

**Dynamics of *Ehi* ceremony among the Newars of District  
Darjeeling**

A Dissertation Submitted

To

**Sikkim University**



In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for the

**Degree of Master of Philosophy**

By

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# सिक्किम विश्वविद्यालय SIKKIM UNIVERSITY

(भारत के संसद के अधिनियम द्वारा वर्ष 2007 में स्थापित और नैक (एनएएसी) द्वारा वर्ष 2015 में प्रत्यायित केंद्रीय विश्वविद्यालय)  
(A central university established by an Act of Parliament of India in 2007 and accredited by NAAC in 2015)

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APRIL-2018

## DECLARATION

I, Surendra Mani Pradhan, hereby declare that the dissertation entitled "Dynamics of Ehi ceremony among the Newars of District Darjeeling" is an original work carried out by me under the guidance of Dr. K.R. Rama Mohan. The contents of this dissertation did not form the basis of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge, and that the dissertation has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other university/institute. This is submitted to the Sikkim University, for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in Anthropology.

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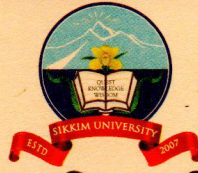
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**Dynamics of Ehi ceremony among the Newars of District Darjeeling**

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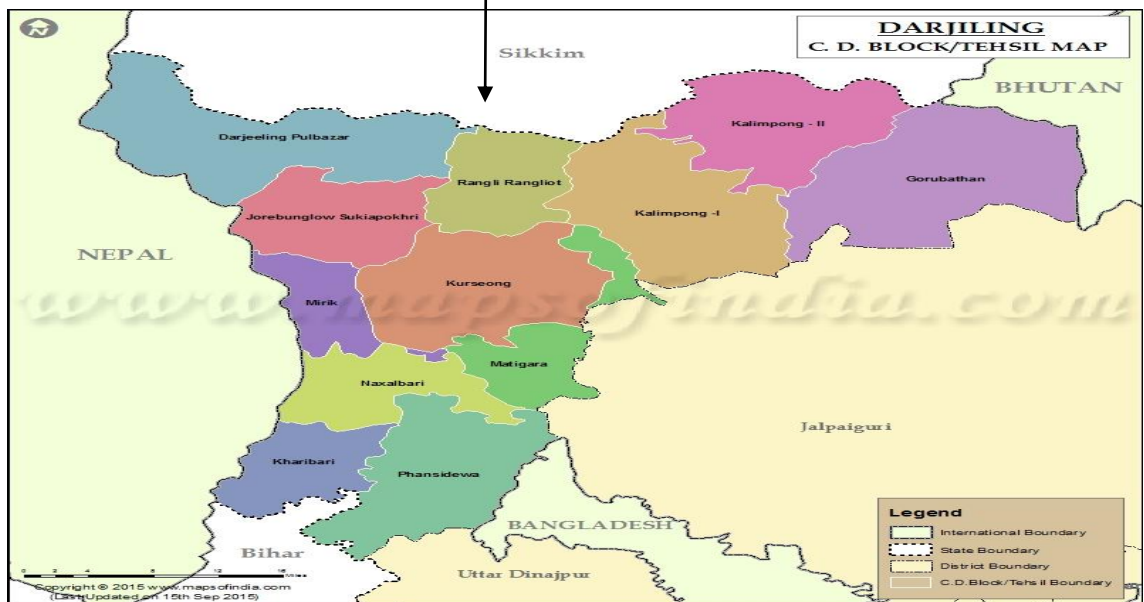
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Source: [www.freeworldmaps.net](http://www.freeworldmaps.net)

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\*Map not to Scale

# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

One of the basic institutions of human societies is family. It is also known as the pillar of society. The formation of the family is through the marriage of consent adults in a given society. Though the consent may be guided by the pressure of family by the medium of their codes and value system, through marriage, the unity of opposite sex enter into the family system. As culture is a multi-linear process and therefore marriage enters into the dynamics of the family institution, of course, the codes and conducts and its rituals depicts the variation in the practice of marriage in accordance to the cultural adaption. Therefore, Ethnographers across the world have recorded unique marriage customs and practices to understand the structural and functional aspects of the society.

Marriage is of central importance in all societies and has been so in each of the civilizations, but the configuration of marriage relation and the weight they are given vary enormously (Trautmann, 2003). Marriage is a social institution which organizes social life and beyond through marriage ties. It is the core establishment of the society with the derivative functions and implications in different cultures and so its purposes, functions, and forms may differ from one culture to another.

There are various definitions of marriage. According to Malinowski, "Marriage is a contract for production and maintenance of children". According to Lowie, "Marriage is a relatively permanent bond between permissible mates" (Rao, 2010). "Notes and Queries on Anthropology give a useful preliminary definition: marriage is 'a union between a man and a woman such that the children born to the woman are the recognized legitimate offspring of both partners'. This points to one important



function of marriage in most societies; the fact that it confers acknowledged social status on the offspring. This is evidently a matter of great importance in regard to such matters as inheritance and succession” (Beattie, 1966).

Marriage performs several important social functions, such as; it forges a new social link, and thus adds strength to relationships. In a marriage, two family networks of the marrying couple are linked and thus still more distant networks are involved. The other function of marriage is that it provides economic cooperation among the marital partners. It brings life partners together and helps them to strengthen their bonds and emotional stability. It not only brings two individuals together but also their respective families, groups and kindred.

The study of Nayers by Gough counters the legitimization of children as the Nayers traditionally had 'no marriage in the strict (i.e. Notes and Queries) sense of the term but only a "relationship of perpetual affinity" between linked lineages (Gough, 1955). According to Gough 'Marriage is a relationship established between a woman and one or more other persons, which provides that a child born to the woman under circumstances not prohibited by the rules of the relationship, is accorded full birth-status rights common to normal members of his society or social stratum' (Gough, 1959). Eriksen views that the main objective of the marriage is an alliance. Marriage leads to family and further; it leads to new kinship and strengthens existing kinship ties.

## **Forms of marriage**

### **Polygamy**

Polygamy is marriage to more than one person. Polygamy has two aspects:

- (i) Polygyny
- (ii) Polyandry

### **Polygyny**

Polygyny is a form of marriage in which one man marries more than one woman at a given time. Polygyny is more popular than polyandry but not as universal as monogamy. Polygyny mostly prevailed among the ancient Hebrews, Assyrians, Babylonians, Indians, and others. At present, it is widespread among tribes but is often simply confined to the wealthier classes. Polygyny is in practice among the Eskimo tribes, Crow Indians, Hidatsa of North America, African Negroes, the Nagas, Gonds and Baigas of India. However, it is permitted in Muslim Community.

Polygyny is of two types:

#### **(a) Sororal Polygyny**

It is a type of marriage in which the wives are invariably the sisters. It is often called 'Sororate'. The Latin word 'Soror' stands for the sister. When several sisters are simultaneously, or potentially the spouses of the same man, the practice is called 'Sororate'. It is usually observed among the tribes which pay a high bride price. The death of the wife or her childlessness is compensated by supplying a new spouse who is generally the younger sister of the deceased woman.

### (b) Non- Sororal Polygyny

It is a form of marriage in which the wives are not related as sisters. For social, economic, political and other reasons, both the types are practiced by some people.

### **Polyandry**

Polyandry is the marriage of one woman with several men. It is less common than polygyny. It is practiced by the Tibetans, Marquesan Islanders of Polynesia, the Bahama of Africa, the tribals of Somoa and others. In India, the tribes such as Tiyan, the Toda, the Kota, the Khasa and Ladhaki Bota also practice polyandry. The Nayars of Kerala were polyandrous earlier.

Polyandry is of two types:

#### (1) Fraternal Polyandry

When several brothers share the same wife, the practice can be called alelphic or fraternal polyandry. This practice of being mate, actual or potential, to one's husband's brothers is called 'Levirate'. It is prevalent among the Todas.

#### (2) Non- Fraternal Polyandry

In this type, the husbands need not have any close relationship prior to the marriage. The woman spends some time with each husband. So long as a woman lives with one of her husbands, the others have no claim over her. Nayars and the Tibetans practice this type of polyandry.

### **Monogamy**

Monogamy is the form of marriage in which one man marries one woman. This is the most widespread form of marriage found across all cultures and communities it is



practiced by the tribes, such as Kadars, Santhals, the Canella, the Sevangas of Malaya and others.

Marriage, Family, and Kinship are the main domain for anthropologists. However, in some cultures, marriage not only takes place between a man and woman first. This marriage could be seen as a mock marriage.

Mock marriage basically has the same rituals as such in a real marriage with humans but in case of mock marriage the bride or a groom is human and the other mate may be a human or a living object. For example, Nayars of Kerala practice the mock marriage between the man and women.

In case, of the Newars, the mock marriage is practiced between a girl and the bel fruit that is wood apple. This marriage holds the same importance as to the marriage with the real human.

### **Review of literature**

Roy (2013) in her book Anthropology the study of man she has given some of the definitions on marriage by renounced scholars and she has also written about the different types of marriage that are practised. However, the concept of mock marriage has not been written by the author.

Rao (2010) in his book Sociology has also provided some of the basic definition given by the scholars and he has written some of the major importance of marriage and

different types of marriages that are in practice. He has also not written about the concept of mock marriage.

Shrestha (2006) in his article “Ritual and Identity in the Diaspora: The Newars in Sikkim” talked about the historical background of the Newars in Nepal. He also talks about the Newars migration to Darjeeling and Sikkim during the time of Gorkha conquest of Nepal in 1769. He also wrote about the Newar named Lakshmi Das Pradhan who probably is seen as the first Newar to migrate from Nepal to Sikkim and also he became the first Municipal Commissioner of Darjeeling. Shrestha wrote about the economy of the migrated Newars of Nepal in Sikkim.

Shrestha (1999) in his article "The Newars the indigenous population of Nepal" talks about the history of the Newars of Kathmandu valley and how after the unification of Nepal by Pritivi Narayan Shah brought the changes in the culture of the Newar community. He further talks about the how the Newar community was clubbed into the Hindu Varna system by the Muluki Ain the law code, 1854 introduced by the Rana Prime Minister Jung Bahadur Rana. He further talks about the struggle for the revival of the Nepal Bhasa which was sabotage due to the linguistic imperialism of the khas kura during the reign of Rana's. This article gives a good insight into the subjugation of the Newars by the Rana's which led to the declination in the linguistics of the Newars of Nepal.

Subba (2011) in his book History, culture, and customs of Sikkim wrote about the migration of Newars to Sikkim from Nepal before 1961 as the promulgation of Sikkim subject was introduced in 1961/1962. He further wrote about the population of Newars in both Sikkim and Darjeeling and he also wrote about the food habits, festivals, and geographical distribution. This book helps the researcher to understand

the population of the Newar during that particular period and correlate the population of Newars in today's context. However, the book doesn't give a good insight into the culture of Newars. Further, he talks about the 'Theory of Tibet (Chin)'. The theory tries to explain how the Newars were actually a Tibetan extraction which today got intermixed with the Indian stock. To validate the theory he gives an example of the architecture that resembles the Bhutias and certain custom of the Newars with the other Mongolian tribes. He further refutes with Bal Gopal Shrestha's take on Newars migration in Darjeeling and Sikkim, as Shrestha took emphasis on the Kasaju family. Subba views that many other Newar families would also have migrated to Darjeeling and Sikkim as it was once captured by the Gorkhas but the other Newar families remained unnoticed and kasaju family became the sole Newar family to be noticed by the king of Sikkim.

Malley (1907) in his book Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling gave a brief description about the Darjeeling such as the history, people of Darjeeling, education, industries, means of communication and transportation and so on. This book shows that the Newars and the other communities lived side by side.

Hunter (1876) in his book A Statistical Account of Bengal: Darjeeling gave a brief account of Darjeeling as it was during the colonial rule of British. He has covered all the aspects such as geographical demarcation of Darjeeling District, forest cover, rivers, economy, materialistic development, Administrative setups and most importantly the communities who resided in Darjeeling during that period. However, Hunter did not cover the cultural aspect of the communities in Darjeeling. According to, C.F. Magrath's District Census in 1872, there were 1087 Newars who were residing in Darjeeling.



Bista (1971) in his book *People of Nepal* wrote about the Ehi ceremony. He states that the marriage takes place between the Bel fruit (wood apple) and the girl before the girl attains puberty. Bista has given an overall view of the Ehi marriage but has not discussed the reasons behind this unique marriage among the Newars.

Vergati (1995) in her book *God, Men and Territory: Society and culture in Kathmandu Valley* has briefly described the Rituals of *Ehi* from a Buddhist Newar point of view. She states that there is a difference in the ritual process of *Ehi* conducted by the Buddhist Newar and a Hindu Newar, however the main motive of *Ehi* ceremony is the same. Vergati in her book did not write about the origin and myths related with the *Ehi* ceremony.

Allen (1990) in his article “Girl’s Pre-Puberty Rites among the Newars of Kathmandu Valley” gave a brief insight on the *Ehi* ceremony and the social importance of the ceremony he views that though the ritual between the Buddhist and the Hindu Newars but the social function of the *Ehi* is the same.

Pradhan (1997) in his book *Newar Jati* wrote about an interesting hypothesis about the migration of Newars from southern India to Nepal due to the conquest. Many scholars do criticize this theory. He further wrote about the *Ehi* marriage and the reasons behind the conduction of the ceremony. However, the book doesn’t cover the Myths related to *Ehi* and what happens to the girl who doesn't undergo the ceremony.

Nepali (1988) in his book *The Newars: An Ethno-Sociological Study of a Himalayan Community* wrote about the history of the Newars of Nepal. He wrote about how the caste system came into existence in the Newar community. He devotes a brief chapter to an institution termed *guthi*, a trust or association that holds and manages the religious property, rights, and duties, or charitable funds, and that both splits and

unites Newar communities along (and across) lines of caste, kin, territory, and religion. He also wrote about the brief process related to the *Ehi* ceremony.

Nepali (1950) in his dissertation "The Newars of Nepal" wrote about the history of Newars of Kathmandu Valley, he has briefly described the Rites of passage of the community. He further also talks about the revival of the *Ehi (bel bihava)* ceremony which was stopped due to some local influence of the leaders. "The Newars who form a microscopic minority in the border town of Birganj had decided to dispense with the *Yihee* ceremony under pressure of compared Opinion. Some of them had even gone to the extent of bypassing the *Yihee* of their daughters. This was adversely reacted to by the Newars of Kathmandu who decided to boycott marriage with such uninitiated girls of Birganj. The traditional views ultimately prevailed. It is understood now that the '*Yihee*' ceremony has again been revived by the Birganj Newars."

Shrestha (2012) in her article "Ehi va bel bivah" has given a detailed description of the procedures for conducting the ceremony. She also wrote about the consequences that the girl faces due to breakage of the bel fruit i.e. wood apple which is considered as her husband.

Chattopadhyay (1994) in his article "History of Newar Culture" talks about the Newars being the early settlers of the Kathmandu valley and they were technologically advanced in terms of arts and craft. The vast majority of Newars who used to profess Buddhism converted themselves to Hindus due to the forceful domination by the invaders such as Harisimhadeva in 1324 AD and later by the Gorkhas in 1769. This invasion not only made them convert themselves to Hindus but also made them follow the dogmatic Hindu Varna system.

Rajbhandari (2010) in his book *Garbha Dekhi Marnapranth Sammaka Sanskar* briefly described the *Ehi* ceremony and the rituals that are performed during the ceremony. However, the book does not cover the myth related to the *Ehi* marriage.

Sakya (2000) in his dissertation “Newar Marriage and Kinship in Kathmandu, Nepal” briefly describe the marriage system and the kinship organization he states *Ehi* as a divine marriage as the marriage is associated with God. He further tracks down the changing nature of *Ehi* in Kathmandu and the social functions of the *Ehi*. The only thing that he did not write about is the origin of the *Ehi* ceremony.

Gough (1952) in her article "Family, Kinship, and Marriage in India" has given an example of mock marriage among the Nayars which is termed as *talikettukalyanam* where linked lineages play their most important role at the puberty marriage rites of girls. At a convenient time, every few years, a lineage held a grand ceremony at which all its girls who had not attained puberty, aged about seven to twelve, were on one day ritually married by men drawn from their linked lineages. The ritual bridegrooms were selected in advance at a meeting of the neighbourhood assembly.

Gough (1959) in her article “The Nayars and the Definition of Marriage” described the marriage process of the Nayar community; the mock marriage *talikettukalyanam* takes place between the humans. The ritual husband signifies that the girl could have relationship with the member of similar sub caste that of the ritual husband. During the death of the ritual husband the children and the mother mourns for him.

Lewis (1989) in his article "Childhood and Newar Tradition: Chittadhar Hridaya's "Jhi Macã" talks about the unification of Nepal by Prithivi Narayan Shah and how the Newars of Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, Patan and other satellite areas preserved their

culture. The article gives an insight into the Newar culture from a male child view who professes Buddhism.

Gellner (1991) in his article "Hinduism, Tribalism and the Position of women: the problem of Newar identity" discuss whether a Newar is a tribe or a caste community. He follows various discussions by the various scholars about the topic. Is Newar a tribe or a caste community? He further talks about the position of Newar women historically and also compared the status of women with parbatiya women. In these articles, it clearly shows that the position of the Newar women's where high as compared to others. Gellner discusses the Newar being a polyandrous one-time theory proposed by G.S.Nepali. He further proves the theory wrong as Nepali confused himself with the suffix used by the Newars. Nepali views that 'the customary freedom of the Newar woman for the successive remarriages and divorces could only be a step forward from the stage of polyandry'. Gellner talks about *Ehi* marriage which gave freedom to *Newari* woman from widowhood. Earlier if a Newar woman wishes to divorce her husband, she could just leave two bettle nuts on the bed. The Muluki Ain (law code) of 1854 made the divorce and re-marriage tougher.

Gellner (1986) in his article "Language, Caste, Religion and Territory: Newar identity ancient and modern" talks about the Newars of Kathmandu as a traditional inhabitants and he also wrote about the Newars language that is *Newari* which has lost its essence due to the coming up of various languages such as Nepali, English, Hindi, Sanskrit and so on. The *Newari* language today has been mixed with other languages and its purity is on the question. He further talks about the identity of Newar whether they are a tribe or a caste.

Hobsbawn (1983) in his book *Inventing Tradition* fairly marks that “when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social pattern for which ‘old’ traditions had been designed , producing new ones to which they were not applicable, or when such old traditions and their institutional carries and promulgates no longer prove sufficiently adaptable and sufficient”.

### **Statement of the problem**

Marriage, the system of legal procedure for the union between the opposite sexes is recognized by the community with the complex ritual mechanism. The ritual to perform the function or to say the union between the opposite sexes remains the same but its practical usage of ceremony varies from culture to culture. The cultural adaptation is the response to the situational development. Therefore the factors for the marriage can be determined by the responsive nature of the situational conditioned. On account of the concept of marriage, many of the tribes or clan with the passage of time began to develop the new form of marriage resembling the proto version marriage. This proto-version was indeed to safeguard the functional hierarchy and status of women. The proto version or to be precise in general term mock marriage was especially prevalent in the community of Newars. It may be presumed that it was the response to the variation of the situation created by the Muslim invasion; others believe that it was the ritual to safeguard (as above mentioned) the position of women status as the medieval era was in constant state of warfare zone. Nevertheless, to examine this issue it is necessary to trace the genesis of mock marriage and it becomes essential to indicate its social functioning as it becomes necessary to highlight the changing aspects of its continuity with the realignment of time.



As there are no systematic and in-depth research studies on the Newars of Darjeeling. This research study focuses on "*Ehi* marriage ceremony among the Newars of Darjeeling." *Ehi* or the *bel bivaha* is a unique social practice that is only practiced among the Newar community. Since Darjeeling is a social hub for all the communities the research study would assess the changes in the *Ehi* ceremony and would also describe the position of the *Newari* girl who has not performed the *Ehi* marriage. Along with that, the research study would also study the interpretations of this ceremony through various myths. Though, there are few ethnographic studies on Newar community but, there is no significant study particularly on the *Ehi* ceremony of the Newars. The study will further help to understand the status of a *Newari* woman and also the religious practice of the Newar community.

### **Objectives**

- (1) To examine the social importance of *Ehi* marriage ceremony.
- (2) To explore the myths and symbolic meaning of *Ehi* marriage practice.
- (3) To assess the change and continuity of the *Ehi* rituals.

### **Methodology**

This research study is empirical in nature and the data collected is qualitative in nature. Both Primary and Secondary were collected for this study. The Primary data has been gathered through Participant Observation, Snowball method, Interview, and Schedule and through Audio-Visual methods which includes Photography and

Recordings. The Secondary data contains books, journals, articles, magazines etc. Additionally, data was also collected from elders, women undergone the ceremony, community leaders. The study was conducted in Darjeeling town and in Rimbick village. The sample size includes two *Ehi* marriages and interview with twenty families whose daughters had undergone the *Ehi* ceremony and ten families whose daughters had not undergone the *Ehi* ceremony.

### **Limitations of the study**

In every research there are certain limitations. The limitations may be related to the language barrier, availability of inadequate data, or political issues. This research study also has some limitations, which were mainly due to the 104 days strike in the proposed field area i.e. in Darjeeling, West Bengal. Due to the strike the *Ehi* ceremony got shifted by two years and the *Ehi* performed by the Buddhist Newar could not be observed. Due to the paucity of the Newar priests the traditional *Ehi* ceremony could not be observed.

## **Organization of thesis**

Chapter 1 deals with an introduction, review of literature on various works done on Newar community and *Ehi* ceremony which is practiced by the community, statement of the problem, objectives, methodology and organization of the thesis.

Chapter 2 deals with the Ethnographic profile of the Newar community of Darjeeling. It deals with the origin of the Newars, Historical background of Darjeeling and also outlines the various social institutions like religion, caste organization, political status, food and Traditional attire of the Newar community of Darjeeling.

Chapter 3 deals with the detailed analysis of the *Ehi* ceremony as in the Genesis of the *Ehi*, myths related to *Ehi*, traditional form of *Ehi* ceremony, social importance of *Ehi*, the celebration of *Ehi* ceremony in Darjeeling, rationale behind the use of *Bel* fruit and the consequences of the breakage of the fruit.

Chapter 4 deals with the change and continuity of the *Ehi* ceremony. This chapter helps to understand the changes that have been occurred in the *Ehi* ceremony in Darjeeling and the factors that has contributed to the change in the culture of Newars of Darjeeling. Further it gives insights on how the Newars of Darjeeling are maintaining their culture to intact the thread of continuity.

Chapter 5 concludes by giving the brief summary of the main arguments and insights.

## CHAPTER 2

### Who are Newars?

The word Newar is derived from Nepal. “The first use of the word Newar was found in an inscription dated A.D. 1654 of King Pratap Malla at Hanumandhoka” (Shrestha, 1999). Newar basically means the people from Nepal. Newars are the inhabitants of Nepal. Gellner has also termed Newars as the “traditional inhabitants” of the Kathmandu valley and spread all over the country in course of time. (Gellner, 1991).

Originally Newars were Buddhists, in recent times, Newars have increasingly become syncretic, and at present, almost all of the Newar people practice both Buddhism as well as Hinduism simultaneously. “The Newars are inter-mixed race, derived from Indian or Tibetan Stocks, and their religion naturally presents a corresponding mixture of the Indian and Tibetan creeds” (Nepali, 1965). They are prominent in business, agriculture, and craftsmanship. Newars have their own language, called Nepal Bhasha (language) or Newari language, which belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family and have their own script called *Ranjana Lipi* (Shrestha, 1998). “The Newar Language seems to have been spoken by the inhabitants of Kathmandu Valley as far as the records go Newar people are believed to have their settlement in the Nepal valley since the prehistoric times” (Bista, 1976).

The Newars are highly concentrated in the Kathmandu Valley. However, a good number of Newars are settled in the regions of Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Rimbick, Pokriabong in West Bengal and Sikkim.

## **History of Darjeeling**

The name Darjeeling originated from the Tibetan words, Dorje meaning thunderbolt (initially the staff of Indra) and ling a place or land, consequently the place that is known for the thunderbolt (Malley;1999). A land-check year in the History of Darjeeling was 1835. Before its securing by the East India Co. in 1835, Darjeeling was a part of Sikkim and for a short time of Nepal too. However, neither the historical backdrop of Sikkim nor the historical backdrop of Nepal outfits any record of its initial history.

Darjeeling framed a piece of territories of the Raja of Sikkim, who had been occupied with an unsuccessful fighting against the Gorkhas. From 1780 the Gorkhas always made advances into Sikkim and by the start of Nineteenth Century, they had invaded Sikkim as far eastbound as the Teesta and had vanquished and added the Terai. E.C.Dozey in his book 'Darjeeling Past and Present' composes, 'Preceding the year 1816, the entire of the domain known as British Sikkim had a place with Nepal, which won it by triumph'.

Meanwhile, the British were occupied with keeping the Gorkhas from overwhelming the entire of the northern outskirts. The Anglo-Nepal war softened out in 1814. Defeated in the war , the Gorkhalis signed the Treaty of Sugauli, 1815 in which, 'Nepal needed to surrender each one of those regions the Gorkhas had annexed from the Raja of Sikkim to the East India Company.

In 1817, in the Treaty of Titalia, the East India Co. re-established the Raja of Sikkim (who was driven out), re-established every one of the tracts of land between the Mechi and the Teesta to the Raja and ensured his control.



With the mediation of the British, the Gorkhas were kept from transforming the entire of Sikkim into an area of Nepal and Sikkim, including the present District of Darjeeling was held as a buffer state between Nepal, Bhutan, and Tibet.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of February, 1835, 'The Deed of Grant' was signed between the Raja of Sikkim and the British Government.

Having procured the Hill Territory of Darjeeling, Gen. Lloyd and Dr. Chapman were sent in 1836 to investigate the tract, to find out the idea of the atmosphere and to research the capacities of the place. They spent the winter of 1836 and a piece of 1837 here and on the premise of their report it was chosen to embrace Darjeeling as a sanatorium.

In 1839, Dr. Campbell, the British Resident in Nepal was transferred to Darjeeling as Superintendent. He was given the task of developing the station and stimulating trade and commerce. Every encouragement was given to the settlers, they received grants of forest land and job opportunities which led to the rise in population from not more than 100 in 1839 to about 10,000 in 1849, chiefly by immigrants from the neighboring states of Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan.

The above-mentioned incidents gave the foundation to the place Darjeeling and the transformation of the Darjeeling today happened after the independence of India from the British Raj.

## **Newars of Darjeeling**

Newars in West Bengal comprises of approximately 35,000 people which constitutes to 2% of the entire population of West Bengal (Akhil Bharatiya Newar Sangathan, 2016). The Newars of Darjeeling have migrated before the boundaries as today was demarcated as such and they have witnessed many cultural changes. The Newars of Darjeeling still practice a customary marriage i.e. *Ehi* or *beli- Biya*. The Newars of Darjeeling falls under the category of Other Backward Classes (OBC) recognized by the Government of West Bengal in 2005. The majority of the Newars in Darjeeling are Hindus and some of them are Buddhists and Christians as well. The Newars of Darjeeling have been given Development Board by the Government of West Bengal on 11<sup>th</sup> of November, 2016, for the Development of the Newar community and to preserve their culture. The Newars of all over India have demanded the Government of India for the inclusion of the Community in Scheduled Tribe list. The caste system is not prevalent among the Newars of Darjeeling which is seen in case of the Newars of Nepal. The Newars of Darjeeling do not follow the caste hierarchy like the Newars of Nepal as most of the Newars of Darjeeling use the title *Pradhan*, a sub-caste in the Newar hierarchy. The Newars of Darjeeling mostly speak Nepali, as Nepali is the lingua franca in Darjeeling very few of the Newars can speak *Newari* language. For the revival of the language the Akhil Bharatiya Newar Sangathan which was established in 1993 and conducts free Newari language tutorial classes. Akhil Bharatiya Newar Sangathan has played a vital role for the Newar communities in Darjeeling, Kalimpong, and Doars. It has spread its branches all over the villages in Darjeeling which has a good number of Newar community living in the villages, this ramification was mainly done for the easement of the Newar community who does

not have to travel all the way to Darjeeling for payment of membership and other problems faced by them.

## **Religion**

To profess what religion is an individual's choice. A family may have a member who professes different religion than others. However, in case of the Newars of Darjeeling, 65% of the Newars are Hindus and 35% of the Newars practice Buddhism and 10% of the Newars are Christians. No Muslim Newars have been recorded till date in Darjeeling.

Some of the Newars Sub-caste who professes Hinduism are Rajopadhaya, Malla, Joshi, Gurucharya, Aamtya, Maharjan, Dangol, Prajapati, Pachai etc.

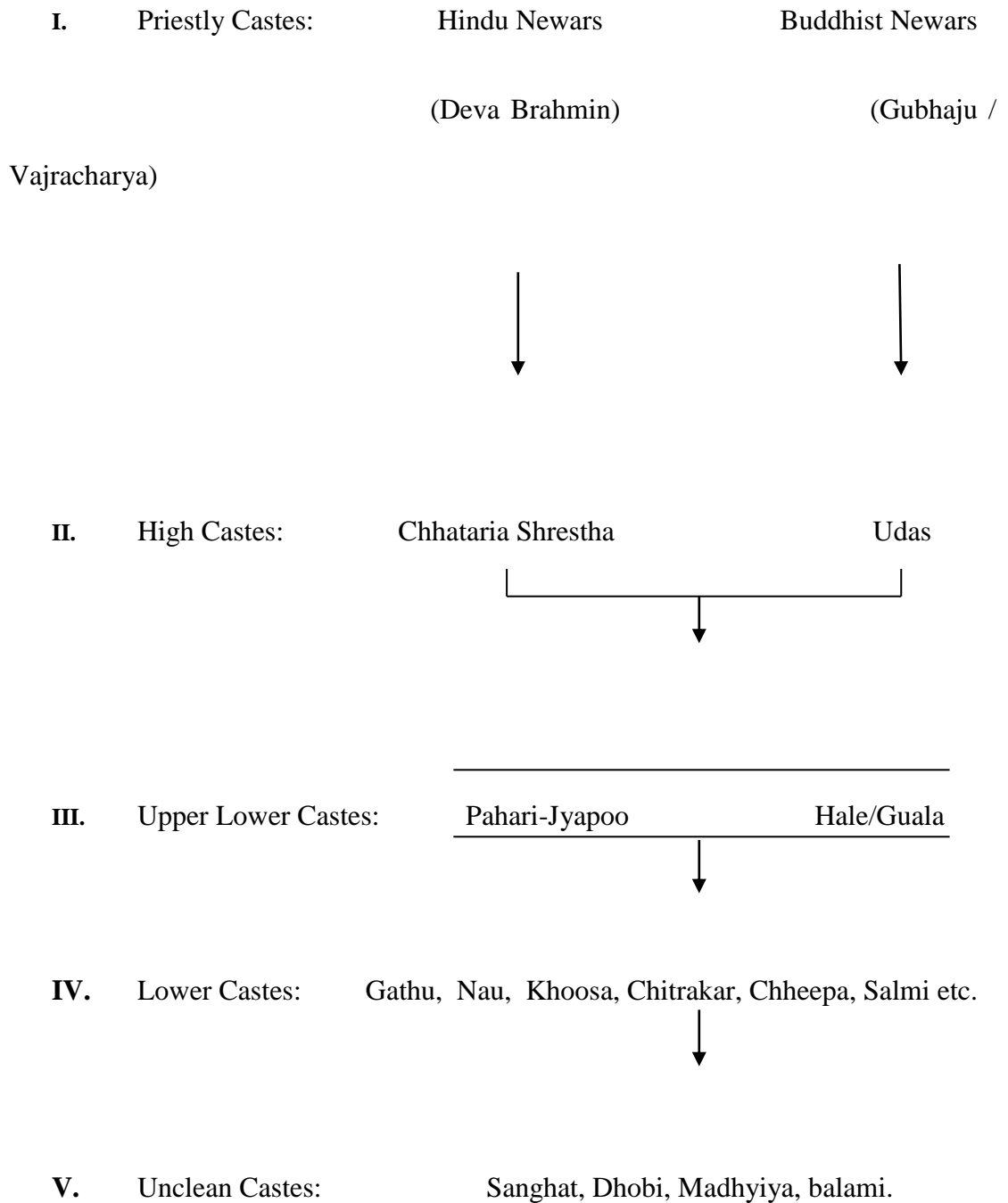
Newar Sub-caste who professes Buddhism are Vajracharya, Sakya, Tuladhar, Tamrakar, Nau, Saymi, Manandhar, Malakar, Chitrakar, Chipa etc.

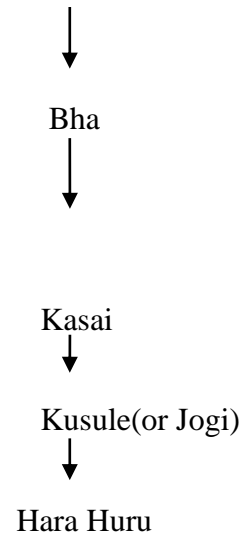
## **Newar castes**

The Newar society is hierarchically divided into various castes. A nineteenth century chronicle, the *Bhaṣāvamśāvalī*, credits the fourteenth century king Jayasthiti Malla for introducing the caste system into the Nepal Valley. However, Nepalese historians showed that the caste system already existed in Nepal during the Licchavi rule (5th to 8th century) and that King Jayasthiti Malla only reinforced or restructured it. For this purpose, several Brahmins from India who were masters of Hindu scriptures assisted him. According to the *Bhaṣāvamśāvalī* together with their subcastes, a total of 725

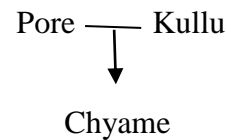
different castes were created during the reign of King Jaysthiti Malla. (Shrestha, 2007).

### Newar caste hierarchy





**VI. Untouchables Castes:**



Source: Subba, 2011.

\*The above diagram depicts the caste hierarchy among the Newar community but however, this caste system is invalid in terms of the Newars of Darjeeling.

**Food Habits**

What to consume is an individual's choice but in general, the *Newar* community is a Non-vegetarian in nature. Consuming of certain meats such as pork, beef, wild boars and yak are considered as a taboo. The favorite delicacy of the *Newar* community is Buffalo meat. Rice is the staple food for the community, but however, wheat and maize are also consumed. Pulses are also consumed but in some occasions, a mixture of different pulses such as moong, Masur, gram, beans, peas are used for cooking *Kwati*, a special dish for the community. In terms of vegetables, they consume all

types of vegetables that are produced locally or known to them. They also consume a variety of local beverage namely *rakshi*, rice beer, millet beer and alcoholic drinks.

### **Festivals**

Festivals are one of the important aspects of one's culture as it is celebrated joyfully and bring cheers to one's life and family. The Newars of Darjeeling celebrates many festivals such as; *Dusshera*, *Diwali*, *Ram Navami*, *Holi*, *Magay Sakranti*, *Buddha Purnima* etc, but the major festival which is only celebrated by the Newar community is *Kwati Purnay*, *Janko*. *Indrajatra* is also celebrated in collaboration with the Sikkim *Newar Guthi*.

### **Family pattern**

The traditional Newar family is patrilineal in nature. Most of the families are extended family, some of them were joint family and few of them were a nuclear family. The head of the family is the father, but in case the father dies, the mother becomes the head of the family. The inheritance of the property though, traditionally was given to the son, but today an equal share is given to the daughter of the family.



Fig 2:1 A Newar Father and Daughter.

## **Marriage**

Newars of Darjeeling are liberal in terms of marriage. Finding one's soul mate is in the hand of an individual. However, if the individual could not find a match then the family steps in and searches a bride/groom for the person. Both exogamy and Endogamy are practiced by the Newars of Darjeeling. Inter religion marriages and Widow Remarriages are also accepted by the community.



## **Economic Activity**

Almost, 70% of the Newars of Rimbick are agriculturalists, they work in their own land and most of the produced vegetables are self-consumed. For their livelihood they buy rice, turmeric, salt and basic curry spices. 15% of the Newars works as shopkeepers and 5% of the Newars works as government employees and 10% of those works in private sector.

## **Attire**

On special occasions, men wear *dhaura suruwal*. *Dhaura* is an upper garment which covers up to knees. *Suruwal* is basically a lower garment. Over the upper garment, the *Patuka*( cloth belt) is worn. The male wore *Dhaka Topi* in their head.



Fig No 2.2: Newar male in traditional attire.

The females wear *Haku Patasi*, a saree which is black in colour with a red embroidered fall on the side. They also wear a white with a slight red coloured shawl.

The head ornaments of Newar women are *sinduri*, *Sir-bandi*. The ear ornaments are *Tusi*, *Mundari*, *palawari-tuci* and *maka-phosi*. The neck ornaments are *Wo-Sikha*, it signifies whether a woman is married or not. Rings on fingers are used and *Kalli* (anklet) are also used.



Fig No 2.3: Newar girl in traditional attire (*Haku Patasi*)

### **Political Status**

The Newars of Darjeeling are politically conscious and a good number of Newars are the members of Regional as well as, National parties. The Newar communities have also demanded the Government to include the Newars in the Scheduled Tribe list. The Government of West Bengal has given the Cultural Development Board to the Newars residing in West Bengal. The board is basically given for the preserving of the Newar culture and for the upliftment of the Newar community.

## Education

The village has three schools. Rosarium Academy is a private school which is affiliated to West Bengal board and provides education till class 10. Rimbick Junior Basic School is a Government run institution and it provides education from class 1 to 5. Seven Heaven School is also a private institution and it educates the child from nursery to class 5. To pursue higher education one needs to travel to Sambang. Sambang has a co-ed government funded High School.



Fig No 2.4: Schools in Rimbick Village.

Primary	Secondary	Higher Secondary	Graduate and Above	Total
76	84	37	23	220

Table No. 1. Education data of Newars of Rimbick.

## Land

The field survey was conducted in Rimbick Village in Darjeeling. Rimbick village is basically a bordered area situated at the foot hills of Sandakphu and Phalut. It is bounded by Sikkim in the North-East, Nepal in the South West. Rimbick village is heterogeneous in terms of population. The village is governed by means of Panchayat system. The village has 108 households with the population of 505 persons out of which 245 are male and 260 are females. The Newar families are in majority in the village. There are 55 Newar household with the population of 220 persons out of which 117 are male and 103 are female.

No. of Newar Households	No. of Newar Males	No. of Newar Females	Total No. of Population
55	117	103	220

Table No. 2: Newar Population in Rimbick.

The village has 42 other backward class (OBC) families, 20 families of Scheduled Tribes, 26 Families of General Category and 20 Families of Scheduled Castes. The village constitutes of 70 families of Hindus, 27 families of Buddhists, 02 family of Muslims and 06 families of Christians. A weekly market is witnessed on every Tuesday, the villagers from nearby village i.e. Maneydara, yakraybong, Gumbadara, Sambang etc. visits Rimbick to sale their produce vegetables, clothes, milk products and so on.

As the village is dominated by the Hindus the village has 3 temples of different Hindu deities such as; Shiva, Ganesha, and Durga. The Buddhist travel to Maneydara an adjacent village to Rimbick and it has a century-old monastery.

The village has one government-run primary health care centre and it is not functioning well due to the shortage of staff. The village also has one private pathology cum health centre named 'Rimbick Singalila Health Centre' and it is well equipped with ECG machine, two beds, oxygen and a 24x7 ambulance service. Villagers do prefer this private health centre over the government P.H.C.

For the burial and cremation of the corpse's the people travel to the nearby river named Sirikhola or Basbotay as the village does not have any burial grounds. To reach Sirikhola or Basbotay they mostly reserve the vehicle.

Due to unemployment and no higher education facilities such as Colleges and Universities the youths, have migrated to Darjeeling and other places for better education and opportunities.

In terms of drinking water facility, the Government has inserted six tube wells in the village and the village also has spring water which is a perennial source for the village.

Most of the houses have their own toilet facility as there are no public toilets in the village.

## CHAPTER 3

### *Ehi (Bel- Bivaha)*

*Ehi* or *Bel-Bivaha* is a unique cultural practice which can be seen only in the Newar community. The literal meaning of the term *Ehi* is marriage. The officiating priests are either high caste Brahmin *Dhya Bajju* or high Buddhist priest *Gu Bajju*. *Ehi* has a socio-cultural and religious significance to Newar female. This ritual is in practice for hundreds of years. In this ceremony the Newar virgin girl ties a marital knot with the *bel* fruit i.e. wood apple. There is a Religious as well as Scientific reason for the use of wood apple fruit for the ceremony. The Scientific reason for the use of wood apple fruit is that the fruit does not easily rot and hence, it can be preserved for the longer time. The religious reason is that the wood apple tree is associated with the Lord Shiva. Hence forth the fruit wood apple is seen as an image of the deity. This ceremony is conducted before the girl attains puberty and before she commences her ménage. *Ehi* ceremony is held when the girl is in her odd age, that is, 5, 7, 9 or 11. The reason behind the odd ages of the girl is related to the nature and gods, such as the number 5 is related to the five elements of the nature Wind, Water, Fire, Earth, and Sky. The number 7 is related to the Rainbow. The number 9 is related to Brahma Sankhya, and the number 11 is related to Lord Shiva. This customary marriage is considered to be the holiest ritual in the Newar community. It is considered to be mandatory for the girl to go through the *Ehi* ceremony as it is one of the important aspects of the rite of passage and the decisions for undergoing the ceremony are also taken by parents or elder members of the family.

Within the series of many complex rituals which make up the life cycle of religious and social obligations among the Newar community is *Ehi* ceremony. The *Ehi*

ceremony is looked upon with high veneration by the Newars. It is regarded as the most strenuous and sacred of all the other rituals.

In Newar community, *Ehi* ceremony is seen as the first marriage that leaves the real marriage, that is, with a human in a secondary position. It is the ground on which the marriage of a girl with her social husband is not recognized as a sacrament since the ceremony of *Ehi* is taken to mean with God Suvarna Kumar, who is immortal and son of Lord Shiva. A *Newari* girl is, therefore never believed to be a widow, even if her social husband dies. She can remarry as many times as she chooses to. The ceremony of *Ehi* is functionally related to marriage and divorce.

*Ehi* links the girl with an eternal marriage with a lord Suvarna Kumar. The most common reason for this practice is to protect the girl from the awful stigma of widowhood and also to protect the girl from the attack of the malicious spirits. Besides this, the other reason for performing *Ehi* is its function as an adult initiation ceremony. A Newar girl is considered as an adult and allowed to perform family rituals after she performs the *Ehi* ceremony. Involvement of the girls in the religious activities increases the family merit.

### **Genesis of *Ehi* marriage**

The origination of the *Ehi* marriage is obscure as there are different opinions among the scholars and no proper documentation works are found till date. However, the only thing in common is the time period when this marriage has been started. The *Ehi* marriage dates back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century BC during the reign of Jayasthiti Malla. Some scholars view that the *Ehi* marriage started due to the Muslim Invasion. Shamsuddin-



Ilyas, a war lord from Bengal raided the Kathmandu Valley and looted, killed and abducted the unmarried women but left the married women untouched. This incident made the Newar community to practice the *Ehi* as a customary marriage which ultimately safe guarded women from dishonor.

However some of them views that the *Ehi* marriage started to counter the evil practice of Sati. As the women who undergo *Ehi* marriage would not be a widow. Henceforth, she does not have to burn herself in the funeral pier of her mortal husband.

According to Dahal, a Parbatya Brahmin priest, the *Ehi* marriage began from the reign of Malla kings of Nepal. This tradition mainly started due to religious concept i.e. *kanyadana*. According to him in Vedas, a *Kanyadana* (giving of the daughter) is said to be when a girl is between 7 years to 10 years. *Kanyadana* is attached to the concept of *Paap* (evil) and *Punya* (merituous). A father who has not done a *Kanyadan* is considered as he has done *paap* (evil).

According to Vergati, an academician, the main reason behind the conduction of *Ehi* ceremony is to maintain purity and social status of the Newar girls.

The above given two theories for the origin of *Ehi* does not seems fit since Newar community has their own Caste organization ,the priestly caste and the lower caste does not perform *Ehi* ceremony. So, if this customary marriage started as a result of safeguarding a Newar women from being abducted during raids and self-immolation, then why the other Newar caste did not perform this Ceremony.

### **Myths related to *Ehi***

The word 'myth' comes from the Greek word *mythos*, which originally meant 'story'. “A myth is a narrative account of the Sacred which embodies collective experiences and represents collective conscience” (Bascom, 1965). Myths are a part of Culture, every culture has certain myths of their own, and likewise the Newar community also has myths related to the *Ehi* marriage.

Once, Goddess Parvati was travelling with her husband, Lord Shiva through Nepal. She met a Newar woman, who was weeping in agony of her husband's death. Parvati felt pity of her and requested her husband to find a solution so that the Newar women would not live a widowed life. Lord Shiva ordered the Newar woman to marry with the fruit of wood apple (*bel*), symbolizing it Lord Suvarna Kumar. He also told her that after her marriage with God, she would never be a widow even after her husband's death. So after then, *Ehi* came into existence.

People also believe that if the *bel* fruit of the bride is small in size, then she would get a younger aged husband than the bride and if the *bel* fruit size is big then the husband will be older than the girl.

### **Traditional form of *Ehi* ceremony among the Hindu Newars**

The rites and rituals for performing *Ehi* are similar to an actual marriage. *Ehi* is performed mostly in groups although it can be done individually. The date is set by consulting the *patro* by the Brahmin along with the girl's *chinha* or horoscope. The *Ehi* ceremony is usually of two days, on the first day, early in the morning after taking a bath she must sit for the rituals, where again a series of worshipping is performed.

At first, Lord Ganesha is worshipped, followed by Lord Shiva. A Shiva Linga is kept and the girl has to offer water and cow milk to the linga. All these two days same worshipping ceremony takes place and the Brahmin tells the bride the story related to *Ehi* and the reasons for performing *Ehi*. The bride has to fast during the day. She is allowed to eat only after the worshipping is over every evening after sunset. She is supposed to eat fruits, sweets, kheer etc, but no salty foods. The same process continues for two days.

Then after begins the *Ehi* ceremony. The main ceremony of *Ehi* is carried on for two days. It begins with a purification ritual and ends with *Kanyadaan* of a girl by her father. If not the girl's grandfather and her father's brother can perform the ritual. *Kanyadaan* refers to 'giving away of the Daughter'.

A day before *Ehi* i.e., the first day is called *Dausalakriya*. The house is cleaned and washed with the mixture of red-soil and cow-dung and made purified. On this day a girl has to take bath and should eat no salty food and other spices. The girl is adorned in all their finery, new clothes, loading them with gold ornaments and family heirlooms to exhibit the financial status of the family. In case of mass *Ehi*, the girls assemble outside at the purified courtyard, where the ceremony is held. The priest then performs the *Lasakusa Puja* (a welcoming rite). Afterwards only, a long series of rituals (worshipping) is performed. The girl's mother or relative would be there to assist the girl during the worship. At the end of the first day, the girls worshipped God Suvarna Kumar and would end the first day.

On the very day of *Ehi* i.e., the second day, the major event takes place. A mandap or enclosure is constructed out of banana stems and at the center is suspended a red square cloth tied to the four corners of the stems. The day starts with a bath and the

girl has to fast and she is not allowed to eat anything until the rituals are completed. They assemble at the courtyard dressed in *Pawasa* that is *jama* and *chaubandi* (glittering bridal suit, blouse and shawl), different kinds of ornaments, red *tika* on their foreheads to give bridal look. Their feet's and toes are painted with 'alak' red colour. The senior-most women of the girl's lineage make partition of the girl's hair for the vermilion (sindoor) ceremony.

Now the most important event of the ritual takes place. *Godadhunay* or washing of the feet of the girl is done. Then the Brahmins (who performs the *Ehi*) daughter present there holds the *bel* and with the twig of that *bel*, applies the vermilion (sindoor) on the girl's hair parting or *siudo* signifying wedlock. The *bel* fruit is wrapped with several rounds of yellow thread and it's the girl's groom. During the ritual, the girl is given the *bel* and sacred thread is tied around her hand until the priest finishes chanting the mantras. *Kanyadaan* occurs when the *bel* is given to the girl by her parents and during the marriage of this girl with a male in future this *kanyadaan* ceremony is not repeated.

After the completion of the rituals, the girl is then given jewellery, ornaments and such things like money as a sort of dowry and set of married women's clothes i.e., sari, *Patoka* and *chaubandi* to the girl by her parents. As the *Ehi* girl is allowed to enter in her house she is worshipped at the entrance of her house. All the relatives of the girl attend the ritual to give her blessings. They give grains, money, and clothes. A feast is organized at the girl's home and all the relatives attend the party. *Bel bivhaha* is performed with great zeal and fun.

When the ceremony is over, the *bel* is wrapped in a piece of cloth and kept away by the family elders so that it is not damaged. But, if this happens then the girl is

considered a widow from then on. If the girl dies before her real marriage to a male, then her *bel* is placed in a river, so that it is washed away.

After the completion of the *Ehi* later the girl goes through the other rite of passage named *Bahra Tayegu* or *Gufa*. The girl is taken to *Gufa* (cave) and she has to stay there. Within these the days, the girl is not supposed to have any kind of interaction with the male members, even with the close ones. She is only allowed to interact with the female members of the family. But the male Brahmin performing the puja is allowed in the *Gufa* (cave). No sunlight is to penetrate where the girl is kept. She is only allowed to come out of the *Gufa* after Sunset and must not come across any of the male members.

### **Traditional form of *Ehi* ceremony among the Buddhist Newars**

The Buddhist Newars believe that the *Ehi* conducted between the girl and the Boddhisattava.

On the first day the girls at home takes a purificatory bath and the nails and feet are painted red and then she wear red coloured cloth and jewellery. The girl has to fast for the day. The girl is escorted by a senior woman of her father's lineage, to the purified courtyard where the priests have already prepared the *yajnas* and *asanas* for worshipping rites. For the two days of ceremonies three elderly *Gubhaju* sit in front of the *yajana*. The three men are considered as the three jewels of Buddhism; the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.

## **Purification**

Before the beginning of the ceremony the girl is purified with the five sacred products of the cow, the holy water of the river Ganga and flower petals is sprinkled over her head, a small rice-mould and a burning wick is carried around the girl in order to remove all her past sins and to show the way for the attainment of wisdom, and a variety of Vajrayana *sutras* and hymns chanted in order to achieve mental purification. The girl offers prayers to Lord Ganesha, and their supreme *guru*, the *bodhisattva* Majusri.

## **The measurement**

It is the second stage, the main event of the day, is quite specific to *Ehi*. The girl is carefully measured by the grandmother or the *gurumii* (the wife of the senior presiding priest) from head to toe with a yellow thread making an auspicious total of 108. The thread is placed on the bowl where it kept for the next day. The thread represents the Buddha's yellow cloth so it is considered as a symbol of purity.

## **The second day**

The girl gathers outside the courtyard for initial purification. The girl wears a bridal suit with the ornaments made of gold or silver bangles, anklets and necklace. To complete the intentionally bridal appearance the forehead should have a red *tika*. The girl is purified and worshipping rites takes place, the girl with her left foot crushes twenty-one black gram seeds with a small roller and board. The seeds are considered as her past sins and so by crushing them the girl has therefore she has purified herself. Now the girl is given some holy water to wash her face and to sprinkle over her head and return to her *asana*. The oldest woman in the house applies the vermilion into the

parting of the hair of the girl. The paternal aunt gives the yellow thread which was measured the day before and places it around the neck of her niece. “She also gives the girl a strip of sari material known as *Ehi prasi* (*Ehi sari*) which she places on her lap. Since only married women wear saris such a gift once again proclaims the girls to have attained such a status”. (Allen, 1990)

In the bowl which is kept in front of the girl now contains the *bel* fruit. The priest now ties the red cord to the *bel* fruit and rubs a little yellow purifying powder on the upturned palms of the girls. A male relative now takes the *bel* fruit and gives it in the hands of the girl while another male member gives money and at the same time pours some flower petals and uncooked rice grains in the hand of the girl. The father of the girl performing *Ehi*, folds the hands of the girl over the fruit and then ties the red cord around her wrists. The girl with the *bel* fruit in her hand walks around the sacrificial fire for seven times which marks the end of the *Ehi* ceremony.

After the completion of the ceremony a feast is conducted, the girl is now free to eat the restricted foods.

Though there is a difference between the ritual procedures in *Ehi* conducted by the Hindu and Buddhist Newars but the social importance of the ceremony is the same.

### ***Ehi* ceremony in Darjeeling**

As Darjeeling being a cosmopolitan town and the other communities living side by side along with the Newar communities. It seems that the Newar’s have adapted certain cultural traits of the other communities. *Ehi* in Darjeeling is celebrated joyfully by calling not only the kins but also the neighbours to the ceremony. *Ehi* in



Darjeeling is conducted only for a day as compared to Nepal. *Ehi* can be conducted in home as well as in temple. To fix an auspicious date for *Ehi* the priest is called and the horoscope of the girl is consulted. On the day of *Ehi*, the girl takes a bath and decorates herself in bridal makeup with the help of other females. The house is cleaned and purified with *gaumutra* (cow urine) and *Gangajal* (Water of River Ganga). While performing *Ehi* at home a new set up is made with the *mandalas* and *yajanas*. The priest decides the *swastika ashana* (sitting position) of the girl and the ceremony begins with the worship of Lord Ganesha followed by Siva Paath, after the Siva paath, Lord Suvarna Kumar is worshipped which is later followed by chanting of marriage hymns.



Fig 3.1: Girl being measured 108 times.

In between the ritual process the girl is measured 108 times from head to toe with white or yellow thread and the thread is used as a garland for the *bel* fruit and later given to the mortal husband as the proof that the girl has undergone the ceremony.

After the chanting of mantras and hymns the most important part of the ceremony called *Godhadhunay* (Washing of the feet) takes place.



Fig 3.2: *Godhadhunay* ritual performed by the father of the girl.

All the Kin members wash the feet of the girl and the *locantee* (who holds the *bel* fruit). The *locantee* is supposed to be of the same age as the girl performing *Ehi* and the *locantee* is often chosen from the Brahmin caste group however, the *locantee* can be from the same sub caste group as the girl. After the washing of the feet, the bride receives the gifts in cash and kind from the elders. At last the mother and the father

of the child washes the feet which marks the end of the *godhadhunay* ritual. After the *godhadunay* ceremony *yajana* is performed.

The *yajana* is performed by the girl, *locantee* and all the present kin members in the ceremony.



Fig 3.3: *Yajna* performed by the Family during *Ehi*.

After the *yajana* vermilion ceremony is performed the *locantee* holds the *bel* fruit in her hand and with the twig of *bel* fruit the vermilion is put into the partition of the hair. For the ending of the ceremony *aarti* is performed.

With the completion of the *Ehi* ceremony a feast is held for the people who attend the ceremony. The girl takes the *bel* fruit and safely keeps it in the box so that the fruit does not break as it would lead to the widow hood of the girl.

### **Social importance of *Ehi***

This ritual is functionally related to the marriage and remarriage of a Newar girl. Symbolically, marriage with a God allows freedom to a Newar girl from the boundaries of her social marriage. A Newar girl is never believed to be a widow, even if her husband dies. Similarly, the performance of *Ehi* allows a Newar girl to marry after the death of her secondary husband. She is also allowed to divorce if the situation comes to do so. Therefore, the performance of *Ehi*, creates a society with no widows and therefore no stigma associated with singlehood.

Besides these, the other reason for performing *Ehi* is its function as an adult initiation ceremony. A Newar girl is treated as an adult member after she observes *Ehi* ceremony. They are also allowed to participate in the religious activities and find their share in the family responsibilities. As the girl has undergone *Ehi* her funeral rites will be the same as the old aged person.

*Ehi* helps the girl to preserve the relationships with the mortal husband as she protects the fruit from the breakage.

### **Consequences of breakage of *bel* fruit**

After the *Ehi* ceremony the girl must take care of the *bel* fruit as now she is married to the fruit. She cautiously locks the fruit in the box with the cloth wrapped around it. If the *bel* fruit is broken then the girl is considered as a widow. In case the *bel* fruit breaks then she acts a widow and performs the death ritual with the help of the priest. They perform the death ritual in the nearby river or stream after performing all the rituals the *bel* fruit which is her symbolic husband is immersed into the water. She

comes back home and moans and fasts for the day. On the next day she offers prayers to her symbolic husband.

### **Meaning of *Ehi* as per respondents**

All the respondents knew that *Ehi* was performed only in the Newar community. Some could tell about *Ehi* while others had forgotten. The respondents did not know about the genesis of the *Ehi*, they just perceived *Ehi* as a tradition which must go on from generation to generation. They could just say by undergoing *Ehi* would lead to rise in status as she is now considered as mature and is expected to behave as a matured person.

An interview with a widow woman who lost her social husband at her forties has two children's, and runs a small shop. She had undergone the *Ehi* ceremony and she could have remarry but due to her age factor as well as her will not to remarry, she stays with her children in her deceased husband's house. She views that her status in family has not lost as she is the Head of the family and the decision maker of the house. However sometimes she feels emotional instability of losing her husband as he was the bread earner and her life partner. Due to her less educational qualification she cannot opt for better earning job, so she wants her children to study and hold a good job and success in their life.

The other interview was conducted with the girl who had not undergone the *Ehi* ceremony the reason behind the non performing of *Ehi* was mainly due to the migration for better education to the city as her father had the job there. According to the respondent she would like to undergo the ceremony as it is a cultural tradition and

she also views that due to not undergoing the *Ehi* ceremony her social status or decision making is not hampered.

The majority of the girls who have both performed or not performed *Ehi* views *Ehi* as a cultural tradition and a unique Newar identity and they must continue this *Ehi* practice from generation to generation.

## CHAPTER 4

### Change and Continuity

Process of change and continuity is an embedded aspect of every culture. Every culture is a multilinear process maintains its own structure and functions. The growth of each society is marked by certain changes along with continuity. These are the crude entity that monitors every culture. If it is to scrutinize, then there is always a change in the structure of the society. With the historical migration and the close affinity with the other cultures, the Newar culture in Darjeeling began to evolve but the notion of 'evolve' cannot be viewed in a segregated manner. The notion 'evolve' will be seen in interchangeable term with the developmental phase of society within the changing continuum specially emphasizing the tradition and adapting changes with reference to newly emerging circumstances. Therefore, it is to be noted that many rites and rituals which are practiced in a different geographical setting got improvised into the other geographical setting. With the coming of geographical borders as it mentions, pose the certain limitation for the cultural practice and hence often this impediments were resolved by drawing the basic necessity created by the novel situation from the available region and hence with the gradual process of time it gave rise to the new tradition but often maintaining the thread of continuity with the parental culture (dominant one through which this culture was drawn) and to be remind was something new, distinct from past and present but maintaining rudimentary aspects of past became a necessity for keeping the culture alive.

Change and continuity of culture was often perpetuated by the prerequisite condition to maintain the close affinity with the dominant culture, as in the case of *Ehi* differing from region to region (using of different priest). And the other predicament was the



essential condition to forge the necessary development as it became evident that the old system was in the condition of obsolete and so the adaption was necessary to correspond the proper functioning of the social system. The development of this whole trajectory of course cannot be isolated from the growing phenomena of modernization. Therefore it gave rise to 'Inventing Tradition'.

### **Changes in *Ehi***

Culture is a dynamic process. It changes from time to time. The *Ehi* ceremony has also changed in the process of rituals and the girl's to be performed age. As the traditional *Ehi* ceremony is conducted for two days with the many ritual process. In Darjeeling the same ceremony is conducted only for a day though, the rituals are the same. The officiating priests must be a *Dhya Bajju* (Newar Brahmin Priest) or a *Gu bajju* (Newar Buddhist Priest) but, in Darjeeling due to the paucity of the Newar priests, the *Ehi* ceremony is conducted by the Parbatya Brahmin priest. Some of the Newars who are economically stable prefer to visit Kathmandu for the initiation of *Ehi* as the officiating priests in Kathmandu are either *Dhya Bajju* or *Gu Bajju*.



Fig 4.1 *Ehi* performed by the older age girl in Darjeeling.

Likewise, the other aspect that has been changed is the age of the girl undergoing the *Ehi* ceremony, earlier to undergo *Ehi* ceremony the girl should be between 3 to 11 years but in some cases an older age girl are also seen performing the *Ehi* ceremony. But in case of *Ehi* ceremony performed by the older age girl the ceremony is not celebrated as joyfully as compared to the *Ehi* performed by the younger age girl.

The social function of the *Ehi* has also changed a bit mostly due to the other communities living side by side with the Newars and the exogamous nature of Newars of Darjeeling the social function of *Ehi* ceremony which was to remove the awful stigma of the widowhood is ceased. Despite *Ehi* ceremony removes the stigma of widowhood the loss of the secondary husband is always viewed as a major loss for the women and the family.

The *Ehi* ceremony in Darjeeling has shifted its course from the social to the cultural sphere. *Ehi* ceremony in Darjeeling is mostly seen as the preserving of the Newar

culture and Identity, as the *Ehi* ceremony is a unique practice which can be seen only in the Newar community.

In Darjeeling the *Ehi* ceremony is mostly conducted for an Individual girl as it is solely funded by the family. The mass *Ehi* has never been conducted. Hopefully, there is a chance of performing a mass *Ehi* as the Newars of Darjeeling have been given the Newar Development Board for the upliftment and Preserving of the Newar culture.

### **Factors behind the Change**

Culture goes many changes due to various factors. The changes are always according to the needs of a particular society. Since a culture adapts in many ways but sometimes it adapts so much that the authenticity of the culture is lost. In context of the Newars of Darjeeling the main reason for the changes are due to the geographical location, socio-economic and language.

### **Geographical Location**

Geographical location is an important factor in terms of economy, culture and defense strategies. Due to the vast distance between Darjeeling in India and Nepal, the Newars of Nepal are mostly concentrated in Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Patan, so the interactions between the two branches of the same communities are scarce which lead to adjustment in the Newar culture in Darjeeling. Darjeeling being a cosmopolitan town and has a mixture of different community cultures, Newars of Darjeeling has adapted certain cultural traits from the other communities. The Newars in Darjeeling

are scattered all over Darjeeling due to this aspect also the interaction with the same community is less.

### **Economy**

An economy is a man-made organization for the satisfaction of human wants. According to Brown (1966), “An economy is a system by which people get living”. The way human attempts to get a living differ in major respects from time to time and from place to place. According to Sahlins (1972), it is “a choice between business and culture”. The main reason for migration of Newars was economy and the rule of the Ranas in Nepal which made the Newars of Darjeeling to adapt and forget their own authentic rites and rituals. According to an informant, Badshah Pradhan when his grandfather came to Darjeeling, he came as a tea plantation worker for the British government. He view that during that period due to low income level the people could not maintain their culture as most of the Newars worked as a labourer on daily wage basis. On the other hand the Newars who had everything in Nepal could not bring it along with them while they migrated.

### **Cultural**

The other important reason for the change in Newar culture is due to the scarcity of the native priest who could perform the traditional rites and rituals. The Newars of Darjeeling began to use the priests from other caste groups which made a huge impact on the change in Newar culture in Darjeeling. With the cosmopolitan nature of

Darjeeling city, and the interaction with the other communities the adaptation of different cultural traits has also contributed in the change of Newar culture.

### **Language**

Language is one of the most important factors for culture as it helps to pass down the one's culture from generation to generation. According to Sweet (1908), "Language is the expression of ideas by means of speech-sounds combined into words. Words are combined into sentences, this combination answering to that of ideas into thoughts". As Darjeeling is a social hub for all the communities and Nepali being the *lingua franca* most of the Newar residing in Darjeeling are unable to speak their own native language. Due to the break in continuity in one's generation the Newars of Darjeeling are unable to speak their own native language and had to recreate their own customs which slightly differs from the traditional Newar culture.

The Education policy in Darjeeling has also played a negative role in term of eradicating the one's Native language as the child has to study English, Hindi or Nepali. No scope of re learning one's native language in the school curriculum has greatly affected not only in terms of language but all aspect of the Newar culture.

The above mentioned factors played a vital role in term of the changing culture of the Newars of Darjeeling. The Newars of Darjeeling are rebuilding their culture as it is necessary for maintaining the culture. Though there might be some changes as it will in all cultures the Newars of Darjeeling are trying their best to revive, rebuilt and retain the thread of continuity of their culture. For the revival of language a tutorial classes are organized by the Akhil Bharatya Newar Sangathan, Darjeeling. Cultural

festival is organized to display the Newar culture to the other people. By displaying the culture the actors do need to learn the aspects such as dance, songs, foods and so on of their own culture, which later helps in maintaining the continuity of the Newar culture.

## CHAPTER 5

### Summary and Conclusion

Marriage is an important institution as it gives a social recognition to the man and women which leads to the legitimization of the children, which later takes onto family system and kinship system. There is no fixed definition of marriage due to the changing dimensions of marriage system and unique marriage customs which differs from culture to culture. One of the unique marriage which is generally term as mock marriage is practiced by the Newar community. The Newars are from Nepal who have migrated to Sikkim, Darjeeling in West Bengal and adjacent parts of the hills during the colonial period and started residing there. After the migration, the Newars of Darjeeling had witnessed many cultural changes.

The Newars basically have their own caste organization in Nepal but in context of Darjeeling this caste organization, it is invalid as they follow the Varna system of Hinduism. The population of Newars in West Bengal is hardly around 35,000 which contribute about 2% of the entire West Bengal population. The central objective of the study has been to analyses the dynamics of *Ehi* ceremony in Darjeeling. The study began with the review of earlier articles, papers and books on Newar culture, customs and traditions. The study examined the social importance of *Ehi* marriage ceremony. It also analyzed the myths, and symbolic meaning of *Ehi* marriage practice, and assessed the change, and continuity of the *Ehi* rituals

The Newars of Darjeeling still practice a customary marriage i.e. *Ehi* or *bel bivaha*. The Newars of Darjeeling falls under the classification of Other Backward Classes

(OBC) perceived by the Government of West Bengal in 2005. Most of the Newars in Darjeeling are Hindus, and some of them are Buddhists, and Christians too. The Newars of Darjeeling have been given Development Board by the Government of West Bengal on eleventh of November, 2016, for the Development of the Newar community and to safeguard their way of life. The Newars of all over India have requested the Government of India for the incorporation of the Community in Scheduled Tribe list. The Newars of Darjeeling do not follow the caste hierarchy like the Newars of Nepal as most of the Newars of Darjeeling use the title Pradhan, a sub-caste in the Newar hierarchy. The Newars of Darjeeling mostly speak Nepali, as Nepali is the *lingua franca* in Darjeeling, very few of the Newars can speak *Newari* language. For the revival of the language the Akhil Bharatiya Newar Sangathan which was established in 1993 and conducts free *Newari* language tutorial classes. Akhil Bharatiya Newar Sangathan has played a vital role for the Newar communities in Darjeeling, Kalimpong, and Doars. It has spread its branches everywhere throughout the rural areas in Darjeeling which has a decent number of Newar people group living in the village, this repercussion was for the most part improved the situation the easement of the Newar people who does not need to venture out the distance to Darjeeling for payment of membership and other problems faced by them.

As the Newars in Darjeeling are mostly scattered all over the places, the study was conducted in the Rimbick village which falls under the Bijanbari block office the village had 108 household out of which 55 household were Newars. The Newars in Rimbick were mostly agriculturalists. They also practice the customary marriage *Ehi* or *Bel-Bivaha* is a unique cultural practice which can be seen only in the Newar community. The literal meaning of the term *Ehi* is marriage. In this ceremony the Newari virgin girl ties a marital knot with the *bel* fruit i.e. wood apple which is



considered as Lord Suvarna Kumar the son of Lord Shiva and for the Buddhist Newar the girl is married to a Boddhisattava. This ceremony is conducted before the girl attains puberty and before she commences her ménage. *Ehi* ceremony is held when the girl is in her odd age that is 3, 5, 7, 9 or 11. But the most preferable age is 7, 9 and 11. This customary marriage is considered to be the holiest ritual in the Newar community. It is considered to be mandatory for the girl to go through the *Ehi* ceremony as it is one of the important aspects of the rite of passage and the decisions for undergoing the ceremony are also taken by parents or elder members of the family.

In Newar community, *Ehi* ceremony is seen as the first marriage that leaves the real marriage, that is, with a human in a secondary position. It is the ground on which the marriage of a girl with her social husband is not recognized as a sacrament since the ceremony of *Ehi* is taken to mean with Lord Suvarna Kumar, who is immortal and son of Lord Shiva. A Newari girl is, therefore never believed to be a widow, even if her social husband dies. She can remarry as many times as she chooses to. The ceremony of *Ehi* is functionally related to marriage and divorce.

The origination of the *Ehi* ceremony is vague as there are many theories and squabble among the scholars. However the only common thing is that the ceremony was started during the reign of Jayasthiti Malla. The *Ehi* ceremony in Darjeeling is celebrated with great zeal and enthusiasm it is celebrated only for one day but traditionally in Nepal it goes for two days. The rituals are basically elaborative. Traditionally, the officiating priest could either be *Dhya Bajju* (Hindu Newar Brahmin priest) or *Gu Bajju* (Buddhist Newar priest). In Darjeeling due to the scarcity of the Newar priests they started to use Parbatya Brahmin priest for the rituals which diluted the Newar culture in Darjeeling. As the *Ehi* ceremony was undergone by the younger age girls in

her odd age 3, 5, 7, 9, 11 some of the older age girls are also seen undergoing the ceremony. However, the *Ehi* performed by older age girl is not celebrated as joyfully as in case of the *Ehi* performed by the younger age girl. The main social importance of the *Ehi* was to give woman a rise in status, freedom of remarriage and to remove the stigma of widowhood is seem to be slightly changing mainly due to the exogamous nature of the Newars of Darjeeling the marriages with other communities is also accepted. But the main point is that, if a girl is married with the guy of other community this social function is ceased as the other communities do not practice the ceremony. The other aim of the ceremony was to remove the awful stigma of widowhood but the loss of her social husband is always felt by the woman and the family.

The *Ehi* ceremony in Darjeeling is witnessing a shift from social importance to more of cultural importance. *Ehi* today has become a more of an Identity factor as it is a unique cultural practice which is only performed by the Newar community.

The Newars of Darjeeling has witnessed many changes in terms of culture due to the factors like geographical location. As the Newars migrated before the demarcation of the boundaries as today, the connection with Newars of Nepal has been lost and due to scarce interaction they had to adapt which changed their culture slightly and the other communities living side to side with the Newars, they have adapted certain cultural traits of other communities.

Economy is also one of the factors which lead to the change in culture of Newar, as they migrated mostly due to the Rana regime and economic crisis they began to focus into the earnings rather than the culture. The Newar who fled from the Nepal could not bring their belongings along with them.

As there were no ritual experts to perform the authentic rites and rituals of Newars due to which the Newars began to use the Parbatya Brahmin priest for the rituals which made the Newar culture diluted. The other reason for the loss in Newar culture in Darjeeling is the break in continuity in one's generation.

Language is an important factor every community has a unique language or dialect which makes them different from the other. In terms of the Newars of Darjeeling the break in continuity impacted the language as very few of the Newars in Darjeeling speaks the native language. The Government of West Bengal should adopt the Government of Sikkim education policy as in Sikkim studying one's native languages is also in the curriculum beside learning Nepali, English and Hindi in Schools. This step would benefit the communities as by studying one can also revive their culture. Later on some of the Newars can also go to Nepal and learn priesthood and start the process of reviving the Newar culture.

The Newars of Darjeeling are now culturally conscious and now they are focusing on rebuilding, reviving and retaining their culture with the help of the Development Board given by the Government of West Bengal for the development and preserving of the culture of Newars. For the revival of language the Akhil Bharatya Newar Sanghathan conducts free tutorial classes in Darjeeling and cultural festival are organized to display the Newar culture to the other people. By displaying the culture the actors do need to learn the aspects such as dance, songs, foods and so on of their own culture, which later helps in maintaining the continuity of the Newar culture.

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## ***GLOSSARY***

*Alak*: Red coloured liquid used by females for decorating the body especially the hand and feet.

*Asanas*: Sitting place assigned by the Priest.

*Bahra Tayegu*: After the completion of the Ehi later the girl goes through the other rite of passage named Bahra Tayegu or Gufa.

*Bel*: Wood Apple fruit scientific name *Aegle marmelos*.

*Bel Bivaha*: Mock marriage between the Bel fruit and the Newar girl.

*Chaubandi*: Upper garment wore by the females of Nepali society.

*Chinha*: Horoscope of a person which is made during the birth of a person by the Priest.

*Dal*: Pulses used for consuming.

*Dausalakriya*: Cleaning and Purifying of the House

*Ehi*: Marriage.

*Godhadhunay*: Washing of the feet of the bride and the groom by the Family members and the kin members.

*Kanyadana*: Giving of the Daughter to the groom.

*Lasakusa Puja*: Welcoming ritual performed in the beginning of any auspicious ceremony or event.

*Lingua Franca*: Common language that is spoken by the people for better conversation.

*Locantee*: Brides Maid

*Mythos*: Story.

*Paap*: Evil deeds done by a person.

*Patro*: Astrology book carried by the Brahmin Priest.

*Pawasa/ Jama*: A kind of Frock wore by especially girls.

*Punya*: Merituous deed done by a person.

*Siudo*: Partition of hair.

*Tika*: A red dot.

*Yajnas*: Sacrificial fire.

## APPENDIX

ETHNICAL DIVISION OF THE POPULATION. 29

Name of Nationality, Tribes, or Caste.	No.	Name of Nationality, Tribes, or Caste.	No.
<i>A- Other than Natives of India &amp; British Burmah- continued</i>		<i>2- Semi-Hinduized Aborigines,</i>	
Dilpali	4	Bari	14
Durlami	26	Bauri	100
Gain	28	Bhuiya	6
Ghalia,	537	Chamar	285
Gharti,	1,419	Chandal	292
Ghatwal,	47	Dom	88
Gurung	3,150	Dosadh	68
Gurkha,	51	Hari	761
Hatwali	7	Kaora	1
Iyakha,	235	Mal	2
Jamadar,	331	Mihtar	226
Jimí	99	Musahar	62
Jirel	2	Rajbansi Koch,	23,124
Kami,	1,886	Total	25,029
Khamba,	3,913	<i>3. Hindus.</i>	
Khawa,	310	<i>(i) SUPERIOR CASTES.</i>	
Limbu,	4,663	Brahman	1,002
Magar,	3,011	Rajput	8,972
Manjhi,	275	Total	9,974
Moktan,	3	<i>(ii) INTERMEDIATE CASTES</i>	
Newar,	1,087	Babhan,	6
Pahariya,	92	Baidya	4
Parbatiya,	21	Kayasth	44
Parci,	3	Total	54
Pradhan,	30	<i>(iii) TRADING CASTES.</i>	
Rai,	1,814	Arawala	18
Risingia,	6	Bania	230
Sengten,	3	Gandha-baniya	17
Sarki,	328	Khatri	145
Suchikar	5	Marwari	10
Sunawar	1,192	Oswal	34
Tamang,	4	Paliwal	7
Thakus,	56	Robi	7
Thani,	13	Subarna-baniya	49
Thapa,	447	Total	517
Unspecified,	398	<i>(iv) PASTORAL CASTE</i>	
Total,	25,781	Goala	420
<i>B- Natives of India &amp; Burmah.</i>			
<i>1. Aboriginal Tribes.</i>			
Aka	165		
Dhimai,	873		
Lepcha,	3,952		
Mech,	893		
Murmi,	6,557		
Urion	1,648		
Total,	14,088		

Source: C.F. Magrath District Census Report in 1872.



Interviewing an Elderly person.



Interviewing a Parbatye Brahmin Priest.



*Bel* fruit wrapped in red cloth during *Ehi*