

rites of passage of two migrant ethnic groups in the same ecology – frontier Bengal: a comparative study

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Frontier Bengal¹ is usually marked as a buffer region. Many migrant groups entered into this region due to their emergent crisis over time. It is the border region of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. Generally this tract has some important traits: people of this region are radical, flexible and dynamic. They are not conservative about preserving their pristine culture. Here many more aesthetic values are crystallized, beliefs and rituals are intertwined to have a distinct cultural identity. Lack of conservatism is reflected in their religio-festive occasions. Even in it, the local rhymes and rhythms are vibrated reflecting 'homogenization and unbridled' cultural traits.

This tract gives birth to many new and typical castes peculiar to this area. In course of time, these migrant groups try to find out a stable position in the greater Hindu caste structure by asserting themselves either as a new caste merging with old ones or forming a new one with a new identity, placing themselves in the regional caste hierarchy. Through this new placement they gradually develop a sense of security, confidence and belongingness.

Diverse rites of passage are often ceremonies surrounding events that make their lives more meaningful and colourful. Many such events in everyday life re-strengthen group solidarity, bind the people in a common tie and develop a common sentiment which according to Durkheim is 'collective conscience'². Often some crisis of life heightened with emotions find justification through it, amidst the major psychological, social and physical changes of human life. Many important transitions of life would become more easy and acceptable through it in their day to day intercourse.

During the early twentieth century the Belgian anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep (1977) observed that all cultures have prescribed ways for an individual and society to deal with these 'emotions charged situations'. They have ritual ceremonies intended to mark the transition from one phase of life to another as described by van Gennep as rites of passage. He described three phases of it: the first phase which he meant 'separation' where people withdraw from the group and begin moving from one place to another; the second phase is known as 'liminality' denoting the transitional period between two states of leaving and

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entering; the third phase is known as 'incorporation' i.e., reentering society having completed the rites.

Malinowski³ (1884-1942), a British anthropologist made his work on Trobriand Islanders (New Guinea), states that often these acts serve symbolically and psychologically 'to bridge the dangerous gaps in every important pursuit or critical situation' (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2008).

He with other structural anthropologists often see these rites as means of creating emotional bonds that maintain social order and enhance group solidarity. He also opines that these rites promote empathy as they use symbolism to reinforce social status, norms and values.

The real paradox is that the diverse ethnic⁴ groups with pluralistic cultures witness different forms of rites of passage on the one hand, and on the other, sharing cultural values and beliefs with each other, developing a homogeneity which are the hall marks of this region. Society arranges all these events systematically to create a harmonious and symbiotic relationship between man, society and environment. As a result, similar types of practices are followed by them in their everyday life forgetting their own cultural identity. Generally they follow the customs and practices of other high caste groups like the Mahishaya⁵, Sadgop⁶, Tili⁷, Teli⁸ and others which is rightly pointed out by Srinivas as 'Sanskritization'. Varieties of leaves, plants, flowers, fruits and material objects considered to be sacred articles are used for ritual purposes which are available from their own environment. Similar types of practices performed by others in their ceremonies related to rites of passage are very common. Unlike the Brahmins, all other groups have been reflecting more or less similar types of activities and action patterns in their socio-cultural life.

II

Considering these traits the two ethnic groups: the Suklis or the Solankis and the Bhogdas or the Bhoktas of frontier Bengal have been selected for this study. The Sukli traditionally known as Solanki, a sub-caste of the Kshatriya, were the people of Rajasthan. But in this local region they are considered as degraded caste who left their traditional caste occupation and were forced to accept agriculture as their profession or occupation for their survival and existence (Manna 2003, 25).

As per Risley's observation they are the small cultivating class who came to Midnapore about six hundreds years ago.... The social position of the Suklis is very low. They rank with the Pods⁹ and Dhoba¹⁰ and the Brahmins¹¹ will not take water from their hands... (Risley 1981, 273-274).

The Bhogda, locally known as Bhokta, migrated from the western tract of this country. They were previously identified as Dasyus, Iethels or Clubman, appointed by the local king to protect the palace. In bygone ages they used to speak in Hindi. This group is only found in this region, especially on both sides of the river

Kangsabati. After the abolition of the Zamindari system they had to accept agriculture as their occupation. Now they are scheduled to get the sanctioned benefit from the Indian government (Manna 2003, 177).

Hundred families of each group have been surveyed for this study. The table 1 describes the sample characteristics of the two groups.

TABLE I: SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

Sample Villages						
<i>Ethnic Group</i>	<i>Birbira</i>	<i>Thatrachak</i>	<i>Sundeula</i>	<i>Alamchak</i>	<i>Mokrampur</i>	<i>Total</i>
Sukli	9	13	16	47	15	100
Bhogda	Kanchan Danga25	Daintikri 75	-	-	-	100

Clan				
<i>Ethnic Group</i>	<i>Kashyapa</i>	<i>Bharadaaj</i>	<i>Sandilya</i>	<i>Total</i>
Sukli	97	2	1	100
Bhogda	-	-	Chandil or Chandilya 100	100

Family Type			
<i>Ethnic Group</i>	<i>Extended</i>	<i>Simple</i>	<i>Total</i>
Sukli	41	59	100
Bhogda	40	60	100

Activities					
<i>Ethnic Group</i>	<i>Agriculture</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Service</i>	<i>Business</i>	<i>Total</i>
Sukli	90	-	10	-	100
Bhogda	64	35	1	-	100

Socio-Economic Status						
<i>Ethnic Group</i>	<i>Upper</i>	<i>Upper -Middle</i>	<i>Middle</i>	<i>Lower-Middle</i>	<i>Lower</i>	<i>Total</i>
Sukli	-	18	56	26	-	100
Bhogda	-	-	7	50	43	100

100 families from each group have been surveyed. The number of villages, distribution of clans, types of families, nature of occupation and socioeconomic status are shown in the Table 1.

The main purpose of studying the rites of passage of these two groups are to know in detail their birth, marriage and death rites which are no doubt important as ethnographic accounts of the two migrant ethnic groups who were originally different from each other.

Now the interesting question is how these two groups perform their rites of passage living within the same ecology. If there are differences or similarities these what are the reasons?

Considering these views I have studied these two groups who are now settled in this frontier Bengal.

III

The Suklis and the Bhogdas perform certain rites and ceremonies in connection with life cycle, i.e., puberty, pregnancy, marriage and death.

The three important major events – **birth, marriage** and **death** are described in detail. Birth is a significant event in human life. Societies, through out the world, accept it as a unique phenomenon for the continuation and rejuvenation of human history. Children are the outcome of the union of two adult male and female members sharing their sexual relationships. So child birth is not only a simple biological process but a long socio-cultural process. A child needs long care and attention to develop his social self and personality. As a result, a series of rites and ceremonies are arranged for his care, protection and development.

First **menstruation** indicates that the girl is attending puberty and the event is intimated to the parents, specially the mother or other elderly female members of the family. In earlier days, the child marriage, i.e., before the girls attaining puberty, was in vogue. After the first menstruation, the girls has to perform some ritual formalities. If early marriage takes place then this rite is a must and after that the girl is considered fit to attain a adulthood and allowed to share the same bed with her husband.

During the time of menstruation she is considered unclean, at least for the period. She has to maintain certain restrictions in her day to day activities and to take full bath when the period is over. Stoppage of menstruation indicates pregnancy. Pregnant women are always welcome in both rich and poor families. She is considered to be blessed as she is going to be a mother. Naturally, the pregnant women get special care from the family members. She has to observe certain restrictions in her behavioural pattern. Care should be taken so that no evil spirit can do her any harm. During this period senior family members consult astrologers or spirit doctors, those who can counteract the evil spirit.

A pregnant woman during her pregnancy never goes to the cremation ground because it is thought that ghosts roam about the place. She does not attend any funeral ceremony or take food at that time though she feels hungry. During the period of first pregnancy, the Bhogda woman never goes to her father's house also. It is restricted. The pregnant woman of any community does her normal work till the last day of her labour pain; there is no restriction on her schedule of domestic chores. In the most of the cases, delivery takes place in the woman's own house. Usually the place of delivery is chosen in one corner of a veranda or one side of

kitchen. The male members are never allowed to go to the place. The two or three elderly female members of the community assist the midwife, popularly known as *Dhaima*. The midwife usually cuts the umbilical cord with a new blade and she keeps the placenta on a leaf. The placenta after birth is generally buried in one corner of her house, otherwise witches can do harm to the baby. After one hour of delivery the child is given a few drops of goat milk until the mother is able to provide him / her with her breast milk. Usually for second or third child the mother can give her breast milk within a very short time, but not in the case of a first one. The mother is allowed to take hot drinks or country liquor to get her strength. She takes dry food to recover physical fitness quickly.

The pollution period in connection with birth continues for nine days, which is popularly known as *Narta*. During the pollution period the mother is considered unclean and she is not allowed to participate in any domestic work. It is to be noted that the corner of the house, where the placenta is buried, is considered important as the mother offers food articles there, just to please the spirits, before taking any food and drink. This is continued for nine days only. On the ninth day the barber attends ceremonially and pares off nails of the mother and all other members of the family including the baby. After this the birth pollution is over. The washer man comes and takes the clothes worn by the mother. After that the mother takes dip into the river or a nearby tank and worships the goddess *Ganga* with cow dung, vermilion, flowers. Few drops of her breast milk are also given at that time with the prayer to the goddess that the baby may not be drowned.

Again on 21st day another social ceremony held after delivery for formal purification is known as *Ekusa*. In case of the sukli, the Napit (barber) comes and performs certain rituals. But the Bhogdas sometimes perform the ritual by their own family members. Generally the goddess *Ganga* is worshipped by the mother of the child for getting her blessings to her child.

The first rice eating ceremony is a must. It is arranged in the case of a Bhogda boy when he attains nine months of age and in the case of Sukli boy six months of age but for the Bhogda and the Sukli girls at the age of seven months. On this occasion, a ceremonial feast is given to relatives, neighbours and some other guests. This day is considered as the first rice eating ceremony day.

On that particular day, the mother of the child goes with baby to the river or a big tank. Other members, relatives of the house also take part in the ritual. At the time of bathing the mother of the child worships a ceremonial pot and puts vermilion, durba grass, flowers and cow dung etc. just as formalities to have divine favour for the baby.

The maternal uncle of the child takes major role in this ceremony. He brings new dress, new utensils (plate and glass) for the child. The child is given a sweet porridge. It is generally brought from the Brahman's house who prepares it for the baby on the occasion of the first rice eating ceremony. On this occasion delicious

dishes are generally offered to the guests who are invited. The invitees are also expected to present something to the baby on this occasion.

Marriage is an important social institution. It plays a vital role in human life.. After marriage the couple settles their life. The widows are not allowed to get marry, but this is not applicable for the widowers. At present the age at marriage for both the male and female has been increased. Previously child marriage was in vogue. But now-a-days the age at marriage of the boys and girls is not less than 21 years and 18 years respectively. Boys are usually older than girls during the time of marriage. In the Sukli or Bhogda community marriage by negotiation is generally practiced through marriage by love or marriage by elopement is not an out of scene.

Middleman (*go-between*) popularly known as Ghatak, brings the information about the marriageable boys or girls who are in different villages, or sometimes in the same village. He informs the father or the elder persons of the family members who are interested in conducting the marriage between the suitable partners. The next important step of marriage is the fixation of date. The members of the two families, in the presence of the go-between fix it. The father of the girl is also informed of the demand of the boy's side. Sometimes a partial amount of dowry is to be given before the final day.

The third important step is the arrangement of several feasts known as *Aiburo Bhat* in her / his own house or some relative's house for the honour of girl / boy who is going to be married. In this way, the particular marriage ceremony starts with various types of rituals. The bride or groom generally does not take any solid food during the day. They usually take sweets or fruits. In the presence of the priest before ceremonial bathing one important ritual, smearing body with turmeric paste takes place. Some married women, either relatives or neighbours, perform this ritual. All female members either five or seven or nine take turmeric paste and touch the body of the groom. He takes his bath either in a tank or a nearby river. Then he returns with his relatives. Next little turmeric paste with oil and other important articles are sent to the bride's house. The bride with the help of her relatives performs the same types of rituals. She is anointed with turmeric paste to complete her bath. Two houses separately arrange the *Sraddh* ceremony known as *Nunnimukh* in their respective houses. The priests of their families conduct these ceremonies. In the evening the groom takes little fruits, curd, and sweets and wears a new dress like *Panjabi*, *Dhoti* and *Putta* (a white wrapper on his shoulder).

After wearing new attire the groom starts by moves on a bullock cart or a rickshaw or a car to reach the house of his bride along with four or five family members including his father and other elders. But there are also other 40 to 50 members who go separately to the bride's house to attend the marriage party. According to the economic condition the number of the wedding group varies. The groom's party is accorded a hearty welcome by the relatives of the bride.

They wait separately till the time of the marriage. The priest and the barber of both the parties are present there. The elder sister's husband and other senior members of the bride ask the groom to come and attend the marriage ceremony. On the other hand, the bride is also dressed with new costumes. She is decorated with sandal paste, cosmetics, ornaments and flower. She is taken to the place where the marriage takes place. Through performing many essential rituals at last the groom applies vermilion on the bride's hair parting by a nut cutter and then utter incantation as directed by the Brahman priest. Finally, the hands of both the bride and the groom are tied with a thread, which is known as *Suta Bandhan*, i.e., tying the thread. Ultimately this ends the ceremonial part of the marriage. The *Basar Ghar*, a typical room, is arranged for the bride, groom and the other members. Early in the morning with the other important rituals *Ashirbad* takes place to bless the newly wed couples with *Durba grass* (*Cynodin dactylon*), rice, flower and Rs. 5 to Rs. 20 by each well-wisher. All elder members, one by one, bless the couple. Then they start their journey back to their own house.

When the couple reaches the groom's house the mother of the groom first blesses her daughter-in-law with some gifts and accepts the girl as her daughter-in-law. Little rituals are arranged there to celebrate the couple. Day after, one ceremonial feast is arranged in the groom's house to welcome the bride's house-members. From that very night the couple is allowed to stay together.

The general custom of the **disposal of the dead** among the ethnic groups is cremation. But in case of child (up to the age of 10) death, the dead body is buried. If any pregnant woman dies, her abdomen is opened to take out the child from the mother's womb. Then the child is buried and the mother is cremated. But in case of an accidental death, the dead body is cremated. This system of disposal of dead is similar in all communities in this district.

In case normal death, the dead body is kept in the courtyard for a few hours during which the necessary materials for cremation are collected and the relatives are informed. Some one has to sit touching the dead body until the cremation. The dead body is taken to the cremation ground. The funeral pyre is prepared. After turning, its face downwards, the dead body is placed on the pyre. Generally the eldest son symbolically touches the mouth of the deceased with fire and then the pyre is lit. When the dead body is turned into ashes they perform certain rituals and return home. The mourning period is continued up to 11 days for the Sukli and 29 days for the Bhoghda. On the 12th day for the Sukli and 30th day for the Bhoghda, the Sraddh ceremony take place respectively.

Birth, marriage and death are important phenomena in the life of an individual. All these two groups respond in a same fashion less in these situations. Most of the cases the birth takes place in their respective houses. The mid-wife popularly known as *Dhaima* belonging to Hari community takes part in the process of delivery and almost common in all cases. The placenta is buried in front of the house. Except

the Sukli community, the mother of the baby offers food and drink to that particular place during her pollution period for the welfare of her baby. But on the other hand, the Sukli burns place daily to get rid of the bad smell.

The pollution period in each community is known as Narta or Chutuk *Charano*, which continues for nine days. For the *Sukli*, *Napit* (Barber) and *Dhoba* (washerman) are essential but in earlier days the common *Napit* and *Dhoba* were not allowed to do the work in the houses of the other castes. At that time the same functions were used to be performed by one elderly community member. Now –a-days the situation has changed; the service of the *Napit* (Barber) and *Dhoba* (washerman) is requisitioned in imitation of the higher caste people. The mother of the baby in all communities worships the goddess *Ganga*. On the 21st day after the delivery a formal purification known as *Ekusha* is performed almost by all the communities, but nature of rituals varies from one community to another. All the communities also perform the rice-eating ceremony but the details vary. This indicates some sort of gradual accommodation into the system.

In respect of marriage there are some rituals and formalities. These vary from one group to another, it has also been observed that the services of the Brahman (Brahmin), *Napit* (Barber) and *Dhoba* (Washerman) have become visible especially in the lower groups, in the tune with the higher castes.

Similarly, after death, disposal of the dead is done by cremation. But formalities and minor rituals differ from community to community. The mourning period varies from community to community- Sukli for 11days and Bhogda for 29 days.

The *Sraddh* ceremony takes place with the help of the Brahman (Brahmin), higher or degraded. They all believe in the existence of *Atma* or spirit of the dead. During their mourning period the sons of the deceased, of all two communities, offer food and drink under a plant (*Bena Grass*) which is planted by the side of the river or pond. After taking bath and before taking food they usually offer food and other articles to the spirit of the dead in the name of the departed soul.

Now it is clear that all these groups are trying to adjust themselves with the changing situation and gradually they are following the higher caste rituals in their day-to-day interactions.

IV

The Case Study

Birth

A case study of a Sukli family has been recorded from a mother to get detailed information about herself and her child.

Arindam Pandit (2 years), son of Badal (35 years) and Arati (25 years), of the village Mokarampur, was born at a nursing home in Midnapur, in the year 1992.

Arati stayed in her father-in-laws' house. From there, she went to nursing home. Normal delivery took place within a day. She was there, for four days. After two days, the child began to suck her breast milk.

The pollution period due to child birth continued for nine days. Ninth day of the birth of the child is known as *Narta*, an auspicious day. Up to this day Arati was considered unclean and she was not allowed to do any work and live separately from others. Through this practice she was given complete rest. On the ninth day, after the birth of the child, the barber, named Jogesh Sit, came and pared off the nails of the baby, its mother and all other members of the family. The child's mother took her bath in a pond and was advised to worship the family deity. A new small earthen pot, known as *Ghat* decorated with cow dung and vermilion was worshipped. Flowers, fruit and sweets etc. were offered to the household deity for the welfare of the baby and its mother. A washerman, named Hari Manna, came and cleaned the clothes of all the members of the house. He took the clothes, which she used during the pollution period. Performance of these rituals, known as *Narta* put an end to the pollution period. But after the delivery. The mother took rest for a period of one month for her recovery.

Again on 21st day another social ceremony was held known as *Ekusha*. The barber came and performed certain rituals. He offered rice, five betel leaves, five betel nuts and coin of 25 paise in the name of the goddess Ganga. An earthen lamp was lighted on a flat dish to have her blessing. The mother took a full bath on that day from the nearby tank and worshipped the goddess Ganga. She took a dip and collected a handful of mud from there and prepared an image of the goddess. Arati, the mother of the baby worshipped with folded hands by offering betel leaf, betel nut, plam leaf, banana, sweet etc. After that, the image was immersed in the water.

The next important rice eating ceremony took place when baby attained the age of six months. Generally for boys the age of six months and for girls the age of seven months is fixed for rice giving ceremony. The liquid food or granule is ceremonially given to the baby indicating the allowance for solid food to the baby from that very day. Such practices are being performed in all the families.

On the occasion of the ceremonial feast, relatives, neighbours and friends were invited. The maternal uncle played an important role.. He brought new clothes, utensils, sweets, red coloured string known as *Ghunsi* and garlands for the baby. Except these, all the guests also brought different articles as gifts for the baby. A bed was arranged with a new mat, bed sheet etc. and the baby were placed there.

Arati again worshipped the goddess Ganga on that very day in the same fashion and uttered "If my child falls in water, please return him and protect from all sorts of danger". She wore a new cloth. The grand mother of the baby gave a bath to him. Arindam wore a new cloth, *Ghunsi* (red cord for the waist) garlands etc. All the relatives neighbours and friends made the day a joyful by cracking jokes. They

also wanted to know the baby's interest by keeping different articles like a pen, handful of crop, a piece of gold and a lump of cow dung in a plate and observed which article the child preferred most. The child took the pen, which indicated that, in future, he would be a learned man. On the other side a great feast with different delicious foods was arranged where fish curry and sweet were the two important items for the guests. In this way the ceremony came to an end and the evening stars gave farewell to the guests.

Marriage

A case study has been collected from Doli Pandit belonging to the Sukli family, to know the detail of the marriage ceremony.

Doli Pandit was a daughter of Mukul Pandit and Sandhya. When she was nineteen years old the marriage took place. The age of her husband, named Shiba Prasad Pramanick, was 29 years. He was educated up to B.A. standard, and indulged in business. He had also a good area of agricultural land.

The elder sister and brother in law of Shiba Prasad informed Shiba Prasad's father about Doli who would be the wife of Shiba Prasad. The middleman or go-between was also there. He settled the terms and conditions of the dowry and finalized the date after selecting the bride. After ten days of selection one date was fixed up when groom's father was informed through the go-between. The bride's father, uncle maternal uncle and go-between went to groom's house. There they took their lunch and before leaving the place they came to know the demand of the groom's house. Finally the bride's father agreed to give Rs. 8000.00 and 50gram gold to her daughter during the time of marriage.

The date of marriage was fixed in the month of *Ashar* (June - July). A few days before marriage, both the parties were busy in taking *Aiburo Bhat* i.e., invitation to take ceremonial delicious meal in different relatives' house.

On the day of marriage the ritual *Gatra Haridra* (smearing Turmeric paste) first took place in groom's house. Then it was sent to bride's house for her use during the time of her bath. A special ceremony was arranged at bathing place where all married women were gathered and they worshipped the goddess Ganga to have her blessings. All these were performed with the help of a *Napit* (barber). The groom came with his party consisted of 75 members to attend the marriage ceremony. They had their own priest and Barber. At 1.30 am marriage took place. After the end of marriage they went to the *Basar Ghar* where the bride, groom, friends and relatives enjoyed the night by cutting jokes

Early in the morning the groom returned to his own house with his newly married wife. The mother in law received her daughter in law with gold ornaments. On that particular day another social feast was arranged to celebrate the concluding function of the marriage at the groom's house.

Death

One case history has been cited to elaborate the death rites and rituals of a Sukli family. Swaraswati Banik was an aged woman residing at Mokrapur village. She had been suffering from paralysis for several years, but on the 13th Poush, (December – January) 1385 (Bengali year) she died at the age of 72 years. She was a widow. After the death of her husband, she used to stay with her brother, Maheswar Pandit, as she had no child.

After death, her body was kept in the courtyard, pointing her head towards the north. Her nephew Shankar, sat touching her dead body. Mukul was another nephew of hers. He first chopped the margosa, in Bengali *neem* (*Azadirachta indica*) tree, then other members collected margosa wood for the pyre. The first chopping of margosa tree is known as *kol*. The cremation ground was decorated with flowers and sandal paste. The basil leaves, in Bengali, *Tulsi* (*Ocimum bacilicum*) were placed on her eyes. They went on uttering the name of Lord Hari, *Bala Hari, Hari Bol*, i.e., “tell the name of Hari”. In this way they reached the cremation ground. The women were not allowed to go there.

Mukul Pandit was her eldest nephew. He took an axe with him as per death custom. He purchased the place, where funeral pyre was arranged, with one rupee coin paying it to the mother earth. Turning his face towards the south, Mukul marked the place three times with spade, and then the funeral pyre was arranged for burning. The dead body was bathed in water and it was decorated with sandal paste, honey was given to her mouth before placing the dead body on the pyre. Uttering the words ‘*Bala Hari, Hari Bol*’ three times, the dead body was turned face downwards and placed on the pyre. Mukul touched fire to its mouth with *Benona* (bundle of jute stick wrapped with straw at one end), and then the pyre was lit. It took four hours to turn the dead body into ashes. Some articles were left there as the Sukli believed that at night the spirit of the deceased would come and consume the articles.

After completion of the burning they brought a pitcher of water from the nearby pond to extinguish the fire. At the end, Mukul broke the pitcher. There was a big banyan tree in the cremation ground to which all of the funeral party showed their respect. Then they took some ash and reached home. On their way home they took bath in a pond. At 3 A.M. they came back with some ashes of the deceased from the cremation ground. There was a basil plant on the courtyard. A brass plate with different articles like one piece of gold, silver, a handful of grains, paddy, *Durba grass*, honey, coconut oil and a lighted lamp were placed in front of it. Mukul touched all the articles first and then he glanced at his image in a mirror. The other people who had gone to the cremation ground repeated the same. After that all of them ate soaked pigeon peas, (in Bengali *mug dal*) with molasses. By then it was about 4.30 a.m. During the last hours of the night they took little rest. On the next day, the 14th Poush (Dec—Jan) they did not prepare any food in their home. They

ate only chapatti and milk. On the third day the friends, who went to the cremation ground were invited to take dinner with the deceased's family where one item of bitter curry was a must with other dishes.

On the 4th day the priest named Bhibhuti Pahari came. At 11.30 a.m. Mukul with others went to the cremation ground and poured water on the pyre and built an image of the deceased in that place and covered it with a cloth and planted a basil plant there. On the eighth day Shankar went to Howrah to immerse (scatter) the ashes in the river Ganga for the salvation of the deceased's soul.

On the 11th day, the barbar, Kartick Manna came and pared off the nails and shaved the beard and hairs of the male members of the family. Mukul went to the pond and took his dip one hundred times there. The Brahman came on the 12th day and arranged the *Sraddh* ceremony by the side of a pond. The priest Bhibhuti Pahari brought ten priests more with him to make her *Atma* free from sin. Extra ten priests were essential to complete the *Sraddh* ceremony.

On the day at 10.30a.m. they arranged *Homa*, a ceremonial burying of clarified butter to give peace to her *Atma*, i.e., soul. Different articles were offered to the priests. All Brahmans of the village and all the villagers were invited to take part in the funeral ceremony.

V

These two ethnic groups are different culturally, with differences in their origins, languages, social statuses and many other aspects. The Suklis possess high status than the Bhogdas. The Suklis' position is just below the Sadgop or Mahisaya and above the Tanti¹², Dhoba, Napit¹³ and others lower castes in the caste hierarchy. The Bhogdas' social position is lower than the Suklis. They are just above the Napits and below the Tanti. Social distance from each group is highly significant as it is measured by the Social Distance Scale. Major differences have been observed from their economic inequalities in spite of their ethnic identities. The ethnic identities are gradually decreasing owing to various processes of cultural assimilation and social development.

With the passage of time these types of ethnic groups have accepted new identities, adopting the new cultural traits from the new settings, pushing back their forgotten memories and traditions into the dark history of the past. As a result, in course of their survival strategies these two groups are gradually forging themselves with the bigger stable social aggregates. Naturally the rites of passage which was performed earlier in a rigid sense, gradually disappears and new forms of ceremonial hallmarks will try to substantiate the demand of the modern societies appearing in the cultural matrix. A time will surely come that will erase the memory of the patchy past in the rolling waves of history, replacing the new hallmarks for their new identities.

Notes

1. 'Frontier' refers here as a western Frontier which is known as 'Samanta Bhuma' of Anga – Vanga – Kalinga , a region of ancient legends. According to Bhowmick (1976, 1), ' Major portions of the districts of Balasore and Mayurbhanj in the State of Orissa, the districts of Midnapur, Purulia, Bankura and Birbhum in the State of West Bengal and the districts of Singbhum, Dhanbad in the State of Bihar may safely be taken or considered as frontier tracts from geo-physical, political and cultural view points'.
 2. Durkheim developed the idea of the collective conscience in his book, *Division of labour in society* as ' The totality of beliefs and sentiments common to average citizens of the same society forms a determinate system which has its own life : one may call it collective or common conscience It is, thus, and entirely different thing from particular consciences, although it can be realized only through them'. (Durkheim 1893 / 1964 , 79 - 80)
 3. For details see [www.britanica.com/eb/topic/360252/Bronislaw Malinowski](http://www.britanica.com/eb/topic/360252/Bronislaw%20Malinowski)
 4. Members of Ethnic group generally differ from other ethnic group. 'Ethnic group might be a viable substitute ' (Suzuki , 2005 : 11). Any ethnic group consolidates its identity in three ways : first asserting on origin either in real sense or in mythical way ; secondly, attributing some unique socio- cultural traits perceived in cognition level or group; thirdly, due to interaction with other neighboring groups determining other perception about that group (Ray 2008 , 5).
 5. Mahishaya – a cultivating land holding caste of Bengal. They are the high caste.
 6. Sadgop – A land- holding agricultural community of Bengal who claim to be equal to the vaisya and superior to goala or milk man.
 7. Tili - an oil selling community belonging to Nava – sakha (nine castes)-a high caste group of Bengal.
 8. Teli , like Tili an oil pressing community.
 9. Pod – They generally belong to the scheduled caste of Bengal . Their occupation are fishing, cultivating etc.
 10. Dhoba – they are the servicing caste and their traditional occupation is washing clothes. They perform many rituals during the time of birth, death and marriage.
 11. Brahman – Brahmin are the high caste in the caste hierarchy.
 12. Tanti – They are the weaver community.
 13. Napit – A barbar caste of Bengal. The caste is a functional group but in caste hierarchy their position is low.
- N. B. Item No. 5 – 13 mentioned in the book by Pramanick, S.K. and Manna, S. (eds.) . 2007.

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