

The Migrant Nepalis in Balurghat: An Account of Adaptation and Change¹

Kumar Chhetri

***Abstract:** The present paper is a brief descriptive account of the Nepalis in a cluster in of Balurghat town, the district town of South Dinajpur district. The Nepali households have migrated from various places in different historical periods in connection with their jobs and livelihoods. They have been living in an alienated kind of social situation, far from their own population and places of origin for generations. A long course of association and interactions with local Bengali speaking neighbours have left a permanent mark on their way of life or culture. The main observation of the paper is that despite accepting and adjusting with many cultural practices of the local dominant community the migrant Nepalis have retained their distinct cultural identity.*

Keywords: Nepali community, migration, adaptation, cultural continuity, culture change.

Introduction

Purpose of the present paper is to discuss socio-cultural continuity and change experienced by the Nepali community living in Balurghat. The families had migrated to Balurghat in different periods in connection with their jobs in military, police and other allied services. Though the Nepalis are generally known as the hill people in West Bengal there are several Nepali settlements/Busties outside Darjeeling, Dooars and Terai, inhabited by the retired military and other allied professionals mostly around the military and police lines like Suesgate Nepali Para (Balurghat), Khalashi Patti (Coach-Bihar), Police line (Jalpaiguri), Salua (West Medinipur) and others. It has been one of the patterns of Nepali migration almost throughout India and many parts of the European countries as well (Kumari 1999; Gellner 2013). In the recent past they kept migrating from one place to another particularly after the discovery of the “martial race thesis” by the British which opened up job opportunities in military and other allied services and after their retirement continue to live in settlements in many parts of the country (Gellner 2013). Suesgate Nepali Para or Nepali Busty of Balurghat where the present study was carried out is the outcome of such process;

this is a settlement mostly of the retired policemen. This settlement is located close to Balurghat police headquarters, Baro Ragunathpur Mouza of Balurghat block in the district of Dakshin Dinajpur, West Bengal. It is a small hamlet of the migrant Nepali population in a town where the Bengalis constitute an overwhelming majority.

Although, there are several works available on the Nepalis of Darjeeling hills and its surrounding areas since colonial days (O'Malley 1907; Gellner 2013; Pradhan 1981; Subba 1989; Sarkar 2010-2011), there is hardly any account of any firsthand study on the Nepalis who live far from their place of origin.

When a group of people migrate from one environment or place to another it faces the problem of adaptation in the new environment. In its adjustment in the new environment it undergoes changes in its cultural and social conditions. A migrant community may accept some of the socio-cultural traits of the numerically dominant community but 'this does not necessarily lead to the creation of a fully homogeneous socio-cultural setup; that is why the "breakdown thesis" or the "melting pot" metaphor does not hold well for the study of social change (Chhetri 1987: 241). The migrants always adapt and modify their socio-economic and cultural life in order to build a normal communication channel with the locals so that life becomes easier in the new setting. They also tend to create a small cultural world of their own through residential segregation, thus well acquainted with a well-knit community life and neighbourhood ties among them' (Nair 1978).

The present paper argues that adaptation is a two way process which involves interaction between the in-migrants and host society, although the pressure of adaptation is much less among host community. The present paper also argues that though the migrant community may adopt the socio-cultural elements of the host society in totality they do not melt into the dominant culture. Some of the questions that the present paper addresses are: what were the reasons of their migration to Balurghat? In what respect Nepalis adopted or adjusted in the new environment? What are the changes that have taken place in their socio-cultural institutions? How do they identify themselves with their native place?

Nepali/Gorkha Community

Nepalis are a group of people who share a common language namely Nepali. The word Nepali signifies multiple connotations like language, community, and nationality (Pradhan 1987). The Indians of Nepali origin are called

Indian Nepalis (Sinha 2009). The Indian Nepalis are also popularly known as the Indian Gorkhas. The Nepalis are synonymously known as the hill community² in West Bengal. They are numerically dominant in the hill region of Darjeeling district and their ethnographic boundaries have been extended up to Siliguri, Terai, Dooars and clusters of urban hamlets almost throughout North Bengal.

The Nepali society is heterogeneous in nature and divided into number of castes and sub-castes. The word Nepali or Gorkha is an umbrella term for several endogamous groups and castes or *jatis* that constitute to form a linguistic community. This community can be broadly categorized into *Tagadhary* and *Matawali*. Tagadhary literally means the “sacred thread wearer” and traditionally they do not drink or use alcohol in their rituals. They are regarded as the clean caste in Nepali caste hierarchy. The Bahuns (Brahmins) occupy the topmost position followed by the Kshatriyas like Chhetris (warriors) and Thakuris (aristocrats). Bahuns are further divided into *Jharra Bahun* who traditionally perform rituals and *Jaisey Bahuns*, the astrologers. Among them also there are certain restrictions in terms of caste occupation and marriage etc. The Jharra Bahuns consider themselves superior to the Jaishis. Matwali are those endogamous groups who traditionally use locally prepared alcohol called *Rakshi* or *Jaanr* in their ceremonies and rituals. It literary mean the “alcohol users” or “alcohol consumers”. The *Newar* (businessman), *Gurung* (Shepherds), *Tamang* (horse traders/cavaliers), *Rai*, *Limboo*, *Yakkha*, *Mukhia*, *Mangar*, *Thami* (agriculturists), *Sherpa* (potters and potato growers), *Bhujel* (beaten rice makers/ palanquin bearers), *Jogi* (ascetics) and others belong to *Matawali* group.

The lower strata of the Nepali caste hierarchy are occupied by the Indo-Aryan origin/stock scheduled castes or dalits like *Sunar* (goldsmith) *Kami* (ironsmith), *Damai* (tailor and musician) and *Sarki* (cobbler) and they are commonly referred to as *kalo Matwali* (Pradhan 1987; Singh 2010; Subba 1989; Subedi 2010). Most of the high and low caste Nepalis had migrated from India to Nepal during the Muslim invasion. All these endogamous groups or *jatis* are further divided into different clans and sub-clans, for instance, *Karki* is one of the sub-castes of the Chhetris who are further divided into *Mudula Karki*, *Sutar Karki* and *Lama Karki* and each of these sub-castes have further divisions.

One can notice difference among the Nepali speaking populations in terms of their religious affiliations. The Tagadharis and scheduled castes are basically Hindu while the Tamangs, Sherpas, a section of Newars and

Gurungs follow Buddhism. A large section of the Nepalis in Darjeeling and Sikkim are Christian. All other endogamous Nepalis are basically Hindu³ and some of them also follow their traditional religious beliefs and practices like shamanism, naturalism, animism and ancestor worship. All endogamous groups and castes possess their own way of life relating to birth and death ceremonies, marriage practices, folk songs and dance, myths and folklores, food habits and attires. Each and every group has its own dialect but Nepali language⁴ has been the lingua-franca of all ethnic groups. There are numerous festivals, big or small, celebrated by the Nepalis like *Dashain* (Durga Puja), *Tihar* (Dipawali), *Pahilo Baisakh* (Nepali New Year), *Chaita Dashain* (celebrated in the month of *Chait*), *Maghey Sankranti* (which is commonly known as *Makkar Sankranti*), *Guru Puja* (worshipping of the guru or teacher), *Sansari Puja* (worshipping of nature), *Lho-char* (new year of Tamangs, Gurungs and Sherpas). *Khukuri* is the most important religious and traditional weapon of the Nepalis. The traditional foods of the Nepalis are *Salroti* (a ring shaped, spongy, pretzel-like bread), *Gundruk* (a non-salted, fermented and sun-dried leafy vegetables), *Kinema* (a traditional fermented soybean food), *Senki* (non-salted fermented radish taproot), *Makai-ko-bhat* (edible dish prepared from the flour of maize), *Chhurpi* (prepared from milk), *Mohi* (buttermilk), *Dahi* (traditional curd), *Dhero* (porridge-like Nepali food), *Masu* (meat), *Rakshi* (locally prepared beverage), *Jaanr* (alcohol made of grains) etc. Culturally these foods have a great significance and are traditionally important in different festivals and ceremonies (Liwang 2006; Tamang 2009).

Indian Nepalis/Gorkhas

India and Nepal share a socio-cultural and religious proximity since time immemorial. In pre-colonial India the Nepalese had migrated to Munger (land of Mughals) and *Lahure* (Lahore) for their recruitment in the army of King Ranjit Singh (Golay 2009), although it became a significant phenomenon after the treaty of Saugoli of 1815-16 in British army. The most important forces of Nepali migration throughout the world in general and South East Asia in particular has been at the same time economic and social, which were supported by the factors like establishment of tea and cinchona industry in Darjeeling, operation of the upper castes in Nepal, recruitment of the Nepalis in military and other allied services of the British India, opportunities to work as coolies and others (O'Malley 1907; Gellner 2013; Dutt 1981). Abolition of the *Kipat* (communal ownership of land particularly among the Kiratis) by the Prime Minister Janga Bahadur Rana was one of the

most important push factors behind their migration particularly to Darjeeling-Sikkim and North-east India. The British engineers encouraged Nepali migration and their settlements through 'official sponsorship' particularly in North-East India, Sikkim-Darjeeling, Bhutan and Burma and they have been 'contributing in the economic development of the region' (Dutt 1981; Devi 2007; Parajuly 1995) but the Kiratas of Nepali group were believed to be the earliest inhabitants of North-East India (Devi 2007: 3005). The Nepalis also entered into the various tracts of North-East India as the grazers and cultivators (Nath 2006; Sapkota 2009). Thus, the Nepalese are found almost throughout India but they are generally concentrated in clusters of villages in different parts of North-East, Darjeeling-Sikkim Himalayas, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and in much smaller numbers in metropolises like Kolkata, New Delhi and Mumbai (Subba 2003; Kumari 1999). Subba (2014) categorized Nepalese in North east India into three types. Firstly, those naturalized citizen of the country living in this land for more than 200 years or so. Second category is constituted of those seasonal migrants from Nepal into the different parts of India for their livelihood. In the third category are those small numbers of Nepalese who hold the citizenship of both the countries. So, one cannot consider all the 'Nepalis in India as a diaspora community' as David Gellner (2013: 136-50) has done because they are not homogeneous in terms of their belongingness, nationality etc. Thus, we cannot consider the first category of Nepalis as diaspora because they have been living in India since many generations and many of them have lost connection with their places of origin, but the second and third categories constitute diaspora since they maintain strong links with Nepal (Subba 2014). Thus, the present study is on a group of Nepalese who belong to the first category.

Nepalis in Balurghat: Migration and Ethnic Consolidation

A migrant population prefers to live together in enclaves with fellow members of the community, who share similar language, place of origin and history, since by doing this they feel socially and culturally secure. The "ethnic goods components" create the possibilities of living in culturally similar areas (Epstein and Gang 2010). The Nepalese, in the present case, also did the same. Although they had migrated from various places and in different points of time, it was their community affinity which united them into a single neighbourhood. Rai Bahadur Chhetri, after his retirement from Balurghat police headquarters, constructed a house at Suesgate with the help of his colleague Narayan Sarkar and encouraged his friends to settle

down in the same area in the 1970s. At present there are around 35 Nepali households, a large majority of them are retired from Balurghat police headquarter, in Suesgate Nepali Para. Many temporary Nepali residents, who work in the police headquarters, also live in this area as tenants. The locality was earlier known as Suesgate due to presence of a small dam on the river named *Atrayi* and later it has been named Suesgate Nepali Para or Nepali Busty due to the emergence of the Nepali settlement.

Table 1: Socio-economic Background of the Nepalis

Sl No.	Caste/ Community	Male	Female	Total	Percentage
1	General (Chhetri, Majhi)	22	20	42	50.60
2	OBC (Rai, Mangar)	04	06	10	12.05
3	Schedule Tribe (Tamang)	05	07	12	14.46
4	Schedule Caste (Darjee)	Nil	03	03	03.62
5	Others*	7	09	16	19.27
	Total	38	45	83	100

Source: field, *4 non-Nepali families having marital relation with the Nepalis

The present work is based on 15 days in-depth study of 20 households in which 4 households are non-Nepali [Das, Mardi, Oraon and Singh] having marital relationship with the Nepalis. Households belonging to the general caste/category constitute of 50.60 per cent of the total households, Other Backward Classes (OBC) constitute 12.05 per cent, scheduled tribes constitute 14.46 per cent and the share of scheduled caste households is only 03.62 per. Most of the Nepali households are small in size. 70 per cent of the total population comprises single unit of family (nuclear family) in which 15 per cent are sub-nuclear families, 25 per cent are supplemented nuclear families and 30 per cent of the total households are joint families. Except three households, which are extremely poor, all others are of middleclass background. They have toilet, bathroom, bicycle, fan, gas and their own house. None of the families owned agricultural land but few families are dependent on animal husbandry; they sell milk and milk products. All the families are dependent on secondary and tertiary sectors occupations. Many of the elderly people draw pensions but younger generations are employed in both public and private sectors. The traditional occupations of the Nepalis have changed in course of their migration in the new environment.

Case study 1

Sushma Chhetri, 87 years old widow and daughter of a retired policeman, who was born and brought-up at Calcutta, stated that in 1960s her husband, a police by profession, was transferred to Hilley from Calcutta and later retired from Balurghat police headquarters. After retirement her husband constructed a house at Suesgate Nepali Para with the help of Rai Bahadur Chhetri. They have been living in this area for more than 20 years alongside other Nepali neighbours. Mrs. Chhetri has three sons and two daughters. Her two sons are serving in the West Bengal Police, one is posted at Raiganj while the other at Coach-Bihar. They occasionally visit their home. Mrs. Chhetri's two sons-in laws are employed in the Indian army. All the members of her family are very fluent in their mother tongue and Bengal. Her children and grand-children have studied in Bengali medium schools and colleges and some of them are studying in English medium school in Kurseong. Mrs. Chhetri's son and other relatives particularly from Jalpaiguri police line, Kurseong and Raiganj visit her during important festivals. They love this place very much and are well acquainted with their non-Nepali neighbours.

Case study 2

Anirban Chhetri, 40 years, is a policeman. The son of a government official, Mr. Chhetri, who was born and brought up at Balurghat old Nepali Busty (near Balurghat bus stand), said that in his childhood he saw many Nepali youth working as police, home guard, and private security professionals, living there. Some of them were the permanent settlers but many, after retirement, left Balurghat for Siliguri and other areas which have greater concentration of the Nepalis. His fathers' friend Rai Bahadur Chhetri encouraged and helped them to construct a house at Suesgate Nepali busty. His family had 10 members including his Oraon (non-Nepali) wife and widow mother. Their maternal relatives from Darjeeling hills make occasional visits during the special festivals and family occasions. His family celebrates both Nepali and Bengali festivals and possess some of the Nepali traditional ornaments, vessels and weapon (Khukuri). His sons and daughter understand Nepali but cannot express their emotions in their mother tongue. The medium of communication in the family is both Bengali and Nepali. His mother loves Darjeeling where she was born and brought up and loves visiting the place. His family loves Balurghat and they do not want to leave the place.

Case study 3

Rajesh Chand Thakuri, 70 year old man, stated that during the British rule there was a police headquarters at Rangpur (Bangladesh) where many Nepalis were serving. After independence they were transferred to different parts of India particularly to Calcutta, Hilly and Gangarampur. He was born in Rangpur (Bangladesh) where his father was serving in the armed force. He served in the West Bengal Police and retired from Balurghat like his father. Since, it was not possible for him to return back either to Rangpur (Bangladesh) or his paternal house (Nepal) he decided to construct a house in Ves Para nearby Nepali busty. There are few families with similar life history as Rajesh Chand Thakuri. His son got married with Namita Darjee at Suesgate Nepali para whose parents had migrated from Rambhi in Kalimpong Sub-division of Darjeeling.

Case study 4

There are persons like Tshering Tamang who make local alcohol (*chullu*), which is the only source of earning in the family. He was born and brought up at Gangarampur and later migrated to Nepali busty in Balurghat. His father was a policeman from Darjeeling. He is very comfortable with his non-Nepali (a Bengali with Nepali mother) wife, who is fluent in Nepali and is familiar with many Nepali cultural traditions. Her only daughter got married with a Bengali policeman. The medium of communication in the family is both Nepali and Bengali. They celebrate both Nepali and Bengali festivals. There are several families bearing same life history as his son who works as a driver at Balurghat police headquarter on casual basis. His paternal family members live in Makaibari tea estate, near Kurseong, which they visit during the Lho-char almost every year.

Case study 5

Phulmaya Mangar, 70 year old widow was born and brought up at Hasimara (Dooars region of Jalpaiguri district) and migrated to Balurghat with her husband many years ago. All of her four sons except one, who is no more, and the only daughter had married with non-Nepalis and have settled down at Das Para, near Nepali busty. Her sons' families celebrate all the Bengali festivals and they do not have much idea of Nepali culture and tradition. Mrs. Mangar wants to visit her home at Hasimara but she does not have money for the trips. One of her daughter-in-law, who is widow, is the only earning member her household (the other sons have set up their own households after marriage), and her grand-daughter studies in a Bengali

medium school. She lives in a rented house. Her sons and grand-children are totally detached from Nepali language, culture and tradition.

Case study 6

Satna Thapa, daughter of a policeman, was born and brought up at Raiganj police line. She married Kartik Oraon (Sarkar), constable at Balurghat police station when her father was posted there. Her only son married a Nepali girl from Kalimpong; she had come to Balurghat to work in a beauty parlor. Her family follows more Nepali culture and tradition. Her Oraon husband and all her family members are well acquainted with the Nepali language, culture and tradition. They also possess some of the traditional ornaments and vessels of both the communities. Her paternal grand-father had come from Nepal to work as private security guard in Raiganj where her father was born. Her father was a policeman who retired when he was posted at Balurghat and settled in the same colony with his non-Nepali second wife.

Case study 7

Like Sudip Subba there are many third generation Nepalis who are totally detached from Nepali culture and tradition. Though many of them can understand Nepali they cannot express their emotion in Nepali language. Their level of acceptance of Bengali culture is very high. Most of them studied in Bengal medium schools and some of them work as casual workers in Balurghat police station. At the micro level, they can be categorized into two sub-groups. First, those who have adapted local culture and tradition and they are on the verge of cultural assimilation. Secondly, there are those who have adapted local culture but consciously resist assimilation. The younger members are undergoing a transformation in their socio-cultural and religious life in general and identity in particular.

Year of Migration and birth place of the 1st generation Nepalis in Balurghat

It has been found that 6 households (40 per cent) living in the Busti have no idea about history of their migration to Balurghat. Among the others, 2 households (13.33 per cent) had migrated in the 1950s (not at the present place), 6 households (40 per cent) of the total households migrated during in the 1970s and remaining one household (6.67 per cent) during 1980s. About the place of origin 5 (33.31 per cent) of the informants were born in different parts of Darjeeling hills, 3 (20 per cent) in Bangladesh, 2 (13.34 per cent) each in Coach Bihar and Nepal, 1 (6.67 per cent) each at Raiganj,

Kolkata and Hasimara. It is very interesting to note that almost all the Nepali households are related to each other either by consanguinal or affinal relations and many of them have their relatives in Balurghat but outside the colony. At the micro level, the Nepalis of Balurghat can be categorized into the old settlers and new settlers. The levels of adaptation among the old settlers have been much higher than that among the new ones.

What these case studies transpire?

The above case studies show that most of the Nepalis settled in Nepali busty are retired police personnel and despite variations in their places of origin and periods of migration it is their linguistic and cultural commonness that make them a single neighbourhood. Their sense of community is limited to the Nepali speaking families and their fellow friends in police line. Their cultural difference with the locals also reinforces their Nepali identity. However, the Nepali households do not live in isolation; they maintain cordial and good relations with the members of other communities, who constitute their neighbours. Living in the Busti for many years the Nepalis have undergone many social and cultural changes in terms of marriage practices, language, food habits, death and birth ceremonies, dress pattern and cultural and religious life because of their detachment from the mainland Nepali⁵ society. Changes have also been noticed among the Nepalis living in Darjeeling and Sikkim where they are distinctly inclined towards Western culture. However in Balurghat they are more inclined towards pan Indian culture and tradition.

The principle of community or caste endogamy is loosely followed by the Nepalis here. The presence of a small number of Nepalis force them to look for brides and grooms often outside their own community. The Nepalis however practice *gotro* exogamy. The inter-caste and inter-community marriages are frequent but there is general preference for Nepali brides and grooms. The marriage between Sukanya Darjee (Nepali Scheduled caste) and Rahul Thakuri (Nepali high caste) was an arranged one and the latter's father accepted the marriage saying "*Nepaliva, vai alcha ne*" (being Nepali is acceptable). The inter-community marriages generally have also been well accepted. There were however cases when inter-community marriages were opposed by the members of Nepali high castes. Sradha Chhetri, mother of 2 sons married Ajit Mardi, a Santhal, and the Nepalis in the locality refused to accept this marriage. After marriage Sradha's relationship with the family has been totally cut-off. Caste has been noticed as a significant factor in case of inter-community marriage. Most of the inter-community marriages have been found among the intermediate castes

of both the communities like Tamang, Majhi, Manger with Das, Sarkar and tribes through elopement. There was no involvement of upper caste Bengalis in the inter-community marriages with the Nepalis.

Intra and inter-community marital relationship

Among the 70 married couples, 56 per cent have intra-community connubial relationship (within Nepalis such as, Rai, Chhetri, Mangers, Thapa and others) and rest 44 per cent have inter-community marriage relationship. Among the 20 inter-community marriages, 60 percent of the Nepalis have chosen their partners from the tribal communities, 33 percent from the Bengalis and rest 7 per cent from the Punjabis. Intra-group marriage has been considered more valuable and prestigious than inter-community marriage. Nearly 45 per cent of the total Nepali households have at least one non-Nepali daughter-in-law

Changes in language practices

Changes have been witnessed in the manner of speaking Nepali language by the Nepalis of Balurghat. Though the first generation Nepalis are much fluent in their mother tongue the later generation has adopted Bengali as the medium of communication and learning. The way of speaking of their mother tongue has been influenced by Bengali, the language of the dominant community. The Nepali children are sent either in Bengali or English medium schools. For them there is no scope of learning Nepali language. The medium of communication at home, houses can be both Bengali and Nepali. Certain endogamous groups in Nepali society like Majhi, Rai, Tamang, Thapa and others have their own dialects but none of them knew their respective dialects. Whether the members of future generation will speak or write in Nepali is a matter of speculation. Although Nepali language is losing its significance among the young generations it is still popular among the Nepali elderly persons and even the non-Nepali policemen. My study shows that excepting the illiterates and infants, cent percent of the Nepalis can speak, read and write Bengali language while 87 percent of them can only speak, and 24 percent can write and read their own mother tongue, Nepali.

Socio-religious and cultural practices

The socio-religious and cultural life of Nepalis in Balurghat has been influenced by the Bengali culture traits due to their detachment from the main land Nepali culture and tradition. Religious and other ceremonies are now performed by the non-Nepali priest. The unavailability of Buddhist monks has been a major problem for the Tamangs. However for funeral

rites they prefer to bring monks from Salugara (Siliguri) and Darjeeling hills. The worshipping of *Goddess Kali*, *Tulshi* (holy basil plant), *Chanchala Kali Puja* (village feast), *Durga Puja*, *Saraswati Puja*, which are an integral part of Bengali Hindu religious culture are now done by the Nepalis as well. Most of the Nepali youth are the members of Bell Tala Park Puja Samity and take active part with their non-Nepali neighbors in organizing community ceremonies and festivals, although they continue to organize their traditional festivals like Dashain and Tihar. They celebrate only the important Nepali festivals like Tika, *Bhai Tika*, *Lakshmi Puja*, *Dausi* and *Bhailo* (a kind of customary singing and dancing similar to carol of the Christians). The other traditional festivals and rituals seem to have disappeared from their cultural life. The younger generation is largely unaware of the traditional meaning and significance of these festivals. There are few Nepalis who do not celebrate Dashain and Tihar but follow all the major Bengali festivals. Thus, in course of their adaptation in the new environment the Nepalis have lost of the elements of their own culture and adopted some cultural traits of the dominant Hindu Bengali neighbours. The traditional typical food habit of the Nepalis comprising *bhat-dal-tarkari-achar* (rice-legume soup-curry-pickle) has been partially modified; they now generally take rice, fish and other Bengali dishes cooked in a Bengali style. The traditional dress pattern has also been lost in course of their adjustment in the new society.

Some Reflections from the Field

The presence of *dhaja* or *lungder* in some houses indicates the continuation of Buddhist tradition and culture. The unavailability of the Buddhist Monks has been a major problem for the Tamangs in performing their religious rites and rituals. However; they still continue with their tradition by bringing Monks from Siliguri (Plains of Darjeeling district) which is about 300 kms away from the Balurghat. Worshipping of Goddess Kali has been accepted by the Nepalis in this Busti, although it is not a part of mainland Nepali culture. The Nepalis have constructed a Kali temple (*Kalibari*) in their locality where they worship the goddess every day.

The construction of a rest-shade (*Choutara*) in the Busti, by one Bhagimaya Darjee in the name of her deceased husband Dhankishor Darjee who was originally from Mungpoo (Darjeeling), indicates continuation of Nepali/hill culture. However, the language that has been used to write the name of donor and the deceased person is Bengali. The Nepalis believe that the construction of *Choutara* by family members gives peace to the deceased person's soul. It has a greater significance in the life of hill people because

they have to walk a long distance in their everyday life as these are places where a tiring traveler can take rest and refresh. According to an oral tradition it was the Majhi (Fishing) community among the Nepalis which used to practice this tradition but later other groups also have adopted it.

Conclusion

A community or a social group is socially defined by its language, religion, ancestry, life style, tradition and a common culture which pass from one generation to the next through the process of socialization, enculturation and performance. However, it may not be always possible for a small community living away from their place of origin and in the midst of a different yet dominant community to maintain the purity and distinctiveness of its tradition and culture. The problem of adaptation and adjustment in new environment has been one of the major problems for the migrant community. The continuous process of interaction and adjustment in new environment with the members of the host society has brought about some changes in their socio-cultural system and there have been some modifications in the social and cultural life of the Nepalis. The significance of Nepali language and culture has been decreasing particularly among the young generation although the older generation sticks to its language and culture. There are a few Nepali families which are on the verge of amalgamation into Bengali culture but they are recognized as Nepali by their neighbours no matter whether they speak Nepali language or not or follows Nepali tradition or not. Community background has been a strong indicator behind their recognition and identity in the locality. Most of the Nepalis in Nepali busty are related to each other either by consanguinal or affinal ties. Although they have adopted some of the socio-cultural traits like food habits, dress pattern, language etc. of the host society, most of them maintain their own community identity and celebrate major Nepali festivals like Dashain, Tihar and others. This is because of their residential segregation into one colony and it is the most important factor behind simulation of their culture. They are economically integrated into the host society. However, from the community perspective they constitute a sub-system with a distinct culture and identity within the grand system. Thus, it can be said that the Nepalis of Balurghat have adopted the cultural and traditional elements of the host society but in totality they still maintained some kind of distinctiveness of their own community identity.

Notes

- 1 An earlier version of this paper was presented at UGC-SAP sponsored national seminar on 'Backwardness, Development and Communities in North Bengal', organized by the Department of Sociology, North Bengal University, on 26-27th March 2015. I am indebted to my teachers and friends in the department of Sociology, NBU for their guidance, valuable comments and moral support.
- 2 The 'mainland Nepali population' indicates Nepalis of Darjeeling district and its contiguous areas of Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar district of Northern North Bengal, India. They constitute numerically and socio-culturally a dominant position in the region. Darjeeling hill is well known for the socio-cultural, political and literary development of the Nepalis in India. I personally consider Darjeeling as the *kipat* of the Indian Nepalis. During my field work also many respondents were taking Darjeeling as their frame of reference by saying "*yo jaghata Darjeeling jasto chaina*" (This place is not like Darjeeling).
- 3 Since inception Darjeeling is cosmopolitan in nature and it is also the homeland of several hill communities like Bhutias, Lepchas, Tibetans and the people of plain origins like Marwari, Bihari, Bengali and others.
- 4 The Nepali language was known by various names in different historical periods like *khash Kura*, *Gorkha Vasha*, *Paharia* and *Parbathya vasha*. This language is regarded as one of the National languages under the 8th scheduled of the Indian constitution in 1992 and it is the official language of the hill region of Darjeeling district, West Bengal and Sikkim (Karkidoli 1993).
- 5 The Nepali society witnessed a revivalist movement in Darjeeling hills, Dooars and Sikkim particularly after 1990s. They are demanding for the Scheduled Tribe status under the Indian union. Most of them have started practicing their traditional non-Hindu believes and practices. It is very interesting to know that most of the intermediary castes have started giving-up the traditional Hindu festivals like Dashain and Tihar including Hindu religion.

References

- Chhetri, R.B., 1987. 'Migration, Adaptation and Socio-Cultural Change: The Case of Thakalis in Pokhara', *Contribution to Nepalese Studies*, 13(3): 239-59.
- Devi, Monimala, 2007. 'Economic History of Nepali Migration and Settlement in Assam', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 42(29): 3005-3007.
- Dutt, Srikant, 1981. 'Migration and Development: The Nepalese in Northeast', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 16 (24): 1053-1055.
- Epstein, G. and Iran N. Gang., 2010. 'Migration and Culture', *IZA DP No.5123* [Http://Ftp.Iza.Org/Dp5123.Pdf](http://Ftp.Iza.Org/Dp5123.Pdf) . (2/10/ 2013)
- Gellner, David N., 2013. 'Warriors, Workers, Traders, and Peasants: The Nepali/Gorkhali Diaspora Since the Nineteenth Century', in D. Washbrook and J. Chatterjee (eds) *Handbook of South Asian Diaspora*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge: 136-50.
- Golay, Bidhan, 2009. 'Rethinking Gorkha Identity: Outside the Imperium of discourse, Hegemony, and History', in Subba T. B., A.C Sinha, G.S. Nepal and D.R. Nepal (eds) *Indian Nepalis: Issues and Perspectives*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing House: 1-27.
- Kumari, Punam, 1999. *Social and Cultural Life of the Nepalese*. New Delhi: Mohit Publication.
- Liwang, Min, 2006. *The Gorkhas: A Glance at Their Culture and Traditions*. Kalimpong: Himal (India).
- Nath, Lopita, 2006. 'Migration, Insecurity and Identity: The Nepali Dairymen in India's Northeast', *Asian Ethnicity*, 7 (2): 129-148. DOI: 10.1080/14631360600734384
- Nair, K.S., 1978. *Ethnicity and Urbanization*. Delhi: Ajanta Publications (India).
- O'Malley, L.S.S., 1907. *Darjeeling District Gazetteers*. New Delhi: Logos Press.
- Parajuly, Lakshmi Prasad, 1995. *Dakshin-Purba Bharitya Nepali Samaj Ra Shitya (North-eastern Indian Nepali Society and Literature)*. Siliguri: Nepali Sahitya Prachar samity [Nepali].

- Pradhan, Kumar, 2010. *Pahilo Pahar* (First Dawn). Kathmandu: Sajha Prakashan [Nepali].
- Sapkota, D., 2009. 'Nepali Settlement and Cattle-rearing in India's Northeast', in Subba, T.B., A.C. Sinha, G.S. Nepal and D.R. Nepal (eds) *Indian Nepalis: Issues and Perspectives*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing House: 214-224.
- Sarkar, Swatahasiddha, 2010-2011. *Demographic History of Darjeeling Hills: The Significance of Migration*. Occasional Paper of SAP, Department of Sociology, NBU, I (V): 95-108.
- Sinha, A.C., 2009. 'Introduction', in Subba, T.B., A.C. Sinha, G.S. Nepal and D.R. Nepal (eds) *Indian Nepalis: Issues and Perspectives*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing House: 1-27.
- Subba, Tanka B., 1989. *Dynamic of a Hill Society*. Delhi: Mittal Publication.
- Subba, Tanka B., 2003. 'Nepal and the Indian Nepalis', in Kanak Mani Dixit and Shastri Ramachandaran (eds) *State of Nepal*. Lalitpur (Nepal): Himal Books: 119-137.
- Subba, Tanka B., 2014. The Nepali Diaspora in India's North East Hill Region in the Current Context. <http://www.cnsuk.org.uk/?option=articles&id=11> (6/10/2014).
- Subedi, M., 2010. 'Caste System: Theories and Practices in Nepal', *Himalayan Journal of Sociology & Anthropology*, IV: 29-50.
- Singh, K.S., 2010. *The Scheduled Castes*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.