

# Following the Migration Trajectory: Exploring the Ambivalent Origin of Theravadi Buddhists of North Bengal

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**ABSTRACT:** Migration is a product of social, cultural, economic and/or physical circumstances in which individuals and societies find themselves entrenched. After the partition of India a good number of Theravadi Bengali Buddhists (Baruas) started migrating from Chittagong of present-day Bangladesh to India and settled mostly in West Bengal, Tripura and Assam. The present generation Baruas of North Bengal migrated here during the time of Bangladesh War of Liberation in 1971. Buddhist Baruas are a religious minority and associated with Magh tribal identity. Behind the term Magh there is a Arakan-Burmese influence and history of long, arduous journey from the present Bihar state (Magadha) and other parts of Northern India to Chittagong. But what trajectory they followed in settling in this part of the country? Before India's independence, Chittagong was inhabited by Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Burmese, Arakanese, Bengalis, Tripuris, Portuguese and British. It is said that from these people the root of present Baruas are traced. Then how they could retain their Bengali language heritage while following a tortuous course of periodic dislocation from one place to the other? An attempt has been made to demystify these paradoxes by tracing their origins down to their present location and unravel the patterns of migration they followed, commenting on their ethno-religious peculiarities.

## INTRODUCTION

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

- a) It is possible to identify the history and trends of community life and changes.
- b) It is possible to study the migratory forces that direct, organize and control community change.
- c) Generally, the student of social life is

concerned with the distribution of the population not only from the standpoint of a demographer.

Moreover, 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 AND THEIR HISTORY

The Theravadi Buddhists residing in Siliguri and New Series ©SERIALS

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some other places of North Bengal are mostly known as a Bengali speaking Buddhist community. With few exceptions like Talukdar, Chowdhuri or Mutsuddi, most of them use 'Barua' as their common surnames. All of them had migrated from Chittagong (presently in Bangladesh) and are genealogically included in 'Magh' tribal group.

Apart from these common (obviously generalized) characteristics, the exact historical trajectory of their origin and homeland so far remains in the domain of obscurity. 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 and Schmid, '94)

#### AIMS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

Therefore, in the present scenario, introspection is needed in exploring:

- a) The history of Buddhism and Barua Buddhists of Bengal.

The objectives here are regarding 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 of each period? What is the influence of each period?

- b) The identity of "Magh" tribe and meaning and use of the "Barua" title.

The focus here is 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?

- c) Period and reasons of migration of the Barua community domiciled in North Bengal from Chittagong.

The study also tries to focus on 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?

- d) Demography and settlement patterns in Siliguri

The objectives here are 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 HISTORICAL TRAJECTORY OF BUDDHISM AND BARUA BUDDHISTS OF BENGAL

When Goutam Buddha started preaching his philosophy in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C, his centre was the kingdom of Magadha or southern Bihar. (Hazra, '95) 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 North-east Bangladesh was under the control of Arakanese from 10<sup>th</sup> Century AD. The descriptions in the Chittagong District Gazetteer (O'Malley, '08) 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 has given the place its name "Chaityagram" or "Chattagram". In the 11<sup>th</sup> Century AD (AD 1010-AD 1044 or AD 1044-AD 1077), Pangaraj Anoharta of Brahmadesh or Anorath or Aniruddha conquered a large expanse of territory including Arakan and Chittagong. 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 1340<sup>1</sup> and from the time of Sultan Ghiyasuddin Azam, the

ties between Muslim rulers and Arakanese kings were strengthened<sup>2</sup>. 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* were held by Muslims in Arakan-controlled Chittagong. (Majumdar, '43)

The historical period of 15<sup>th</sup> 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 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.

On the other hand, in AD 1795, Burmese King Bodawpaya (AD 1782-1819) conquered the Arakans. A majority of the population panicked and several of them migrated to Chittagong. A few Arakanese revolted against Burmese occupation. Their feeble leadership skills caused them to flee from the Brahma forces and take asylum in British-controlled Chittagong. Therefore, in AD 1798, several Buddhist clans from the Arakans arrived in Chittagong. The British Government granted them asylum in the present-day area of Cox Bazaar. The place has been named after Captain Hirman Cox, who was compelled to look after the Arakanese migrants by the British Government. 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. However, they were provided land to settle on in Bakharganj, rather than 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, '46)

#### THE IDENTITY OF THE 'MAGH' TRIBE, 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 tribes of Santhals, Munda and Chakma 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 and Rajowang, one can 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 as well as locals, who embraced Buddhism, came to be known as *Mag* or *Magh*.

Descriptions of European writers like Risley, Hunter and O'Malley and present day discussions reveal that, *Magh* and Buddhism are synonymously treated in Chittagong. The Chittagong Gazetteer, Sukamal Chaudhuri's *Banglay Bouddhodharma*, Kamal Chaudhuri's *Chattagramer Itihashetc.* also treated all followers of Buddhism as *Magh*. In present day, non-Buddhists of Chittagong consider the word

*Magh* and Buddhists to be identical in the usual settings. (Chaudhuri, '82)

However, it is unanimously agreed upon by all that those belonging to the *Magh* community are divided into several groups.

The divisions are:

1. *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.
2. *Jumiya Magh* - The Marma or Arakanese living in south of the hills of Chittagong were Jhoom 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.
3. *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. (Barua, '86)

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.

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 latter 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) in his article "*Account of Arakan*" had concurred with this argument and written that "The name *Maghor Mag* applied to the Arakanese given to them by the people of Bengal'. They do not know the term. (Phayre, 1841)

In his book, *Contemporary Buddhism*, Sukamal Chaudhuri 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. (Chaudhuri, '82)

It would be a great mistake on the part of researchers if one mixes 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 (Burma) and show their respect as they were descendants of the original Arakanese Royal Buddhist family which came from Bihar (Magadh).

The present author now takes a look at the texts that attest the genesis of the Barua surname and its use. According to the Ethnographic Glossary, "Baruas are the descendents of a powerful dynasty of Buddhist Kings. In 1891, the English Census Superintendent Mr. Hunter also conforms to the above facts" (Risley, 1891). Generally it is known that "in ancient times, the most highly ranked military ruler of Chhattagram under the King of Arakan was a man called Barua, Bara (Renowned) + Ua (Ruler). As per the late scholar Benimadhab Barua, when Ikhtiyaruddin Bakhtiyar

Khilji attacked and conquered Magadh in 12<sup>th</sup> Century AD, the *Brijior Bajji* Prince fled to Chittagong with seven hundred residents of *Bajjito* save themselves and hide from Khilji. They are regarded as forefathers of the Barua community. Prior to Mughal annexation, the Baruas were the supreme vassals of Chittagong. (Barua, '74)

Present day research has revealed that the use of Barua as a surname is a recent phenomenon. According to Sukamol Chaudhuri, 'Previously the title *Barua* was not used by the Barua Buddhists of today. 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, '82).

Buddhism in Bengal was published in 2007 by All India Federation of Bengali Buddhists contains an essay by Joydutta Barua "A Brief Sketch of *Maghs*: As depicted in old records" states that even much before the use of the names Rajbangshi and Barua, people of this community were using different names. For example, among the forefathers of renowned Dr Arabindo Barua (1907-1982) was one Phule Tangya. In this family following names are found in the genealogy for last 250 years or so: (Barua, 2007)

- PhulTangya
- Pushka Chand
- Nayan Chand Talukdar
- Kirti Chand (Jamadar)
- JoylaalMunshi (Barua)
- Gagan Chandra Barua
- Dr Arabindo Barua

This family adopted surname Barua sometimes in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Barua (2007) 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 17<sup>th</sup> Century, these people dropped name "Mang" or "Meng" and did not prefer to use any appellation. They started asserting themselves as Rajbangshis. 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 could be found. According to Sukamal Chaudhuri, most probably they started to use the title *Barua en masse* from the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> 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 him over all the Arakanese settled in Bengal. (Chaudhuri, '82)

From the above discussion, one 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* to other areas.<sup>3</sup> However, it has been accepted that every *Magh* does not bear the same characteristics.
- ii) The history of the *Magh Barua* community that has been discussed is linked to the event of migration from Magadh.<sup>4</sup> They are known to other communities as *Mamragrior*, *Rajbangshi* and there is no discrepancy in this regard.
- iii) The Arakanese Buddhists and Barua Buddhists are completely different sects and the conjecture that there has been no intermingling between the two is unrealistic. In this context, Herbert Risley, Hunter and in the recent past, Sukamal Choudhury, Joydutta Barua and Natun Chandra Barua 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 borderlands 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. Through progression, numerous lands, languages, races, religion and cultural exchanges among individuals, building of relationships and spontaneous rise of intermingling happened. This gave birth to a hybrid language, culture and race.

Shri Suniti Bhusan Qanungo has written in his book "A History of Chittagong, Vol I, Part IV, Chapter 2" 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 strengthen, 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. (Qanungo, '88)

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 their streak of changing their location. It has been illustrated as:

Mamragri (RajbangshiMagh) → MaghBarua-  
>Bengali Barua Buddhist → Bengali Buddhist

Therefore, to escape the Burmese aggression towards the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> 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 states *Maghas* an identity in the ST certificate. Even though it is mandatory to enjoy the benefits of reservation, they refer to themselves as Barua Buddhists in their day-to-day lives. In case of

organized employment, they believe using the term "Bengali Buddhists" to be more practical. Some families that don't use Barua as a surname, use Choudhury, Talukdar and Mutsuddi titles as surnames to bring them under mainstream ambit.<sup>5</sup>

#### THE PERIOD AND REASONS FOR 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* 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 repairmen 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 platoon was created in the army called *Magh Paltan*.<sup>6</sup>

Later on, many soldiers from the *Magh Paltan* were deployed in the Police Division, as they were rendered redundant. (Khan, '99) 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 and in their quest for security during the Second World War, Partition of Bengal and the Bangladesh Liberation War. Prior to settling in Siliguri, they lived

in Assam, Shillong and the tea gardens of Dooars. Quite a few of the families had immigrated 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.

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.

#### DEMOGRAPHIC AND SETTLEMENT PATTERNS IN SILIGURI, NORTH BENGAL: A CASE STUDY

Siliguri is considered as the second most important commercial centre of the state of West Bengal. It is also considered as the gateway of North-East India. It is a fast growing city with an area of 15.54 sq.km located in Terai range of dist. Darjeeling, a northern most district of the said state. It is bounded by Kurseong sub-division on the north, Bihar and Bangladesh on the south, Jalpaiguri district and Bhutan on the east and Nepal on the west. The place is connected with the universe by road, rail and airways. Tea, timber and tourism are considered as the economic basis of this growing city. According to the census survey report (2001) the total number of Buddhists in Siliguri was 3270. Among them 1659 were male and 1611 were female and presently the number of Bengali Buddhist families in Siliguri is near about 1500 and almost all of them are directly or indirectly migrated from Chittagong, Bangladesh.

From the essay entitled "West Bengal's Bengali Buddhists: A Survey (Year 2007)" by Ashish Barua, 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 is only 32. Quite a few Bengali Buddhists reside in the town of Siliguri in the district of Darjeeling. For instance, among the areas of Domhani, Goyerkata, Bagrakot, Nagrakata, Kalchini, Binnaguri, Odlabari, Damdim, Falakata, Jaigaon, Moynaguri and Malbazaar etc, Malbazaar, Binnaguri

and Moynaguri have a comparatively higher number of Buddhist settlements.

A few Bengali Buddhists reside in the district of Cooch Behar. The population of Bengali Buddhists in Bengal number 11,395. Apart from them, a number of Buddhists reside in the nooks and crannies 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 latter. Their distinctive characteristics can be noted only in those Buddhist hamlets where they reside as a community. (Barua, 2007)

Even though there are no specific neighborhoods demarcated as Bengali Buddhist settlements in Siliguri town, however, it can be said in general that while choosing an area to settle in they prefer to stay nearby Buddha Mandir (Buddhist Temple) and are actively engaged with the activity related to the Buddha Mandir. 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, namely, Vidarshan Dhyana Ashram (Haiderpara), Antorjatic Bouddho Shikkha Ebong Gobeshona Kendra/ International Buddhist Education and Research Centre (Gurung Basti), Siliguri Salugara Humanistic Buddhist Mission (Salugara) and Buddha Bharati, (Mahakalpalli), one 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 250 and the total population of Bengali Buddhists living in Siliguri Town rounds off to 1000 to 1200.

As a part of sample selection, the present author has collected data from 50 families. Personal

interactions were used for collecting further facts in an attempt to substantiate the study and make it robust and significant.

*Table 1. Distribution of the families according to their time of migration and connection with Bangladesh (Chittagong)*

Time of Migration Period	Frequency of Interaction					Total
	Regular	Often	Sometimes	Over Phone	Never	
Before 1945		3	2	2	7	14 (28%)
1945-1960		6	4	3	7	20 (40%)
1961-1980	1	4		1	5	11 (22%)
After 1980	1			1		2 (4%)
Do Not Know				1	2	3 (6%)
Total	2 (4%)	13 (26%)	6 (6%)	8 (16%)	21 (42%)	50 (100%)

From Table 1, it can be inferred that the number of families migrated from Bangladesh (Chittagong) before independence and partition is 14 (28%). Actually at that period, Chittagong was the 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 employes of rail and police department. Highest number of families (20 i.e. 40%) 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 (22%). Only 2 families came recently from Bangladesh and 3 families did not know the time when their forefathers came to India (4% and 6%)

Now if one looks at the frequency of their interaction with Chittagong in terms of visit to relatives' place and regular conversation, then only 2 families visited Bangladesh almost every year without any special reason. 13 families go occasionally to attend some family programmes. Sometimes visit to Chattagram is reported by 6 families. This information shows that 40 % of the same have physical connection between countries whereas 16% of them maintain connection over phone only and 42 % reported that they have no communication with Bangladesh.

When one compares and tries to find out the correlation between the time of migration and frequency of interaction then it can be observed that the 2 families sharing deep ties with Bangladesh

migrated comparatively later (after 1970). Of the 14 families that migrated before 1945, 7 of them (50%) do not have any link with Bangladesh while two families communicate only over the phone. The remaining five families communicate infrequently. The 3 families that were unable to comment on their history of migration quite obviously do not maintain ties with Bangladesh. Of the 21 families that do not have any ties with Bangladesh, seven migrated prior to 1945, 7 migrated post partition, between 1947 and 1955, 5 moved at the time of Bangladesh Liberation War and 2 were unable to account for their time of migration.

From this survey, it can also be understood that of the 50 families surveyed, 22% or 11 families had chosen Assam as their first place of residence. 64% or 32 families settled in different parts of North Bengal and 18 families chose Siliguri as their place of settlement. The remaining 36% moved to Siliguri from the tea estates of Alipurduar, Birpara, Bagrakot, Kalchini, Nagrakata, Damdim and elsewhere. Some members of the 7 families had arrived in Kolkata with a few relatives for mainly further studies. The presence of friends and family is a significant factor for minority communities to consider while choosing a place of settlement.

Of the 50 families, the number of first generation migrated families is 22 or 44%, meaning that the elderly members of these families were born in Chittagong or Burma (10\$ or 5 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 28 or 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.

An attempt to analyse the history of Bengali



Buddhist settlements in the town of Siliguri has led us to conclude that 14 of the 50 families surveyed for data collection, had migrated from Chittagong prior to 1947. However, only 2 of these 14 families had settled in Siliguri town to begin with. Majority of them (viz. 5 families) initially lived in Assam, 3 in Kolkata and 4 in different tea growing areas of North Bengal (Alipurduar, Nagrakata, Kaichini and Banarhat). Later on they moved to Siliguri town. On the other hand, of the 20 out of 50 families that had migrated to Siliguri directly from Chittagong, 14 families (or 70%) migrated between 1950 and 1980.

From the above mentioned data, it can be said on the whole that Buddhist settlements in Siliguri prior to 1949 were sparse. In the introduction to his article “Uttarbanga Bouddho Sanghashramer 50 Bochhorer Itikotha”, Barun Bikash Barua (Uttarbanger Bouddha Bihar O Kichhu Bouddha Achaar, ( Barua, 2009) has written that towards the end of the month of December in 1949, the revered monk Atulasen had arrived in Siliguri from Darjeeling in search of Barua Buddhists living in Dooars. The revered bhanta was unaware that at that time, a handful of Barua families lived in Siliguri (Barua, 2006). Therefore, 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 “Vidarshan Dhyana Ashram, Haiderpara” located in the neighbourhood is one of the most revered Buddhist temples in the town of Siliguri. The area 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 Baruas of Bangladesh are comparatively controlled more on communitarian basis and their individual freedom is less prioritized. These Barua families live in a quite close-knit manner. The influence of the Buddhist temple and their head monks (bhantes) is quite strong even in present times and clubs and associations of the elderly also observe societal rules, laws and festivities quite fastidiously. The communitarian control in India 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. 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. Yet their religious moorings maintain a communitarian cringe, bordered on religious minority status remaining within the predominant Hindu community.

#### Notes

- 1 In AD 1340, Kadar Khan or Kadal Khan, the Commander-in-Chief of Sultan Fakruddin Mubarak Shah of Sonargaon conquered Chittagong and first brought it within the folds of Sonargaon. This is the start of Islamic rule in Chittagong. During his reign, the renowned traveller, Ibn Batuta (AD 1346) had visited Chittagong. Later on, Samsuddin Ilyach Shah had conquered Chittagong along with Sonargaon and extended his rule over Gaur. He became the first independent Sultan of Bengal (AD 1352-1358).
- 2 The successors of Ilyach Shah were Sultans Sikandar Shah and Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah. During the rule of Ghiyasuddin, the Arakanese King Narmikhla or “Mong-Sau-Mong” Brahmaraj dethroned him and he sought asylum in Gaur (AD 1406-1430). Sultan Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah also known as Nasiruddin Muhammad Shah helped him recapture his lost kingdom. This Arakanese royal family became well-known as *Mrauk*. After Narmikhla rose to the throne again, Buddhist Kings (AD 1430-1645, 17 kings) started adopting a Muslim name along with their Arakanese Buddhist names.
- 3 A few early correspondences from the Chiefs of Chittagong to Arakan Rajahs indicate that entire population of Arakan was addressed as “Muggs”. One of such letter from Warren Hastings to Francis Law, Chief of Chittagong dated 21st May, 1777 and reply from Mr Law dated 23rd Nov, 1777 is reproduced in Revenue History of Chittagong (1880). The spelling changed to *Maghand Mag* in the 19th Century.

(Buddhism in Bengal, All India Federation of Bengali Buddhists)

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

However, according to the second source, in the second half of the 12th Century AD, prior to Muslim invasion

and subsequent expansion of their kingdoms, several Buddhist Arakanese people were influenced to move to Chittagong. They are the ancestors of the present day *MaghBarua* clans. Judging the source of the facts, the second view has greater historical significance undoubtedly. Yet, it cannot be said with conviction that this migration at a specific time or region.

For instance, subject expert Natun Chandra Barua (Retired Teacher of Pali, Chittagong), has mentioned in his book "Chittagong's Buddhist Community", that in AD 1894, the "Tattabodhoni" newspaper's Chaitra Edition (published by litterateur Dwijendranath Tagore) carried the news that in the 12th and 13th Century AD, the Buddhists were subjected to inhuman torture, hence left the Magadh Kingdom and took shelter under the Arakanese Buddhist King. MrBarua has mentioned that after living closely with Arakanese *Maghs*, amity developed between the two communities and marital alliances were slowly initiated and accepted.

- 5 During the Muslim and British Rule, a lot of Baruas held high ranking positions in the government. Those who were managers of estates, officers and high grade clerks were entitled *Mutsuddis*. To make it easier to collect land taxes, land was divided into *taluks* and *tarafs*.

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

- 6 In his book, 'Contemporary Buddhism in Bangladesh', Sukamal Chowdhury mentioned that, British did not interfere into the religious matter of the Buddhist people of Chattagram who in a mass came to be known as *Magh* from the beginning of the 17th Century. They

rather fully geared their interest in making their army stronger by recruiting able bodied people of the place and formed a separate platoon with them, titled "*Magh Platoon*". Subsequently, some of the Buddhists were raised to the position of 'Jamadar', 'Suvadard' and 'Havildar'.

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