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## Chinese Diaspora in India: Continuity and Change

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### Abstract

*The Chinese diaspora , primarily in India for the last two centuries and just few thousands in numbers, is mainly concentrated in Kolkata followed by Mumbai with numbered presence in select towns over the country. The origins of the community are traced mainly to the colonial context of India-China relations since mid-19th century. The first arrivals were the merchants and skilled labour in then Calcutta, the capital of the Raj in 19th century and Chinatown was to become a distinct address for the community in India. The destiny of the Chinese community in India makes an interesting account of enterprise, struggle and perseverance. The 1962 India-China war was a disturbing experience for the community which came to be looked upon with suspicion and with a phase of instability and insecurity led to migration to other countries and a drop in their numbers in Kolkata and other places. The present generation of Chinese community having inherited and nurtured cultural traits from their migrant forefathers has become an inextricable part of Indian social fabric and is a unique representative of amalgamation of two ancient cultures having moved onto modern, developing, globalizing times.*

### Keywords

Chinese diaspora, Chinatown, Colonial, Migration, Enterprises, Tanneries.

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## **Chinese Diaspora in India: Continuity and Change**

India-China relations has had a civilizational context since ancient period with the flow of trade and Buddhism. The visits of Chinese travellers to India during different centuries forms an important idiom of the old cultural bonds. However after the 12<sup>th</sup> century the contacts between the two civilizations ceased to approximate the broad relationship of the earlier centuries. In the subsequent centuries even these residual contacts were to be lost as India and Asia fell under the control of Western imperialism. Since the British conquest of India ties between the two peoples assumed a colonial context after a hiatus of centuries. The urge for better opportunities in British India brought forth the first phase of migration of Chinese to India in the late eighteenth century and the process continued in the nineteenth century. With the British foothold into China in mid-nineteenth century after the Opium Wars, more Chinese moved to India. The early twentieth century social unrest and later Japanese invasion of China brought Chinese refugees to Kolkata and the post-1945 civil war phase in China triggered the final phase of Chinese immigration to India. However the destiny of Chinese community in India post-1947 got intertwined with the ups and downs in India-China relations. Although these two centuries the struggle and industry of this diaspora in the country of their adoption and its socio-culturo-economic existence witnessed a continuity as well as subtle change through their generations in the host country.

This paper attempts to take insights into the immigrant Chinese diaspora in India and its coming to terms with the various phases of their destiny during the British rule and since the Indian independence. The focus of the Study is on the Indian Chinese community in Kolkata as 90 percent of the community in India is based in Kolkata. It reexamines few field studies, newspaper writings, documentaries and blogs of Indian Chinese community as well as scant available secondary sources on the theme.

The Chinese in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries perceived India as a 'land of opportunities' regarded as a safe, peaceful and plentiful

place as compared to the chaotic situation in China during this time.<sup>1</sup> Calcutta(sic) ,the then capital of British in India was the favoured destination. The intention of the migrants was to earn enough money and return to China. Amicable relationship with the British ensured that the initial Chinese immigrants were able to make a living for themselves in India. In fact, these Chinese seemed to have looked up to British and not to local Indians as their main benefactors. The British distrust of locals probably made the employment of Chinese easier who, in their opinion ,were hard-working and willing to please.<sup>2</sup> The first Chinese settler in British India as per records was a Chinese trader Yang Dazhao popularly known as Atchew(in English) or A.Zhao (in Chinese) from the Chinese province of Guangdong (pronounced Kwangtung) who ventured in Bengal .British records indicate that Atchew was granted 650 bighas<sup>3</sup> of land at an annual rent of 45 rupees by Warren Hastings ,the Governor General in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup>

Atchew established sugar mill on the land and brought Chinese labour to work with him. The Chinese residents of Atchew's colony not only grew sugarcane but also manufactured sugar and liquor as evident from an advertisement in Calcutta Gazette of 15<sup>th</sup> November 1804.<sup>5</sup> The original settlement still has traces of its existence and is called Achipur after its Chinese founder. Every year during the initial weeks after the onset of Chinese New year, Chinese from Kolkata throng to this site and make offerings at a Chinese temple there. Atchew is a symbol of the collective memory of the Indian Chinese community as the one who first established a settlement for developing his business in India.<sup>6</sup>

Kolkata eventually became the hub of Chinese settlement in India. New immigrants from China always settled in Kolkata first and relatively few Chinese immigrants lived in other Indian cities, most of them originally from the Kolkata Chinese community. The first wave of Chinese immigrants came to Kolkata in the nineteenth century and consisted of traders and skilled workers. Commercial relations between Kolkata and Guangzhou (Canton) province in south China had grown rapidly after the opium was introduced by the British as one of the main Indian exports to China.<sup>7</sup> A sizeable number among immigrants was those of Chinese carpenters from Guangzhou who did contract jobs for the British. Until the India-China conflict of 1962 these Cantonese carpenters had significant carpentry contract at the Hooghly dock.<sup>8</sup> They were also the prominent group in numbers and

influence in the Chinese community in India. While most of the carpenters were Cantonese, another Chinese sub-group was that of Hakka Chinese who at the time were largely shoemakers. They lived in the Burra Bazaar, Bentick Street and Bowbazar areas of Kolkata city, which is known as the old Chinatown of Kolkata.<sup>9</sup> Since shoemaking and dealing with leather were professions shunned by caste Hindus, the Chinese immigrants were able to create a niche for themselves. With British expansion in north-eastern India, many Chinese from Kolkata moved to northeast and got employment in tea gardens in Assam and Darjeeling.<sup>10</sup> These Chinese socialised among themselves and in course of time Chinese associations, schools, clubs, burial grounds and other social organisations came up in northeastern India.

A third subgroup of Chinese immigrants comprised the 'teeth setters' from Hubei (pronounced Hupei) province of China. These teethsetters were known in China to travel from village to village fixing and cleaning teeth. Some of them sailed out of China in the 1920s and 1930s and made it to Kolkata. These Hubeinese teethsetters continued this practice of wandering after they arrived in India. This subgroup of Chinese immigrants is thus found residing in remote and far-flung places in India.<sup>11</sup>

The population of Chinese immigrants in Kolkata till the first three quarters of nineteenth century was less than a thousand. The Calcutta School Society in 1819 enumerated the population of Chinese in Kolkata as 414.<sup>12</sup> A 1858 article in *Calcutta Review* estimated the Chinese population to be around 500. The same article referred to the lack of Chinese women.<sup>13</sup> Being a tiny community around this time, the Chinese intermarried among the different subgroups, mainly Cantonese and Hakka and also with others living in the neighbourhood of Chinatown, mainly 'Hindustanis' (local populace) and also 'Eurasians'.<sup>14</sup> The worsening of domestic situation in China after the defeat of the Taiping Rebellion by the Qing government after 1865 led many of its participants to flee abroad through Hongkong and Macao. They were among the more than 300 people hired by the British to come to India as railroad construction workers.<sup>15</sup> The success of Chinese business in India and the political upheaval in China provided a big push for more Chinese immigrants leaving for Kolkata. The turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a period of turmoil in China. The exodus marked apart from others, no less than the top revolutionary leader of China, Kang Youwei escaping to India to seek

refuge from Qing regime. Kang was in India from 1901 to 1903 moving to various places and finally stayed at Darjeeling.<sup>16</sup>

The Chinese community by the turn of 20<sup>th</sup> century did not remain untouched by the progress of nascent national movement in India. The Swadeshi Movement in 1905 after the partition of Bengal witnessed even the participation of Chinese traders in Kolkata in boycott meetings.<sup>17</sup> The settling down of migrant population in early decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century also marked a diversification in settlements and Chinese subgroups. The new Chinatown which in presentday Kolkata refers to Tangra in eastern Kolkata began to take shape around 1910 when some Chinese shoemakers decided to process leather for their business and moved to the area which is also known as Dhapa. When compared to the initial settlement of Territti Bazaar Chinatown, popularly known as 'Cheenapara', in Central Kolkata, the evolution of Tangra neighbourhood is a reflection of fortunes of Chinese community in Kolkata. While Territti Bazaar was mainly inhabited by the Cantonese with few pockets of Hakka population, Tangra as new Chinatown emerged as a predominantly Hakka neighbourhood.<sup>18</sup> The early years in Tangra were hard for the Hakka Chinese and the poverty of the neighbourhood could be markedly contrasted to the prosperous settlement of Territti Bazaar.

The second phase of Chinese immigration to India was during the first three decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century consequent to collapse of imperial dynasty in China and years of civil war worsened by Japanese invasion in the 1930s and 1940s. The population of Chinese in India increased steadily from 8300 in 1931 to 14,000 in 1946.<sup>19</sup> This phase of migration was markedly different from the first phase of migration. Firstly, from this period there was a rise in the number of families with women and children migrating to India. The second factor was that the immigrant population now consisted of mostly unskilled workers. The new immigrants faced numerous hardships on reaching Kolkata. They came across a community ill suited for family members.<sup>20</sup> Since the initial groups of Chinese immigrants comprised mainly of male workers, the existing dormitories and staying places were only for single men. Further there were limited economic opportunities for women. The worsened conditions in China left little choice for the migrating families but to eke out an existence for survival in Kolkata.

The fundamental difference between the migration patterns during this period and the preceding century was that earlier few

Chinese came with the intention of settling in India. Even the Cantonese who enjoyed an amicable relationship with the British and the Hakka Chinese who established profitable businesses, mainly wanted to make money and then go back to China.<sup>21</sup> Even until the late 1930s Kolkata Chinese perceived India as their temporary residence and most planned to return to China after the War would come to an end.<sup>22</sup> This relationship with the host country in Kuhn's study on overseas Chinese has been referred as one of 'sojourning' i.e. living temporarily away from home with the intention of returning sooner or later back home. This sojourning mentality drove Chinese in India to work extremely hard for a period of time and then go back to China with their families for a break.<sup>23</sup> This perception could be discerned at the Chinese-medium schools established in Kolkata and other Indian cities, where the courses were all about China and the stated goal of education was to one day return to China and contribute to the construction of the "motherland".<sup>24</sup>

The advance of Indian national movement in the 1930s brought about a forging of links with the nationalists in China which was threatened by Japanese invasion. This contact between the two national movements sidestepped the colonial context of India-China relations during the last hundred years and contributed to a growing interest in the other. A significant development in the year 1936 was the setting up of Cheena Bhavan in Shantiniketan by Rabindranath Tagore through a scholar from China Prof. Tan Yunshan for encouraging Chinese studies.<sup>25</sup> The legacy of Prof. Tan Yun-shan has been illustriously carried by his son Prof. Tan Chung.<sup>26</sup> In the year 1938 a Chinese educationist Tao Xingzhi visited India and had interaction with Gandhi.<sup>27</sup> In 1941 the Chinese leader Marshal Chiang Kai-shek visited India during the ongoing Second world War for enlisting Indian support in the Allied war effort.<sup>28</sup> These developments must surely have been a succour to the Chinese Indian community who still maintained contacts with their homeland.

The Second World War years witnessed a rise in the fortunes of the Chinese community in the new Chinatown in Kolkata. The increase in the demand of leather during the war gave a boost to tannery business which more and more Hakka Chinese joined and permanent structures were put up in Tangra. Hakkas being a closely-knit community, Tangra Chinatown developed almost completely secluded from outside influence. The role of community organisations was instrumental in the overall physical development

of the area. The Pei May School came up in Chinatown as a community initiative around this time. While the old Chinatown in Territti Bazaar area was cosmopolitan the Tangra area inhabited mainly by the Chinese was insular in nature.<sup>29</sup>

The end of Second World War in 1945 however came as an alarming period for the Chinese community in India as the conditions in their homeland worsened. The outbreak of full scale Civil War between the Communists and Guomindang (Kuomintang) in 1946 ended with the establishment of Communist regime in China in 1948. With an uncertain future back home many Chinese began having second thoughts about leaving India. It was around this time that permanent settlements of Chinese began emerging in Kolkata. Some of those who had families in China tried to bring them to India while others ended up marrying local Nepali, Assamese or tribal women 'from the hills' in view of a dearth of females in the community.<sup>30</sup> The multicultural and multiethnic society of Kolkata had been conducive to the Chinese maintaining their exclusivity and pursuing their own way of life without much interference from the British government. After the Indian independence in 1947, this state of affairs continued and the Chinese-medium schools were allowed to function even though they did not follow any of the existing Indian systems.<sup>31</sup>

The issue of ethnic and cultural identity among 'diasporic' and immigrant communities has been discussed by scholars from various disciplinary perspectives in recent years. The self-perception of Chinese community in India has been discussed through some recent studies. The first-generation Chinese immigrants in India seemed to be relatively clear about their Chineseness.<sup>32</sup> It is argued that the Chinese in India are not a unique community in regard to their notion of Chinese identity. There was a perceptible distinction between those who settled in Kolkata and those who lived in other parts of India. The Chinese in Kolkata, especially those living in Tangra area, rarely indicate processes of assimilation and acculturation. On the other hand, those who live in other areas of Kolkata and India, have had more intimate interactions with the local communities.<sup>33</sup> The Hakka community of Tangra who created a profitable niche for themselves in Kolkata's leather industry distinguished between themselves and others, not only Indian groups but also the Cantonese Chinese and Hubeinese Chinese. This identification of themselves as 'guest people' left little scope for assimilation.<sup>34</sup> The non-Hakka Chinese and even Hakkas who ventured out from

Kolkata to other parts of the country were, however, more adaptable and identified themselves with the areas chosen by them as their new settlement. This author has witnessed the popular shoe business of a Chinese entrepreneur who settled in Dehradun and was known to have set up shops in Ludhiana, Lucknow and Kanpur as well, as Lu Hongkong & Company.<sup>35</sup> Other mentionworthy examples are those of the D. Minsen and Co. and the John Brothers Shoestores in Connaught Place in Delhi. Both enterprises were set up in the year 1938 in Delhi by Chinese immigrants in 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>36</sup>

The nationality status of the immigrants in official records was however ambiguous. Many Chinese immigrants came and lived in India without any form of identification documents. Even those born in India did not seem to have a clear idea regarding their citizenship or nationality. Some Chinese applied for passports from the embassy and Consulates of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in India that had opened after the establishment of diplomatic relations between the PRC and India in 1950. Others took either Taiwanese citizenship or remained people with 'no nationality'.<sup>37</sup> As the events unfolded in the late 1950s, with the rapid deterioration of relations between India and China this ambiguity in the official status of the Chinese immigrants in India and their attempts to preserve their "Chinese" identity was to prove disastrous for the community during the high point of mistrust and drift towards the war by 1962.

The year 1962 witnessed a climacteric in the fortunes of Chinese Indian community. The India-China border war threw the community in India into a predicament where the country of their adoption and the country of their origin were at war with each other. The national reprehension towards China came to perceive the community as enemy and they came to be seen with suspicion and hostility. There was crackdown on the members of the community and hundreds of them were sent in detention to Deoli, a former POW (Prisoners of War) camp in the desert area in Rajasthan. A large number were deported to China as well. Further, restrictions were placed on the movement of people of Chinese descent. The years following the war saw an exodus of the community and a significant number left for Canada, USA and other countries. The population of the community in Kolkata came down to less than ten thousand. The issue of interned Chinese figured in the correspondence between the Indian and Chinese governments wherein these people were referred as 'Chinese nationals'.<sup>38</sup> The predicament of an ordinary Chinese in



India around this time is reflected in a poignant story titled 'Wang Choo' by Hindi writer Bhishma Sahni which is woven around a Chinese character Wang Choo who came to India during the British rule in the early 40s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The innocuous Wang however is caught in the vortex of ruptured India-China relations in the 1960s.<sup>39</sup> The account is a reflection of the trauma undergone by the tiny community posing questions about their identity .

The destiny of the Chinese community in India makes an interesting account -one of enterprise, struggle and perseverance. As discussed in foregoing pages, three sub-ethnic Chinese groups exist in India and each of them is linked to a distinct Chinese dialect and particular occupational specialities.<sup>40</sup> The existence of this diaspora for more than two centuries is a unique history of continuum and change. The Hakka Chinese who began carving out their livelihood in India in shoemaking in course of time took to tannery enterprise in a major way and established themselves as major stakeholders in leather enterprise in Kolkata. This subgroup among Chinese Indians has also been the most assiduous preserver of Chinese culture and traditions in India. A field Study of Hakka Chinese in 1980s brings about interesting findings.<sup>41</sup> The post-1962 years threw the challenge of survival for those Chinatown people who decided to stay in India and to move on in their lives. The Sino-Indian conflict blocked the channels between the Indian Chinese and their native places in China. The families in Chinatown now changed their economic strategies to industrial entrepreneurship. Jennifer Liang's interview of Indian Chinese has brought out the fact that since the families could no longer remit money to China, they were able to accumulate enough capital through their own savings. This led to investment in the tannery business for meeting the increasing demand for leather in the market.<sup>42</sup> By the year 1980 there were around 300 tannery enterprises in Kolkata owned and ran by Hakka Chinese. Apart from their business in tannery, Hakka Chinese owned and operated shoe shops (150 in 1980), hairdressing salons and restaurants.<sup>43</sup>

The tanning business of Tangra, however, suffered a rapid decline in the 1990s because of both internal and external reasons. The tanneries failed to innovate and diversify given the changes in local and global demands for leather. The Municipal authorities placed stringent environmental requirements and many of the tanneries were forced to move to new locations. The Supreme court directives on closure of polluting tanneries also was a move in this

direction.<sup>44</sup> The assured market in the Soviet Union since long was lost with the collapse of the Soviet Union. The business also suffered because of obsolete machinery. This setback to a booming business led some Tangra Hakka Chinese to sell their business and leave India.<sup>45</sup> However many tannery owners switched to the restaurant business and the Chinatown which was earlier segregated due to its association with leather making, is now famous for its popular Chinese restaurants frequented by middle-class Indians. Restaurateurs in Tangra have created a niche for themselves since the 1990s and have displayed entrepreneurial skills in selling Indian-Chinese food -the Chinese food suiting Indian tastes.<sup>46</sup>

The Hubeinese dentists who earned their living wandering to different cities of India also found their predicament changed during the India-China tensions of 1962. Many of them settled down in Kolkata when restrictions were placed during the War on the movement of people of Chinese descent. Number of them became permanent residents of the city. This not only enabled the teethsetters to improve their skills but also resulted in a rise in their fortunes. The families now led lives which was more comfortable since it entailed less travel unlike the case in earlier decades.<sup>47</sup> Like Hakka Chinese subgroup, the Hubeinese dentists are a closely-knit community and rarely marry outside their community. The community helps and supports each other and make it a point to attend ceremonies and functions organised by the community. As of now less than fifty families of Hubeinese survive in Kolkata. The most well-known descendant of the Hubeinese Chinese Indian community is perhaps Meiyang Chang, the Chinese Indian contestant from Dhanbad in the music Programme Indian Idol on Sony TV.<sup>48</sup>

The retaining of Chinese culture within the decades of their existence in the Hindu surroundings of Kolkata has had peculiar shades in the lives of the Indian Chinese community. As pointed out the Hakka Chinese subgroup which practically dominates the community has been the most strident in this opted behaviour to the extent of secluding itself from any outside influence. Until the early 1960s the Chinese immigrants successfully preserved their "Chinese" identity through endogamy, especially within the same dialect group most practised by Hakka subgroup, cultural practices, distinctive educational system and confined dwelling neighbourhood.<sup>49</sup> The Hakkas built a walled community for themselves and often their residences were right above or next to

their tanneries. Tall walls separated the tannery-cum-residences of the Hakka Chinese from other ethnic groups in the neighbourhood. The fact that their workplaces were within the same area made it unwarranted for them to travel to other parts of the city or interact with other ethnic groups.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore the subgroup has always attempted to distinguish itself from other Chinese subgroups in India - the Cantonese and the Hubeinese, using the term 'lao' translatable as 'fellow'-a word connoting a vulgar person, a hillbilly or hick.<sup>51</sup> From their perspective, the Cantonese do not work as hard, are not as frugal, and either more Indianised or more Westernised than the Hakka. In all such references, the Hakkas are perceived as more loyal carriers of Chinese traditions than the other Chinese subgroups.<sup>52</sup>

While diligently preserving the Chinese traditions the Chinese diaspora in Kolkata have incorporated multiple religious beliefs in their day to day lives. Kali worship is one of such practice. The Chinese community in Kolkata probably began worshipping Kali through chance encounters and matters related to "miracles" rather than an adoption of or being influenced by Hindu belief system.<sup>53</sup> There are two Chinese Kali temples in Kolkata - one located in Cheenapara or the old Chinatown, and the other in Tangra, the newer Chinatown. The temple in old Chinatown is known by the name of Cheena Kali and the area having for long been a melting point for many communities, the long-shared space of Chinese with dosads (pig slaughterers), a Dalit community with whom the Chinese had links through shared residential and business spaces, could have influenced the Chinese beliefs. The ties continue in the present through the participation of dosads in Chinese New Year celebrations.<sup>54</sup> The other Chinese Kali temple exists in Tangra and was got built in early 1970s by Li Quansheng, a Burmese brought up by a Hakka family.<sup>55</sup> There are many accounts regarding the origin of this Kali temple. One of the popular account says that the site of the temple had couple of vermilion-smeared black stones worshipped by local residents of the area and the Chinese followed suit.<sup>56</sup> A Chinese scholar's version is that the Chinese probably started worshipping Kali as a fertility goddess, because there was none in their pantheon. As the goddess is closely linked to fertility rituals and many women in Tangra pray to Kali for a child and so did the Chinese Indians.<sup>57</sup> The temple continues to play an important role in the new Chinatown as the Chinese New Year parade is usually

preceded by a puja at the temple. At least 2000 members of the community gather here on Diwali night to witness the Kali Puja, participate in Pushpanjali and partake of the Prasad. While the mantras (hymns) and the way the puja(worship) is conducted is completely Hindu, some typical Chinese traditions such as lighting of tall candles, Chinese incense sticks, burning of handmade paper to ward off evil spirits, make the aroma at the temple conspicuous from what one gets at other temples or pandals.<sup>58</sup> This is an interesting glimpse of the adoption from the host country while steadfastly keeping to the Chinese tradition.

The post-1962 period has brought with it significant economic and social change in what was once a closed community. The years threw the extreme challenge to their existence whereby their population which had reached a high point of above 20,000 started declining rapidly due to the exodus to the other countries. Those who decided to stay were ones who gradually came to terms with the new situation. The younger generation born after 1962 has decided to take up vocations other than the ones in which the community had prospered through the earlier decades. Thus even after the shifting and closure of flourishing tanneries subsequent to court orders in last two decades there has been initiating of new enterprises by younger generation as restaurateurs, sauce-makers and salon business-owners. The Eve's Beauty Parlour on Lindsay Street, the first saloon in Kolkata, was established by the Chinese Indians. Over the years beauty parlours much like the Indian Chinese restaurants, have become synonymous with the Chinese community.<sup>59</sup> It is a common trend within the Chinese community in Kolkata and in other parts of India to find families where man runs a restaurant and the wife works in a beauty parlour.<sup>60</sup>

The generation which witnessed the 1962 experiences however still carries a feeling of grudge and a certain despondence. This is borne out of the day to day experiences of the members of community. Interestingly, out of the 4000 some present population of Indian Chinese community in Kolkata, some 200 were born before 1947 when India became independent and 1950 when the country became a republic. These Chinese were not welcome in China and were a stateless entity in India. They had a registration certificate which allowed them to stay in India but had to be renewed every year. Their grudge is that millions of Bengalis from erstwhile East Pakistan before 1971 arrived in India in the late 1940s and were

granted registration certificates which then enabled them to become Indian citizens even though they were not even born in India unlike the Chinese in Kolkata.<sup>61</sup> Calling themselves Deoliwallahs after the Deoli internment camp some 60 of these men and women have heart-rending stories to tell about this tumultuous phase of their existence in India. An account by Yin Marsh, a journalist reminiscing as a thirteen year old living in Darjeeling when she and members of her family were arrested, kept in the local jail and sent to Deoli camp has appeared with the title 'Doing Time with Nehru'.<sup>62</sup> So huge was the anti-Chinese sentiment in India that a whole lot of innocuous Indian Chinese mostly in the Dooars (North Bengal) and Assam were in for shock. Some had married local women and spoke only local languages. They were more Indian than Chinese in businesses and lived firmly entrenched in Kolkata. A 2015 documentary by Indian photojournalist Rafeeq Ellias titled 'Beyond Barbed Wires: A Distant Dawn' highlighted the plight of the internees through interviews.<sup>63</sup> An Assamese bestseller titled *Makam* by Rita Chowdhury in 2009 (English version published in 2018 as *Chinatown days*) was based on the Indian Chinese community in Tinsukia and their struggle.<sup>64</sup>

An award winning documentary by Rafeeq Ellias in 2005 'The Legend of Fat Mama' centred around the travails of the community in Kolkata post 1962.<sup>65</sup> It struck a nostalgic note in search of a woman who was known for the most delicious noodles in Chinatown. The post-1962 years witnessed the closure of many Chinese run schools and newspapers with the exodus of the community. There was a Chinese newspaper *Seong Pow* (The Overseas Chinese Commerce of India) which appeared every morning from Chinatown. The only newspaper however closed down during lockdown and later death of its editor in July 2020.<sup>66</sup> A blog of The Indian Chinese Association for Culture, Welfare and Development is in update since 2007 to 2016 and a Facebook page with updates till November 2023. The association was headed by Paul Chung, a retired teacher of Don Bosco School. The blog and Facebook page carries updates for the Indian Chinese community regarding Chinese culture, festivals, musings, literary landscape, the employment opportunities abroad and achievements of Chinese community globally. It takes pride in mentioning the feats of Indian Chinese and in one of the update lists IIT Kharagpur alumnus Peter Chan, a prominent Bonsai expert who was given away the IIT Kharagpur alumni award in 2015.<sup>67</sup> Another blog by Indian Chinese Community in Kolkata has updates till 2015

and its Facebook page with updates till June 2023.<sup>68</sup> By 2015 the community began renovating the Pei May School complex which had remained abandoned for long. The school once used to be the only Chinese medium school in the city set up to teach kids of migrated Chinese community. However Chinese kids began going to English-medium schools and Pei May school lost its relevance over time. Led by Liu Kuo chow the Chinese Welfare Association brought together Chinese residents to form the cooperative that would run the Trust governing the school.<sup>69</sup>

The blogs and Facebook pages by the young Indian Chinese speak of the vibrant cultural existence in the form of participative festivities in the traditional Chinese festivals such as Spring festival, Chinese New Year Festival and the like. They also point out a keenness for preserving the rich cultural heritage from the country of their origin. Very few of the younger generation may have visited the land of their forefathers. At the same time the young Indian Chinese born in India are increasingly trying to define their Chineseness in the context of their immediate surroundings. Singers Thomas Chen and Meiyang Chang are reflective of this vibrant younger generation.

The two centuries of the existence of Chinese diaspora in India mark a story of enterprise, struggle, hopes and despair as well. It has reflections of interface between two peoples from the oldest civilizations with ancient cultural bonds. The modern relationship of the two peoples evolved in the colonial context under the British rule where the Chinese immigrants came to India in search of opportunities in British India. The migration was also due to the worsening conditions at home and the hopes of making livelihood in the host country. Eventually Kolkata became the city of two Chinatowns the evolution of which has been a saga of the perseverance and resilience of the diaspora. With the Indian independence the fortunes of the Indian Chinese community got linked with the relationship of the two countries. The community found itself caught in the deteriorating relationship of the two countries and was placed in a terrible predicament in 1962 when the country of their origin and the country of their adoption were at war. The post-1962 years which saw exodus on a large number bringing down the population of community drastically have also witnessed the most trying phase in the history of its existence in India.

The significant socio-economic changes during these years in the ways of the Indian Chinese diaspora is a testimony of the struggle beyond survival and the adaptation for meeting the new challenges. The contribution of this tiny community to the changing food habits and style of Indians is marvellous. The Chinese food has carved out niche for itself across the length and breadth of the country. The contribution of Chinese community in leather business in Kolkata which at one point of time had third largest share in tannery enterprises in the country has been significant. The traditional handmade shoes and teeth-setters may have given way to new enterprises post- globalization but the entrepreneurial credibility and the industriousness of the members of the community has stood the test of time. Having inherited and nurtured cultural traits from their migrant forefathers the community has become an inextricable part of the Indian social fabric. It is a unique representative of amalgamation of two ancient cultures having moved onto modern, developing, globalizing times and looking forward to integrating with the mainstream while at the same time preserving their distinct cultural identities.

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