

Chapter 2

Historical Settings and Physical Configuration of the Community

- History
- Identity
- Migration
- Demography and Settlement Pattern

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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 Magh was 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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