter-religious and inter-community marriages, these aspects get acquainted with and are accepted or adopted by the other families with different cultural background.

The two main festivals of Bengali Buddhists are Buddhajayanti and Kathin Chivar Daan. These are celebrated in all the different Buddhist temples across the city and numerous events are organized. It has been observed in the case studies, that women from the Barua community who have opted for inter-community marriage or inter-religious marriage, still celebrate and participate in most of these festivals, along with their children. Sometimes they also involve themselves in *Sangha Daan* (donation to at least 3 to 5 monks) as well.

Consequently, it may be said that when a Barua woman moves to a Hindu family as a bride there seems to be no cultural influence occurring on that occasion on any member of the family, but later it affects a few people indeed and this influence is reflected in their everyday life.

On the other hand, as customary in all other patriarchal social system, in Barua society too, post-marriage the woman comes to stay with her husband in his family. In the event of the bride hailing from a Hindu family, she too adjusts herself to her new marital family and its conducts and customs. Comparatively, marriages where the bride comes from a Hindu family and the groom comes from a Barua family, are lesser in number. These kind of marriages exert influences which are different from the inter-community marriages mentioned earlier.

In cases, where the **lady from the Barua community marries into a Hindu family**, her adaptation to the lifestyle, customs, conventions and rituals of that family increases with the passing time. She gets involved in different festivals, religious awareness, and new words and culinary habits that are totally new to her. But this kind of adaptation is primarily individual based, or may be said to have occurred at the micro level. The bride's family may gain some awareness on the different kind of festivities or on certain customs and conventions but those are not considered with any seriousness. In most of the cases, it may be observed that under such circumstances, images/idols of several gods and goddesses find their place by the side of Lord Buddha in the household. If the elderly members of the family be alive and present, then such images get their first entry in the form of calendars or similar such things and later go for a permanent settlement. Eventually seeking blessings of gods and goddess at the time of child birth, organizing Saraswati Puja, visiting temples for worshipping, participating in Durga Puja

and Kali Puja occur as well. It has been found in my field study that there are quite a few Buddhist families in Siliguri who are greatly influenced by the Hindu religion and culture and they also follow quite a few customs and rituals of Hinduism. It is redundant to point out that in such families, Hindu ladies are more welcome as brides of the families and the level of cooperation is much higher as well.

Another form of intercommunity marriage is when it occurs within the same religious community but between people from different ethnicity and/or different linguistic groups. Like that between a **Bengali Barua person getting married to a member of Nepali Lama Family**. In Siliguri there happens to be a sole example of marriage between this kind of Theravadi and Mahayani families. Both the husband and the wife constitute a working couple and they are blessed with a son as well. It had been informed in a discussion with them that after an initial family resistance, they got married to each other in the year 2007. Ms. Lama had to struggle initially to adjust with the new environment that she was in. Although she had repeatedly mentioned the cooperation and open-mindedness of her in-laws, the members of her husband's family, yet it could be understood that shifting from western dresses to saree from chanting Pali hymns to Bengali culture- everything seemed like an ordeal to her. But her new lifestyle and her new learning – all were confined to herself only – there was little scope for interchanging of cultures and hence, it was kind of unidirectional circumstantial adaptation.

Mr. Barua can speak and understand Nepali language; he also loves the Nepalese cuisine. But he preferred to get dressed in Western outfits on his marriage reception instead of a Nepalese outfit. Their three years old son can speak a little of the Nepali language. Ms. Lama now seldom celebrates Dusshera or Losar but she also participates in Buddha Jayanti and Kathin Chivar Daan festivals.

After having analyzed all the above mentioned issues regarding intercommunity marriages, let us throw some light upon certain factors regarding the same.

- The Barua community is neither extremely sensitive nor conservative about intercommunity marriages. They attach more importance to the happiness and choice of their children.

- It is always considered to be the best option if marriages take place within the community itself, yet such marriages are not possible always. Often eligible couple are not found for a marriage to take place, there is a scarcity of eligible groom particularly. At present, the girls from the Barua community are getting educated, accomplished and progressive and so, without a suitable groom to be found within their own community, they are refusing to contemplate marriage within the community any more.
- In case of inter-community marriages, when a Barua groom brings home a bride from some other community then the prestige of the Barua community rises as a whole, and the new members' adaptation process begins with trifling little things at the micro level; but the relatives and the members of her maiden family are not so much influenced at all. Instead Hindu customs and rituals start trespassing into Buddhist family. The obvious and spontaneous influence of the majoritarian religion in society grows even stronger in these cases.
- On the other hand, when a girl from the Barua community moves to a Hindu family as the bride, although she is compelled to adapt herself to the Hindu customs, rituals and other cultural aspects including the worshipping of multiple idols of gods and goddesses, yet simultaneously and parallelly the members of her family-in-law too accept Buddha as God and start worshipping Him. In most of the cases as she gains control and dominance over the family with the passing time, she is able to install and establish her own cultural practices to be followed in the family. But as said earlier, in such cases, it has been observed that the woman has to have strong ties with her maiden family as a precondition to that situation. In reality, these marriages actually influence the next generation as they play an important role in the formation and development of the children born out of such marriages.

Therefore, in intercommunity marriages, merely the so called patriarchy is not at work fully in its conventional sense; rather, the role of woman in such marriages is very important. Since she devotes a huge portion of her life and time in the creation and development of the unit of

family, therefore her influence over the members of the family is immense and that is often reflected spontaneously.

5.1.2 Reflection of Exchange through Nomenclature

With the help of the genealogical table of a few families and from published material that was studied, (Chaudhuri 1982) it has been observed that till the first half of the 20th century, Arakanese names were popular with Bengali Buddhists, such as *Mamapru*, *Chelapru*, *Khailapru* and *Kalampru* etc. However, these names are not in use in the present time. A few Hindu religious names are popular in the Bengali Buddhist communities. The practice of christening children with non-religious, short and modern names among Bengali Buddhists is on the rise, much like the Hindu community.

As an example, a list of 285 Barua Buddhists living in Siliguri can be presented. It has been observed that only four names from them are associated with Buddhist culture, while 11 names are of Hindu origin while the remaining 270 names are non-religious, popular Bengali names.

The names belonging to the first two groups have been presented here.

Buddhist Names	Hindu Names
Lumbini	Partha
Sujata	Indrajit
Sugata	Gopal
Gopa	Lakshmi
	Rajlakshmi
	Krishna
	Aparna
	NiladriShekhar
	Shiladitya
	Basumitra
	Padma

Therefore, in this case, the number of names derived from Hinduism is almost three times the names influenced by Buddhism and Buddhist culture. On the other hand, the names like Goutam, Tathagata, Sujata, Amitabha and Buddhadev are also quite common and popular among Hindu Bengali community.

5.2 Syncretism and Boundary Maintenance reflected in Socio-Religious Occasions and Customs.

The Baruas are not really located in a particular zone of Siliguri or other North Bengal region. Earlier they had a predilection to reside in and around the Buddha Mandir, but now that is no longer a priority on some pragmatic consideration. The Baruas are all spread over the town and their neighbours are also of different religion, caste and creed. So naturally staying close and living in amity, Baruas and other communities are involved in social engagements pertaining to attending invitations, exchange of gifts and participation in various festivities or ceremonies, which foster the friendly relationship between the two communities to a great extent. However, the nature and type of the events are not similar, so the involvement of Baruas is also adjusted accordingly depending on the ceremonial attributes with respect to the participation.

In this section we will see the dimensions of their cultural exchange and social boundary maintenance. In the first part, we will try to analyse the amount of adoption and distinctiveness in their life cycle rites and rituals and in the second part, we will check how and to what extent Barua community of Siliguri town is participating in the major festivals of other communities.

5.2.1 Influence and adoption of Hindu practices in Life-Cycle Rites and Rituals of Barua Community

- **Birth** - The new life which begins from the birth of a child, who will grow up in the society needs introduction and formal recognition in the same society. It is in a way imperative to arrange appropriate ceremony by the family members to introduce the new born to social circle. The birth related various stages of rituals and ceremonies are mostly followed by the Hindu practices with only one exception; that in place of *BramhinPurohit* or priest, Baruas engage Bhanter to preside over the ceremony. For

example, *Sadhbhakkhan* or the ritual of wish (*saadh*) fulfillment by preferable dishes is performed like Hindu Bengali community for pregnant women mainly from the parental side. This occasion is attended by the female representatives of various communities staying in the neighbourhood. This phenomenon is mostly observed in the inter marriage between Baruas and non Baruas (mostly Hindu).

In the first rice-eating ritual of the child, the male baby in particular draws more importance and the ceremony is celebrated by inviting the neighbours, relatives and friends depending on the financial capacity of the organizing family.

- **Marital Customs** - The most varied and diverse scene of social life, socialization, action and reaction, values, instruction is viewed in the context of marriage related decision, doctrine, customs, conduct and rituals performed. That is the prime reason why marriage occupies a central fulcrum in the discipline of sociology. The occasion of marriage and attending the same, reflects the capacity, attitude, customs of the family, in particular the matter of approval of the inter community marriage which is of prime importance. Marriage practice of Barua Buddhists of North Bengal in India, shows some leniency to and influence of Hindu practices. At a glance these are:
 - In contravention to traditional practice of the Baruas, now-a-days marriage takes place in the house of the bride.
 - Easy acceptance of marriage between Hindus and Baruas.
 - Practice of dowry.
 - Practice of Hindu marriage customs like -*Mehendi, Gaye Halud, Subha dristi, Maala badal, Sindur daan, Stri achar* etc.
 - Abolition of customs like, *Haala Song* and *Madi Hondani* and cousin marriage.
 - Use of red and white bangles and regular use of vermilion by the married women.

Moreover, the use of *panjika* (Hindu religious calendar) to settle the date of marriage, consulting an astrologer, imagination of clan (*Goutam Gotra*), sometimes practice of *Kali Puja* or *Luxmi Puja* and following the practice of popular Hindu Bengali marriage customs like *subha-dristi, mala-badal, sindurdaan* etc. evince quite a strong influence of Hinduism over

Baruas. Imitating the Hindu custom and processes of marriage, the Barua family also conducts *Aiburobhaat* (bride and groom take their last meal as unmarried persons before the marriage) the day before the marriage. The bride is affectionately invited by her relatives and friends for *Aiburobhaat*.

Apart from this syncretism there are some points of distinctiveness also. If we minutely examine the ethnographic materials of Buddhist Baruas of North Bengal then we will see that the continuum is conceived simultaneously and yet distinctively they are maintaining their own social structure and culture at least to some extent or in some other words there is an element of boundary maintenance. They do not perform marriage ceremony in front of fire (*agnisakshi*). In other words, they do avoid *Hom – Yangya* while solemnising their marriage. As Barth said, it is clear in this situation that boundaries persist despite a flow of personnel across them. Cultural differences can persist despite inter-ethnic contact and interdependence (Barth 1969). Boundaries that a group draws are always in inter-active situations. Boundaries are never drawn in isolation.

There are no strict set of ritualistic guidelines to be followed during a Buddhist wedding by reading from their scriptures, as marriage is generally not seen as a path for salvation by Lord Buddha and therefore Lamas' or Buddhist monks' presence is not mandatory to solemnize the wedding. However, it was observed before, the wedding is governed and steered by *Vantes* in front of *Mangalghat* (lay vessels that hold mango leaves and a coconut on top) by reciting verses from Mangal Sutta. Therefore,

- Presence of Buddhist Monks (*Vante*) is essential. They recite mangal-sutta in Pali. There is no role of Brahmin priest in *Barua* marriage.
- One non-professional priest of their community (*mantradata*) performs actual rites for the ceremony.
- Seating arrangement for the bride and groom is different.
- Though now-a-days inter-religious marriages are taking place, but in-group marriage is always preferable.
- They do not make any fire hearth (for performing *Agni sakshi*) at the time of marriage.

In these days, the common marriage practice is fixing one day for *Ashwirbad* where both the parties meet one another and offer their gifts and blessings to the bride and the groom. After that they exchange rings and cut the engagement cake which is clearly an influence of western culture and this system is gaining popularity day by day. But this is till date limited only to the well-off families. Historically, for their shifting trajectory of migration perhaps and intermixing with other people the attitude towards marriage here is not very fixed or rigid one, rather remains much flexible. There had been not much resistance reported even of earlier days, arising out of the religious differences in the inter-religious marriage between the Baruas and the Hindus.

In the occasion of Barua bride and Hindu groom, the wedding invitees as spectators were excited, curious and interested to acquire the experience of Buddhist marriage rituals and customs. The giving away of a gift to the newly-wed is an essential part of wedding ceremony. Delving deeper into it, the socio- economic indicators of giving away the gift reveal the relationship, characteristics and attributes between the guests and the host of the wedding. The entire gifting process is determined and governed by the financial capacity, intimacy, the depth of the relationship and socio-economic status of both the parties. Due to the expansive influence of the globalised market, the Buddha statue in various shape or size, is available everywhere and it stands out to be an appropriate object with respect to the process of gifting and it is also readily available in Siliguri market. The invitees who do not belong to the Barua community and not much aware of the choice and need of the bride and groom, they easily adapt to select Buddha Statue as a satisfactory gift, which is pocket- friendly as well. For an example, the marriage which took place in Siliguri between a Barua groom and a Mahayani Lama bride, they received Buddha idol or statue as a wedding gift from both the sides. From the account of an elderly Barua, in earlier days, it was quite a common convention to present utensils to be used as daily usage by the newly married or to gift books which were considered to be noble and perceived as an aristocratic courtesy. In modern days, instead of these books or utensils, the usual way of presenting is various dress material, sari or decoration pieces available all over the market in the Siliguri town.

Here another dimension of this cultural influence deserves mention. Like most of the civilizations Hindu civilization is a veritable example of complex structure of great and little traditions. For instance, Hindu marriage all over India is not performed in the same way. There is a *Shastriya* (Internal values of Hindu religions) part of the marriage including *Hom – Yangya* (worshipping and taking oath in front of fire), *Kanyadaan* (giving the hand of the bride to the bride- groom), chanting *vaidik* mantras etc. But there is also a *Loukik* (local popular practices) part which is according to local culture and varies from community to community. For example, there are many differences between the Hindu marriage of Northern India and Southern India in this Loukikpart because these are influenced by local culture, environment and availability of the necessary products.

The transmission level of these two parts is also not the same. Loukik rites and rituals transmit more rapidly than Shastriya ones because these are external, easy to follow and adjustable with time and demand of the society. Bengali Buddhists of North Bengal are now much influenced by Bengali Hindu marriage but this influence is basically limited to transmission of popular tradition like *mala badal*, *subha dristi*, *sindur daan* and *stri-achar*.

- **Funeral Customs-** Death is inevitable and beyond control of the humans, which brings lifecycle into a termination. So bereavement related rituals or funeral rites is mostly addressed around the activities to pacify the spirit of the recently deceased, through various mourning and memorial events organized amongst close relatives and friends, which does not really need endorsement or acknowledgement from the larger society, apart from being a piece of information.

The living quarters of Buddhist Baruas in Siliguri are different and the practice of living in apartments has increased over the years, which has made the traditional funeral customs of the deceased difficult. This has led to the practice of conducting these rituals in a concise manner. In the Chittagong area, the son of the deceased fetches water in a new urn from the nearby river or pond and mixes raw turmeric, perfumes and soap and cleanses the body with a lot of care. The ritual of bathing the deceased holds an important position in the Barua community.

In Buddhism, it is considered auspicious to see a dead body. All tradition and materialistic things are intransient and all intransient things cause pain. Life is impermanent which is why it is subject to old age, sickness and death. Once this transcendental realization dawns on man, it is possible to achieve salvation. This is why, a dead body is not considered inauspicious or impure in Buddhism.

The Barua community is not much influenced by the Hindu practices of mourning. In the event of a death, practicing the faith or the presence of a monk is significant. Apart from that, their period of mourning is restricted to six days for all. On the last day, the *shraddh* (last rites) ceremony is performed.

Therefore, it is essentially observed that:

- The news of death is first conveyed to the monks in the vicinity. Prior to taking out the funeral procession, it is mandatory for them to recite the *Sutta* (Sutra or Hymns).
- It is a common practice to take the body of the deceased to the nearest Buddhist temple at the time of taking out the funeral procession.
- Before the *shraddh* ritual or the weekly mourning, a monk is expected to visit the household of the deceased every evening for reading out the scriptures.
- In the Buddhist community, the mourning period is completed within a week for all.

Apart from these, a number of other practices have developed in the Barua community as a result of influence of the surroundings. For an example, the carrying of rice and water by the eldest son and the ritual of *mukhagni* (touching the face of the dead with a lit torch) have been adopted although the worshipping of the Fire God or *homa*, circling the fire at the time of the wedding, etc. have not been adopted yet. During the seven day period of mourning or *Satdinna/Hatdinna*, the mourners are not permitted to sit in high places or lie down, to use soap, combs and hair oil or to stitch. They should consume vegetarian food, wear white

clothes and walk on barefoot. Shaving the head by sons and cutting nails before the commencement of shraddh rituals are also common practices like Hindus.

A wife has to renounce her sarees, ornaments and sindur upon the death of her husband. She has to drape a white saree (a thin black border is permitted). These practices are prevalent among the Buddhist Baruas of Siliguri because of the influence wielded by Hindu neighbours on them. Apart from this, they believe that the difference between death and rebirth is seven days at least. Considering this, it is imperative for the family and loved ones of the deceased to follow a few customs.

At present, it has been observed that a *kirtan* (devotional songs) is organized at the household of the deceased on the day of performing the final rituals after a period of seven days. At least five monks are invited to share a meal on this day and for donating different items. Among the items to be donated, it is important to have an umbrella, cloth, thread and needle, soap, candles, paper and pen, food items and cash. The neighbours are invited for this purpose as well. This ceremony marks the end of the mourning period and the practices that were associated with it. Usually non-vegetarian food is served at this ceremony named *Niyam Bhanga* (end of restrictions).

As an invitee attending a festival or a ceremony is a part of socialization, it bolsters recognition in the society when being invited by the other communities. The Baruas receive various invitations from the other communities and neighbours, through their personal and family relationship, flair of communication with other community, mutual cooperation in the time of need etc. which act as prime catalysts as well. However, in the event of demise, both the communities become little conservative and performs final rites with close family members.

It is worth mentioning that any occasion or festival of any nature, being social or religious; life-cycle events, whether large or small, are accompanied by a meal of some sort, had always been an essential part of the festivity or ceremony. In case of family occasion or ceremony the guests are invited to dine, which is 'reception' and for religious occasion the distribution of offerings to deities (Prasad) or any particular preparation remain the prime session of the very occasion. In general, while living in the close proximity of various other castes and religions, it is observed

that most of the rules and regulations with respect to food, with few exceptions, is relaxed. The urban middle class Bengali is very much fond of all kind of foods available in their reach. Mag Baruas prefer dried fish and pork in their favorite food list. However, on occasions or ceremony, they usually avoid by delisting this when they interact with other community in social context. Since Pork is not universally accepted as a food, they try to avoid any discussion about it. And the evening reception menu is carefully crafted so that everyone can participate to dine together.

5.2.2 Participation in Major Festivals of Other Community

The life cycle related ceremonies are performed based on certain religious practices but socialization over the religious activities and social interactions become their cardinal aspect. Also there are certain festivities like New Year, which is celebrated by all the communities, groups, or populace with equal involvement, enthusiasm and spirit. In present days, the *Rakhi Utsab* (*Rakshabandhan*, a popular, traditionally Hindu annual rite)) or *Holi* (festival of colour, popular Hindu perennial festival) is not observed only within a religious group, but has spread across all religions and are recognized as universally acknowledged festivals.

However, certain festivals are organized and followed by specific communities as their main event with respect to respective religious stand points namely for Buddhists' Buddha Jayanti, for Christians' Christmas, for Muslims' Eid etc. Due to diverse culture, language and dialects, place of belonging etc., it is very challenging to identify and discuss any particular festival of Bengali Hindu. But in general notion the Durgapuja is the biggest annual Hindu festival for four days. In this segment, we will pick **Durga Puja** as a topic to discuss and analyze the subject of intermixing and exchange. Durga Puja, also called Durgotsava, is an annual Hindu festival in the Indian subcontinent that reveres the goddess Durga. The special pointer that makes Durga Puja the cultural extravaganza is so inviting that no Bengali person ever wants to miss it and every non-Bengali wants to experience at least once to savour the feel of the festivity in the month of *Ashwinas* per Bengali calendar (typically September or October of the Gregorian calendar). The festival brings lot of joy, happiness in people in general by offering them scope to enjoy the annual long leave, hopping decorated *pandals* (temporary ceremonial structure)

adorned with lights, taking food in the array of road side eateries or restaurants, buying and gifting new apparels to near and dear relatives etc. It becomes a melting pot for cultural exchange and economic activities. It would not be prudent to conceive an idea that this festivity is only meant for Hindus in terms of arrangement, participation and enjoyment. Putting aside the religious dimension of the festival this festivity is so important and cardinal in nature to West Bengal state and its population, that this event amalgamates politics, economics and socialization on a single platform and draws participation from all corners and strata of the society.

However, being the largest Bengali festival which is performed as per Bengali practices, the Baruas are not out of the spectrum or inducement. The elderly Baruas keep some distance with respect to participation. The youths are more engrossed in the pleasure of the festivity from evening till midnight by leveraging all means of socialization like meeting friends who live far and near, dining together, strolling around the pandals etc. The middle aged Baruas are divided in adopting two types of outlook and view, one of the group is extremely active and participates in the community club by offering voluntary service in charting out Puja plans and associated budget, subscription collection, arrangement of Puja, food, pandals and other knitty-gritty, but refrain themselves from offering *pushpanjali* (is an offering of flowers to Hindu Gods and Goddesses). Some of them, Barua women in particular, offer their service in Puja activity in every aspect of the preparation with greater fervor. Contextually, it can be inferred and observed that the exchange can only happen when the arranging party allows and does not create blockade of any sort in participation, with amicable gesture. So the involvement in Puja by Baruas also addresses the acceptability of minority community in larger canvass of majority representation. So it is quite obvious that the celebration is not only encompassed within its religious boundary but has traversed outside the fence to assimilate every representative of the caste, creed or the diaspora like Baruas.

The Baruas also arrange and organize *Kali puja*, *Saraswati puja*, and *Manasa puja*, offering to *Lokenath Baba* (Hindu deities and religious guide) in their own home or in respective *temples* with great involvement. However, there is no report of any kind of resistance or opposition

experienced by the minority Barua community while arranging or performing the above mentioned celebrations.

There have also been instances where Buddhist children are initiated with other Hindu ones at Saraswatipuja (worship of Goddess of Wisdom as per Hindu mythology), usually being held in pandals in the locality, organized by any School or local clubs or other organization. However, what is most noticeable in case of these two religious orders is the attempt to maintain harmony. There are several instances where Buddhist monks have initiated the child in writing on *Saraswati puja*.

Although Buddhism flourished as a counter practice to idol worshipping, follower of caste system and ritual centric Hinduism and Buddhists are living outside the caste structure since the time of its origin; but very often they are aspiring for the same status and rights like worshipping Hindu gods and goddesses or following different rites and rituals at the time of life cycle ceremonies due to their proximity with larger non Buddhist community like the Hindus. As Martin Orans (Orans, 1965), has described how a tribe that has been looking towards the great tradition of high Hinduism, has been pulled towards emulating the caste pattern. Similarly, Magh Baruas of North Bengal are worshipping at Kali, Durga or other Hindu temples and for the purpose of offering sacrifices with name and *gotra* (clan), they are using *Goutam gotra* (Hindu clan name and name of Buddha prior to his incarnation) as their clan name. These practical life-style strategies help them to avoid unwanted questions at the time of socio-religious interaction with Hindu community members. Above mentioned analysis shows that though they are ethnically associated with 'Buddhist Tribe' identity, but socio-culturally exactly not so.

Observation

Around fifty men and women from Barua community were interviewed to collect the following data with respect to their daily compulsory religious activity, rituals, practice and faith related subjects. Based on how Barua families in the area of North Bengal conduct their daily life and practice rituals at home, how they intermingle with relatives, friends and neighbors from religious perspective, we can categorize them as following:

Those who perform Buddhapuja at home and shun other religious events.

Among these fifty respondents, twelve (24%) of them believe that abiding by the Panchasheel and Astasheel is the only religious conduct. They feel that to follow Buddha's teaching and performing activities to improve the Buddhist society should be the cardinal goal of the religious life of the Theravada Buddhists of Barua community. All these families attend the religious events and conduct the rituals with utmost sincerity. These activities include the worship of Buddha twice a day both at morning and evening, meditation and prayer at home, visiting Buddhamandir on regular frequency etc. Many Baruas are actively involved with Bidarshan Dhyana Ashram where weekly two classes on Buddha teaching is arranged and conducted. Apart from these formal activities, Baruas also indulge themselves in informal ways to nourish their religious activity like reading books on Buddha, discuss and contemplate Buddhism with their children to inculcate the philosophy, offer Fang to Bhanter etc. By regular chanting Mantra or singing Buddha hymn the Baruas remember the words of mantra by heart and memorize those very well. Sibalipuja is also conducted with Buddhapuja by many of them. While respecting the invitation to attend events of friends or neighbors from other religious community, some of the Baruas refrain from participating in those events. In this aspect one teacher revealed that he has stopped attending other religious events when he realized that his non-Barua friends or neighbours do not show the same degree of interest in his own religious events. Some of them feel not so interested because of strict customs and rules observed by Hindu community with high importance on purity with less or zero tolerance on any defilement for the practitioner.

Participates in the events of other religion, but imposes importance to his own religion i.e. Buddhism.

Twenty persons (40%) out of above mentioned fifty interviewed for research, strongly harbour the idea of having religion in society to maintain peace and harmony conjugated with basic law and order. As a minority community the Baruas have to maintain a cordial relationship with majority Hindus on both religious and social transactions. For an example, it can be referenced that some of them are actively involved and contribute to various Hindu

religious worshipping (Puja) events like Durgapuja, Lakshmi puja, Kalipuja etc. Some Baruas induced by interest and for acquiring knowledge read and study the other religious books or other materials. Also they offer prayer to Hindu gods and goddesses along with Buddha.

It is worth mentioning in this context that with respect to religious conduct the family members can have different opinions and practice. Senior members of the families are believed to be religious custodian in nature and prefer to have more importance on their own religious practice and belief, while younger generation is more open and willing to participate in mainstream activities in the society they belong to, which can be observed in various occasions. Many students have expressed being happy while with their friends during Durgapuja, Saraswati puja, visiting puja pandals in particular. The fast life of modern days has shortened the free time while religious events give an opportunity to congregate with friends. The festival is the melting pot for all caste and creed in the society and to live in society mutual respect and support to each other from religious and social perspective is extremely important. As a representative of young Barua community, a Barua youth revealed that he performs various activities during Durgapuja in terms of collecting subscriptions, helping in worshipping activities. He also takes same interest to bring his non- Barua friends to take part in the Cheevardan or Buddhapuja. And his non-Barua friends also take initiative to support Cheevardan and Buddhapuja by collecting subscriptions, offer helping hand in organizing these events etc.

The list of auspicious days as per the Hindu calendar, also have huge importance for some Barua families. And many of them conducted 'First initiation to learning for kids' (*Hatekhari*), which is a celebratory occasion on the day of Sarawati Puja. They organized the Saraswati Puja for their children and students, conducted the hymn and offered tributes following Hindu rule of prayer (Anjali). Some of them attend other religious festivities and events but they are not interested in idol worship (*Murti puja*). This segment of Baruas remains liberal and open towards the religious belief and conduct. Their belief system hovers around the idea that serving humanity and maintaining family ties is the cardinal duty of life. Generally, they are respectful to all religions and corresponding religious beliefs.

One mother of a Barua family offers respectful salutation (*Pranam*) while passing by Hindu temples but does not perform the worship (Puja) of the idol in formal way. However, she does not interrupt her daughter in worshipping Sarasawati Idol during the festivity which is a core and a holy Hindu event related to education in particular. Similarly, from another family it is known that they have Nepali neighbour and they have similar transactions between them with respect to religious practices and rituals. During the conversation it was revealed that inter religious marriage also played a crucial role in fostering religious endurance within the families and maintained harmony between them. Those who are not accustomed with the rituals of other religion apart from Buddhpuja, have to see the entry of other religion with related gods/goddesses along with formalities or rituals due to the existence of inter- religious marriage in their house. For an example the daughter-in-law practices the reading of Sathya Sai teachings, while before her induction into marriage only Buddhpuja had been conducted.

Maximum adaptation to Hindu Religion and Culture

In case of 18 persons (36%) adaptation to Hindu religion and culture is observed maximum due to the high influence and effect of Hindu religion. There remains minimal difference in daily religious activities in comparison to a Hindu family. The reason for this adoption is primarily due to 'regional effect'. Before settling down in Siliguri, while migrating from Chittagong most families have spent significant time in Assam or other parts of West Bengal. In this respect the neighbours and surrounding environment plays an important and critical role in shaping preferences. As an example the fourteen out of fifty surveyed families are under this category of substantial adoption of Hinduism. Most of them have the collection of The Gita, The Bible, books on Sri Arabindo's teachings and they periodically worship various gods and goddesses of Hindu religion. Manasa puja and related Manasa narration (Pnachali) is organized by the ladies of the community not only for observing the pure religious practice, but to foster amity in the neighborhood, they exhibit the similar features with respect to religious customs that deal with fertility, protection of the children etc.

Those who are living in high- rise apartments as a residential community arrange various events to render religious reverence and homage to various gods and goddesses - like Barer

Pujo (Shani – a male deity from Purana, considered inauspicious and a bringer of bad luck) where almost everyone participates voluntarily with alacrity.

In another example, a Barua family having a transferable job had lived in various places and practiced Hindu religious events since there were no Bhanter available around the locality or region. They worshipped in local Hindu temple, consumed Prasad (a small offering of sweets or other food) with family and children together. At present, they organize Lakshmi, Saraswati and Bipodtarini Puja on a large scale. Monday is considered a very auspicious day for the worship of Lord Shiva and they observe fasting on the day as well. Loknath Baba and Saraswati puja are arranged every year in their house and also they read Hanuman Chalisa, The Gita regularly. The family had settled in Siliguri long back in the process of early phase of migration.

Secondly, due to industrialization and consequent urbanization etc. the basic religious characteristics had been altered and relaxed to some extent. So inter-religious marriage between Hindu and Buddhist family is not a surprising event nowadays and as an effect many religious prejudices have been eradicated. Many Barua families have adopted the other religious customs and practices post inter-religious marriage of their children.

5.3 Bengali Buddhists: Perception and Reaction of Others.

In this part we will observe how much the other communities, mostly Hindu and non-Barua Buddhist, are aware of this Barua community with respect to their existence, customs, culture and lifestyle. Many of time it is realised that two religious institutions despite functioning congruently for a long time, seldom have any communication between them. However, the practice of intermingling with general public, comprising other communities, is prevailing. It is also observed sometimes that when a connection or link is established between the two communities during any festival, the religion stands not the sole or main reason for the daily exchange.

We will be discussing the mutual exchange and relationship in the above context - because a minority community's acknowledgement resides not only on the situation, security, dignity

and constitutional recognition; but mostly on the surrounding social acknowledgment and unified receptivity.

In this section we have spoken to a monk of the oldest Tibetan Buddhist monastery situated at Salugara in Siliguri and a Pujari of an established Kali Mandir adjacent to Buddhabharati Buddha Mandir. The discussion reveals that both the communities are interconnected and mutual exchange is persistent at different levels. We have made an attempt to know from the other laypersons about their understanding of the life-style, history and festivity of Barua community and about non- Barua communities' participation in those festivals.

5.3.1 Bengali Buddhists: Insight and Response of Other Religious Sects.

Interaction and Connection with Tibetan Buddhist –

We are supposed to comprehend the level of exchange and the maturity of the connection between the Local Mahayani Buddhist community and Theravadi Buddhists community or how much the Mahayani Lama Buddhists are cognizant of the existence of Barua Buddhists. International Tashi Gomang Stupa is one of the oldest monasteries in the Salugara locality. It was founded by Tibetan Monks and followers of Dalai Lama. The monastery is believed to have been built by the Tibetan lama Kalu Rimpoche. Presently, six monks stay in the premises on regular basis and often many other guests from other towns, states and countries also visit, while a few stay back for various reasons. A group of children from different places of India, mostly from the hills of West Bengal, Sikkim, Nepal and Bhutan stay here as residents.

We have conversed with Guru Dorji of International Tashi Gomang Stupa - one of the teachers and resident monks of this monastery. It has been expressed that as per their understanding, they believe that Buddhists from mostly Thailand, Cambodia, Srilanka, Myanmar etc. usually hail from Theravadi Buddhist community. Guru Dorji is not much well acquainted with the Theravadi Buddhists of Bangladesh, but he accepts, as being realistic, that the existence of the border between Myanmar and Bangladesh has been the logical reason of the presence of the Theravadi Buddhists in Bangladesh. He explained that there is no great internal differentiation between these two streams of thought apart from the rituals shaped by them independently

over the passage of time. He does not possess much awareness about the general Barua Buddhists. On the contrary, he is more comfortable in keeping close contact and cordial relationship with some of the Hindu pujaris (priests) in the vicinity. Guru Dorji enjoys the fact that the interest and attention expressed by Hindu community in Buddhist festivals and philosophy is gaining ground. And he relishes his own inquisitiveness in Hindu rituals, festival, customs etc. as well.

However, Guru Dorji has told us that Buddhism has many offshoots and a legion of gods and goddesses. A visit to Bodhgaya reveals the reason, backed by thousand years of history, behind the origin of these offshoots or various streams. He is certain that the Theravadi Buddhists and its worshippers are also Buddhists similar to him and belong to another stream with no exception, everything at the end merges into Buddha and only Buddha. GuruDorji opines that the main difference between the two streams being – Theravadi Buddhism promotes the personal improvement and salvation while Mahayani Buddhists emphasise on the importance of the prosperity of the community.

Guru Dorji knows about the presence of Bhantes in Siliguri but never had the opportunity to interact with them on any occasion of festivities. He is unsure of the fact of existence of Barua Buddhist population or the Buddha mandir. He does not even recollect the fact that the 2555th Buddha Jayanti celebration was jointly organised by both the streams in Siliguri on May 17, 2011. The absence of the consciousness of that joint observance can be attributed to the lack of popular inclusion and equal participation, highlighted by the lack of mutual awareness due to absence of effective campaigning. The Buddhists of both the streams in the region remained slack in comprehending the importance of the united activities of 2555th Buddha Jayanti celebration.

It can be derived from the above mentioned discussion and analysis that the religion as a component is not always the prime influence between the two Buddhists communities for mutual exchange. Personal intimacy or socio-religious exchange is not noticeable between these two minority communities of Buddhism. At the same time establishing relationship or keeping in touch regularly is not a very common occurrence. However, both the communities

are comparatively more interactive and fluent in mutual exchange with Hindus, while they are confined to their own separate existence despite of their common religious belief. Our next survey ratifies this inference as well.

Interaction and Connection with the Hindu Temple –

Bidyachakra Kalibari (Goddess Kali Temple) was established in 1963. The location of this Kali Temple is just adjacent to Buddha Bharati (Buddhist temple of Mahananda para, Siliguri) and practically they share a common separation wall between themselves. Shri Manik Ghoshal is the priest (pujari as per Hindu terminology) of this Kali Mandir. Interaction with Shri Ghoshal reveals that the land was donated for both the establishments i.e. for the Buddhist and the Hindu Temple by the landlord Bnashi Pal in yester years. Shri Rathindranath Ghoshal who was the grandfather of Manik Ghoshal and the first pujari, travelled to Tarapeeth and got himself initiated in various techniques of worship, adoration, occultism or hyperphysical practice (Tantric rituals and system) for over 12 years or more.

He was greatly renowned by the name 'Lalbaba' in the locality. In present days the compound is having Lord Shiva and Shree Hanuman temple together as well. Along with the priest's family dwelling in the land (where the temple is located) another family also resides, and the rental income is accounted for in the temple's earnings.

Now we can try to understand to what extent the pujari of Bidyachakra Kalibari, staying in close proximity to the Budhhabharati is cognisant of the daily life, festival, functions, faith and worshippers of his next-door neighbour Buddha Bharati. Shri Manik Ghosal told us that he is not much aware of the details or lacks understanding of the daily rituals of the Buddha Mandir. He only knows about the existence of a Trustee Board to oversee its religious activities. As a Hindu priest his understanding of Theravadi Buddhism is limited, but he still manages to connect with Buddhist religion as he is a Tantric worshipper through the esoteric traditions both of Hinduism and Buddhism over a period of thousand years namely Yoga, *Tarachar* (a process of worshipping Goddess Kali), *Cheenachar* (Voiced by Shiva to Parbati - an occult way of worshipping), Shamanic and yogic beliefs and practices, *Dehatatta* (worshipping the Body without the dichotomy of Mind and Body) . He sincerely honours a similarity

between *Tara Maa* (Goddess Kali of Tarapeeth) and *Pragyaparamita* (Perfection of Wisdom in Buddhism).

Shri. Ghoshal is not aware of the hierarchy of the senior monk or Abbot. He does not even know who the secretary of Budhhabharti is, but he had a chance once to get familiar with a young Bhikshu and they developed a cordial friendly relationship between them. He could relate to similar journey of financial crisis, domestic disaster, instability as a young religious wayfarer himself like the young Bhante. However, the relationship could not be fostered long as they drifted away in their separate pursuits of life. He understands that his neighbours have migrated from Bangladesh, hailing from low income group families. He clarifies that the visitors are mainly young boys in their pursuit of becoming Shramans and young Bhanter (who is known as *Chhoto Bhante*) come to stay in Buddhabharati for a short while.

Only during a few days, he becomes aware of Buddha Bharati's daily routine of reciting religious books, reading of Mantras (*Mantrapaath*) etc. Although he knows the importance of Buddha Jayanti as a principal festival of the Buddhists, but fails to comprehend the religious significance of Kathin Chevar Daan of Baruas' apart from knowing that new clothes are given to the monks in the Buddha Bharati at certain time of the year. He appreciates the sincere efforts put in by the organisers and residents of Buddhabharati towards maintaining the rules and regulation as well as their organising capability. He also values and gives importance to the formal process of day to day living and earning mechanism of Buddhist monks or Bhanter in Buddhabharati. At the same time, he is critical about the commercialisation of the Buddhabharati Guest House for organising social functions (including DJ party), social gatherings etc.

Such a long close cohabitation naturally rouses the question in mind whether both the establishments had ever come to a disagreement on any dispute which led into some sort of difference of opinion. We come to know that both the mandir committees were having some issues relating to the wall which was keeping them apart as two different physical entities. A couple of years back due to heavy rain and storm the old wall of the Kali Mandir got dismantled. A portion of the boundary wall of these two mandirs was erected collectively and

the other portion was built by the Kali mandir committee. The dismantled one was part of the wall which was built collectively and remaining was part of the Kali Mandir's own wall. However, post disaster the Budhhabharati committee had offered to reconstruct the entire wall at their expense with two conditions. First, they asked to shift the wall inside which was facing towards the road and secondly, they wanted to do paintings with Buddha and Jataka on the newly constructed wall, obviously to promote Buddhism.

Kali mandir committee expressed their consent over first condition. However, they were not accepting the second condition which led to some sort of disruption in the relationship between the two committees. In later time, they both could get over the dispute and continued in amity. Shri Ghoshal pointed out that such issues did not create distance between him and other occupants of Budhhabharati. He also adds that although the two different religious communities never participated in religious festivals of each other or got together in commonality, but he holds his respect for all religions equally. His grandfather was also an open-hearted and liberal kind of a person. Also those who worship and follow the Tantra way, they are not prohibited by anything. To fulfill his spiritual quest he can go anywhere, participate in any sort of activities even of a different religion, be it of Islam or Buddhism. He values mutuality and mixes around with anybody and everybody.

During conversation with Shree Ghoshal, it is quite revealing that he is in close contact with various Barua families. When we make an entry to this mandir, the first thing that comes to notice is the marble slab, which is donated by Bhaskar Barua in the memory of his deceased parents. We come to know that the donation happened twenty years back by the Barua family. At present, the nearby Bengali Barua and Nepali Buddhist families also regularly visit the Kali Temple and conduct Hindu way of prayer or Puja. Especially when Bidyachakra Kali Mandir organizes religious festivals like *Kalipuja*, *Deepavali*, *ShivaRatri*, there happens to be a huge number of visitors flocking the premises. No one is debarred from offering or praying in front of Goddess Kali. While performing prayer (*Puja*) in Kalibari the Baruas are introduced or identified as *Gautam gotra* (gotra denotes the progeny, as one of seven Rishis) during the process. He shares that he has seen the marriage in his family with Baruas. His Brother-in-law though himself, a Barua Buddhist was a regular visitor of Kali Mandir and conducted his

offerings as per Hindu rituals. Shri Ghoshal shared one marriage incident which happened in the Kali Mandir since both the families were against that particular marriage. The bride and the groom did not have a choice to go to any Barua Buddha Mandir, so they decided to solemnise the marriage in Kali Mandir by following Hindu rituals conducted by a purohit. However, Shri Ghoshal nowadays does not entertain such requests without the presence of both the parents. As normal visitors Nepali Buddhists also visit both Bidyachakra Kali Mandir and Budhhabharati during the auspicious days and festivities. Also, there are certain families despite being Baruas who prefer to visit Kali Mandir and conduct prayer over visiting Budhhabharati. Shri Ghosal also uses a rented house from a Barua family. As a spectator he also enjoys Buddhajayanti, Cheebardan etc. Under the present circumstances, he feels that politics based on religious polarity is bringing only distance between the religions. Practically the people need to understand the religion, faith etc. in their real essence and meaning. He said that we have always observed clashes between different religions during all ages in history. The same divide and rule policy was adopted by the British creating or encouraging divisions among the subjects to prevent alliances that could challenge the sovereign power and as an effect of the same the citizens of India are paying the price till date. On the disputed issue of citizenship, he believes that it should not be mixed with religion as they are both two diverse things to be accepted by the state. The government should take enough measure to create the policy first and then accordingly set the programme to implement the policy. This will eradicate the possibility of distress and apprehension in various sects with respect to citizenship. As per him, there is nothing above humanity in this world.

This secular minded young priest does not stop criticising the RSS initiative of purohit (priest) training or stricture of Vishwa Hindu Parishad. Shri Ghoshal seems to be inclined towards leftist ideology while trying to understand the importance of Sangha and Budhha himself. He also tries to get hold of those who have drifted away from Buddhism. In this context Shri Manik Ghoshal shared his experience. While conducting Narayan Puja in some Barua families, what he has heard is that low income group Barua families are not very keen to be part of Sangha and their activities. Those Barua families are in the belief that the Sangha is a playground for rich and influential class of the Barua society. Those who can afford to pay

hefty subscription/donation fees or are able to cater to the basic needs of the Bhantes, are more welcome by the Sangha committee. During the festival only the names of those persons are publicly announced who have donated large amounts in Sangha's fund. This Barua group understands that the amount of donations remains the yardstick of sincerity of a devotee which results in their avoidance of Sangha. So, the prevalent tendency to walk along with the mainstream Barua society is juxtaposed with the predominant division of class among the Baruas.

Taking a cue from this internal disparity, inferences can be drawn to mark the cleavage lying in the idea of the Barua community living like a homogeneous clan or as a part of a unified ethnic group. Although Buddhism had originated as an alternative doctrine to Hindu complex culture of rituals and hierarchical caste system, in this particular case it is observed that low income group Barua families are more comfortable in conducting the worship with the available Hindu Mandirs where the restrictions are limited or the process of worship remains comparatively relaxed. The continuous influence of the majoritarian Hindu culture, and added attraction / belief in the miracle of Hindu God is governing the life of this marginalized religious society. On the other hand, the discriminating treatment received from within their own clan or Sangha is culminating in a show of indifference to Theravadi Buddhist religion. This distraction is originating from not showing affinity to Buddhism and the increasing Hindu influence is evidently leading them to embrace majoritarian religion more vigorously in near future.

5.3.2 Bengali Buddhist: Socio-Religious Exchange with Other Community People

We have already seen that the Barua Buddhists are scattered within the Siliguri town with no zonal concentration. So obviously they must have neighbours from other communities. The areas adjacent to Theravadi Buddha Mandirs are occupied by different communities in large number. Owing to this cohabitation in close proximity with each other, mutual exchange amongst them becomes an important factor. It exhibits clearly how far security, recognition and acceptability the Barua community has gained from the other communities.

On the anvil of simplicity, we will now focus on the main themes as a part of our deliberation and assay to portray an overall picture around the idea of mutual exchange, which encompasses the following,

- **Participation of Other Communities in Barua Religious Festivals and Practice**

Kathin Chivar Daan is one of the most memorable and greatest festivals for Bengali Buddhists. Chibar means the dress or robe which monks usually wear. On this occasion the Buddhists at large consider the associated act of donating food and robe to the monks as auspicious and sacred. The chibar is donated to monks who have already observed the Barshabash, which we have discussed in the previous chapter in great detail. Now we will observe the extent of this festivity in Siliguri town. Erstwhile, this festival used to be celebrated with much fanfare in all the four Viharas of Siliguri.

Of late the number of participating Viharas has come down to two only. It is not observed in two Viharas, one of them being closed and the other relatively new. So there are two operational Buddha Mandirs where Chivar Daan tradition is performed regularly and bhantes from all around the region assemble to participate in the festival. However, this is solely limited to Boudhyas and only Baruas take part in the celebration where non - Barua participation is limited so far as participating number is concerned. But as a part of cultural activities of North Bengal, this event is generally well covered by press in newspaper with due seriousness. The air of festivity draws vendors to erect numerous temporary food stalls during this event along with arrangement of public transport to ensure mass participation. The non - Barua residents living in the vicinity of the Buddha Mandirs are aware of the celebration and they know about the monks. For an example, the Muslim neighbours residing near Hyderpara Buddha Mandir are invited in Cheevar Daan festival and they voluntarily attend this religious festival of a different faith and partake meals together as well. However, the intrinsic religious details of the festival are not known to them.

BudhaJayanti is an auspicious day for all the Buddhists. The birth of the Buddha, His Enlightenment and His departure, all these phases of his life took place under the full moon of the Baisakhi month (1st month of Bengali calendar), which is why this date is known to all as

Buddha Purnima. It has also been stated in earlier chapter that apart from Theravadi Bengali Buddhists settled in Siliguri, there are Mahayani Buddhists both from nearby hill regions and from the plains who reside in a couple of Tibetan Monastery in the outskirts of siliguri. These Mahayani Monasteries are organized and governed by Lamas and the followers' representation come mostly from the Nepalese. The Buddhajayanti festival is organized by the Buddhists, but the tone and characteristic of the arrangement is of different nature. The auspicious day of Buddhajayanti has been declared as an official holiday by the Union government and so it has become a universal festival for all religions, castes and creed and we observe their participation on various levels and in different functions. Amongst the visitors, there is participation of non-Buddhist Bengali families comprising youths, teenager as well as teacher and professors of various colleges. From the account of our discussion we have come to know that the prime reason for the influx of non- Buddhist group for paying visit has been various like inquisitiveness about a different religion, attraction to the festival, interest generated as a place of popular visit or because of earlier connect, or for some other unknown reasons. It would be prudent to bring to the notice that only non-Bengali Mahayani Monastery is being visited by the Bengalis. The lush architectural patterns of the Gompas, colorful idols, lavish interior, non-familiar musical instruments and different sort of recitation, presence of lamas and 'Prasad' distribution make this a popular place of attraction for the general public including all communities and religion.

Comparatively, the Bengali Buddha Mandir is flocked primarily by the Barua community and excepting them no Bengali representative takes the trouble to pay visit to this place, apart from the members of some Nepali families who visit all the Buddha Mandirs, be it belonging to the Mahayani or Bengali Theravadi community. However, there has been no presence of Bengali Barua in Mahayani Monastery. They arrange the event of prayer in their households only. It is of much relevance to observe that there happens to be a new Buddha Mandir being overseen by a Bengali Barua Bhante, in Shalugara area of Siliguri town. Also on the main road there stands in majesty a well-known Mahayani Monastery since long. The neighborhood is represented by many Mahayani Nepali Buddhists showing a lot of respect for the Theravadi Bengali Bhante, who has claimed that he had been well supported by these Nepali Buddhists

when he bought the land and erected the Buddha Mandir. The place is often visited by the Nepali women along with members of other linguistic communities.

Being one of the cardinal festivals of the Buddhists, Buddha Jayanti is celebrated by Bengali Theravadi Boudhyas, and the Nepali or Sikkimese Mahayani boudhya in separate threads according to their own regulations and separate operative modes. However, both the Buddha communities got together to form a Festival Committee to celebrate the 2555th Buddha Jayanti in the year 2015. The festivity got initiated with the 'Prabhat Feri' attended by both the Theravadi and the Mahayani groups, followed by flag hoisting for World Peace, reciting Mangalsutta, deliberation on the philosophy of Buddha and conducting religious teachings. The entire event was conducted both in Bengali and Nepali languages, wherein Bengali remained predominant as a medium of communication. Some of the representatives of both Theravadi and Mahayani groups are capable of understanding both languages and moderating between the groups. However, it was also evident that language is the prime barrier to free exchanges between these two groups in the context of culture, philosophy and socialization. Apart from performing various religious rites, cultural events were organized in the afternoon through to the evening. A few community service programmes such as blood donation and distribution of free books were also organized on that day. Enthusiastic participation of various religious communities was observed. The cultural production was catered by the non-Barua Bengali youths or teenagers, conjoined by other communities like Marwari, Bihari etc.

Theravadi Buddhists are known for their special meditation training practice, **Vipasanna Meditation or Bidarshana Dhyana**. The fact is that the other communities are also adopting and participating in this religious training. The center here named 'Panchanadi Vipassana Kendra' is situated in Dagapur, Siliguri. This centre follows the teachings of S.N. Goyenka and the tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin (Burmese leader of the Vipassana movement). Satya Narayan Goenka was born in Burma in 1924 to Indian parents from the Marwari ethnic group and grew up in a conservative Hindu household. He was a successful businessman, but started experiencing severe and debilitating migraines. Unable to get medical relief, he sought help from the Vipassana teacher U. Ba Khin and was under his training for 14 years. After his death in 1971, Goenka had moved to India and started his meditation centres at different places of India.

People of different religions and ethnic groups come to these centres. The Panchanadi centre has a mixed group of members from different castes, creeds and religions. Many Baruas also appreciate and follow the technic and method of the Panchanadi Meditation Centre than their very own Bidarshan Dhyhan Shibir conducted in Hyderpara Buddha Mandir. People also go to Bodhgaya for the advance level of training.

- **Impact of Social Activities Performed by the Barua Community**

In this part of the study we will discuss about the initiative of the Barua community in social activities, mainly education and public welfare with the participation of the other religious communities and their overall effect. As a minority community, the Baruas are able to keep up their individuality with respect to religious customs and maintain the exchange with the other communities to some extent. However, It is subject to uncertainty whether as a community Baruas are having any social impact or becoming the important partner in the exchange as beneficiaries as of now.

In the earlier chapter we have observed the existence of schools established by Barua Buddhists and the existence of the welfare associations. So, in this chapter we will analyse in a summarised format the overall and generic activities of these aforementioned institutions. We have identified prominent personalities such as Dr Satyapal Bhikkhu, Shri Rastrapal Bhante, Shri Debapriya Barua. This list of renowned persons is quite impressive and of immense credibility in the arena of education of Siliguri town. Buddhabharati Bhuwanmohoni Bidyamandir began as a primary school and as late as in 1970 it was given the status as Buddhabharati High School with merely thirteen students. Over the years it got transformed into a high school receiving government grants. Mr. Sherpa in the year 1992 donated, at a very low fee, twenty-four Kathas of land for the cause of the expansion of the school, so that it could cater to the need of the increasing number of students. It has been observed that from the very beginning Shri Kailasnath Ojha along with Shri Debapriya Barua had shouldered the sole responsibility of the expansion and devoted their time for the improvement of the School in all aspects. So, the establishment of this school had been possible due to the collaborative efforts of these two stalwarts and active participation of various individuals. It can be logically derived and said that

the environment of mutual exchange contributed to the establishment of this school. Initially, apart from Shri Debapriya Barua, few Barua teachers and guardians remained a part of the school committee. However, in the present context the school committee responsible for school operations is comprised of Hindu members owing to non-availability of competent Barua members. Shri Debapriya Barua was the first Headmaster of the Haiderpara Buddhabharati Higher Secondary School which has now grown over the time in terms of number of students which crosses more than thousands comprising non-Buddhist communities in majority. Post retirement Shri Debapriya Barua independently managed to set up a Buddha Statue marking the auspicious day of Rabindra Jayanti as the foundation day of the statue within the school premises. In the foundation day ceremony, many Buddhist monks and Shraman delivered their speeches while non-Buddhist students performed Tagore's famous poem 'Shrimati' in theatrical form, which is based on the Buddhist dogma, associated history and philosophy as depicted by Rabindranath Tagore.

In the heart of Siliguri town, the Haiderpara Buddhabharati High School plays a prominent role in educating the children residents of the nearby locality irrespective of caste, creed, and religion and Barua students are seen to be scattered in various other educational institutions. In the entire North Bengal, the only Dharmadhar Pali college was established in Mahananda Para of Siliguri which used to offer the title 'Pali Sutra Bisharad'. In Gurung Basti the 'International Buddhist Study and Research Centre' used to conduct religious discussions, seminar lectures and workshops, to be held regularly where the professors of Philosophy, History and other faculties of North Bengal University used to take part which yielded greater community influence.

Finally, it can be said that the students of the Haider Para Buddhabharati Higher Secondary and Buddhabharati Bhuwanmohini Primary school hail mostly from lower middle class Hindu families. These institutions are extremely important also for the destitute or poor children. On the other hand, the well-to-do Barua families while keeping pace with the times, have enabled their children to attend the English medium educational institutions or join in nearby renowned Bengali medium schools. Apart from this, the school library makes available the 'Jataka' story as an inevitable resource aids for the introduction of Buddhism or the Buddhist principles to the

students during the very formative years of their lives. There is no confusion or doubt that this genuine exchange of philosophy or the Buddhist principles indisputably disseminate the ideal of communal harmony in the vicinity and beyond.

In a contextual note, 'North Bengal Buddhist Forum' is a general institution of the Buddhists where any Buddhist person from North Bengal can get membership. The institution like Siliguri Bouddhya Jubak Maitri Sangha organizes Voluntary Blood Donation camps, free book distribution for the needy students, and arranges ambulance service for moribund patients. Haiderpara Bidarshan Dhyana Ashram and Mahananda Para Buddhabharati both run a facility to let out banquet halls in a low cost arrangement. As per the Mandir Steering Committee members' statement, they cater to accommodate people irrespective of their caste, creed, religion and also make available halls to persons having limited financial resources.

Apart from these community establishments in this area, there are some prominent persons from Barua community with ample educational background, efficiency and sense of social responsibility who have contributed a lot for the improvement of activities of their locality and in turn they got accepted by the masses with admiration and love. A sense of mutual respect is observed while discussing with the residents who live near the Buddha Mandir.

So, from the above discussion it is quite obvious that being a minority community the Baruas are not very vocal about their festivities, culture and presence. However, a candid humanitarian appeal flows and the participants enjoy it across religious barriers. However, under the current dispensation of feeble religious authority, the internal and inherent bonding among Barua Buddhists has dwindled into crisis. Buddhism is a confederate religion and it is a very difficult job as a whole to bring the scattered Baruas with various economical layers under a homogeneous single framework of union without the Sangha and Sangha Pradhan's firm ability to control and forge an unabated religious influence.

Take away from the discourse on socio-cultural-political location of Barua Buddhists:

After conducting this detailed mapping on the aspects of mutual perceptions that exists among different communities vis-à-vis Barua Buddhists, certain important questions need to be answered to further the degree of comprehension. Why is it so that the Barua Buddhists

remain even a minority among the other dominant Buddhist sects? Why they fail to attract the attention of the majority Hindu festivity buffs to their religious festivals? Despite having close ties with the political power dispensation of the state, realized by a handful of Buddhist monks, why do they still maintain a non-significant presence in the societal matrix?

It might not seem a wide conjecture to arrive at the reasons for their secondary status in society. Historically speaking, this Barua Buddhist had always been on the run to relocate them in a different religious locale before settling in North Bengal in general and Siliguri in particular. This North Bengal phase of their migration remains pretty recent getting them scattered across different parts of North Bengal primarily in search of jobs, the strength in their number decreased. This has produced a deep sense of insecurity followed by some desperation to save their religio-cultural identity. With a limited success in finding a formidable patron for providing material supports from within their own community, in the last 60-70 years of their veritable living they could not come out of the cringe. At times the Barua laity finds their religious identity not very useful in salvaging a prominent social position. Most of non-initiated Baruas are either ignorant or oblivious of their origin and genealogy.

With the missing of this basic bulwark to stave off either the all pervasive influence of Hindu culture or to ensure a living connection with the Mahayani Buddhist community, the Barua Buddhists remain in a comparatively vulnerable social and religious position. On the other hand, born and reared in a robustly individualistic consumer society, the youths belonging to Barua Buddhist sect are drawn heavily to assimilate the dominant signifiers of the majoritarian religion i.e. Hinduism. Perhaps this perennial preoccupation was responsible for adopting Hindu rites and rituals as amalgams to specific Buddhist signatures.

As a corollary to this immensely insignificant social moorings, in a desperate bid perhaps, a handful of Barua bhantes are seen to have sheer inclination to attract government funds for development and progress. It is of some importance to observe that quite often an official appeal comes from some Barua abbots to celebrate major iconic Hindu festivals like Dipavali

or the colour festival, while flaunting their official position as a member of the Minority Development Alliance, Government of West Bengal.

Faced with these double-contenders and fraught with immense identity crisis, the Barua Buddhist community of Siliguri (along with other parts of North Bengal) cuts a very small niche while abiding strictly by their own religious doctrine. Rather, the whirlpool of socio-political upheavals invariably seeks to destabilize the iota of boundary they put up as resistance against possible religio-cultural onslaughts.

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Chapter 6

Summary and Conclusion

Chapter 6 - Summary and Conclusion

In the course of this research under the title 'Theravadi Buddhists of Siliguri: A Study of Socio-Cultural Distinctiveness and Exchange', I have discussed on my research method in the **first chapter**. Here apart from specifying the subject-matter of my research, its 5-point objectives have been tabled. I have sought to use the help of some theoretical ideas like 'Ethnographic Perspective', 'Study on Syncretism', 'Boundary Maintenance and Identity Formation with Minority Issues' etc. towards bolstering the theoretical framework of our study.

Two more important parts of this chapter are Review of Literature and Research Design. In the throes of dearth of availability of literature on the Theravadi Buddhist (Barua) community of North Bengal due to very little prior research on them, I have divided the scant salvage into three different parts. Since the Bengali Buddhist community living in Siliguri town had a history of migration from Chittagong of the then undivided Bengal, in the first part I have tried to explore the genealogy and expansion of Buddhism in the contemporary time placing it in the wider perspective of the geographical location and political upheavals of Chittagong against the backdrop of perennial religious ethos, society and culture of Bengal. I have entered into some theoretical readings in the second part. The third part deals specifically with both published and unpublished writings of Barua Buddhist scholars that encompass the history, migration, culture, rites and rituals, religious chores and information on their basic identity.

Different chapters of the thesis have been written based on the information obtained from both the primary and secondary sources. In the face of sheer lack of books and information on this community, I had to depend solely on the conventional sociological tools and techniques i.e. interview, case study, survey, observation etc. Each of the relevant photographs attached here is clicked or collected with due permission.

The discourse on the Theravadi Buddhist or Barua Buddhist community living in Siliguri is spread over four chapters, i.e. second to fifth chapter. The **second chapter** seeks to unravel the mystery about their history, identity and migration and to offer an easy, acceptable account of these pointers. It oversees their settlement pattern in Siliguri as well. Materials available so far on the history of Barua community are few and far between to arrive at a general acceptance.

Even at present time they seem to have differentiated views regarding their own identity or predecessors. The reason behind this could be their past remaining interspersed with an elongated history of migration across political and geographical boundary that denies any unilateral or linear trajectory of their identity. The other important aspects that have already been discussed are their association and dissociation with different places like Magadh, Arakan, Burma, Chittagong or communities like Mag, Rakhain, Bengali etc. The telltale impact of economic crisis has surfaced overwhelmingly in each story of their migration. The influence of political or communal unrest may have dotted their stories of migration only as secondary reasons. The later life patterns of this migrated community have been determined by the historical time and place of their new settlement.

Taking a cue from the above, in the **third chapter** of the thesis we have seen how to assert their separate identity this Barua community could build up their religious institutions in Siliguri town. The efforts have remained directed to know their educational and occupational status as a distinct community and to determine their ideological moorings vis-à-vis politics and policy initiatives. The quest of the study has been to fathom the degree of influence of the Barua social welfare organisations on the other majoritarian communities in terms of their programme, efficiency and acceptance.

The evolution of the Barua community as a permanent settler in Siliguri had begun way back in 1950s. Their primary initiative was directed to establish their religious institutions for two specific reasons. Their community identity as members of the Magh tribes and their religious identity as Theravadi Buddhists remained basic two tools for maintaining their distinctiveness and to achieve recognition. They were pretty much aware of the importance of congregation as a religious minority. But they evidently dithered over their tribal identity, questioning its efficacy either to ensure their social security or in realizing educational and social prestige for their descendants. This indeterminacy factor must have produced changes in the formal assertion of their community identity.

The Barua community has been registered as a tribal group and can enjoy the benefits of reservation due only to their Magh identity. But we have had several such occasions where we

have seen them pragmatically opting for the security of coexistence at the cost of their community identity in consideration of political, economical and occupational status.

The influence of Buddhist culture on Indian traditional education is a well-known fact. Buddhist philosophy had been referred to by Rabindranath Tagore, Arabindo et al and practiced by none other than B.R. Ambedkar. An effective and important exchange of ideas might have been possible amongst the Theravadi Buddhist community and other religious communities through the medium of education. Generally speaking, a religious educational institution may impact immense socio-economic influence based on its degree of excellence. We may cite the examples of Ramkrishna Mission or the educational institutes run by Christian missionaries. But despite having potentials, the educational institutes run by Theravadi or Barua community have failed to achieve heights of excellence or have social exchange. Less number of activists or organizational shortcomings remained as deterrents to carve out a niche of excellence by them.

I have tried to project mainly the cultural aspects of the Barua community in the **fourth chapter** of the thesis. While living together with several other linguistic or religious communities, the distinct identity of a single community may be asserted through food habits, dress culture, language, festivals and religious rituals. Amongst these distinctive pointers, a natural commingling may also be possible through the process of adaptation and assimilation with respect to food culture, dressing and language. Past history, present status and the ideas about future course of a particular community can be ascertained by analyzing the evolution and degree of assimilation of these cultural factors.

It is quite pertinent to mention here that the Buddhist society based on Sangha is stratified into two different streams namely *Bhikshu* (Monk) and *Grihi* (Householder). The language use, dress culture and food habits of these two streams are also different from each other. Lack of manpower, association, financial resource and infrastructural deficiencies of this Barua community in Siliguri town, unlike Kolkata or parts of Bangladesh, have a limiting influence on the functional capacity of the Bouddha Vihars, and influence and controlling power of the Vantes.

The main crisis faced by this community is lack of popular recognition in the society at large. Very few commoners have any idea about their very existence. By Buddhists or Buddhism a common Hindu person means the Mahayani or Tibetan Lamas. Some of them may also visit Tibetan monasteries on the occasion of Buddha Jayanti. On the other hand, to the other sects of Buddhism (Mahayani and Tantrik Vajrajan Buddhists) the Buddhists living in Srilanka, Myanmar or Thailand are known as Theravadi Buddhists. The separate existence of the Bengali Barua Buddhists, living in Siliguri is often ignored for their pronounced affinity to the majoritarian Hindu culture in terms of their everyday chores and rituals. In offering obeisance and financial contribution to Hindu temples, through the mention of Gotra (Caste), following Hindu almanac, idolatry, believing in ghosts, gods and afterlife – this community loses its distinctiveness and the Vantes are no exceptions. Most of the other residents are not really aware even of the location of the Buddha mandirs in the town. It appears at times that the Baruas are not very keen on making their separate identity known to fellow residents.

Important Theravadi festivals, as observed in Siliguri, remain lackluster due to lack of manpower and absence of proper participation of Buddhist monks. Yet, the two Buddha mandirs here diligently observe both festivals and perform worship while maintaining their regular efforts in educational, health and social welfare activities. The very presence and participation of the Vantes in any festival or domestic rites has a special importance in Barua society. We have cited the life history of one of the oldest and most experienced Vantes of Siliguri in this chapter.

In order to arrive at an iota of comprehension regarding the degree of exchange amongst the Baruas and the other communities like the Mahayana or the Hindus, we have dealt with the issues of mutual awareness, social relations, participation in religious festivals and other subtler exchanges in the **fifth or the ultimate chapter**. We have made an assay to gauge the depth of distinctiveness maintained by this minority migrant community while living amidst the Hindus – how far they have adopted Hindu rites in their daily household chores, worship or life practices. How much they feel comfortable in their daily discourse with the other communities? Durga Puja, being the largest Hindu festival, has been cited as an example in this regard. I have also tried to find out how much knowledge about the fellow Barua citizens rests with the Hindu or

Mahayani Buddhists of Siliguri in terms of their existence, culture and history. This last chapter contains specific information about the degree of participation of these other communities in Theravadi festivals or family occasions.

Exchange between two different communities is mostly ascertained by the number of inter-religious marriages and in the corresponding narratives of experiences. Now-a-days, inter-religious marriages between the Hindus and the Baruas even in Siliguri are not very rare though, some aspects of them need special mention. Inter-community marriages do not really face many obstacles in the Barua society. Perhaps, the reason for this lies in the perception of having increased their population and achievement of a kind of recognition by the dominant community. For this, if a Barua groom marries a Hindu bride, this marriage marks an endowment of social prestige too. The reverse is also accepted if the Hindu groom's educational and professional standing has some reckoning in the society. While marrying off their educated and economically independent daughters, the Barua parents often choose a suitable husband from among the other communities. There remains a single Barua-Lama couple in Siliguri town.

Approaching the end of the thesis, the study may claim to have found some truthful revelations that have also ignited the zeal to probe farther into the reality about the Barua community. In the throes of non-availability of information-on-record, there happens to be a lot of contradictory ideas doing rounds regarding the history or genealogy of this community. It has been distinctly observed while the affluent and established Barua families love to identify themselves with the rulers of Magadh, the less fortunate section of the Barua population acts frantically to insist on their Arakan Magh tribal ancestry to access the facilities of reservation. So, this meagerly minor community is seen to be divided over the issues of their own origin and identity.

Historians and the researchers ascribe the Barua community as an example of hybrid community. Our field survey also ratifies their mingled mosaic characteristics, achieved through perennial migration and intermingling with other communities. As such they remain ever confused towards preserving their anthropological and cultural heritage. They generally are

found to be eager to accept their individual social position, living as a commoner in the larger society.

In spite of the overwhelming predominance of a synthetic synthesis between religion and politics in the contemporary time, the Barua community remains conspicuous by an absence of charting out particular demands or assertive movements. On an individual count, we may see one or two people from this community or even Vantes becoming a member of the minority cell or a Tribal Development Board constituted by the state government, but they remain as exceptions and at times they receive tacit criticism from within their own community.

Generally speaking, the Barua community remains at the lower rung of the economic ladder. A few among them prove to be exceptions by achieving government jobs or getting established in business, but the lives of the majority population of the Baruas remain riddled with economic crisis. The Vantes or Bhikshus are not exceptions. Mostly the young members of the impoverished families opt for monastic life and become Shramans. As a consequence they are generally found to have braved difficulties in getting academic access.

To conclude, we may say that in their daily life course the Barua Buddhists do not have much distinctive differences with their Hindu neighbours. Despite being a religious minority community, they are not considered a threat like the Muslims. On the other hand, they fail to attract the attention of the majority Hindus unlike either the Christian missionaries or the Mahayan Buddhists. Even the Bouddha Vihars could not achieve the stellar status of having a binding influence on the variegated members of the Barua community because of several shortcomings. The Theravada Buddhists or the Magh- Barua community of Siliguri seem to have prioritized their social security over maintaining their distinctiveness – be it in the professional fields or in terms of their political preferences. And this sense of insecurity warrants an urge to be part of the mainstream cultural and social ethos. The consequent neglect in the distinctive communitarian moorings raises serious doubts on the future survival of this minority community amidst majoritarian whirlpool.

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NOTES:

ⁱ In AD 1340, Kadar Khan or Kadal Khan, the Commander-in-Chief of Sultan Fakruddin Mobarak Shah of Sonargaon conquered Chittagong and first brought it within the folds of Sonargaon. This is the start of Islamic rule in Chittagong. During his reign, the renowned traveller, Ibn Batuta (AD 1346) had visited Chittagong. Later on, Samsuddin Ilyach Shah had conquered Chittagong along with Sonargaon and extended his rule over Gaur. He became the first independent Sultan of Bengal (AD 1352-1358).

ⁱⁱ The successors of Ilyach Shah were Sultans Sikandar Shah and Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah. During the rule of Ghiyasuddin, the Arakanese King Narmikhla or "Mong-Sau-Mong" Brahmaraj dethroned him and he sought asylum in Gaur (AD 1406-1430). Sultan Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah also known as Nasiruddin Muhammad Shah helped him recapture his lost kingdom. This Arakanese royal family became well-known as *Mrauk*. After Narmikhla rose to the throne again, Buddhist Kings (AD 1430-1645, 17 kings) started adopting a Muslim name along with their Arakanese Buddhist names.

ⁱⁱⁱ A few early correspondences from the Chiefs of Chittagong to Arakan Rajahs indicate that entire population of Arakan was addressed as "Muggs". One of such letter from Warren Hastings to Francis Law, Chief of Chittagong dated 21st May, 1777 and reply from Mr Law dated 23rd Nov, 1777 is reproduced in Revenue History of Chittagong (1880). The spelling changed to *Magh* and *Mag* in the 19th Century.

^{iv} Two facts have been established concerning the time of migration of the Magh Barua families from Magadh. According to the first source, towards the middle of the Second Century AD (AD 146) a vassal king of Magadh established an independent state in Arakan and Chittagong and made Dhanyabati its capital. Those arriving from Magadh at this time created the Magh Barua community together with the local Buddhist Arakanese subjects.

However, according to the second source, in the second half of the 12th Century AD, prior to Muslim invasion and subsequent expansion of their kingdoms, several Buddhist Arakanese people were influenced to move to Chittagong. They are the ancestors of the present day Magh Barua clans. Judging the source of the facts, the second view has greater historical significance undoubtedly. Yet, it cannot be said with conviction that this migration at a specific time or region.

For instance, subject expert Natun Chandra Barua (Retired Teacher of Pali, Chittagong), has mentioned i that in the 12th and 13th Century AD, the Buddhists were subjected to inhuman torture, hence left the Magadh Kingdom and took shelter under the Arakanese Buddhist King. Mr Barua has mentioned that after living closely with Arakanese Maghs, amity developed between the two communities and marital alliances were slowly initiated and accepted.

^v During the Muslim and British Rule, many Baruas held high ranking positions in the government. Those who were managers of estates, officers and high grade clerks were titled Mutsuddis. To make it easier to collect land taxes, land was divided into 'taluk' and 'taraf'.

Those who owned taluks came to be known as Talukdars while those with tarafs were called Tarafdar or Zamindar. These Tarafdars were given titles like "Chowdhury" and "Bhunia". Shikdar and Hazari were the titles given to those in the military, which means "chief". Those leading a paltoon of thousand soldiers or so were called Hazari. Kshatriya-born Gautam Buddha was also known as Shakya Singha. The monastic order established by him inspired many Kshatriyas, who then embraced Buddhism. Despite converting, these Kshatriyas did not renounce their erstwhile heritage of using Singh or Singha titles. This is why a lot of Buddhists can be found using the title Singh or Singha.

^{vi} In his book, 'Contemporary Buddhism in Bangladesh', Sukamal Chowdhury mentioned that, British did not interfere into the religious matter of the Buddhist people of Chattagram who in a mass came to be known as Magh from the beginning of the 17th Century. They rather fully geared their interest in making their army stronger by recruiting able bodied people of the place and formed a separate platoon with them, titled "Magh Platoon". Subsequently, some of the Buddhists were raised to the position of 'Jamadar', 'Suvadard' and 'Havildard'.