**Doctoral thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Behavioural and Cultural Studies
Heidelberg University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy (Dr. phil.)
in Anthropology**

Title of the thesis

Whose city? Ethnic communities in Kolkata, India: An exploration into decentralization of urban governance system in preserving their cultural identity

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year of submission
2019

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Preface

I have grown up in a small university town, Santiniketan. This town is not only quite famous in the country but considered to be special internationally as a niche for art and music. As a result, we have seen people from different parts of the world, happily mingling with the locals and calling Santiniketan their home. It was the perfect equilibrium I started to seek outside my small town as well. Integration seems to be organic yet as I left to study Urban Planning, I was suspicious of its superficiality. The cultural diversity reflected on the spatial landscape was fascinating, still, the inherent complexity was unavoidable. Especially in the context of India, the success of bringing order through multicultural policies has always made me curious. My thesis focuses on the two different but mutually dependent aspects: first is how a community defines its identity with respect to being a minority, legally as well as socially. The second is, this understanding of narratives recognizes the role of myself, as a researcher. I have tried to understand how the members of the diasporic Indian-Chinese community of Kolkata see identity. While discussing the legislative evolution of minority rights in India, I have tried to locate how they position terms such as culture, ethnicity, and minority. This thesis focuses on the reflection of the broader context of the city on the narratives. How being minority is seen from the perspective of the community which they narrate to a person who is not from their community, but not unfamiliar either. This thesis depicts identity narratives of community on 'being minority' while my role as a researcher has been interpreted in this process.

Chapter One: Minority? If You Say So

1.1. Introduction

The wind has fallen off, so there was not a fleck of white visible on the surface, and with the afternoon sun glaring down, the water was as dark and still as the cloak of shadows that covers the opening of an abyss. Like the others around her, Deeti stared in stupefaction: it was impossible to think of this as water at all - for water surely needed a boundary, a rim, a shore, to give it shape and hold it in place?

— Amitav Ghosh, *Sea of Poppies, pp. 395*

The awe of the unknown that overwhelms the minds of the migrants is timeless. Whether it was the colonizers crossing the Atlantic or the Punjabis from India seeing snowfall for the first time in Canada, the vastness of the unknown, unprecedented experiences of the new land has been overwhelmingly immense. From this point onwards, life takes a different turn. The nexus of acceptance, rejection, preservation, and hesitation starts to unravel in the new country. This process continues for generations, giving shape to diasporic identities. From this perspective, the inquisitiveness that one has about one's identity is not only an academic inquiry but also an existential reality. Does the statutory title of minority change the existing identity narratives? The introspection, which helps in assembling the fragments of everyday experiences, is it tinted with the judgement they receive formally/informally – socio-cultural acceptance, rejection, and adjustments?

Ideally, crossing the border – acquiring new citizenship (in most of the cases after surrendering the previous one) and living in a country for generations exploring new opportunities – appears to be a linear process. The process of moving to a new country involves struggle and turmoil, but it also reflects aspiration of a better life of peace and prosperity. But does it confirm integration and complete oblivion about their origin and the journey? For a diaspora, the situation is more complicated. Often after years of living in a country, a diasporic community strives for its identity to be recognized, and simultaneously, struggles to define its identity. Which perspective describes the identity of a diasporic community? Is this only a romanticism of longing for the land left behind, or a cultural connexion with the homeland? Or a juxtaposition of collective and individual identity? Or the strife between the majority and the minority communities? The experiences of diasporic communities as minorities and their journeys, continuing for generations, are fascinating where their imaginations often overpower the real-world particularities. For many

communities, heroic tales of a glorious past, stories of a land of abundance make the present difficult state a little bearable, giving them hope that they will overcome all the hurdles like the way their ancestors did many years ago. Mostly anthropological and diasporic fictions are the creative mediums to understand the history and sentiments of a diaspora, which talk about a state of dual or even multiple identities. In diasporic literature like *Midnight's Children* (Rushdie, 1981); *Interpreter of Maladies* (Lahiri, 1999) and *The Namesake* (Lahiri, 2004), and the *Ibris Trilogy* by Amitav Ghosh (2008; 2011; 2015), we find the post-colonial narrative of diasporic experiences strangely appealing because the stories of ordinary lives and socio-political turmoil are not vaguely distant – at the same time, we realize that this turbulence of juxtaposition of cultures is a part of us, our lives. The cultural mosaic of a country is vibrant with the contrasting socio-cultural characteristics and multiple complexities of identities. Inherently, the complexities are not devoid of the undercurrent of globalization at the national scale or the overpowering informal politics. The process of classifying communities into minorities is not only introducing a set of policies but involves a plethora of vagaries shaping their identities.

My thesis aims to explore this jeopardized version of identity – how identities are formed, performed, and narrated in relation to the structure of legislative safeguard measures or the minority policies. Diasporic identities have a non-figurative complexity in them – the dilemma of dual identity, the overpowering effect of globalization, citizenship, and the idea of the utopic homeland, all have a snowballing effect on the perception of diasporic identity or the attempt to define it. Can a legislative protective shell retain all these complexities and assure a supportive system? Moreover, how do the communities perceive this minority recognition – do they accept it or contest it?

So, what is the significance of looking into identity narratives? Why should identities be elaborated? I will present my argument that there is a contextual significance of this subject both from the perspective of on-ground practice and academic theories. Moreover, there is a growing disjuncture between the academic endeavours regarding identity politics and socio-political reactions. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is one of the most significant documents to establish the guidelines for securing human rights all over the world. It states:

> "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political,

jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty." (United Nations General Assembly, 1948)

On this platform of non-discrimination, the Declaration mentions in several articles that movements should not be restricted, "everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state" (Article 13:1) and "everyone has the right to leave any country including his own, and to return to his country" (Article 13:2). Ironically, despite such safeguard measures, minority issues are the most distressing news that we come across every day, constantly reminding us about the growing rigidity of state boundaries, increasing xenophobia and global concern over our collective future. The relevance of minority issues[1] in today's world is enormous and so is the scope of locating and examining the issues from various perspectives.

We are witnessing a refugee crisis in Europe and its far-reaching impact on political decisions, social acceptance, and economic opportunities. One of the many reasons behind Britain exiting the European Union is said to be the publicly expressed deep-rooted xenophobia. Connecting acts of violence and terrorism with the immigrants and their religious beliefs is a common practice these days. The anti-immigrant propaganda of right-wing political parties is increasingly becoming popular. However, it would be wrong to assume only the newly arrived immigrants face the challenges, after decades of living in a country a diaspora faces existential questions about their diasporic identity. All over the world, minority issues are a lived reality, be it the years of civil war in West Africa, disrupting and devastating the lives of civilians and making them seek shelter in other countries, or the racial or ethnic discrimination of communities in South East Asia (the much-discussed case of the Rohingyas[2]). Among these incidents of violent discrimination with collapsing law and order,

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[1] At this point the term 'minority' has been introduced in a generic sense. I will discuss later in this chapter the details of the categorization. Kymlicka and many other authors advocating multiculturalism have used the term for defining minority groups – namely, national minority, indigenous people and immigrants. Refugees are considered to be in a slightly different situation as they are minorities, but their trans-country movement is involuntary in nature. Here discuss the issues related to minorities from a holistic perspective. Later, when introducing the diasporic Chinese community, I will explain which minority communities they would belong to from the perspective of multiculturalism. Moreover, I will talk about the concept of multiculturalism which in a broader spectrum includes all the marginalized communities on the basis of gender and sexuality.

[2] The Rohingyas are a Non-Buddhist minority group from Myanmar. In 2015, a large number of Rohingya people started to travel by boats to other South-East Asian countries to avoid discrimination, torture and planned genocide. The people on these boats were not allowed to enter into Malaysia, causing them to remain on boats for days without proper food and water. Other countries like Thailand and Gambia agreed to give them shelter. This incident was a strong example of a case where basic human rights were violated and denied, causing huge international uproar.

and political unrest causing people to flee, the other side of the story emerges, where people are becoming increasingly insecure with 'others' who appear to be different from the majority. On the other hand, while securing social justice, what should be the approach of the state? Does it acknowledge group-specific cultural rights? Or treat every individual as the same? As many regressive systems like child marriage or gender discrimination are persisting in the name of freedom of minority rights, this choice can be critical. This unfathomable difference between cultures is probably not unprecedented; diasporic history has seen violence and intolerance numerous times before. Probably what marks the difference now is that in recent years, these situations have been reoccurring in different countries around the globe. There is an unavoidable similarity between the conservative political agendas regarding immigrants and marginalized groups across the globe. The invariable debate is about the ideal political model which can assure peaceful coexistence.

The different schools of thoughts of political ideologies such as liberalism, the welfare state, multiculturalism, or cosmopolitanism provide alternative explanations of socio-political undercurrents of group relations[3]. In 1975, for example, Sweden officially adopted a multicultural policy – a policy that gives the immigrants a right to enjoy all the privileges of a welfare state like the citizens. At the same time, the immigrants are free to make their decision on their cultural choice. Among the Asian counties, The Constitution of India states provisions for identifying and securing the rights of minority groups. Other countries with a legislative acceptance of multiculturalism in the form of minority policies are Australia, Canada[4]. On the other hand, France follows the egalitarian welfare state model which does not recognize separate policies for any community[5]. On the global map, many of the countries have adopted multilateralism or reshaped their policies for making them more accommodating for cultural communities. Nevertheless, the numbers do not guarantee the success of multiculturalism as the ideal political model. Multiculturalism faces criticisms regarding the basis for categorization and the hegemonic role of the state. Moreover, from another perspective the rightists find multiculturalism to be a threat to the unity of the nation-state. For India, there is another dimension to this argument – the hierarchy of the caste system. The caste system does not only naturalize the social categorization, but I would argue that in the

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[3] The political models will be discussed in a later section of this chapter.

[4] For reference, http://www.queensu.ca/mcp/immigrant-minorities/evidence/australia (accessed on 28/09/2017 at 20:00 IST); http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/sweden-restrictive-immigration-policy-and-multiculturalism (accessed on 28/09/2017 at 20:05 IST).

[5] https://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/mar/04/france-older-people-care-welfare-state-spending-priority accessed on (28/09/2017 at 20:08 IST)

context of India and its legislative reforms, the subject of cultural/ethnic minority group received very little attention[6].

Despite the contrasting situation on the ground, in academia, the post-modernist era celebrates diversity. Different theorists have given their views on the juxtaposition of the dynamics of cultural interactions and the global economic forces. The postcolonialists and the postmodernists (Spivak, 1988; Bhabha, 1997) have fiercely questioned the objectivity of the understanding gathered about the third world or the colonized with the eyes of the western world. These philosophical schools have also liberated the epistemological foundations of the concepts like ethnicity, identity, and race. Discourses like identity politics, politics of representation, and cultural hybridity question the process of representation and ask for a cross-disciplinary approach for a critical perspective. Appadurai (1996) and Hall (1990) explored the cultural dynamics. Appadurai (1996) describes this chaos through segregating in different 'scapes' as he calls it. Through these scapes, he elaborates on multiple dimensions of cultural interaction. From a different perspective, Bhaba (1994) considers cultural hybridity as an outcome of colonization. Spivak (1988) states that the western perspective of looking into the third world is never purely subjective but involves the interest of the colonizers. These narratives reflect the superficiality of the perspective which brings out the objective of re-establishing the rights of the westerners for economic profits. Can the rulers represent the oppressed? Essentially all these post-colonial and post-structuralist works provide sets of alternative perspectives to understand the dynamics of human societies – the economic benefits and political motives along with the historicity.

Why is it that since time immortal, accommodating a new group of people or a marginalized section of society has been such a challenging task? For the diasporic community or rather (initially) the immigrant community, whether the movement is voluntary or forced, the challenges are manifold, and they continue for years. How a diasporic community becomes a minority community can be understood from various perspectives.

1.2. Research Question

The theories inherently have the commonality of the objective of understanding the array of dimensions that constitute an identity and the particular mode in which a state operates in recognizing/not recognizing, treating group identities. As I have mentioned in the preceding

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[6] I will discuss the historical context of the caste system in Chapter Three and the legislative measures in Chapter Four.

section, multiculturalism being one of the most widely practiced political philosophies in different countries assures group-specific rights. A multicultural state recognizes the group-specific cultural identities and accommodates them through minority policies. Though multiculturalism faced severe criticisms for the hegemonic role of the state in categorizing communities, it remains as the most practiced political ideology guaranteeing minority rights. My objective is to understand the identity narratives in the context of legislative recognition as a minority in a multicultural state.

This thesis provides another alternative critical perspective into the relationship of a multicultural state and minority groups. My thesis asks the question: how does a multicultural state like India[7] accommodate the various diasporic communities based on their cultural distinctiveness? Subsequently, how does this process (recognition of a minority, policy structure and social reaction) influence the narratives of identities of individuals from these communities? Do minority recognition and group-specific minority policies play a role in defining their version of their identity? I will focus on exploring the role of cultural identity and how cultural identities are formed through introspection, social projection, community attachment, and most importantly as a hybrid diasporic culture. Furthermore, I will look into how narratives take shape as intertwined tales of reflection of collective and individual identities.

The study is based on an examination of the Chinese diaspora of Kolkata. I will try to answer the research question and the trajectories in the context of this community. The Chinese community has a long association with this once vibrantly cosmopolitan city[8]. They first started to immigrate and settle in Kolkata during the early eighteenth century because of the civil unrest in different provinces of China. As a hardworking community, the Chinese were able to quickly establish their businesses in Kolkata. They even acquired a near-monopoly over certain occupations like tanning, dentistry, and carpentry and the British colonizers began depending on them for the kinds of work that usually a Bengali would not take up because of the restrictions of the caste hierarchy. After the Sino-Indian War in 1962, the Chinese started to leave Kolkata. Most of the people from this community have already settled in Australia and Canada. Among all the diasporic communities of Kolkata, this community is still surviving with a fading population. It identifies itself with the

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[7] I will discuss India's legislative history of its multiculturalist policies for minority rights in Chapter Four.
[8] In Chapter Three, I will discuss the socio-cultural and economic history of this community and their gradual shift of locations through the years.

characteristics of a diasporic community. For almost three hundred years, they have managed to have their cultural distinctiveness. Interestingly, this community could have sought the provisions reserved for the minorities (as they come under both the linguistic and religious minority categories), but they have not availed any.

Since the focus is to look into the perspective of the people of Chinatown, I have found the ethnographic fieldwork technique most suitable where I would be able to contextualize my role as a researcher. *Writing Culture* (Clifford, 1986) questions the conventional idea of the role of the researcher, techniques of fieldwork, and culture as a generic term. The introduction of reflexivity, objectivity, and representation in ethnography through this postmodernist approach liberated the conventional way of looking at ethnographic research. To conduct a people-centric study, I have found this argument appropriate for understanding and representing the narratives while placing myself as a part of the study.

For over a year, I have interacted with this community extensively – collecting their narratives, accompanying them in their daily life, and joining them in celebrating festivals. Participant observation was my primary method for understanding the community and its activities. However, focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews were also a part of the study. The objective is to understand, as I have mentioned, how the legislative and social recognition as a minority influence the identities of this community. Here, by the term 'identities', I imply the rhetoric of individual identities as well as that of the collective identity. How do the people from the minority groups perceive their identity and the identity-building process through facilitating policies? How is culture defined when it is being emphasized as an identity-building component? The significance of cultural identity or rather this hybrid cultural identity is understood from the perspective of the community (as a minority, as a cultural minority, not as any minority, and so forth). The identity-building process is seen here as an amalgamation of various trajectories – the everyday interaction with the larger society, the sharing of common neighborhoods, citizenship and nationality, and community attachments.

The distant aim of this academic endeavour is to find an objective appraisal of a legislative structure in India that is considered to be successful in conveying the message that minority safeguard measures are a package of holistic solutions. I want to seek answers regarding such measures from the communities themselves, for whom the policies are constructed and implemented. Do special treatments as minorities secure a better life for these communities? Does this, on the contrary, intensify social segregation? Understanding the efficiency of

policy structure from the perspective of the community and its cultural identity is a task that requires a comprehensive and subjective elucidation – one that requires bridging the gap between legal particularities and lived experiences.

1.3. Structure of the Thesis

It is evident from the theoretical framework that the thesis deals with multiple intertwined concepts. It is structured keeping in mind the necessity of an extensive study of the background while simultaneously relating it to the relevant concepts. Chapter One deals with the basic concepts, questions, and linkages. I put forward my research questions, their background, and their relevance in the context of the present-day social and political scenario. Starting with the theoretical discussions regarding diaspora, cultural identity, and multiculturalism, this chapter introduces the concepts as a background to the narratives which will later be described extensively at the analysis stage. The concepts such as diaspora and its cultural identity have been introduced to understand the formation of a particular community as a minority. Simultaneously, this discussion about diaspora as a minority community has been contextualized in a multicultural nation-state, where the political-administrative perspective has been explored as it is experienced by the community. Culture or cultural identity here has been understood as the bridging element between these two separate discussions.

Chapter Two introduces the area of the study – the Chinatowns of Kolkata, as well as the methodology suitable for this particular socio-cultural environment. The objective of this brief section is to recount my initial encounter with the locality and the community to present the challenges along with the basic task of reassessing my research methodology. I will justify the ethnographic fieldwork techniques I have used to address the research question. In this chapter, I have discussed my role as a researcher in a city with which I am very much familiar. Introducing myself as a part of the study given an understanding of the ways these narratives have been reflected in this thesis. Placing myself in the process is an integral part of the study which also involves explaining my unique role where I belong to the majority. This aspect does not let my work qualify for the native anthropology category, while at the same time, makes my stand a unique one where the community recognizes me as a part of their everyday commonality of interaction with a Bengali. I have described how my relationship with the community found its own balance over time.

Chapter Three focuses on the history of the Chinese community in Kolkata – the early migration in the colonial period, its socio-cultural role in the colonial society, and the post-independence transformation. Simultaneously the story of the Chinese community has been narrated against the backdrop of the evolution of Kolkata as a city from being the colonial cosmopolitan capital to the cultural hub that it still is. This chapter aims to describe the change in the socio-political landscape of the city along with the concurrent changes in the lives of the ethnic communities that reside in it. In the eighteenth century, Calcutta was a polyglot settlement, comprising British, Armenian, Portuguese, Dutch, French, Jewish, Chinese, Greek, and native Indian inhabitants. There were visibly distinguishable spatial communities like the varied European community and the Bengali community. An identifiable socio-ecological zone was located between the Indian and European areas. It reflected the intermediate economic and social role of the Anglo-Indians, the Portuguese, the Armenians, the Jews, the Parsis/Parsees[9], the Chinese, and the Greeks in the functioning of the city (Kosambi & Brush, 1988). These inhabitants formed communities, whose location, structure, and constituency changed over time while retaining what at a first glance appears to be a core identity. Standing at this point in history, where almost all of these communities are now extinct, I want to explore their histories – of how they developed – to understand their present. Relating it with the research question, this section has discussed how this community has been reflected in various archival documents. I would argue that the stereotypical perspective of looking at the community had already formed during the colonial period where both the Bengali and English writers often considered this community to be mysterious. These accounts help in understanding the present socio-cultural position of the community.

Chapter Four talks about India as a multicultural state and its minority policies. This chapter focuses on the historical reference of such policies, the role of the nation-state, and the legislative definition of the minority in the Constitution of India and state policies. I will try to understand the legislative definition of a minority through the theoretical framework of multiculturalism. This section discusses the almost unchallenged view of India as a multicultural state and how it has been perceived in relation to the basic promises of multicultural policies made by liberal democracies. The primary objective here is to locate the evolution in the meaning of 'minority' since India's independence through the articles of

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[9] The Parsi/Parsees are Zoroastrians who migrated to India from Persia in approximately in 600 CE. However, the Parsis settled in Kolkata much later, in the 18th century. The Parsis are considered to be an affluent community with their remarkable entrepreneurship qualities. (see more, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/parsi-communities-ii-in-calcutta Accessed on 22/08/2018 at 16:22 IST)

the Constitution, The Constitutional Assembly Debate, and several legal cases and state legislations. In this context, the common interpretation of minority as scheduled castes and tribes has been parallelly discussed. The historical progress of argument for the two different groups (based on ethnicity or culture and caste characteristics) provides an understanding of how communities have been legislatively defined. Moreover, through this, it can be understood how fundamental political choices have changed the way reservation policies of vulnerable groups have been formed and implemented.

Chapter Five presents the narratives of the community members on identity and perceptions of being a minority. The observations mentioned in this chapter are derived from my extensive interaction with the community. This chapter addresses the pivotal question of my thesis: 'How do communities perceive their collective identity?' The objective is to understand how the community (as an amalgamation of individual identities) sees the identity-building process and how they position culture in this process which is if the collective introspection of the Chinese community recognizes this culture as their identity. Concepts like home, belonging and memory have been understood as the various dimensions of the diasporic identity of the community.

Chapter Six or the conclusion summarizes the findings, examining how they have helped throw light upon my research questions. The objective of this thesis is to find an appropriate theoretical approach to understand the identity narratives of the people and identify various factors shaping them. It also examines the influence of the minority policies of the state on them. The reciprocal process between the two is explored as it is being experienced. This comprehensive chapter displays if this objective has been fulfilled by addressing the initial research questions posited.

1.4. Theoretical Framework

Parekh argues that the marginalized groups are commonly criticized about how they use "abstract and quasi-absolutist language of identity rather than pursuing their objectives in the more familiar and manageable universalist language of equal rights and interests" (Parekh, 2008, p. 33). In the present global situation of different political ideologies and the resultant minority policies, one needs to acknowledge the process through which communities turn into minorities. Does this recognition ensure equal rights? Moreover, can group-specific rights also nourish regressive practices and eventually jeopardize the effective functioning of the state? What significance does the collective identity of these communities have on the rhetoric

of government-community dialogue? All these questions call for an effort to understand the community's perspective of their identity – the different versions, dimensions, and dilemmas. I will provide a framework of the concepts structuring my research and explain how these concepts are intertwined in this section. It elucidates the recent developments and applicability of these concepts. The research questions 'how does a diasporic community perceive its collective identity and how do minority policies of a multicultural state influence their views' require an understanding of two discourses and their interrelation.

In the first section, I will discuss the concept of diaspora – how diaspora and cultural identity (alternatively ethnic identity) are related. I will present the chronological development of the discourse of diaspora, the concept of identity, and the trajectories of related theories. The second section discusses the development of multiculturalism as a political philosophy and contextualizes the study from a multiculturalist approach. I will discuss the recent schools of thought such as politics of identity and politics of redistribution and recognition to explain the dynamics of socio-political interactions at the global as well as local level. The concept of culture has been discussed in the context of multiculturalism or as part of the alternative theories and extensions of the initial idea of multiculturalism. In the process of discussing the concept of identity, culture, and politics of representation, I will emphasize that the postmodernist approach ties all the different discourses together. This philosophical shift calls for a critical understanding of identity politics. I have utilized the postmodern perspective to elucidate the objectivity of my research question with the concepts like multiculturalism, diaspora, identity, and culture as well as justify my research methodology.

1.4.1. Diaspora

Historically, the term 'diaspora' has been in use for a long time, but it has been academically inferred only in recent years. Diaspora originates from the Greek word *diaspeirō* (*dia* 'across' and *speirō* 'scatter'). There are several discourses regarding the 'ideal' definition of diaspora. The epistemology of the term diaspora evolved from the conventional categorization of the diasporic characteristics (Safran, 1991) to postcolonial diaspora (Gilroy, 1996; Hall, 1990) which takes a discursive abstract route to capture the multiple layers of diasporic identity. Diaspora as a concept of academic discourse started with a search for a definition that incorporates all the aspects of diasporic experiences. Safran suggests six characteristics of a diasporic community:

"1) They or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original "center" to two or more "peripheral," or foreign, regions; 2) They retain a collective memory, vision or myth about their original homeland—its physical location, history, and achievements; 3) They believe that they are not—and perhaps cannot be—fully accepted in their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it; 4) They regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they are or their descendants would (or should) eventually return—where conditions are appropriate; 5) They believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and 6) They continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship". (Safran, 1991, pp. 83-84).

Safran has provided a comprehensive definition of diaspora. Safran's definition does incorporate the common and timeless aspects of diasporic experience, still does not recognize the unique history of each group, that each diasporic community might not have all of these aspects. Thus, identifying a diasporic community according to these criteria can be misleading as each diasporic community is unique in its experiences and its relationship with the host society. Each of such reciprocal relationships produces unique forms of cultural practices. Furthermore, certain aspects of this definition might not be applicable in the global context anymore, such as the idea of returning to the homeland[10]. The phenomenal change in the global socio-political scenario and the advancement of technology have made the world a global village where people are more connected through social media.

Scholars like Clifford (1994), Cohen (1997), Mishra (2007) question the conventional way of defining a diaspora. According to Clifford, technological advancements have led to the practice of maintaining a "border relation with old country" among the diasporic communities (Clifford, 1994, p. 304). This has made it possible for these communities to maintain close contact with the homeland which has changed their relations with the host country. These changes have been seen across multiple communities and are not specific to

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[10] Globalization along with technical innovations have changed the previous notion of 'connection with homeland'. Moreover, a transnational tie is not necessary for a diasporic community to retain its diasporic characteristics. I have discussed the concept of de-territorialisation in this context in Chapter Five.

a geophysical reference. I would argue that social media forms an interactive space where any physical connection with the homeland is not necessary to be conversant with the homeland. Moreover, the information available through electronic media can help to create a semi-imaginary image of a homeland – a second-hand experience of the lived reality in their homeland. Mishra explores the literature of the Indian diaspora to understand the traumatic experience of the Indian diaspora, both old and new, and the process of portraying an ideal homeland – which he calls imaginary (Mishra, 2007).

Cohen avoids mentioning the aspect of the desire to return to the homeland. Cohen's definition, in a simplistic way, presents the common characteristics of diasporas without emphasizing much on the intention or desire to return to the homeland. Also, he refers to the homeland as "natal or imagined natal", indicating the impact of a reconstructed collective memory. A memory which is inherently fragmented, obscure, and hesitant in nature.

> "All diasporic communities settled outside their natal (or imagined natal) territories, acknowledge that "the old country" - a notion often buried deep in language religion, custom or folklore - always has some claim on their loyalty and emotions…but a member's adherence to a diasporic community is demonstrated by an acceptance of and inescapable link with their past migration history and a sense of co-ethnicity with others of similar background" (Cohen, 1997, p. ix).

Cohen and Clifford both differ from Safran in their opinions, and this difference depicts the change that the discourse has been going through. The initial attempts of defining diaspora by some criteria have been replaced by a more abstract and figurative perspective, which portrays the experience of the community as unique in each circumstance. This change in the discourse brought its attention to the uniqueness of different diasporic experiences. Therefore, one of the prevalent approaches is still, as Butler (2001) describes it, to use an 'ethnographic approach' to study individual cases without seeking a generalized normative conclusion. Though this approach may invoke criticism of being too subjective, there is a sense of recognition of the uniqueness in each of the cases. Whether it is the attachment with the collective identity of the community or the sense of having a dual loyalty for both the countries, all of these dynamic concepts do require an avant-garde approach in my view.

Chariyandy argues that the diasporas originated out of modern colonialism involving traumatic dislocation, grow beyond their painful past, and produce vibrant cultural practices – postcolonial scholars like Gilroy or Hall tend to look beyond the process and more into these

cultural expressions. Chariyandy terms these as postcolonial diasporas (Chariyandy, 2006). According to another perspective, the construction of endless new diasporas is more of a continuous process in today's world than it was ever before (Clifford, 1994; Sahoo & Sheffer, 2014; Butler, 2001). A globalized economy and technology have made movements easy and reduced mental distance. The movements of people have become more frequent than before. This network of movement across the globe on a local to a global scale continuously superimposes new layers of familiarity, the unknown, and attachments. Adding to the multidimensional effect of these movements, the experiences differ from one generation to the other. Butler (2001) emphasizes the 'multi-generational' aspect of the diaspora, where individual experiences of migration have mingled with the collective history of a group and its shared identity as an immigrant community. It is indeed this aspect of difference in the perceptions which forms the basis of the theory of multiculturalism – the gradual acceptance and coexistence with a culture different from one's own.

In our everyday life, we find scattered pieces of unknown and vibrant cultures everywhere. The globalized world has facilitated these changes in our urban surrounding, such as the Thai eatery around the corner, the Chinese dry-cleaning shop, the fancy Turkish hamam in the city. It would be wrong to ascertain the existence of several diasporas around us as only a recent phenomenon because diasporas have been omnipresent throughout history such as the Jewish diaspora and the African diaspora. What does impress us in recent years is the complexity of the matter. The superimposition of different diasporic practices enriching urban cultural mosaic. The far-reaching impact of globalization has ensured the spread of a closely-knitted network of communication across the world, where virtually no place is far enough to reach. Moreover, people now are connected through global consumer culture. On one hand, cultures across the world are increasingly becoming similar and on the other hand, theorists like Appadurai (1996) emphasize that this dynamic is also producing ineluctable heterogeneity. Thus, the concept of diaspora relates to diverse forms of identity. Mishra, while talking about the recent phenomenon of "diaspora of colours" says, "diasporas of colours are those migrant communities which do not quite fit into the nation-state's barely concealed preferences for the narrative of assimilation" (Mishra, 1995, p. 8). Therefore, the old definition of diaspora constantly needs to be re-adjusted and understood in this dynamic and versatile global context.

The commentary of the recent works focuses on the recurring questions in understanding diaspora: which communities should be termed as diaspora especially in today's context?

How do we segregate the micro-sections and trajectories of a large diaspora? How do we address the new cultural forms? Given the present dynamic global scenario, movement is constant and the resultant hybrid forms of the diaspora can be spectacularly complex. Can all the individuals from a diaspora be exclusively defined by a collective diasporic identity? Or, how do individuals connect or claim their attachment to a particular diaspora?

To objectively address these questions, the discourse of diaspora heavily depends on cultural identity from a holistic perspective. For my research question, I will discuss the relevance of culture and ethnicity as representative terms for diasporic identity. This would facilitate identifying the significance of ethnicity and culture in the narratives. Moreover, it would help to contextualize the concept of identity and identity politics of a diasporic community.

1.4.2. Diaspora and Identity (ethnic or cultural?)

Identity, coming from the Latin word *idem* (same), is defined by Oxford English Dictionary as "The fact of being who or what a person or thing is" or "The characteristics determining who or what a person or thing is". The transition of this discourse is based on the recognition of identity as a dynamic and intertwined concept and not a set of fixed and innate characteristics which are unalterable. For Geertz (Geertz, 1973, pp. 259-261), the primordial ties are essentially emotional, based on attachments or sentiments. The individual or collective identifying characteristics such as race, religion, language, regions act as foci around which the primordial ties develop a form. He believes the attachments of groups formed because of primordial ties are stronger and more real than civic loyalty. He further adds that severing these primordial ties will jeopardize the core of the individuality of an autonomous person, either by absorbing into a mass of no cultural differences or by being dominated by a competing community. Parekh describes (2008) identity as a set of all the characteristics of a thing, which makes it different from other things. For human beings, this definition remains the same, but they are also an active agent in determining the characteristics, consciously making decisions regarding which characteristics they want to be associated with and represented by. Parekh focuses on three main aspects of individual identity as personal identity, social identity, and what can be called a human identity. He also reminds us of the coexistence and reciprocal relation between these aspects (Parekh, 2008, p. 9). Similarly, collective identity or group identity is constituted of individual identities and their narratives, but they also consciously ascribe to their collective group identity, which can be based on a commonality, be it gender or a shared history of displacement. An individual may define his identity as a collective image of all these identities, constantly changing

through self-criticism and social projection. He possesses his aspirations and objectives, community attachment, and legal identity, which are all interconnected and constantly influencing each other.

For my work, I have tried to see the reflection of the collective identity through individual identities. Cohen (1994, p. 133) reminds us that collective identity is an assemblage of individual experiences, and understanding individuals' affiliations or responses is key to knowing their collective identity. Collective identity may include a group struggle of a marginalized or vulnerable group, which might be speaking up for their group rights, cultural or political self-governance rights, and against racial discrimination, in a very dynamic manner. This rather simplistic compartmentalization of identity has a rather complex functional equation between them which from a sociological perspective Calhoun (1994, p. 14) describes as "incompleteness, fragmentation, and contradiction of both collective and personal experience".

These definitions of identity have a strong coherence. Deviating from the initial attempt to focus on similarity or sameness, almost all of them incorporate terms such as 'difference', 'others' and 'representation' which emphasize difference as the point of reference. Many of the authors (Hall, 1990; 1996; Said, 2003) have extensively written about this phenomenal change or rather a paradigm shift in the discourse where the discussion is more about the representation of identity than what is identity. Hall (1996, p. 5) emphasizes the notion of difference as the defining point for identity when he says identities are "productions of marking differences and exclusion". He states that identities can function as points of recognition because of their ability to exclude and demarcate the outside.

The globalized world today has brought us to a new threshold where the discussion revolves around the dynamic nature of identity, new forms, and the politics of representation. Said (2003, p. 333) attributes this phenomenal change in what he calls a "language of identity" to the political dynamics of the eighteenth century where one group (namely the colonizers and the western world) claimed supremacy over other cultures, glorifying their triumphs and pride. There was cumulative resistance from numerous minor groups against the hegemonic power display for the right to be represented. Spivak (1988) emphasizes that any narrative of the western world about the colonized or the third world fails to represent them as these narratives are never free from the political motive, or at least the feeling of political supremacy. This post-colonial perspective on power dynamics is instrumental in understanding the dialectics of identity politics of today.

Gilroy (1996) recognizes identity as being constructed within the representation rather than outside the representation. It is indeed the context of the present which involves the struggle where the objective is to understand and maintain our identity in our lives as well as be recognized for the same identity by others (Calhoun, 1994, p. 10). Here, the politics of representation is not only about the contradiction or difference that exists between the self-defined version of identity and the account of the others but also about the underlying power equation and historical context. The term 'politics of identity' indicates a collective struggle, which, as Calhoun (1994, p. 21) describes, is not only about seeking recognition but also about refusing or rejecting recognition. The politics of identity implies a situation that invokes a continuous dialogue between the self and collective identity.

Parekh (2008) reminds us of the major drawback of this notion of group struggle, where stereotypical images of oppressing others can be formed or blind faith in one version of history can be proven as misleading. Collective identity or the community identity could gradually transform into a conservative, subjugating system playing an authoritative role, and compelling the individuals to be a part of the community. The initial objective of recognition beyond the stereotypical categorization and related discrimination ultimately converts into performing a stereotypical ritualistic doctrine. A very relevant example can be found in Rey Chow's work, where she cites how the struggle for liberating the stereotypical image of Chinese culture seen from a western hegemonic perspective became a conformist practice itself, accepting only native Chinese experience as the authentic representation (Chow, 1998, p. 4)[11].

Despite these complexities, the collective identity of a group is the collective voice of the people of the community, reflecting the dialogue between the community and the larger society. Cohen (1994, p. 11) connects the concept of self with a need for identity where the collective self might differ from the individual self, but the need for identity is present in both. However, he considers collective identity as having more contradictions as it is composed of individuals and is constantly in dialogue with other collective identities. Cohen's discussion of identity leads to the question of representation. How is identity represented? What are the roles of self and others? Moreover, how is identity represented by culture? Or rather, why am I emphasizing culture and not ethnicity alone?

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[11] I will discuss Chineseness in detail in Chapter Five where I will try to contextualize this concept with the Chinese community in Kolkata.

Concerning my research, the first question of how identity is represented remains crucial. As I search for an alternative reflexive understanding of this representation as a minority from the perspective of the community, I realize it requires an understanding of the politics of representation. What is the epistemological way to enquire into this process of representation? Who represents whom and how is one form of representation more acceptable than another? In a way, an understanding of identity is inspecting the correlation between the two agents in the process of representation and being represented. Mohanty describes it as "the relationship between personal experience and public meaning – "subjective choices and evaluations, on the one hand, and objective social location, on the other" (Mohanty, 2003, p. 392). The portrayal of identity revolves around the question 'who represents whom and how?' It not only encompasses subjects such as how the black diaspora is represented in popular culture, or how women have been portrayed in Indian films but also how the state recognizes and represents the communities as minorities through the amendments and policies. As Mohanty suggests (ibid.) there are two philosophical schools that discuss the rhetoric of representation. The essentialist view focuses on the unchanged status of the community members, who share a common group identity. On the contrary, the postmodern perspective argues that identities are constructed. It focuses on the indispensable need to understand the historical context of the socio-economic and gender-based stratification within the group. Essentialism has already been criticized, especially by feminists, for its holistic and generic approach and for not identifying the underlying process of discrimination within the group (Mohanty, 2003, pp. 392-393). Despite the major drawbacks, incorporating the essentialist perspective is key to understanding collective identity – the way it is framed and represented. Similarly, the claims of the postmodernists that individual experiences are constructed and thus should not be counted as representative images of identity politics cannot be overruled. Post-colonial theorist Spivak (1988) challenges that the two types of representation evolve out of unequal power relations and concludes the western perspective of representing the subaltern or the third world is incomplete and biased. However, away from the radical post-colonial theorization, Mohanty suggests a middle way from a realist perspective:

> "The claims about the general social significance of a particular identity
> should be evaluated together with its accompanying assumptions or
> arguments… Both the claim and the underlying assumptions refer to the social
> world. They need to be engaged as such, and evaluated as we evaluate other

such descriptions and theories about society… This realist attitude towards identity politics does not guarantee that a particular version of identity politics is justified; that justification will depend on the details of what is being claimed." (Mohanty, 2003, p. 402)

Mohanty points towards the opportunity of empirical studies where understanding the process of representation through narratives can reveal the nexus of power politics and the dynamics of social relations. Hall (1996) emphasizes a similar perspective, where he talks about the relevance of the historical and political context in which identities are situated and constructed. He also argues that identities are produced out of a particular discursive practice. From this perspective, identities are the points of attachment to the subject positions created by the flow of the discourse. The strong inclination towards postmodern ideology emphasizes not only the collective struggle of the minority groups but simultaneously, the larger context of society and power relations have been considered as a part of identity. However, some authors do not accept the ambiguous nature of the debate. Brubaker & Cooper do not agree with the evasive nature of defining identity and encompassing the larger context. Instead, they consider an alternative term for the sake of "conceptual clarity for social analysis and political understanding alike" (2000, p. 36).

The second aspect of this discussion is how identity is synonymous with either ethnicity or culture, or both. Simultaneously, it can be asked why one is preferred over the other to be a true expression of identity? For a diasporic community, we might instinctively conclude the identifying element to be ethnicity. The popular trend of this discourse in the past was to relate the functions of a diaspora with the pre-decided characteristics of an ethnic community. The post-modernist and post-colonialist ideologies look beyond this tendency to compartmentalize. However, I would like to argue that even with the liberal perspective, ethnicity as a concept has its limitations due to the extensive misinterpretation of the term over the years in different contexts. The politics behind the term evolved out of the idea of a conformist socio-political system manipulating the concept to distinguish the 'others' from 'us'. Ethnicity has been widely misinterpreted or manipulated for political motives; we have seen many examples of this in the recent past. However, ethnicity remains an important base for differentiating between groups which are key to the understanding of dynamic interactions. Anthias (1998) stresses the three aspects. Diaspora does not substitute the term ethnicity rather ethnicity elucidates the dynamic nature of diaspora. Though we tend to treat ethnicity and race from the same perspective which considers the scope of both the concepts

to be narrow and pragmatic, the functional importance of the idea of ethnicity does not allow us to completely banish this term but rather calls for a restructuring of the concept. On the other hand, the concept of race has lost its importance as it is no longer considered as a "biological marker of difference" (Anthias, 1998, p. 576). Authors like Fenton (1999) and Toland (1993) emphasize the overlapping concept of race and ethnicity with the common domain shared by the two. Ethnicity inherently focuses on the shared characteristics of a group mainly on the basis of common culture or nationality, whereas racism is attached to a pragmatic thought-process, where a person is believed to be related to a particular category and possesses some characteristics, which determine his position in society. Fenton (1999, p. 52) defines ethnicity as "the way in which social and cultural difference, language and ancestry combine as a dimension of social action and social organization and form a socially reproduced system of classification", whereas racism is the fundamental process of differentiating between individuals. The historical reference of the usage of the term might reveal that it pertains to physical attributes as "the population marked by the characteristic appearance are constitutionally or characteristically different" (ibid., p. 3). What these two concepts have in common is the basis for identification as a group whether it is religion, language or nationality. Yinger points out the ambiguity of the term where ethnic groups can represent anything between small, almost primordial groups to large groups of people with any common characteristics (1985, p. 157). However, written in the 1980s with examples drawn from the US, his work recognizes the possibilities of implying ethnicity to understand a wide array of changes in society. Furthermore, he considers ethnicity as a force resisting assimilation. representing the dilemma of urban pluralistic societies – the critical choice between cultural homogenization and conservation of pragmatic social norms as minority culture (ibid. 173).

We do see a lot of instances where the concept of ethnicity has gone through severe criticism, which is generated from this aspect of presuming a common link with racism. Another fierce criticism declares ethnicity as a term imposed on a group for segregation and subsequent manipulation. Toland (1993, p. 3) mentions the role of the state and ethnicity as a medium to exercise authoritative power. Toland focuses on the concept of peoplehood while describing ethnicity. According to her, this sense of peoplehood originates from the shared cultural history and the fact that the state has been manipulating this identity to manifest the objectives of the dominant cultural group. The state can use its power to maintain the discrepancy between the groups to continue to give preference to the dominant cultural

group. As per Toland, "the state has the capacity to create a common we-feeling" which will re-establish ethnic nationalism (Toland, 1993, p. 240). She also mentions that a complete pluralism might be unachievable as the "images of peoplehood" will be manipulated by the state or the dominant culture (ibid., p. 3). However, there are other alternative explanations available which emancipate ethnicity from the restriction of being a manipulative term. If we look at how the discourse related to ethnicity changed over time, then we might notice that the sixties was the time when ethnicity was starting to be recognized as a symbol of the struggle for cultural identity, whereas by the eighties, the ethnicity of the groups became the identity, voicing against cultural homogenization (Fortier, 1994). Yuval-Davis (1994) focuses on the functional multiplicity of the term. She defines ethnicity as "primarily a political process which constructs the collectivity and its interests". Emphasizing the role of differences like gender, class, and religion as the basis of ethnic politics, she states that ethnicity is not specific to the minority community, rather the success of the major hegemonic ethnicities depends on how adjusting they are (Yuval-Davis, 1994, pp. 182-183).

The postcolonial discourse has initiated the possibility of adding new dimensions to the discussion. It successfully conveys the liberating idea that every individual or group is ethnic and focused on the multiplicity or dynamic nature of identity (Ashcroft, et al., 2006). The paradigm shift is recent yet prominent, with some phenomenal works produced on this topic, especially by Stuart Hall. Hall (1996) calls for a change in the perspective – by asking to identify ethnicity with historicity and not be inclined towards racial connections.

I do agree with these current liberal developments of the discourse, but since my work is closely related to the reflection of political ideology, I feel defining a community's identity only based on ethnicity, which still has a constant threat of being judged as a symbolic term of socio-political manipulation, would limit the scope of the study. Here, the meaning would be also dichotomous with the multiplicity of views ranging from conservative views to postcolonial ones, which altogether reject the claim that ethnicity can be an expression of identity. Do I prefer to use the term 'culture interchangeability'? Back in 1985, Yinger agrees with this possibility. He mentions that the study of ethnicity is a convergence of different approaches. His study of the available literature implies that ethnicity can be understood from various perspectives to explore various social contexts. On the other hand, since my work is explicitly based on the narratives, I would not implant these terms in the narratives for bringing out an inference. Rather the objective here is to understand the significance of the meaning of these terms in their narratives. I cannot indeed choose between ethnicity and

culture as they both are omnipresent in the narratives. Ethnicity remains a crucial concept in my study of the Chinese community where I am trying to find the relevance of ethnicity as an enforced identification criterion, and at the same time, looking at narratives that establish the identity of the community solely as their ethnic identity. The postcolonial perspective does give me an option to explore the possibilities of how ethnicity can be a product of political power play, or how ethnicity can be an image of commonality to ensure unity within a group. It is crucial for my study to recognize and incorporate the broad scope of cultural interactions where identities are created, contested, and altered. Thus, ethnicity is not a stoic concept with unalterable characteristics of a group. The scope of understanding the identity of a community is much broader, which allows recognition of the dynamic interactions of a cosmopolitan city. Thus, rather than the idea of ethnic identity which focuses only on group-specific characteristics and interactions, a much more liberal form of definition will give me a wider perspective to understand the various communications at the local, national and global scale. This would also make it possible to understand the duality of the process, to imply the significance of ethnicity in the narratives of the community as their identity and an identifying criterion imposed on them. Finally, as Toland (1993, p. 13) suggests, individual identity is dynamic and cannot be expressed only by the ethnic identity, which she considers to be situational – evolving out of particular interactions at particular points of time.

If ethnicity is used here as a term encompassing both group identity and culture, then why would I consider culture as a separate entity in collecting narratives from the community about their identity? Ideally, ethnicity is explicitly used in defining group characteristics; of course, authors recognize the possibility of expanding the boundaries of this rigid definition, but culture plays a crucial role to understand how an individual connects to the greater urban or even global society or how one sees the self beyond the defined characteristics of ethnic identity. In this regard, Bottomley's argument against the tendency to consider culture and ethnicity as the same is particularly relevant. Following Hall's work, he states that culture is primarily a social process through which people respond to social conditions and historical references, which in turn gives rise to rituals, beliefs, and social customs. He says these expressions or products form a variety of social relations, "including those based on gender, class, and region of origin, or religion as well as ethnicity" (Bottomley, 1991, pp. 304-305). He also reminds us of the inadequacies of pairing culture with ethnicity without considering other factors such as class and gender. In my work, thus, I would need both concepts simultaneously when looking for the significance of these terms in the narratives situated in

the broader context of the city. Culture does provide a broad umbrella to place individual identities in the larger society and marks the junction where individuals contest or accept group identities. Moreover, cultural identity might also validate the credentials of ethnic identity and focus on the invariability of hybridity. Cohen (1994, p. 134) very aptly says "individuals do not come to interaction asocially or without culture". Thus, culture instantaneously becomes the medium for interaction as well as the resultant expression. If we look at a very basic definition of culture in anthropology, then culture implies the defining characteristics of people. As per Friedman, there can be two ways to understand the culture from the anthropological perspective. The first category is generic culture, which is the common characteristic of human beings to be able to plan their lives based on a shared medium of language while no other species can formulate their lives in this way. The second category is differential culture, which denotes the representative characteristics of a group based on the differentiation with the 'others' (Friedman, 1994, pp. 67-73). This segregation of cultural identity went through a radical transformation during the postcolonial and most radically in the postmodern era. During the second half of the twentieth century, there was a worldwide dissatisfaction with academic theorization. Concepts like identity, culture, and ethnicity have gone through drastic transformations. The global political environment, growing consumerism, and technological advancement all worked as an impetus to seek an alternative perspective, a perspective that would involve the larger context.

A deconstructionist approach defines culture as a social construct rejecting the previous claims of culture being the integral identifying characteristic. Friedman talks about how culture is constructed through the interpretation and means of the process and systems. He focuses on the role of anthropologists generating meaning and defines culture as a product of meaning which evolves out of interpretations in society and through interactions between societies. He mentions interactions between society and anthropologists as interactions of societies (Friedman, 1994, p. 74). The meaning or relevance of culture evolves out of its relative position vis-à-vis the others. Thus, otherness becomes the key to assigning meaning and defining culture. Moreover, from this perspective, there is little possibility that culture can be defined as a self-sufficient and self-defining object with fixed characteristics. Rather, it is evident that there are many other cultures constantly influencing, contradicting and coexisting within a culture. As discussed by Bhabha (1997, p. 1) the locus of postmodernist concern should be what he calls the "in between spaces"; these are the spaces where new

identities are formed out of the interaction between cultural difference and beyond the initial subjectivities.

In this discourse, then, how do we understand and define ethnic and cultural elements? Or, considering the dynamic interactions propagated by the post-colonial discourse, is it at all necessary to try to recognize them? For me, the crucial aspect here is to understand and subsequently epistemologically relate the basic elements of culture like language, ethnicity and sexuality. As I have mentioned before, the objective is not to imply terms like culture or ethnicity to explain the narratives, but rather to depict the meaning of these terms as embedded in their stories. Here the focus is to understand how ethnic identity is used by others as well as the Chinese as a process of differentiating them from the rest of the city. Quite understandably, the aim is to understand the identity of a diasporic community from their perspective. As I have mentioned, a subjective understanding might discourage such research where I try to understand identity through some definite cultural components or depict how the community sees the collective cultural identity. I would argue that there is a scope for empirical work which will focus on the elements of culture as well as have space for recognizing abstract subjectivity. The works by Cohen (1994) and Friedman (1994) support my endeavour in two aspects. For Cohen, the objective of the study is to understand the repertoire of representative forms of a community evolving out of the individual and the larger society. For this, elements of cultural identity can be explicitly understood as products of representation. Friedman talks about defining culture as similar but not identical previous experiences around the world in a similar framework for interpretation but does not restrict this process to being "a question of the simple absorption of explicit cultural models or definitions of reality, but of a social interaction in which such explicit models become resonant with subjective experience" (Friedman, 1994, p. 76).

Here it would be worthwhile to mention the implication of the concept of cultural hybridity for two reasons. First, cultural hybridity and the discourse around it can be an appropriate example of explaining how this study can be accommodated within the empirical structures similar to previous studies and how a subjective understanding can still be achieved. The second reason is despite the limitations of the concept of cultural hybridity, it remains as an

expression of the identity of the diasporic communities[12]. Hybridity can be implied in reviewing the process of interpretation and simultaneously providing an alternative perspective. It can be considered as the final form evolving out of cultural interaction. Cultural hybridity has been one of the most discussed concepts of postcolonial discourse, which, as explained by Bhabha, is a counter-narrative to the colonial texts – an alternative mode of interpretation (Baya, 1998). The extensive range of valuable postcolonial academic works (for example Appadurai 1996, Bhabha 1997, Gilroy 1996 and Hall 1990) on developing the alternative perspectives to look into the concept of cultural hybridity does provide us alternative perspectives to observe the politics of representation, interpretation and most importantly interaction between cultures. I would focus on the aspect that, from a different point of view, the term cultural hybridity emphasizes this practice of studying the cultural differences and interactions within similar yet evolving methodological frameworks. By similar methodological structures, I intend to mean empirical study with a subjective understanding. In his phenomenal work *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, Hall (1990) talks about the hybridity of cultural identity, which is primarily the amalgamation of different cultural expressions specifically denoting colonial historicity. However, Puri, in her work on expressions of equality through cultural hybridity, emphasizes this aspect of difference, where she mentions that "epistemologically *similar* discourses of hybridity may be harnessed to quite different political projects (…). It is therefore important to read particular discourses of hybridity not only in themselves, but also in relation to other available cultural discourse at the time" (Puri, 2004, p. 5). Notably, here, she does not reject the possibility of studying a discourse of cultural hybridity within a similar epistemological framework but points out the significance of other parallel discourses as well. Similarly, Papastegiadis states that Spivak (1988) contradicts Hall's view of hybridity as synonymous with cultural identity and a "translation across cultural difference is always possible". For Papastegiadis, in *Can the Subalterns speak*, as an answer to who represents whom in the context of translating cultural texts Spivak has shown how this is always incomplete – as such a representative would require stepping away from the condition being represented (2015, pp. 275-277).

I would emphasize that the justification behind the aim to understand the cognitive process that focuses on defining one's culture and as a consequence, differentiating from others as a

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[12] The concept of cultural hybridity will be discussed in Chapter Four to understand the context of the diasporic communities of Kolkata. Hybridity as an alternative perspective has been understood in the context of the Chinese community of Kolkata. Cultural hybridity encompasses both the cultural interactions and the influence of the power relations at the same time.

group right (ibid) is crucial. The cultural identity of a diaspora as an expression of their collective identity and as the result of the social processes can be understood from the postmodern perspective, where cultural hybridity or the concept of self can provide the required multidimensional objective understanding. However, this does not rule out the possibility of following the methodological structure of an empirical ethnographic study.

1.4.3. *Multiculturalism and Diasporic Population: Expectation, Outreach, and Disenchantment*

This study is situated in India, a country that strongly advocates multiculturalist policies. Different groups in India are declared by the state as minorities based on religion and language and their rights to practice and preserve their cultural characteristics[13]. There are multiple theoretical frameworks available to understand the present-day implication of multiculturalism. It can be understood concerning essentialist or anti-essentialist perceptions of multicultural societies. Anne Phillips (2012)[14] discusses the four trajectories of the implication of the meaning of essentialism where she explains the inherent limitations of this concept. She focuses on the tendency to generalize, which is relating a characteristic as group behaviour and naturalizing this process, which eventually denies the role of social mechanisms for its creation. This collective identity is always related to political action, and is one and unified (Phillips, 2012). Essentialism is criticized because, to a large extent, it does not take into account the complexity of socio-political interactions and focuses on homogenization or categorization. Ideally, according to the models of assimilation, the immigrants gradually blend into the host society, accept the national culture and there is barely any possibility left for any collusion or discontentment. Gordon (1964, pp. 75-77) proposed a model of assimilation analysis with the variables to study the assimilation process of a group to the core society. Alba and Nee recognize Gordon's work as a ground-breaking one in describing the process of assimilation but they do not agree with the earlier views of the inevitability of assimilation. The focus of their work is primarily on the complexity of the process. They propose that the system of assimilation largely depends on the functions of the state institutions which can bring about success in assimilating different groups (Alba & Nee,

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[13] Chapter Three discusses the legislative definition of minority, historical overview of minority politics and minority of rights in detail.

[14] According to a note from the publisher, this is the final accepted version of the author's work, however there might be some changes in the final published version. The original citation is: Phillips, A., 2010. What's wrong with essentialism?. *Distinktion: Scandinavian journal of social theory*, 11(1), pp. 47-60. DOI: 10.1080/1600910X.2010.9672755

2003, p. 281). Portes & Zhou (1993) further elaborate on the uniqueness of the challenges each group has to encounter. The vast difference between the host and immigrant society makes it impossible for the children of the immigrants to access all the educational and occupational opportunities of the non-immigrant society. Here, segmented assimilation is not necessarily attributed to conservative attachment towards the group identity, but this provides them with the available resources (Portes & Zhou, 1993, p. 96). Even though recent theorists have recognized the inherent complexities of the process of assimilation and further incorporated concepts like class difference, individual and collective identity, and institutional structure of the state, the assimilation theory does not fully comprehend the magnitude of the issues of group identity. On the other hand, multiculturalism promotes the peaceful coexistence of multiple cultural groups within the state jurisdiction but inherently believes in the hegemonic role of the state in deciding the conditions (Kymlicka, 1995; Murphy, 2012). However, we have enough indications to contest this basic solution (for example, Phillips, 2007). Even when a state provides a structured policy for the minority groups, the execution, repercussion, and overall efficiency of those policies can be questioned. There are alternative views that challenge the hegemonic role of the state deciding which groups are to be called minorities and which culture is allowed to operate to which extent. For an individual from a diasporic community or any marginalized community, identity is an amalgamation of various aspects. As a consequence, the definition of identity cannot be restricted to citizenship or affiliation to one nation-state, affiliation to one culture, and confinement to a particular geographical space. There are deep-rooted cultural clashes, social preservations with political-administrative insecurity. This clarifies why I started this discussion with examples from literary works on diasporic communities. The diasporic experiences are not mere fictional romanticism but are part of a lived reality. I would argue that the lack of innovative solutions is due to our inability to comprehend the unparalleled distinctiveness of each diasporic group.

Multiculturalism has evolved as an alternative non-essentialist view of a multicultural society. It criticizes essentialism from a liberal perspective. Similarly, multiculturalism has been considered as an offshoot of liberalism which is essential for addressing group-specific issues. Works of Taylor (1994), Kymlicka (1995; 2014), and Patten (Patten, 2014) position multiculturalism somewhere in-between liberalism and essentialism. They acknowledge the need for standard liberal state policies securing the fundamental rights of the citizens, yet they seek to accommodate the group-specific special rights within this structure. Multiculturalism as a theory has evolved through time. From the groundwork done by

Kymlicka and Taylor, this theory has developed a far more critical perspective with each new group of theorists proposing a new dimension to look into cultural rights and socio-economic inequalities. Recent works can be broadly categorized into different groups based on the objective and the hypothesis of each such theories. Gutmann (2009) and Young (2002) advocate for politics of recognition whereas Fraser (2001) (2003) insists that the two paradigms, recognition and redistribution should be addressed to eradicate social injustice. Similarly, Barry (1997), Lavy (2000) and Modood (2007) have their approaches[15]. From another perspective, the comparatively newer variation of the definition of multiculturalism is based on all the groups in need of social justice, encompassing all kinds of diverse minorities such as lesbians and gays, women, children along with immigrants and indigenous people. However, theorists like Kymlicka do not intend to overrule the argument that multiculturalism should not include all these communities.

In recent years, the inadequacy of multiculturalism as a theory and in practice has been highlighted for many reasons, but it has not been discarded completely. Given the present global scenario, even with growing right-wing influence, it is indeed a difficult task for countries like the United States of America, Canada, New Zealand or Australia to completely reject the multiculturalist ideology whose public policies are already structured on a multicultural basis. Apart from these countries with a significant history of having ethnically or culturally dissimilar populations, most of the other liberal democracies with a polyethnic population structure have introduced some multiculturalist measures to ensure minority rights. Ideally, the rise of multiculturalism is directly related to disillusionment with an essentialist perspective that could not successfully explain the dynamic nature of identity.

Multiculturalism, in the broadest sense, relates to the existent cultural, ethnic and nationality-based diversity within a state. The multiculturalist theorists, with their dissimilar views, tend to agree on this common point that multiculturalism is about acknowledging the juxtaposition of socio-cultural diversity within a state. Multiculturalism has been explained and questioned from different perspectives. Taylor relates multiculturalism to the politics of recognition, which essentially involves shaping identities with recognition as well as "*mis*recognition of others" (1994, p. 25). The recent theorists have questioned the functional aspects of multiculturalism – affiliations of individuals with one or more cultural groups, addressing the conservative discriminatory systems as a part of group practice and the role of the state in

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[15] I will include a comprehensive discussion of their works in the next section.

formulating a multiculturalist policy. Kymlicka, who is undoubtedly considered a forerunner among the multiculturalist theorists, provides a simplistic structure. The recent works significantly portray the complexities of an urban world which is also arguably the drawback of Kymlicka's texts. Critics[16] have argued that his model does not address many of the issues. However, a chronological review of his works will reveal that his later works are focused on reifying his theory from a critical perspective as a response to the criticisms he received.

Kymlicka's work, *Liberalism, Community and Culture* (1989) is the preamble of his theory. In this book, he sets the ground for what he presents in his second book *Multicultural Citizenship* (Kymlicka, 1995). In the first one, as a response to the critics of liberalism, he provides a rationale for the affiliation of individuals with the state as a part of communities and not as isolated entities which he calls cultural membership. In *Multicultural Citizenship*, Kymlicka proposes that liberal democracy can have a peaceful coexistence of different minority groups by providing group-differentiated rights. He provides a categorization of the minority communities: national minorities, indigenous groups and immigrants and their respective rights – self-governance rights for national minorities and polyethnic rights for immigrants. Kymlicka assures that such group-differentiated rights would not disrupt the integrity of the state as the rights are based on liberal principles. Moreover, a national cultural or what he calls a societal culture will work as a cohesive agent to integrate the different communities. Functionally, Kymlicka rests the theory entirely on cultural diversity, where "a state is multicultural if its members either belong to different nations (a multicultural state), or have emigrated from different nations (a polyethnic state), and if this fact is an important aspect of personal identity and political life" (Kymlicka, 1995, p. 18). Here, he defines culture as "synonymous with nation or people" with certain distinct characteristics, "as an intergenerational community, more or less institutionally complete, occupying a given territory or homeland, sharing a distinct language and history" (ibid). In synergy with his primary argument, Kymlicka further (2001) defends the rights of ethnocultural groups in liberal democracies or, how nation-building states should accommodate policies securing rights for minorities.

A multicultural state identifies three kinds of diversity – a multinational state, a polyethnic state and a state incorporating indigenous people. Each of these has a distinctly different history and process of integration or assimilation. According to Kymlicka, a polyethnic state

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[16] For example, Young (Young, 1997) states that Kymlicka's method of dividing the population on the basis of history of the community is too rigid and categorical.

typically highlights the stake of the immigrants. Here, this theoretical ease of discussing polyethnic states only from the perspective of immigrants stumbles upon the inherent difference between immigrants and the diasporic population. The role of diasporic communities remains, to some extent, ambiguous, especially if it is compared with the national minorities or indigenous groups. Diasporic communities have a shared history of a previous homeland which brings with it many cultural practices, customs and beliefs. The relation with the host country changes with different stages of adaptation, acceptance and accustom-ability. Their distinctiveness is 'voluntary' in nature, which means they practise it at home or within their community and they also do not seclude themselves from the institutional structure of the state. In this context, Kymlicka gives the example of individuals speaking the dominant language. He mentions this juxtaposition as a loose accumulation of subcultures (Kymlicka, 1995). Are diasporic communities primarily immigrants? Though the definitions of the terms separate both, from the perspective of multiculturalist policies, they are considered similar if not the same. A diasporic community is recognized by its distinguishably different cultural existence which is also the case for an immigrant community.

Kymlicka considers multiculturalism to be a part of a "larger revolution", whose foundation has been the "liberal democratic constitutionalism" (Kymlicka, 2014). When Kymlicka talks about the larger prospect of a human rights revolution, he essentially calls it a reciprocal process – "…as historically excluded groups struggle against earlier hierarchies in the name of equality, they too have to renounce their own tradition of exclusion or oppression in the treatment of women, gays, people of mixed race" (Kymlicka, 2014, p. 4). His other works such as *Multicultural Odysseys* (Kymlicka, 2007) are further elaborations of his theory which discusses the global multicultural societies and their issues. Kymlicka and Norman (Kymlicka & Norman, 2000) in the editorial section emphasize that the debate of minority rights and democratic citizenship cannot be examined as abstract and individual cases but should be considered and studied in detail. Similarly, in the book *Multiculturalism and the Welfare State,* he addresses the recent issue of "politics of recognition against politics of redistribution" and the impact on the welfare state (Banting, et al., 2006). More empirical case studies are found in his later works, addressing the recent criticisms of multiculturalism. It is undoubtedly true that critics found his theory to be based on an unrealistic categorization of communities and a rigid definition of culture, but his later works address the complexities

of democracies. His work is holistic as well as comprehensive and can be called the base of multicultural theories of today.

The practicality of the argument that Kymlicka puts forward is aptly addressed by Gutmann (Gutmann, 2009). Gutmann links multiculturalism with the politics of identity. She focuses on the role of group identities in a democratic state as well as individual affiliation to a group. Gutmann suggests that individuals often identify themselves with more than one group, and a state can eradicate cultural injustice while facilitating cultural freedom and group rights. As Pickett rightly points out, Gutmann is not among those recognition theorists who argue for "greater sovereignty" for cultural groups (2006, p. 147). Young (Young, 2002) states that democracy should ensure inclusion where people, as a part of the mechanism will be able to participate and influence the result. On the other hand, Fraser (2001; 2003; 2004) has a different approach to understanding social injustice in a multicultural society. She presents the complexity of social struggle and addresses the social inequalities by her "two-dimensional theory of justice" (2003, p. 3). According to her, this discourse of social justice is based on the demands for social-economic redistribution and, at the same time, recognition of cultural identity. She argues that these two "folk paradigms" are not independent elements and social inequalities regarding race, sexuality and gender are two-dimensional in this regard (Fraser, 2003). Moreover, in an interview, Fraser further explains her approach as a response to the shift in the global socio-economic scenario with the growing influence of neoliberalism. Recognition is another indispensable aspect of observing social justice, but rather than calling it politics of identity, Fraser looks into it as the dynamics of cultural transition. Through her theory, she promotes what she calls "nonidentitarian politics of identity", which can be integrated with "egalitarian politics of redistribution" (Fraser & Naples, 2004, p. 1113). Levy's (2000) social and political theory on multiculturalism is distinctively different. He advocates neither for preserving the cultural rights of minority groups nor for forceful integration. Instead, he focuses on the state to act against the dangers of a multicultural society – violence and cruelty. He identifies the inherent dangers of cultural pluralism and proposes a structure for multicultural policies which accommodates the measures to ensure peaceful coexistence. Barry (1997) on the other hand, critically reviews the claims of multiculturalism against liberalism.

Tariq Modood focuses on multiculturalism from the perspective of policy reform for equal citizenship and not as "remote or utopian ideal" (Modood, 2007). Based on examples from post-immigration Britain, he goes beyond the cultural idiosyncrasy of multiculturalism and

focuses on 'difference', which he considers as developed out of a reciprocal relationship. He states:

> "Multiculturalism refers to the struggle, the political mobilization but also the policy and institutional outcomes, to the forms of accommodation in which 'differences' are not eliminated, are not washed away but to some extent recognized. Through both these ways, group assertiveness and mobilization, and through institutional and policy reforms to address the claims of the newly settled, marginalized group, the character of 'difference' is addressed." (Modood, 2007, p. 39)

Though those opposing the entirely culture-centric view have a valid justification as multiculturalism must work towards securing the basic rights and freedom (which became a predominant idea in the post-multiculturalism phase), for many of the pioneers, such as Kymlicka, culture or cultural difference does work as an umbrella concept incorporating the many other interrelated aspects of a minority community. Nevertheless, Modood introduces us to a very critical aspect – that of recognizing that difference is not just constituted "from the side of a minority culture but also from outside" (Modood, 2007). Kymlicka maintains the obligatory boundary of multiculturalism, the picking out of recognizable ethnocultural characteristics, while Modood presents the intricacies of the reciprocal relation. The 'multi' component of multiculturalism indicates the inherent difference, but is not predominantly limited to a dualism (Modood, 2007) – this provides a ground for understanding the coexistence of several subcultures.

Murphy's (2012) view of multiculturalism suggests that the objective is not limited to demarcating and preserving the cultural difference but also to recognizing the interrelated issues. Murphy warns us that the conservative view of not acknowledging cultural change or preserving cultural change at a particular point of time invites the invariable criticisms of essentialist views of culture. A very common instance mentioned (such as Modood, 2007; Phillips, 2007) in this situation is how serious crimes committed against women in the name of cultural tradition by different communities are defended. In a discussion on whether or not to preserve the cultures in their original forms, Murphy (2012) provides two vital points citing the work of Jeremy Wadron. I will imply these arguments for understanding the dynamic stand of diasporic communities. First, in the post-globalisation era, expecting a certain culture to stand unchanged against time would be a wrong assumption. Every culture has intermingled with other cultures and evolved into newer forms. Second, for diasporic

communities, maintaining the balance of cultural difference is critical, whose exaggeration (claiming a pure or original form of a particular culture) can lead to the creation of cultural stereotypes.

In most of the broad discussions of multiculturalism[17], the definition of culture has been explained in the beginning. This particular way of introducing the theory reflects how this theory is perceived or rationalized. Multiculturalism evolved into a complicated discourse mostly because the way we define culture has been changed. The concept of a multicultural state promotes cohesiveness – an amalgamation of many subcultures. However, the nature of subcultures has been questioned in recent years. Are they static or constantly evolving through interactions? Phillips (2007) in her argument, puts forward the feminist perspective which criticizes the stoic stereotypical idea of culture in multiculturalism. Calling it "multiculturalism without culture", she advocates for multiculturalism which does not allow racism but also ensures a sensitive understanding of minority cultures. Similarly, Merry (2001) focuses on a non-essentialist view of culture for understanding the culture-right relationship. Contextualizing culture as well as human rights in a particular social condition recognizes the fluidity of both terms. For this study, I find it is relevant to explore the recent views on culture after discussing multiculturalism as an academic discourse. This will help to develop a more critical understanding of multiculturalism from the perspective of questioning the very base and as I have tried to find out the meaning and relevance of culture in the identity narratives in my fieldwork, this review will help to elaborate the different depictions of the meaning of culture in those narratives. The objective of understanding culture from this critical perspective is to relate or contextualize the responses that have been collected.

1.4.4. The Quintessential 'Culture' in Multiculturalism

If my objective is to look into narratives on identity, how do I define identity in this process? Especially how culture is an expression of identity? Which aspects do I consider as expressions of culture, and what is culture for a diasporic community? The cultural identity of diasporic communities can be diverse as well as complex, encompassing the dichotomy of collective group identity and individual identity. For a diasporic community like the Chinese of Kolkata, tracing back the original (if any) cultural identity is implausible. At the same time, the community does insist on practicing the diasporic cultural tradition as the original

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[17] By broad discussions, I mean the basic introductory articles on multiculturalism in Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy.

form of their culture. Realistically, this original culture has already come across several other cultures and has been nourishing an array of customs, beliefs and rituals other than its 'own'. In this case, how does a multicultural state recognize and accommodate these various forms of culture of minorities? Also, paradoxically, it can be asked if these measures are suitable for the community, or how this particular process of identifying a community is perceived by its members? I would try to contextualize the claims of an ideal multiculturalist state in a diasporic community like the Chinese community of Kolkata and inspect the possibilities where they tend to differ or contradict. Here, Kymlicka's *Multicultural Citizenship* (1995), which is one of his foundational works on multiculturalism is the basis for examining the interrelation between the liberal view of minority rights or group rights and individual freedom. I have tried to relate Kymlicka's concept of 'societal culture' in my fieldwork for understanding the relationship between the culture of the majority and subcultures of a minority community. Societal culture for him is:

> "a culture which provides its members with meaningful ways of life across the full range of human activities, including social, educational, religious, recreational, and economic life, encompassing both public and private spheres. These cultures tend to be territorially concentrated, and based on a shared language." (Kymlicka, 1995, p. 76).

Societal culture is based on the requirements of modern society: "a mobile, educated and literate work-force", and the subsequent requirement of a common identity. This common identity in most cases is a common language and shared history, which is even more emancipated by an equal opportunity to access a common public educational system. Using the example of the United States of America, Kymlicka describes how a societal culture can accommodate many other cultures with diverse ethnic, linguistic and religious backgrounds. Kymlicka's idea of a societal culture has an uncanny similarity with a national culture: in fact, he states that 'societal cultures tend to be national cultures'. The societal or national culture has the liberal structure to give freedom of choice to individuals to practice the culture of the community, or to choose among an array of other cultures, or more realistically have both. According to Kymlicka "freedom involves making choices amongst various options, and societal culture not only provides these options, but also makes them meaningful to us" (Kymlicka, 1995, p. 83).

However, the obvious question here is how does an individual decide? Undoubtedly there are cultural practices that are patronizing and often deny basic human rights and allowing group-

differentiated rights might encourage such practices. Kymlicka presents two preconditions for a good life here: first, individuals must lead their lives according to their own beliefs without 'fear of discrimination or punishment'. As a second condition, which also limits the first – he states, "we must be free to question those beliefs, to examine them in light of whatever information, examples and arguments our culture can provide" (Kymlicka, 1995, p. 81). These two preconditions are mutually dependent, so none can overrule the other. Invariably, following this argument, in a liberal society, individuals are free to take their decisions: the individual is also an informed person capable of making responsible decisions.

Along with Kymlicka's concept of societal culture, I have also taken into consideration more recent works which are critical of Kymlicka's approach. I have focused on the various definitions or explanations of culture or cultural identity in the narratives of the informants. I have neither rejected Kymlicka's categorization of culture nor accepted it as a precondition to study a minority community in a multicultural state. At the same time, recent arguments regarding the politics of recognition or social injustice (Fraser, 2001, 2004; Taylor, 1994; Young, 1997, 2002) shape the context of my fieldwork.

1.4.5. *Cultural Identity of Diasporic Communities in the Multicultural States: Beyond the Formulated Approach*

In my fieldwork, I have tried to look into the integration of communities as minorities in the national societal culture as an inseparable component of a multicultural state. At the same time, I have borrowed ideas from theories related to the politics of identity which present a much intricate and complicated version of multiculturalism. This idealistic condition of a multicultural state has evoked two questions. The first question is undoubted, how does a state attempt to define minority subcultures (the rhetorical question being what is 'their culture') for implementing minority rights policies? And the second question is how does a community perceive this process? Is there any alternative view on their identity other than the state-assigned cultural identity?

To answer the first question, as we can imagine, a liberal society requires a high level of administrative efficiency. The state decides on how to establish a multicultural national identity which includes selecting the foundation of the societal culture if we want to see it from Kymlicka's perspective. Kymlicka and other multiculturalists have given an idea of the boundary of state intervention but in most cases, it is not specific.

Here, Kymlicka puts forward his view on the integration of immigrant communities. As I have mentioned in the last section, Kymlicka justifies the rights of communities to be able to practice their 'own culture', and also very clearly marks the difference between immigrants, refugees, and national minorities. He distinguishes between their expectations and demands in a multicultural state. He does elaborate upon the justification behind a multicultural state encouraging or 'allowing' immigrants to maintain their 'own culture', which he considers to be a matter of choice. But what makes it slightly awkward is the 'allowing' criterion or rather the idea that the host country decides the terms of allowing them to practice their own culture. He justifies the process of converting immigrants into national minorities whereby the provision of providing them with resources and self-governance will enable them to form a more closely connected community. Nevertheless, he also emphasizes the fact that immigrants cannot claim their cultural right entirely because they have given it up together with their original national membership. Many of his remarks make this clear, for example when he says, "after all most immigrants [as distinct from refugees] choose to leave their own culture…and they know when they come that their success, and that of their children, depends on integrating into the institutions of English-speaking society" (Kymlicka, 1995, p. 96). He also says, "… they relinquish the national rights that go with membership in their original culture" (ibid., p. 96). Though the objective is to provide an environment for integration, the role of the state seemingly appears to be condescending. The clear division between majority and minority, and the latter expected to integrate, has been an anticipated outcome of multicultural policies. It becomes more obvious with the assumption that immigrants are already a disintegrated and dispersed population, not united enough to practice self-governance, which leaves them with the only option of integrating with the majority (ibid.). To assure this process is a welcoming one, the state must ensure that the host or main culture is accommodating and welcoming. (Kymlicka, 1995, p. 96). Kymlicka also briefly mentions in his book by citing Waldron's work what the possibilities of differentiating between cultures are. In modern societies, the forms of cultures are intermingled, and an individual is not affiliated to one but associated with various cultures. How does the state manage all these boundaries of cultures with their distinct practices remaining the same over the years? By all means, controlling the varied cultural practices of communities and accommodating them within the large sphere of societal culture seems like an unrealistic possibility. Again, varied backgrounds of individuals can also influence their decisions to accept the societal or national culture to be the one and universal culture.

If we take into consideration the fact that, in a liberal democracy, the state assures to provide the right for maximum individual freedom, which implies social, religious, cultural, and economic freedom without any socio-political discrimination, then also the intertwined significance for the minorities is that they are bound to accept the state's intervention and follow the common societal/national culture. However, the realistic scenario is much more complicated, and the role of the state and its neutrality are often questioned. The categorization of majority or minority does influence the state's role. Even when the state advocates multicultural policies, it represents the majority or the dominant socio-political group. There is a very practical possibility that the state and the state-created societal culture are not perfectly neutral entities. The diasporic discourse considers this possibility of integration as a problematic one as well, from a different perspective. The diasporic identity often inherently carries memories of grief, terror, and loss: in this situation merging the community into the national community might not ease the process of integration. Above all, the base of the popular belief that minority communities are separatists and a threat to the nation-state is wrong and misleading (Clifford, 1994). This difference leads to the second question of how communities perceive this process of identification. The alternative views on culture also provide a way to understand the reactions of the minority groups. For most critics of Kymlicka, the process of identifying minorities – categorizing the differences – and finally finding a common platform (which in this case is the societal culture) works against the primary objective of eradicating differences. While finding out the recent arguments for the apparent retreat of multiculturalism, Phillips (2007, p. 23) claims that it represents the "stereotypical contrast between Western and non-western values and replays monoculturalism in a political guise". Here, what she very diligently puts forward is the inherent emphasis on the stereotypical differences – "between liberal and illiberal, modern and traditional, Western and non-western culture" (Phillips, 2007, p. 24) and this kind of sharp distinction does more harm as this practice ultimately leads to the 'radical otherness', where people are categorized based on some otherwise inexplicable judgements. The multiculturalists who advocate for the eradication of social injustice, for example, Young (2002), talk about how a democracy can achieve political cohesion. She proposes the 'discourse of inclusion' which is a political environment of "a heterogeneous public engaged in transforming institutions to make them more effective in solving shared problems justly" (p. 12). Similarly, Benhabib (2002) proposes a model of deliberate democracy which accepts voluntary ascription and encourages cultural interactions.

Coming back to my research question of how identities of minority communities are shaped by the policies of a multicultural state, all these arguments contribute to understanding the process. My inquiry will be to understand this argument in the context of the Chinese community of Kolkata. Here, essentially by this argument, I do not mean the several critiques of multiculturalism but the argument that justifies the need for a societal culture or particular policies aiming to obviate the discrimination or social injustice. But indeed, my questions find relevance and a theoretical base in these critiques of multiculturalism without completely superimposing them on my line of thought. The theories of identity politics or politics of recognition capture the dynamic nature of social relations and cultural interaction which is pivotal in understanding the identity narratives of a diaspora.

Chapter Two: Knowing Chinatown and Myself: An Introduction to the Study Area and Methodology

2.1. Why Ethnography?

Looking at my research question, I have often been asked why I chose the ethnographic research technique while it could be conducted with a series of structured interviews and questionnaires. After all, I aim to collect narratives on identity and find the impact of multicultural policies of India – did it require me to go through the meandering way of participant observation? For me, the answer to this question signifies the broader context of my research. The ethnographic research methodology allows observing and participating with the community in a liberal, non-definitive way. By engaging with the community as a participant observer, I wanted to understand the context of the urban space, the dynamics of collective and individual identity, and the multiplicity of an identity narrative. Other than participant observation, my fieldwork techniques have some definite traces of narrative ethnography. I have extensively used narratives to illustrate events, relations and imaginations in the context of the dynamics of urban space. The content is inherently descriptive and open-ended which as Okely terms it, is "highly loaded and selective" and not just a mere description. While looking into the identity narratives of the Chinese, I find support in the argument proposed by Okely that, unlike other social sciences, ethnography does not look for "separating substantive from the theoretical issues" (2012, p. 16). Furthermore, while describing his research methodology, Nonini points out, that a "tentative account of social totalities" can be achieved through ethnographic research without attempting to attain "the Archimedean position of a social analyst" (1999, p. 49).

I wanted to find out the trajectories of identity narratives that were meant to be shaped by individual experiences and, at the same time, trace the fragments of the collective identity. When the objective is to look into the subjectivities of the narratives and find out the bigger context, participant observation enables me to trace the connexion between narratives as we build a closer and comfortable relationship over time. Often, the formal guard the participant would initially have would turn into familiarity or even a sense of cordial intimacy – this is only achievable over time and a constant presence in the participant's physical space. The credibility of my research is based on minimizing the 'reactivity' (Barnard, 2008, p. 354).

McHugh mentions there is an immense scope of using ethnographic techniques in migration studies. Citing his study of migration patterns of elderly people between the northern and sunbelt community in the US, he elaborates the insight into the dialectics of home and journey, life-course trajectories and collective identities (2000, pp. 78-80). Similarly, studying a diaspora involves looking into the dialectics of the larger society and individuals.

Looking at the vast number of ethnographic works already produced in the discourse of diaspora, it might sound like a repetition – nevertheless, a key reason for me to take up ethnographic fieldwork is the same as for others, to understand the larger context, the dynamics of society – or what Axel mentions as moving beyond spatialization to "subjectification and temporalization" (2004, p. 45).

Another aspect is the liberty of designing the methodology. Studying a diaspora such as the Chinese community of Kolkata can focus on various aspects and reifies the need to understand the significance of positionality. For example, research techniques adopted in studying different aspects of different Chinese diasporas are diverse (see, Ma, 2003; Li & Juffermans, 2014; Nonini, 1999). Even for the Chinese diaspora of Kolkata, I have come across four research works ever conducted on this community and each one is distinctively different from the other, in both objective and methodology. Undoubtedly, the work of Ellen Oxfeld (1993) has been one of its kind. Her extensive fieldwork in the Hakka community resulted in a meticulous descriptive study of this entrepreneur community. Zhang's monographs (Zhang, 2009; 2010) on schools of Chinatown and the religious practices of the community as the community's cultural identity are both topic-specific and compact. Both have taken up individual components of cultural identity and provided more of an empirical study with a prescriptive solution. The other two works are not entirely based on the Chinese community. Bonnerjee's (2010) doctoral thesis and her work with Alison Blunt (Blunt & Bonnerjee, 2013) encompass the aspect of the diasporic experience of the Anglo-Indian and Chinese community from the perspective of a cultural geographer. The purpose of mentioning the works of these scholars is to emphasize the distinctiveness of the approaches. As ethnographic research designs are explicitly case-specific, they give the researcher the liberty to design and test the methodology on the ground. Moreover, I would argue that designing the methodology does not only depend on the uniqueness of the situation, participants and research question, but most certainly on the uniqueness of the stand of the researcher.

2.2. Bengali/ Researcher/ Friend: Situating Myself in Chinatown

Paradoxically, the role of the researcher in ethnography, which marks the difference with other qualitative research techniques, also is a debatable area of this discipline (Cohen, 2007). Like other researchers, I have also tried to figure out my role as a researcher and attain the ideal balance of having an insider's view with a neutral outsider's objectivity (Barnard, 2008).

I have dealt with the dilemma of taking sides, coping with my own emotions, struggling to keep myself separate from the community's despair and aspirations. I had interacted with the community closely – participated in the preparation of festivals, small outings, and long chatting sessions or *adda*[18]. After a few months, in April 2015, when the community members had a meeting with government officials, they asked me to join and speak on behalf of the community. I was told that as an urban planner I would understand the plans better. This opportunity provided me with a chance to reshape the research into "critical ethnography" (Cushman, 2002). It was a lucrative opportunity. Eventually, I took a step back and restricted myself from the "invited activism" (ibid., 2002, p. 928). It was evident that my research question did not require me to take a stand and fight against social injustice on behalf of the community. With this decision, was I unresponsive to the need of the community? Cushman explains that not all ethnographic research has to follow a critical approach, and not following an activist's role does not make the research unethical (ibid., 2002, p. 932). On a similar note, Armbruster (2008) states that the interpretation of ethics in anthropology extends beyond personal conviction and questions the larger political context.

In the initial days, I wanted to understand my relationship with the community and the larger context of the city. Was I a native? Or an outsider? Or was it "studying sideways" (Hannerz, 2010, p. 60) in a city which was kind of my home? I presumed that the familiarity/ nonfamiliarity with the field would decide the course of my fieldwork, shaping my observations. I grew up in Santinitketan, a small and quiet university town near Kolkata. My parents, who were from Kolkata, made sure we spent our two annual holidays in Kolkata. Kolkata was a source of unlimited wonder for me and my brother. The hustle-bustle of the city mesmerized us. Our father was always eager to show us around. As a historian, he wanted to show us the peculiarity of this city – a junction where the colonial past meets the present. Tiretta Bazar is very near to my father's ancestral place and I have often been to this area. Other than a few Chinese grocery stores on the main road, it was hard to imagine this area as the famous Chinatown of Kolkata. I was curious to know about this community, but not overly. A glance or two while passing by gave me the confidence to know the area well – a familiarity with the physical space. My acquaintance with this community space remained stationary for years. I never tried to talk to anyone or have a peep inside the Chinese temples,

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[18] *Adda: Adda* in Bengali refers to the process of informal meeting of people from similar socio-economic background. It is widely used for describing a chatting session. More than often *adda* is considered to be a unique part of the Bengali culture. However, Chakrabarty (2000) does not attribute the word *adda* or the tradition solely to the Bengalis but he relates *adda* to Bengali Modernism.

yet I was secured in the idea I knew the community well. With time I started to venture into other parts of the city as well. Like other people of my age, I went to Tangra (the comparatively newer Chinatown in the other end of the city) to have Chinese food. There was a quasi-comfortable familiarity with the Chinese community which was limited, yet considered sufficient[19]. My interest in the community was transitory, similar to my curiosity for other immigrant communities. The only difference was that I did not ridicule the community, which is common among the Bengali community; neither did I consider them to be secretive or suspicious. Mine was unmindful attention, which I mistook as an understanding of the community.

There is another angle to look at this ignorance: I am a Bengali and historically Bengalis never had a smooth interaction with the Chinese. In Chapter Three, I will discuss how Bengalis, being the majority and also confined within the rules of caste hierarchy, never had a close relationship with the Chinese. The Chinese were too strange for them and, on the other hand, as a closely knitted community, the Chinese were self-sufficient. Interactions were limited to business interests. The British colonizers made it possible for many communities to run their businesses in Kolkata. These communities lived in the fringe zone of the British and Bengali communities. The 1962 war between China and India turned out to be disastrous for the Chinese community. Not only were many sent to the Deoli Internment Camp, but their businesses and properties were encroached by the time they came back. Of course, after living in a city for years, the Chinese and the Bengalis interact, and the acquaintance is more evident than past bitterness. However, does that make me a native of the community? If I ask the community about their identity, a large part of it has to be how they have been treated by the Bengalis. How would I know they are not filtering the content knowing that I am a Bengali? Or coming back to reflexivity, how would I balance my identity as a researcher who is a Bengali? Will I be 'over'-sympathetic for the community or try to justify on behalf of the Bengalis? These questions puzzled me in deciding the boundary – where to draw the line between self and researcher, or how to balance between both.

While explaining my role as a researcher in Kolkata, I find support in Narayan's (1993) argument that a native researcher having a complete insider's view is an unrealistic assumption, so a native might differ from the participants on multiple issues. She proposes a

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[19] I have discussed the historical context of the relationship between the Bengali and the Chinese in Chapter Three. I have explained how the caste hierarchy determines the nature of relationships with other communities, and in the present days, the impact of globalization reshaping these relations.

greater emphasis on the reflexivity of the researcher or "shifting identities in relationship with the people" (Narayan, 1993, p. 682). In my case, as a researcher, I stumbled upon questions like, "How do I present myself as a Bengali researcher to the community – will I read between the lines too much?" Or on the contrary, would the participants expect me to understand every context? Chock (1986, p. 89) describes her miscommunication with the participants, where they assumed she would understand their ironical way of talking, but she did not – this was a possibility in my research, too. On the other hand, questions like "being a Bengali will I feel responsible for the ill-treatment they have faced so far?", "would I try to compensate that by being over-sympathetic?" and "are they going to treat me as a researcher or primarily a Bengali?" turned out not to be jeopardized in the field. The participants were more accommodating. They had more common aspects with me than I had expected. They frequently mentioned common food, places, and festivals I was familiar with. Initially, I was certain this was an attempt to make me feel comfortable, but later I realized that the image of exclusivity of Chinese culture is shaped by both the communities, with the hybridity of the urban culture being the commonality between all the communities. My initial hesitance with my Bengali-self proved to be insignificant in the field. The community accepted me more readily than I had expected, and my Bengali background never became a barrier in interaction for the community. Paradoxically, they would refer to a common joke about the Chinese or how they are called *Chinki*[20] by the Bengalis while talking to me. Often, they would expect me to know the context, not because I am Bengali but because we share a common cultural space. Armbruster argues that considering the concept of reflexivity, there is not any exclusive native perspective as any perspective on others is embedded in a perspective about one's own (2008, p. 11). In my fieldwork, this has been a two-way process – the participants had interpreted me and my work from a perspective that involves themselves. I started with a mindset of compartmentalizing the status quo of the situation – myself as a Bengali, as a researcher, as an outsider in the Chinese community, and inevitably with a role in addressing the social inequalities. However, in the field, I quickly realized that these are inseparable from each other. The reflection of myself in my research also implied to understanding the broader socio-political equations. One way of understanding my relationship with the field can be illustrated with Hannerz's (2010; 1998) concept of "studying sideways". He has used this term to explore a new trajectory of anthropological research of looking into transnationals other than anthropologists like missionaries and foreign correspondents. I

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[20] In India, the word *Chinki* is an ethnic slur used to describe people with mongoloid features.

would like to borrow this term and use it in a different way to describe my relationship with the participants, which is not exactly doing fieldwork at home but yet, there is a sense of familiarity. Sharing the geographical space and the obvious glocal connections between us are strong commonalities, where, paradoxically, we differ in other aspects of the same ground. Here, I imply the perspective of my participants to understand my role as a researcher. As Collins describes it in his fieldwork with the Quakers, when I went to a community meeting or a festival, I became a part of the meeting by weaving myself into the fabric (Collins, 2002, p. 92). He states that the self is constructed through conversations with others. Moreover, he points out that "our ethnographic experiences are apprehended and comprehended entirely by virtue of our memory, or facility to recall similar experiences that we have had in the past" (Collins, 2010, p. 243).

As I agree that my experience of the community is an integral part of my inquiry, it also leads to the understanding that this experience is not only about identifying socio-cultural similarities or dissimilarities. After all, my memory and imagination of the community are not about a place or a group of people. As Okely (2007) mentions, my bodily experiences are essential parts of forming my idea of the identity of the Chinese community. I distinctly remember the smell of smoke in the morning from all the coal-fuelled stoves of the teashops or the yellow street-light flooding the streets of Chinatown in the evening. Moreover, these experiences have been shaped by interactions and growing familiarity. Many taught me how to hold the chopsticks in the right way or how to eat wantons with soup. I also started to have a sense of comfort or confidence in the physical space which I considered to be congested or even unsafe in the beginning. Initially, I would avoid the part of Sun Yat-Sen Street behind Si-Up Club because of the over-flowing garbage on the street and drunk men at night – the Chinese did not care about it at all. They told me nothing bad could happen to me as the neighborhood knew I was close to the Chinese people. After a while, this dark section road became my quick everyday short-cut route.

How do I present myself as a researcher in my writing? Or rather, do I incorporate myself as a part of the observation or subsequent representation, or seclude it completely? Ethnography has been dealing with the complexity related to the role of the researcher, narration, and unavoidable imprint of the observer's perspective. *Writing culture* has presented a temporal journey of this dilemma in the most comprehensive way. The classical anthropological method had maintained a distinct balance between subjective observation and keeping strict objective distance while writing. This tendency started to change in the 1960s when authors

began to incorporate their personal experiences as a key element of their writing, breaking the previous norm of maintaining the objective distance (Clifford, 1986). It is by now clear that I am for obvious reasons greatly inspired by *Writing Culture* and the subsequent movement. Though it might contain the typical post-modernist evasiveness, as I have said earlier, rather than doting on achieving the ideal objective perspective of the researcher, I tend to focus more on the larger context, which includes myself, the socio-cultural landscape (a space defined by interaction) and the historical references. Lisette Josephides elucidates this in a very easily comprehensible way in a rather intense discussion on locality and informants proposing "metadiscourses on their culture and wide world". She says: "Anthropology is communication in the borderlands, where one situated commentator meets another. In this space, ethnography and theory merge when data are seen as derived from the interactions and statements of people who have their own critical awareness" (Josephides, 1997, p. 20).

Towards more recent years, the acceptance of such liberal and radical ways of writing has become more common with two aspects becoming very prominent during this process. The first aspect is the recognition that fieldwork study and subsequent interpretation is a self-balancing system consisting of the researcher, the informants and the objective of the study (Josephides, 1997). The second aspect is the realization of the essentiality of context. William Sax did his extensive fieldwork in the central Himalayas among the Harijans to study traditional rituals of healing practices. While describing his epistemological stand in describing the field details, he writes:

> "Such "reflexive" ethnography is no doubt more personal than older styles of ethnographic writings, which left the ethnographer out of the narrative. But to abandon the older style of (pseudo-) objective ethnographic writing is not to reject the idea that there is a real social world that can be more or less accurately described; it is only to acknowledge that the ethnographer's observations and analysis are partial and limited, and to enhance the adequacy of his representation by being truthful about how it was produced." (Sax, 2009, p. 5)

My methodological stance reflects William Sax's opinion of describing the context, atmosphere and, most importantly, my role in a particular situation. During my fieldwork, I have come across multiple situations, where my role could not be entirely neutral, unobtrusive and almost invisible. Rather than considering it as a limitation, I have used these situations as a new perspective to understand the community. The motive of my representation of the narratives is to present the thought process of the community in the most

elaborate way possible, but I do emphasize the significance of my perspective. I have tried to incorporate the contextual relevance of any observation or narratives. In an interview, Amitav Ghosh mentions the inherent discomfort of the anthropologist to include himself in the writing, which he says is true for fiction writers as well. The delight of anthropological writing which I consider is the same for fictional writing as well as academic works. He says:

> "Anthropologists aren't alone in their discomfort with the omniscient narrator. It's rare nowadays to come across a novel written in this form. (…) I don't think these attitudes are always based on reasoned positions: they are often the product of diffused cultural and political anxieties, mainly concerned with the matters of identity. Suffice it to say that in my view the very possibility of an imaginative literature rests upon the willingness to embark upon the adventure of trying to see the world from another person's point of view." (Stankiewicz, 2009, p. 539)

Amitav Ghosh mentions "diffused cultural and political anxieties" as a key aspect that overcasts the judgements regarding the ethical stand of the writer in fictional writings. I would argue this over-complicates the serious academic works as well. The process of narration inherently involves the narrator. Whatever imperfections it may contain, it is unavoidable. The criticisms highlighting this drawback come from various backgrounds: the feminist ideologists criticize texts written from a gender-biased objective; postcolonial theorists condemn the westernized perspective of describing and understanding the subject. Whatever the point of reference, these criticisms evolve out of ascertaining the ethical stand of the writer.

2.3. Shaping Fieldwork: Methodology, People and the Connections

The first step of my fieldwork was an attempt to locate the community or to understand the realistic implication of the notion that Chinese live in Chinatown. Is there a geographical reference? Kolkata has one Chinese community spread over two Chinatowns, one is Tiretta Bazar and the other is Tangra. Later on, I was promptly corrected by people from Tiretta Bazar that Chinatown is Tiretta Bazar as Tangra came up much later. Well, the people from Tangra not quite agreed to this. They were right when they made the point that Kolkata knows Tangra as Chinatown because there are Chinese eateries. Leaving aside which Chinatown is authentic, I tried to see/find out if the claim of finding Chinese in Chinatown was right. Many of the Chinese live neither in Tiretta Bazar nor in Tangra, but most of them visit these places often. I had decided that I would focus on people visiting both areas and try

to establish contact with them. These two areas were the foci of my fieldwork. I did venture out of these two Chinatowns but most of my time was spent here.

I arrived in Kolkata in September 2014. Though I have been preparing for the fieldwork since the beginning of 2014, I did not get a chance to visit the field. The fieldwork was divided into three phases. From September 2014 to January 2015, January 2015 to July 2015 and finally October 2015 to January 2016. It is often considered that a typical anthropological fieldwork design should include breaks (Barnard, 2008, pp. 382-383) to have a comprehensive understanding of the situation as well as to deal with the exhaustion. Pardo mentions the time away from his field studying the *Popolino* (considered to be the Neapolitan poor) gave him an insight into the process (2012, p. 56). Initially, I did not want to have these phases. Due to visa requirements as well as my residence permit in Germany, I had to divide the entire period of the fieldwork into the mentioned phases. The short periods in Germany helped me to arrange the field notes, interviews, and group discussions. During this time, I could also have discussions with my supervisor and have a holistic view of the work done so far.

I had started to prepare my fieldwork from February 2014 after completing the mandatory Colloquium in Anthropology – parallel to the literature review as most of it was contacting people from the community via social media. I also reached out to my friends and acquaintances in Kolkata to explore their contacts in this community. Initially, I wrote to people who were active in commenting and posting on the Facebook page of the Cultural Association. H1 wrote back almost instantaneously in an encouraging way. He gave me his contact details and asked me to meet him in Kolkata. I was a bit reluctant because other than him no other contact worked well. Along with closely observing the community, I had decided upon three other methods – semi-structured interviews, group discussions, and spontaneous conversations in the neighborhood. I was determined to have as many conversations I could with community members in different situations. I had decided I would try to incorporate participants from both genders and different age groups. However, since the population size is quite small (considered generally as 1500 people in Kolkata presently), I could not be selective. In Germany, I had prepared a rough structure with discussion points for the semi-structured interviews which were based on my research questions[21]. During my time in Kolkata, I had allocated some time for archives and libraries to search archival material on the Chinese community, the legislative history of minority rights and the history

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[21] The structure of the interview questions has been provided in the Index section.

of Kolkata. I considerably collected a large amount of archival material from the National Library and Archaeological Survey of India. I also collected material from the National Archives, Trimurti Bhavan Library and the Archives and Library of Minority Commission. I will discuss the details of this research material later in this chapter.

Coming back to the promised meeting with H1, I finally met him at a coffee shop on Park Street. He was warm and enthusiastic. After a brief chat, he invited me to the ongoing rehearsal of the Chinese New Year Festival. I was still unsure about how to contact other members since the Facebook connections did not work out well. H1 gave me some phone numbers and ensured that I would be able to easily meet them in the rehearsal. I soon started going to dance and song practices regularly. Looking back at this incident, I now realize that this was an ice-breaking phase for me and a great opportunity. I met Z at the rehearsal and he became one of the few people with whom I had interacted most extensively. I also met R1, who is a Bengal married to a Chinese girl. He eventually introduced me to his father-in-law, who, in turn, introduced me to his friends at various Chinese clubs. After the initial network building with the community, I had finalized the methods. One aspect of my fieldwork, which was very helpful, was a diversion from the traditional task of learning a new language. Though I was with the Chinese community, they spoke Hindi and Bengali and only the older generations used some Chinese words. It was not difficult for me to follow but it took some time to be habituated with the hindi accent. I will write in detail about this mixed language in Chapter Six.

I had conducted several interview sessions with fifteen people. I met them for interviews which are mainly conversations with leading points rather than structured ones. I have accompanied them on their daily chores. I grew a close bond with seven people whom I met regularly. Apart from that, I became a regular at the clubs and eating houses.

After the first break in January, I changed my course of action. Initially, my objective was to collect as many interviews as possible. However, I soon realized that some of the participants were thoughtful enough to agree to a lengthy interview, but the answers were quite mechanical. In these cases, I had learned to be selective later on. During the fieldwork, I tried to conduct several rounds of interviews with the same person, but in some cases, I managed to have only one. Sometimes, only one interview would turn out to be an open one, but mostly after a series of interviews, I would see that the person was intrigued by the rounds of conversations we had. Rather than meeting new people for more interviews, I started to focus on conducting a series of interviews with the same person.

One more method which I improvised was when I started to participate more in the daily community activities such as chatting sessions at various clubs, preparation of festivals, Sunday meetings at Church. Rather than only meeting people over an interview or a group discussion, I realized that an informal chatting session at a club or eating house was more effective. People would participate enthusiastically, and a conversation would bring out different perspectives. In many of these situations, I would not participate by asking a question but just following the conversation. This was time-consuming, yet ensured more meaningful lively participation.

Chatting Session While Chopping Onions (April 2015)

As we had decided yesterday, I come to the Nam Soon Club to meet N1. Other than N1, there is N1's assistant, who is wandering around, looking busy. It is a nice sunny morning, not too hot, so I sit on the veranda and have a look around. The tiny courtyard is bordered by a strip of land with the usual trees like mango and lime, and some seasonal flowers. In the meantime, N1 sets up his table next to me with the help of his assistant. There is a huge pile of onions and chillies. N1 explains he will be cooking noodles for today's dinner hosted by the club for the members. He is definitely very busy today and he says if he starts to chat with me then he will be late. Yet, he seems quite eager to talk. He asks the assistant to bring tea for both of us and brings a few slices of pound cake for me. I sit beside the door of the temple, and he takes the corner chair. N1 brings his teacup and cigarette to settle down for a chat. Surprisingly, this temple compound or the club premise is very peaceful, unlike its surroundings. I casually start the interview. Other than switching on the recorder, I do not start to question him right away. He finds it amusing that I want to know about him, however, he starts quite enthusiastically.

The small door at the corner of the courtyard opens and a guy enters. He is of N1's age and seems to be familiar with the place. He does not pay much attention to our conversation/interview and begins to chat with N1's assistant. I begin to worry a bit that N1 might leave the interview and start to talk to him, especially because today is a busy day. However, N1 is quite engrossed in talking about inter-cultural marriage and Chinese etiquettes. N1 speaks in Hindi with a regional Bihari accent.

F1 sits on a chair, maintaining a little distance from us. He listens to our conversation but initially does not show any interest in participating. I focus on N1 and try to notice if he is comfortable talking in F1's presence.

A part of the interview is mentioned here to demonstrate how F1 joined our conversation. Though N1 knew about my research, F1 did not know anything; yet he started to talk quite enthusiastically. They both spoke concurrently, often disagreeing with one another. After F1 joined the

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conversation, he almost hijacked the interview, but it turned out to be an interesting conversation with very little input from my side – except for some leading points at times. It could not be called an interview or even a focus group discussion, yet both of them prompted each other to talk more.

N1: Not a problem. We cannot be misguided. They will tease us, but we are always quiet and on our own.

F1: [F1 joins the conversation and starts to talk comfortably] We know how to survive. Does not matter what you think, the facial change […] will be there. No matter how much you try. Even we will say in India we are a little bit [x], even you go to America [...] black and white and Chinese […] colour. Now people say colour.

N1: It is there. Show them the book. I feel like killing them…

F1: I wanted to show it to my wife's doctor, he has this habit…

N1: He has two books.

F1: *Arre* [Expression in Hindi for surprise] I do not have any now. One is gone. My Mami will bring one for me later.

N1: He is very fond of history. He is also very interested in social work these days. He is also retired.

Me: Which book are you talking about?

F1: Um. Lost tribe.

Me: And the other one?

F1/N1: Another one was by these people […] those two girls

Me: They were from CEPT {a Planning institute based in Ahmedabad, Gujarat} right?

F1: Yes! From CEPT. They took photos of the temples in Kolkata. Chinatown also […] they tried to do this thing…

[Conversation continues]

During my time in Chinatown, there were a few festivals and occasions when the whole community came together. These were great opportunities for me to observe as well as interact with a large array of people who were not only Chinese.

Major Events During my Fieldwork

Here, I have mentioned sections from my field notes of two such major events. I have participated

on these occasions but in a passive way. These were events where I could observe the activities and write down the details afterward.

Preparation for the Chinese New Year (December 2014)

I first went to the practice of the cultural program for the Chinese New Year on 6th December 2014. H1 had told me that the practices did not have a schedule because it depended on the availability of the participants. However, he said he would make sure I would be informed about the date and time when they decide to meet.

I reach Sacred Heart School on Weston Street at 4:30 pm. I take a rickshaw to reach there early. The street is narrow and congested with a number of shops selling kebab and curries filling the entire area with smoke and the aroma of spices. The school entrance appears to be smaller than I had expected. It is a small door opening to a large courtyard. Half of the courtyard is covered, and the other half is open. The big building on the right makes it impossible to have a lot of sunlight. The covered half has a small stage where kids are running around chasing each other. Slightly elder children are sitting and talking on one side. Presumably, the mothers of these children are sitting on the staircase leading to the stage. I find H1 trying to finalize the songs and go to him to say hello. He says hello and asks me to take a sit. After seeing that the practice is not going to start immediately, he comes to me and introduces me to his wife. She is running around after their child, who is just three. His wife is from a different state, where the Chinese population is very rare. She speaks Cantonese and found it difficult to adjust to Kolkata in the beginning. She spends most of her time taking care of her three-year-old son. She's shy in the beginning but soon starts to talk about her son, his schooling and his habits. H1 introduces me to R1, who is married to a Chinese girl, and seems to be quite enthusiastic about the practice. A guy enters the compound with a scooter. H1 says his name is Z. Z says hello with a big warm smile. He sits down with me and we start to talk. R1 also joins in and promises to show me around after the practice is over. Z asks about my life in Germany and I fix an interview with him. It is difficult to continue a conversation because everyone has some work or the other. I ask them about the children participating and they explain that not all of them are Chinese – some are of 'mixed' origin. One of the parents might be Chinese and the other is Bengali, Bihari or Nepali. The mothers are three middle-aged women wearing *salwar kameez* and chatting among themselves. There are two boys and five girls, all in between the age group of 8-15. The only toddler is H1's son. The practice has not started yet and H1 insists they should have two 'Chinese' songs. They have a long discussion and the mothers vote for Bollywood songs instead of Chinese. The kids, especially the eldest girl in the group, are elated by the idea. She quickly shows some dance moves. H1 tries to convince them, but they do not want to give any Chinese song a chance. The practice finally starts with the only Chinese song they have finalized so far. Someone plays it on the speakers and the kids start to dance with umbrellas. The

next song is a Bollywood song. The mothers look excited and clap in between. It is already dark by now and the mothers start to hurry up. I did not notice that two men have been sitting near the gate – they are the fathers who have come to pick up the kids. R1 comes to me and asks if I would like to visit his Chinese in-laws, who live in the neighborhood. I ask H1 and he assures me the practice is over and they will be discussing the time for the next practice. I leave with R1 to meet his father-in-law.

I get a call from H1 that they are going to the *dosa* [popular paper-thin wrap made with fermented rice and lentil flour, a delicacy from South India] place in the corner and I can join them. I hurry up to leave from R1's in-law's place and hop on to R1's scooter. The *dosa* place is small and I find H1, his wife and their son along with Z. They start to talk about how good the *dosa* is and finally the toddler starts to talk to me, which I soon realize is to have a look at my phone.

Note: I attended other practice sessions where we followed a similar routine – dance practice and having *dosa* from the corner shop. The children became familiar with me but never wanted to sit and talk. This time was precious for them and they loved to play. Surprisingly H1's son became very fond of me and would come running whenever he saw me entering the courtyard.

Meeting with the Government Officials (April 2015)

When A2 asks me if I can join them for the meeting with the local Municipal Corporation, I instantly agree. He does not elaborate on the context much but mentions that the plan will only be finalized after meeting the community.

[…] I arrive at Si-Up Club exactly at 10 am. I come to know that everyone is waiting for the officials near the Breakfast Market area. I rush to the spot thinking I am late for the meeting. However, the officials have not arrived yet, but they are around the corner somewhere. I find a lot of familiar faces in the group and they all look very excited. D1 asks if I can take some photos with my camera. The officials arrive and start to talk among themselves about what all needs to be done. One of them asks D1 (who is kind of representing the community on this occasion) to show them around. They talk about street lighting and 'including Chinese elements' in the planning of the area. While taking photos, I try to walk with the group which now consists of the officials, community members and a few curious onlookers. A2 and others from the Club ask me to ask them something. Reluctantly, I ask them a few questions from an urban planner's perspective such as "how far has the plan been developed?" and "what kind of Chinese element are they considering to incorporate?". The officials along with community members walk up to Toong-On Church. The roads are congested, and the footpath has been completely encroached by ragpickers. There is garbage on the road with a huge garbage dump yard next to Toong-On Church. The officials do not seem to be bothered by this pathetic scene. We enter Toong-On Church and the officials are visibly excited to see the deities. They start to take photos with their mobile phones – most likely for their

collection. We go to the first floor, which has a hall with big windows. I am still waiting for the consulting session with the community members. The officials agree to the invite of having tea and snacks. D1 quickly arranges tea. The officials sit around a big table and a draft copy of the plan is circulated. I realize that many of them are seeing it for the first time. Still no sign of discussion with the family. They lightly joke among themselves that without funds nothing will be possible. D1 tries to peep over their shoulders to have a look at the plan and listens to their conversation carefully. Others are standing next to the window. The officials decide to leave. Some go downstairs to see them off, the rest looks down from the big windows. I decide to join the second group. They show me some of the buildings in the neighborhood which used to be important Chinese landmarks. I ask them about the meeting and they say they are waiting to see what happens. Nevertheless, everyone agrees that it was a good thing that they visited. I go downstairs to join the rest. A middle-aged guy who is quite influential (A2 tells me) is there and talking to them about the poor condition of the neighborhood. He, too, is hopeful that the redesigning of the area will turn out to be successful. D1 and A2 are quite happy about the meeting. D1 asks me to make sure again that I have taken photos. Someone proposes that since this is a special day and a successful one, we should take a group photo together. It takes time to make everyone stand in a row. When we are almost ready, one kid from the street decides to stroll around in front of us. F1 starts to shoo him away. I insist that we take two sets of photos, one with me and one with the community members only. The guy from the neighborhood does not want to join first, but the group unanimously decided that he is very much part of the Chinese community, so he should be there in the picture. First, it is my turn to take the photo and I say to them, "Ready? 1, 2, 3... say cheese!" B1 starts laughing and says, "Say chilli-chicken." I look at him and he further elaborates his joke "We are Chinese, so we say chilli-chicken" [in India, people generally associate chilli chicken with the Chinese as a typical Chinese cuisine]. Knowing the common jokes associated with the Chinese in Kolkata, I feel a bit embarrassed, but they all start to laugh at B1's joke. After taking the photos, I talk to B1 about the project. He says he is not very hopeful. B1 leaves in a hurry and the rest of the group also decides to leave. The morning is almost over, and they all have works to finish.

While being away from the field for three months (August 2015-October 2015), I went through the collected data. Though I had decided I would not have any obligation of having participants from all age groups, I realized I did not have participants from the teenager group at all. I spoke with Z, who had a good rapport with the young crowd, and he said it was unlikely they would agree to sit for a lengthy conversation. I started to communicate with a few people through Z and they agreed to write about their stories. I structured a questionnaire that would help them to talk about their life. Z shared the questionnaire with them and a total

of nine persons wrote back to us. Some very interesting stories came up, but there was little chance to follow up. I will mention some of these in the thesis, but not all.

2.4. Fieldwork Schedule

Since I was dealing with community members with various professional and personal commitments, my daily schedule was often planned at the last minute. On the days when I did not have any interviews or plans for meeting people, I spent time at the clubs or eating houses. I would also organize my work at the National Archive according to the situation in the field. Interviews were held at places convenient for the participant like their own shops or tea shops. After meeting a person a few times, I could understand where she would feel comfortable. M1 never opted for an eating house or tea shop. She insisted we should meet at her place or church. Contradictory to this situation, A2 was never at home in the evenings, he would always meet me at the club. The benefit of meeting people at these places other than their own home was that often others would join the conversation – I would get a chance to build more contacts.

Diagram 1 Schedule of a Typical Day

Morning

– Tirretta Bazar for tea
– look for someone to chat

Later half of the morning

– Interviews in Tengra or Tirretta Bazar

/Nam Soon Club

/Meet Apak at D'Lay Eating House or his home

Afternoon

– Continuation of the interview or chatting sessions

– Lunch along with sorting out the notes and recordings from morning

Late afternoon

– Interviews (if scheduled)

/Meet Thomas or Robert after their offices

Evening

– Continuation of the interview

/ Meet Atat at Si-Up Club

Sundays would usually be busy because most of my participants would be at home and free to meet over a cup of tea. Most importantly, the Breakfast Market on Sunday was a place to meet people and probably also an opportunity to see the individual participants coming together as a community.

2.5. Participants

I was pleased with how the contacts multiplied quickly. I fixed meetings – as many as I could. But soon enough I realized that more than two interviews a day were not a plausible option for me. I was completely exhausted by the second interview. I also had to consider

some alterations in the way I conduct interviews. Worried about missing something important, I would ask questions, write down notes, record (check the recording as well). In this chaos, I would invariably/inevitably stop being an interested listener. Especially during interviews with Z, I noticed he would talk a lot more if it was more like a conversation.

After the initial month of getting to know people in the community, especially in Tiretta Bazar, I started to understand the situation a bit better. Initially, I had thought that there would be no dearth of people willing to give an interview, but this joy was short-lived. I soon realized the questions I was asking them could not be answered over one or two meetings. There was a need to meet them regularly to build trust. Among all the people I had interacted with in Chinatown, I grew a close bond with seven of them. I started to accompany them in various activities and met them regularly. On the other hand, there were people like M1, D1 and L2, whom I met once in a while, but had a good rapport with as well. I had also marked a few places where I turned up regularly and sat there for hours. In the later phases of the fieldwork, I used to go to the Si-Up Club regularly in the evenings to listen to the conversations of the old men. Another place was the D'Lay Eating House, where I would chat with A1 over a bowl of wonton soup. It was very helpful for me when I became a regular at these places. These long sessions of observation were useful in understanding the broader context – the interaction between the city and the community. I came across many aspects which I would not have thought about including in the interviews. For example, they often spoke about the relation between the Hakka people and other groups, or children not following Chinese customs.

I could not be selective about the specifications of the participants, instead, I focused on interactions. I had different reasons to grow special bonds with people from different age groups. I went out regularly with H1 and his family, Z, R1. We were almost of the same age group and could talk endlessly about politics, movies, and food. On the other hand, A2, A1, and the old men from the Si-Up Club were happy to have a companion. R befriended me because I had spent a considerable time in Delhi, which was her hometown before marriage. As an incredibly busy mother, M1 spoke about her life and her engagement in various church activities as a devoted Christian[22]. In general, I had two groups of people with whom I had interacted closely over the entire period of fieldwork. The first group consisted of young people like H1, Z, L1, M1, B1. We grew a bond together through the practice sessions of the

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[22] The appendix section includes brief descriptions of character sketches

festivals, talking about Chinatown and what they wanted to change. Parallel to that, I was close to the group of comparatively old, retired people. They were always ready to talk about their lives and the world around them. Most likely, I represented the younger generation who was ever busy according to them. The fact that someone from this generation was ready to sit and chat with them for hours was probably surprising and a little amusing for them.

2.6. Leaving the Field: Last Few Cups of Tea Together

I went back to the field in October 2015 and stayed there till January 2016. This visit was not entirely fieldwork-centric. I had planned to complete collecting the archival material from the Trimurti Bhavan Library in Delhi and the Nation Library Kolkata. I had also planned to meet historians specialized in 19th century Kolkata to collect materials on the socio-cultural composition of colonial Kolkata. However, I also met participants for interviews and mostly went to Si-Up Club to spend time with them. I had decided to work on certain aspects which were not sufficiently discussed in the first two phases. Eventually, I started to tell them it was time to go back to Germany. Initially, not knowing the process of PhD well, they had assumed I would come back after a while. After explaining that I would be writing and not planning to visit them soon, the Si-Up Club group were visibly disappointed. It was hard for me not to be emotional – at the same time, I wanted to capture this moment of paradox where attachment with the participants was overtaking my objectivity as a researcher. I once again explained that I would write their stories and focused on answering the ethical concerns. They did not pay much attention, instead, they told me to take care of my health and to be in touch with my parents. A2 said, "You know you can visit us anytime you want, right?" The last evening I had spent in the dimly lit club. I knew I would not be making it to return for one last time on the next day which would be extremely busy. Despite knowing the impossibility, I promised I would visit and then I left. I suppose I wanted to avoid the immediate rush of sadness.

2.7. Processing of Data

The collected data from the field consisted of interviews, group discussions, field notes from daily observations and special notes made on specific occasions. I had mostly recorded the interviews where the participant was comfortable, whereas some interviews were completed after combining the points I had jotted down during the interviews. Simultaneously, most of the group discussions were noted down and elaborated later on. I had started transcribing and summarizing interviews during the period of fieldwork itself. Later on, after coming back to

Germany, I went through the recorded materials and transcribed the sections I wanted to use in my writing. I did not use any software for coding or analyzing the collected data. Instead, I have extensively used Microsoft Excel to organize the specifications of the collected data. I have also used Microsoft Excel to collect and arrange details of individual participants. I took several photographs during the period of fieldwork. These photographs helped in describing life, neighborhood and connections. I have used these photographs to further elucidate their narratives. They not only presented daily life in Chinatown but also reflected my perspective of looking into the community. Few photographs were taken on particular occasions which described my relationship with the community. I have extensively used photographs to further illustrate my account of Chinatown. The understanding of the field experience is essentially an amalgamation of my daily experience in Chinatown. It comprises my sensory details and the personal details of each character. Over time, I tried to understand individual stories in the history of the community and the larger context of the city while at the same time essentializing the recognition of my role as a researcher in depicting the details. I have introduced the characters as I have seen the community and have not specified their details to any real person. These characters are primarily sketches of people of the community.

Chapter Three: A Retrospective of Kolkata with the Chinese

3.1. From Calcutta to Kolkata: Placing the Chinese in between

Looking at its cultural diversity and extensive interactions through the global economic network, can we assume that this city is truly cosmopolitan? If yes, then are the Chinese a part of this cosmopolitan legacy? Did the Chinese or any non-Indian community come to Kolkata? This question can only be understood from the history of the city. The colonial period was the time when the traditional conservative Hindu society went through a tremendous change, a change that would not only transform three insignificant villages into one gigantic city but also radically redesign the socio-cultural mosaic of the city. The multicultural characteristics of Calcutta or Kolkata cannot essentially be attributed to globalization or the economic liberalization of the 90s. All four major cosmopolitan cities of India- Delhi, Mumbai (Bombay), Chennai (Madras), and Kolkata – have a significant colonial influence on architecture, food, language, and virtually whatever forms the image of the city. Much of the present I of these cities is a contribution of the colonizers. They not only had a great impact on the socio-political and economic functions of the city, but they were successful in remodelling or structuring (in the case of Kolkata) the entire city. Kolkata was almost solely built by the English. A very brief history tells us about the political turmoil and the graduate deterioration of Mughal power which climaxed in 1757 with the defeat of the Nawab of Bengal in the Battle of Plassey. Later on, with the final downfall in the Battle of Buxar, it became evident that the English had overpowered the Mughals. But if we look at the sequence of events then it would be clear that Kolkata was gradually being built as a city much before the Battle of Plassey. In 1698, the British East India Company acquired three villages (Govindapur, Sutanuti and Kalikata) from a local landlord and started to develop them into a presidency city. The favorable geographical location quickly made Kolkata the hub of trade and commerce. The accounts of Trade and Navigation of different ports under British India are evidence of the diverse array of imported and exported products. One example can be found in the report of April of 1983 where the main imported items were building and engineering materials, furniture, carriage, wine, and liquors, and the main exported items were cotton, indigo, jute, opium, grains and pulses, ivory and others. Other than the United Kingdom, regular shipments were sent to countries like Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Egypt, China, Turkey. Other communities also benefited from this extensive network of business of the British. Kolkata presented lucrative opportunities to the traders from different countries and very soon the Greeks, Armenians, and Chinese became a part of the socio-cultural mosaic of the city. Interestingly, the financial opportunities attracted not

only wealthy business communities like the Armenians but comparatively smaller groups like the Greeks or the Chinese as well. Kolkata remained the capital, as well as the stage for many crucial decisions regarding the expansion and administration of the colony until Delhi was announced as the capital of India in 1911.

After the British settled in Kolkata permanently, the Indian urban society went through an unprecedented change. For the convenience of discussion, it is here divided into two sections – the socio-cultural transformation and the change in the physical landscape. Both of these are practically inseparable though. From English education, railway, and advances in medical science to the western extravagances like expensive alcohols, artifacts and western dressing style completely changed the people – this lifestyle was unforeseen by the Bengali society before. Interestingly, the impact of the British lifestyle reached all classes of society in one way or another. Despite religious and social reservations, urbanization shook the core of the caste system, and at the same time, shaped peculiar hybrid forms. The urban settlement pattern as well as occupational structure overruled the previous stringent norms of the caste system. The British became the authoritative figure who could defy the social rules and be approachable to everyone. There are two sides to the socio-cultural change – first, the changes the Indian society went through, and similarly, we do find a very strong impact of this Indian-ness on the lifestyle of the British as well.

More or less from the second half of the 19th century till the beginning of the 20th century, Kolkata was shaped by the British. Kolkata saw the rise of an English-speaking, rich group of people along with a middle-class who chose to work under the British. Among the Bengalis who made a fortune by trading with the British, was Rabindranath Tagore's grandfather Dwarkanath Tagore. Krishna Kripalini wrote in Dwarkanath's biography:

> Dwarkanath started the export business as a partner of his European friends. From the beginning of his career, he maintained a close relationship with the European businessmen and the officials of the East Indian Company. He came to know them either through Rammohan Roy[23] or his relatives from Pathurighata, and he also made an effort to extend his own social circle.

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[23] Rammohan Roy was one of few social reformers of 19th century Bengali who extensively worked on abolishing practices like *sati* and child marriage. He contributed in establishing schools and colleges.

He used to export silk, sugar and soda according to the orders he received either from the company or other European businessmen. (Kripalini, 1984, p. 44)

The acceptance of the western lifestyle or in a way modernization, also made it possible for various businessmen to introduce new goods in Kolkata. Kolkata thus was not only a port where the British could send a ship full of goods to England and other countries but also a place with an increased consumption rate. It became a place for trade and commerce. The Hindus adopted the western lifestyle to a large extent which was antithetical to the deeply religious way of life they had nurtured before. This transformation was never easy – there was resistance from almost every class of the conservative tightly bound society. The western lifestyle challenged a society whose values were deeply embedded in social and religious taboos. We are talking about society where eating beef, travelling to other countries by crossing the ocean (*kalapani*[24]), or not marrying the daughter off at the right age could mean the family would be socially boycotted[25]. The cruelty and extortion towards people from lower castes or women were brutal and at the same time well calculated. Brahmins were lenient for the rich people from the Kayastha or Vishya caste who backed them in return with money and gifts. At the same time, the harshest rules were applied to people from lower castes. The rich collection of 19th or 20th century Bengali literature contains a vivid description of this era and the gradual westernization. Coming back to the story of Dwarkanath, he was keen to be a part of European society, show off his wealth[26] and expand his business. He did pay for his love for the western lifestyle and rejected the rules of traditional Hindu society. His wife had refused to have any contact with him. We find several references (Dev, 2010); (Kripalini, 1984, pp. 120-121) describing how his wife sought the advice of the Brahmin priests to purify herself. Here, the two very apparent significant changes in Bengali society are the flourishing businesses in the city and the fierce objection of the traditional Hindu society against westernization. Kaliprasanna Singha's *Humtum Pyanchar Naksha* is a sarcastic account of everyday life in Kolkata which reflects the

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[24] *Kalapani* meaning 'Black Water" indicated the sea or the ocean. Crossing the ocean used to denote that the person has been to other 'impure' country which of often resulted in socially isolating him/her.
[25] Social boycotting of a family was a common practice in 19th century Bengali which continued till the beginning of 20th century. This process used to be called as *ekghore karā* where the family would not be supported by the community by the order of the Brahmins for any work and ceremony. This was considered to be a devastating punishment and used as a means to maintain the caste as well as class hierarchy in Bengali.
[26] See, Kripalini (1984) for the description of the lavish parties thrown by Dwarkanath in England to strengthen his business network.

pandemonium of the Bengali society of the colonial period. Nag in the editor's note gives an insight into Kaliprasanna Singha's perspective. Kaliprasanna Singha's used to consider family lineage, elitism the same as education. For him, these people were only the eligible ones to be respected in society. His disappointment was reflected in his fierce criticism of the famous families in wretched conditions, and the families who made money by the grace of the British (1991, p. 10). Kaliprasanna Singha, in his usual satirical tone, divided the Bengali society into three types – English old, who followed the British blindly, new class, who was educated but did not follow the British, and pure Hindu, the conservative group far away from the English culture (ibid. 4). *Apanar Mukh Appuni Dekh* is another similar satirical work by Bholanath Mukhapadhya, depicting the chaos in the Bengali society (Mukhopadhya, 1982, first published in 1863). A reflection of this transition could be seen in the cultural composition of the city as well.

On the other hand, we see the strong current of social changes. Bengali intellectuals and social reformers could see the irreplaceability of the English language and advocated for the same to be taught in schools. At the same time, the implementation of law and order under the British, growing trade and commerce almost forced the city to accept the changes. This change was unprecedented and was soon to turn Bengali society upside down. Interestingly, the Bengali society accepted some and similarly rejected some changes. Moreover, we see a quasi-adjustment, a situation where traditional practices or beliefs were reshaped by the new trend. But, this change was not radical, and this process was selective. There are several references such as *Raibari* (Debi, First Published in 1991) and *Thakurbarir Andarmahol* (Dev, 2010) about husbands taking up initiatives to teach English to their wives. The changes came gradually. We find numerous examples of the conservative Bengali families' fascination to follow the British lifestyle. This picture of gradual adaptation became evident when it became common for Bengali families to go to Whiteway and Laidlaw, a famous British departmental store in Kolkata for shopping. At the same time, this transformation was dichotomous. While allopathic doctors were allowed to enter the women's section of the house, Chitra Dev wrote that Rabindranath Tagore's mother always used to wash her hand whenever the doctor checked her pulse (Dev, 2010). Numerous such examples (see works like *Thod Bori khara*, *Sharatkumari Rachanaboli*, *Paakdondi* among many others) narrate the social transformation as well as the internal contradictions where conservative Hindu belief and the related social system faced turmoil. The economic prosperity thanks to growing trade and commerce made it possible for the Bengali community to look beyond and to some

extent overrule rigid Hindu norms. Many rich businessmen of that time were not Brahmins, yet had an influential position in society. This trend was truly unprecedented in Hindu society. Replicating the British architectural style or importing artifacts from Europe (Tagore, 1973), the Bengali society in many ways adopted the Western lifestyle. Above all, the predominantly Bengali society of Kolkata started to share the city with others. The changes were brought mainly but not entirely by the British. As I have mentioned earlier, the economic growth enabled other communities like the Armenians, Greeks, Chinese, and others to make a living in the city as well. The Bengali quarters of the city still followed the Hindu lifestyle, but at the same time, a Greek church nearby or a Chinese salesman (Neel Akasher Neechey, 1959) in the neighborhood became the new normal. The monochromatic life of the Bengali society became vibrant with new elements in their daily lives.

It was not only the Bengali society that went through a transformation, adoption, and adjustment. The British colonizers had to go through the same, albeit in a different way. Interaction between the British and the rest of the city was multi-layered and complicated. In the formative years, they had to find ways to survive in this new land with a hot and humid climate by altering their food habits or incorporating cotton in the place of silk and wool in their everyday clothes. Quite naturally, social interactions grew beyond interactions obligatory for business and diplomacy. It quickly became a common trend for the British men to have one or more Indian mistresses who also introduced them to the Indian lifestyle (Ghosh, 2006). The intimate interactions faced obvious criticisms and went through the restrictions related to the class and gender hierarchy of both societies, yet these were one of many ways to get accustomed to local culture. Hicky regularly ridiculed these British officials and their hybrid lifestyle in India. Ghosh argues that after the initial formative years, mostly from the 1780s onwards, this kind of informal interactions became a concern for the East India Company and these 'mixed-race elites' were not considered to be eligible for managing several services of the Company (2006, pp. 8-9). Despite the sheer discouragement, interactions grew over the years. The percolation of local cultural practices in the European society of Kolkata took place not only through intimate relations but via various means. One of the main sources of interactions outside their own was through attendants and many people who served the British in some way or another. To maintain the luxurious lifestyle which was blatantly different from the traditional Indian one, the British required extensive numbers of attendants and exclusive services. There was an entire group of people of mixed ethnicity who would serve the British. In her famous travelogue, Parks

(1975; First Published in 1850) described the everyday life of the British in Kolkata and the restricted interactions with the locals. Similarly, the Godden sisters (Godden & Godden, 1966) in their autobiography recounted how their father, who was a British officer, enjoyed spicy curry with rice in their Narayanganj (now in Bangladesh) residence and how as children, they were surrounded by nannies, who taught them Bengali. Accounts of colonial life by Parks (1850), described it to be extravagant, which involved restricted yet regular interactions with other communities than their own. Liang quoted interviews with old Chinese residents of Kolkata, where they fondly remembered the days of the British when their services were much valued (2007, p. 398). Interactions were not sporadic or vaguely defined by any chance; each community had some clearly defined role. Some of the communities like the Armenians, who were wealthy allies of the British, enjoyed a cordial social life with them as well (Stark, 1894). Some were only useful in providing specialized services. Many writers in the colonial time described Kolkata in great detail. Several travelogues and memoirs also described the socio-cultural landscape of the city. Although the white superior perspective might have misinterpreted, ridiculed, and oversimplified many of the local socio-cultural complexities, nevertheless, these documents are excellent records of that era. In 1892, *The Mirror*, a monthly magazine of London, described Tiretta Bazar of Kolkata as a great market. The market also reflected the cultural diversity of the city, the article stated:

> "In this spot, are to be met with persons of numerous nations, all of them purchasing the common necessaries and luxuries of life – English, French, Dutch, Armenians, Portuguese, Danes, Swedes, Norwegians, Turks, Persians, Arabs, Chinese, Japanese, Siamese, Malay, Jews, Parsees, Armenians, Greeks & c. (…), whilst the incongruous expressions of the countless varieties of castes among the Hindoos renders the Tirhetta Bazaar [sic] altogether to the inquisitive beholder one of the most interesting marts for business in the world." (The Mirror, 1842, p. 94).

The motive for elaborately describing this juxtaposition is that all these intertwined factors created the multicultural image of Kolkata. The physical and cultural space of Kolkata was shared by a number of communities. As I have mentioned before, the multicultural landscape of the city flourished gradually with the growth of economic opportunities. Many communities could not withstand the competition and eventually left, and many did the same after the independence of India. All the communities did not come to Kolkata at the same

time. Sen argues that because of poor urban infrastructure, rigid social norms, and an economy in transition hindered the growth of Kolkata as a city. Even if the East India Company encouraged other communities to start their business ventures, it was not until the 19th century when Kolkata turned into a cosmopolitan city (Sen, 1979).

A chronological understanding of the change in population composition of Kolkata can be derived from two sources. The fragmented quantitative data from different studies and census reports[27], and numerous literature depicting the everyday life of colonial Kolkata. The first kind of source, which is quantitative studies of the population composition and growth of Kolkata in the late 18th century, remains fragmented due to a lack of reliable data. While sporadic population surveys and quantitative works like Finch's *Vital statistics of Calcutta* or *A statistical account of Bengal* by Hunter do give an idea of the nature of the population, a systematic study is almost impossible. Census of India, *Reports of the population estimate of India (1820-1830)* mentioned that out of 179,917 people living in Kolkata, 118,203 were Hindus, 48,162 were Muslims, 13,138 were Christians and 414 were Chinese[28]. The estimate of 1837 made by W. Birch, who was the Superintendent of Police of Kolkata mentioned in Finch's work, considerably matched with the previous estimates. Birch's work gave a more detailed account of the cultural composition of the city.

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[27] There has been a number of quantitative studies in the colonial period on the population composition of Kolkata, yet they were not generated in regular intervals. After Independence, the regular census survey started to take place every 10 years. However, Census of India does not recognize the cultural or racial background of the population in the survey. In fact, under the category of religious background, most of the minorities are included in the 'others' category, which does not specify their community identity.

[28] Census of India, *Reports of the population estimate of India (1820-1830)* edited by D. Bhattacharya and B.B. Bhattacharya as quoted in (Mukherjee, 1977)

Table 1: Population of Kolkata in 1837

English	3138	Western Hindus	17333
Euro-Asian	4746	Bengali Hindus	120318
Portuguese	3181	Moguls	527
French	160	Parsees	40
Chinamen	360	Arabs	351
Armenians	636	Mugs	683
Jews	307	Madrasees	55
Western Muslims	13677	Native Christians	49
Bengali Muslims	45067	Low Castes	19054
		Total	229714

(C. Finch *Vital statistics of Calcutta* Journal of the Statistical Society of London (J.S.S.L) Vol 13, 1850 as mentioned in Mukherjee, 1977)

This categorization did not follow any particular basis such as religion or ethnicity, moreover, it reflected a layman's general perspective of looking at the cultural composition of a city to most certainly facilitate the smooth functioning of the colonial administration. However, one of the few significant anthropological works on the cultural composition of Kolkata, *Aspects of society and culture in Calcutta*, mentions the gradual growth of the community which followed in the later period. The Chinese speaking population was 2301 in 1901 and increased to 3326 in 1931. A year before the Indo-China war in 1962, the population was 8814 (Hasan, 1982, p. 86). While the Chinese population was increasing over the years, this was not the case for many other communities. The Armenians were 636 as per Birch's record in 1937, which gradually decreased to 230 over the span of 76 years in 1891 (mentioned in Government Census as quoted in Stark, 1894). Stark explained the gradual decrease in population of this community at that time as "by being merchant and petty traders, they continued to follow the tradition of their ancestors" (1894, p. 145). The population of this community fluctuated over the years, depending on the economic situation. By the end of British colony in India in 1947, there were around 2000 Armenians left in India, which decreased to 150 in 2016 (Chakraborty, 2016). This was the case for most of the communities after the British left India. In *Calcutta:1964, A Social Survey*, Bose (1969) takes into account

only three European communities in Kolkata – the British, Armenian and Chinese. Here also the lack of quantitative data makes it impossible to study the gradual decrease in population, but quite evidently since most of these communities were dependent on the British for economic benefits, it was difficult to continue to live in India.

The overall change in the cultural composition of Kolkata after independence was not quite unprecedented. Several works on the cultural landscape of Kolkata after Independence show this transformation (see, Siddiqui, 1982; Bose, 1969; Singh, 1998). However, during the tumultuous time in the 1940s with the Partition of Bengal, which was part of the Partition of India in 1947, the Bengal Famine and the riots, we have a very little account of how these communities survived in Kolkata.

3.1.1. City-space and Cultural Mosaic

Nayar found a common tone in British travelogues on India, which started with a bewildering view of an unknown land to finally finding a regularity, a system in the chaos:

> "The central images therefore are of boundaries that dissolve, numbers are incomputable, markers and meanings that are obscured, and, most significantly, limits that are exceeded. The boundary sees to transform this chaos into a *locus amoenus* by suggesting/demarcating in contrast with this boundarilessness, a certainty of number, well-defined boundaries and clear marker on the landscape. The binary opposite of overflowing/regulated, unmarked/marked, boundaryless/ bounded constitute two related (colonialist) rhetorical forms in these travelogues." (Nayar, 2002, p. 61).

I would argue that this sequence is similarly applicable in justifying the superimposition of British town planning on the Indian landscape. Colonial structures and layouts echoed that quest to establish an order with the typical colonial grandeur. The planning of Kolkata has been peculiar in a way that it followed a certain pattern and social groups with their boundaries were almost identically reflected in spatial pockets. Following the typical colonial style of planning, the city was seen to be divided into two major parts, replicating the social categorization – the European section and the predominantly Bengali Hindu section. Apart from the motive of expressing the supreme authority and power, initially, the British planning was intended to create a landscape of orderliness, a place worth living. Jemina Kindersley (Kindersley, 1777) mentioned the need to separate the British quarter by building a fort because the roads through the native areas were unpleasant, therefore the British lives in

Kolkata should be improved (as quoted by Nayar, 2002, p. 87)[29]. The urbanization process in Kolkata involved various means – some were as peculiar as selling lottery tickets to raise funds for construction. From 1793 to 1837, the money raised by this was used in building some of the iconic landmark structures of Kolkata such as St. John's Church and Town Hall (Chakraborty & De, 2013, pp. 28-33; also see, Chakraborty & De, 2013, pp. 173-174 for the Committee for the Improvement of the Town of Calcutta and the Lottery Committee). Interestingly, these two sections were never mutually exclusive. With the regular socio-economic and cultural interactions over the years, the overlapping spatial forms and mixed styles of architecture became evident. For both the spheres, the percolation of the other culture in their physical space was inevitable. Chattopadhyay argued that the tendency to study the city as compartmentalized in two static sections is generated out of an inability to "move between city scale and the architectural" (2000, p. 154). She also emphasized that the presumption that British areas are different from the native area by "layout, density, architecture and everyday life" is an oversimplification of the complex hybrid forms which were shaped during urbanization. The British and natives were not exclusive autonomous entities, neither did they function in seclusion (ibid. 154).

As in any other Indian city, the spatial organization of Kolkata also reflected the complex caste hierarchy, though not as stringently as in rural areas. The history of *Para*[30] (particular localities, mostly informally demarcated) often indicates the concentration of the majority of a population of a particular caste. Even if there was a random amalgamation of people from different castes living in the same area, there would be obvious restrictions in their daily interactions. For example, marriages outside their caste were harshly criticized to the extent that their family might face a social boycott. Some localities were considered to be areas not suitable for people from higher classes/castes to go and were avoided. Several names of areas in Kolkata refer to the occupation or caste of the initial residents such as *Muchipara* (where the cobblers live) or *Kalutola* (area of the people whose occupation is to extract and sell oil from mustard seeds). The social restrictions for mingling were not as strict as in rural areas but took a peculiar shape in urban areas. Any two or three communities would have more interactions than others for certain reasons. The British would interact more with the Anglo-

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[29] Kindersley, J., 1777. *Letters from the Island of Teneriffe, Brazil, the Cape of Good Hope, and the East Indies.* London: J. Nource as quoted by Nayar, P. K. (2002) in his work 'The Imperial Sublime: English Travel Writing and India (1750-1820)' published in *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies,* 2(2), pp. 57-99
[30] *Para*: Chattapadhyay (2000, p. 157) defines *para* as a term to distinguish between localities – "the *para*s extended over an area approximately one-quarter by one-half mile, a space that was easy to cover on foot and cognitively constituted a territory".

Indians or the Chinese; the first is because of the particular origin of the Anglo-Indians and the latter for certain customized services. This complex network of interaction was inherently demonstrated in the physical layout of the city as well. Especially the initial days of growth of the city showed the European quarter consisting of a fort and a predominantly white neighborhood, whereas moving towards the north the neighborhood changed into a native, Bangali dominated the landscape. From the perspective of the Bengalis, the area between Chowringhee Road, Park Street, Theater Road and Wood Street was known as the *Sahib para* (Chattopadhyay, 2000, p. 157). Ghosh mentioned this area as the "foreign residential section of the city" in his work published in 1950, almost immediately after independence (1950, p. 55). Most authors preferred to describe the city divided into these quarters such as Long (1974).

For my work, to trace back the location and positionality of the Chinese community, I will be studying the growth of the hinterland of the white town, or the fringe zone – where the European quarter ends and the native area starts. Chattopadhyay pointed out that "the city consisted of overlapping geographies and conceptions of space and territory, both indigenous and foreign, that were constantly negotiated. Not surprisingly, the line of demarcation between the white and black towns shifted depending on the context and the perception of the observer" (2000, p. 157). Though the quarters did not have a clearly defined boundary, there was often a transitional area where those communities lived who made their living by engaging in business with both the communities– the Chinese were one of them. However, the overlapping physical space was not always peacefully shared by native and European communities. The contrasting way of life created frequent conflicts. For example, in 1849, the Superintendent of Police issued a notice declaring restrictions on the processions of *Bijaya Dashami*[31] on certain routes, especially in the European part of the city. However, a mass protest soon followed this announcement, and the notification was withdrawn (Chakraborty & De, 2013, pp. 120-122).

Coming back to the element of heterogeneity in the physical layout and social structure of the city (Chattapadhyay, 2000; 2005), it also perpetuates the favorable environment for the other communities. The hybrid forms of the lifestyle of both the European and native communities also meant an extensive list of goods and services in constant demand – which made it profitable for other communities like the Chinese to continue their businesses in Kolkata.

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[31] *Bijaya Dashami* is the final day of the annual Hindu festival – Durga Puja.

3.2. Atchaw, Achipur, Tiretta Bazar and Tangra

Almost all the authors who have worked on the history of the community (See, Oxfeld, 1993; Liang, 2007; Zhang, 2015; 2009) have agreed on the first settler and how he expanded his business in the initial days. In the late eighteenth century, a Chinese tea trader named Yang Dazhao or Atchaw came to West Bengal. Zhang (2009) mentions that Atchaw was his British nickname, most likely a short form of A. Zhao. Atchaw reached West Bengal from the Guangdong province of China and as a smart businessman, he quickly learned that this place had more opportunities for trading than the civil war affected China then. According to British records, he was given 650 *bighas*[32] of land for a yearly rent of 45 rupees (Liang, 2007 and Zhang, 2009). The sugar mill must have been quite successful and attracted many more Chinese workers. This incident marked the beginning of the long legacy of Chinese-owned businesses in Kolkata. Most likely the workers were runaway sailors and – according to a complaint made by Atchaw[33] - the new Chinese settlers in Kolkata were luring them to Kolkata. Thus, the first Chinese settlement was in Achipur and quite quickly the Chinese started to settle down in Kolkata as this place had many lucrative business opportunities to offer. As I have described before, Kolkata in colonial times was much different from what it is today. The port was thriving and Kolkata had many small quarters of people from different parts of the world. The Chinese also formed a niche in this city without much difficulty. The prosperity of the businesses was evident from the advertisement in *Calcutta Gazette*, which has been mentioned by Oxfeld (1993) and Sarkar (2014) in their works. Sarkar quoted the original advertisement:

> "Tom Fatt, native of China, begs to inform the Gentleman of Calcutta and the public in general, that any person having ponds in their gardens, or elsewhere, and being desirous to have them cleaned out, he will contact them for the same upon very reasonable terms, being certain that he can finish his work quicker than any Bengali people, by means of a Chinese pump. Any gentleman willing to contract with the said Tom Fatt, is requested to enquire as his Rum Works, at Sulkey opposite Calcutta.

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[32] *Bigha* is the traditional way of measuring land in India.
[33] Zhang (2015) and Sarkar (2014) mentioned the petition made by Atchaw in 1781 to the British Supreme Board against the new settlers of Kolkata.

N.B. He makes Loaf-Sugar equal in quality to that made in Europe, and excellent Sugar-Candy. Also, all sorts of cabinet work, the same as in China." (Sarkar, 2014).

The two things which become clear as the extent of diversity of the expertise and where they claim to be different and more efficient than the Bengali workers. The period after this was marked by the growth of the community. How the community started to settle in the Tiretta Bazar area is not very clear. Datta (1991, p. 69) mentioned that Lal Bazar and later on Tiretta Bazar were small bazaars that later on flourished after the British started to grow. The houses of that area were mostly built-in 1827. In this regard, the most convincible evidence is the street directories.

Table 2: Tiretta Bazar Street and Weston Street in 1915

Tiretta Bazar Street	Weston Street
1, 2, 3 – Shop and vested land	1 – Miss K. Joseph
4 – Dey's Pharmacy	3 – L. F. Lisely & Co., Contractors, Landing Cleaning & Forwarding Agents
4/1, 5 – Chinaman: Thinik and Co.	5 – Chinaman
6/1 – Shop of Chinaman	7 – S M Solomon
7, 7/1-9 – Shop and Chinaman	9 – Lipton Ltd.
10- Golam Haidar, Leather warehouse	11 – Warehouse and Stable
11-13 – Chinaman	13 – D E Cruz, S De Rozario
14,15 – Basti [Slum]	15 – Rama's Lodge
16 – Warehouse	Chinese Church
17 – Chinaman	17 –
18 – Chinese Church	19-21 – C & A Danby, Reed & Comb Manufacturers

This *Street Directory of 1915* (Limited, 1915) portrayed Tiretta Bazar as an area of mixed land-use. It appears as a residential area of smaller communities, visible by the predominance of the presence of Anglo-Indians, Chinese and Jews. Other than them, there are commercial establishments. While finding any residential building occupied by a Bengali Hindu or a British in that matter is rare, however, some of the enterprises were owned by Bengalis.

Table 3:Tiretta Bazar Street and Weston Street in 1929

Tiretta Bazar Street	Weston Street
1 – P M Packi & CO & Lee Khim & Co	1 – F O David & Mr Tussaint
2 – Khosh Bahar Mollah	2 – W H Brady & Co
3 – Tsong Soo Fein & U Ley son	3 – Cobbers Shop
4 – Effoo & Co	5 – John Lewes & Co
4-1 Chinese Club and School	6 – M Ellias & A Morris
6 – Sea Sen & Kong Lee Loong & Co	7 – C Jacob
10 – Shem Thoi & A N Takru	8 – Crossley & Co's Godown & W H Deeth & Co's Godown
11-13 – Chinese	9 – "Lipton Building" Lipton Ld
16 – Chinese Hotels and Shops	10 – Mr Mcdonald & W H Deeth & Co's Godown
17 – Fing Thwa & Kwong Man Do & Co	11 – Lipton's Godown
17-1 – Choonghee Dhong Thein Hane Church	12 – Shop

Thacker's (Thacker's Press and Directories Ltd., 1929) directory indicates a similar cultural composition. Unlike today's Chinatown, this area was home to smaller communities which made it a busy and flourishing neighborhood. One of the major changes in the physical layout of Tiretta Bazar had been the implementation of the Calcutta Improvement Act 0f 1911.

Tangra started to grow as a second Chinatown much later. Tangra is distinctively different from Tiretta Bazar. Situated in the other corner of the city, Tangra is primarily a Hakka neighborhood. This area is known for its tanneries owned by the Chinese. According to Oxfeld (1993, p. 78) the Chinese started to build their tanneries in Tangra in the early 20th century. She mentions that World War I was a great opportunity for the Chinese to expand the tannery business since the pieces of machinery were cheap and many of the businesses owned by the Indians had failed. During World War II, the government made it mandatory for large tanneries to supply leather for the army, which gave the small Chinese enterprises the possibility to enter the home market (ibid., 79). Oxfeld stated that the typical Chinese way of running a business, which included living in the factory and involving family members in production, enabled them to survive the competition. Moreover, Tangra has a few geographical advantages. Located in the lowland area of Kolkata, there was not any scarcity

of water, and waste management was easier as well. The Chinese of Kolkata were almost invisible in the larger political picture. They were a hardworking and closely-knitted community. There was not much evidence of any warm relationship with other communities, but there was not any enmity either. Other than occasional tensions such as on 26th April 1928 – it was reported that there was a serious riot between Indians and the Chinese at King George's Dock where many were injured (The Times of India, April 28, 1928) – the environment was not volatile. This situation drastically started to change after the diplomatic ties between India and China fell apart when Dalai Lama came to India in 1969. The tension between the two countries over border issues had a serious impact on the Chinese of Kolkata (Zhang, 2015, p. 80). Newspaper reports of that period indicate that the Chinese were under constant surveillance. The New York Times states on 22nd October 1962 that out of 9500 Chinese living in Kolkata, about half of them are supporting the communist regime. Along with this information, the report also talked about increasing the security check on the Chinese of Kolkata (The New York Times, 22th October 1962). This surveillance started in 1959 when the Indian Government imposed the Foreigners' Act under which the Chinese had to register themselves at local police stations (Zhang, 2015, p. 80). Zhang also mentioned the growing intolerance towards this community resulting in attacks on the Chinese by Indian mobs.

3.2.1. Chinaman and Chinapara: The Perpetual Strangeness of the Chinese

Deterritorialization inherently talks about the sides- who are adopting whose culture, leaving which original territory. The process of the Chinese settling in Kolkata and the almost generic process of maintaining the delicate balance of their own and other cultures involves the perspective of the narrative. In this section, I will chronologically present the various literature where the Chinese of Kolkata have been represented and discussed. A very generic way to distinguish between the perspectives can be to crudely divide between the Bengalis and the British. Defying the fact that the Chinese have been part of the cultural landscape since the late 18th century, the Bengali community of Kolkata still perceives them as mysterious and outlandish. The various cultural tours of Chinatown of today or a vivid description of Chinatown by a Bengali almost a hundred years ago show that the interest in this community and its lifestyle has been almost constant. I would argue that the other communities have somehow adjusted themselves to the predominant Bengali culture- so much that a Bengali household with a saree hanging on the veranda next to a Greek orthodox church perfectly matches the symphony of the city's cultural landscape. The Chinese, on the

other hand, have been treated with suspicion and faced ridicule. Why so? Bengali and British writers had an almost similar tone in describing the Chinese. A community that might reside in Kolkata but is mysterious. Alabaster's (1858) narration of the Chinese community in its beginning years denoted the aspects, which were repeated by other authors as well. He described the Chinese as distinctly different from others, in their "whity-brown" color, speech, dress and institution (Alabaster, 1858, p. 368). The most crucial part of his study was that he not only described the community but also emphasized the ignorance of their existence. He noted that the Chinese did not give up their customs to mingle with the rest of the population. The Chinese could not possibly remain unnoticed in the city. Even with this colossal difference, they had escaped the keen observation which they might have attracted as they were too weak to invoke antagonism and received indifference instead (ibid).

From another perspective, a glimpse into the description of Kolkata's Chinatown written by a young Bengali writer in the early twentieth century might reveal the stark cultural difference. His description echoed the same strangeness mentioned by Alabaster. This would give a vivid account of the old Chinatown.

> This Chinatown is one of the main attractions of Kolkata. The Marwaris in Barabazar, Muslims in MechhoBazar or the Europeans in Chaurangi have a distinct influence on the area but you can still find Kolkata there. The moment you enter Chinatown, you will not feel that you are in Kolkata. Especially at night, the light and shadow, people, their conversation and the houses will remind you of far-away China.

> You will find the narrow road meandering through the housing- if you keep on walking, you will see a Chinese mother breast-feeding her child in front of the strangers; colourful picturesque but incomprehensible Chinese advertisement hanging on the front doors; a Chinese musician singing a peculiar song in a strange tune; or three-four Chinese men discussing among themselves in their nasal tone. After every few steps, you will come across a Chinese motel or a modern hotel. You will find a gambling house, an opium den or a Chinese temple. The atmosphere is completely different here. (Roy , 1923, p. 28)

Though this is not a real account, it is realistic to a large extent- portraying how Chinatown might look from the perspective of a Bengali. The shocked undertone and the superior perspective from which this article has been written is quite prominent and we will probably

not approve of this kind of description today, but we should also remember that this article was written in 1923. As I have discussed in the previous section, for the conservative, religious and deeply patriarchal Bengali society the Chinese were radically different. We should remember that in the early 20th century, women in Kolkata had just started to attend schools regularly or getting rid of the *parda*[34] system slowly. In contrast, Chinese women running their eateries or wine shops was an incredible sight for a Bengali. On the other hand, Chinatown was known as a den for drinking and gambling, both of which were almost prohibited in Bengali society.

If we conclude here there was not any interaction between the Bengali and the Chinese- both the societies were aloof and distant, then it would be a little premature. The Chinese gained their economically important and irreplaceable position because of their monopoly in certain businesses. Their customers were not only the limited European communities but also Bengalis who were exposed to the western lifestyle by the British through education and limited social interaction. Most of the affluent and famous Bengali families (on the forefront of which was the Tagore family of Jorashanko[35]) were great admirers of art and music. These families invited artists and imported furniture from Europe. Carpentry and shoemaking were the two main skills the Chinese were famous for. Presumably, in those days, the options were limited for furniture, either it was made in one of the showrooms in the European part of the city or by the Bengali carpenters. So soon the intricate Chinese designs became popular. On the other hand, only people from the lower section of the Bengali society would deal with leather or leather products; so the supply and the choices were limited. But under British influence, leather shoes were considered fashionable. In this situation, the Chinese provided affordable shoes in western designs and quickly became popular. The Chinese in one way was a true part of some Bengali households. Abanindranath Tagore was one of the very few to mention the Chinese of Kolkata in their writings. In his autobiography, we find a vivid description of Chinese artisans making a birdcage in their palatial house in Jorashanko. He described the annual visit of the Chinese shoemaker:

> During Puja [the annual festival of worshipping Goddess Durga] the south
> veranda was always used to be crowded. The *Chineman* [a literal English

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[34] Parda system is a social system of secluding women or forbidding them from interacting with males other than family members. Though it is generally associated with the Muslim communities but it was a common practice in 19th century Bengal which continued till the beginning of 20th century.

[35] Jorashanko is a locality of Kolkata known for the ancestral home of the famous Tagore family.

translation would be China-man or Chinese-man] used to come to measure our feet for shoes. We were called to the south veranda. The Chinese man used to fold newspapers to make long tapes with which he used to measure the size…*Iswarbabu* [name of a person with the title *babu* – Bengali honorific for man] taught us a poem in Chinese- "*iren de pagla, uren de pagla, ka se*". It probably meant the shoes are tight on both feet. Whenever the Chinese man came, we used to say this and he always laughed. Later on, in a comic opera, I dressed like this Chinese man with loose pyjamas and a black china-coat. (Tagore, 1973, pp. 232-235)[36].

In most of the sporadic, fragmented descriptions of the Chinese of old Kolkata, we see that they are an inseparable part of the Bengali household- especially the upper-middle-class or the affluent part of the society. These people were the first to be educated and introduced to the western lifestyle. This section of the society was liberal and often broke with conventional practices such as untouchability[37] (for lower castes as well as foreign goods or even people). They were the customers for shoes, woodworks and later on for Chinese dentistry. However, in the nineteenth century, Chinatown was not a familiar place for a common Bengali. The Chinese were in a way a part of the Bengali household, but the interactions were merely for business. The very rigid social boundary kept these two communities apart. As I have mentioned before, how a Chinese was described showed the awkwardness of encountering the unfamiliar. In a nutshell, the Chinese were distant and mysterious for the Bengalis; they were accustomed to the European lifestyle, but the Chinese were always strange for them. The locational factor also played an important role here. The old Chinatown or the Tiretta Bazar Chinatown was completely secluded from surrounding Bengali neighborhoods. The area in itself was a self-sustained system with small thriving businesses and residential parts but entirely different in nature than the Bengali, Marwari, or any section of the city.

The relationship between the Chinese and the Bengali was no doubt based on business interaction. There was little possibility of growing a steady social bond. The Chinese culture was too strange for the Bengalis, and the Chinese of Kolkata were a thriving community at

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[36] Rabindranath Tagore, the famous poet, was Abanindranath Tagore's uncle. They both belong to the era when the Tagore family was considered to be the core of Bengali renaissance. Though the compilation of all of his works was published in 1973, he here narrated his childhood memories from the late nineteenth century.

[37] We find numerous descriptions of this untouchability in cases of foreign goods or people.

that time which could very well survive on its own. I would want to emphasize the aspect that Chinese as a part of Kolkata and its cultural mosaic has been recognized very recently. For a long period after the war, we hardly see any imprint of the Chinese in popular culture. I share the same helplessness with Zhang because of the lack of resource. The movie '*Neel Akasher Neechey'* (Neel Akasher Neechey, 1959) portrayed the emotions of a Chinese salesman selling popular China silk in the streets of Kolkata. The movie starts with Wang Lu, the Chinese salesman, being followed and ridiculed by a group of Bengali children, which he doesn't seem to mind. The story reflected the way the Bengalis looked at the Chinese – as strangers and to some extent a cornered community. The movie, based on a short story by Mahadevi Barma, was directed by Mrinal Sen. This movie was banned in India as political tensions grew between the two countries.

There was a long break after this movie till the Chinese again became a topic in popular media. The 1962 war had completely changed the socio-political background and the Chinese were pushed into oblivion. The long silence reflected the political encouragement behind socially boycotting the Chinese and tagging them as an enemy of the nation. There was no documentation about how the community survived after the camp. This long phase of silence was because people were reluctant to take the Chinese story to a larger audience since there was prolonged political tension. Very recently, as people started to approach them, the Chinese were assured enough to speak on public media about their experience and their right to have an apology from the Indian government. Several recent documentaries focused on the Chinese community, its culture, and the growing concern over the reducing size of the population –many of these documentaries did not mention the war or uncomfortable issues but emphasized food and the breakfast market. Very few of the documentaries had chosen life after the 1962 war as their subject. The two documentary films, *The Legend of Fat Mama* (2003) and From *Boarder to Boarder: The Chinese in India* (2013) were exceptionally popular among the international audience but could draw little attention of the people of Kolkata. *The legend of Fat Mama* shows the struggle of the Chinese community mingled with the nostalgia of the happy past. It might appear that the entire community lives in the past where they are constantly reminded of the food and hustle-bustle of a busy Chinatown. The elders talk about the comforts and small pleasures like enjoying street food. This film very pertinently focuses on Chinese who have migrated from India and settled in Canada. Their Chinese identity in Canada is shaped by their life in Kolkata. They easily conclude that they can relate more to Kolkata. The interviews reflect the complex juxtaposition of being

socially secluded in Kolkata, yet Kolkata being the pivotal and irreplaceable point of their identity. *From Border to Border*, on the other hand, focuses directly on the Indo-Sino war of 1962 and the great turmoil related to the deportation to the Deoli Camp. The community spoke about the years they had spent in the Camp being treated like a treacherous enemy of the nation. Many of them would talk about the sudden change in their social status and being deprived of basic amenities. The film captured the accounts of the experiences after they came back from the camp. Most likely, this was the turning point for the community to realize they would never be given back their social recognition and ease of being a part of Kolkata, their home. The mass migration which started after the war and is continuing finds an explanation in the statements of the people in this film. Before the war, I would not say the Chinese were inseparable from the Bengalis – the cultural and social boundaries were there always, but after the war, they lost their claim over the city and their right to be treated as commoners. This film very aptly captures the fading existence of the community in the city. Apart from these two, there are a few other documentary films (for example, *Old Chinatown Kolkata India-Bangla Documentary*, 2012; *India's Chinatown*, 2012), but the pattern of these are quite similar and far from controversial issues – invariably depicting the easy eye-catching subjects such as breakfast market or Chinese tanneries.

The objective of this chapter is to assemble historical events as well as accounts of insignificant details of daily life seen from different perspectives – the Bengali, British, and the Chinese. Though the accounts are not perfectly temporally synchronized, they do provide a comprehensive understanding of how this community has been perceived by its members as well as others. This is expected to give an understanding of the fabrication of the cosmopolitan urban culture of Kolkata, or answer the question – "has Kolkata been a cosmopolitan city at all?". The historical context of the community sets the pretext of my research question about the impact of minority legislation on the communities. Moreover, the accounts on the history of the community mentioned here do highlight an inseparable part of the identity narratives.

The different narrations from a Bengali's perspective in the late nineteenth century would give an idea about how the Chinese remained as a strange and mysterious community for years in a city where regular business interactions would not ease the discomfort of social unfamiliarity. It would be wrong to conclude that the perspective from which the Chinese were seen and judged has no relevance in the present globalized world. This perspective, I would argue, persists in a different form and has a different manifestation. The identity of the

community and the identities within the community have formed over the years by justifying, modifying and adjusting themselves. The idea is not only to have a historical account of the community but also to understand the implication of this perspective in the community's narration of their identity today.

3.3. The Chinese Perspective

To understand the positionality of narratives on identity, the history of the community is the basic groundwork. Moreover, the history of the community is not only a compilation of historical facts and figures but a parallel study of different versions of it. The Chinese I interviewed have been mostly very precise about their history. Except for a few situations when the participant is carried away and provides a lot of details, the accounts have been restricted to information regarding their family. It was as if they were oblivious to the community as a whole.

The old men at the Si-Up Club often recollect the days when Chinatown used to be different than what it appears to be now. There were open areas where children used to play. They often mention that there were more Chinese people in Chinatown. While sitting at D'lay Eating House and enjoying a bowl of wonton soup, A1 looks at the busy street and talks about the time when one could only see Chinese people on this street. He will abruptly end by saying that people have moved abroad now. But again, A1 is an exception, I do not manage to know about the community's past when I chat with others. One aspect which is common in everyone is the reluctance to talk about the 1962 war. The elderly will not mention it at all. Someone tells me that F1 is the only person from their group who was sent to Deoli Camp. However, F1 never brings this topic up. Once walking together in the neighborhood, I ask him about the war. He talks about his childhood in the hills. After realizing how sensitive this topic is for him, I decide not to ask about it again. However, it is different with the young crowd. H1 or Z do not hesitate to talk about the war or how the community suffered. Z explains that even the Chinese kids of his generation do not know much about the war. He considers this as part of the strict discipline that Chinese parents follow. He assures me that it is not especially with me, but the elderly people are like this with everyone. Z thinks that the unwillingness to talk about the war is a typical Chinese characteristic – they like to move on and not hold on to bitter memories. However, I realize that the reluctance also comes from a sense of uncertainty and precaution. A2 tells me one day that they had burnt all the financial records of the club and old photographs during the war because the police could arrest them for that. "How is that a crime?", I ask him. He is not sure, but he is sure it could be

considered a crime then. During this conversation, I sense the uneasiness. The discomfort is also because Kolkata, which is his home, became an unknown hostile place questioning his authenticity as an Indian. He does not want to recollect the time when he was not safe in his neighborhood. Even now, this uncertainty that anything can happen prevents him from talking about that time. He says the Chinese of Kolkata did not suffer because of the war. It was the same. Once the war was over, they went to movies and sang songs. The momentary uneasiness quickly vanishes when he laughs while remembering the old songs.

Before the war, A2 says, life was difficult in Chinatown. People had to work hard to earn their living. However, life was simple and happy. Now people have more money. The 1962 war was the major event that not only disrupted their lives but also questioned the legitimacy and integrity of their identity. Long after the war, even now they remember the uncertainty of their existence in the city. Other than the war in 1962, life was all about running a successful business, working hard, and following the Chinese rituals. I have often tried to investigate the claim of the Bengalis or the British even, that the Chinese are not social. A1 and A2 tell me that this was not the case in the past. The community itself was big enough to socialize. Their parents never had to find support outside the community. They did not try to learn Hindi or Bengali because there was no need to. The past plays a role in selecting their social circle now. Though they have friends outside the community and their interactions are just like any other, I have found that the closest friends are always from the community. Z says that elderly people do not want to remember the time immediately after the war because the city had completely changed for them. For those living in Tangra, life was difficult. Their workshops were vandalized regularly. Complaining to the police was meaningless. M1 once says even if she was very young at that time, the missionaries helped them a lot in education and medical treatment.

In almost these narratives, the reluctance to talk about the past, especially the war is visible. However, it was unavoidable as well, the past of the community came up during the conversations frequently. The references are related to two subjects. First, the good days when one could find Chinese everywhere in Chinatown. The second is war. Though this topic was consciously avoided, in many instances it was foreseeable. In this context, while finding the impact of the Independence in 1947 and the 1962 war on the Anglo-Indian and Chinese community, Bonnerjee (2010, p. 42) aptly mentioned Legg's work where he pointed out that nostalgia is often related to the period after or before a traumatic experience. For many of the people I studied, the trauma of war was part of their presence. The city or the physical space

does not let them distance themselves from their past. The poverty after the war or the mass migration, the impact of the war on the community is evident. Here, the pride in the community is there as if to balance the trauma. I have studied people who decided to continue living in Kolkata and not to migrate. Therefore, their experiences are different from those of those Chinese who migrated to other countries. Is not about a place "but it is actually a yearning about time (2007, p. 8).

No one dares to mess with the Chinese

H1 starts to talk about the war. He takes time to explain things and includes a lot of detail. Interestingly, he likes to look at the positive side of the war. He talks about the people who had to migrate to Hongkong and China. For him, their standard of life has improved a lot. "Whoever was caught at that time, from one perspective there was a loss. But almost all of them who lost everything were sent to Hong Kong or China. Their lives became better. They achieved all what they could not here. They come here sometimes. They can still speak Bangla or Hindi. They have achieved double that what we have here. They had to suffer but they also gained a lot".

Me: Was there an insecurity after the war?

H1: […] Many of the Chinese were heartbroken after the war. Some of the businessmen decided that this situation would disrupt the businesses. They started to sell their businesses and ran away.

H1 says that he had heard the refugees [Chinese from Assam and other North-Eastern states] were brought to Kolkata and then sent to China in ships. I ask him about how the Chinese adjusted themselves in their same old locality after the war. H1 says:

In the old days wherever you look, you could see Chinese, and now wherever you look, you find other people. […] whenever there was a tension, both the parties were not afraid of each other. Before 62 or may be a little after 62, in our time we were not afraid. That was the real Chinatown. Wherever you could see there were only Chinese on the streets. May be two out of ten would be Indian, rest would be Chinese face.

When the ratio became 50:50, we were young then… you must also know him, there was a person name U, who was a big gangster, we were not even afraid of him. Anytime, if there is problem, we oppose, and we fight. Everyone knew us. As it is said,

the Chinese have courage and the Bengalis create problems. We do not talk, we just fight. They know about our culture. The Chinese… Do not bother them, they live peacefully – earn and eat. If you bother them, they will not keep quiet. So, now we live peacefully, they do not bother us, and we do not interfere in their business.

When H1 speaks about the war, it is an incident that has changed the lives of many around him. Moreover, it has changed the power-equation of the neighborhood. For him, the

consequences of the war are there in his daily life. He talks about how they are not afraid of other communities. However, he also knows that they are less in number and not having a lot of political support puts them in a vulnerable position. He does not want to acknowledge this transformation by saying they are still a powerful community. Paradoxically, his account oscillates between nostalgia and its projection on the present. As Boym explained, "the fantasies of the past, determined by the needs of the present, have a direct impact on the realities of the future (2007, p. 8)". Here, in this case, the nostalgia validates H1's claims of the authoritative role of the community, helping them to twist the reality of the present.

Migration has a definite direction, reasons, and predicaments. As Appadurai (1991, p. 192) pointed out the relevance of the term deterritorialization in the movement of a community or an ethnic group, the loosening of territorial boundaries and economic relations changes the basis of cultural reproduction. The essence of migration and the resultant cultural reproduction can be envisaged from this concept. Deterritorialization is attached to the process of contemporary migration where a group or a person travels from one country to another and in that process, the cultural belonging is uprooted only to be implanted again in a different environment of a new country. The blurred boundaries outside the comfort of the original territory, cultural interchange, and resultant hybrid forms are inevitable. In this regard, Hopper (2007, p. 53) mentioned the possibilities of reterritorialization by citing Tomlinson's work. He explained that deterritorialization can also lead to a new form of territorialization. The Chinatowns in different parts of the world are architectural and cultural miniatures of China. He claimed this to be an attempt to recreate their past lifestyle and prevent mingling. I will not agree with this view completely. I would rather call it a dichotomous process because cultural exchange is inevitable and so are the attempts to preserve their past legacy. The Chinese, from the time they first came to Kolkata till now, which can be called the receding phase, have generated a cultural identity – continued to be distinctively different from the city. The cultural reproduction is not systematic, organically generated; rather as I argue and will explain in the further sections, it is deeply rooted in the reciprocal relationship of political decisions and community reactions. The sporadic alterations of the relation and the product are both common and expected. If we look into the process through which the modus operandi of the community has taken the present shape, we might see that the community went through phases of reforming (rather re-forming) their lives for the sake of creating a culturally hospitable environment for them.

An investigation into the present cultural forms of the community takes us to the purpose of the migration more than two hundred years back. Similar to any other diaspora, we can ask a set of questions about this community- how and when did the Chinese come to Kolkata? And the most interesting of all, why did they stay back? My intention here is not only to narrate the history of the community to merely present the sequence of events but to relate their past with the fabrication of their present-day cultural identity. As a part of this discussion, I have also emphasized the relevance of the Chinatown of Kolkata, a space that has shaped the identity of the community. Cities are indeed spaces where the memory and attachments of a diasporic community find ground. I have focused on tracing back the identity of this community as a minority. This also signifies how this community has been depicted by others historically. The narratives portray the nostalgia of the old days. I will discuss the impact of nostalgia on their collective identity later in this thesis. The historical references of how others have been perceiving this community will also help to contextualize the present mode of social interaction.

Chapter Four: Being a Minority

4.1. Defining Minority

Who are minorities after all? What are the legislative criteria to identify a community as a minority? Related to this, what is the social identity of a minority community? These questions are seemingly too heavy and a little inappropriate for the busy Chinatown in Tiretta Bazar. Looking at the busy streets in the morning, I hesitate to engage someone in a discussion like this. After all, they get little chance to ponder legislative riddles on a busy day like today. The sun is getting stronger and trucks are being loaded or unloaded in the warehouses of Tiretta Bazar. Customers are pouring in D1's grocery store, which is smelling heavily of soya sauce and herbs. I have some options for whom to spend the morning with. It could be D1, but he seems to be busy with customer orders, or I can go to A1's home too. I'm not sure if he will be home though. A1 likes to meet his friends in the neighborhood in the morning. Unmindfully, I take Damzen Lane for a stroll. While walking, I pass by teashops and verandas where rikshaw-pullers are taking naps. The narrow lane smells of damp, spices and strong detergents from the clothes being washed by the side of the road. Children are playing on the street and being scolded by passers-by. Now and then someone's mother is calling the unwilling kid to bring a vegetable from the corner shop urgently needed for the curry she is making for lunch. Middle-aged Chinese women are coming back from their grocery shopping session in the morning, on a rickshaw full of bags of different sizes. I wander around in this neighborhood amongst the morning chaos in a trance almost – trying to figure out the relevance of the legislative definition of minority. The urge to start a conversation on this topic seems a bit lost in this perfectly synchronized pandemonium. I think to myself if a discussion like that will interest anyone? On the second thought, I see the need to look at the narratives of the people explaining their position, dynamics of relations, and juxtaposition of their individual and collective identity. Whether being or not being a minority changes these equations, in this process elaborating their views on the concept of a minority. I decide not to ask all these questions in one go and talk about minority identity instead. This topic does not seem to be new for them, yet they probably did not have a chance to have a lengthy discussion on this. The questions provoke some thoughts and people generally take time to talk about them.

While having breakfast with L2 at a small and crowded eating house in Tangra, he starts to talk about the minority identity of the community spontaneously. The room has basic wooden benches to sit and groceries are stacked on the floor. I already know that L2 does not like to talk much and there is often a long pause before he starts the next sentence. He speaks about

this eating house and how only a few eating houses are surviving in Tangra now. Like most of the other elderly Chinese, he mentions the recent migration and decreasing size of the population. I ask him if he considers himself or his community as a minority. L2 says that before the war when there were plenty of Chinese in Kolkata as well as in India, he would not have said that they were a minority then. But now, they are a minority. He associates minority as a numerical comparison with the majority of the population. He stares at his bowl for some time. I wait a bit longer, unsure if he wants to say something else. He concludes by mentioning his visit to the Minority Commission of West Bengali. He does not know whether they are "officially" a minority or not. Getting a minority status or not is of little significance for him. L2 does not consider that the legislative recognition of being a minority will help in their situation. The size of the community is decreasing, and he considers discrimination or seclusion are a part of it.

L2's impression of being a minority is somehow similar to the current views on defining minority. Looking at the temporal change in the definition of minority, a similar tendency can be seen where there is a transition from minorities being defined only by numbers to acknowledging socio-political discrimination. The present legislative and theoretical discourse started approximately during the mid-twentieth century, after the Second World War. Though the main proponent of minority rights, multiculturalism became popular much later. During this period protection of individual rights had a growing importance in the international background. This culminated in discussions related to minority rights (see, Pejic, 1997; Preece, 2005). Preece mentioned change as a transition from "minority guarantees" to "minority rights". She differentiated between the two as the rights discourse is based on "normative content and corresponding moral authority" and guarantee is dependent on the "discretion of the guarantor" (Preece, 2005, p. 14). The normative foundation supported by several international regulatory frameworks (such as the *European Convention on Human Rights*[38]) provides a guideline for the states as well as gives a platform for better communication with other countries. *The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability* (2006)[39], *International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant workers and*

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[38]*The European Convention on Human Rights* which was formerly known as *The Convention for the protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms* was first drafted in 1950. This Convention works towards ensuring human rights across Europe.
[39]https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/500/79/PDF/N0650079.pdf?OpenElement Accessed on 27/02/2018 at 19:50 IST

Members of Their Family (1990)[40], and *Convention on Rights of Children* (1989)[41] are evidence of extending the implication of the term minority to other vulnerable groups as well. However, these rights are rather individualistic than collective.

How a state will identify and treat its cultural diversity depends on its legislative structure and political objectives. A multicultural state might identify minority groups based on language, religion, and ethnicity, yet differ based on structuring legislation for securing collective rights. The international legal framework regarding minority rights is considered to guide two key areas – first is how to define a minority group? And the second aspect is what kind of legislative structure a state might adopt to provide a separate set of legal tools? A consolidated definition of minority was introduced in 1977 by Capotorti, Special Rapporteur of the United Nations Sub-Commission on Prevention and Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. Capotorti defined a minority group with a set of criteria in his Study on the Rights of Persons Belonging to Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.

> "A group which is numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a State and in a non-dominant position, whose members possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics which differ from those of the rest of the population and who, if only implicitly, maintain a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion or language." (Francesco Capotorti, *Study on rights of persons belonging to ethnic religious and linguistic minorities*)[42].

Capotorti's work is significant as it points out the vital issue that a minority community deals with and often is defined with. Also, this definition shows the significant change from a comparatively simpler version which states a minority group to be an ethnic or racial group, sharing some group identities and has a low status in the society (Andersen & Taylor, 2008). In his definition, he acknowledged collective identity as one of the criteria.

I find a reflection of this line of thought when H1 mentions the Nepali community of Kolkata as a minority. He explains that whichever community is small, the state should help that community. For him, small communities are minorities which he associates with

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[40]https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/565/47/IMG/NR056547.pdf?OpenElement Accessed on 27/02/2018 at 20:02 IST
[41]https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/547/84/IMG/NR054784.pdf?OpenElement Accessed on 27/02/2018 at 20:04 IST
[42]As cited on http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Minorities/Pages/internationallaw.aspx accessed on 08/02/2018 at 19:33 IST

vulnerability. He mentions numbers as a deciding factor - "I won't go into religion". He does not consider ethnic identity to be a factor in deciding minority identity. He associates the term minority with a weaker position in society. Whatever might be the basis of identification of the community – ethnicity, religion, or language, the primary factor is discrimination. For him being a minority invites a lot of unwanted attention and subsequent discrimination. He is not aware if he is eligible for the benefit schemes. He does not associate minority status with the special provisions provided by the government to prevent discrimination, yet he identifies himself with only discrimination. "Are you entitled to some schemes?" I ask him. He says maybe as a Christian he is entitled to some benefits, he is not very sure though. He is not certain about the difficulties which other minorities face, but he is sure that they must be facing some adverse situation like the Chinese community, maybe more. Interestingly, H1 associates being numerically inferior with discriminations inevitably. However, he does not identify a minority community with characteristics, but aspects that can be the basis of social segregation or discrimination – something which specifies their vulnerability, or a comparison with the majority.

Internationally, among all the declarations, the three main declarations which explicitly mention and elaborate minority rights are *The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* adopted by the United Nations in 1966, *the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities* adopted by the United Nations in 1992, and *the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People*. However, Pejic (1997) argued that the ambiguity related to the implementable definition and the guideline persists in these documents. Article 27 of *The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* adopted by the United Nations states:

> In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons
> belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with
> the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, or to profess and
> practise their own religion, or to use their own language.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights was first formulated by the United Nations General Assembly in 1966, however, it only came into force in 1977. Though this Article remains as the major international acknowledgment of minority rights, it has some ambiguities which give scopes for a different interpretation of the statement. Pejic mentioned three key aspects of this Article. First, this Article leaves an option for states with no minorities, which also indicates a possibility where states might not have any minorities at all.

Second, it does not specify whether citizenship is also a precondition. And third, the Article mentions the rights with a negative terminology 'shall not be denied' (Pejic, 1997, pp. 669-670). However, she mentioned (ibid., p. 672) the General Comments of the Committee in 1986 clarifies that all individuals and not only citizens are entitled to these rights[43]. The 1992 Declaration is much more precise and elaborates the rights of persons belonging to minority communities as well as the responsibilities of the state. To summarize, the Declaration proposes that the state must protect the ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious identities of minority communities with legislative measures. Persons belonging to minority groups should be able to enjoy their cultural and social life and maintain peaceful contact with other groups. States should ensure against discrimination and the provision of all human rights and fundamental freedom. States must also encourage minority groups to learn their mother tongue and to know their community. However, it says that persons should also be able to participate in the decision-making process at the national or regional level, provided it is according to the state's legislation. This makes it a subject to be decided by the state. This contextualizes Kymlicka's view of exercising the rights of minorities while keeping the aim of national integration intact. On the other hand, Ramcharan stated that these rights were formulated considering individuals, however, there is an objective of recognizing them collectively or as a group (1993, p. 33). The recognition for group identity takes off from but not limited to fundamental human rights. Similarly, the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples speaks of the rights of persons but also mentions areas where they exercise their rights as a part of a collective entity[44].

The question, however, remains as to how do the states implement these guidelines? How to include these in the legislative and policy structure of a multiculturalist state? *The International Standards and Guidance for Implementation* (2010)[45] of minority rights address

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[43] "As indicated in General Comment 15 adopted at the twenty-seventh session (1986), the enjoyment of Covenant rights is not limited to citizens of States Parties but must also be available to all individuals, regardless of nationality or statelessness, such as asylum seekers, refugees, migrant workers and other persons, who may find themselves in the territory or subject to the jurisdiction of the State Party" as cited in http://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=6QkG1d%2FPPRiCAqhKb7yhsjYoiCfMKoIRv2 FVaVzRkMjTnjRO%2Bfud3cPVrcM9YR0iW6Txaxgp3f9kUFpWoq%2FhW%2FTpKi2tPhZsbEJw%2FGeZR ASjdFuuJQRnbJEaUhby31WiQPl2mLFDe6ZSwMMvmQGVHA%3D%3D Accessed on 26/02/2018 at 13:50 IST.

[44] "Recognizing and Reaffirming that indigenous individuals are entitled without discrimination to all human rights recognized in international law, and that indigenous peoples possess collective rights which are indispensable for their existence, well-being and integral development as peoples […]" as cited on http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf page 4., Accessed on 26/02/2018 at 23:04 IST

[45] http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/MinorityRights_en.pdf published by United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner., Accessed on 27/02/2018 at 19:16 IST

some of the ambiguities. Rather than a framework for legislative measures, this document elaborates the practical context of the concepts. It stresses securing the physical existence of persons belonging to minority groups and protection of their identity against forced assimilation (*International Standards and Guidance for Implementation*, 2010. p. 7-8). The identification or recognition of a minority group involves the state granting a set of special rights to a group as well – which is the prime argument of multiculturalism. Kymlicka and Norman differentiated minority rights by two aspects: "(*a*) they go beyond the familiar set of common civil and political rights of individual citizenship which are protected in all liberal democracies; and (*b*) they are adopted with the intention of recognizing and accommodating the distinctive identities and need of ethnocultural groups" (Kymlicka & Norman, 2000, p. 3). Minority rights recognize the cultural identity of these groups by providing them with the means to preserve and practice the same. Multiculturalists like Kymlicka argue that the need for a separate set of laws is realized when liberal democracies cannot secure the cultural rights of these groups (ibid., p.4). However, Barth argued that since minority groups are created and shaped by the functionality of modern nation-states, these two topics are inherently related. The definition of a minority group depends on the definition of the nation (2008, p. 37). However, Pieterse emphasized that ascribing collective rights to groups also rigidifies the group boundary, which does not include people who belong to several such groups. Moreover, he questioned this "ascribed status" of collective rights in relation to individual choice of cultural identity (Pieterse, 2004, p. 37). On the other hand, Brubaker talked against the practice of "groupism" based on ethnicity, nation or races (Brubaker, 2004, p. 50); instead, he proposed to focus more on "practical categories, cultural idioms, cognitive schemas, commonsense knowledge […]" (ibid., p. 68). In a nutshell, declaring a community as a minority in legislative terms with a separate set of rules and regulations restricts the community in a definite boundary. Here, the ethnicity of the community is clearly defined by certain parameters. So, how does a community want its identity to be represented, considering group-specific rules are still considered as the most practiced tool of a multicultural state? In his study of ethnic communities of Klaipeda of Lithuania and Laipaja of Latvia, Kraniauskas stated that ethnicity is defined by culture, language and origin. However, different groups prioritize among these. He proposed that rather than finding out a common policy for representation of ethnic communities' identity, ethnicity should be looked at as "social reproduction of structures of cultural patterns of behaviour" (Kraniauskas, 2001, p. 206). Thus, practicing ethnicity does not need to be interpreted as a group struggle for accessing resources (ibid.,203-206).

4.2. Minority Policies in India: Legislative Boundaries and Beyond

While discussing the possibilities of expansion of the scope of structuring the international guidelines, Pejic mentioned the "sheer diversity of factual situations" (1997, p. 684) This significantly defines a state's struggle to formulate its legislative structure for minority rights. Multicultural states which recognize minorities and subsequently work towards securing their rights also have to acknowledge the specifications of the socio-political situations. The legislative and policy structure depends on the historical context of the state. Bhattacharyya suggested that citizenship in India is a product of state and society – the terms are decided by the mixed impact of both. Society encompasses more ethnic or group identity, whereas the state is the legislative authority for secular individualistic rights (2012, p. 28).

India qualifies to be a multicultural state because the articles in the Constitution of India strongly formulate the ground for minority rights or group-specific rights in general. The nationalist ideology of pre-independence India focused on collective regional identities as the foundation for national unity (Bajpai, 2002). Mallick stated that in India, only the liberal democratic structure with a neutral stance of the state is not enough to secure the group rights of minority communities. Though the multiculturalist approach has been emphasized from the time of formation and the Constitution recognized minority rights, he argued that it is more applicable for practice in private than the public domain (Mallick, 2013, pp. 74-74). However, the conceptualization and implementation are different from that of international models. In the democratic structure of India, secularism has been displayed in a particular way – as a medium to secure the religious rights of the people along with an attempt to separate state from religion (Bajpai, 2002). I would argue that similar to the ambiguity of the terms in different international laws, states also differ from each other in identification criteria. Thus, replicating international guidelines might not be a practical implementable solution. In the following section, I will present two aspects that are critical for establishing minority rights in India. The first is the difference between minorities and Scheduled Castes and the subsequent development of group-specific rules. The second aspect is the ambiguity in further development of a definition of minority following the guideline provided in the Constitution.

In its long history of being a culturally vibrant nation, India is not oblivious to discrimination and the social seclusion of various communities. Unlike the categorical division of minorities in Western countries (for example, Kymlicka's two categories of national minorities and

ethnic groups), India has a complicated history of group rights comprising of a balance between two binaries – whether to follow the ground rules of a welfare state or protect collective rights. There are two different but interrelated foci of group representation through preferential policies – preserving the rights of a discriminated category[46], which includes Scheduled Castes (*Dalits* in a broad sense), Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes, and securing rights of minority groups. These two groups have a different socio-political history of origin, yet they are often considered as one under a broad heading of minority (for example, see Sinha, 2005, pp. 356-357). Going by the conventional definitions of minorities, Scheduled Castes and tribes do not match with the criteria. Moreover, the agenda for representation of their identity, or struggle for their rights are different for these two groups. They are still accommodated in one category, most likely because of being numerically inferior and the discrimination they face. However, Waughray distinctly noted the difference between Scheduled Castes and minorities in India. She mentioned that Scheduled Castes have a constitutional status different from the minorities, where they have "affirmative action policies (known as reservations) in higher education, State employment and political representation" (Waughray, 2010, p. 329). Scheduled Castes do not directly qualify to the international criteria of being a minority, which is based on either religion, language or ethnicity. The only commonality amongst persons belonging to this category is the identity of a *Dalit* for reinforcing the practice of discrimination. Thus, *Dalit* is rather an imposed identity (ibid., p. 332-333). However, in the history of Indian legislation, minorities have been conceptualized differently. After India's independence, Dr B. R. Ambedkar[47] was elected as a Member of Parliament and he was heading the Drafting Committee of Constitution of India. Initially, the objective was to provide affirmative legislative support to all the disadvantaged

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[46] Weber (From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology edited by Gareth, H. H.; Mills, C. Wright) considered caste as a social ranking (p. 397) – "caste is always a purely social and possibly occupational association, which forms part of and stands within a social community" (ibid., 399). Béteille (1965) differentiated caste and class on the ground of mobility and "legal and religious sanctions" (p. 190-191). According to her, the association of class with caste has diminished over the years as options for occupation increased. Jodhka (2016) argued that the caste system in India is still functional because of its ability of adaptation. The base of the caste system is inherently related to discrimination and operates through hierarchy of political power structure. Vaid (2012) did not identify castes on the basis of different *jatis* under one *varna*/caste; rather she found it appropriate in today's context to focus on the groups recognized by the government for preferencial policies (p. 404).

[47] Born in 1891, Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was the main proponent of ensuring equal rights to *Dalits* or discriminated castes. As an advocate and a politician in later life, Ambedkar led a number of movements against untouchability. After India's independence in 1947, Ambedkar was elected to the Constituent Assembly and joined the government as the Law Minister. He was elected as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of Constitution of India. His views on the protection of rights of discriminated castes have been extensively captured in the Constituent Assembly Debate (Bajpai, 2000; 2002). He converted to Buddhism in 1956. Along with him, many of his followers rejected the caste system, left Hinduism and converted to Buddhism.

groups which included *Dalits* as well as religious minorities. By the time the report was finalized in 1949, the priority was to ensure secularism. A separate set of affirmative actions based on religious identity was not encouraged, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes were the ones to receive legislative protection (Bajpai, 2000, p. 1837). Ambedkar established successfully that *Dalits* are eligible for affirmative actions for ensuring equal rights and in this way, they are a "minority plus" (Waughray, 2010, p. 346). Waughray mentioned that despite arguing against portraying caste as a religious element when presenting its case before the UN Committee against Racial Discrimination, India associated castes exclusively with Hinduism (2010, pp. 347-348). Later it was extended to the Sikhs in 1950, and in 1990 to the Buddhists.

Bajpai mentioned that in the Constituent Assembly Debate[48], the minority claims were made based on numerical inferiority and disadvantages. Furthermore, the argument was based on the earlier nationalist ideology of different communities (not individual citizens) building the nation (Bajpai, 2000, p. 1838). The directions for ensuring minority rights in the Constitution of India have been mentioned in two articles: "Any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same" (Article 29:1). "All minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice" (Article 30)[49]. These two articles in the Constitution of India mention the term minority. One focuses on the freedom to establish and operate any educational institution by the community while the other secures the right to conserve essential elements of a minority group such as culture or language. However, there exists a theoretical void between linguistic and religious minority groups. Though culture or ethnicity has been mentioned as an identifying component, there was no attempt so far to incorporate that. The recognition of religious and linguistic minorities has followed a certain process, but for

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[48] The Constitutional Assembly Meetings were held from 9th December 1946 to 24th January 1949. Established under British rule, the assembly meetings were initiated to draft the Constitution of India. The debates varied diversely in their subjects from national security to communal violence but the undertone of one united national identity was clear. The Constitution of India is theoretically the sole guiding line for the legislative, administrative structure, and thus these debates are the foundation of the 'national identity' that was intended to be created.

[49] Surprisingly, the religious and linguistic categories were not introduced at the same time. The primary focus was put on defining linguistic minority groups as per Article 350 (B) and the office of the Commissioner for Linguistic Minority was formed in 1957. On the other hand, the declaration of religious minority as a notification on minority communities was introduced in 1993. The central government designated Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, Sikh and Zoroastrian communities as minority communities. Later in 2014, Jains have been added as well (see http://ncm.nic.in/Profile_of_NCM.html).

culture or ethnicity, it ends with theoretical statements without practical possibilities. Other than these two, some further articles[50] mention rights against discrimination of the minority. However, these articles are based on other contexts and most often the minority issue has been an auxiliary subject, expanding the premise of the article. For particularly this aspect, the recommendation in the Constitution is sporadic, indicating a more inclusive perspective. Article 29 focuses on the basis of group rights and does provide the rationale for any legislative measure to secure but a further continuation remains missing. This article includes hints about defining characteristics of a minority group without elaborating it any further. We find this issue emerging again in a broad legal spectrum when the Minority Commission tries to define the categories of a minority. Similarly, Article 30 mentions the right of minority communities to establish educational institutions, which can be extended into many possibilities to conserve the cultural characteristics of a community. In both these articles, the critical aspect of defining characteristics continues to be imprecise. Article 350 (B) states that the safeguard measures of a linguistic minority will be checked and reported to the President by a special officer for linguistic minorities. Unlike the other articles, this article specifies the categorization while indicating the safeguard measures to secure the rights of the community. The further extension of this article can be found in several bills put forward by the Minority Commission in a much later period. A number of reports and bills indicate that in the later period there are two distinct minority categories: the linguistic and the religious minority. These were formed in a later period, but many court statements emphasized the Constitution to be the foundation of this categorization, specifically mentioning Article 30. It would be worth mentioning the case of T.M.A Pai Foundation and Ors. Vs State of Karnataka and others (2002), where the Court specifies (Johari, 2007, p. 572): "Linguistic and religious minorities are covered by the expression "minority" under Article 30 of the constitution. Since the reorganization of the States in India has been on linguistic lines, therefore, for the purpose of determining the minority, the unit will be the state and not the whole of India. Thus, religious and linguistic minorities, who have been put at par in Article 30 have to be considered state-wise."

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[50]Several other articles in the Constitution are applicable for 'minority' and are considerably relevant, but these are based on fundamental rights of citizens which have general applicability. For example, Article 15 Constitution of India states prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. Or, Article 25 Constitution of India secures freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion. Articles 14 and 16 are also applicable from this perspective.

This statement clarifies that the Constitution has been the guideline and diverts the subject from being a concern of the central government to the state governments[51]. The state-specific perspective is unique here, which was not mentioned so far, as it emphasizes the numerical aspect of a minority group, which is differing vastly from one state to another in India – just like the social seclusion as a group (*Ranganath Misra Commission Report*, 2007). It opens a new horizon of possibilities to quantify in terms of population, income and other parameters of the standard of living. The Constitution of India defines two domains of operation which are applicable for minorities – common and separate domains. Under the common domain, fundamental rights and duties mentioned in the Constitution are instrumental in securing minority rights – such as Article 51(A), which states the fundamental duty of every citizen of India to promote harmony and spirit of common brotherhood (e), and "to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture" (f). The "Directive Principles of State Policies" such as Article 46, which directs that states shall attempt "to promote, with special care, the education and economic interests of the weaker section of the people, and, in particular Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of social exploitation" facilitate the structuring of such policies[52].

H1 is confident that they belong to the general category and not a minority. Here, he mixes up the two legislative categories for groups with special group-specific rights – the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Castes, and the minority communities. The reference of general category is only used in the Indian scenario to indicate the majority of the population who do not belong to any caste reservations. In the Constitution of India, Amendments denote that minorities are entitled to equal opportunities. Moreover, here, minorities are recognized by their collective identity – defined by language, religion, or

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[51] Particularly important for this study are the West Bengal *Minority Commission Act* 1996, which states 'An Act to constitute a Minorities' Commission to study and suggest additional social, economic, educational and cultural requirements of religious and linguistic minorities of West Bengal with a view to equipping them to preserve secular traditions of West Bengal and to promote national integration.' Following the central legislative direction here minority has been defined as 'a community based on religion such as Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, or Zoroastrian (Parsee), and includes- (i) such other minority as the Central Government may notify under clause (c) of section 2 of the *National Commission for Minorities Act*, 1992, or (ii) such other minority based on language within the purview of article 29 of the Constitution of India (hereinafter referred to as the Constitution) as the State Government may, by notification, specify from time to time.' (See also *West Bengal Minority Development and Financial Corporation Act* 1996)

[52] As cited on http://ncm.nic.in/constitutional_provisions.html accessed on 21/03/2018 at 11:05 IST

culture. Apart from the Amendments, the National Commission of Minorities[53] can declare a community as a minority, whereas a state can structure policies to secure their rights. On the other hand, Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and Other Backward Castes hold their allotted quotas for education, employment and political representation[54]. However, as I have mentioned before, in generic terminology, minority refers to castes or those who are entitled to have the benefits of the reservation system.

Where the reservation system has a direct impact on everyday life or political powerplay, the measures related to minority rights seem to be distant and at the mercy of the states. Caste-politics is a dominant force in the political picture of India, both at the state and national level. However, minority communities fail to secure that amount of attention. Moreover, the numerical difference becomes crucial for the struggle of recognition and representation. On the other hand, Waughray points out, "the Constitution affords minorities freedom of religion and "identity rights" but they are not entitled qua minorities to the benefit of reservations, while Muslim and Christian Dalits are specifically excluded on the grounds of religion from SC reservations" (2010, p. 342). This dichotomy restricts a minority community (other than the Scheduled Castes of Sikhs and Buddhists) who are facing discrimination from availing the protective measures allocated for Scheduled Castes, Tribes and Other Backward Castes.

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[53] The National Commission of Minorities was established under the *National Minority Commission Act* 1992. The Constitution recognizes minorities and provides directions towards protecting their identity, yet it does not identify minority groups. The National Commission ensures realization of the directions provided in the Constitution by identifying minority groups on the basis of language or religion. Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhist, Christians and Zoroastrians were recognized as religious communities from the beginning, while the Jain community was declared as a minority community not until 2014. Under the legislative framework of the National Commission of Minorities, states like West Bengal have established their own Minority Commissions. While the selection of communities as minority can only be notified by the National Commission of Minorities, the states can formulate state-specific minority policies (according to http://ncm.nic.in/Profile_of_NCM.html accessed on 26/03/2018 at 10:56 IST)

[54] The first Scheduled Part of Section 26 of Government of India Act replaced the previously used term 'distressed class' with 'scheduled caste'. "Scheduled Castes means such castes, races or tribes or parts of or groups within castes, races or tribes being castes, races, tribes, parts or which appear to His Majesty-in-Council to correspond the classes or persons formally known as the 'Depressed Class" as His Majesty-in-Council may specify" (Mathur, 2004, p. 51). Under this Act, the Council of State and Central Assembly of British India had a number of seats reserved for Scheduled Castes. In 1946, reservation was applied in government jobs, the percentage being the proportion of Scheduled Castes population to the total population. After Independence, seats were allocated to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and the Anglo-Indian community in *Lok Sabha* and *Vidhan Sabha*. Similarly, a number of posts were reserved in State and Union Affair related jobs. By 1970, 15% of the seats were reserved for Scheduled Castes (SC) and 7.5% of the seats for Scheduled Tribes (ST) (Mathur, 2004, pp. 51-54). The Mandal Commission was set up in 1979 to identify the discriminated castes or classes to determine the percentage of reservation. Based on a number of social and educational parameters, the Mandal Commission report recommended that 27% of reservation should be allocated to 'Other Backward Class' (OBC). However, they declared 52% of the population of India comes under the OBC category. Reservation of seat for SC, ST and OBC is applicable to elected government bodies, education and employment in public sector, though the percentage varies in each sector.

This dichotomy further complicates the relationship of communities with the state. Moreover, communities like the Chinese often view this gap in legislative provision as a product of their complicated relationship with the state in the past. In general, separate legislative rights seem to be normal for the people belonging to the SC, ST and OBC category, whereas minority rights in West Bengal is a distant concept for many. The legislative implication of the term minority is not clear for some, however, having said that, many associate it with the discrimination they face.

4.3. Defying Minority

F3 has a sarcastic smile when he starts – as we talk, it seems to be more ironic than sarcastic. He talks about the time when people starved in Chinatown after the 1962 war. He considers all the attempts from the government as a temporary balm for their sufferings. I start to speak about minority rights with A2. I know that A2 likes to talk about the rights of his community – we have had discussions on this before. However, F3 rarely speaks in the club. He reads his newspaper and enjoys his tea. Although I know he is listening to our conversations, he does not participate. However, today happens to be an exception. He folds the newspaper and looks at me with a smile. He does not consider applying for a minority status because "only the chosen ones are given minority status". He says this will invite trouble and the Chinese have a phobia of being in trouble. They do think that asking for such favors will complicate their relationship with the state government further. This sense of insecurity is there when they are even unsure of their fundamental rights. A2 wants to say something but does not think that it is right to interrupt F3 so he interestingly listens to the conversation. As F3 goes back to what he was reading I look at A1. Talking on the topic of minority confuses him a little bit, he does not have much to say. He rather would talk about his identity as a Chinese. He tells us a little story about when he went to China with his father. His father introduced himself as an overseas Chinese where he said he was an Indian Chinese. It seems like it is one of his favourite stories to tell. He takes his time explaining both the terms and laughs while talking.

On another occasion, we were talking about a book. Recently someone from Chinatown has written a book on his experience of Deoli Camp. We start to talk about it. It is only me and F1 who have read it. A2 does not seem to have a high opinion of the book or the author. He says no one except a few can verify the content of the book. He emphasizes that F1 has received offers to write about his experience. He refused it by saying "*paani main rahke magarmachh se dusmani karega*?" [Hindi proverb meaning one cannot be enemies with the

crocodile while living in water]. A2 is adamant that one cannot write anything criticizing the government while living in Kolkata. I try to reason with him by saying that he can write whatever he wants. He refuses to agree – it is not the case for them. The fear of 'I might have done something wrong' overshadows the demand for equal rights.

From the perspective of discrimination, there is a scope for providing similar solutions for discrimination. Panni stated that caste-based protections would increase discrimination over time (2001, p. 3346). He suggested that "non-caste secular strategies" can eradicate caste-based discrimination (ibid.). I would like to add that this argument also leads to a possibility of minorities facing discrimination because of their collective identity, yet that discrimination is not addressed. A non-caste based secular approach can incorporate discrimination of any kind. From another perspective, caste has been characteristically linked with race. Panini (2001) mentioned that although caste is not synonymous with race, they function similarly. On the other hand, with the connection between global and local, caste gains a "global mobility" and resembles ethnicity (Reddy, 2005, p. 571). My argument here is once again not to highlight how to define caste, but to specify the parameters of categorization of caste and minority groups and the commonality of discrimination. Apart from the difference between individual identity (castes) and collective identity (minorities), both dwell on similar components which can be connected at a meta-level and can be a platform for discrimination. However, in the Indian scenario, measures against caste discrimination are diverse and farsighted, whereas considering the possibilities of discrimination of minorities, actions are more concentrated on preserving their cultural heritage. Each minority community has its own set of expectations from the government and its unique history of collective identity. Moreover, each community deals with the existence or non-existence of supporting policies differently.

We are sitting in the dimly lit hall of the Club. A2 and his friend are here. His friend F3 is engrossed in a magazine. I start to wonder why there is not anyone else present here today? At least F1 should have been here by now. A2 begins to talk about his recent trip to Darjeeling [a hill station in West Bengali]. His aunt was ill, and she passed away there. A2 says his wife complained about the terrible cold there. He finds it a little funny that even though she is from that region, she could not tolerate the cold. On my way to the club, I saw that the boundary wall of the club was almost encroached by the rag-pickers. We start to talk about that. A2 says no one does anything about it. I ask them if they have ever asked for any support from the government? "Like what?", he asks. I tell him about the minority policies

the government has and how that might help. A2 does not appear to be interested or impressed, but I still try to continue on this topic.

Me: "You might consider applying for a minority status, you know."

A2: "What to do with that?"

At this point, I see A2's friend, who rarely speaks, starts to smile. A2 says they do not need any support from the government. It will only bring trouble. A2's friend nods to that. A2 seems like he has a lot to say and he starts to talk about wartime, gives an example of how the Tiretta Bazar area is getting dirtier and more congested every day. He does not believe that claiming a minority status would help them anyway when the government has never helped them in the past. He says an official from the Minority Commission was working on giving the Chinese community this minority status, but nothing came out of that. Correcting himself, he says that no one from this community ever tried to apply for it either. His friend nods again while keeping his eyes fixed in the magazine. The sarcastic smile that he had a few minutes ago was gone, his face looks sad, yet with a strange kind of determination.

It has been emphasized that they would rather be in oblivion than under the constant vigilance of the government. The threat of being politically vulnerable has put them in a situation where any communication with the state is considered to be risky, especially when they are demanding a set of special provisions. The lack of confidence, in this case, is compensated by the sense of the strength of their collective identity. The security of being part of their community compensates for the lack of interactions with the state government. The question I often ask the participants is – "Would you want to have the benefits of the rights secured for the minorities?". This question meets with eyes rolling, uninterested shrugs and sneer. However, the participants choose to talk about it for long, explaining their pride in being self-reliant for so long. Approaching the government for minority status is against their 'culture', something which they have not inherited from their forefathers.

"What about the restoration project then?" – I ask them. Even if it is not related to minority status, this project is about preserving their cultural heritage which acknowledges their collective identity. F3 laughs – at my naivety probably – and continues to read the newspaper. I keep on staring at him for an answer. A2 steps in, he does not like F3 out rightly rejecting any possibility of future implementation of the project. For him, it is going slowly, but something might happen in the future. F2 finally decides to talk or rather contradict A2. "It is not going anywhere," he says. For him, if the government has not done anything for

them in the past, he does not see why they would be interested in this project. This is as simple as why the community should not seek any special acknowledgment from the government. F3 not only thinks that the government will not help them but also considers any such expectation as an insult to the community. On the other hand, D1 is uncertain about the parameters but he is optimistic about the benefits assigned to a minority community. He says that they are trying to enlist themselves [I have found that very few people in the community agree with this – as per many Chinese from the community, there has not been any official request sent from the community to the State Minority Commission]. As a minority, for D1, the benefits will be some help or recognition from the government, especially action against the antisocial gangs extorting money. However, he knows the minority communities of West Bengal such as Jains, Parsees, Sikhs, Muslims, and Buddhists. He says the Chinese community wants to enlist themselves as a minority community based on their religion, which is Confucianism. However, he knows that it should be either Buddhist or Christian, facilities from the government. Very few members of the community speak in favor of seeking a minority status. It is not something they are particularly aware of or interested in. On the contrary, they spoke about their collective strength.

However, I soon discover a difference in opinion. From a different perspective, L1 does not seem to acknowledge the collective identity at all, so the discussion regarding minority rights for the community does not interest him. The peculiarity of the circumstance when I met him for the first time and his views were somehow synchronized. I am about to come back home after a long day in Tiretta Bazar. R2 suddenly shows up, riding his tiny red scooter. He insists that I should come with him to Tangra – "I will show you some amazing eating joints and you can meet my friend L1", he says. I have heard about L1 and his dragon dance troupe from the local boys, so I think for a while and then hop on to the back seat. The traffic is quite heavy but R2 manages to drive through the narrow lanes. Terrified, I ask him to slow down – he does not listen. We reach the Tangra and he continues to ride through narrow deserted lanes with warehouses around us. It is dark, and the sporadic existence of street lights is making the environment mysterious, if not scary. I become seriously worried now. I am not unfamiliar with scary stories of robbery in Tangra so I ask R2 to go back. He says he knows this area well and I should not panic. We reach the end of Tangra almost, there are not many warehouses or tanneries around. The noises from the main street seem to be distant and I can only hear the frogs and mosquitoes. On one side of the road, there is a lowland with thickly overgrown taro plants. On the other side, there is a tannery, most likely with a big

door. R2 finally stops here. He knocks on the door and L1 opens it. He gives us a warm smile and it seems like he was expecting us. We enter through the big door into a huge hall. It has one more floor on top of it, which is only visible when we enter. It is indeed a tannery, but not a functional one. The air is warm, humid and smells of leather. There are a few drums and the mask of a lion lying on the floor. It seems a bit strange to find essentials of dragon dance in a deserted tannery. L1 explains that he has inherited this place and practices dragon dance with his team here. He seems to be interested to start a conversation, yet he is careful of what he says. We sit down near a gigantic fan as there are too many mosquitoes. L1 soon starts to talk about the community. His English is polished with a strong accent. He chooses small sentences, but he does not talk in an indirect complicated way. He is quite open about his opinions of the community and his identity. Once he begins to speak about the community, he continues for some time. Besides the noise of the fan, it is his voice echoing in the big vacant hall. Unlike others, L1 does not talk about the pride of the community is not approaching minority status. He questions the nature of the collective identity of the community. The unity of the community is not what people perceive from the outside. L1 does not want to talk about minority identity because it is not important. For him, seeking minority status is not of any use because of the internal lack of cooperation. He bitterly recollects his previous efforts when some influential members of the community opposed him. As he speaks, he looks at R2 for support. I initially think that his view has something to do with his fights with others, but I decide not to interrupt him. He mentions one restaurant owner from Tangra who fought with him for a development work that he proposed. L1 does not believe assisting the community with minority rights will help in any way because he does not consider this community as a collective entity. Moreover, he thinks nobody will be willing to take up the effort to go to the government offices. The internal community politics bother him more than the social seclusion.

His perspective does seem a little different from others. On the second thought, he does acknowledge the collective identity, but from a perspective to criticize the disagreements with the community. It surprises me to see that he seems so careless of the community support, which is vital for others. Not only does he criticize the community, but he also makes it clear that his individual identity matters more to him. He does not worry much about the community being a minority or not. As I meet him frequently afterward, I find an explanation – a hypothesis which might clarify his standalone perspective.

W1 has a similar view to L1. When I approach W1 for an interview, he seems to be quite interested. He asks me to come over to his dry-cleaning shop. The address shows it is located in the poshest part of the city – I take a taxi and reach there on time. It is a considerably big establishment on the main road. We sit beside a big window and start to talk. After I tell him a little bit about myself and my work – W1 firmly says that he can only talk about himself and the culture. Since he has lived away from Tiretta Bazar, he does not have a (strong/true/real) connection with the community. He cannot talk about the community because he has not been a part of it. As he says this bluntly, I am surprised. My experience does not reflect that the locational factor has a strong role to play in maintaining the connection with the community. Moreover, the way he puts it is more like he does not want to do anything with the community. He elaborates on how difficult it is to teach his children about Chinese culture but does not mention any role of the community. After we get to know each other well, W1 tells me in detail about the prospect of sending his son, who is an athlete, to foreign countries for training. I reply that I do not know anything about this, however, I think this must be expensive. He says he has the money, but he needs to be sure which place is best for him. W1 takes a keen interest in education in foreign countries and the standard of living there. But he does not want to move to any other country, which is understandable. He lives in the richest part of the city and his business is doing considerably well. W1 seems to be distant from the community; unlike L1, he is not even interested in participating in community activities.

I soon get to know that like W1, L1 has a considerable amount of wealth – a family business and a dragon dance group. L1 lives in a luxurious apartment unlike most of the community members. As I start to visit him frequently at his home, I discover his social circle is distinctively different from the others. I start to doubt that he does not need the backing of his community because of his affluence. Moreover, the question of minority status does not invoke any interest because he has probably not faced much discrimination. He grew up in a protected environment, far away from Kolkata – in an elite boarding school. After coming back to Kolkata, he did not have to deal with the common problems of the community. He does not properly fit into the ideal social interaction systems of Chinatown – the clubs, Sunday breakfast market, and festivals. L1 on the other hand wants to be a part of the collective identity, but according to his own terms. He emphasizes on many occasions that people do not listen to him when he proposes something new. In the discussion of the minority status of the community, interaction with L1 and W1 gives me an alternative

perspective to look at the significance of minority status on individual community members. There are two aspects of this, firstly, L1, B1 or W1 do not see community identity as an essential factor, however they rely on their Chinese identity when talking about themselves. The lifestyle, which clearly shows a considerable amount of affluence, does not require to depend on their community for support. Neither is the discrimination which others face a problem for them. The second aspect is, in a similar way, considering the community as a minority, or that minority status is not an immediate concern for them. Whereas most of the community consider it as an essential requirement, community identity is not an essential component of their individual identity. As W1 says they distance themselves from the community of Tiretta Bazar or Tangra, yet Chinese culture is an integrated part of his family. The feeling of vulnerability or discrimination which prompts others to consider them as a minority community and simultaneously stress on their collective identity, rejecting the possibility of state intervention in the process, is not so relevant for them.

In India, minority issues are predominantly either dealing with caste politics or religious minority groups, and I would like to argue that there is a void between these two dominating aspects. Ethnic minorities or groups claiming minority identity based on collective cultural characteristics are not identified and not reflected in the legislative framework. Surprisingly, rather than dismissing the prospect of having any other classification of minority groups in legislative terms from the beginning, the cultural difference had been recognized in the Constitution of India and as well as in the very important Constituent debate. However, R2 is confident that the Chinese community wants minority status based on their cultural heritage. On several occasions when we meet at our favorite coffee shop in a crowded mall that sells electronic products, Z articulates his views very clearly. Croisy linked the definition of a minority with the struggle against oppression, as a fight for the right representation of their identity. She mentioned that "the term minority refers to cultural communities (mainly diasporic communities and ethnic groups) that have suffered, and still suffer today from multiple forms of discrimination and which have experienced therefore a lack of social, economic, political opportunities and a lack of recognition/representation within their located geopolitical spaces" (Croisy, 2014, p. 1).

4.4. Whose City?

The solution multiculturalists propose is representation in political decision-making. The primary difference between the treatment of Scheduled Castes, Tribes, and Other Backward Castes categories and minorities is a set of visible, lucid, and effective legislative rights

(reservations) for the first group. The discussion regarding the minority status of the Chinese community or any ethnic community does not limit itself to providing a set of services but also reservation of seats in the elected bodies. How is this relevant in the discussion on the views on the minority status of the community? Along with the less-articulated minority rights in India, there is also an intertwined issue of representation. Representation in the decision-making process of the government has an impact on fighting for their rights as well as on how the community will be treated by the larger society. From this perspective, I would argue that the lack of having a political representative further weakens their position.

The 74th and 75th Constitutional Amendment Acts of 1992 provide a guideline for decentralization of rural (also known as *Panchayati Raj*) and urban governance respectively, which emphasizes the participation of the discriminated section of the community. In this way, recognition of a discriminated group might have some far-reaching impact like representation in the local governance and participation in the decision-making process. Participation of the weaker section of the society has been stressed while making and further elaborating the prospects of these two acts. For example, among the diverse range of academic works and policy documents on this aspect, Jain & Polman (2003) in a training document published by the United Nations on the training of the elected members of the Panchayats talked about the inclusion of women and representatives from the weaker section of the society as stated in the Act.

During my fieldwork, I have come across views that do not associate the Chinese community as a minority group. The term minority in many cases implicates a vulnerable position in society based on their community identity. Here, factors for identification such as religion, language, or culture are not of their primary consideration. On the other hand, ideally, for them in India a minority group is only legally recognized by the government if that community has the political stronghold to represent their community. However, few wanted the minority status because of their community identity or culture. Interestingly, in general, being a minority as a social product and a minority as a legally defined entity are two different categories. Many from this community consider themselves a minority community because they are numerically inferior, yet do not consider themselves eligible for group-specific rights which they understand are only for Scheduled Castes, Tribes, and Other Backward Castes. Reservation or group-specific special rights are inherently associated with caste politics but less with minority communities like the Chinese. I had the perception that being a minority does not represent their collective identity in its entirety. Their collective

identity as overseas Chinese is more crucial than the legislative identification as a minority group.

Chapter Five: Identities Constructed and Confronted in the Alleys of Chinatown

5.1. Introduction: Portraying Identity

Sitting in one of the famous coffee shops, Z, a young Chinese software designer, talks about the dilemma of performing customs and how meaninglessly ritualistic they are for him.

> "I seriously don't know who will take care of them. I mean after my parents or their generation who will take care of all the rituals. I join my father when they pray for their ancestors or the New Year *puja* (prayer). But I find it fake because I feel awkward when I pray, but I don't feel the same for going to the Church. I don't know, I mean we, our generation is quite confused, the Chinese part as my family and the Indian part as my profession or my social life. See, how many people can actually cook proper Chinese now? Is the language only left now? I can't speak proper Chinese. What left is our colour?"

Though he starts with his apprehension about the religious practice, he ultimately relates practicing religious rituals with the same thread of language and food as apparatuses of their shared identity, the 'Chineseness'. Paradoxically at the same time, he questions the imperative nature of this collective reproduction or replication of cultural practice. In this chapter, through narratives like these, I have specifically focused on the superimposition of multiple identities and the process which relates to its order, acceptance, and rejection.

How are identities built and narrated? Who tells the tale and who listens? Are they nothing but a nexus of memories, stories, and imagination; spreading, evaporating, and looming over the mental space? After spending some time observing the daily life in the *Cheenapara*[55] (Chinatown) of Kolkata, identity often seems to be a shadow of one's larger self, the community, or the belongingness. And reciprocally the community's identity is a mosaic of such individualities. Of all the chatting sessions with old men in their clubs; chefs answering questions while swiftly chopping onions and busy mothers dressing up their children, I could sense belongingness and detachment at the same time. The diverse narratives have a

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[55] The literal translation of *cināpāṛā* will be Chinatown, but *para* in Bengali is recognized as a socio-cultural, functional space. The term is an inseparable part of description of spatial concentration of a community and organic informal division of a city, town or a village. The *para* concept was the most prevalent during the colonial period with the very rigid spatial boundary defined for each caste. In the present days, *para* is more used for depicting the locational reference of a community. There is an immense significance of the history of the each para as they given an idea about the history of the city as well along with the caste politics and functional division. Sarat Chanda's *Abhagir Swago* or Bibhuti Bhushan Bondhyapadhya's *Pother Panchali* are some of the works in Bengali literature brilliantly citing the social and cultural life of different urban and village *para*s.

similar tint through their shared past and the experiences of being Indian-Chinese in Kolkata.

In the beginning, I had elaborated my research question of how a community sees itself as a minority in a multicultural state. In this case, the diasporic Chinese community is entitled to a set of separate special rights for the minority, but they so far have preferred not to claim those. Subsequently, the apt question to be asked here is, why so? And what is an alternative narrative of identity from the perspective of the community? How does the collective as well individual identity take shape in this juxtaposition of a legislative structure of a multiculturalist state and the quest to maintain the collectively agreed original image of the community?

The narratives are inherently complex with attempts to seek a balance between duelling binaries of cultures and trying to define identity. The narratives I found in Chinatown Kolkata have evolved through time, with the personal experience and stories of family history. The complex form of identity takes shape as a nexus of recognizing oneself as an Indian, as a Chinese descendant and as a hybrid. The perennial quest of being accepted exists simultaneously with the opposite force of having a secluded, separate and proud identity of being Chinese. I will present examples of the 'Chineseness' as a collective memory that is performed and represented by the community. Here, the representation is not only for conserving the connection with the country of origin but also as an attempt to establish their distinctiveness, non-conformity with the socio-political designation as a minority. This amalgamation of narratives is the thread in addressing the initial research question of how the state policies shape the identities of communities as 'minorities". The question here in a larger context of the city becomes more elusive, incorporating various other actors. In this section, with the same objective, I have focused on the role of 'others'. 'Others' here, has been used as a term for demarcating the rest of the city from this community as well as the community itself as the 'others' from the perspective of the surrounding environment. I have discussed how the notion of 'others' and the related seclusion becomes the inseparable expression of their identity. Finally, I adjoin this discussion with my previous understanding of the acceptance of the legal definition of a minority among minorities. For this, I have looked into the impact of the informal political system, political representation and community beliefs. As an extended part, I present my argument on the connection between cultural hegemony and its political manifestation, and how this determines the mode of the identity-forming process.

5.2. Trajectories of Fusion

This section illustrates the distinctiveness of Chineseness and Indianness and the interactions as portrayed in the narratives. First, I look into the elucidation of the keywords frequently mentioned for defining this community such as 'Indian-ness' and 'Chineseness', and space where these two identities merge. What significance do terms like Indian-Chinese (or Chinese-Indian alternatively) hold for this community? Similarly, another dimension of this discussion will be to understand collective and individual identity as defined by community members. The initial two sections will be focusing on describing different perspectives defining citizenship, attachment with the homeland, and the imprint on their everyday life. The following section will explain the subsequent question on the role of culture as identity as well as the expressions of identity. Simultaneously, here I have mentioned the postcolonial discourse as a means to see beyond transnationalism, to recognize the complexities of hybridity, and understand the political undercurrent of a multicultural nation-state. Moreover, the ambiguity of the concept of diaspora in the postcolonial discourse allows incorporating different expressions of culture while historicizing the context.

5.2.1. Indian-Chinese or Chinese-Indian?

The multiculturalist theorists assure us that a community in a multicultural country should be not secluded and the state will not intervene in their freedom of expressing their cultural uniqueness. Though Kymlicka has been to some extent silent on the particular role of minority policies, it can be assumed that the theory fundamentally stands on safeguard policies for such groups which require identification of the minority groups such as immigrants or national minorities. The process of identification as a minority thus helps a community to retain its cultural uniqueness. Subsequently, this idealistic situation encourages a community to have their own identity in a welcoming national culture which Kymlicka calls societal culture. Trying to find the reflection of this theory in the urban riddle of Kolkata involves asking the painful question to the Chinese community once again, "How do you define yourself?". The Chinese in Kolkata take time to reflect upon their identity, after all, it is not a simple story. Asking the Chinese community to define who they are, results in a puzzled reply and subsequent discomfort to discuss this any further. I have found a common pattern non-confrontational answer on behalf of the community who is habituated to the curious glances in everyday life and also became a subject of tourist attraction recently. They have probably been asked this question on numerous occasions – in offices, social gatherings, schools and any interaction involving people from outside the boundary of their own

community circle. Willingly or not, almost everyone goes through the process of introspection and formulates the answer for different categories; for oneself, close acquaintances, and strangers. Through interactions, I have slowly learned the way of how they express themselves. Initially, the answers would be carefully structured, and then as they start to know me better, they would talk more about their views - the slow revelation of inner conflict and impugn.

Z, who was born and bought up in the fringe of Chinatown, is an energetic member of the community. He calls this neighborhood his home, while at the same time, as a software designer, he interacts more with the outside world than many of the other community members. For him, his identity is:

> "I will consider myself nationality-wise definitely Indian because I have a passport and all. But ethnicity-wise or may be caste-wise you can say we are Chinese. So, whenever we have to refer ourselves it is more like Indian-Chinese so it is like that. For me, China is just another country. People just keep on asking stupid questions, if India and China play football, whom will you support? That is the sad case in India, people confuse nationality with ethnicity."

Following this question, when asked about if he faces any discrimination or not:

> "Just two weeks ago I lost my phone, I went to file a complaint in the police station. They told me *ye cheez ko Chinese main kaise bolte hai*? [How do you say it in Chinese?] I got irritated […] I got so irritated that I said I didn't know Chinese. As kids, we are not perceptive and one more thing, our school had a Chinese crowd so we mixed around with them."

In another conversation with L1, he says he has to give these explanations almost every day. When asked if they feel different about their identity, he concludes:

> "Of course there is. How come you look Chinese? I say, yeah I am Chinese born in India. No, being Indian Chinese isn't offensive. I am an Indian, I have a passport, born and brought up in India. Even though that I practice so much Chinese culture, if I go to China, I can feel that I am more Indian than Chinese. I have more Indian friends than Chinese friends…I am following the Indian culture too."

There are two interwoven aspects here, first, the various ways to rationalize their identity in a direct simplistic manner by connecting nationality with identity. The second aspect is,

simultaneously, these two different identities, Indian by nationality and Chinese by culture are maintained through compartmentalizing these two. In her study among Anglo-Indians in Kolkata, Blunt (2005, p. 180) talks about a similar situation of "reflecting a loyalty and attachment to India whilst maintaining a distinctive community identity". The nationality and the community attachment are two different exclusive elements that coexist, and in a multicultural state, it is possible to have both. I would argue that in India, this ideal situation is different for different communities. For some it is effortless and easily while for a few, their culture and nationality do not go hand in hand They might not be considered a part of the commonalities of the urban landscape where they need an explanation. For the Chinese community, this process of maintaining both is crucial. Here, I would point out the need to have a critical balance between these two identities. Is there a superimposition? For many of the people I met from this community, the projection of nationality and culture on each other is something theoretically viable but not for everyday life. These two terms are interchangeably used, and they do make a choice of which identity to prioritize and when. As for the multiculturalist theorists, such as Kymlicka, a multicultural state accommodates separate group identities and this should be possible without disrupting the notion of a unified national (or societal) culture. The Chinese not only struggle to accommodate themselves in the broader canvas of the city but also to convince themselves of such a scenario. When a person from the Chinese community has to prove that she is an Indian with a Chinese origin, she is also simultaneously structuring this argument considering the mindset of the majority – what they perceive as their own and who is an outsider. In her community, she might want to portray herself in a different way where being an Indian with Chinese origin made sense, however, she might focus more on the commonality with a Bengali than talk about her Chineseness. As if there is a necessity to establish the alikeness. However, by this, I am not portraying two separate compartments of Chinese and Bengali culture, but focusing on the shaping of identity from these interactions. On the other hand, through these narratives, I am trying to locate the mode of interactions – how the equation between two communities defines the majority and minority. Moreover, for the Chinese community in this scenario, being a minority is a social construct where the community is accepting the terms of the majority and concurrently challenging them. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, many do not want the legislative tag of minority as it specifies or formally declares their social vulnerability.

Is this something unusual? It might not be so. As India has a legacy of regional rivalry where the residents of most of the states within the country have expressed their discontentment over the migration from other states, acceptance comes with various degrees and is often superficial or momentary. The claim that the state of Maharashtra is exclusively for the Marathi people caused a riot and many Bihari migrants were killed[56]. In a different scenario, some of the majority of the Bengalis of West Bengal are insecure with the increasing number of Marwaris in the state. However, the expression is very subtle in this case. The dominance of one culture at a regional level tends to disappear at the national level where the nationality or national identity aptly accommodates all these smaller regional or local cultures. However, where a Parsi (see footnote 9) or a Muslim in Kolkata does not evoke curiosity, but the Chinese of Kolkata do, the situation turns out to be quite different. The arrangement of words such as Indian-Chinese or Chinese-Indian becomes a decision to make – a choice where they either put their Indian legislative identity in the forefront of their Chineseness as authentication of their origin from China, as ancestral homeland. In these, narratives the effort to quantify their Indian-ness and the Chineseness becomes evident when L1 says, "I have more Indian friends than Chinese friends. I am following the Indian culture too". Similarly, H1, the only singer in the community who can sing in Chinese, carefully articulates the order of the words:

> "By looks, by the culture we are maybe Chinese but we are born citizens of India.
> I would call myself an Indian-Chinese. I am very particular about it. […] then the
> upbringing, the value, I would say I look like a Chinese but at heart, I am an
> Indian."

For this community, after years of living in India, Chinese culture is still not comfortably accommodated within the broad structure of the national culture of India as a nation-state. The paradox of having a different culture than the accepted 'own cultures' of the nation has had definite repercussions. The ready acceptance of statements like "being a Parsi by culture and Indian by nationality" is not as easy for the Chinese – not even for themselves.

Many of those with whom I have interacted intensively, frequently have brought up the justification of how they are Indian and instantaneously how important the Chinese culture is for them. It seems like the description of being Indian is comparatively easier. The Indian

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[56] In 2008 after a month long sporadic violence against North Indians residing in Maharashtra, the North Indian students preparing for the entrance exam of all India Railway Recruitment Board were beaten up by the Maharashtra Naviraman Sena.

identity can be established with some very tangible legislative proofs such as a passport and voter card. At the same time, the Chinese identity is essential but to some extent vague where culture, ethnicity, and values of the community are considered to be reminiscent of mainland China or rather the imagined homeland. But however blurry the image is, it is the quintessential component of describing oneself.

Nevertheless, where is the need for this compartmentalization? As I see it, in this community the attempt for compartmentalization is the reflection of the larger urban society. As W describes, "We have become more Indian than Chinese. I am more fluent in Hindi than Chinese. I cannot change my color, the color of my skin". Despite knowing Hindi better than any Chinese dialect or loving Bengali food more than wonton soup, the Indian-Chinese feel that they are not given a chance to be Indian completely. The immediate urban society reminds them that they are different from others – always meant to be on the fringe of the urban community. As a former employee of an international airline, R is distinctively different from other women from the community. She explains that her upbringing in New Delhi and extensive international professional experience gave her a new outlook. She speaks broken Chinese along with fluent Punjabi and Hindi, which turned out to be an advantage in her profession. However, she says being identified as someone different can be frustrating too. For her, in Kolkata, the situation is more amicable in other parts of India (she compares it with New Delhi) because Kolkata has a big Chinese community. In Kolkata, the community still prefers to restrict their social interactions within the community. She explains that it is not always the "typical Chinese behavior" of being less sociable but also how others treat them. She gives an example of a recent incident. Her friend's daughters are studying in one of the most expensive public schools in Kolkata. At a school celebration, the Chinese kids were asked to wear "ethnic Chinese dress" and sing the Chinese national anthem. The children tried to explain that they are as Indian as others. The parents finally had to intervene and explain that they are not Chinese citizens. R presents a well-articulated argument that reflects the general mindset of the community - if the larger urban community rejects them or fails to understand them, they tend to find refuge within their community even more. While talking to the people in their sixties, they make it clear that they were not allowed to mingle with Bengali kids when they were young. Even now, children from the community will have two groups of friends – the closest ones will be Chinese in most cases. They do venture out more than their elders, but acceptability and trust take time to build a relationship, while within the community the similarities and acquaintance make friendship

spontaneous. On the other hand, the fear of rejection or betrayal is always there. Chineseness is not a choice but an identity that is more real to them – often without any choice of reverting the roles. It can even be said that Chineseness as an identity is closer to the community because the others decide so and leave them with no options.

Collecting narratives of the 'others' has been a different experience. The Chinese remain mysterious and strange while some do have courteously good relations with them. The reason behind this distance is always the Chinese. R2 is married to a Chinese girl from the community and considers himself a part of the community. He is omnipresent in all the community meetings and festivals. One day, on our way back, he starts to talk about the Chinese. Most likely he relies on the common Bengali thread between me and him and expects me to understand his perspective. For him, the Chinese will always be Chinese, no matter how much you do for the community, they will never trust outsiders enough. "You will always be an outsider." He makes it a point to mention that there is no need to be so proud of Chineseness because it is not even real. Most of them have not been to China whereas he being a Bengali has been to China and knows the Chinese culture better than them. They are too proud to learn anything from him because he is Bengali. After being initially surprised at the superficiality of the cordial relationship, I find it to be common. In a completely different situation, I met a teenager Bengali girl who does not know any Chinese person but considers them unamiable. "It is very easy to find *Chinkis.* Just go to any college in North Kolkata and you will find them wearing horrible short pants". Surprisingly, very few Bengalis speak about the war in 1962 and consider the Chinese as outsiders – the war seems to have faded from the memory of the Bengali community. However, the perpetual strangeness of the Chinese community is attributed to how they look and their lifestyle – their Chineseness.

Now, how to look at this quintessential Chineseness? One way of looking at it is as an ethnic and only identity that the community calls its own. Another way specifies the necessity of having one. Finding it difficult to be recognized by the Bengali and other communities, the Chinese take refuge in their Chineseness even more. There is a need or desperation even, to relate oneself with the community, to replicate the 'typical' Chinese community behavior. Here, the individual identity is often a copy of the collective identity which is considered as their irreplaceable core Chinese identity. What the community believes as their core identity is a continuous process of transformation. Yet, overlooking the process of intermixing is the recollection of the past, a connection to unite them. According to Werbner (2002), the

diasporic identity consists of multiple loyalties, other than the host nation-state. He emphasizes the materiality of performance to establish identification with the homeland. For this community, the prospect of a regular connection with the homeland is not plausible. In this case, lineage or collective history is the only way to establish their identity as a community.

The multiplicity of identity varies greatly. Yet the balance between Chineseness and Indianness is maintained somehow distinctively. One day, while talking to P, he starts to talk about visiting his daughter in Australia. "It must be nice, but do you get the visa easily?", I ask him. Getting a visa is often a huge problem. With a twinkle in his eyes, as if he is revealing a secret, he tells me that it is not a problem for him as he has a British passport. His daughter in law starts to laugh at his reactions. With a huge smile, P explains that he was born in Kolkata, in a nearby government hospital. Since he had Chinese parents and was born in the British era, he was given British Citizenship after India's independence. He is not very sure about this bureaucratic riddle and loosely mentions that since it is a hassle to change citizenship, he does not try to change it. After all, having British citizenship has its advantages. For him, visiting his children in Australia or New Zealand is a pleasure and probably the British passport becomes useful then. He of course does not want to settle though. Why would he? He has his friends and family here, Kolkata remains his home. The British passport is symbolic as he is a Chinese living in Kolkata. For him, it is a simple case. However, in M1's case, the distinction between Indianness and Chineseness is not so transparent, yet it is necessary. M1, as a devoted Christian, spends a lot of time with nuns at the local church. She is associated with charity works and runs a school for the local children. Her work brings her closer to people outside the Chinese community where the common thread is the Catholic faith. One day, she mentions that she has to go to a Hindu wedding of an office colleague of her husband who is not Chinese. However, she also clarifies that these interactions are limited and more formal. M1's social circle primarily consists of people from the community and church.

Coming back to the discussion of homeland, invariably, the root of Chineseness might be considered as the cross-border relation with China, the homeland. A strong and continuous connection with the homeland can reassure the community in India of their cultural origin. Supporting the transnational perspective of the discourse of diaspora studies (Safran 1991; Laguerre 2009; Cohen, 1994). Sahoo (2013) emphasizes the role of homeland. He states that a diaspora survives and thrives because of active connection with the homeland which is

even stronger because of the various means provided by globalization, be it technological advancements for communication or blooming of the multinational industries. However, the Chinese in Kolkata provide an antithetical image of this ideal transnational scenario. Do they consider China as their homeland? The Chinese community in Kolkata has few ties left in China. Very few have contacts with their relatives there. Many say that even if they have contacts, they hardly have anything in common anymore. T says he was always curious to see China. He says it is quite obvious because he has heard so many stories from the elders. Finally, after his retirement, he planned a trip, but it was not how he had expected. He says that even the language they speak here is different from what they speak in China. He traced back some of his relatives, but they did not have much in common. For the people of the community, China as a homeland is a collection of stories. As I have mentioned earlier, here, the typical need to build a connection with the homeland is replaced by the Chineseness in the community – the various ways of performing it.

Through the holiday trips to China, they experience differences rather than similarities; present China hardly resembles what they have heard from their elders. Relating themselves entirely to China as their homeland seems to be vague. What about the role of the Chinese government? Whenever asked about connections with the Chinese Embassy, I have been told that it is merely formal and superficial but provides them with the recognition they seek. After the painful experience of the 1962 war, it is impossible to have an encouraging political atmosphere, but the improved relationship with the Chinese Embassy gives them the desired support for holding on to their Chinese origin. The lack of recognition they face as Indian citizens is supplemented with the acknowledgement from the Chinese government, but the attempt to find common cultural ground yet again remains futile.

A2: "They [Chinese Embassy] asked us why we did not provide lunch for the Elder's Day celebration and we told them that we did not have any money. Since then the Chinese Embassy has been sponsoring the lunch. We have no connection with the Embassy other than this. At least they ask us how we are doing, nobody really care here".

Thus, the essential Chineseness is not a response to the unified Chinese culture across borders but the remnant of a thriving community. As I have already mentioned, the Chineseness gives the community a sense of security – an identity by which they are secluded from the larger society but paradoxically at the same time, it becomes their own choice as well. Whatever interaction they have with Mainland China makes the difference in their respective cultural stances more evident. Louie (2003) in her study demonstrates how

Chinese Americans of San Francisco tries to re-establish their connection with Mainland China through a youth festival organized by the Peoples Republic of China. She explains that though the objective of the Chinese government was to improve relationships with the Chinese Americans. However, the distinct cultural difference between the Mainland Chinese and Chinese American participants made it difficult. Moreover, the economic or cultural transnational ties reform territorial identities in a way where the local nationalism or Chineseness is different from the official one (Louie, 2003, p. 662). Most importantly, she points out the possibility of having multiple versions of Chineseness and "Chineseness as a race without culture" (ibid., p. 647). Echoing her views, I would even argue that a diaspora can sustain even if the direct transnational ties with the homeland are not there. As a replacement, the community adheres to the community identity almost as a replacement of the long-lost ties with the homeland. Before going into this argument of the non-existent but irreplaceable core identity, there is a need to clarify how the identity of a diasporic community from the homeland. I would even argue that the academic discussion of inevitably linking diasporas as transnational communities can also be nonapplicable for some cases. Over time, the quintessential direct connection with the homeland is not indispensable for a diaspora to survive. Inevitably, over time the Chinese community has lost its touch with China and the only way to know about the homeland is through popular media. The unique role that technological progress plays here is not to facilitate the community to re-establish a direct connection with the homeland but to help in creating their own version of the cultural root, their Chinese identity. Thus, the diasporic identity can create its own space and survive by following the ideal image of the community. As Waldinger & Fitzgerald (2004, p. 1178) remind us that the states, both host and homeland play a crucial role in determining the underlying political terms for cross border movement. This is not only true for the movement between countries but also leads to a quasi-adjusting state of cultural space of the community. Crang, Dwyer and Jackson (Crang, et al., 2004) mention two very liberating aspects for this transnational perspective. The first one calls for looking beyond "simple oppositions between national and transnational, the rooted and the routed, the territorial and the de-territorialized. Diaspora is not only an inherently spatial term. Its particular historical forms evidence particular and distinctive spatialities" (Crang, et al., 2004, p. 2). Second, they state that this transnational space is not only limited to legitimate members of the community but shared and structured by a diverse range of people. Thus, understanding a diaspora as a transnational community invites the idea of a culturally interactive space shared by the community and others. The Chinese community in

Kolkata defines their identity not only with the reference of an imaginary, ideal, unchanged culture but also relates to the city or non-Chinese linkages.

During my fieldwork in Chinatown, I have not found such desire or realistic possibility to return to the ancestral homeland, in fact, the idea of China as the homeland is indeed quite vague for this community. A lack of immediate connection with the ancestral homeland is supplemented with the collective memory of the community. For the community, their ethnic identity forms the base of the collective memory. Here, the repeated emphasis on ethnicity in most of the narratives defines both the reason for exclusion from the host society as well as the primary bond within the community. Ethnicity, as a group identification is not only a claim of the community but also a social process of recognizing or labelling. Parallel to the contextualization of the entire discourse of diaspora from the postcolonial theorization, there is the possibility of elaborating terms like ethnicity, migration, exile from the perspective of the community. It is indeed slightly dangerous to incorporate ethnicity in this discussion without falling into the major pitfalls of the concept. Here, I would mention ethnicity strictly as a term replicating the group or community identity, as Weber emphasized the belief in a common decent. From this perspective of ethnicity 'as a presumed identity among actors which represents a potential for group formation, communal relations, and social action' (Jackson, 1982, p. 6). From this perspective, this 'presumed identity' can be imposed as well, not only by the group itself but also by other external agents. Scott (2009) writes about this categorization of people under one ethnic label for administrative benefits which he states is against the multiple identities as a lived reality. To understand the far-reaching extent of the implication of the term ethnicity, I have presented the daily life of the community in the immediate shared neighborhood or the city as their home with the attached nostalgia and imagination. The objective is to explore the ideas of home and place-making for the community.

The community uses terms like ethnicity and culture interchangeably while culture and identity mean the same for them. All these terms, other the other hand have been efficiently replaced by "Chineseness". The need to have a separate distinct community identity has a very practical reason – the rejections by the larger urban society. Is there a core identity that remains unchanged? Irrespective of time and space? Moreover, why is there this dire desperation to identify oneself with a metanarrative or trying to replicate the community behaviour? Why is there a need to correlate all the individual and collective experiences on this scale of 'Chineseness'? 'This is how we Chinese are' or 'this is how the community is'

all refer to that said core Chinese identity, unchanged over years, and generating the same value system. When Z talks about not having a political representative, 'I guess it is a typical habit mentality of the Chinese, we are self-sufficient, we work hard, and we earn, Chinese and all are more generally self-sufficient'. Or about the family time they have together, 'Not exactly because I don't know, the parents and all are generally not talkative people, at least in Chinese and all, not a let's sit and talk'. Sökefeld (1990), while discussing the close connection between self and identity (as both go through various cultural and social texts), states that the concept of identity as 'the disposition of basic personality features acquired mostly during childhood and, once integrated, more or less fixed' (ibid., p. 417) has been destroyed by poststructuralist deconstruction (ibid.). A similar notion of primordial attachment is almost obsolete in present-day literature. A rather simplified explanation sees this 'Chineseness' particularly in the context of a diasporic community (see, Ang, 2001) as an attempt to have a connection with the ancestral homeland. Two pitfalls are to be avoided in selecting the premise of this discussion: firstly, similar to what Louie (2003) notes, "Chineseness" as characteristics are distinctively different from that of the "Chineseness" of mainland China leading to the escalating relevance of concepts like memory, homeland and belonging. Secondly, this diasporic experience has to be seen as what Anthias (1998, p. 561) calls the approaches of Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy of studying black diaspora, to be the 'heuristic mean to focus on the differences and sameness of the connective culture'. For the Chinese community, "Chineseness" is required for keeping community ties intact and for a sense of security. The actual cultural gap with Mainland China is not unrecognized but that makes little difference as the need to have a firm basis of Chineseness is crucial. N1 says:

> "There is a saying, *hujjuti Bangali aur Mehnati Cheeni* [Bengalis are problem makers and Chinese are hard-working]. Because of my work as a president [he has to deal with the local politicians and goons] people come and threat me. They [local Bengalis] want to encroach upon our ancestral land in Achipur. I tell them if I start beating then I will leave none. We Chinese are like this. We do not mess with anyone but if someone bothers us, we teach them a lesson."

The narratives are often reflections of the belief of having a core identity and the responsibility of performing that identity. The belief is nevertheless emancipated from doubts and conflicts. This conceptualization of a core identity or Chineseness is not strictly individual or collective but from a perspective where the functional need of this kind of identity has been emphasized.

A2 explains that growing up in a Chinese family invariably comprises of certain rules – rules to be Chinese and behave like one. He makes it clear that it is his generation that is more lenient where his parents had strictly forbidden him from mingling with children from outside the community. The general belief was that the Chinese children would forget the teachings of the elders and become like others. The congested neighborhood of Chinatown makes this effort of creating a secluded Chinese niche rather challenging. The physical proximity and everyday interactions are unavoidable, but still, the effort was very evident. He also mentions that this act of secluding a child was not very successful as he, later on, worked at the port and befriended many Bengalis. A2 does not see anything wrong with this attempt because who does not want to keep the community closely bounded? Even now, Chinese parents would very much like their children to marry within the community, but it is not possible every time.

The very idea of the identity of a diasporic community is embedded in a tapestry of concepts like collective memory, home and belonging which are influenced and altered by the socio-political apathy or sympathy of both the host country and the ancestral homeland. The collective memory for a diasporic community is the base of their identity which leads to the authentic (and imagined) history of their common past. Memory by its very nature is selective, depicting images with certain socio-cultural significances and subsequently altered with changing social settings. Rather than dedicating diasporic memory to a primordial identity, diasporic memories are "imaginative reconstructions that bear the friction of cross-cutting structural processes. Here ethnicity, gender, generation and regional circumstances suggest difference in the way memories are recalled, articulated and situate meaning" (Davidson & Khun Eng, 2008, p. 7). The collective memory as their identity involves a certain amount of performativity which enables the next generations to participate in the realization and recreation of that memory. By performativity, I mean the process of setting a community-specific behavioral pattern through practicing rituals, promulgating beliefs and customs. The way chopsticks are still mandatory in Chinese households or teaching the children few Chinese words at least knowing well that they would eventually forget. Nevertheless, the percolation from one generation to the other makes the collective memory more elusive. For a diasporic community, the collective memory depicts the shared history, cultural legacy and social customs from their ancestral motherland. This assertion of one authentic Chinese identity is popularly defined by the term 'Chineseness'. Inevitably the claim of one authentic Chinese self resembles the basic promises of primordial identity. This

interest in finding the ideal Chineseness or a core Chineseness has faced criticism, more for the claim that only Chinese people have the true perspective to understand and represent Chineseness.

The recent discussions overrule the claim of primordial identity in the very beginning, the post-colonial discourse contextualizes the dynamic nature of diasporic identity in the broad spectrum of nationalist politics, cultural transition and socio-economic stimulus. The discussion of Chineseness has its risks of overcasting the process of the transformation but also has immense importance as the collectively agreed image of community identity. For Ray Chow, what started as the quest to be represented and against the 'systematic exclusivism of many hegemonic western practices', paradoxically took a form of stereotypical categorization (Chow, 1998, p. 4). Chow criticizes the far extending outreach of 'habitually adamant insistence on *Chineseness* as the distinguishing trait'. The chineseness of mainland Chinese and that of the diasporic community are inherently different or similarly the situational dissimilarity between a diasporic community and the migrants. Gungwu differentiates between the memory and desires of the Chinese diasporic community and Chinese migrants. He states an example of the Malay Chinese of the Strait, a diasporic community settled there for three or four generations. Questioning the practice of assuming their identity as Chinese, Gungwu proposes to recognize their 'desires and memories' to be something new (Gungwu, 2007, p. 12). Born in the family from the diasporic *peranakan* Chinese community in Indonesia, Ang (2001, p. 30) demarcates the essentialist notion of 'Chineseness' to be the territory of Chinese identity which can only originate from China, 'to which the ethnicized "Chinese" must adhere to acquire the stamp of authenticity'. The strong geographical reference or having a geographical epicentre forms different trajectories of identity, the westernization of a diasporic Chinese community implies a great deal of deflection from that authenticity, 'even a position of shame and inadequacy over her own "impurity"'. She mentions that for a remote Chinese diasporic community, their 'Chineseness' is 'even more diluted and impure'(ibid., p. 32). This hierarchy of degrees of 'Chineseness' creates the dichotomous identity of a Chinese diasporic community where the authenticity of their homeland is more an acclaimed imagination than a lived reality. Here, the influence of the immediate actuality of the host country comes into being. In fact, the rhetorical relation with the host country claims 'Chineseness' more relevant. In this community, the very definition of Chineseness differs from one person to another. For T2, Chineseness is their Chinese culture and he feels that

the parents should teach the children their culture so that they are aware of the legacy. He says:

"More or less, if not a hundred percent but our generation can teach our children eighty percentage of our Chinese culture. The first thing is respect, you meet someone whether you know him or not, if the person is Chinese you have to say, "hello uncle or aunty". You must have respect. (…) there are many cultures [rules of Chinese culture]. Like using our chopsticks, not talking while eating, a Chinese should have these qualities".

The superimposition of traits from both the references composes the identity of a diasporic community which is much contributed to the postmodern concept of hybridity in its historical context. The relevance of hybridity in identity politics has been denoted by Stuart Hall ((Hall, 1990) in most of his phenomenal works. In this chapter, the prime objective is to find the imprint of the constantly changing, unsettling image of identity in these narratives. The foundation of this identity involves 'always a politics of identity, a politics of positions' (ibid., p. 226). What he calls 'as a matter of becoming as well as being' (ibid.), represents the common dilemma I have found in the Indian-Chinese community. Moreover, I have focused on Hall's interpretation of the importance of reconstruction of history and culture for understanding the community's perspective. As reflected in most of his works, he has emphasized this very dynamic nature of identity and multiple actors altering the image constantly. This approach of engaging new perspectives and pushing the limits of old theorization (Sareeta, 2014) forms the platform to look into the intricacies like shared history, fantasy and belonging in their narratives. For the Indian-Chinese community, identity is not only introspection but also a form of recognition that they familiarize themselves with. As I meet the person, again and again, familiarizing myself to the extent that I could be called a friend, the opposite side of the story starts to reveal. The other side is undoubtedly the intermixing, the mingling and resultant mosaic of belief and confusion. There are situations when one has questioned the customs, family or community traditions. In Cohen's words, "But the self is not as passive as a subject of society or culture; it has agency, is active, proactive and creative" (Cohen, 1994, p. 115). In this community, both the traits are very evident where the self is performing the rituals and the reciprocal process of questioning that course.

The discourse of diaspora is dominated by discussions of transnational relations but little has been said about the "diaspora – diaspora relationship" (Laguerre, 2009). He argues that homeland plays a crucial role in determining the importance of one diasporic site over the

other. Similarly, a relationship with one diaspora can be constrained because of the relation between the homeland with another diaspora (Laguerre, 2009, p. 202). This situation is the same for the hostland as well where the relationship equations between diasporas and the hostland differ greatly, which changes the reciprocal relationship among diasporas. Communities interact with each other at different levels over shared space and this fusion finds its expression through food, music, festival and any other cultural form we can think of. For any diasporic community, this change with the contact of other communities is inevitable. In fact, for a diasporic community, it is impossible to mark the limit where the authentic identity ends and the hybrid form starts. As Clifford (1994, p. 306) states "even the "pure" forms are ambivalent, even embattled over basic features". There is an immense significance of geographical location as well where the community shares the space (the Chinatown area) with other communities. This process of sharing the immediate neighborhood and the city in a larger context is the catalyst for any transformation in their identity narrative. Dutta (2012) points out that intense mixing creates affection and sentiments as well as transforms the differences as normalcies, part of daily life. The invariable interactions are thus a concurrent part of the essential Chinese culture or Chineseness. This process is often not recognizable at a first glance as the evidence is inseparable from the Chinese culture. Whether it is the Chinese Kali temple[57] or a different version of Bengali *daal*[58] being a part of the Chinese kitchen, the acceptance and further modification of other cultural traits have been subtle but constant. The main reason being the changes were not adopted by one generation but gradually integrated. The next section will elaborate on the process of blending in their daily life as well as how Chineseness persistently remains as their identity.

5.2.2. *Bhetki Paturi[59] over Red Roast Pork?*

The Chinese in Kolkata have been part of the city for more than a century now. In this long time, the attempt to retain their culture has been accompanied by the inevitable mingling with other communities. The juxtaposition is evident when it comes to food or preference of food. For me the icebreaking talk has always been about food, be it the wonton soup or biriyani, people would enthusiastically participate in the conversation. Food is indeed a

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[57] *Any lentil curry is called *Daal* in many regional languages in India.
[58] Chinese Kali temple or Cınekālıbārı is a temple of Hindu Goddess Kali in Tangra Kolkata. This temple is equally popular among the Bengali and the Chinese population of the locality.
[59] Bhetki Paturi is an old Bengali delicacy made with barramundi fish. This preparation needs skill and patience as the process involves marinating the fish in mustard sauce and wrapping it in banana leaf for steaming.

medium through which people communicate in Kolkata where the use of sugar in curry will confirm whether the cook is *Bangaal* (people whose ancestors were from present Bangladesh) or *Ghoti* (people whose ancestors originate from West Bengal, a state in India). It is no doubt that the Chinese will share some of that passion, but what makes the situation different here is the balance between the responsibility of maintaining their Chineseness and the fondness for other's food if we can call it so. In the interviews, people used "our food" and "their food" frequently to distinguish Chinese cuisine from the rest. On the other hand, they do recognize that the Chinese food whether it is hakka noodles or dumplings, they have been improvised to match the local taste. However, those who are in the restaurant business declare that the food they eat at home is completely different from what they make for their non-Chinese customers. They explain that since customers like spicy food, they have to add chillies. I have found that this kind of compartmentalization is not always very distinctive. I have observed the mingling of the Chinese culinary practice with different culinary traditions has resulted in new hybrid dishes. Simultaneously, I have also seen the individual preferences dwindle between Chinese food or their local favorites – a decision which indicates their adherence to their collective identity, their food. This duality, which strongly reflects multicultural taste, also involves the struggle to keep their tradition of Chinese food alive. One of the numerous components of this mixed array of culinary preferences would thus invariably include Chinese food – a recipe from a small fishing village in China. Here, food is synonymous with memory. Holtzman emphasizes that similar to the saga for food, which involves intrinsic details of the broader social, cultural and hegemonic situation, memory also includes multiple layers of experiences. He states that "food thus offers a potential window into forms of memory that are more heteroglossic, ambivalent, layered and textured" (Holtzman, 2006, pp. 373-374).

If we are to consider food as the community's identity, then we need to explore the duality of this identity. The way Chinese food is an inherent part of the community so are the other culinary delights – Bengali curries, Muslim *biriyani* and fine confections from Parsi bakeries. This community, like other diasporas, has gradually adopted the culinary practices of the host country.

Generally, many prefer hot and spicy food more than their older generation, but at home, they are bound to follow the Chinese tradition of cooking with mild flavors. Even if they accept recipes from outside their kitchen, it is revised to suit their taste. There is a conscious effort to differentiate between the 'Indian' and 'Chinese' version of a dish, which becomes

prominent when A2 says 'you will laugh at that curry, you will say this is curry?' or when explaining the fundamental difference between Indian food cooked in a Chinese Kitchen and an Indian one, "You can cook but not the same taste, that I tell you even the *daal* you make in the house will not have the same taste.…like you people make the thing is different, no?".

At home, the situation is quite different, the everyday Chinese food is what they call 'very different from the Chinese you eat'. Through the years, gradually the typical Bengali recipes have become a part of their kitchen but a milder version. The recipe is altered to suit the Chinese taste and often as an attempt to separate their collective individuality as a community.

> "Sometimes we make but not the same. A Chinese family will cook curry in the house, chicken curry, beef curry or fish curry in the house. We make Indian food, sometimes curry also…that is Chinese style. The taste is good so we continue. Every day you make Chinese also is difficult, fed up to eat. Sometimes Indian and sometimes no? Like that. Not every day".

In Si-up club, food is the most relished topic, it brings back fond memories, favorites from the neighborhood and secrets of traditional recipes. Often the strict boundary between Chinese and Indian food seems to fade away in such conversations.

> "I have been in Hong Kong for nine months when I reached Calcutta and told my wife I am coming to Kolkata… *bola* I will make you good food, *hum bola* don't try to make me any good food, I am going to eat kabab roll or either any curry. I come to Calcutta, I took my wife and my kids and went to this Shidhshree. We took the tiffin and buy *jhol maach* (fish curry). …my favourite is *Ilish*[60], what do you call? *Ilish* with mustard. And *Bhetki paturi*[61] and that I love to eat. I eat that thing always my stomach gets upset…You can't get that taste outside, they something common but not the same.

Though Indian rather Bengali food is not a part of their everyday diet, it is part of their habitual food habit what they crave for and identifies themselves with.

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[60] Ilish is the favorite fish of the Bengali community, which is often avoided by others because of the difficulty to eat.
[61] See footnote 64.

Figure 1: Preparation of a feast

Figure 2:Shopping at Breakfast Market

"When you come back from Germany what do you eat here first? ...even when we come back, we don't go for Chinese food, we go to eat Indian food first. When you open the *Bhetki paturi* what the smell comes no?"

When asked about what they would like to have after they come back to Kolkata, if there is any special delicacy, the reply is often- 'not good food, the regular one. *Daal*, *bhat* [rice], kabab, and fish and fish head'. Bengali and Muslim food are the closest alternatives they find around themselves and have grown a fondness for. It is a common practice in the community to use chopsticks at home and switch to using hands to eat when they are outside. This interchangeability is rather impromptu and barely anyone notices the shift. A2's friend who worked at the port for years was habituated to eat one Chinese meal at home and the other consisted of a spicy curry at the port. Similarly, the Chinese households make sure that the children learn and follow the eating etiquette at home but the personal preferences vary greatly from pizza to kebabs. This food practice has two noticeable aspects. First is the dichotomous situation of food preferences between "their food" and "our food" and the essential Chineseness as a component. Most of the time, the two food habits are adjusted parallelly quite effortlessly but they often also feel the obligation to uphold the legacy of their food. Paradoxically at the same time, this very boundary between authentic

Chinese food and other food is not very distinct. Eating typical Bengali or Muslim culinary delicacies is not an exception from their daily food habit but very much part of it. In many of the interviews, the people can relate themselves with this globalized multicultural food habit and it indeed becomes a medium to express their identities, but at the same time, they separate it from their Chineseness. They do recognize this adaptation as a part of them but do not necessarily consider it as a part of their Chineseness. The other aspect is the numerous forms of fusion food that have become part of the community's everyday life. Whether it is the generous use of chillies in noodles or Bengalis curries being a part of the Chinese kitchen, the community has widely adopted the local taste. Though, on second thought, local itself is an assortment of Chinese, Bengali, Bihari, Muslim, and many other cuisines. This perfectly functional chaos consists of adaptation and modification where the offerings at the Chinese Kali temple consist of fruits following the Hindu ritual along with Chinese noodles. The Chinese have not only adopted, but the wide acceptance of initially unfamiliar Chinese food is the evidence of the process of counter adaptation.

this community, hybrid forms are accompanied by the subsequent resistance to reinforce the 'original' Chinese identity. Emphasizing the inter-community interaction of daily life, I will focus on the role of nostalgia, belonging, and popular culture. However, for Mannur, the affection and attachment towards food in a diasporic community is not only a gesture provoked by nostalgia but also a means to validate their affiliation with the national identity of their homeland, which she calls a 'culinary citizenship' (Mannur, 2009). Here, I take a slightly discursive route to emphasize more on the community attachment than the longing to return or claim the national identity of their homeland. For a diasporic community, the idea of returning to their homeland is distant. It is replaced by their intense attachment to their community. A diasporic community is neither strictly antinationalist nor does it show the eagerness to be integrated like immigrants, it is more of a hybrid accumulated form of acceptance, resistance, and adjustment (Clifford, 1994).

While discussing everyday cosmopolitanism through the shared space between the Anglo-Indian and the Chinese community, Bonnerjee (2010) talks about food as a connection between both the communities and the rest of the city. She also points out that though sharing delicacies and inventing fusion recipes is a part of practice, still, the communities consider their food to be the distinct boundary between them and other communities. Holistically, it is the food with the tradition of conserving recipes and collective recollection of the past embedded in this process that defines the community identity and separates it

from others. The Chinese breakfast market is a space for cross-community interaction through food. It is these interactions that generate the local element, the product of the neighborhood space. Here, along with the Chinese, the neighborhood is shared by the Anglo-Indians and the Bihari Muslim community. The local thus is shaped by the dynamic interactions of these communities where bartering of tastes is also an acceptance of the other community. It should also be kept in mind that these interactions are not beyond the hegemony of caste politics. After all, it has not been long since the Hindu communities started to eat pork or beef, which were strictly a religious taboo. There was very little chance that a Bengali would develop a taste for soy sauce and noodles. The present rush at Chinese eateries at Tangra is a recent phenomenon, a common globalized trend. Rather than this implicating a liberal picture of cross-cultural acceptance, there is a bit of superficiality in it. The Chinese usually go to a Bengali restaurant to eat Bengali delicacies but are not usually invited to a Bengali friend's place for dinner. On the other hand, a Bengali might enjoy pork wonton at a Chinese eatery but very much unlikely that pork will be cooked in their kitchen. The deep imprint of social and religious taboo related to food continues to control the food habits to some extent. It is quite obvious that marginalized communities find comfort in each other where the interactions are easy. Sharing the same neighborhood space and the same feeling of seclusion, they do accept each other more promptly. While living in the same neighborhood with the Muslim, Bihari, and Anglo-Indian communities with different festivals of each community, there are certain mutually agreed practices that they follow. On *Bakri Eid*[62], A2's landlord sends goat meat as a gift but on Chinese New Year, they send him 'some good cake' and not something home-cooked. Knowing each other's religious practices so well, he knows the Muslim landlord might not accept anything from the kitchen where pork is cooked. It is a common practice that while eating outside a Bengali or a Chinese might break a taboo by eating whatever they like, but at home, the situation is quite different. Here the commercial eating places have a very interesting role to play where the differences between communities are erased for the time being.

A Chinese breakfast market is a place where local interactions take shape of food, and also where the Chinese community finds the quintessential Chineseness. The Chinese breakfast market in Tiretta Bazar is a temporary one, every Sunday morning Chinese breakfast items are sold by some of the community people. Along with them, vegetable, meat, and fruits

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[62] *Bakri Eid* or the Feast of the Sacrifice is one of the two most important Islamic festivals, the other being *Eid Al-Fitr*.

sellers gather in one of the streets of Chinatown, giving it a look of a small thriving market. It is a place where the whole community comes for weekly shopping and a special Sunday breakfast. The shopping part becomes elongated with meeting people and chatting sessions in nearby tea stalls. After some visits to the market, I found out that some of the sellers selling "authentic" Chinese food are not Chinese – rather they are independent sellers who had once worked for a Chinese restaurant owner or somehow managed to learn the recipe. Similarly, the food itself often is a version that satisfies both the Indian and Chinese tastes. A very popular dish in the breakfast market is *shrimp puri*[63]. *Puri*, primarily an Indian or North Indian delicacy, has been modified by adding fried shrimps, which on the other hand, is a favorite of the Indian-Chinese community.

Figure 3: Shrimp Puri

I was told that the market was a monopoly of the community some decades back, but now they have to rely on the non-Chinese people as the population of the community is shrinking. For the community, the market is not only about food or a place to spend the Sunday morning, but this market signifies their past glory, a place where they celebrate their Chineseness. Presenting a similar argument, Mankekar (2002) in her study of the Indian grocery stores in the San Francisco Bay Area shows that these stores are nodes of cultural interaction and reinvigoration of the identity of the diasporic community. The "constitution of spaces of familiarity" or the "social context" is also embedded with gender, social, and

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[63] *Puri* is a deep-fried flat bread, considered to be delicacy in India.

class hierarchies (Mankekar, 2002, pp. 81,91). She gives examples of shop owners treating the working class differently than the "educated" people or how a divorced woman is looked down upon. She emphasizes that the "sensory stimuli" that the appearance of the stores provides with the clutter of a plethora of things and the distinctiveness of the smell of Indian spices create the ambiance of familiarity (Mankekar, 2002, p. 89). The dominating population at the Chinese breakfast market might not be of Chinese origin but the bunches of bok choy or the fermented vegetables give a sense of authority over the space, reclaiming the space as an authentic Chinese one. This market also serves as the space for much-needed community interactions. Whoever comes for shopping, spends hours here, talking to others. People get to know who is leaving for Australia or Canada next or whose son is visiting soon. There is also a subtle territorial demarcation of the market, the northern side is mostly occupied by non-Chinese sellers and the southern part has more stalls selling Chinese food, vegetables, and meat. The communities do interact and holistically this market is an epitome of the Chineseness of the community as well as serves as a weekend market for other communities.

Figure 6: Sunday Breakfast Market in Tiretta Bazar 3

Figure 5: Sunday Breakfast Market in Tiretta Bazar 2

Figure 4: Sunday Breakfast Market in Tiretta Bazar 1

5.2.3. *Performing Religion*

As dictated in the Constitution, minority status is decided by specific religions. These rigid definitions and identification of religion do not give scope for recognizing religion as performance, a hybrid of tradition, transformation, and one's interpretation. For this community, the ritualistic procedures of performing religion are comprised of not one religion but many. Not only the religious connotations of Hinduism, among the Chinese, religion imbedded in the allegories of social practices of the Bengali society dominated by caste and class hierarchy.

Werbner defines diasporas as "chaordic" yet predictable when he describes the multiple ways of connecting or disconnecting with the imagined homeland. He says:

> "What people buy into is an orientation and a sense of co-responsibility. The rest is up to their imaginative ability to create and invest in identity spaces, mobilize support or manage transnational relations across the boundaries. Chaorder defines this complex combination of shared rules and focused competitiveness" (2002, p. 126).

On the other end, this chaordic characteristic also implies to community's mode of interactions with the host society. If instances of adaptation of Hindu rituals or following religious norms of Muslim society are results of coexistence, sharing of cultural space, then these also reflect the articulated side of these organic religious practices. The ritualistic performances follow the societal norms closely. Here, these performances define the diasporic space but only after closely assessing the religious and societal norms. On a broader perspective, as Werbner says the "embeddedness of diasporic subjectivities" can be traced through the "performance" of diasporic individuals imagining and creating diasporic identities; the religious preferences, and ritualistic performances also echo societal conditions. The practice evolves out of an organic selective process. As Zhang (2015, p. 183) mentions the Chinese immigrants follow religions like Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, along with local beliefs. After living in Kolkata for generations, these practices now coexist with Hindu religious beliefs. On the other hand, Christianity became popular after the war. This coexistence shows peculiar modifications of rituals and adjustments to fit the community's needs. This does not confirm the dangerous oversimplification that these two religions previously existed in their pristine form. Werbner (2002) mentions cultures as having "the capacity to shock through deliberate conflations and subversions of sanctified orderings" (p. 134). Zhang (2009; 2015) in her works describes the history and significance of various Chinese temples in Kolkata and Achipur. The temple of

Bogong and Bopo in Achipur, Taishou temple in Tangra are famous ones for their unique history. Zhang states that the Chinese visitors who come to the Taishou Temple follow the rituals common in India.

Figure 7: Inside a Chinese temple in Tiretta Bazar

Figure 8: Courtyard of a temple in Tiretta Bazar

Replication of the rituals or incorporation of elements of Hindu religious belief is the most evident in the Kali temple in Tangra. This temple of Goddess *Kali* is popular among the Chinese as well as the Bengalis. As Zhang (2009, pp. 61-62) describes this temple was built in the 1970s by a Chinese, Li Quansheng. She mentions this as a manifestation of the popularity of the Goddess Kali among the Chinese. This small temple eventually became very famous among the local Chinese and Bengalis. Apart from the regular offerings, there are special ceremonies on certain auspicious days. This temple has been portrayed as a motif of adaptation of Hindu rituals by the Chinese in recent documentaries and news reports. I associate this temple with L3. As L3 lives in Tangra, he asks me to wait near the Kali temple. Though I have read about this temple, it never occurred to me that I should visit this place. When he mentions this temple as the location, I think to myself that it is a chance to see it. The temple is at the corner of the street. It looks like a typical small temple that one would find in the neighborhoods. The temple is painted in red which is associated with Goddess Kali. The front part of the temple has an iron gate through which I can see the statue and the offerings. As I keenly observe the offerings, most likely to mark any unusual items, L3 arrives hurriedly. He seems to be happy with my interest in the temple. We leave for breakfast as it is getting late. On our way back, he stops in front of the temple and asks me if I have taken a photograph. He talks about the temple proudly and mentions it as a unique identity of the community. For him, this temple has made this locality famous. He seems to be familiar with the rituals and says that the Chinese come here to perform the rituals regularly. In Bengali, it is known as 'Chinese *Kalibari*'. He is aware of the Hindu lineage of the temple and the difference it has compared to other temples of the community. He distinguishes this temple from Hindu temples by saying it is their own. Most likely as I see it, for other temples they are conscious of the majority of the devotees being Hindu Bengalis. As they organize the ceremonies at this temple and manage the day-to-day activities, they have grown an attachment where they are not only visitors but part of it. However, interestingly, the ceremonies are performed by Hindu priests. The balance or negotiation between these two communities is that the temple is managed by the Chinese while the rituals are performed by Hindu priests. One way of looking at this is that the Chinese worship the goddess, yet they do not consider themselves eligible enough to officially perform the rituals in the temple. After years of living in the city, they have acclimatized to the Hindu notions of purity (only Brahmins can perform the formal rituals at the temples). There is a sense of acceptance of the rules of Hindu society along with an understanding of various ways of performing rituals. Though they know the details of these

ceremonies such as when to offer flowers and specific prayers for the occasion or god, they would not perform the ceremonies at a temple where they might do so at home. For L3, the functionality of this system is as acceptable as any other Hindu person in the community who would explain to me why a Brahmin should perform the ceremonies – because it has been happening like this for a long time. L3 shares the religious belief participates in the ceremonies but will probably not perform the official ritualistic duties at the temple. He accepts the rules of the Hindu castes system and follows them without questioning as it is a part of his life – an environment that he is accustomed to. Moreover, the Chinese would consider that the Hindus would invariably know the rituals better than them, or the Bengalis are entitled to perform them.

Interactions with A2 elaborates on the individual adaptation of the Hindu religious beliefs. Similar to F3, he also accepts certain rules of the Hindu religion, at the same time, he selects some rituals or prayers for every day which he particularly respects. Just before the Chinese New Year, at the club in the evening, A2 starts to talk about religion most likely due to the festive environment in Chinatown because of the New Year celebrations. He says he does not only enjoy Chinese festivals but also Hindu ones. For most of Chinese, the annual Bengali festival of worshipping Goddess Durga for five days is a grand affair. They follow almost all the rituals, both social and religious. A2 adds that not only during this festival but on usual days he follows certain Hindu rituals. Performing these rituals such as saying certain prayers give him strength in difficult times. He says he starts the day with a prayer for God Ganesha. I am a bit surprised to know this ritual because it seems a bit uncommon. Looking at my surprise, A2 explains that every auspicious ceremony starts with this prayer, so he prays every morning so that all the works go well. I faintly remember that I might have heard something like that from the elders. Still a little surprised, I ask him why does he do it? He replies that it gives him strength and for him whichever religious practice gives him courage is important. He mentions prayers in Mandarin which his father had taught him for the same purpose. A2 says he does not have a defined way to describe his faith. He follows rituals from different religions. For A2, he is not an exception. His sister is a believer of God *Sani*[64], he says. She goes to the temple to give her offerings. "What about your children?", I ask him. His children are Christians, he says. While he is not a Christian, he goes to church whenever he feels like it. However, because of not being a Christian himself, he did not

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[64] *Sani* represents the planet Saturn. In the recent years, worshipping *Sani* has become popular as it is said that he eradicates all the evil powers.

baptize his children. His brother took them to church when he was away for his work. This is common in this community where the religious affiliation changes from one generation to the other. A2 selects certain rituals from a different religion. A2's connection with certain Hindu rituals reflects current religious trends – the popular rituals as well as deities. From one aspect, he is free to choose whichever religious practice he wants to follow, but on the other hand, he is also aware of the rules of Hindu religion – the myths, restrictions, and stigmas attached to right and wrongs do's and don'ts of performing rituals.

M1 does not leave much chance for identifying any complex juxtaposition of rituals in her life. No other topic interests her more than her religion – Christianity. As I start to accompany her to church meetings, I see her involvement with the church activities more closely. We often talk about religion and what it means to her. For M1, being a Christian is one way of giving back to the missionaries who had helped them after the war. Moreover, she considers this religion to be kind and helpful to the poor. The social works which she is involved in give her an identity – a sense of being useful for society. Christianity is a part of her life because of its practicality. Asking about Chinese temples and religious festivals, she does not particularly consider them as a religion but a part of their cultural heritage. Performing those rituals is her collective identity – how she associates with the community. She goes to the temples whenever there is a festival. Religion for M1 is not only for spiritual interests but also a means for social interaction – to meet people with common interests. She makes me meet her friends. Some of them travel a long distance to attend the meetings. As I interact with them, I see the connection they share. After the meetings they share some snacks and people talk about their lives. M1 cherishes these meetings, which give her some relief from her duties as a wife, mother, and daughter-in-law. She enjoys the little walks in the church compound, asks for the recipe of a snack from her friend before she hurries back home again to cook dinner. Many of the Chinese in Chinatown are Christians. However, many of them are not very certain of the nitty-gritty of it. As M1 mentions, most of them turned to Christianity as a shelter after the war, but without leaving their previous practices. For the young generation, the religious duties of being a Christian are simpler. Since many of them study at convent schools, it has more significance. As A2 puts it, he takes a bit from every religion and prays. As I have mentioned, for A2 the ceremony has little significance, but he finds it amusing that it was done without him. While talking to this community, I often get the perception that being a Christian represents a modern way of life while the rituals of Buddhism or local Chinese religions are complex and incomprehensible. Yet, at the same time, these unfathomably complex rituals with the stories behind them are

inseparable parts of the community. Performing these rituals, celebrating these festivals bind the community together. It is about celebrating their existence in the city.

For a smartly dressed-up teenager like RH, who loves hip-hop dancing, it is quite unlikely that he would religiously come to the practice of the New Year Celebration, but he does. These festivals give him a recognition of his own, he can celebrate being Chinese. Initially, I concluded that he enjoys the attention on stage, but I meet him again before a performance at a cultural fair in Kolkata just before Christmas. RH and his friends are going to perform in front of a big crowd; they seem to be confident. They seem to have internalized the fact that they represent their community on these occasions. Coming back to RH, or other teenagers in the community, these rituals are to be followed because they have learned that these are important. Not exactly an obligation, neither devotion, for many these rituals are the tangible, very real part of being a Chinese. The rituals reflect the age-old traditions, which in turn re-establishes the existence of this community – something that they can claim as their own.

'As their own' cannot be traced back to authenticity or proven as an attempt to evoke imageries from an imagined homeland. However, the significance of a religion of its own should be understood from the necessity of having it, and the process through which binaries of different religions are connected with performing rituals and linking belief systems.

5.2.4. *Venturing Outside the Community: Intermarriages*

In anthropology and sociology, intermarriage has always been a fascinating subject to study, not only because the popular assimilation model declares it to be a compulsory part of group interaction, but intermarriage also communicates the fabrication of group interactions, group boundaries, and preferences. The traditional assimilation model (Gordon, 1964) emphasizes that marital ties between different communities can eventually create a cohesive society, eradicating social boundaries. On the other hand, recent theorists are not entirely convinced by the naivety of this model; they argue that patterns of intermarriage indicate the reciprocal relationship of the larger society and the communities – the intrinsic details of intercommunity relations. Qian & Lichter (2001), in their study of intermarriage between natives and immigrants from the United States Census Bureau's Public Use Microdata Sample of 1990 and 2000, have shown that interracial and native-immigrant marriages differ from group to group. Their study of American young adults indicates that Whites are more inclined towards intermarriages similar to Latinos and Asians, while African-Americans are less likely to go for intermarriages. Intermarriages are more common for native-born

Latinos, Blacks, or Asians than their foreign-born counterparts (Qian & Lichter, 2001, p. 308). Rodríguez-García (2015) challenges the classical idea of intermarriage being the epitome of social integration and supports the recent views of recognizing intermarriage as a tool to understand the complexities involved. Quoting several studies, Rodríguez-García gives instances where intermarriage has resulted in increased gender discrimination, racial labeling and increased cultural difference (2015, pp. 13-17). In their study of understanding the impact of intermarriage on the immigrant community in ensuring positive changes with greater social cohesion in Catalonia, Spain, Rodríguez-García, et al. (2015) derived the conclusion that the resultant effects are multi-dimensional and depend on aspects like historical context and gender. Moreover, they focused on "bidirectional" cultural influence between couples. Intermarriage or mixed marriage rather than demonstrating the group's willingness to integrate with other communities, evolve out of a larger socio-political dynamic.

Rather than studying the statistical data of intermarriage, my objective here is to understand the community's perspective on intermarriage and the evolution of the community identity in this context, verifying against the multiculturalist views and assimilation model. This will further elaborate on their socio-political stand in society. This community in Kolkata has developed marital ties with other communities over the years which represents a glimpse of how they perceive themselves as a community – the interplay of resistance and acceptance. For this community, the foremost practical reason for marrying outside the community is the decreasing size of the community, which makes it difficult to find a match within the community. Many will consider it to be a recent development, as it was almost forbidden a few decades back (Oxfeld, 1993). Marriages were mostly arranged, and the partner was selected from the community either the Tiretta Bazar Chinatown or Tangra. I have found the present situation to be contradictory to this scenario. Evidently, the temporal gap between Oxfeld's work and mine marks the considerable change that the community has gone through. Moreover, the growing trend of exogamy also involves questions such as; Marriages in which all communities are preferable? Do these cultural interactions have gender-specific impacts? Furthermore, does the community perceive the growing number of children from these mixed unions as a part of the community?

I would argue that it is not merely a very recent phenomenon as many people from the community who are now in their sixties or seventies married into Nepali, Anglo-Indian, Muslim and Bengali communities. The community has had considerable experience of

intermarriages in the past. If we look at the colonial past of these diasporic communities, then we can be certain that inter-community marriages were not particularly common but not exceptionally rare either. The general tendency of these communities was to marry within the community, not only because of their stringent community rules, but these communities were also considerably large in the colonial period. Most likely inter-community connections were utilized for finding a suitable match. The Anglo-Indian community was of course an exception as inter-community marriages were there as far as the history of the community goes. The term Anglo-Indian itself denotes the ethnic mix between the Indian and British communities. The Chinese were not an exception as they too preferred to have marital ties within the community. Oxfeld's inference of the tradition of arranged marriage has a practical reason. In a traditional, primarily patriarchal Chinese society free mixing of both genders was not common. Finding a suitable match required extensive networking within the community. The first-generation Chinese settlers were certain about marrying within the community. Some men would even go back to China to marry and bring the bride to India. For obvious reasons, they would want the same for their children. Hsieh writes that his grandfather came to India in 1917 at the age of 26 to join his cousin in the leather business. His young wife and two children were still in China. He wanted to save some money and go back to China after one year. He did not have any plan to permanently settle in Kolkata and bring his family to Kolkata although he started his own business in Kolkata eventually (Hsieh, 2011, p. 146). After his grandfather's untimely death, his father had to come to Kolkata to take care of the business. Hsieh describes that there were very few Chinese women in Kolkata at that time. Most of the Chinese immigrants were men. The preferable marriageable age for Chinese girls was between sixteen and eighteen while it was twenty to twenty-two for the Chinese men. His father had to go back to China to marry a girl chosen by his mother. He explains that the parents of the young men who were in Kolkata were constantly worried that they would marry local girls and forget about their homeland. The parents were determined that the children must learn the Chinese language and culture. The children who were not born in China were called "mountain dogs" signifying that they were ignorant of the Chinese culture and customs (2011, p. 152). For these reasons, intermarriages were not common and were reproached by the community. For the succeeding generation, it was evident that they were not to go back to China. They could, however, find Chinese partners in Chinatown as it was a thriving community by then. Significantly, the socio-cultural landscape of Kolkata also started to undergo a major transformation after independence. As the British started to leave, Kolkata saw an

unprecedented chain of events – including a new government, the formation of East Pakistan, the famine, and the Chinese community probably started to acclimatize itself with the change. The rigid class boundary differentiating between the elite English, as well as a few rich Bengalis and the rest of the city, was no longer there, instead, the Bengali middle class became the largest community. Interactions between communities became more frequent in this hard time. It was a difficult time for business too, and the Chinese, probably for the first time, started to consider alternative employment options and sent their children to regular colleges. The difference in lifestyle also created opportunities for intermarriages. Similar to this situation, Qian & Lichter (2001) agree with the traditional model of assimilation when they comment based on their study that there is a considerable increase in intermarriage from the first generation of immigrants to the succeeding ones. The wave of globalization in the later period made way for free interactions, and popular media may be made intermarriages a little more acceptable. For this community, the general practice of endogamy finally started to fall apart after the 1962 war. This transition has gained considerable momentum since then.

The change, which has been significant over the years, is that intermarriages are accepted gracefully now. N1, a second-generation Chinese is married to a Bengali woman. She is considered to be a nice person and people from the community respect her. I was told that "not all the inter-community marriages are bad, look at N1's wife". For people like A2, N1 or F1, who are in their seventies now, marrying outside the community was difficult. They had to make their family agree. Whether they would accept the match happily or not was quite a speculation. Though N1 claims that she has adjusted very well, and his parents accepted her happily, most of the time there is a number of sacrifices done to achieve this acceptance. For their generations, acceptance came gradually as the families were closely knitted and most likely everyone, especially a man had a role to play in the family business. Moreover, the community was recovering from the war when they were looking for partners. In this tumultuous time, they could not be picky. N1 had a hard time initially finding a job for himself; he ended up being a chef and eventually was working in one of the high-end dining places in Kolkata. During his struggling days, his wife supported him. His parents would have always preferred a Chinese bride, and why would they not? A Chinese bride could assure that the children would be of pure Chinese origin and the traditions would be taken care of. The parents of that time still had memories of the thriving community before the war when finding a match within the community was not difficult. They took

their time to come to terms with the fact that the community had begun to disintegrate. The community started to accept intermarriage as new normalcy after the mass migration started. N1 says his son migrated to Canada and decided to marry an Indian girl. He mentions that, for his son, whether the girl was Chinese did not matter, but he ended up marrying a Chinese girl from Bangalore. For N1, since he has married a Bengali, it made hardly any difference. He is more concerned that his son migrated to Canada, but he also understands that there is no future for him in India. Migrating to another country has detached his son from the community and marrying a Chinese girl did not help much in this situation. Marrying outside the community is not a rare event anymore, but it never goes unnoticed. I have been given instances of intermarriages in a very casual manner, but important enough to mention when introducing a person. Though the community worries about the fading Chineseness and the younger generation being less sensitive about their responsibilities toward the community, they also realize that forcing the younger generation to marry within the community will not be possible. This insecurity is almost identical to the worry of the parents of first-generation settlers, but what marks the difference is the lack of resistance. The elders of the community say they are helpless, so they have to accept. The present generation is more independent in making their decisions. Still, some facilities would insistently look for a Chinese match, mostly for those who are unable to find a match by themselves. H1's wife is from a state in far North-Eastern India. She belongs to one of the few Chinese families left in these hilly states. H1's case is an ideal example of the difficulty in finding a suitable match within the Chinese community. It requires extensive connections and patience to find someone suitable within the community and even then, the chances are rare. A2 often expresses his wish to become a grandfather and regrets that his daughters, who are successful professionals, do not want to marry. He says he never objected but "they do not want to get married, I do not know why". He continues, "I have already told my daughters if you are happy and boy is good". He says his daughters are educated and do not find the boys from the community to be suitable matches for them as they are "cook or carpenter, no scope, nothing". Alison Blunt, in her study of the Anglo-Indian homes of Kolkata, finds a similar explanation for more Anglo-Indians marrying outside their community where the girls are more educated and find the boys from the community to be underqualified for them (Blunt, 2005). The present generation ventures out from the close circle of the community more often than their elders which acclimatizes them to the other cultures. Since they live in all parts of the city now, they are habituated with open mixing with the opposite gender from other communities, eventually marrying them does not

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introduce them to a completely unfamiliar culture. Even if the parents or family will collectively criticize this trend of marrying outside the community, individually they are bound to accept when their children opt for intermarriage.

I have found intermarriages to be common in the community, but the acceptance largely depends on the socio-political position of the other community. For some communities, the Chinese people tend to be more flexible where children from these intermarriages are even considered Chinese or inherited the typical Chineseness. There is a visible order of preference where marrying into some communities is more desirable than others. The recent works of Rodríguez-García (2015) and Song (2009) aptly ask the fundamental question of which all marriages should be considered as intermarriage? A1 says he is happy with whomever his daughter wants to marry, after all, she is well educated. But as a father, he will always be worried. People in the community have made bad choices before. For some, though the community shares the neighborhood with other communities, the inherent but hidden worry is that the children will marry into the other community. Ideally, one would find nothing wrong with it as they are both marginalized communities and very much acquainted with each other's lifestyles, but Chinese parents will not agree to a marriage as this will probably be upsetting for the community. As for preference, it is quite subtle in expression as no one will express their disapproval directly. Why so? I could not get a straight answer. Most likely because the Chinese share the same doubts as most of the Bengalis. The Chinese community not only has adopted the Hindu religious customs but the common misconception or rigidity as well. Many marriages in the past between the two communities could not ease this tension completely. On the other hand, the most common is a Chinese marrying a Nepali. A Nepali girl or boy is almost the closest replacement of a Chinese, at least physiologically. The common joke that I heard from the people is that at least the child will look Chinese in this case. Precisely for the community, a Nepali girl marrying a Chinese boy will quickly adopt the Chinese culture. Thus, which all marriages should be considered as intermarriage depends to a large extent, on the collective perspective of the community. F1's parents are related to the Lepcha[65] community. So ideally F1 is the second-generation offspring of two inter-community marriages, but the community does not discriminate against him based on his mixed origin. Furthermore, he was introduced to me as one of the community's youths. Communities like the Chinese

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[65] Lepcha are the indigenous people from the area of Sikkim, India. However, they are also found in the entire North eastern Himalayan Belt.

community where the concern is the decreasing population, tend to be more accepting of intermarriages now. It is indeed crucial for the Chinese community to have as many members as possible, even if some are of mixed origin. But, this general approval is often more favoring for some than for others. On the other hand, these intermarriages face subtle discrimination not only by the Chinese community but also by the urban society. As Song (2009) expresses her doubts about open acceptance and integration of intermarried couples by the larger community, Daniel (2002) states that interracial identities are denied social and economic opportunities and do not represent a more open and accepting society. Similarly, for the Chinese community, some intermarriages are regarded inferior to others and the couple must struggle for recognition. Ironically, this belief of the social hierarchy of different communities is not by all possibility invented by the Chinese community but borrowed from the two bigger and stronger communities of Kolkata – the Bengalis and the Marwaris. Another perspective, which I learn from talking with N1, is that other communities is overtaking the neighborhood gradually. Most of the buildings owned by the Chinese people are now sold; N1 sees this as a clear sign of the decay of the community. The other aspect is the gendered view of the situation, the sacrifices or adjustments the women are bound to accept when a non-Chinese marry into a Chinese family or the opposite. Marrying a Bengali hardly raises a question, in fact, that secures a healthy homely family life for the girl because Bengali boys are considered to be timid and homely. Marrying into a Muslim family can be a little problematic for the family, though there is no practical reason behind it.

Therefore, the experience of intermarriage is gender-biased. A man marrying into the Chinese community will not go through the same set of experiences as a woman married to a Chinese man. A man will have the choice of rejecting any possibility of practicing Chinese culture, and not only that, he might express his displeasure in his wife or family participating too. Though mostly, I have found some non-Chinese men married to Chinese women being partially supported. They regularly accompany their families to the Chinese festivals. Having said this, these households in day-to-day life will have any Chinese element in them. I met a Bengali guy, R2 who is married to a Chinese girl from this community. R2 says they met while working. R2's wife, when I met her, had visibly adopted the Bengali lifestyle, from wearing the Hindu symbols of being married to living in a Bengali joint family. R2 makes it a point to mention that it is his wife's family's dream to have a boy like him as their son-in-law. For him, he is educated and well established. He thinks that rarely a match

like him can be found in the Chinese community. A Chinese girl marrying outside the Chinese community or a non-Chinese girl marrying into a Chinese family must accept the culture of the husband's family. That means if not abandoning her previous cultural practices, then at least compromising to some extent. This is still common social practice in India, irrespective of the community she belongs to. Giving up on most of the customs and rituals does jeopardize the freedom of the girl and the Chinese community is no exception.

When a Chinese woman from this community marries a Muslim man, which I was told is not very common, there is a substantial change in her appearance and lifestyle. People from the community find it difficult to adjust. The Chinese with their western lifestyle, do not generally approve of the conservative lifestyle as they claim it. On the contrary, when a Chinese woman marries into a Bengali family, usually the family of the woman is not contentious about it. R2's wife was not very keen on an interview because talking about her life as a Chinese does not interest her so much. Surprisingly her involvement with the Chinese community is through her husband now. The dominance of male members in a typical Bengali household as well as the difference in socio-economic status between two families determine the particularities of the experience of the married couple. The process of cultural adaptation is not essentially a mutual one. A1's daughter-in-law is a shy woman in her late thirties. She is a Nepali who is married to A1's eldest son. She prefers to wear *Salwar Kameez* at home and does not follow the usual western-style dress code of the community. She does not speak Chinese and A1 regrets that his grandchildren will not learn to speak their Chinese dialect which in his case is Hakka. Except for a few homes, it is usually the men who will do the talking and this tendency is more prevalent in comparatively less affluent households. Other than wearing Indian dresses at home, A1's daughter-in-law seems to be very careful in her behavior and follows the rules of the Chinese households well. She has never joined our conversations but took a keen interest in whatever we are saying. If I ask her anything, she will politely reply, but make sure that answer will not offend her in-laws. Not only intermarriage, but intermarriage in the community can also vary greatly in that sometimes the partner even if Chinese, would be from another part of India. The role of the woman in the household as well as how the community treats her also depends on the socio-economic conditions. As mentioned earlier, R was an air hostess before she married L1. With considerable international experience and hailing from an affluent Chinese family, she found the Chinese community in Kolkata to be very friendly and welcoming. Visibly enough, she did not have to struggle a lot to make

friends here. The small group of rich people of the community who prefer a modern lifestyle became her social circle almost immediately. On the other hand, H1's wife found it difficult to adjust to Kolkata. As she is from another state, she is not familiar with the customs of the Chinese community of Kolkata. She probably feels that she is an outsider and confines herself to taking care of her family.

Figure 9: Meeting friends at the Breakfast Market

For the youngest generation in the Chinese community, I have found that many have Nepali or Bengali surnames or the mother is Nepali. F1, as I have mentioned earlier, can neither speak any Chinese dialect, nor does he consider himself as a full Chinese, but he feels that he is a part of the community. As someone truly pointed out to me, it is difficult to find a family where there has not been an inter-community marriage. Furthermore, R2, the Bengali, insists that the community cannot be proud of its original Chineseness as someone from most of the families must have had intermarriage. He explains that many of these enthusiastic children rehearsing for the New Year festival are not even "fully Chinese". I eventually learned that his anguish was because he thought he was not considered an important part of the community even though he married a Chinese girl. As this Chinese-Indian society is dominated by patriarchal norms, once a woman marries into a family from a different culture, she must accept the new culture as her own. However, the same happening to a man is very much unlikely. R2 might be a respected guest in the community as a son-in-law, but he can never be Chinese. He raises a question: Do all the children from

intermarriages have the same acceptance? Song expresses her concern regarding the view of intermarriage as the final stage of successful integration because the offspring can also face discrimination and social segregation (Song, 2009, p. 341). As I have explained before, for the Chinese community, social acceptance depends on the particular combination of intermarriage, just as the acceptance of the spouse. What matters is the community's relationship with the other community. Children from Nepali and Chinese mixed marriages are considered as a part of the community, but on certain occasions, there are chances that they would be looked down upon based on the prevalent hierarchy of the socio-economic status of these communities. Fu questions this particular scenario where intermarriages are thought to erode social boundaries. He has studied the pattern of African and Americans' and Mexican-Americans' marriage with the whites from the US Census PUMS of 1990. His study indicates that the racial boundaries still prevail in racial intermarriages, which further determines the level of acceptance, and not only that, the racial hierarchy also determines the "spouse-selection" (Fu, 2001, p. 157).

The level of acceptance of intermarriages and the offspring as a part of the community is very much conditional depending on the socioeconomic status of the families, nature of interaction with the community, and of course the demographic situation of the community. The scale of Chineseness and strictness of its definition are thus flexible. On the other hand, as Rodríguez-García (2006, p. 406) points out "intermarrying does not necessarily have to be thought of "as an act of modernity", the intermarriages in the Chinese community do not confirm an effective integration into the larger society. Reflecting the collective behavior of the community, individuals, as a part or offspring of intermarriages, justify their Chineseness or tend to follow the traditional Chinese lifestyle.

5.2.5. *Who Can Sing in Chinese?*

One of the questions I have asked all my informants is proficiency in speaking any of the Chinese dialects or reading or writing Mandarin. I received mixed replies, the most common answer being 'can understand and speak but cannot read or write'. The changes from one generation to the next are fairly visible. The second or even few of the third-generation Chinese can speak Chinese and some can read and write in Chinese as well. The third or fourth-generation cannot speak Chinese, only some broken sentences. In the Si-Up Club, people regret that the younger generation does not want to learn Chinese. "Children? No", they will reply. "They do not want to learn, they want to learn English" because that is the language they learn at school. The present trend of sending children to English medium

schools and the radically decreasing number of the population culminated in a closure of all the Chinese medium schools. Otherwise, schools like Sacred Heart Church School in Bowbazar, which used to offer Chinese courses, have discontinued the course now as there is no teacher. The Nam-Soon Club used to have a small community-run kindergarten school, those who are in their sixties have a fond memory of studying there and learning Chinese. N1 describes that people do not want to send their children to this modest kindergarten anymore, there are many posh options in the neighborhood. He assures that it is still functioning though, the children from the neighborhood come here. A school is a good option for the majority of the economically weaker section of the neighborhood. Previously, the Chinese language was necessary for communicating within the community, for the daily livelihood, for maintaining social relations, and for the assurance of not being secluded from the community. Most of the first-generation Chinese could not speak any language other than their dialects of Chinese because interaction outside the community was very limited. The monopolistic nature of their businesses gave them the advantage of always being sought after. Once the community started to disintegrate economically, interaction with the outside world was being increasingly more important. As the effect of globalization became prominent and permanent, English was the more worthwhile language to learn because of its demand in the job market and as a medium of the popular media. The linkage with the Chinese language became weaker with each generation. N1's friend explains when they were young, they used to go to the Chinese school and continue till the sixth standard or until they knew the language well. After this, they were shifted to the English medium schools. These days, this is almost impossible as the English medium schools are extremely competitive. Also, there is no one to teach Chinese in school anymore. Knowing a Chinese dialect is not an attractive option for the younger generation. H1 and his wife made an extra effort to teach Hakka to their son; they would speak to him only in Hakka since he started to speak. I met this little boy first when he was yet to go to school. He could only speak Hakka at that time. As I reached the end of my fieldwork, he had by then already spent a few months in school. He speaks almost no Hakka, only Hindi, and English. H1 explains that they were told by the school that the boy is confused with languages and he better learn only one or two languages at a time. They had to make a choice and Chinese, as per H1 will have little relevance in his son's academic or professional future. The parents are also content if they can teach their children a few Chinese words. For couples of intermarriages, the chances are even less than the children would know Chinese.

On the other hand, the common conversational language of the neighborhood is a mixture of Hindi and Bengali. Most of the people from the community are well versed with this form. The Hindi here is spoken with a strong Bihari accent. I could understand the practical aspect of being proficient in this mixed language – almost any interaction outside the community would require them to know it well enough. Eventually, this became the language for conversation within the community as well. Now and then they would speak some Chinese, but generally conversations are multi-lingual. I asked the retired old Chinese men sitting in the Si-Up club, reading newspapers if they knew Chinese calligraphy, my hope is this age group had seen the heydays of the community before the war. They pointed at this one shy man, "He knows!". But he calmly declared that he has forgotten it. It has been a long time and he did not get a chance to practice. N1 however, assures me that he still remembers some of the words. He says his children cannot speak Chinese, but they do understand a few words. They do understand if someone is cursing them in Chinese. He declares that the most important thing is that a Chinese should always know how to sing in Chinese. Otherwise, how would he prove that he is Chinese? With the diminishing popularity of the Chinese language, the surrounding material cultural imprints such as books and calligraphic tools have become extinct. A1 proudly remembers that D'Lay Eating House was a Chinese bookshop before. No one is interested in reading Chinese books anymore, so they closed the shop. A1 fondly recollects those days when there used to be only Chinese people on the street. It was a time when the Chinese bookshop matched with the surroundings perfectly, unlike today where we only find hardware stores and warehouses transforming the area from a friendly residential neighborhood to a congested commercial area. For A1 this change has radically transformed the indispensable Chinese characteristics of the neighborhood. Essentially it is the language that is fading, but holistically a change in the cultural landscape is unavoidable.

Different Chinese festivals like Chinese New Year, New Moon, or Elder's Day are celebrated in Chinatown. It is also a time for the family to get together when family members from all over the world come to Kolkata. Every year, it is a challenge for the organizing committee to arrange the cultural program. H1 is the only one who can sing in Chinese. There are only a handful of children from the community who participate in the dancing. During one of the rehearsals of Chinese New Year, the committee was not able to decide on the songs. H1 like always was insisting on a Chinese song, a song that they will learn from YouTube. One of the mothers who were there watching their kids dancing, asked

why they could not dance on *Bang Bang* (a popular Hindi song). It was a more entertaining song after all. H1 did not want to give it a second thought, but the girls loved the idea. One of them quickly showed the dance steps she had already picked up by watching television. Similar situations occur every day, whenever there is a choice between the community tradition and the popular culture, few would prefer the latter. The entire process of performing 'Chinese' culture is learned from previous generations, part of which through time is forgotten or became obsolete. For many rituals, the exact reason or interpretation has been forgotten, but the community's struggle has kept the festivities alive. For the young generation, most of whom cannot speak Chinese, the Chinese tradition is a distant attachment – an attachment they feel responsible towards but also distracted by the popular culture of every day. To make the festivals attractive and have more participants, there is no other option than to allow popular Hindi songs and dances.

Figure 10: After the Dragon dance practice

Figure 11: People enjoying food during a Chinese festival

Figure 12: Spectators during the New Moon Festival

In this section, I have tried to show the inevitable nature of hybridity as well as the various forms of hybridity, created through adjustments, attachment, and affiliation. Interestingly, through the years, the definitions of authentic Chineseness have changed and become much more amenable. The infusion of other cultural traces has almost become undetectable. However, the collective voice of the community insists that they are different from the others, however, diluted their Chineseness might be, the community connections work as their immunity. In chapter four, I have presented the community's perspective of their legislative identity, and if they want to be recognized as a minority. The general point of view was the community is a minority as they interpret the minority as being a marginalized community. Here, rather than accepting the minority immunity from the state, the cultural identity or Chineseness is the community's tool to resist social isolation. Here, I have also tried to relate the parallel system of acceptance and resistance of the individuals with the collective insistence on maintaining a distinctively separate identity.

5.2.6. *Ora and Amra (Them and Us)*: *Chinapara and Kolkata as Home*

Along with hybridity and its forms, subjectivity also defines the shaping of identity. In this section, I mention the aspects of subjectivity where the self, both individual and collective, seeking acknowledgment and acceptance simultaneously with the process of rejection, reclaims its ideal, 'authentic' (Ang, 2001) identity. The community encounters life outside

Chinatown every day, through work, socialization, and as strangers. Within Chinatown, the shared space with other communities, they face striking differences. They are 'others' for the rest of the city. This positioning or relativeness provokes judgments in the form of comments, ridicules, or only as a harmless stare. For someone from this community, the subjectivity of one's being is an influencing force, determining the terms of behavior, preferences, and often narrative. The juxtaposition of acceptance and rejection refills the shape of one's identity. I have tried to depict the situation where one defends the community identity or desolates it and the related justification that accompanies it. I have also emphasized the role of memory, nostalgia, and aspirations to trace the belongingness for the community and city cohesively.

William Safran in his essay *Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return* talks about expanding the definitional limit of the diaspora and incorporating minority communities as well. He lists five characteristics that are essential signs of a diasporic community. Safran (1991, pp. 83-84) decides that a desire to return to the homeland is one of the essential characteristics of a diasporic community. Here, the wish to return to their homeland is considered as one of the inherent characteristics while the solidarity with the nationality of the motherland is another. These characteristics are contextualized against a transnational scenario where identities related to the host country and the motherland can be separate entities. I would like to differ from this rather rigid structure of categorization. Instead, I would like to focus on the situation where the very idea of returning to the motherland is incomprehensible or the present motherland hardly resembles the past image. Rather, the connection over cyberspace or having family ties spread around all over the world seems to be more plausible. Gajjala while explaining the intended meaning of diaspora in her work mentions "this presumed link between diasporic community and motherland is easily questioned, nor is there any reason why we must be held hostage to any form of linguistic or epistemological tyranny" (2002, p. 185). In another work, Safran himself evaluating this relation in the context of globalization states "unlike earlier motherland centred dyadic diasporic relations, diasporic communities today have multiple centres of interaction" (1991, p. xiv).

Figure 13: Daily life in the Chinatown of Tiretta Bazar

Figure 14: Alleys of Chinatown

Figure 15: Neighborhood in Chinatown 1   *Figure 16: Neighborhood in Chinatown 3*

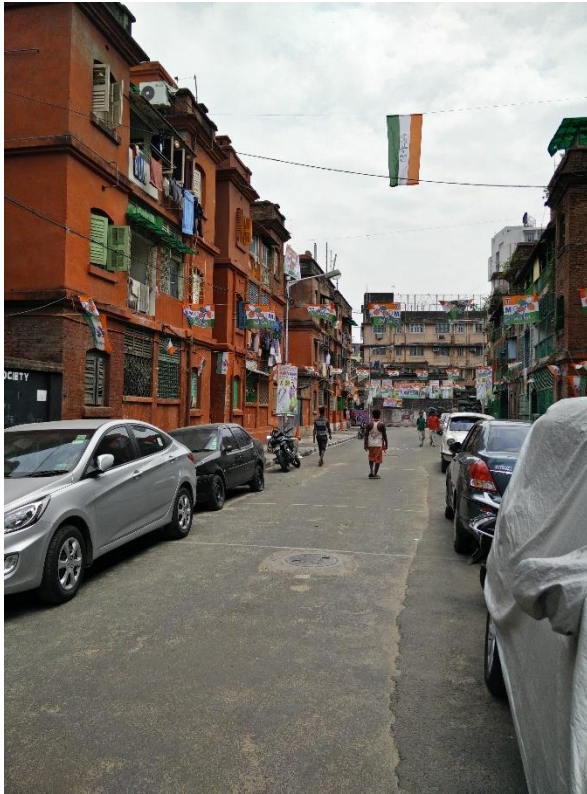*Figure 17: Neighborhood in Chinatown 2*

Figure 18: Neighborhood in Chinatown

Figure 19: Neighborhood in Chinatown

Figure 20: After the morning market in Tangra

Chinatown in Tiretta Bazar might appear as any other residential area of North Kolkata with dilapidated buildings, congested roads, and a complicated riddle of numerous narrow lanes. But the existence of Chinese temples here and there, people speaking Anglo-Indian dialect, and old Chinese ladies haggling with the rickshaw puller give this area an alien touch. For the Bengali or Marwari population of the city, Chinatown is a place for occasional Chinese food or where people talk in a funny language. Tiretta Bazar once was predominantly a Chinese residential area while now, space is shared between Chinese, Anglo-Indian and Muslim communities. Sharing the space relates to all sorts of adjustments that the communities make to acclimatize themselves. Even if there is objection or unacceptance, it remains in a very passive way. It is a balance which they have acquired over the years and accommodated each other's culture.

Tangra, on the other hand, is still more dominated by the Hakka population. Tangra is the Chinatown for the rest of the city, with famous Chinese restaurants and bars. Those who live in Tangra are more community-dependent than those who live in the Tiretta Bazar area. Tangra and Tiretta Bazar are functionally quite different as well: Tiretta Bazar is more of a residential area while Tangra is more of an industrial area. Even after the tanneries were shifted to Bantala, this area still holds the characteristics of an industrial area. The residents of Tangra remained quite economically affluent even after the crash in the tannery business; the Hakka community there is more confined to themselves. But for the Chinese community, home is still the Tiretta Bazar area, where their ancestors lived, where their temples and clubs are.

D1, owner of the confectionery shop in Tiretta Bazar, is an eminent person of the community. He says:

> "All my elder brother's family is migrated, even we have also migrated actually. All my family are Canadian citizens actually, my daughter and my wife. Because I am continuing my business. Personally, I have been there for three years. I have migrated now for ten years. My wife is in Canada…when we were there, there are a lot of other communities, Chinese from China, Taiwan. There are Indian communities from India, who have migrated from Delhi. We were very friendly with those who have migrated from India, we could communicate with them and share common things like *Lalu Prasad* jokes, Bollywood. We could communicate in the Hindi language also. With the Chinese community, we had nothing to talk about, no? They don't know anything about India. At our party, we could sing

songs and share common jokes. There we feel more India, we share the same food also."

For D1, his Indian traits or habits are more visible and welcome in Canada than in India. In India, he has to face inevitable doubts about his Indianness, his physical features distinctly differentiate him from others. But in Canada, he is as Indian as others, sharing common likings for food or movies. The negligence or doubt that he faces in India is not there and he feels undistinguished. Similar recollection can be heard from H2 as well, whose sons are both settled abroad. He says his sons miss the homeland very much, all the festivals and the food. Along with this, he also emphasizes the fact that living in a foreign land makes them homesick for their country so much that they even cry listening to patriotic songs. The emphasis on emotional patriotism becomes synonymous with the imaginary and material representation of home. Here, the idea of the nation as home, the related comfort and attachment are profound in the context of a foreign land. It is evident from these discussions, that the bond shared with other Indians in a foreign land is not a part of the mundane daily activities in India. The belonging to a nation is subjective to a foreign unfamiliar context which is also heavily dependent on temporal changes. Blunt and Dowling (2006), while talking about imaginaries of a nation or empire reproduced at a domestic scale give the example of Amy Kaplan's work on American imperialism and the concept of national identity where she explains these shifting boundaries of 'domestic' and 'foreign'. From another perspective, the caste and sub-caste system or *Verna* in India might be an example of a similar situation. In India, this social hierarchy system also has many divisions within each caste. These sub-castes are the micro-level divisions of a caste and are most rigid at the village level. The relation between several sub-castes is the determining factor for restricting marriages or deciding other social constraints (Weber, 1991; - originally published in 1931, Blunt, 2010). Though ideally a comparison between these two would be unjustified, through this, the substantial difference of perception from a spatial-temporal perspective can be visualized. If the nationality is represented as the caste and the community identity as the sub-caste, then subsequently the migration from village to the city can also be seen as the movement from the homeland to another country. In India, the differences may be strikingly huge, but in the context of a foreign land, they tend to disappear. The only element of recognition becomes the common nationality however complex that might be in the homeland otherwise.

Ironically, In most of the cases here, nationality and nation as a homeland are two different entities. The nation as the homeland involves the perspective of the 'other', where the term of acceptance is partial, full, or conditional. The juxtaposition of the different variations of India as a homeland defines their identity dilemma.

5.2.7. Kolkata as Home

People from the Chinese community have dispersed over the years all over India and abroad. All of them trace back their origin to Kolkata, where their great-grandparents came to search for work. For many families, most of the family members have moved to another city in India or probably to Canada or Australia, but nostalgia brings them back to Kolkata often. The Chinese New Year is a sort of official family reunion time where they enjoy festivity amidst the large extended family over sumptuous lunches. Does Kolkata have all its relevance because of the family ties or the shared memory? The kind of affection common for ancestral land? Most likely, the attachment with the city goes beyond that. The city defines the premise of familiarity, the nexus of connections, and shared experiences of day-to-day life. Surprisingly, on a comparative scale, Kolkata provides them with the much-needed security, assurance of being part of the larger mass. D1 focuses on this aspect while talking about Kolkata and comparing it with Delhi.

> "It depends. [Among our] known people we feel very much loved. Not in Calcutta, in Calcutta, we feel very much home but suppose in Delhi and other places we feel out of home. Not only Hindi but the attitude is different. See unconsciously we think we are Indian, and we try to behave like one. But other people see our skin and they treat us as not one of them. But mentally we think as one of them. Yes, very funny city."

Kolkata for many Chinese, provides the niche, the familiarity, and the closeness to call it their home. In other cities, a Chinese with "a Chinese face" is easily distinguishable, which makes the initial and ultimate boundary for interaction. As D1 puts it, people in Kolkata are aware of the Chinese population and to a large extent are not surprised to come across one. R, who was brought up in Delhi, considers herself as a "Delhite" and makes it a point to say that Delhi has made her more confident, which is more modern, and Kolkata is a bit conservative. But going around in Kolkata is rather easy, people are much friendlier and warmer. Delhi has that "Punjabi" thing, that arrogance.

In this age of globalization and the creation of a global community, it would be a myopic view if I would want to relate a community only with one city. What I intend to do instead is understand the reason behind the apparent comfort that the community shares with this city and the connotation of historical reference. Once a cosmopolitan city, Kolkata is a shared geographical space between many communities. For communities like the Greek, Jews or the Armenians, who have been a part of Kolkata's history, Kolkata is inherently the base of their socio-cultural inheritance. The Chinese community, after living in Kolkata for generations, has to regularly announce their presence to seek acceptance. H1 performs in the various cultural program across the city for Christmas and New Year celebrations. He mostly sings in Mandarin but also has multi-lingual versions of the same song, which includes a Bengali version as well. In one of such programs, he says "*Ami apnaderi Kolkatar Chele*" (I am a boy from your city). Statements like this in Bengali hint towards an attempt to be a part of the Bengali majority or accepted by them. This incident was not a sporadic isolated one; many a time, I get to hear a story in Chinatown of how someone from the community surprised a Bengali with his Bengali linguistic skill. Knowing the language helps them to mingle with the Bengalis and invariably have their rights in the city a little more firmly. But what I want to focus on is that this right is compromised to an extent, Kolkata is their city, but the city itself with its majority of the population as Bengali or Marwaris, does not accept the Chinese completely to be a part of the mundane life.

Figure 21: Morning rush in Chinatown

During my fieldwork, I was curious to see how social interactions change over the different geographical scales, how relations become more closely knitted in a small neighborhood and the claim over the shared space is strongly defined. As I have discussed in detail before, both Tiretta Bazar and Tangra were considered to be predominantly Chinese areas, which included Chinese clubs, schools, shops and eating houses. As the population started to decrease, encroachments were inevitable. Tiretta Bazar comprises a higher Muslim population now than Chinese, and Tangra has a scattered Chinese population here and there. N1 used to live in Tiretta Bazar before, later he bought a house near the airport in a new posh apartment complex. He comes to Tiretta Bazar every day in the morning to work in the Club. He explains that the distance is a lot, but he does not like it there. Though things have changed in Tiretta Bazar, he likes to come back here. H1 also says the same, "earlier we used to live in Tiretta Bazar now we have shifted to Boubazar" (which is near Tiretta Bazar). He makes it clear that for him it is important to live near Tiretta Bazar; his family is very much attached to this place and it is very convenient. Y used to live in the Park Circus area but recently his children bought him an apartment in the new housing complex in the Tangra area. A defined geographical territory gives them a sense of security and the comfort of being with their people. This confidence is often rather a mix of memory and imagination than a lived reality. On Sunday mornings, people come to Tiretta Bazar for the breakfast market or for praying together, which eventually extends till noon as they lazily sit in one of the eating houses and chat. When they describe alleys and corners of Chinatown, it is a mix of their memories and stories heard from their elders. A1 describes how D'Lay Eating House used to be a Chinese book store before and the old man used to be the owner of the shop. The present Chinatown hardly resembles the Chinatown they grew up in or heard stories about. N1 talks about the time before the 1962 war,

> "Mostly eighty percent was Chinese here, twenty percent was mixed. Now the situation is the opposite. 90 percent is Muslim, there is no Hindu at all. Hardly one Hindu family in 100 house and one or two Chinese families. Look, it is our one school surrounded by a Muslim slum area.
>
> […] Before wherever you look, you would see only Chinese people. But now? It is only Muslim people".

Within this shared space with overlapping socio-cultural boundaries, the Chinese community still finds the confidence to call it their place, where they are not strangers. They

are an active and recognized part of the placemaking. Memory, nostalgia and imagination create belongingness to this place.

5.2.8. *Three Decades after Ellen Oxfeld's Work*

Ellen Oxfeld had done extensive fieldwork on the Chinese diasporic communities of Kolkata and Toronto. Her fieldwork in Kolkata involved the quintessential anthropological techniques where she was engaged in the daily activities of Chinese families, had in-depth discussions, and chose a complete structure of participant observation. The initial interaction with the community involved challenges and she was not trusted in the beginning as the memory of the 1962 war was still vivid. She looked into Chinese entrepreneurship in the tanning business from the perspective of family relations, community traditions, and Chinese ethnicity. Her work involved both the communities from Kolkata and Toronto, which facilitates the reader to have an understanding of the changing socio-cultural background of a transnational community and the subsequent reaction to that impetus. The theoretical background of this work included an extensive understanding of the *Pariah Capitalist* and fitting the Chinese diasporic community into that structure. Also, focusing on the "temporal and spatial strategies", she states (Oxfeld, 1993, p. 19)

> "…understanding the dynamics within the Calcutta Chinese families is absolutely critical to understanding both the development of their businesses and the strategies adopted by individual and families in their host societies."

Her objective was different from mine and not only that, she worked exclusively on the Hakka community and their tanning business. Hakkas are the most affluent sub-ethnic group and also the largest Chinese population in Kolkata. In Tangra, the Hakka community is the majority and the tanning business is almost their monopoly. So, her work did not let her venture much outside the Tangra area whereas my emphasis is on the Chinese community as a whole and my study includes both the Chinese community from the Tiretta Bazar area and Tangra.

I didn't read Oxfeld's work until I finished my fieldwork and finalized the field notes. It was a conscious decision to avoid carrying any preconceived notions to the field. My objective was to read her work afterward and locate socio-temporal changes. Reading her work after more than three decades leads to an obvious comparison of the socio-political circumstances and the expressions of cultural hybridity. As a part of my inquiry, I have concentrated on three aspects- first, the visible impact of the change in the occupational structure. As the

second query, I try to consider the political tension as a social resentment influencing their perspectives and inspirations. Finally, I look into the overpowering impact of globalization, by which I mean wide-ranging information about the world, global popular culture. Most importantly, in my fieldwork, I came across some community behaviors or traditions that were considered to be 'typically Chinese'. I was curious to know if this aspect was a part of her observations as well.

Ellen Oxford started her fieldwork at the beginning of the 1980s when the memory of the outrages of the 1962 war was still very fresh. She also mentions this as a reason for the resistance from the community she faced initially during her fieldwork (1993, p. 55). The war in 1962 did not only identify the entire Chinese community as an enemy for the nation but also sabotaged their livelihood for the long run. People who were deported to the Deoli camp in Rajasthan often came back to see that their houses and tannery workshops have been encroached by others, a situation where they felt helpless and when the police allegedly did not intervene. During the period when Oxfeld conducted her fieldwork, the community was reviving from the distresses of the war, which also included a distrust for the Bengalis or other non-Chinese communities, and that was deeply reflected in the narratives she collected. Oxfeld writes that for the Hakka people, it was important to keep a functional relationship with other communities, especially the Bengalis. The Bengalis are the channels to get their official works done, otherwise according to them, like Chinese, they are discriminated against and have to pay a bribe (Oxfeld, 1993, p. 57). Though she also mentions that the relations are not necessarily restricted to such rigid norms, it was the modus vivendi for both the communities at that time.

Yet the community did survive the war and during the 80s they were regaining their businesses. Oxfeld divided the economic boom of the community into three phases. The first was when mass migration started and new tanneries were set up. The subsequent second phase was when people started to migrate and the remaining industries started to expand their operations. And the third and final growth was because 'businesses were divided among descendants' (Oxfeld, 1993, p. 79). When she conducted her fieldwork in Tangra, the Hakka community was a prosperous one, doing well in their ancestral tanning business. In the 1990s activists filed complaints against the environmental pollution caused by the tanneries in Tangra and Tapsia. The Supreme Court of India ordered in 1996 that the tanneries should be shifted to Bantala, a leather complex newly formed by the West Bengal Government. After all, the bureaucratic and technical delays, the shifting of tanneries

continued till 2007 and even beyond that. The remaining tanneries were ordered to be shut down in Tangra. This legal notice and subsequent relocation to a faraway Bantala had a shattering impact on the Hakka community. Many people chose to shut down their tanneries in Tangra rather than move to Bantala. For the community, moving to Bantala was not cost-efficient, convenient, nor fitting into their generations-old practice of family-run, self-sufficient structure of operation. The loss that the tanners suffered during this period kept on continuing for those who shifted to Bantala as well. Space, water, electricity, and labor were more expensive than they were in Tangra. People from the Hakka community chose to migrate even more in this situation. Oxfeld had completed her fieldwork years before the relocation of tanneries started, so she could not envisage that the community would face such a difficult time. Her narrative of the community reflected an economically strong community, which was self-sufficient and closely knitted. In a contrast, when I started my fieldwork in Tangra, most of the tanneries were closed and they were replaced by Chinese restaurants, few of them like Beijing or Big Boss are now quite famous destinations for Chinese cuisine. I would not relate the migration to the relocation completely as clearly, it is not the only reason to migrate. For this community, migration is not isolated or sporadic but has been a steady phenomenon after the war. My focus is rather on the socio-cultural adjustments the community accepted in this period. The Hakka community, losing its financial stability now, has seen many from the community shifting to other professions.

My experience of the Hakka community involves those people, who had a tannery some time back but not anymore. Most of the families I have met, still have a considerable amount of savings from the previous generation, but the tanning factory-related occupational engagement is gone. The younger generation is aspired to have white-collar jobs or to migrate. The tanning industry, which not only gave the community its livelihood but also defined its cultural practices, customs, and also social norms, is not there. The tanneries which are still owned by some of the Hakka people in Bantala might be earning moderately well. But the closely knitted community bonds are not there. A tannery in Bantala is merely a factory in an industrial complex, not an integral part of their household. L1 used to own a tannery from his father, which he had inherited jointly with his brother. After the relocation orders came, they were forced to close down the factory in Tangra and shift the tanning work to Bantala. L1 now uses this tannery for his dragon dance practice classes. Similarly, as the functional characteristics of space changed, the customs through the transformation as well. Many of the past prevalent customs are now only ceremonial. Playing Mahjong was an

integral part of the Hakka community. The inclination towards gambling, as Oxfeld says, is an expression through which the Hakka community "simultaneously mimics and revolts against, reinforces and undermines the compulsions of the market with which they must necessarily deal in their daily lives" (1993, p. 120). Like every other aspect, a change in the occupational structure also directs these customs to change.

As an important section of her study, Oxfeld describes the inseparable nature of the mode of operation of a factory with that of the household. The members of the family worked as laborers in the factory and as the size of the operation increased, the inputs from the female members decreased. Female members of the family work in the factory but are not a part of the major decision-making process. Oxfeld considers this attitude is because "women themselves view their work as a necessary response to a need in the family and enterprise" (1993, p. 160). Also, she mentions that the role of women in business varies but it is never a responsibility for a woman as it is for a man. The patriarchal structure of the society does utilize the contribution of the female without providing much authority to them. Oxfeld's description of the sexual division of labor because of 'domestic space closely intertwined with industrial space' is not there anymore. The relocation has completely changed the structure of the operation. Though during my fieldwork in Tangra, I found a similar pattern in the small eating houses and restaurants where the family kitchen is used for cooking for the family as well as the customer, female members will manage this business. On the other hand, contradictory to her observations, now many of the big restaurants are managed almost entirely by the owner's wife or his widow. One such lady owns one of the biggest restaurants in Tangra and she efficiently manages the everyday operations in the kitchen and the accounting as well. She is also a known figure and often is the spokesperson of the community. When describing why Chinese women restrict themselves from going to buy raw material for the tanneries, we also get an idea of the social norms for women in general. As Oxfeld states:

> "Although Chinese women accompany one another on shopping trips, it is not considered proper for married women to spend considerable time away from home, especially in activities bringing them into prolonged contact with men. In this community, the sexes rarely mingle once they are out of school. At wedding and other social occasions, men and women don't mix, and banquet tables tend to be sex-segregated. The majority of marriages are still arranged, and women who

depart from the prescribed norms by talking freely with men are gossiped about…" (ibid., p, 146).

This strict segregation has loosened over time and there is hardly a restriction that I have seen for the younger generation for attending colleges, making friends, and deciding their career. The discernment she noted about marriages outside the community is hardly an issue now. Marrying outside the community is not an exceptional scenario and since the size of the community is shrinking, it is indeed difficult to find a suitable match. Many parents like A2 are happy if their children marry. To whom they say it does not matter. Though marrying a Muslim can displease some parents, certainly, the objection is timid. The third and fourth-generation Chinese women are working in diverse fields from the aviation industry to corporate works. Yet paradoxically, the participation of women in social meetings is completely missing. During my fieldwork period, I have not seen any woman from the community joining the meeting for discussion with the Kolkata Municipal Corporation. It leads to the idea that generation-wise the role and responsibilities have changed. The participation of women for earning livelihood for the family or sharing the financial burden has increased, but apart from some exceptions, the involvement of women in formal matters is still less. I emphasize mentioning these exceptions because the women who have a hold in the community are because they own quite a fortune, similar to what Ellen Oxfeld mentions many a time in her work. The importance of wealth in this Hakka community is still immense and defines the position of the family in the community.

The economic destabilization due to relocation changed the entire socio-cultural functioning of the community. This has initiated interactions outside the community to be more versatile, loosening the restrictions of the community and mingling with the rest of the city. The reason behind this explanation is that knowing the community after thirty-two years of her fieldwork involves changes not only because of the differences in perspectives but also other external factors. But the community did not alter itself into another form or integrate completely. The community still maintains its identity as a closed community, distancing itself from others. During my fieldwork, I often heard stories from the past where the occupational structure consisted primarily of independent businesses of various sizes and how that used to lift the self-confidence of the community. They were not dependent on anyone and hardly needed to interact outside the community. On the other hand, the community people often were dependent on each other for work, making the community ties even stronger. The celebrations of the festivals or gatherings, the whole community for a

wedding or a funeral were prompted by the community feeling which had an economic side as well. Many say that even now the people of the Chinese community cannot blend with other communities because of this old system. As W says, "if you want to join a club or a community, nobody to stop you. Because we are happy among ourselves, we do not venture out. It is our fault only". Through these various cases, I have tried to demarcate the change and show that the community has not entirely transformed into a new identity. A critical and even changing balance keeps the old paraphernalia integrated into their daily lives.

The common inference drawn from her work by others (Hsu & Serrie, 1998) and also partially Oxfeld herself is that the Hakka community or the Chinese community as a whole is the only immigrant community not to follow the Hindu caste system; the hierarchy system present in the community is purely based on wealth. This view can be contested from two perspectives. The first one is from the context or the scale of her study. Oxfeld did not take into account other sub-ethnic groups of the Chinese community in Kolkata. Her focus was on exploring various dimensions of Chinese entrepreneurship and she entirely focused on the Hakka community for this reason. Other sub-communities have their own opinions about each other, especially the Hakka community is considered to be the one without any ancestral heritage and untrustworthy. I came across narratives describing how the rest of the community looks down upon the Hakka community even if they are the most affluent. Though not following the Hindu caste system, the community believes in a similar pragmatic discriminatory system based on clan history. The history of internal conflicts along with differences in cultural traditions and customs creates the internal mosaic of the community and often this judgement has no immediate present relevance and is recreated based on collective memory. The other view emphasizes the effect of localization and its trajectories. If not the caste system, the community is influenced by the notions of social class and elitism. Those are common in Kolkata: The reluctant attitude towards the prospect of marrying their children to a Muslim or considering Bengalis to be the safe option to be friends with. These reservations have not percolated from their traditional beliefs but are practiced as a part of localization with their host society.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Discussions on community and related aspects are significantly important in today's global socio-political scenario. Yet, we have not reached a conclusion where we understand what makes a community a community? Various perspectives or schools of thought either justify or reject the very idea of the existence of communities in a state. Is it a group of people connected with each other because of common physical or social attributes? or/at the same time, they connect because of an indirect yet strong political power play? This becomes a little bit more complicated when we identify a group of people as a diaspora or diasporic community. The attempts to delineate the boundaries of defining community struggle to justify the balance between tangible definitive characteristics and the opposite. However, the political theories whether to accept or discard the concept of community work towards pivotal realistic interventions – policies or legislative measures. My thesis addresses a situation where a multiculturalist state recognizes the existence of group-specific minority rights, yet there is a need to understand the relevance and consequence of this set of special rights. In India, The Constitution completes the base for group-specific policies which further elaborate the criteria for identifying a community as a minority either based on religion or language.

My thesis questions this process of identification of a community as a minority both in legislative and social terms. It looks into the narratives of community members to understand the process of shaping their identity or identity narratives. Does the tag of being/or not being a minority make any difference? Moreover, is being a minority community a preferred solution for preserving their rights? Does a community want to be identified as a minority? Rather than going for conclusive findings, I have tried to identify the reciprocal relationship between the community and the city to understand the juncture/ disjuncture and interactions between communities shaping a unique stand of identity, or a sense of identity. In this process, I have focused on how terms like ethnicity or culture have been portrayed or positioned in the narratives. Another trajectory of the research question looks into the significance of individual and collective identity and how these two binaries are balanced. Finally, the objective remains to understand the identity narratives of the community to locate the significance of the commonality or connection about the legislation of social identification as a minority. How does a community perceive its identity as a minority and how that, in turn, reshape identity narratives in the larger context of the city?

The nature of the research question called for ethnographic techniques were following the participant observation method would focus on the perspectives, their contexts, and trivial details of everyday life. The trajectories of the research question not only required the

narratives but also the understanding of the transitions over time (individual and in a group), and in different situations while contextualizing in the broader canvas of the city. However, the representations of the narratives in this thesis reflect my interpretation and cannot be viewed as a neutral depiction of events and stories.

Being a Bengali, I had encountered a situation where I was not a part of the community, but the city remained as the vital commonality between us. My stand as an ethnographer along with my emotions and dilemmas is reflected throughout – while analyzing as well as representing. I gradually accepted that I was a part of the inquiry where I presented the perspectives as I realized them with my struggle for a neutral stand and the eventuality of understanding the impossibility of it. I have tried to depict my familiarities with the people, the larger context of the city, and how these have shaped my relationship with the community. My familiarity with the Bengali society has given me an understanding of the particularities of the forms (if we can call them a hybrid) evolving out of the interactions. The findings are inevitability tinted with my journey through this fieldwork. While representing the findings, I have incorporated myself as a part of the narratives or part of the story. Representing the experience in a way similar to autoethnographic writing (Ellis, 2004) gives a chance to sketch the context of the city, its people, and myself as almost a story.

My argument is based on an ideal scenario that accepts the essentiality of categorizing group identities in definitive terms as minorities. The narratives of the Chinese community inspect the dimensions of such categorization. Though the legislative categorization has been emphasized as the imperative element – the impact of social ramification because of such categorization has also been understood. Beyond the linear cause-effect relationship between legislative protection for group-specific rights and effect on everyday life, I have tried to look into the consequence where a community is also socially considered as a minority which takes into consideration of the caste and class biases, primarily Bengali society of Kolkata. The versions of the narratives under any condition were not fixed – the narratives changed as I interacted more with the person or in a different situation. This positionality of the narratives gave an insight into the perspectives and externalities influencing it.

In the narratives collected through interviews and everyday interactions, one of the inquiries is – if the community considers itself as a minority. Moreover, if the community also considers availing the legislative provisions for the minority. Here, the community does consider itself as a minority group more because of the social judgments that they face. Being a minority is not essentially classified into legislative and social terms, instead, the general perception of minority portrays it as an experience – a long process of acceptances, rejections

and adaptation. If it talks about vulnerability and disappointments, it also looks up to the pride in recognition of their community identity. Being a minority is an everyday experience that is shaped by the city. The Chinese community has not been identified as a minority community in legal terms yet. Though this community qualifies to be a minority based on the linguistic and religious criteria. However, for the community members availing the minority status is not a necessity. They are not mostly aware of the legal rights of a minority community. Moreover, for most of them, minority communities are synonymous with the reservation system for the deprived castes.

The narratives extensively describe that the shared pride of the community has been the self-sufficiency and the bonding among its members. The thesis shows with examples the doubts which question that the set of separatist rights might not be able to guarantee the equality the community expects. They would, however, focus and nurture more the organically developed related with the other communities – through food, marriages, and music. It is considered that the socio-political situation which treats this community as a minority will not change with the application of a set of rules, rather the process of perusal of these added advantages will be problematic. These interpretations highlight the relationship with the state and the role of citizenship. In a comparative subjective understanding of the state and the social responses, for the community, the second one remains more crucial. The general conception about the community as reclusive might also be a retort to the social judgments – a defense mechanism that likes to see the stronger side of the community and their pride in being hardworking and self-reliant.

Elaborating on these findings further, related to my first inquiry of considering this community as a minority, is the question or rather critical doubt on the declaration of a group of people as a community. What is the necessity of collective identity? Or rather if this perspective is at all needed. This directs to the discussions on individual and collective self which is subsequently applied to understand the narratives – told as an individual and representing a community both. Most of the people, identify themselves as a community because of their common Chinese lineage – of having a common past, like other diasporas. At the same time, they also share a common present – similar challenges and lifestyles. This source of commonality is however questioned and contested in various ways. For many associating with a community is a practical need where they feel secure or at home. The commonality of experience becomes the link between them. On the other hand, for some performing collective identity is a duty towards their family. The community represents all that they perceive as their own. Nevertheless, this is not unquestionable, people, especially

those who are young often see this as an obligation obstructing them from freely interacting with the outside world. However, it is almost unanimously agreed upon that community connections are an integral part of life, and seeking an alternative to their Chinese collective identity is not perceived well. The narratives which were told in different situations show an alteration of the perspective. In situations there is an effort to recognize the similarity with the others, on the other hand, in a discussion about the war, the emphasis remains on the cohesiveness of the community. There is a balance to be maintained in everyday life – between individual and collective identity, and various versions of collective identity. Here, as Melucci (1997) sees it, individual reflexivity determines how to define and perform this collective identity. Focusing on the role of free-flowing information, he puts forward the view that an individual's ideas of identity are constructed and produced by the external environment. Priorities and related explanations take up an essential part of the narratives. Coming back to the point which needs further elaboration, what is the meaning and relevance of identity for this community (if we can by now call these people a community)? The people relate identity with ethnicity or culture and it is rarely an isolated entity. By this I mean, individual identities are defined by and compared to their collective identity constantly. For many from this community, identity is defined and shaped by their relationship with the larger urban community. Paradoxically, the parameters which are used in segregating this community from the rest, are also the means for defining their identities. People have spoken about the way they look, their food, and festivals as their identity. Almost parallelly, it has been mentioned that they are Indian nationals too. In most of these narratives, identity is not about defying the community but how individual choices are made adjusting both. Younger people often mention marrying outside the community or having Bengali friends, yet they justify their choices as well. Even for the older generation accepting a daughter-in-law from outside the community might be common but there will be an obvious comparison with a set norm of 'what the Chinese community should do". Identity has been more often defined in definitive terms which involves an explanation of citizenship and performing identity. Are being Indian, Indian-Chinese, or Chinese-Indian different experiences? For many, these are distinctively different and reflect prioritization. The attempt to compartmentalize is there in most of the interactions I had. However, the segregation of identity of traits of different identities goes beyond the tag of Indian by citizenship and Chinese by ethnicity. Through the inquiry about their identity, I have tried to locate the implication of being a diasporic community and how new forms take shapes from the interactions. In many instances, I have been told about the difference between Bengali food and Chinese food, or between the

Chinese and Bengali or Marwari way of life. Also, why it is crucial to continue their 'own' Chinese cultural practices. Even if they like spicy Bengali food, or going out for the annual Durga Puja festival – these are not their own. Defining identity for this community also means marking the differences. Nevertheless, these practices are not isolated or even distinguishably different from each other in everyday life. For example, how the caste system has been internalized where for a Chinese family a matrimonial match from a Bengali family would involve an inquiry in their caste specifications. especially from the older generations spoke about their opinions of different castes and other communities. These opinions invariably reflected the general mindset of the larger Bengali community. The dichotomy is evident when there is an attempt to distinguish this community based on the same parameters which are commonly mentioned for separating them from the larger urban society. The shaping of identities is positioned in the urban landscape of Kolkata as their home.

While discussing legal rights with the community, another integral part of the research question has been addressed which is the relationship with the state. Like any other diaspora, this community as a collective entity has a relationship that is constantly changing with the state. The Indo-Sino war of 1962 still has a profound impact on this community. Identity as a minority in Kolkata's urban society has been shaped by the relationship with the state. Many narratives about identity invariably mention the turmoil during the war. It was during the war when they saw the city turning hostile towards them and the state considered them to be outsiders. However, though this period marked the darker side of being a minority in a city, many would also add that the situation became normal soon. While talking about identity as a minority as an experience, the impact of the war has not been emphasized in the narratives.

As Jenkins (1997) concludes, individual and collective identity are not separate entities, the narratives depict that multiple layers of identity formation. Moreover, the individual identities of this community are a reflection of their image of the collective identity. This identity is at the same time is shaped by the reactions of the larger urban society. Being a minority, is thus, a lived experience rather than a legislative tag. For many of these people, identity is not about being a minority on papers but as an everyday experience of a social construct. The collective identity for them is a defense mechanism, and the need to attach themselves with the characteristics of this collective identity is a response to the social reactions. Identity or shaping of identity is thus a process about performing and becoming (Jenkins, 1997). So, is the attachment with a larger collective identity unanimous? Very few Indian-Chinese have responded that they did not consider themselves to be a part of the community. However, they recognize their Chinese origin and practice 'Chinese culture'.

I had started the previous chapter with Z's dilemma in accepting community traditions without believing in them. For him, these rituals have very little significance in his modern globalized lifestyle. After the interview on the way back home, I receive a long message from him. He has reconsidered his earlier reply. He has said that a conversation with people like me gives him a chance to introspect about who he is and his community. He also thinks about how important it is to preserve the culture of the community. He says metaphorically that it is like Ship of Theseus, if every aspect like language, ritual, and food changes if he will still be called a Chinese? He might just look like a Chinese but will be not one, the way the ship might just look like a ship.

This introspection probably holds the key reason for continuing to perform the community traditions, customs, and rituals that were once their culture in the ancestral homeland. The importance and intricacies might have reduced over the years, turning these into mere replications but the tradition is the expression of their past, their shared history, and a celebration of their difference with the rest of the city. For a diasporic community like the Chinese community in Kolkata, individual efforts to identify themselves with the Chineseness is not a compulsion induced entirely by lack of integration measures by the government or compulsion of the community rules but also a conscious individual decision, which is not free from the doubts and the social restrictions but consistently trying to pursue a balance between the identities. It is indeed the contribution of all these multiple actors creating the mosaic of individual identities – the acceptance and rejection in the social mainstream are not the monopoly of the majority but also decided by the communities as well. The context of Kolkata with its cosmopolitan history assembles this process, as (Robinson, 2006) says differences and diversities create new identities. This attempt can be seen as an effort to be recognized as a socio-culturally different entity without being secluded or isolated. So, the 'Chineseness' as the collective community culture can be fitted into the argument put forward by Cohen (1994, p. 50) which denounces the ultimate control over individual behaviour. He considers the cultural rules of politics to provide a structural framework for individuals but it is on the contrary defined by the "creative individuals". He insists on "the importance of self as the essential dynamo of the social process". India as a multicultural state has structured a set of legal rights for the minorities. However, the identity narratives of the Chinese community depict a story of the social process of acceptance, rejection, and adaptation which are constantly changing. Moreover, these are

individual journeys where Chineseness is questioned and accommodated at the same time. What is being a minority then?

During one of the festivals, looking at the enthusiastic crowd, I had asked F2 if he liked the feeling of festivity with roads full of people in Chinatown. He had replied – "you tell me. It is more important for you to like it". Identity grows beyond the legislative tag of a minority into a reciprocal dialogue with the larger society.

Appendix

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Character Sketches

H1

I met H1 when I started my fieldwork. H1 was friendly and accommodating. He soon introduced me to his family and friends. He is an active member of the community's cultural association. He is a singer as well who can sing in Chinese (Hakka). He is a popular singer who gets invitations to sing at different cultural events in Kolkata. H1 is proud of his Indian-Chinese origin and makes it a point to speak Hakka and celebrate all the traditional festivals. His soft manners and leadership qualities have made him popular in his community. On occasions, I have heard him talk to the younger generation of the community where he has spoken about the importance of their culture and the responsibilities to continue their cultural heritage.

Z

A man in his 30s, Z is energetic and ambitious. I have met him through H1 who is his close friend. They work together for organizing community activities and festival. Z is one of the few who has been quite outspoken about their views and I developed a bond with him. We met regularly after his office in the evening. Z has spoken a lot about himself giving me a picture of his daily struggle. According to him if belonging to an ethnic minority community is difficult enough, then for him, the struggle is even harder because of complicated relations within the community. He often reminded me that I should consider his perspective differently because he sees from a point of view of a person who interacts with both worlds. Z is quite popular among his neighborhood kids.

R2

A man in his 20s, H is an inseparable part of any community event. However, he is a Bengali who is married to a Chinese girl from the community. He is probably the only Bengali who is involved in the day-to-day activities of the community. He introduced himself to me at a practice of New Year celebration and took me to meet his in-laws. He has often spoken about how or why he is interested in Chinese culture and how he knows the authentic Chinese culture because he has been to China. Surprisingly, it seemed like his wife who is Chinese, was not a part of the community activities. I have only met her once.

A1

As an elderly member of the community, he knows almost everyone. I was introduced to him by his son-in-law at the beginning of my fieldwork. I soon started to go to his home regularly to chat with him. He took me around in the neighborhood to meet his friends at different clubs. Because of A1, I met the elderly group of the community with whom I interacted extensively. A1 is now retired but does not like to sit at home. His other children live outside India and he visits them often. But he says he cannot stay away from Kolkata for long because he is attached to his community and this neighborhood. However, he does not come to clubs in the evening regularly, so I have met him mostly during the day. We used to go to his favourite eating house in the neighborhood.

A2

A2 is in his 70s and he has retired from his job at the port a few years ago. Both of his children are working and live abroad. He comes to the clubs regularly and participates in all the community activities. Though he lives a little away from Chinatown, he makes it a point to come here every day in the evening. After some time, I knew where to find him – at the club, he would be sitting at his place, smoking a cigarette. A2 spoke a lot about his community and the war. I had developed a bond with him most likely because I reminded him of his daughter. He would often fondly mention his daughters. A2 was the one who asks me to join the community's meeting with the government officials.

F1

A man in his 60s, F1 lives in Chinatown. He grew up in the northern part of Bengal and moved to Kolkata after the war. He is an active member of the clubs. I have met him through N1, but soon I started to meet regularly. He likes to read and know about his community. He has given me references to the very few books written by the community members. He also asked me to share whatever material I have on this community. F1 has a different opinion about many things and often the discussions at the club would turn into arguments. He is known as an expert on the history of Chinatown and others would ask me to talk to him.

F2

A man in his 60s, F2 is a regular member of the club. I have met him at the club, but it took time to interact with him more. He is reserved and likes to read his newspaper than talk. He does listen to our conversations but rarely says anything. He slowly started to talk to me

about his views on the community after a long time. As the president of the club, he had a lot of responsibilities, but he was unsure of the future of the community.

D1

Like F2, D1 is an active member of the community who participates in all the festivals and represents the community during the official talks with the governments. A man in his 60s, D1 runs a very successful business with many outlets in different parts of Kolkata. He is one of the few from this community who is a foreign citizen. D1 spends some time every year in Canada with his family but the majority of the time, he is in Kolkata. His shop is on the main road of Chinatown which became my favorite place to observe the daily activities.

B1

I have met B1 a few times. A man in his 40s who works in the corporate sectors, B1 is outspoken and an active member of the community. Though he lives away from Chinatown, he makes sure that he attends all the meetings.

N1

I met N1 through because of A1. N1 is an old friend of A1 and they go to the same club. N1 is a retired chef who lives away from Chinatown but comes to his club every day. He is also the secretary of the club. He is in Chinatown mostly during the day, chatting with his friends. In the evenings, he is mostly home. Like others of his age, his children do not live in Kolkata anymore. The work at the club keeps him busy. He has numerous stories to tell about the struggle of the community. He also mentions that he does not know much about history, his responsibilities are solving legal disputes with others. I have mostly met him at his club where he would invariably be busy with some work – it is either dinner at the club or some repairing work. We would sit on the wide veranda overlooking the courtyard and enjoy our tea. At times someone would drop by and join the conversation. Otherwise, N1 would start talking with this other person and I would scribble something on my notebook unmindfully.

M1

M1 who is approximately in her 40s, lives in the older part of Chinatown with her family. I remember visiting her home for the first time. After entering through the small door of an old building, I was startled by the darkness inside. I climbed a grand staircase whose railings are still shinning even after years of poor maintenance. Once I reached her apartment, I

found her getting her son ready for an outing. To find M1, a young energetic woman in a very old, almost dilapidated building was a complete contrast, I had thought. I soon started to meet M1 regularly and accompany her to the church meetings. As a devoted Christian she goes to the church meetings and helps them with the social work. She often spoke about her religion and her family. She is involved in various social work projects going on in the neighborhood, but her commitment comes more from being a devoted Christian than as a Chinese. She has introduced me to her fellow church-goer friends. They mostly spoke about the importance of religion and how Christianity helped them to survive after the war.

L1

A man in his 40s, L1 lives in Tangra. He owns a Dragon Dance troupe where he trains the local boys and they perform at Chinese New Year celebrations. I have always met him separately as he does not come to the clubs or morning markets. He lives in a neighborhood close to Tangra. After seeing his expensive apartment, I could make out the stark difference in lifestyle between him and most of the people from the community. He spoke a lot about his community and the disagreements, yet he did not talk a lot about himself. He did not like to be interrupted while talking as well. Whenever I have met him along with his wife, she was the one eager to talk about herself while he takes a backseat and keeps quiet.

R

R was introduced to me by her husband. A woman in her 30s, R lives with her husband and children. She loves to talk about her life and life in Kolkata in particular. I was always welcome in their house located in a plush neighborhood. She would offer me some lemon water, I would make myself comfortable on their big couch and we would chat for a long time. Her husband would hang around for a bit, but she would rarely give him any chance to speak. R is from a different city and had quite a busy life before she was married. She eventually has made her social circle in Kolkata, but she missed the business, the thrill of working in an international organization. While she considered the Chinese of Kolkata to be more united, it was evident that her social circle was the affluent class of the community. Once in a while, her husband would mildly interrupt her because he probably did not want her to talk about certain issues. Unlike many other women of the community, R talked about the internal conflicts of the community, most likely because she did not grow up in this community and did not have common reservations.

A3

A3 is a woman in her 20s. She is soft-spoken and takes time to mingle with people. I have met her regularly in the neighborhood with her child, a 4 years old boy. Initially, she did not talk much or only spoke about her child. Later on, while we played along with her child in the courtyard of the school in the evenings, she spoke about herself. She is Chinese but from another part of the county. Coming from a remote village in the mountains she had a hard time adjusting to the community and the city. She mostly confines herself to the family and taking care of her child. I have not seen her interact much with other women who used to come to the practices of any events. Yet, she was an interested listener, whenever we had discussions at the dosa place or coffee shop, she would listen carefully to our conversations.

W1

A man in his 40s, W1 runs a laundry shop in one of the poshest parts of the city. His laundry shop is old and spacious. His shop is always busy where W1 is running around instructing his staff. W1 lives nearby and he rarely goes to Chinatown. Unlike most of the other Chinese I have met, W1 does not mingle with the community much. I have always met him at his shop away from the familiar environment of Chinatown. W1 and his shop seem isolated from the hustle-bustle of Chinatown. He has limited interaction with the community and he wants to keep it in this way. He has spoken about his ambition of sending his son out of the country to study and asked for my opinion. Though he did not want to move to a new country, he was ambitious for his sons.

Y

In his 80s, he is one of the oldest and active members of the community. Since Y has not been keeping well, he mostly stays at home. His children live in other countries. I remember Y sitting in his living room, talking slowly about his experience. Though he lives alone with his caretaker too fragile to go out, he keeps himself updated with every news of the community. Y was a leader of this community and even now people approach him to solve a dispute or advise on organizing a festival. He has been interviewed many times and he has his views on the community articulated for any such discussion. However, with me, he chose to talk about his present life – old age and his children. Unlike others, I have always met him at his home, an apartment on one of the higher floors of a newly constructed building. He always sits at his favorite couch with the big window in the background. It was almost always very windy and as he talked, I noticed the corners of the tablecloth flying. He

had a busy life he always said, and he is loved by his students, family and community members. As he spoke slowly, the wisdom and contentment aptly fit in with the serenity of the room.

L3

L3 is a soft-spoken man in his 60s. He likes to talk about his family and life in Tangra in general. I never went to his home but met him at his favorite eating house. We have spent hours there talking and slowly finishing our wonton soup. As a retired person, L3 mostly spends his time meeting his friends. However, he found Chinatown not to be the same as before. The increasing number of people leaving Chinatown depresses him. Sometimes, during a short walk, he would show me the Kali temple or other places in Tangra, but his excitement of showing places would have a touch of sadness. In the smoky eating house with basic wooden benches, he probably found the warmth of the community life he longed for.

H2

H2 is a doctor in his 60s. He practices independently at various clinics in Kolkata. I was introduced to him by a member of the community and encouraged me to call him. I have usually met him at a dispensary where the backroom has been converted into his chamber. He seemed to be a popular doctor in his locality and I often waited for some time before he completed his work. I did not mind waiting though. His chamber was interestingly decorated. The benches were basic and old. Numerous old pictures and calendars hang on wooden wall which also worked as a partition. Among the posters which he must have gotten from the medical representatives, hangs an old print of a painting – bamboos and Chinese calligraphy. H2 did not talk much initially. I had thought he would not be interested in the interactions, I was wrong. He spoke about himself, the community and mostly about his son who lives in Australia. He spoke slowly as if he was introspecting his life – sitting in his small chamber where we could hear the fruit vendors shouting outside, he often drifted away.

Structure of Discussion

1. Introduction

Leading points- (Name, age, family, occupation, religion, address, dialect)

2. Family history

Leading points- (India-China war 1962, the relatives, occupation, migration)

3. How do you feel about your community?

Leading points- (interaction with the city, festivals)

4. Any incident which made you think about your identity

5. How are your interactions outside Chinatown or your community?

Leading points- (interacts in your daily life)

6. Do you think social scenario has changed over time? (from your childhood till now)

Leading points- (childhood memories, friends)

Institutional recognition

1. What do you think about 'minority in India? Who are called the minorities?

2. Do you think the Chinese community is considered as 'minority?

3. What do you think about this migration pattern? What are the causes?

Transcription Rules

[…] = Unfinished sentences

[   ] = input by the interviewer

[x]   = Inaudible

I   = Researcher

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