

**SIGNIFICANCE OF BEL BIBAHA AMONG NEWARS AND ITS IMPACT IN THE  
LIVES OF WOMEN**

Dissertation submitted to Jadavpur University in the partial fulfillment of the requirement for the  
award of Degree of Master of Philosophy (Arts) in Sociology

Submitted by

**RITI RAI**

University Roll No- 101601303008

Examination Roll No- MPSO194015

Registration No-138561 of 2016 -17

Under the Guidance of

Dr. Dalia Chakrabarti

Professor

Department of Sociology

Jadavpur University

Department of Sociology

Jadavpur University

2019

**SIGNIFICANCE OF BEL BIBAHA AMONG NEWARS AND ITS IMPACT IN THE  
LIVES OF WOMEN**

Dissertation submitted to Jadavpur University in the partial fulfillment of the requirement for the  
award of Degree of Master of Philosophy (Arts) in Sociology.

Submitted by

**RITI RAI**

University Roll No- 101601303008

Examination Roll No- MPSO194015

Registration No-138561 of 2016 -17

Under the Guidance of

**Dr. Dalia Chakrabarti**

Professor

Department of Sociology

Jadavpur University

Department of Sociology

Jadavpur University

2019

**JADAVPUR UNIVERSITY**

**Kolkata, 700032**

**Faculty of Arts**

**Department of Sociology**

**DECLARATION**

I, Riti Rai, declare that my M.Phil., dissertation titled "Significance of Bel Bibaha among Newar and its impact in the lives of Women" submitted for the award of the degree Master of Philosophy in Jadavpur University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted or any other degree or diploma in this University or any other University.

Signature of Student

**JADAVPUR UNIVERSITY**

**Kolkata, 700032**

**Faculty of Arts**

**Department of Sociology**

**CERTIFICATE**

**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

This is to certify that the dissertation “Significance of Bel Bibha among Newar and its Impact in the lives of Women” being submitted by RITI RAI has been written under my guidance and supervision during the academic session (2018-19).

The dissertation is approved for submission towards the partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the Degree of Master of Philosophy (Arts), in Sociology, Jadavpur University.

Dr Piyali Sur

Head of the Department

Department of Sociology

Jadavpur University

Kolkata

700032

Dr.Dalia Chakrabarti

(Supervisor)

Professor

Department of Sociology

Jadavpur University, Kolkata

700032

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

The study entitled, " Significance of Bel Bibaha among Newar and its impact in the lives of women" would not have been successful, without the kind support and kind help of many individuals. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to all of them.

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Dalia Chakrabarti, Department of Sociology, Jadavpur University who supported with her continuous guidance and support throughout my study period. Her valuable knowledge was instrumental in helping in all stages of my research. Without her support this research would not have been possible. I would like to thank the respondents who were also the main instrument of my research completion.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to my parents and friends, for giving the valuable ideas, understanding and encouragement during my research work.

**RITI RAI**

# CONTENTS

	PAGE NO
<b>CHAPTER 1</b>	<b>1-13</b>
INTRODUCTION	2
1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM	3-4
1.2 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY	4-5
1.3 OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY	5-6
1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION	6
1.5 METHODOLOGY	6-11
1.5.1 INTRODUCTION	6
1.5.2 RESEARCH DESIGN	7
1.5.3 POPULATION	7-8
1.5.4 SAMPLE SIZE	8
1.5.5 DATA COLLECTION	9
1.5.5.1 PRIMARY DATA COLLECTION	9-10
1.5.5.2 SECONDARY DATA COLLECTION	11
1.5.5.3 ANALYSIS	11
1.6 AREA OF STUDY	11
1.6.1 DALAPCHAND A BRIE PROFILE	12-13
1.7 CHAPTERISATION	13

	<b>PAGE NO</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2</b>	<b>14-20</b>
LITERATURE RIEW	15-20
<b>CHAPTER 3</b>	<b>21-29</b>
THE NEWARS AND BEL BIBAHA OR IHI	22-29
3.1 THE NEWARS OR PRADHANS	22-25
3.2 BEL BIBAHA AND ITS PRACTICES	25-29
<b>CHAPTER 4</b>	<b>30-34</b>
HISTORY OF BEL BIBAHA	31-34
<b>CHAPTER 5</b>	<b>35-41</b>
EXPLANATION OF BEL BIBAHA	36-41
<b>CHAPTER 6</b>	<b>42-44</b>
CONCLUSION	43-44
REFRENCES	45-48
APPENDIX	49-50

## **LIST OF ILLUSTRATION**

- PHOTO 1 – IMAGE OF FIRST NEWAR (Lakshmidas Pradhan)
- PHOTO 2 - IMAGE OF THE BEL FRUIT OR WOOD APPLE
- PHOTO 3- NEWARI GIRL OFFERING PRAYERS WITH BEL
- PHOTO 4 – INVITATION CARD OF BEL BIBAHA
- PHOTO 5 & 6 – NEWARI YOUNG GIRLS PERFORMING BEL BIBAHA  
IN MASS



## **LIST OF CHARTS**

- FIGURE 1 – PERCENTAGE OF NEWAR POPULATION IN RESEARCH AREA
- FIGURE 2 -- EDUCATION BACKGROUND OF RESPONDENTS
- FIGURE 3 – AGE GROUP OF THE RESPONDENTS



# **CHAPTER-1**

## INTRODUCTION

India is a multi-cultural nation and the second most populated country after the China in the world. It is a country where there are various different religions, ethnic groups, tribes together in one nation. Though it is a developing country but still there are various ethnic groups and tribes following their own old and strict cultural notions. The ethnic group generally denotes a people with common bio-social and bio-cultural traits who are backed by common identity. Ethnicity thus is defined as a human product, which manifests when a group makes use of primordial bases as culture, religion and territory to secure the interest of its members (**Thomson and Rudolp, 1986:26**). Hence, ethnicity is often regarded as “self consciousness of a group of people united, or closely related, by “shared experiences such as languages, religious beliefs, common heritage or political institutions” (**Poudyal, 1997:115**). The study deals with one of the ethnic community present in Nepalese community of our Indian society. This study shows how the people are inclined towards their ethnicity and traditions. It is one of the unique cultures which has their extra belief and rituals.

## **1.1 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM**

The Newars are one of the upper castes in the Nepalese community. They practice the different form of traditions in their community. Although, marriage is the one of social institution in the human society but marrying of pre-adolescent girl with a fruit is very unique form of marriage and culture practiced among the Newars. It needs to be studied because since its long time, our country has achieved many things and people are more aware of everything going in and around but still this tradition is practicing in some parts of the country by the Newar community.

This study in mainly focusing on three generations of the society as because this tradition basically started since an ages and is still practiced by all the Newar community all over the world. And here in our country Newar group of Nepalese community also follow it and observe it till today. They called it as pure form of tradition so to know the reasons behind their various assumptions on the practice of Bel Bibaha. Doesn't it get changed in various ways of performing the tradition and what made them to carry forward this kind of tradition till the today or in future?

The time frame chosen for the research is of three generations and is looking back to 50 years of the practicing the tradition in their community and making sure that there has gone through certain changes in their culture.

The population of the community has been increased in our country and in that particular area of the study comparing the past. The study is done in such area where there is inter ethnic groups residing together and following their culture and sharing them with each other in the society.

## **1.2 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY**

Bel Bibaha is the one of the most important practice done on this ethnic group i.e., Newars till today. The rationale to choose this topic is that in this 21<sup>st</sup> century where our country is achieving and developing day by day. Education, modernization, industrialization and westernization are the key factors prevailing in our society but still there is being practice of this tradition in the Newar community. In the name of culture and tradition they are having a marriage of the pre-adolescent girl child with the Bel fruit following the Hindu rituals.

Another main rationale to choose this topic is that there is lack of studies done regarding this topic and I believe that this is one of the major interesting topics to be studied clearly

about their tradition and beliefs. So, to understand the main reasons and factors for following these rituals in their particular ethnic community till today and preserving their culture from centuries ago.

Although it's been more than decade that this Newar community is residing in our country and they have been neglecting by not giving an importance to their culture and not studying in their community. The studies can provide the detailed information of this community and their prevailing rituals or customs till now which could help to know the cultures of our country.

### **1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

There are three main objectives discussed below to find the main core of the study and they are as follows:

1. To review and draw a comparative analysis of past (fifty years) and present (ten years) prevalence of Bel Bibaha or Ihi.
2. To highlight what are the causes behind Bel Bibaha and its patriarchal notions attached to it.

3. To highlight the significance and effect on the lives of the women who got married through Bel Bibaha.

## **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION**

1. What does it mean to them to be a Newar?
2. Are they able to preserve their Newari culture and tradition in their original form?
3. What is the significance of the Bel Bibaha in their Newar community?
4. Does this ritual affect to other ethnic group in the society?

## **1.5 METHODOLOGY**

### **1.5.1 Introduction**

The first part of this chapter describes the research design, the study population and sampling procedure. The methods of data collection are both primary and secondary sources and the data analysis for the objectives are extensively explained.



### **1.5.2 Research Design**

This study employed the survey research through which the study achieves the proper information without any mistake. Research design is the drawing an outline or planning and arranging the details of the research. It helps the researcher to plan a strategy of conducting the research. Thus, it is a detailed plan how the goals of research will be achieved. According to Henry Manheim (1997) ‘research design not only anticipates and specifies the seemingly countless decisions connected with carrying out data collection, processing and analysis but it presents a logical basis for these decisions’. (Ahuja,2001)

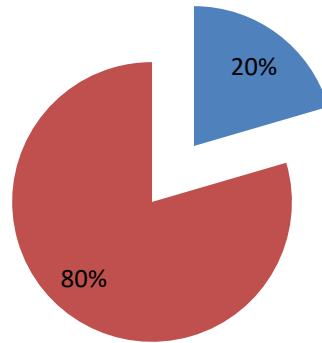
According to Issac and Michael (1997), survey research is used to “answer questions that have been raised, to solve the problems that have been posed or observed, to assess needs and set goals, to determine whether or not specific objectives have been met, to establish baselines against which future comparisons can be made, to analyze trends across time and generally to describe what exists, in what amount and in what context”.

### **1.5.3 Population**

The population of the Newar in the society is equal to other ethnic group in the society. Newars holds the 20 % of the population in the research area. Though they are less in number but hold the strong and dominant group. They cover a large number of the land in the research area. They total number of Newar population in the society is 215 among of 1050 of total population in the research area. See the figure in the next page.

**Figure 1 - PERCENTAGE OF NEWAR  
POPULATION IN RESEARCH AREA**

■ NEWAR ■ OTHER COMMUNITY



*Source: Field work; Self*

#### **1.5.4 Sample size**

Sampling is a portion of people drawn from the larger population. It will be representatives of the population only if it has same basic characteristics of the population from which it is drawn. According to Manheim (1977) "a sample is a part of population which is studied in order to make inferences about the whole population".

The convenience samples of 60 respondents were taken away from the particular community. In each category, different size of respondents were chosen for the study to

get the information regarding the past practices and present practices and belief which is continuing in their society. The main focused group were taken to the first generation people because of them we can know the main facts of the following tradition.

### **1.5.5 Data collection**

The data collection is the utmost importance for the research investigation. The study used various types of data collection techniques and sources of information both primary and secondary to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. Multiple strategies are used to collect data from the different respondents.

#### **1.5.5.1 Primary data collection**

The primary data are collected from various methods. Field survey is one of the basic methods for collecting the data. Both closed and open ended questions were the main method used in collecting quantitative data and while in-depth interviews, discussion, case study and observation method were used in the collection of data. The key respondents were the girls and women who go through the Bel Bibaha.

- **Interviews:** During the research in-depth interview were prioritized on the basis of the topic. The respondents were categorized into three groups as covering the three generation of women in the society. First groups were the one who were of the first generation women of the Newars, who were above the 65 years and the second generation who were above 40 years and the third generation who were the young of 16 years.
- **Case study:** It is a research strategy and empirical enquiry done through which the researcher get the depth of information. It was done with the first generation women and second generation women as they have a depth and clear context with the topic. They are the main respondents because of them they are performing with their girl in their society.
- **Group Discussion:** An informal discussion was conducted among the youth of the locality which included the men and women of the Newar community as well. It included the topic that what are the patriarchal notions to the Bel Bibaha of their young girls in their community. Through group discussion we can find the general views of the people and ideas related with the topic.

### **1.5.5.2 Secondary data collection**

The secondary data is supplementary to the primary data collection in the improvement of the research. The secondary data collection sources are various books, journals, articles, documents and many internet sources.

### **1.5.5.3 Analysis**

The analysis of the data is the main component of research. It is carried out by the triangulation which means by comparing the information derived from various methods and tools like from the literature and written documents, interviews with Newar women and men, and discussion with the resource person of their community. Various other techniques used like observations and documentaries to get the information, ideas and knowledge so it could be helpful during the analysis of data.

## **1.6 AREA OF STUDY**

The study is based on micro level study carried out in the Dalapchand village in district Kalimpong of West Bengal. It is 7.5 kms away from the main town. It is one of the villages in this district where there is population of 1050 with the 200 households. There are different caste and community living together in the village among them Newar are one of it. The village has also an agrarian economy and almost of the 50 % of the villagers is mostly dependent on agriculture.

## **1.6.1 DALAPCHAND: A BRIEF PROFILE**

### **Location**

Dalapchand, a village situated in the Kalimpong district of North Bengal nearly half an hour of drive from the main town Kalimpong. This place is highly promoted by different tourist attraction such as small home stay and picnic spot near to river.

### **People and community**

There are different ethnic groups in Dalapchand which are the proper inhabitant of the place. The Chettris, Bahuns, Rais, Lepchas, Limboos, Newars, Bhutias, Tamangs, Subbas, Gurungs, Thapas, kami, Damai, Bhujel are the main group of the place. Besides this other people migrated from Bihar and Nepal for business purpose are also living in the region.

### **Economy and Infrastructure**

People of Dalapchand sustain their livelihood through agriculture, government services and tourism based business. Most of the people owns their land holding and have their house to live. The infrastructure of area has highly risen up after the different tourism sites have been established in this place. The small home stays near the rivers and experiencing the nature life and picnic spots are the main attraction of people.

The Dalapchand village has three government schools among them one is Dalapchand Junior School and other two primary schools named Lower Dalapchand Primary School and Upper Dalapchand Primary School, two private schools (Minerva Academy and Marigold English School) among the other infrastructure, there is one Health centre/dispensary, one post office, one milk dairy, one rural State Bank of India, one gram panchyath and one community hall. The village is connected with well electricity and means of transportation .i.e road is well connected to various places.

## **1.7. CHAPTERISATION**

This research has total six chapters. The first chapter deals with the introductory part of the research study. It deals with various sub- topics relating to the statement of problem, objectives, and methodologies. It aims to clear the brief and clear view of the research. The second chapter deals with the secondary sources of research and provides the information taken by the sources basically it is reviewing the literature. The third chapter deals with the brief description of the Newar community and their cultures. The main core of this chapter is about Bel Bibaha, its present actual practices and what are the main reasons of it and how they are taking it. As we already discussed the present forms of Bel Bibaha and now in this chapter 3, it really focused in the past of Bel Bibaha. The chapter deals with the history of Bel Bibaha and its myth regarding it in their community. The last chapter and the final chapter of this research is the one of main as the chapter deals with the summary and conclusion of the whole research done in the topic.

## **CHAPTER 2**



## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

The study has focused to the tradition and culture of the ethnic community. Our society is much inclined towards the cultures, customs, beliefs and traditions as we live in the country called India. Though modernization plays vital role but conservatism is always present there in society. Bel Bibaha is one of the most interesting topic which my study is deals with it. And this tradition is mainly related with the young girls and women. It is one of the old tradition which is still in the performing by the Newar community but large number of people is not aware of it in our Indian society. This review of literature is the important tool for conducting the research and it helps the researcher to make a proper frame to conduct it.

The study deals with one of the unique tradition which is still had great significance in their society and believe that it is practiced since centuries ago. The book entitled, “The Sacred Town of Sankhu: The Anthropology of Newar Ritual, Religion and Society in Nepal” by Bal Gopal Shrestha (2012) basically talks about the history and culture of Sankhu i.e., the oldest sites of Kathmandu Valley.

It is an anthropological study covering the details of the town's myth, history and society. The author attempts to show the rich culture of the society and more importantly talks about the Newars. The Newars caste who were the large in number and their culture and traditions were very rich and high and it believed that the name of country Nepal is also came from the word Newar. It tries show up the relationship of the Newars to other groups in the Sankhu and their social status. This literature helped to understand the culture and traditions of Newars in past years.

Bal Gopal Shrestha (2015), *The Newars of Sikkim: Reinventing Language, Culture, and Identity in Diaspora* gives a detailed information of the Newar ethnic group in Sikkim. It presents a description of the changing patterns in the culture and rituals of the Newars in Sikkim. The author shows the history of the Newars in state Sikkim, the establishment of the Sikkim Newar Guthi, a socio-religious association and the cross- border connections between Newars of Sikkim and Kathmandu. It talks about the history of migration of the Newars towards Sikkim and Darjeeling from the Kathmandu. It shows the socio-economic relationships between different ethnic groups during the nineteenth century in Sikkim and examines the contemporary status of Newars in Sikkim.

The book entitled "The Newars: An Ethno- Sociological Study of a Himalayan Community"(1965) by Gopal Singh Nepali describes the distinctive material culture and

a social organization of the Newars of Nepal. This book clearly shows the Newari culture, traditions, customs and rituals which is very much rich in their community and society. The Newars were the dominant caste in the society and they have large numbers of their group. The two main interesting topics discussed in the book are that the study of Newars and their interaction with other ethnic groups in the Himalayan region and the cultural traits or relation between the Newars and the Nayars of Malabar.

The article, "Hinduism, Tribalism and the Position of Women: The Problem of Newar Identity" by David N. Gellnar (1991) is an anthropological study on the cultural and political group in the society of Nepal. The article attempts to show how a similar though more subtle stereotype, originating in the political subordination of the Newars to the Parbatiyas in post-period in Nepal. It talks about the stereotype nature, their cultures and traditions and mainly focusing on the life and status of women as Newari women has freedom of their decision to spend their way of life.

The book entitled, "Encyclopaedic Ethnography of "Himalayan Tribes" volume-4 by N.S. Bisht and T. S. Bankoti (2004) and "Gazetteer of Sikkim" by H.H. Risley (1894) has the collection of different aspects related to historical background of Sikkim, Darjeeling,

Kalimpong and neighboring areas Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet. This two literature describes the various the ethnic groups and their cultures of the people residing

on the places. As the study deals with the Newar community belonging to the Kalimpong area it helped understand their historical background and the migration to Kalimpong, Darjeeling and Sikkim.

This book describes details facts about different community, their religious practices, belief system, cultures and provides comparative study of different communities in terms of region. This literature talks about some basic changes concerning about modernization, westernization etc which has been took place throughout the community. This book helps me to understand about physical features, social life, history, origin, development, economic activities and rites and rituals about Newar community in brief.

The article, "Newar Traditions: A Ceremony called Life" by Utsav Sakhya (2010) has finely discussed about the whole ritual followed by the Newars right from the birth to death i.e., rite of passage. And the research specially dealing with the Bel Bibaha tradition of Newars, it helped to understand their rich culture and high belief upon their community.

The book entitled "Mesocosm. Hinduism and the Organization of a Traditional Newar City of Nepal" (1990) by Robert I. Levy, is the study of Hinduism as a form of symbolic system for organizing the life. The author gives the detail description and analysis of the symbolic world of Bhaktapur city, within the Kathmandu valley. As we all

know Kathmandu, Nepal is the main religious place, where the Hinduism is the dominant religion in the society. This book helped to understand the Hindu Newars were the main dominant group and follows the different festivals. He investigates the meaning of community to people who lives there and suggest how the religious forms are challenged in south Asia.

William J. Goode (1963), in his book, "World Revolution and Family Patterns" have done work in family patterns and he describes the changes occurred in the family patterns over the countries like Japan, China, India, Arabic Islam, Sub-Saharan Africa and western countries. It shows that the relationship between social structure, social institution and family patterns are roughly changed past years. The book helped in comparative studies of past and present time as it talks about various other external forces like westernization, industrialization and educations are leading society towards the change. As this book focus the study in India too and making the difference clear that family patterns are changing, choices of mate to both men and women, and women right is also marching forward.

There are various literature including books and articles used for this research among them this are the main which is used for the core ideas and studies to make the research successful. Most of the books are related to Newars which helped me to understand their culture, historical background and migration to the other places from their homeland. Various authors has dealt with various issues like their culture and tradition as a whole,

their historical background, their status in the society and the whole subject of Newar within one particular city etc which helped me on various stages of the research.

## **CHAPTER 3**

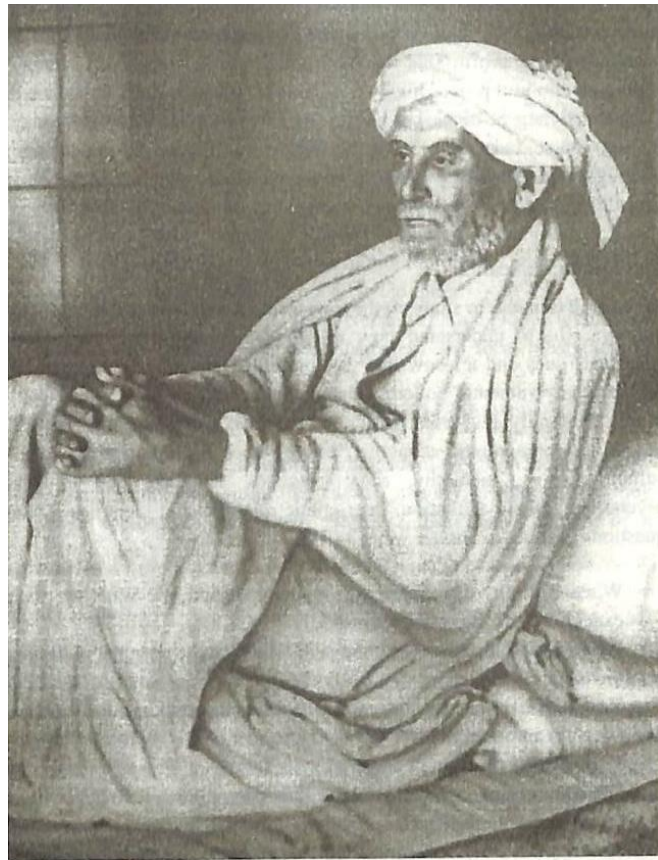
## **THE NEWAR AND BEL BIBAHA OR IHI**

### **3.1. THE NEWARS OR PRADHANS**

The Newars are also known as Pradhans. They are one of the upper castes in the Nepalese community after the Chettris and Bahuns who are basically the upper caste Brahmins. Newars form a linguistic and cultural community primarily Indo-Aryan and Tibeto- Burman ethnicities following from Hinduism and Buddhism with Newari as their common language (**Levy, 1991**). The Newars are the originally inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley in Nepal. It is believed that the word Newar is derived from the name of the country Nepal itself. The Newars are also considered to be a skilled and successful trading community, and their involvement in trans-Himalayan trade was already well established many centuries ago. (**Subba 1989:134; Sinha 1981:193**). The Newars are also known for their contributions to culture, art and literature, agriculture and cuisine.



It is believed that Newar people began to migrate to Darjeeling and Sikkim soon after the Gorkha conquest of Nepal (1769 AD). It was believed that the Lakshmidas Pradhan (Kasaju), a Newar from Bhaktapur and many other Newar people migrated to Sikkim in order to save their life. Another important reason behind the migration of people to India was in search of employment.(Shrestha, 2015: Baudar, 2006)



*Photo 1. Lakshmidas Pradhan (kasaju) 1816-94, the First Newar*

On 1 February 1835, the East-India Company annexed the Hill of Darjeeling from Sikkim. This East-India Company began to encourage Nepalese to migrate to Darjeeling by providing land at a cheap price expecting their support for this occupation. In 1839, it counted only 100 inhabitants but within 10 years its population had reached 10,000. During the following 30 years Darjeeling saw a rapid increase in its number of inhabitants with the continuous influx of Nepalese migrants. In 1901, the Newar

population in Darjeeling counted 5,880 souls out of population of 249117 (**Shrestha, 2015**).

It is said that Nepalese people migrated into the Darjeeling foothills as the potential of developing tea estate by employing them through the East-India Company. It is said that it was not possible for many Nepalese migrants to go back to their homeland but most of the high status people returned back but among them Agam Singh Giri, Dr. Prashmani Pradhan and Indra Bahadur Rai choose to stay in the land their forefathers had migrated. The Guthi, or socio-religious association, is one of the most important components of the Newar. The word guthi is derived from Sanskrit word gosthi carrying out rituals and social work. This association was involved in establishing and maintaining the temples, monasteries, shrines and rituals in the society. Gellner divided Newar guthi into six types: economic guthi, public utility guthi, caste council guthi, lineage deity guthi, guthi for the worship of particular deity and funeral guthi (**Gellner 1992**).

The Newars has twenty-two sub-castes. There are two types of Newars or Pradhans, one of them follows Hinduism as a religion and another follows Buddhism. They observe

various feasts, festivals, rituals and traditions in their community which makes them rich from other ethnic groups like they observe its specific annual festival and procession i.e. jatra. Indraajatra, is the biggest street festivals which is held in the month of August and September.

The masked dances of various deities are another important feature of Newari society. They perform the Ihi ceremony of young girls and Jankwa old age ceremony for old people at the age of 77. This community observes the common festivals of Hindu Nepalese society like dasain (Dusherra), tihar (Diwali), maghay sakranti (Makar Sankranti), pahilo baishak (Nepali New year) etc, together in the society.(Shrestha,2004)

## **3.2. BEL BIBAHA AND ITS PRACTICES**

### **Introduction**

Bel Bibaha is also known as Ihi or Ehee (Newari term). Bel Bibaha is a form of marriage practiced in the Newar community. It is a ceremony where young pre-adolescent girls are married with fruit called Bel or wood apple, scientific name, *Aegle marmelos* performing all the rites and rituals of marriage. It is believed that Bel Bibaha or Ihi is one of the purest and sacred form of marriage in their Newar society which has been started since centuries ago and is still followed by them.(Sakhya, 2010; Shrestha, 2012)



*Photo 2: The Bel fruit or wood apple*

The study deals with the three generations of the society. It is clear that they are still following the Bel Bibaha as their tradition with much respect and belief. The research focuses on the actual practices of Bel Bibaha in the Newar society from the period of 2010-2018 i.e. 8years. The study clarifies that Bel Bibaha is a form of marriage in Newar community where the pre-adolescent girls are married to Bel or wood-apple. The marriage is done only in odd age i.e. at the age of 5, 7, 9 and 11. The Newars found it very important, purest and sacred form of tradition in their community where other ethnic groups don't. Both Hindu Newar and Buddhist Newar practiced this Bel Bibaha of their young Kumari girls. The Bel Bibaha of young Newari girls is two day ceremony performed by the Newars. The first day is called Dusula Kriya where the young Kumari girls have purification bath by themselves and dressed with new clothes and different ornaments and taking fast for the day until the puja ends. They are accompanied by their mother in the courtyard and they had to perform rites and rituals, puja along with the priest.

The second day of the Bel Bibaha is very much important part of Bibaha or marriage for the girls and parents too because Kanyadaan is performed. This girl is fully dressed in a bridal wear with red coloured saree, tika in forehead, gold jewellery and seated in front of mandap (the particular places where the marriage ritual is performed) with the Bel fruit in their hand. The Brahmin priest chants all the mantras during the rituals of marriage and the red colour sindoor or vermilion is put in her parting of hair by a small virgin Brahmin girl child of her age in the name of Bel fruit or Lord Kumar which signifies the girl is married with Bel fruit. The Kanyadan ritual is followed with fire sacrifice and the parents of the girls symbolically gives away their virgin daughter in the hands of Lord Kumar or Suvarna Kumar keeping the belief that they are safe in the hands of God. After the all rites and rituals get done than the first thing is that girl is served with the Newari food which has the richness of their community and she receive the gifts from the family members.



*Photo 3: Newari girl offering prayers with Bel*

The Hindu Brahmin priest is used to perform the Bel Biabaha of the Newari girls in the present days because it is not possible to find the Gubhaju (Buddhist Newar priest) and Deobhaju (Hindu Newar priest) nowadays in the society as simple as the past days. People are not that aware of their languages and studies of their caste so they can be the

Newari priest. Some of the family performs this Bel Bibaha in the temple with the presence of family members so that there will less of expenditure.

And in another side some of them who are economically sound used to organize it on a big celebrations and occasions in their family and want to share their traditions with them. They have started the trend of modern way to organize and celebrate this ritual. They started printing the cards and sending to the other people in the community by inviting them to be the part of their culture. Now a days most of them are well established Newars because of their skills and clever and knowledgeable mind they hold in good position. And some of them in the research area started practicing the Bel Bibaha in this way.

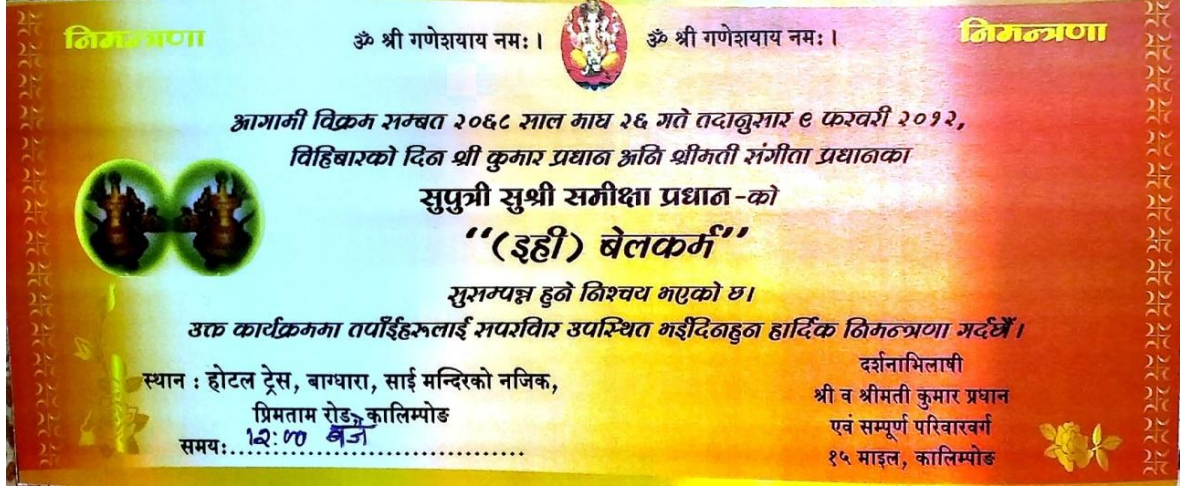


Photo 4: An invitation card of Bel Bibaha

One of the respondents named Pratima Pradhan shares her experiences and make clear that Bel Bibaha is very important for Newari girl as she shares her own experience being the Newari girl and marrying to her same caste. Before her marriage was fixed with the Newari boy she was asked about her Bel Bibaha and Bel but she was unable to show as she had not performed the Bel Bibaha in her childhood. So before a day of marriage she had to do her Bel Bibaha than only she was eligible marry to human husband.

It is believed that they have to perform the Bel Bibaha in their pre-adolescent period as per their going on tradition or as the rules it may call because if some Newari girl in future will marry the Newar boy than its more important for them. Without the Bel marriage, they are not preferred or passed to marry the human husband. Another important point related to Bel Bibaha is that after the Bel Bibaha is done they are restricted to eat the Bel fruit. Nowadays people are so smart and intelligent they have

started the immersion of the Bel in the rivers so that it will not get broke and damage and save themselves from the being widow of Bel.

## **CHAPTER – 4**



## **HISTORY OF BEL BIBAHA**

### **Introduction**

The Newar or Pradhan is the upper caste after the Chettri and Bahun (Brahmins) in the Nepalese society. The previous chapter talks about the present practices of Bel Bibaha in their community or group. Bel bibaha of the young girl is regarded as the important for them as it is practiced since centuries ago. In this chapter we are dealing with the history of the Bel Bibaha like how it started, how it were done in older days and for this we are dealing with past two generations like 60years back.

It is believed that the tradition of Bel Bibaha started long time ago. It is said that during 14<sup>th</sup> century when warlord Shamsuddin Ilyas from Bengal, India hits for raid to Nepal kingdom. The invading force sacked the land, burnt the palaces, looted temples, killed the men and boys and did every destruction which they can do and dishonored young girls and left only the married women there. And this led the people to believe their young girls and daughters can also be saved if they are married too so they started marrying of their pre-adolescent girls to save from dishonored and future problems. (Chattopadhyay,1980)

Bel fruit is considered to be a very tough and strong fruit among all the fruit because of its hard shell. It is believed that marriage with Bel is conducted to ask the Lord for the similar strong human groom in future. The best fruit is chosen for the wedding ceremony so that the girl gets the best husband. Bel Bibaha is the most important part of Newari girl in her community. It should be done in their childhood. It is said that the after their marriage with Bel, the girl should keep it safe so that it could not get damage. Though Bel fruit does not easily break or rotten but still the girls should be careful about it. It is believed that if the Bel fruit in case get damaged or anything than the girl is regarded as the widow of the God. (Nepali, 1965; Sakhya, 2010; Shrestha, 2015)

Bel Bibaha is two day ceremony. The ceremony was organized by the Guthi, a socio-religious association of Newars and they look into the every single matter and preparation. It is said that Bel Bibaha of a girl is held at her odd age like 5, 7, 9, before they reach their puberty phase. As already said, it is two day ceremony beginning with purification ritual and ending to Kanyadan of the girl. Ihi or Bel Bibaha represents the marriage between a virgin girl and a virgin god which is pure and immortal. It is a sacred ritual for Newari girls conducted by priest called Gubhaju for Buddhist Newars and Deobhaju or Rajopadhyay for Hindu Newars. This marriage ritual is performed in group or mass. The first day of Bel Bibaha is called as Dusala Kriya, where the girls prepare themselves at home with purification bath, new clothes, jewellery and ornaments.

The girls are accompanied by their mothers or mother-figure women from their family to assist them in the ceremony and the girls have to take a fast during the whole ceremony and eat only after the sunset. (Gautam, 2008; Shrestha, 2002)

On the second day, the main ritual takes place when the girls are assembled at the courtyard of temple with well dressed in bridal suit, ornaments and red tika on their foreheads. There will be the ritual of Goda dhune or washing of the feet of the girl by their parents and decorated with red colour 'Altah' in their feet to look beautiful bride. The Bel fruit is wrapped with several rounds of yellow thread and the Kanyadaan rituals

proceed with the fire sacrifice and parents of the girl symbolically giving their virgin daughter in the hand of eternal Lord Kumar and the red colour sindoor or vermillion put in the forehead of the girl as a symbol of married. The girls are also given 'Tha bhu' Newari set of meal which includes rice, yogurt, egg, bara, roti, rice wine etc after the marriage ceremony and at the end of the ceremony their parents give the new clothes, jewellery and ornaments etc as a gift. (Shrestha, 2004; Subba, 2008). See the relevant picture in next page.





*Photo5: Newari young girls performing Bel Bibaha in mass*

## **CHAPTER – 5**

### **EXPLANATION OF BEL BIBAHA**

#### **Introduction**

Bel Bibaha which is followed by the Newars in our Nepalese community is their unique tradition. It is still followed by them in this present modern era where science and technology is the mode of living. Everything is easy and online, people and society are educated and modernized with western culture, norms and values. As we all know Bel

fruit is strongest among all other fruits because of its hard shell. It is believed that marriage with Bel is conducted so that she will get similar strong human groom in future. The best fruit is chosen for the wedding ceremony so that the girl gets the best husband so he can protect her from the evil spirits in future.

The causes behind the Bel Bibaha among the Newar community is that during the reign of Rana in Nepal, the girls and the women were not safe, they were taken away forcefully without their consent and they were raped and ill treated by the dacoits and the soldiers for their interest and enjoyment. Adding the point, the Newari girl or women are beautiful and had the sharp external features they were more unsafe from such activities. So, to keep their daughters safe from them they started performing Bel Bibaha with the Bel fruit

believing the Bel, the incarnation of Lord Vishnu. They believe that if their daughters get married to God than they will be safer and they would not get into the trouble.(Bista, 1976)

Another main important cause is that during the rules of King in Nepal, there was the practice of 'Sati' system where their daughters were not safe in the society. They were not counted as a human being after the death of their husband. If incase they do not go sati

then also they have to face many problems in the society and were ill- treated by the in-laws because of widowhood. Sati is a system where the wives have to sacrifice their life and immolate themselves in the husband's pry without any reasons and fault. The Newar people are clever among all the caste in the Nepalese society and they don't want to see their own daughter giving away their life without any fault. To save their daughters life from the evil rituals of widowhood, they started practicing the Bel Bibaha of their young girl with the Bel fruit in the name of Lord Kumar or Suvarna Kumar, so that their girl would save their life after the marriage with human husband and never be called as widow. It is said that they want remove the widowhood from their community and give a chance to live their daughter and girl with freedom.(Dube, 1996; Sakhya & Bajracharya, 2008)

The Newars had proved by themselves by taking a big and clever decision in past and still it is believed that they are in present. And there in a proverb in the Nepali that "sath kaiyaa bara-baar ek newar" meaning that "one Newar is equal to seven

Marwaris" and they are regarded as the cleverest among the all Nepali castes in the Nepalese community.



The Newars is still practicing this Bel Bibaha in the present modern society because they believe that their ancestors have given them a greatest asset as in the form of tradition which is only followed and practiced in their community. Though every caste in Nepalese society has different unique tradition present in their communities which make them differ from each other but this is the something totally different from others.

They believe that it is started by their ancestors to save their girl and daughter, and it should be carry forward by generation to preserve their culture in the society. The rituals of Bel Bibaha are not changed it is done in the same way as it used to be. It just that now a days people used to perform this tradition as a big ceremony with their family, friends and societies. They organize it is different way by doing big parties kind of reception and they used Hindu Brahmin priest for the whole rites and rituals.

It is clear that Bel Bibaha is done by every Newar with much enthusiasm and happiness. It is because the Bel Bibaha is the important wedding than the wedding with the human husband in future. One of the respondents says that if in future if her husband dies than

also she is not called as widow of her husband because her marriage is already done to Bel and until it is safe but if the Bel is broken that she is considered as widow in society

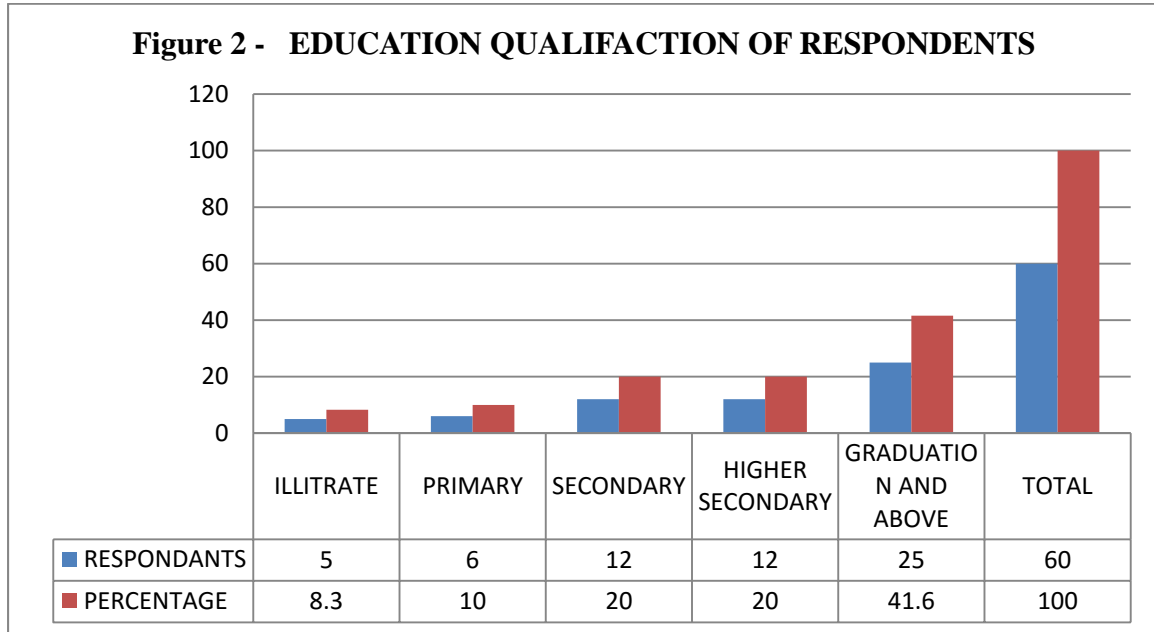
though being wife of living human husband also she cannot be dressed as a married women and put sindoor or vermillion and potay (green beads necklace) which is the symbol of married woman in the Nepalese society.

Some of them believe that it is the best way to preserve their culture following the age old traditions and making aware to the coming generation about their community. In this 21<sup>st</sup> century where the science and technology is growing rapidly but still some the communities like Newars are still performing the rituals and remembering their ancestor through it. One of the important point that it still retained is that the women of the Newar group are saved from the widowhood, they are saved from going the through certain exclusion, torture and evil activities in society where a widow goes the way, they have a freedom to choose their partner and get married. They have a freedom of choice for their mate and take their own decision.

And young girls who has gone through this tradition find that it is modern time and find that its old tradition and believes that it should not follow anymore because the Bel Bibaha is not such things like safety of women is assured by doing this kind of tradition

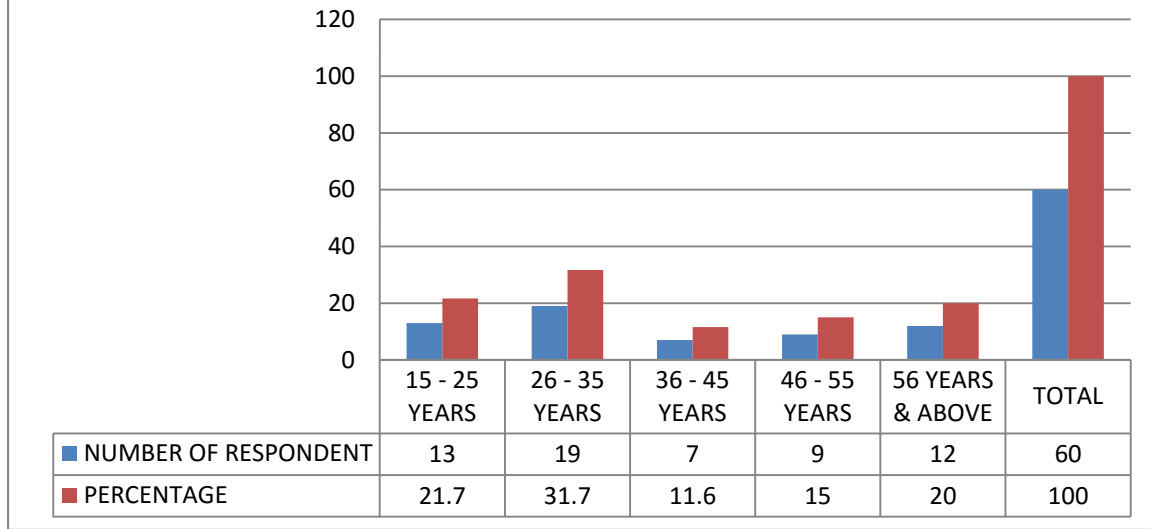
in their community or in the whole nation. They find that people are being so mentally weak so they do such evil crimes in the society with women, they are not recognizing the small baby or the age old women. And it is not sure that following this tradition, only

woman can have a freedom to choose their life and for marriage etc but now a day women are so forward and independent that she herself can look after her and fight for her decisions.



*Source: Field work; Self*

**Figure 3 - AGE GROUP OF THE RESPONDENTS**



*Source: Field work; Self*

The Figure 2 and Figure 3 both are the resources that show the qualification of women respondents and age group of them. It gives idea that people have different perspectives with regard to their age and qualification background. As the research is looking on three generation and the generation gap provides different perspective on the same topic. Their views, ideas, interest matters in different situation with the time. As we talked above that generation gaps leads towards different views on it.

## **CHAPTER-6**

## **CONCLUSION**

### **Introduction**

This chapter deals with the whole five chapters of the research where the study has mainly focused on Newar community belonging to Nepalese society. The different chapters have their different roles and ideas of the topic which research is done. The Newars are one of the dominant caste in our Nepalese society and they follow various traditions in their caste.

After the completion of whole chapters we came to know that Bel Bibaha is a purest form of ritual or marriage with god in the Newar society. They have been started to save their girl or daughter from other attacks in the ancient ages and later they wanted to save their daughter's from widowhood. It is seen that peoples of Newars are happy to perform this ritual with full of enthusiasm. They believe that performing and following this tradition helps them to remember their ancestors. They feel proud of their caste because no other caste has such a tradition where the daughters are regarded as god or Kumari and keeping safe from the evil attacks they married them to Bel fruit or Lord Kumar. Bel Bibaha for Newars are their pride and they can proudly follow it believing that it can make their community strong and unique.

As per research, the Newars are one of the dominant group in the society. Though they are less in number in the society comparing with some of the other castes like Tamangs , Rais and Limboo but they hold they had a strong status. As we already discussed in Chapter 3 that because of their rich culture, cuisine and skills in the trading, they hold the high status in the society and having a good trading skill they rule the market with Marwari's. Hindu Newars are more dominant group in their own community rather than Buddhist and Christian Newars. Because of all this reasons they are quite forward in the society and dominant group in the community. And this leads all leads making them and their culture more visible in the society, they believe in performing their cultures and making them alive.

They describes though our society is much affected with the westernization and modernization but they should not forget where they come from and where they belong and what they believe of themselves. This all views clear that may be people are much inclined towards the present modern time but they should always feel proud of their caste, community, identity and their culture.

## REFERENCES

Ahuja, R., 2001. '*Research Methods*', Rawat Publications, Jaipur

Baudar, H. 2006. '*Labor Movement: How migration Regulates Markets*', New York: Oxford University Press.

Bisht, N.S. & Bankoti, T.S. 2004 '*Encyclopaedic, Ethnography of HIMALAYAN TRIBES*' Volume 4. Delhi: Global Vision Publishing House.

Bhattacharya, Narendra Nath. 1975 '*Ancient Indian Rituals and their Social Social contents*', Delhi: Manmohan Book Service

Bista, D.B., 1976, '*People of Nepal*', Kathmandu, Ratna Pustak Bhandar

Bryman, A., 2004, '*Social Research Methods*', Oxford University Press, UK

Chattopadhyay, K.P., 1980, '*An Essay on the History of Newari Culture*', Educational Enterprises Pvt Ltd, Nepal

Cohen, Anthony P. 1993. '*Culture as Identity: An Anthropologist's View*', New Literary History, The John Hopkins University Press



Dube, L. 1996, '*Caste and Women*', M.N. Srinivas (ed) *Caste its 20<sup>th</sup> century Avatar*

New Delhi, Viking Penguin

Gautam, D. P., 2008, '*Guthi Byabasthapan (in Nepali) (Guthi Management), Nepal ma*

*Guthi ko mahatwa ra Upadheyata (in Nepali)*, Kathmandu, Shree Satya Sai Offset Press

Goode, William J. 1963, '*World Revolution and Family Patterns*', The Free Press

Gellner, D.N., 1992, '*Monk, Householder, and Tantric Priest: Newar Buddhism and its*

*Hierarchy of Ritual*', Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

Gellner, D. N., 1991, '*Hinduism, Tribalism and the Position of Women: The Problem of*

*Newar Identity*' *Man*, Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland.

Issac, S. and Michael, W. B. 1997, '*Handbook in research and evaluation: A collection of*

*principles, methods, and strategies useful in the planning, design, and evaluation of*

*studies in education and the behavioral sciences*'. San Diego: Educational and Industrial

Testing Services.

Levy, Robert I. 1992 (1990). *'Mesocosm. Hinduism and the Organization of a Traditional Newar City of Nepal'*. Berkeley: University of California.

Majumdar, Ramesh Chandra. 1951 *History and Culture of Indian People, The Vedic Age'* Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.

Nepali, G. S. 1965. *'THE NEWARS: An Ethno-Sociological study of a Himalayan Community'*, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, Himalayan Book Seller, Kathmandu.

Shakya, U, 2009, *"Newar Tradition: A Ceremony called Life"*, ECS Nepal: Enriching the Nepali way, vol. 93, issue: May, ECS Media Pvt, Nepal

Shakya, B. R. & Bajracharya, S.H., 2008, 'Newah: Boudha Sanskriti- Changu Dharana', (in Nepali), (Newar Buddhist Culture-one perception), Lotus Centre, Kathmandu, Nepal

Shrestha, B. G., 2015. *'THE NEWARS OF SIKKIM: Reinventing Language, Culture, and Identity in the Diaspora'* Vajra Books, Jyatha, Thamel, Kathmandu.

Shrestha, B. G., 2012. *'The Sacred Town of Sankhu: The Anthropology of Newar Ritual, Religion, and Society in Nepal'*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, U.K.

Shrestha, B. G., 2002, *'The Ritual Composition of Sankhu: The Socio-Religious Anthropology of a Newar Town in Nepal'*, Leiden, The Netherlands

Shrestha, K. L. 2004, *'Kalimpongya Newah Guthi (Newar Guthi in Kalimpong) (in Newari)*, The Sandhya Times, Oct.8

Sinha, A.C. 1981. *'Resource Distribution and Multiple Ethnic Identity in Sikkim'*, In: C. von Furer Haimendorf (ed.) *Asian Highland Societies in Anthropological Perspective*, New Delhi: Sterling, pp. 183-202

Subba, Tanka B. 1989. *'Dynamics of a Hill Society. The Nepalis in Darjeeling and Sikkim Himalayas'* Delhi: Mittal Publications

Subba, J. R., 2008. *'History, Culture & Customs of Sikkim'*, New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House.

Thompson, D. L. & Dov Ronen. (Eds.). 1986. *'Ethnicity, Politics and Development'*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

## **APPENDIX**

### Questionnaire

1. Name:
2. Age:
3. Marital Status:
4. What is Bel Bibaha or Ihi?
5. Is there any specific age for Bel Bibaha? Yes or No, please elaborate.
6. Have you done Bel Bibaha? Yes or No.
7. For this Ihi functions, does the priest required?
8. Where this Bel Bibaha is organised?

9. Why only the Bel fruit used for this ritual, why not others?
10. What is the causes behind this ihi or Bel Bibaha ?
11. What is the importance of Bel Bibaha in your community?
12. Why this Bel Bibaha is only done with girl child? Explain.
13. Are there any strict rules regarding Bel Bibaha ? Why?
14. Does your community still follow this tradition?
15. What will you do with the Bel fruit after the Ihi or Bel Bibaha is done?
16. Do you find any changes in this Bel Bibaha regarding past and present days?  
Explain.
  
17. Do you have to go through and strict notions before and after this Bel Bibaha?  
Explain.
18. Did this Bel Bibaha have affected your life styles?
19. Do you think that factors like modernisation and education has effect on this Bel  
Bibaha?
20. Is there any mythological belief or reasons to follow up this Bel Bibaha?
21. What are the patriarchal notions regarding Bel Bibaha?
22. Does this Bel Bibaha make any difference in one's life in future?
23. What is your view of Bel Bibaha which is still following in this 21<sup>st</sup> century?

## **GLOSSARY**

Bel : Wood Apple

Deobhaju / Rajopadhyay : Hindu Newar Priest

Ehee / Ihi : Bel Marriage

Gubhaju : Buddhist Newari Priest

Guthi : Newars Socio- Religious Association

Indrajatra : Street festivals of Newars

Kumari : Newari Young girl

Potay : Green beads necklace

Sindoor : Vermillion

Tha Bhu : Newari Meal

