
Brahmaputraka Chheuchhau: Portrayal of the Indian Nepali Diasporic Life***Ramji Timalina, PhD***Associate Professor of English
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*ramjikoshi@gmail.com*DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/jodem.v14i1.57572>**Abstract**

This article analyses how Indian Nepali writer Lil Bahadur Chhetri's novel Brahmaputraka Chheuchhau [Alongside the Brahmaputra] depicts the transnational life of the Nepali Diaspora in India. The analysis of the novel is based on the theory of diaspora and its literature discussed by Robin Cohen, James Clifford and Janine Dahinden. The analysis focuses on the setting, characterization, the migrants' relation with the hostland mainstream, Nepali cultural practices and the role of the migrants in the development of the land of arrival. It finally presents the common features of the Nepali Diaspora in Assam, India. The discussion concludes that the novel is a good example of Nepali diasporic literature. It is hoped that this article can be a sample for the analysis of other works of Nepali diasporic creations, especially the works of fiction.

Keywords: Characterization, cultural practices, diaspora, Indian Nepali community, transnational life.

Diasporic Leaning of the Novel

*Brahmaputraka Chheuchhau [Alongside the Bramaputra], first published in 1986, is a novel written by Indian Nepali writer Lil Bahadur Chhetri. The novel revolves around the life of the Nepali grazier community settled alongside the river Brahmaputra in Assam, the north-east India. Bhawani Ghimire, writing a preface to this novel, mentions that there had been no novel written upon the two million [the then estimation] Nepalis in Assam before this creation. This novel, according to Ghimire, has been able to present the lively depiction of the total life of the community. Ghimire concludes that it has become the fictional *shilalekh* [epigraph] of the struggle the Nepali community in Assam has been undergoing for centuries.*

In the acknowledgement section of the novel, the novelist himself stresses on the fact that the Nepali community in Assam is not just for the temporary employment. Most of them are the permanent settlers with their agricultural set up that contains primarily animal husbandry and growing interest in farming, too. They have not lived there, the novelist argues, just for their benefit; but they have also contributed to the development of the area. Many of them are the children of the Gurkha soldiers who have devoted their lives for the protection of India, their hostland. Thus, they have been demanding for their social, economic and political rights there.

Ghimire and Chhetri's arguments lead us to view the community presented in the novel from the perspective of diaspora. Diaspora "combines low levels of transnational mobility with high levels of local anchorage in the receiving and low level of local anchorage in the sending country" (Dahinden 53). In this sense, diaspora is different from travel as it is not a temporary stay in the hostland (Clifford 311). The picture of the society found in the novel is that of the permanently anchored Nepali community in Assam.

Chhetri further claims that despite the use of his imagination for the fictional set up, the novel addresses a specifically real place, time and atmosphere in Assam; the result is the real history of the Nepali community in the north-east India. It has made this novel a social realistic creation, he opines. This authorial claim aligns with the feature of a diasporic writing that is the mixture of the writer's imagination with the real experiences from the life of the community in the diaspora being "both realistic and fictio-critical in orientation" (Timalsina 37). Utpala Ghaley Sewa argues that "The novel presents a mix of the historical and the fictional, with a strong autobiographical undercurrent of felt experience" (188). Chhetri further specifies that he has tried to put the realities of the Nepali community in Assam from 1940s to 1960s. He confesses that he has attempted to incorporate the sweet connection between the local Assamese community and the transnational Nepali community in the area. Such a connection between the migrants and the hostland mainstream communities is an integral aspect of diasporic life and writings.

Despite the usual conflicting relation between the migrants and local communities, the migrants need to develop good relation with the hostland mainstream. Tristan Brusle reports that "the willingness of Indian Nepali activists to tie themselves to India and root themselves in ancient Indian history is strong" (170). He comments

that “whether Indian Nepalis like it or not, reference to Nepal always surge in discussion about their denomination, language or cultural traditions. The link to Nepal, although denied, exists in many cases.” (171). Brusle posits that “To answer how Indian Nepalis could belong to a diaspora and have, thus, a diasporic consciousness, we need to focus on representations and practices relating to Nepal” (172). Tanka Bahadur Subba also argues in the same line: “The Nepalis form one of the largest and most widespread diasporic communities in India numbering about 5 million and found in almost every part of India with greater concentrations in the states bordering Nepal” (213). Subba acknowledges the role of the Gurkha soldiers in laying “the foundation of the deterritorialized, supra-caste, supra-ethnic Nepali diaspora in India tied together by the Nepali *lingua franca* (italics original) and fired by a common challenge to their survival” (220). Chhetri’s novel is an attempt to address these realities in a fictional setup.

Diasporic Setting

The setting of the novel is alongside the River Brahmaputra that flows from China through Assam to the Bay of Bengal. The novelist himself specifies it and argues that the life of the Nepali community in Assam is closely connected to this river. The huts, the animal husbandry in the grazing fields and the farms both depended on and are threatened by this river. Sewa explains: “The river is a living entity, but extends to encompass in metonymic relation the sense of not just geographical space, but the complex of the culture, people and the history of Assam” (189). There are many villages of Nepali settlements along the river. Among them, the incidents of the novel take place in Kachhugaon, Mahakhutti and Bayaranti.

The narrative, mostly in the first half of the novel, deals with Kachugaon. It is a *chhapadi* [grazing station with sheds], not a village in the real sense of the term. It borders the Brahmaputra. It is covered with *kansa* [hard elephant grass]. There are some huts prepared by the Nepali settlers where the herdsmen live with their cattle. The river flows with the cool wind from the Himalaya so that the Nepalis there find it similar to their hilly settlement left back in Nepal. They feel free in such a set up as it provides them enough space for rearing their cattle (Chhetri 1). Despite the generations-long Nepali settlement in Kachhugaon, the numbers of huts have not increased as expected because it is their grazing area only. The successful herdsmen have settled in the villages away from it for farming and business. They use the area

just for animal husbandry. Towards the middle of the novel, this settlement is destroyed by the flood in Brahmaputra. The grazier community shifts into the jungle a little further where there is less danger of flood.

The next location of the story is Mahakhutti. It is a mixed settlement with the majority population of the Nepali migrants. But the other nearby villages are reported to have the majority of Assamese people. Bayaranti is the next village where the population is the mix of the Nepali, the Assamese and the Kachhari. In the district, the number of the Nepalis is significantly high; however, they belong to the minority community in total. Thus, the novel deals with the fate of the Nepali minority population in the hostland. As diaspora is the discourse of the minority (Clifford 311), the setting of the novel presents the diasporic scene.

Many places in the area are named after the Nepali people who first started their animal husbandry at th(e)ose spots. Some such names are Khadka Pal, Kulbire Tole and Marasine Pal. Khadka and Marasini are Nepali surnames, whereas Kulbir is the Nepali name of a person. 'Pal' and 'Tole' refer to settlement. Such a setting connects the nature of the characters' arrival and growth in Assam: "The arrival of Nepalis in Assam, mainly as graziers on the Brahmaputra islands and as land clearers, was encountered by the British colonial power in order to populate a region with low population densities, after its incorporation into the Raj" (Brusle 172). Brusle reports that "Their settlement in Assam is more the result of the fixation of the population after decades of movement between Nepal and India" (173). Michael Hutt asserts that "the Nepali diaspora in northeast India ... is the product of primary migration from eastern Nepal" (123). The time of the narrative is from 1940s to 1960s when most of the Nepalis in Assam were only the graziers while only a few had started to be educated, farmers and very few moved towards the town for modern works and life. The characters used in the novel further explain the socio-cultural realities of the diaspora.

Transnational Characters

The novel has presented the characters from the hostland mainstream i.e. the Assamese people and the transnational Nepali settlers. The number of Nepali characters is far higher than that of the Assamese people. Transnational characters are the people who have left their homelands or the country of origin "in search of work" or other forms of existence (Cohen 17). Once they get permanently settled in the land of arrival i.e. the hostland and develop a society of such settlers, it becomes diaspora. Such

diasporic subjects are “distinct versions of modern, transnational, intercultural experience” (Clifford 319). The novel presents such characters and their offspring. It was the time when “Rarely any rich Nepali migrated to India” (Subba 225). The major characters in the novel are the proofs of these statements.

The main character of the novel is Gumansingh who is called Gumane, a derogatory term for his name coined because of his low socio-economic status. He was born in Nepal, but was taken to Assam by his parents when he was three years old. His parents had to leave their birthplace because of poverty. Once they reached Assam, Kesar Bahadur Khulal (also known as the *Mahajan*), the next character, happened to meet them at a train station. Having pity upon their vulnerable condition and with the hope of making them his long-term buffalo herds, the *Mahajan* took them to his *chhapadi* (grazing station). In the beginning, they worked as per his command. After a few years, they started their own buffalo husbandry; and lived their lives till death. This is the story of almost every Nepali migrant to Assam except the Gurkha soldiers who settled there after their retirement. Most of the Gurkha soldiers of the time were the people recruited from the Nepal hills, mostly from the eastern Nepal. Thus, the Nepali community in Assam was made up of the Nepali transnational migrants and their offspring.

The *Mahajan* is an example of a successful Nepali settler in the area. He is an owner of about three hundred buffaloes, a nice farmland and a dairy business. He has provided employment to many Nepali migrants in his *chhapadi* and the farm. He has lent many buffaloes to other Nepali herds so that he can develop a close Nepali society and his command over them. His sons are born in the same place. As the second-generation migrants, they have taken college level education and have started to promote their dairy business. This shows the gradual rooting of the Nepali migrants in Assam developing Nepali Diaspora.

The *Mahajan* commands certain level of grip over the society there. He is a money lender, crops provider and protector (even the destroyer) of the Nepali herdsmen. The regional level leaders of the then ruling Congress Party of India believe that Mahajan is the leader of the buffalo herds in the area. They praise him for starting the first dairy among the Nepali migrant settlers and showing others how the community can be rooted in the hostland. They try to inspire other Nepali settlers on

contributing to the land following the *Mahajan's* path (133). He has a level of good relation with the people of the Assamese community and the administration in the area.

Gumansingh (Gumane), the main character of the novel, was just a baby when he was taken to India. At twelve years of age he became an orphan. He is found to be a frightened lonely child weeping at the father's death just after three years of his mother's demise. This is symbolic position of the Nepalis in Assam. As they have left Nepal, their motherland, and have been in a new land, they feel frightened, lonely and helpless like an orphan. Then Gumane does not like to stay at the *Mahajan's* home though he is a man from his own community and under whose protection he has grown up. It symbolically shows his indifference to the people from Nepal as they do not really protect him; but they exploit him instead. He returns all the remaining buffaloes to the *Mahajan* and frees himself from his grip the way his father freed himself from the grip of Nepal leaving it with his family to settle in India. Gumane is free though he is helpless and without a single penny with him.

Then Gumane moves to Keshav Kakati's (also known as Kakatibabu) home. Kakatibabu is an Assamese freedom fighter and the protector of the helpless people in the area unlike the *Mahajan* who exploits such people. This shows the difference between Nepal and Assam. Nepal has exploited Gumane and his parents, but the land of Assam gives refuge to them when they are helpless. Now, Gumane begins his education helping Mrs. Kakati in her household works. The narrator presents Gumane's condition: "*Eka gaans khaana oo paaulaa tara sneha rasa piuna paaune thaau chaina. Aba ta oo jiunuparchha aaphnai nimti ani aaphnai khuttaamaa*; He may get a meal; but he has no place to get affection. Now, he has to live for himself and on his own." (5). It is how he begins to live on his own with his major assets "*dharma and sadaachaar*; duty and virtue" which symbolically are the celebrated qualities of Nepali people around the world. Gumane has acquired these qualities from his mother. He has acquired the qualities of struggle, dutifulness, honesty and laboriousness from his father. These, too, are the celebrated Nepali qualities for which they are trusted around the globe. The narrator comments that he has a generations-long relation with poverty; but poverty has not been able to torture him as it has become his life style (3). The condition of the main character highlights the common fate of the Nepali transnational migrants in Assam. The Nepali community there is like an orphan taking shelter in others' home. They trust the local people because they have no other alternative to believe in. Such vulnerability is the reality of a diasporic community.

Gumane grows there with many difficulties. Later he cannot stay at Kakatibabu's place because of Mrs. Kakati and her son Haren's behaviour. He shifts to the home of the local school's headmaster who is a Nepali in his origin. This again is symbolic. Though the migrants take shelter in the hostland community, they have to face many problems and difficulties for adjustment. As a result they have to develop a close relation with the people of their own migrant community. This is the next reality of a diaspora. Gumane's love with Kakatibabu's daughter Malati cannot be materialized because of the obstacles created by Mrs. Kakati, Haren and the social norms symbolizing that it is not possible for the diasporans to be completely accepted in the hostland mainstream.

Then Gumane passes his class ten and leaves the place in search of job, education and safety. He reaches Guhawati, gets a job of teaching Nepali children a little away and begins his college education. He is well accepted in the Nepali community there as a teacher and the agent of social awareness. In a new community, his past as an orphan and a servant's son does not hinder his assimilation. His good qualities are respected. It shows that the good qualities and the capabilities, not their history, help a diasporan to exist in the hostland. Instead, sometimes the history becomes a burden. But they cannot leave it as Gumane again comes back to the *Mahajan's* dairy and gets appointment as the manager. There, too, he is troubled by his history. Mahajan wants Gumane to get married with his daughter who is not mentally fit. Then Gumane leaves the place second time in search of freedom and prosperity.

Then Gumane enlists himself in the Indian Gurkha Army and fights in the India-Pakistan war. Unfortunately, he is wounded in a bomb blast resulting into a frightening appearance and limping move. But, he accepts it positively as his contribution to the protection of the nation that has given him shelter. Later, he returns to the place where he was grown up and works for the society. Now, Lieutenant Gumansingh is a conscious citizen of the nation. He tries to unite the youth for the contribution to the community and the society. He takes part in political activities as well.

Sewa argues that Gumane represents "the issues and challenges a diasporic people negotiate in the host and" (192). His life is a symbol of the settlement and growth of the Nepali community in India, especially Assam. Like his, the land of origin of the Nepalis living in India is Nepal. They have migrated to India in search of

opportunities. They search it in the jungle, in the beginning, as cattle herds, farmers and later as educated employees in different civil and public sectors of the nation. They have been adjusting with different local and ethnic communities with some level of trust and cultural conflicts there. They remember their land of origin time and again, but they have been involved in the promotion of the hostland itself. They have preserved the Nepali culture with Nepali language, dress, religion and tradition with certain hybridity in all of them. It is how they have grown the Nepali Diaspora in India.

The novel has presented other characters who represent different types of the people of Nepali origin in India, especially Assam. Manbir and Jureli are Gumane's parents. When they reach Assam, Manbir works as a buffalo herd in *Mahajan's* husbandry and Jureli helps in the household works. When they establish a separate hut for the buffaloes, they manage a homestead in the settlement. Kanchha Mahajan, Nandalal, Bam Bahadur Limbu, Pandit Gehanath and Kharel Baje are some typical Nepali people. There is a mention of Jaya Prasad Subba and Vishnu Prasad Upadhyay who are the freedom fighters and social activists from the Nepali community in Assam. Subba is also the unifier of Nepali community and one of the national leaders of All India Gurkha League. They are real people of the time the novel is set in.

There is also the role of some Gorkha soldiers enlisted for the Second World War. A soldier in the train protects Manbir and Jureli from the Indian passengers especially from the taunting talk of Sikha soldiers in the train from Katihar in Bihar to Assam. There are some young Nepalis who have devoted their lives for India and its freedom taking part in Netaji's Azad Hinda Force and the others were involved in the independence movement. The talks of the time centre on the same movement, the Second World War, Nepali-Assamese relations, life back in Nepal and their problems and achievements in Assam. Many Nepalis of the first generation recite the *Ramayana* or listen to it and feel good at being Lord Ram's people.

Relation with the Hostland Mainstream

The type of relation between the hostland mainstream and the transnational migrants also exhibits the diasporicity of a community. Robin Cohen concludes that "there is barely a [diasporic group] that did not at some stage experience discrimination in the countries of their migration" (166). As a result, "a troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group" (17). As a result, diaspora consciousness is "constituted negatively by

experiences of discrimination and exclusion” (Clifford 311). The novel has given space to such relation as well.

When Gumane wants to take consent from Kakatibabu to decide what he would be doing after his father’s death, Pandit Gehanath expresses his contempt: “*Pheri tyo jaata mildo na bhaata mildo achhaameko jimmaa lagaaudaa haamro naaka kahaan rahyo ra? Yahaa waraparakaa nepaalee jaatee jiundai mareko bhaiena ani?*”; And how can we save our prestige submitting him to the Assamese who has neither the caste nor has the cuisine similar to us? Doesn’t it mean the Nepali people around here are alive-dead?” (36). It is an expression of racial and cultural affinity within the Nepali community and the difference from the hostland mainstream. It is not only the difference, but also contempt. Though the Nepalis and the Assamese communities seem to be close in many aspects, there always exists the cultural and communal conflict between the hostland mainstream and the diasporans.

Kakatibabu’s wife also expresses the similar contempt against the Nepali communities there. When Kakatibabu reaches home with Gumane to keep and educate him there without any prior consultation with his family, his wife angrily retorts: “*Kachhugaunmaa tyatraa nepaalee kasaike eka muthee bhaata dina saktainan yasalaee?*”; Can no Nepali in Kachhugaon give a fistful of rice for this boy?” (40). Similarly, when Kakatibabu takes the youthful relation between Gumane and Malati like any other relations between a young boy and a girl, his wife expresses even worse contempt: “*tyo jaata na bhaatako gothaalosita chhoreeko bihe garchhau timee?*”; Do you marry off your daughter with that cowherd whose caste and cuisine do not match with us?” (73). This is a usual cultural conflict between the diaspora and the hostland mainstream. It is seen also in the political campaigns and election candidature described in the novel.

As a result, the Nepalis there fear that the local people may rise against them and they have to go back to Nepal: “*haameelaee eka dina aakhiree yahaabaata khedchhan*”; Finally, one day they will chase us from here” (81). The novel refers to some continuous conflict with the Misami and Abbare communities that are mixed up in the area of Nepali settlements. Nepalis need a large grazing field for their cattle; whereas, the Misami and Abbare are expanding their farmlands in the areas that have been used for grazings (87). Referring to the first settlement of Nepalis in Assam in the request of the British India Company government, the Nepalis comment:

“kaamapardaa tyasaree nepaaleelaaee guhaare, hijoaja tinai nepaaleele khaaisake bhanna thaalekaa chhan; When they had their work, they pleaded the Nepalis; but these days they have started blaming us for finishing off their resources” (90). This is a feature of the diasporic settlement:

A number have become the objects of violent hatred in their countries of settlement. What makes this form of inter-ethnic tension different from the general case is that in some measure these groups can look outside their immediate communities (for comfort, comparison and identification) to co-ethnic communities elsewhere and to the possibility of returning to a real or imagined homeland. (Cohen 167)

The Nepali community as described in the novel possesses this feature. So, it is a diaspora community.

Cohen also discusses the positive relation between the diaspora community and the hostland mainstream. Sometimes, “A bond of loyalty to the country of refuge or settlement competes with ethnic solidarity.” (167). Gumane’s preference to stay in Kakatibabu’s home instead of in Mahajan’s house is indicative of this type of connection. Gumane’s father has also consented it to Kakatibabu, not to the Mahajan. Kakatibabu also thinks that the people of Nepali community have settled in Assam as industrious people so that they have the equal rights to use the land like the Assamese people (73). He believes that *“nepaalee veera pani chha. Pariaaundaa oo aatmasammaan bechera pachhi hatdaina; Nepalis are brave, too. When needed, they do not return back selling their self-respect”* (161). Such a belief from the leader of the mainstream is an asset of the diasporans.

Kakatibabu and Kesar Bahadur Khulal are good friends. They exchange gifts in their festivals. Nepalis of all levels and classes are close to Kakati. He encourages the Nepali parents to send their children to school. He loves Gumane and treats him like his own son. For him, humanity wins all racial and cultural differences. Manbir reveals his mind to Kakati: *“ke garnu, maanchhelaee maanchhe chaahindo rahechha. Mero jata, tero jaata bhanne kehee pani rahenachha. Chheuchhaaukaa meraa jaatabhaai daai birsera mero aakhiree belaamaa maile tapaaeelaee samjhe; What to do? I came to know that man needs a man. Your caste and my caste are nothing. Forgetting the people of my own caste around I remember you at the end of my life”* (33). It shows

that the humanitarian relation transcends all divisions among the human beings even in a diaspora.

Finally, Kakatibabu leaves his property in Gumane's care. Gumane turns Kakati's house into a library and a centre for educating the elderly. This is a symbolic act in the novel. It connotes that the Nepali youths are so trustworthy to the wise Assamese people that the people in the hostland feel that these youths can promote the necessary consciousness in the society. This trust is the property the Nepali people have earned there.

Nepalis' Contribution to the Assamese Society

The modern society in Assam has been developed with the contribution of the Nepali migrants. They have contributed to the development of different sectors. The first of such contributions is the establishment of many settlements in the area. The regional political leaders praise the *Mahajan* for his contribution to the establishment of Mahakhutti village. Similarly, the high school at Mahakhutti has been built with the attempt of the Nepali people there. Most of the teachers and students are also from the Nepali community. But the medium of instruction is Assamese (44). The Nepalis are promoting and protecting the local language, too.

Many Nepali youths from the area enlist themselves in the Indian Gurkha Army and fight for the safety of the nation. Gumane is one of them. He protected India from Pakistan putting his life at stake. He proudly believes that he could save the nation: "*deshasewaa gareko bhanna paryo aba!*; Now, I should say I have served my nation!" (115). Other Nepalis also feel proud of such contributions from the youths. The headmaster praises Gumane's contribution:

Tai tan ta bhaagyamaanee po rachhas. Je bhae pani deshako nimti ladis. Juna deshako haawaapaanee, anna khaaera hurkyaun haamee, pariaaudaa tyasako sewaa garna paaunu thulo bhaagya ho; You are a fortunate guy. Whatever is the case, you could fight for the nation. It is an opportune moment to get the chance to serve the nation, when a need be, whose air, water, and food we have consumed to rear ourselves. (117)

This feeling among the Indian-Nepalis is a proof that they are ready to contribute to nation building whenever they get a chance for it. They are grateful for the protection they have got in that land.

Some aborigine people from Assam itself feel that the nation is not able to aptly recognize such contributions of the Nepali people. Malati represents such people from the hostland mainstream. She asks Gumane what he has got in return of his contribution to the land. She is unhappy with the behaviour the local Assamese people show to Gumane and other Nepalis: “*juna deshavaaseeko nimti timeele yuddhako daaumaa aaphno jeevanako chyaankhe thaapyau, timeelaaee ke die tinale?*”; What have they given to you for whom you put your life at stake?” (142). But, Gumane still believes: “*jasale dinchha tyasale paaunchha nai. Ani jasale lina maatra khojdacha, tyasale tirnaiparchha arkodina. Mero tyaagamaa deshale samrakshana paayo, tyo mero pani ta upalabdh ho*”; Those who contribute surely will get its return some day. And those who try to get the benefit only will have to pay finally. In my contribution the nation got protection; it is my achievement, too” (142). Such a belief in Nepalis shows their desire to contribute to the hostland.

Common Features of Assamese Nepalis

The novel also deals with some common features of the Assamese Nepali people. Discussing their common history Brusle reports that “their history is also one of displacement by natural events” (173). The novel describes how these people have been affected by the flood of Brahmaputra.

The narrator reports that the major problems of the Nepalis in Assam are related to grazing field, land ownership, eviction, natural disasters such as flood and the river sweeping past their settlement resulting into the problems of food and shelter, citizenship, voting right, unemployment of the educated youths, language and no provision of primary education in the mother tongue Nepali as well as the problems related to the preservation of language, culture and identity. As a result, they still feel themselves temporary settlers there despite their generations-long settlement in the area; “*sadhainko asurakshit, santraasa, aatankita ra sadhain aadhi hridayasita paailaa tekekaa, aadhi jeevan baanchekaa*”; Ever unsafe, suspicious, terrified and ever half-heartedly treading on the land, living a half-life” (166-67). Anastasia M. Turnbull finds that “The fear of eviction is very real for Indian Nepalis” (139). The eviction in the novel such as eviction caused by both the flood in the Brahmapura and the state-sponsored eviction represent such fear prevalent in the Nepali community.

The nature of the profession of graziers also create problem for them. The *Paltan Bazar* in Guwahati is named after the settlement of many Gurkha soldiers in the

area. But slowly the number of the Nepali settlers decreases there. It is because when the town is expanded, the Nepalis move into the forest in search of the grazing fields. They feel comfortable with the animal farms not with modern life styles resulting into their ever-transitory settlement wherever they reach. They are “*gaaee-bhainseeko puchchhara nimothne jaata*; the community that always holds the cattle’s tail” (77). Many of their problems are connected with this nature they have been exhibiting for long.

The next problem of the Nepali community in Assam as described in the novel is that of being backward and uneducated. The narrator reports that they have never understood the value of education and modernization: “*uneeharooko eka maatra uddheshya chha jeevikaa kamaaunu*; Their single goal is to earn for livelihood” (80). Such a short sightedness makes them believe: “*haameelaee maato kina chaahiyo yaha?*; Why do we need the land here?” (81). Because they think some day they have to return to Nepal: “*aakhiree eka dina aaphnai desha nagaee sukha chhaina*; Finally, one day, we have to go back to our own nation” (81). They do not think that India is their nation. Nepal is their homeland. Such a thinking and the consequent feeling determines their diasporicity in Assam.

But some youths such as Gumane and Tope Master have begun to organize the Nepalis and motivate them to fight for their rights and permanently stay there. So, they have started to take part in the local, regional and national level elections. The Gurkha League has conducted many meetings and campaigns for the organization of the Nepalis across India. But such activities are not getting enough promotion because of the lack of sufficient racial consciousness among the Nepalis. They are superstitious, too. More than the rights in the life, they want to secure their position in heaven and believe in the power of religion. The reference to the visit to *Parashuram Kunda* [Pond] for just taking a dip in it in the cold January morning and Pandit Gehanath’s belief on *Gayatri mantra* and its power to avert the flooding Brahmaputra are humourously satirical instances of such superstitions in the novel.

The new and poor migrants suffer from the rich Nepalis themselves. Gumane and Tope Master suffer when they try to make the community aware of the situation. Despite this reality, sometimes they also promote each other. They use the term “*aaphnai nepaalee bhaai*; own Nepali brother” (78) that encourages them to help each other in times of needs and crises. *Mahajan* has helped many of his friends and workers

when they are in need. He helps Gumane to complete the last rites of his father. So does he when his longtime friend Ghorsane Sainlo passes away.

The Nepalis in Assam have common cultural practices. Brusle finds that “Their culture is seen as something fixed, little influenced by surrounding communities. It is also essentialised. Their customs, thus, are seen to be much more conservative than the ones in Nepal.” (176). So, Brusle asserts: “Language and cultural affinities explain such diasporic moves” (181) and their links to Nepal “need not be advertised, but they are real” (184). It is one essential feature of diaspora: “a strong ethnic group consciousness over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history, the transmission of a common cultural and religious heritage and the belief in a common fate” (Cohen 17). This novel exhibits these aspects of the culture in the Nepali community in Assam.

The narrator mentions that most of the people in that area have been migrated from the east Nepal. So, they have been following the eastern hill Nepal based traditions, rituals, art and culture. With some mixture of Assamese words, their tone is of eastern hilly Nepali. Despite their adaptation of the Assamese atmosphere, they have continued pure Nepali tradition and culture. They worship the *maulo*, conduct *gotha dhupa*, worship the *budhi bajyoo*, the *jogis* blow the *pheri* in the nights, the wizards beat their drums and find the problems of the sick. They celebrate pure Nepali festivals such as the Dashain and the Tihar. They relish Nepali recipe that includes beaten rice, *philunge* (niger-seed) and mustard pickle, and round holed bread. In the marriage ceremony, they use *naumati baja* for music, prepare the *kasar*, recite poems and compete *khado* and the women folk at the bridegroom’s home play *ratyauli*. Women take fasting during the Teeja, the Tihar and sing the *sangini*. They worship the god Shiva in the form of Dangariya or *bhang*. This Shiva worship has been copied from the Assamese society. Women mostly follow Nepali dress pattern; but the males dress has been influenced by the local Assamese *gamcha* above the underwear. Nepali *topi* is sometimes replaced by Assamese *pheta* (49). Such a mostly continuity and some modifications are a common pattern of diasporic culture.

The Nepali language is their lingua franca despite the variety of ethnic languages being their mother tongues back in Nepal. Hutt highlights the reasons behind this practice: “The Nepali language is the basis of Nepali ethnic identity outside Nepal: it is the primary basis of self-identification with the diaspora community. This is why so

much of the argument about the status of Nepali in India . . . has focused on the status of their language” (116). The novelist himself, in the acknowledgement, accepts that the language used in the dialogue of the characters is not a standard Nepali, but the colloquial Nepali that is used among the Nepalis in Assam. Such a language is the mixture of Nepali and Assamese words with Assamese inflected pronunciation. To ease the difficulty for the readers the novelist has provided the standard written Nepali terms in the brackets after each such unusual word.

The last common feature of the Nepali community in Assam as presented in the novel is their causes of migration. Sewa discusses that “the 1900 kilometer long open border between India and Nepal, the British induction of the ‘Gurkhas’ into the army” and “the push factors of economic hardship and illiteracy of the large and economically vulnerable population of Nepal” are the major reasons of Nepali migration to India (188). All these reasons are presented through the fates of the characters in the novel. Finally, the novel hints at “the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in tolerant host countries” (Cohen 167) like India and especially Assam area.

Conclusion

Lil Bahadur Chhetri’s novel *Brahmaputraka Chheuchhau* [*Alongside the Brahmaputra*] has presented a clear picture of the Nepali Diaspora in Assam, north-east India. The setting of the grazing fields and farmlands occupied by the Nepali transnational migrants and their offspring helps in the development of the narration that symbolically tells the history of the Nepali settlement in the area. Most of the characters in the novel are the Nepali diasporans who struggle to adapt themselves in the area. Some local Assamese characters are used to show how the Nepalis there have to face and manage the conflict with the hostland mainstream. The different shades of the relation between the Nepali and Assamese characters unfold both the positive and negative aspects of a diasporic society. The novel focuses on the common features of the Nepali community in Assam including their problems and achievements, cultural practices, linguistic hybridity and causes of migration. With all these qualities, the novel has become model writing on the life of the Nepali Diaspora in India.

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