

In-Between Political Cultures and Creating New Homes

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Abstract

This paper attempts to see migrants' perception on some sentiments which are deep rooted in socio-political life of the host society. The study collects information from 100 Nepalis and 100 Telis from two sites (Pangei and Tellipati) of Manipur, India, inclusive of generations of migrants during 2014. The Nepali and Teli people come into the category of locally used description called 'Mayang' people who are from outside of Manipur. Migrants have to establish new homes and social networks to arrive at new sense of identity in between cultures. Questioning on adaptation, investment in social activities, political participation, with the host culture are important to harvest a sheer sense of inclusion. Manipuri society representing as the host society, interactions of 'Pangei Nepali' and the host society in rural set up on one hand; the Telis of Tellipati and the host society in urban set up on the other have been discussed.

Key Words: Migrants, Manipur, Identity, Adaptation, Culture, Inclusion

Introduction

Socio-economic factors are the driving forces leading to the production of a large number of migrants in every nook and corners of the globe. Phinney (1990) argued that there were two independent dimensions underlying people's cultural identity; individuals may have independent identities with respect to their cultures of origin and to their societies of settlement. This bi-dimensional conception has been presented frequently in the literature (Berry 1997). It has been portrayed as both a source of problems and as an opportunity for individuals and societies. It involves people having commitments of various kinds to more than a single nation so that individuals have varying identities, commitments and affiliations (Baubock, R., Heller, A., and Zolberg, A. 1996). In the framework of in-between cultures, two issues are raised: the degree to which people wish to maintain their heritage culture and identity; and the degree to which people seek involvement with the larger society. The larger

society means the recipient society in the study of migrants. Living between or among cultures necessarily demands a specific form of social adaptation. Socio-cultural adaptation refers to the individuals' social competence in managing their daily life in the intercultural setting. Kim and Ruben (1988) argue that a person goes through a process of stress and adaptation that leads to growth in intercultural communication skills over time.

Adaptation is defined as the process through which persons change their certain behaviours to facilitate survival in a new setting. It implies with different dimensions, may be biological, cultural, political, economic and psychological aspects. Socio-cultural adaptation enhances connectivity in terms of culture and civilisation. It is required to heap up the stock of knowledge, habits, social and personality attributes, creativity and ability for socio-economic adaptation to the system. This phenomenon is called accumulating human capital. In this modern capitalistic society, migrants' economic

success in the host society is basically determined by their human capital, education and the perception of their place of origin in comparison to the recipient mainstream society. The human capital theory states that individuals invest in themselves and their children through education in the hopes of giving higher economic return (Borjas 2006).

Manipur is one of states of the Indian Union. Myanmar lies to its east and three states on west, north and south. The arrival of the British was a key historical landmark for streams of migrants from different parts of the country. Despite, migration is a sensitive indicator of economic development; it is also an instrument of cultural diffusion, since migrants act as culture brokers in the process of cultural diffusion (Kaur 1996). Migrants are often inclined with identity concerns. Searching for identity under the prevailing system has anthropological significance since it tries to uncover the different aspects of culture. A.C Sinha (in Rai 2008) pointed out that Indian Nepalis have certain behaviour of seeking identity under Indian constitutional provisions. He raised up voices why Indian Nepalis unable to evolve a distinct personality of their own independent of Nepal.

The migrants, while creating new homes in the new milieu, they are more likely to form a synthetic culture and it will be noteworthy to identify how they redesign to acclimatize in the prevailing cultural environment. From the literature, it is learnt that a large component of culture is below the level of conscious awareness. In her book *Patterns of Culture*, Ruth Benedict (1934) pointed out that a culture is a consistent pattern of thought and action. This pattern shapes personality and behaviours of the members of a particular cultural group. This particular behavioural pattern forms a unique cultural pattern that distinguishes from that of others. She added that behaviours of

members may be estimated from their attitude and activities towards polity, economy and social institutions. Understanding a culture is an exploration of the images of the realities. In the eyes of post-modernists, it is the meaning of the words, images that rule the social system rather than the words, images. There is a need for incorporating post-modern philosophy while understanding the world views on migrants' culture.

Migrants behave in the tune of two meaning system, either in the tune of their origin culture or in the tune of the host culture. A culture usually works within certain space as super-individual and super-organism beyond the control of mankind. Coherently, Migrants also have their unique thoughts and actions which correspond to their patterns of culture. When the migrants experience intercultural transactions, there are culture shocks, feeling strange and sense of isolation. On the other side, the host society feels xenophobia, fear of competition, cultural interruption relating to norms, values. It, therefore insist the need of a delicate mechanism for positive aspect of integration. The concept of integration suggests an emphasis on unity and stability in a unified social order. Integration may be defined as – dynamic and structured process in which all members participate in dialogue to achieve and maintain peaceful social relations. It refers to the principles by which all members are related to one another.

In order to assess the migrants' integration to the host society, the Nepali village and Tellipati surrounded by Meitei community have been selected. The non assimilated migrants of Manipur and their generations are locally identified as the *Mayang*, meaning mix up population or people. The term '*Mayang*' which is used by the locals of Manipur generally sums up the people who came or who are from outside of Manipur. The Nepali and Teli also

come into this category of description. Nepalis and Telis are the migrants and children of migrants having their own distinctive cultures. The samples of 100 persons each from Tellipati and Pangei Basti have been selected. The purpose of the study is to see their perception on some sentiments which are deep rooted in socio-political life of the host society. The Pangei Nepalis one society in rural set up; the Teli society in urban set up are independently assessed in connection with their integration to the host society - the Manipuri society. The Telis in majority of them resides in the valley districts in vicinity to towns. The Nepalis in Manipur are mostly confined in Senapati district. Their settlement gradually expands southward up to Sugnu and Serou of Thoubal district.

Pangei Nepali

Pangei of Imphal East district is an area formed by collection of localities. Pangei Nepali is one of the localities. It is also resided as well as surrounded by the Meiteis and there are undergoing evidences of acculturation between the two cultures. The Meiteis are the majority people of the state. They embrace Hinduism with less evidences of rigid caste system. The Nepalis are also Hindus. They are also known as the 'Gorkhas' or 'Gorkhali'. Caste plays vital roles in their social organisation. The Pangei Nepalis are considered to be the first Nepali stream reached to the state accompanied by the British mostly as sepoys. After their retirement, they continued to settle in the state as permitted by the then king. Pangei Nepali basti is perhaps the oldest Nepali village in Manipur and then spread across other parts of Senapati district like Char Hajar, Kala Pahar etc. Now their stay in Manipur has acquired up to third or fourth generation. Having earned the trust of the British, the Gorkhas were detailed to protect the Britishers. It is evidenced from the history that some of them also came to the soil of Manipur

as cooks, milkmen, traders and agriculturists. Most of the people in Pangei Nepali Basti are agriculturists or do small scale business. Very less population get higher education; most of them are literate. Mean household size is 5 persons. A little more than half are having own cultivable land and some are doing cultivation in other's land. 72 persons say that having two children is the ideal whereas only 8 persons say having four and more than four is the ideal number of children.

The Pangei Nepali participates in many traditional ceremonies, festivals and social functions of the hosting Manipuri society. They can speak Manipuri efficiently. Their participation in *Marjing Lai Haraoba* (pleasing the god) of the Meitei is quite a cybernetic integration between the two. Participation implies their socio-cultural inputs both material and non-material culture on the contents of *Marjing Lai Haraoba*. Their household environment and social behaviours are very close to the host society. Inter-community marriage is not strictly prohibited. An assimilated sense of inclusion is observed to the people.

Telis of Tellipati

The locality in which the Telis predominantly reside is named as Telipati within Ward No. 26 of Imphal Municipal Council. The Telipati is located in the heart of Imphal city and this is considered as the only and the first settlement site of the Telis. The Telis in Manipur also have acquired up to fourth generation. This site comes under Imphal East district and they are mostly doing small and medium scale business in the city. The Telis are in actual a caste group of the Bhojpuri people according to Indian caste system. In Manipur the Telis become a community having different caste within the Teli identity. The state officially recognises Teli as a constituent of other backward class. The Bhojpuri people basically from the state of

Bihar had been infiltrated to the state of Manipur during post independence period.

The Telis claimed that many children born to Teli families in the state have become the son of the soil by mingling the children of other communities of Manipur. (The Sangai Express, Imphal, January 31, 2011). The locality of Telipati is facing a dispute with the neighbouring community at present. A portion of the locality has been claimed as a sacred historical place by a Meitei committee - *Ahongpung Historical Monument Protection Committee*. The dispute may be because of some political reasons which is beyond the control of the state and is highly sensitive. The Telis came to the state initially as traders and nowadays they have got diverse forms of occupation ranging from middle class business to high profile trade and commercial activities. Their houses are mostly owned by themselves and very few are staying on rent. Household size is nearly 7 to 8 members in a household. Most of them are living in as joint family. Unlike Meitei Hindus, Telis are more caste conscious.

Host Fear of Disintegration

Manipur witness a major change in population structure during the colonial period because of the arrival of migrants. Apart from population dynamics, there was a big socio-economic and political change such as introduction of new trade and commerce, replacement of local market by capitalist market, enforcement of new

political interests etc. There is cultural transaction in the state but lack of public education on the importance of diversity. Diversity of groups corresponds to diversity of resources such as knowledge, talents, skills, intelligence, judgement, wisdom and experiences possessed by them. These resources are a form of wealth which can be directed to accomplish the goals of the state or a portion thereof. Integration is a systematic compilation of resources making meaningful machinery. Lack of integration or improper arrangement of the resources derails ethnic groups; impregnate the dream of separate homeland due to sense of isolation. Since 1950s, several political upheavals towards the threat to the territorial integrity of Manipur were taken place. The All Manipur Student Union appeared in 1965 and put up voices about apprehension on population influx into the state. The host anxiety towards the territorial integrity is attributable to one tragedy historical event –gave away the Kabow Valley of Manipur to Myanmar. There is a tradition of negotiation of someone at expense of some other. A peace talk between the central government and group of militants is again pressurizing the territorial boundary. Since the threat to Manipur’s integrity is a burning political problem, issues of territorial integrity are highly sentimentalized in host politics. Migrants’ perception on these political issues needs to be observed through anthropological lens to scan their political pulse and temperament.

Table 1. Major Threats to Manipur’s Integrity

Possible Threats	Telis of Telipati	Pangei Nepali
Misgovernance	21	23
Lack of people's political participation	8	3
Lack of unity and sense of nationalism	29	39
Sub standard of people's mind	1	7
Conservative of Ethnic leaders	27	11
Can't say	14	17
Total	100	100

This table reveals heterogeneous responses in the opinion towards major threats of Manipur. Lack of unity, sense of nationalism; conservativeness of ethnic leader is found to be the main reasons. Among Telis, 29 think lack of nationalism as the main cause, 27 think conservativeness of ethnic leaders as related problem. Misgovernance is also considered a threat relating to the problem. 21 of Telis and 23 of Nepalis think Misgovernance is a threat to integrity. Manipur being a state of multi ethnic groups of different interest due to lack of concrete integrity mechanism, the state integrity is often threatened. The respondents agreed in majority that the state is facing problem due to lack of unity and sense of nationalism. Misgovernance and conservativeness of ethnic leaders are also the factors targeting to Manipur's integrity and communal harmony.

Host Fear of Unjust Dead

Quite a long period of time, the people of Manipur is experiencing several political conflicts, messy law and order due to insurgency, armed conflicts, and fake encounters and so on. This is due to lack of usual political and ethical standards in the existing system. This is why the state is declared as disturbed area. Theory suggests that illegitimate means might be appeared when there is breakdown of socio-political standards. Armed Forces Special Powers Acts, (AFSPA) 1958, are Acts of Indian Parliament initially designed to implement in the North Eastern India. The Acts have received criticism from many civil organisations for its alleged human

right violation in the name of suppressing insurgency. AFSPA since its implementation in Manipur, 1980, it is considered as a draconian law and has become one political issue. Many CBOs and students organisation are demanding to repeal this Act.

There are series of unsolved massacres in Manipur such as Heirangoithong massacre (1984), Tera Bazar massacre (1993), RMC massacre etc. as shadows of AFSPA. The *Malom Massacre*, in the year 2000 is one of the bloodshed incidents. Assam Rifles convoy was attacked near Malom by insurgents. In reacting to it, the troops shot at civilians at a nearby bus stop, killing 10 civilians. *Malom massacre* prompted Irom Sharmila to begin her fast to death that lasted till 2016. People of Manipur witness a number of fake encounters because of AFSPA that grants immunity to security forces when they operate in disturbed areas. Opinions on AFSPA, of the communities under study are gathered to know their involvement in host political aspiration. This indicator is just to know an overall political pulse of the respondents vis-a-vis the host mainstream political pulse. AFSPA has taken away lives of many innocent people and it has terrified all the civilians of Manipur for being insecure ways of life. This sense of insecurity scratches the political sentiments of the people. Civil organisations and intellectuals including legal experts have put up exhaustive criticisms at multiple episodes of space and time coupled with diverse forms of movements. However, they remain unsuccessful.

Table 2. Opinion on Armed Forces Special Power Act

Opinion on AFSPA	Telis of Telipati	Pangei Nepali
Important for peace and security	23	8
Important but need some modification	12	13
Unsuitable to insurgency imbroglio of state	8	1
Should be repealed as it creates armed conflicts	19	25
No comment	38	53
Total	100	100

More than half remain silent in giving comment on this opinion among the Telis. This could be probably due to more political sensitivity in the area upon the issue. To the Nepalis of Pangei, one-fourth think that ‘Armed Forces Special Power Act’ (AFSPA) should be repealed; about one-half feel it is not secure to give comment on it. A very few think this Act is important for the state. The Nepalis are relatively closer to the sentiments of the mainstream affected by AFSPA.

Social Involvement in Host Society

Pangei Nepali is so well established in their village and most of the time they participated in various socio-economic gatherings with the neighbouring community. Religion is no longer a dividing factor for distinctiveness of group. Opinions on acceptance of local club and *Pooja* committee are also observed. The level of education in Pangei village is quite similar with the state picture of rural set up. Their occupation is primarily agriculture; and hence investment in higher education is found to be either neglected or not affordable to the villagers.

Both of these migrants are having equal religion with the host society. They have equally main festivals such as Diwali, Durga Pooja, *Yaoshang* (Holi) etc. Pangei Nepalis also feel themselves as Manipuri Nepali as many of them belong to

third or fourth generation migrants. Theoretically, people without much psychological stress actively participate in festivals and social gathering by sharing quality time to organise the events. Manipuri *Thabal Chongba* dance (group dance of boys and girls), for example is a unique element of Holi festival where the Nepalis of Pangei also take part in organising it. They also take part in *Lai Haraoba* ceremony which means pleasing the god, one of the most traditional days-long festivals of the Manipuri society.

The Telis are also celebrating most of Hindu festivals of the state and the ways of participating in such aforementioned festivals are more or less similar with that of Pangei Nepalis. Thus they involve in various unique elements of Manipuri festivals. Their membership in the local committee for organising social events such as *Yaoshang* Sports (during Holi festival, Meitei localities organised local level entertaining sports), *Thabal Chongba*, Durga Pooja has been studied to identify how deeply their socio-cultural ways of life are rooted into the soil of Manipur. Local Committee formed is usually for the purpose of organising social events in the locality in a voluntary pattern. This is also a key factor for determining the level of integration.

Table 3. Membership in Local Committee (*Lup*)

Any committee you join	Telis of Telipati	Pangei Nepali
Not interested to join <i>Lup</i>	17	12
Not yet but I will join later	19	7
No such union is formed	3	1
Yes I am a member	25	63
Not necessary for me	36	17
Total	100	100

Local level committee are very effective in making group decision. It is also very helpful in the integration process. The Telis has got sizeable number of people who don't think it is necessary to join local level committee. They

are traders with strong belief on capitalism. They are therefore more concern with economic activities rather than sense of solidarity through cultural organisation. The Telis have their own temple complex for recreation as well as for

establishing a link with their original tradition, Vaishya Youth Club and Pooja Committee for various purposes. Like the host society, the Pangei Nepali also formed Meira Paibi (women torch bearers) association to control substance abuse and to prevent local disputes. Membership tends to be higher in Pangei Nepali as compared to Telis of Telipati. Acculturation process between the Nepalis and the Meitei community is thus, evidently observed. Their ways of food habit, dress and ornaments, housing pattern, communicating gestures are well integrated with the Meitei community. They have also established an integrative form of political and economic institution. A strong sense of solidarity is observed by virtue of their face to face relationship between Pangei Nepalis and the host society.

Nationalism – the Need of Manipur

The political system of Manipur is largely affected due to lack of senses in nationalism,

ethnic identity struggles and struggles over limited resources. Less involvement and participation of migrants in social gatherings makes them hard to participate in socio-political activities and decision making.

The present situation of the Manipuri Political Culture, very much needs the involvement of migrant communities. Some of them share the fear of disintegration which is looming in the minds of the people of Manipur and some aren't part of any of it. If we look into the whole picture of Manipur, clearly, there is a cultural divide. We can consider that the migrants and the host society have been able to co-exist together through generations, sharing and spreading their roots into the land of Manipur. How much of the Nepali or Teli stands in their mindsets as Manipuri Nepali or Manipuri Teli and how much involved they are, has a critical impact in the integration of our society.

Table 4. Strengthening the Solidarity and Nationalism

Ways to Strengthen Solidarity & Nationalism	Telis of Telipati	Pangei Nepali
Social reforms	17	8
Develop network platform sharing views free and fair	19	41
Remove communal acts	13	9
Introduction of resource development actions	11	6
Improve political system	25	21
Can't say	15	15
Total	100	100

Need for strengthening solidarity and nationalism is ideally responded. Out of the possible actions to arrive to this ideology, developing a network and platform in order to share opinion is mostly preferred. Improving political system is also commonly mentioned strategy for solidarity and for building up of nationalism. Developing a common platform is entrusted to 41 persons among the Nepalis. The Telis are relatively having more trust toward political solutions for most of the social cause. Therefore, improving political system is

preferred by one fourth of the population. The responses from the two communities – the Nepalis and the Telis reveal that responses are more homogeneous among the Nepalis and it is rather heterogeneous among the Telis. The Nepalis and the Telis become members of the state, but some of them are temporary migrants and yet to be integrated. Their participation to socio-political life ways is by and large integral to the neighbouring communities.

One Nepali from the Pangei area says they have been settling in Manipur for many generations.

Manipur is his motherland. They have never thought of leaving this place. Sons of the Soil, as they call themselves are because they are by and large adapted to Manipur. Between the Telis as well, there is no shortage of this same sense of belonging to this land. Governance and Political system is perceived as major role player in mechanising the mainstreaming of the migrants.

Obstacles in Manipur to Progress

Manipur has got a handful of socio-economic hindrances that articulately decelerate the progress of the state. It is publicly aware that corruption, favourism, insurgency, underemployment, substance abuse, ethnic conflicts, communal disharmony are on rise in the state. There are several agitations, strikes

and curfews, mass rallies affecting to the general day to day lives of the people. So far, there is less evidence of political movement underpinning the sense of nationality or integral identity without hurting the sentiments of any of the ethnic group. Contrarily, the movements by an ethnic community opposed by another ethnic group, the movements by some CBOs, opposed by another organisation has been continuously appearing in the state. In such a scenario of political cleavages, the affirmative participation of the migrants and the host society would be definitely helpful in bringing peace and progress of Manipur. There are many obstacles to the progress of Manipur and it is the right time also to be familiar with the viewpoints of the migrants comprising of different communities.

Table 5. Obstacle to the Progress of Manipur

Obstacle to the Progress of Manipur	Telis of Telipati	Pangei Nepali
Economic control by migrants	3	4
Lack of guidance, counselling by majority community	12	26
No work culture and laziness	41	18
Unemployment of highly qualified youths	20	27
Imbroglia insurgency	10	11
Can't say	14	14
Total	100	100

According to their perception, obstacles to the progress of Manipur could be lack of work culture and unemployment of highly qualified youths. Lack of guidance, lack of proper counselling by the majority community is also a factor for the same cause. There are 41 Telis saying that no work culture is the main obstacle to the progress of Manipur. One fourth of the Nepali thinks it is due to lack of guidance from the side of majority community. Both Telis and Nepalis are hardworking people but they hardly invest in higher education. The Telis are having passions completely in doing business of retailing, hotels, supply of goods etc. Apart from it, there are many other semi skill migrant labourers who are searching for host economy.

Conclusion

Migrants form a fusion type of culture by synthesizing with that of recipient society. The

Migrants' perceptions are often the result of the combination of two cultures. When they first started migrating to Manipur, they were registered under the Foreigner's Act. So, in the mindsets of the local people, they are still perceived as semi- foreigners. In the present time, there are lots of Nepali and Teli families who are 3rd and 4th generations of the ones who first migrated in the state.

Both the Nepalis and Telis are caste societies. Manipuri society became caste society only after adoption of Hinduism in the 18th century. Even though, caste system is there in Manipur, caste rules are not strictly followed because of the domination of the pre-existing cultural pattern of the people. On the other hand, caste system seems to be diluted among the Telis and the Nepalis as are influenced by the host society. Formation of *Meira Paibi* (torch

bearers, a form of social organisation of women that functions in preventing substance abuse as well as to prevent other socio-political deviances, armed conflicts etc. in the locality) by the Nepali is an example of diffusion originating from the host society and it operates in the Nepali Basti for preventing substance abuse in the locality.

When studying the third and the fourth generations of these migrants, we can witness two different kinds of thought, by adopting the concept of Robert Redfield (1956) who was the champion of 'Little and Great Tradition' model which describe the structure of tradition, inclusive of both cultural and social structures. Firstly, when they look at themselves in the small context of Manipur only, they consider themselves as a little community. In the other sense, when it comes to the Indian mainstream, taking into consideration their sheer larger number, they see themselves belonging to a 'Greater Tradition' and the host society to 'Little Tradition'. And from inside of these two philosophies, the migrants react to the Manipuri host society. The first thought, shows the migrants as a minority. And this makes them to be in a position to keep the host culture as an essential connection. The need for participation and inclusion is also increased. The migrants have been relatively a part of the Manipuri political issues. They have shared some of the sentiments of the host society. The ones that have been able to grasp an idea of the sentiments of the host society are trying to adapt by compromising between the boundaries of their original culture and the recipient society's culture.

Their second way of thinking, which is in respect to their larger population and culture in the Indian mainstream, they consider themselves to be a part of a much bigger culture

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in the national mainstream and feels closer to them. So, with this kind of mindset that they are a part of the great tradition, they try to preserve their own original culture and at the same time, prevent assimilation. And in their effort for adaptation into the host society, they take part and involve in the socio political organizations, but keeping in their minds that they are part of a bigger tradition. And we can observe a reflection of their unwillingness to be farther away from their bigger Indian mainstream. These two thoughts are evident in the mindsets of the Nepali and the Teli who have been in Manipur for generations. This is how they manage in between cultures. The Telis and Nepali claiming themselves as sons of the soil, stand for Manipuri nationality. Yes, some of them are proud to call themselves as Manipuri. It surely is a good sign and to take actions to promote this, launching researches for a deeper understanding would be beneficial.

Migrants, who are aware and understands the host society's wants and scholars and stake holders from the host society, who is conscious of the two perspectives of the migrants, needs to come together to sensitize the masses and give public education regarding the people's sentiment towards AFSPA, the fear of disintegration, the issues hindering the development of our state and all other problems, to properly examine and work together to find a solution. The migrants in between the little and greater traditions in one hand and the host society in one hand have to see themselves as parts of larger whole. Spirit of nationalism creates national integration by overlooking the ethnic distinctiveness. Otherwise, isolated form of socio-political identity inherent with 'ethnicism' will emerge which may again hamper the process of integration.

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