CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Problem

The present doctoral thesis is an empirical study of the Nepali-community in a habitat called Kanglatongbi, which is located in the rural valley of Manipur within Imphal West District at a distance of about twenty-three kilometers to the North of Imphal, the capital of Manipur, on certain aspects of Cultural Adaptation.

The Nepalis form a discrete population having religious identity, language, customs and other aspects of culture. They have their geo-political antecedents in Nepal. Much works have been done on the Nepalis, about their socio-cultural traditions in the original habitats and environments. But anthropological study on the life, culture and the nature of adaptation of the immigrant Nepali population in the new habitats, is rather scanty. It may be asserted that a micro-study of the nature of adaptation or cultural adjustment of a Nepali community in migrant setting will provide a new dimension of understanding of the migrant population elsewhere. The present thesis is based on
the study of Nepali community which has migrated and settled in a village having a different ecology and environment from their original ones. The selection of the people in a single village as a focus of study is based on the contention that it is more satisfying to observe small bits of reality under powerful magnification than to take in great expanses of space in sweeping surveys. Such a micro-geographical limitation will certainly allow in having a close familiarity with the day-to-day activities of the lives of the people, which is essential for an appraisal of cultural adaptation study.

The present study aims to analyse the interaction between the Nepalis and their physical, biotic and cultural environment. The relationship of man with his habitat is an important aspect of study within the general perspective of socio cultural anthropology. Man's unique ability to exist in a variety of ecosystems as well as to adapt to varied external conditions is clearly demarcated by the migrant population who settled down in a new area away from the original ancestral environment.

Since the Nepalis of Kanglatongbi find themselves in a new environment, they have to adapt accordingly in terms of socio-cultural and occupational realms. In a general way, it might be said that the Nepali community as a whole in the State, have gone through many changes in terms of the realms stated above over the last few decades. This, however, does not mean that the Nepali community of Manipur as a whole reflects the same degree of persistence in respect of traditional way of life or in terms of the degree of change. For instance, those Nepalis, who have settled in the hilly region of Manipur might display a different adaptational pattern from those who have settled down in the valley. The degree of change that is seen in the population inhabiting the hilly region and those inhabiting the valley region may not be the same. Obviously, ecological factors are not the same in the two habitats. It is likely that the Nepalis inhabiting
the hills, at least, retain their traditional socio-cultural ways and occupational pattern.

It may be asserted that the Nepali population in the valley is in the midway between the two extremes, i.e., they have retained a few traditional elements thereby giving their distinctive identity and also, they have incorporated certain new features from the new environmental settings.

The present study aims at looking into the extent to which the statement made above is true. Another extreme example could be of those migrants who are living in urban area of the valley of Manipur. The nature of economic adjustment would be different in the case of migrants who are living in the urban area, especially, the Imphal area.

As regards the relevancy of migration and adaptation study model, there is scope. Even the similar studies may be carried out at macro level. Besides, the applicability of cultural adaptive studies may be taken in manifolds such as:

(i) In the development of processual archeology, cultural evolution may be understood through environmental adaptation by the archeologists;

(ii) Many sociologists, zoologists and geographers, etc., have entered into the common intellectual ground of cultural adaptation perspectives of cultural ecological concept from the sidelines of their specialized subjects. Generalized knowledge of adaptive studies may be applied in planned socio-economic integrated developmental programmes in local or regional levels, etc.

In an identical situation of a community to the Nepali Community in an ecologically changed situation, Reddy and Reddy (1998:1) asserted that:
alternations in geographical environment or migration into a new environment let to change in the socio-cultural systems of a community. When any population migrates from one environment to another, it faces the problem of adjustment and adaptation to the new environment. In its adjustment to new environment it undergoes changes in its cultural and social conditions.

Similar processes of change in the environment-culture interactions may also be occurred in the Nepali community of the village under study.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The important objectives of the study may be highlighted as follows:

1. To examine the nature, factors, and the process of immigration of Nepalis to the territory of Indian Union including Manipur;

2. To examine the existing mode and nature of the processes of cultural adaptation within the theoretical framework of cultural ecology among a migrant Nepali population in the valley of Manipur;

3. To examine the nature of cultural integration of the Nepali community with the local communities; and

4. To outline the emerging problems of the Nepalis in terms of cultural adaptation.

1.3 The Theoretical Underpinnings

It is pertinent to discuss the theoretical underpinnings of cultural ecology as the framework within ecological anthropology. Hardesty (1977:1) notes that "the science of anthropology has traditionally been a holistic discipline. Anthropologists have advocated a broad, comparative study of human behavior in search for general laws and principles, and little about man has been left out."
Contextually, anthropologists have explored the ways in which environment has been used in the anthropological explanation, an area of endeavor referred to as ecological anthropology. Of the several roots of ecological anthropology such as environmental determinism, environmental possibilism, population ecology, systems ecology, ethnoecology, etc., ‘cultural ecology’ is one.

The central interest of cultural ecology, the term initially coined by Julian Steward in 1937, is to appraise the mutual relations of people and the environment that they occupy and use. He defined it as the study of the process by which a society adapts to its environment. Its principal problem is to determine whether these adaptations institute internal social transformation or evolutionary change. It, however, analyses these adaptations in conjunctions with other processes of change. Its method requires examination of the interactions of societies with one another and with the biophysical environment.

above focused their analyses in terms of cultural adaptations of human to their immediate environments. The most important preoccupation in cultural ecological researches has been with the study of 'cultural adaptation'.

Haeckel coined our modern understanding of ecology in 1870, defining it as 'the study of the economy, of the household, of animal organisms'. This includes 'the relationships of animals with the inorganic and organic environments, above all the beneficial and mimical relations Darwin referred to as the conditions for the struggle of existence' (Netting, 1977:1). Therefore, an ecosystem consists of organisms acting in a bounded environment. Ecological anthropology as an important field is particularly relevant to contemporary concerns of the general environment. Anthropological knowledge has the potential to inform and instruct humans as to how to construct sustainable ways of life. Anthropology, especially when it has an environmental focus, also demonstrates the importance of preserving cultural diversity. Biological diversity is necessary for the adaptation and survival of all species; cultural diversity may serve a similar role for the human species because it is clearly one of our most important mechanisms of adaptation.

In a general sense, ecological anthropology attempts to provide a materialist explanation of human society and culture as products of adaptation to given environmental conditions (Seymour-Smith, 1986:62). Ecological anthropology focuses upon the complex relations between people and their environment. Human populations have ongoing contact with and impact upon the land, climate, plant and animal species in their vicinities and these elements of their environment have reciprocal impacts on humans (Salzman, and Attwood, 1996:169). Ecological anthropology investigates the ways that a population shapes its environment and the subsequent manners in which these relations form the population's social, economic, and political life, (ibid). In The Origin of Species (1859), Charles Darwin presents a synthetic theory of evolution based on
the idea of descent with modification. In each generation, more individuals are produced than can survive and competition between individuals arises. Individuals with favorable characteristics or variations survive to reproduce. The environmental context determines whether a trait is beneficial. Thomas R. Malthus has an obvious influence on Darwin's formulations. Malthus pioneered demographic studies, arguing that human populations naturally tend to outstrip their food supply (Seymour-Smith 1986:87). This circumstance leads to disease and hunger, which eventually put a limit on the growth of the population (ibid).

As a reaction to Darwin's theory, some anthropologists eventually turned to environmental determinism as a mechanism for explanation. The earliest attempts at environmental determinism mapped cultural features of human populations according to environmental information (for example, correlations were drawn between natural features and human technologies) (Milton, 1997). The detailed ethnographic accounts of Boas, Malinowski, and others led to the realization that environmental determinism could not sufficiently account for observed realities, and a weaker form of determinism began to emerge (Milton, 1997). At this time, Julian Steward, who looked for the adaptive responses to similar environments that gave rise to cross-cultural similarities (Netting, 1996:267), coined the term 'cultural ecology'. Steward's theory centered around a culture core, which he defined as 'the constellation of features which are most closely related to subsistence activities and economic arrangements' (Steward, 1955:37).

In 1950s dissatisfaction with vague and rigid theories of cultural change stimulated the adoption of an ecological perspective. This new perspective considers the role of the physical environment in cultural change in a more sophisticated manner than environmental determinism. Ecological anthropology is also a reaction to idealism, which is the idea that all objects in nature and experience are representations of the mind. Ecological anthropology inherently opposes the notion that ideas drive all human activities and existence. This
particular field illustrates a turn toward the study of the material conditions of the environment, which have the potential to affect ideas. Furthermore, Steward was disillusioned with historical particularism and culture area approaches, and he subsequently emphasized environmental influences on culture and cultural evolution. Boas and his students (representing historical particularism) argue that cultures are unique and cannot be compared. In response, Steward’s methodological approach to multi-linear evolution calls for a detailed comparison of a small number of cultures that were at the same level of socio-cultural integration and in similar environments, yet vastly separated geographically.

By the 1960s and 1970s, cultural ecology and environmental determinism lost favor within anthropology. Ecological anthropologists formed new schools of thought, including the ecosystem model, ethnoecology, and historical ecology, (Barfield, 1997:138). Researchers hoped that ecological anthropology and the study of adaptations would provide explanations of customs and institutions, (Salzman and Attwood 1996:169). Ecological anthropologists believe that populations are not engaged with the total environment around them, but rather with a habitat consisting of certain selected aspects and local ecosystems (Kottak, 1999:23-4). Furthermore, each population has its own adaptations institutionalized in the culture of the group, especially in their technologies, (loc.cit.).

It is contextual to mention few key works of ecological anthropologists that are as follows:

Interests in environment and culture continued and remained a major trend in cultural anthropology in America during 1940-1960. Julian Steward developed the concept of multi-linear evolution, which assumes that ‘certain basic types of culture may develop in similar ways under similar conditions but that few concrete aspects of culture will appear among all groups of mankind in a regular sequence’ (Steward 1955:4). Steward sought the causes of cultural
changes and attempted to devise a method for recognizing the ways in which culture change is induced by adaptation to the environment \cite{ibid}. This adaptation is, what he called, cultural ecology. According to Steward \cite{ibid}, ‘the cross-cultural regularities which arise from similar adaptive processes in similar environments are ... synchronic in nature.’ The fundamental problem of cultural ecology is to determine whether the adjustments of human societies to their environments require particular modes of behavior or whether they permit latitude for a certain range of possible behaviors, \cite{ibid, 1955:36}. Steward also defines the culture core and discusses the method of cultural ecology, variation in ecological adaptation, development of complex societies, and various examples of the application of cultural ecology. Julian Steward work was a pioneering one that influenced many ecological anthropologists and subsequently led to the formation of new, more holistic theories and methodologies. Steward was interested not only in establishing ‘environmental relationship’, but also in developing a theoretical-methodological scheme for understanding development of human societies. According to him, cultural ecology differs from neo-functionalist conception of cultural history in the sense that ‘it introduced the local environment as the extra cultural factor in the fruitless assumption that culture comes from culture’ \cite{Steward 1955:36}. Steward, in his analysis of cultural ecology, has carefully demonstrated why a specific group adapts to a specific ecological niche. The three basic procedures that Steward initiated for the analysis of cultural ecology are:

\begin{itemize}
\item[(i)] Analysis of the interaction between the environment and technology that a group uses,
\item[(ii)] Analysis of the patterns of activity required by the exploitative technology used in a given area and,
\item[(iii)] Other aspects of the culture affect description of how the behaviour involved in exploiting environment.
\end{itemize}
Marvin Harris- Regarding the application of cultural materialism Marvin Harris’ (1966) analysis on the eating taboo of beef by the Hindu gives the best example. He demonstrates that this taboo makes sense in terms of the local environment, because cattle are important in several ways, (Milton 1997). Thus, the religious taboo is rational, in a materialist sense, because it ensures the conservation of resources provided by the cattle (ibid). Harris comments upon the classification of numerous cattle as ‘useless’. Ecologically, it is doubtful that any of the cattle are actually useless, especially when they are viewed as part of an ecosystem rather than as a sector of the price market, (Harris 1966:52). For example, cows provide dung, milk, and labour, and Harris explores all of these instances thoroughly in this article. He notes that dung is used as an energy source and fertilizer. Harris further states, ‘the principal positive ecological effect of India's bovine cattle is in their contribution to production of grain crops, from which about 80% of the human calorie ration comes’ (ibid). Cattle are the single most important means of traction for farmers. Furthermore, 25,000,000 cattle and buffaloes die each year, and this provides the ecosystem with a substantial amount of protein, (Harris 1966:54). By studying cattle of India with a holistic perspective, Harris could provide a strong argument against the claim that these animals are useless and economically irrational. Marvin Harris’ work led to the development of new methodologies in the 1960s. For Harris, cultural change begins at the infrastructural level. Harris’ cultural materialism incorporates the ecological explanation and advances a more explicit and systematic scientific research strategy (Barfield 1997:137). Marvin Harris’ accomplishments and research indicate a desire to move anthropology in a Darwinian direction. The cultural materialism of Marvin Harris has also been criticized by many workers. According to Milton (1997:480) ‘his presentation of cultural features as adaptive effectively makes his approach deterministic’. In fact, some scholars claim that the cultural materialism is more deterministic than cultural ecology. Environmental determinism was largely discarded in the 1960s for the ecosystem approach. Moran (1990:16) criticizes the ecosystem approach for its tendency to
endow the ecosystem with the properties of a biological organism, a tendency for models to ignore time and structural change, a tendency to neglect the role of individuals, and a tendency to overemphasize stability in ecosystems. Marvin Harris is best known for his development of cultural materialism, which centers around the notion that technological and economic features of society have the primary role in shaping its particular characteristics. ‘Marvin Harris assign research priority to infrastructure over structure and super structure’ (Barfield 1997:137). The infrastructure is composed of the mode of production, demography, and mating patterns. Structure refers to domestic and political economy, and super structure consists of recreational and aesthetic product and services. ‘Harris purpose is to demonstrate the adaptive, materialistic rationality of all cultural features by relating them to their particular environment’ (Milton 1997).

Roy A. Rappaport- In his book Pigs for the Ancestors: Ritual in the Ecology of a New Guinea People. Roy A. Rappaport (1968) examines approximately 200 people belonging to Tsembaga Maring community who live in two relatively isolated valleys. The Tsembaga Maring practice animal husbandry with pigs as their primary resource. Rappaport found that pigs consume the same food as humans in their environment, so the Tsembaga must produce a surplus in order to maintain their pig populations. Pigs are slaughtered for bride price and at the end of war. So, the pigs must be kept at exactly the right number. This is accomplished through a cycle of war, pig slaughter for ritual purposes, and re-growth of the pig populations. Such a cycle takes ten to eleven years to complete. Rappaport illustrates that ‘...indigenous beliefs in the sacrifice of pigs for the ancestors were a cognized model that produced operational changes in physical factors, such as the size and spatial spread of human and animal populations’, (Netting 1996:269). Thus, religion and the kaiko ritual are cybernetic factors that act as a gauge to assist in maintaining equilibrium within the ecosystem (ibid). The kaiko is a ritual of the Tsembaga during which they
slaughter their pigs and partake in feasting. The kaiko can be understood easily as 'ritual pig slaughter.' The 'biologization' of the ecological approach that this study represents within cultural anthropology led to the label ecological anthropology, replacing Steward's cultural ecology, (Barfield 1997:137).

Robert McC. Netting- Robert McC. Netting's (1968) study on cultural ecology of Kofyar community is another important contribution in this area. Netting uses his study of a Swiss alpine community the Kofyar to show relationships between land tenure and land use. He also discusses the future of shifting cultivation and the consequences of the Green Revolution, (Netting 1997: Preface). His discussion on cultural ecology (1977) contain chapters that focus on ecological perspectives, hunter-gatherers, Northwest coast fishermen, East African pastoralists, cultivators, field methods, and the limitations of ecology. This book provides numerous examples and applications of ecological anthropology and is an excellent outline and profile of the ecological movement in anthropology. Michael Tomasello - Michael Tomasello's, (1999) book: The Human Adaptation for Culture, envisage that human beings are biologically adapted for culture in ways that other primates are not as evidenced most clearly by the fact that only human cultural traditions accumulate modifications over historical time. In the same pulse, Stephen Shenan (2000) also explained that the history of Culture of mankind was the product of adaptation to the environment by means of culture. Many workers in the later stages emphasize different dimensions of Cultural Adaptation in the changing ecological condition, such as that of Mustafa Kamal Akand (2005). Agarwal (2008) made an attempt to emphasize the effect of climate change on human adaptation. Melinda A. Zedar work 2011 was on the role of agriculture as an adaptive process. He explained that agriculture arose in the context of broad based systematic human efforts at modifying local environments and biotic communities to encourage plant and animal resources of economic interest in pursuit of cultural adaptation. The core factors of cultural environment that influences the changing economic spheres of
the Ongees of Andaman and Nicobar Islands was addressed by Das and Sharma (2012).

Most cultural ecological study concerns small areas and small group of people—a village, a community, a valley, etc. The cultural ecologist claim that the findings for the smaller group represent the larger culture.

The methods of the cultural ecologist are essentially those of the ethnographer careful observation and recording of the ideas and material practices of the people whose culture is being studied, as well as participant observation. The difference lies, perhaps, in the emphasis placed on the biophysical world the people use and the socio-cultural environment. Whereas the ethnographer, the origin of myths, and religious beliefs and practices. The cultural ecologist devotes comparable attention to knowledge and beliefs regarding plants, soils, seasons, terrain, agriculture, livestock and other aspects of the environment the people use. Cultural ecology’s use of emic approach as a method and research framework frequently emerges through a common sense evaluation of how to do fieldwork.

Ecological anthropology has utilized several different methodologies during the course of its development. The methodology employed by cultural ecology, popular in the 1950s and early 1960s, involved the initial identification of the technology employed by populations in the use of environmental resources (Milton 1997). Patterns of behavior relevant to the use of that technology are then defined, and lastly, the extent to which these behaviors affect other cultural characteristics is examined (ibid).

Rappaport and Vayda also contributed the application of new methodologies such as ecosystem approach, systems functioning and the flow of energy in the 1960s. These methods rely on the usage of measurements such as caloric expenditure and protein consumption. Careful attention was given to concepts derived from biological ecology, such as carrying capacity, limiting
factors, homeostasis, and adaptation. This ecosystem approach remained popular among ecological anthropologists during the 1960s and the 1970s (Milton 1997). Ethnoecology was a prevalent approach throughout the same decades. The methodology of ethnoecology falls within cognitive anthropology. The 1970s and 1980s saw the emergence of radical cultural relativism. In the 1990s, ecological anthropologists rejected extreme cultural relativism and attacked modernist dichotomies (body and mind, action and thought, nature and culture) (ibid). Recent ecological anthropology studies have included political ecology, uniting more traditional concerns for the environment-technology-social-organization nexus with the emphasis of political economy on power and inequality seen historically, the evaluation and critique of Third World development programs, and the analysis of environmental degradation (Netting 1996:270).

Anthropological knowledge has been advanced by ecological approaches. The application of biological ecology to cultural anthropology adds a new, scientific perspective to the discipline. Ecological anthropology contributes to the development of extended models of sustainability for humankind. Through research and study with indigenous peoples in an ecological framework, anthropologists learn more about intimate interactions between humans and their environments. In the 1990s, this field has enhanced our perceptions of the consequences of the development of the Amazon. The presence of ecology, an interdisciplinary undertaking, and the concept of the ecosystem in anthropology add new dimensions to theory and methodology. Thus, ecological investigations bring additional hybrid vigor to the field of anthropology.

Despite certain limitations in theoretical, methodological and applications of cultural ecological framework, the present study has been studied within the theoretical paradigm of cultural adaptation among the Nepalis.
1.4 Selection of the Field Site

As stated earlier, the study is in the nature of a village study - based on the study of one village-community. Therefore, in order to examine the mode of cultural adaptation, the present researcher has chosen a typical village, called Kanglatongbi where Nepalis are inhabited – considering the following factors, such as:

1. The present researcher had undergone anthropological field study among the said village community as the first study among the Nepali-community in Manipur in the year of 1984 and submitted a dissertation in partial fulfillment of the Post-Graduate Degree (Final) in Anthropology. Therefore, it was thought that with the previous experiences, it could be developed a better understanding pertinent to the processes on cultural adaptation of the studied community with more adequate methodology, methods and techniques and in drawing concrete conclusion etc.;

2. The spatial area of the village is relatively large and has a fairly long history of settlement of Nepalis migrants. Thus, it gives the scope for observing emergent trends in terms of adaptational process;

3. The present village comprises seven hamlets, which are not the mere geographical units only, but are also the discrete social groups as well. In most of the cases, day to day activities are seen to confine within the limits of each hamlet;

4. The people in the village are numerically dominated by the Nepalis and at the same time the seven different hamlets are more or less oriented in accordance with the caste groups and lineage. This represents a good scope to study different groups in terms of their social interactions;
5. The village is situated at a reasonable distance from the main urban influences. The communication link with the State capital, Imphal is very good. The people of the village have good access of contact and relation with the people of other villages and towns. The village is surrounded by a number of communities;

6. Besides, the village is more or less the cultural centre for the whole Nepali community of the State. Communication is good for inter village and inter-district visits.

7. The village may be regarded as the meeting ground of traditional beliefs and practices on the one hand, and modern ideas on the other. It is expected that adaptive study would be interesting in such a situation;

8. The village is located at the meeting point between the hilly region and the valley region of Manipur. Thus, giving the scope of a typical geographical unit. Hence, it may be considered as typical village for anthropological research;

9. As the present study is an exercise of auto - ethnography, i.e., the study of one’s own community, it is thought that it can develop a better understanding of deeper cultural realities along with the field work and homeknowledge or emic-knowledge ; and

10. Finally, considering the existing law and order situation of the State, the present peaceful village was considered for such study.

1.5 Methods and Techniques

The fieldwork for the study has been conducted from 2nd November 2008 to 2nd November 2009. It may be assumed that collection of field data partly depends on the personality of the investigator and partly on the technique that is
dealt with the people among whom one is working. It is not possible to follow all
the postulated methods in the field as exactly as those of metric measurements in
a controlled laboratory experiment. Various techniques have been used side by
side along with the ethnographic field methods and techniques for generating
necessary data. Complete census of households of the village has been conducted
without sampling i.e., the whole village community has been studied as a unit of
study. The data were collected through the use of key informant, interview
method, participant observational method and genealogical methods combined
with the use of a structured household survey schedule. Informal and formal
group interviews and focus group discussions (plate1) were done. Household and
community meetings were also attended with permission in the capacity of being
a member of the community.

A number of cases were collected from different individuals who were
subjected to careful scrutiny before drawing a conclusion. Almost all the
functions and ceremonies held during the field work have been attended. To
know the past events and migration, open-ended interview with questionnaire
schedule was done. Official and non-official documents were also collected to get
information relevant to the history of settlement. Objective travelling has been
made in Northeast India and Eastern Nepal where Nepalis are concentrated.

The quantitative and qualitative data collected were analyzed by pursuing
the original descriptions of the field notes to develop generalization. Attempts
have been made to obtain the support of concrete facts as far as possible. The
present study has been presented in content format consisting of seven chapters.
Appendices and glossary of Nepali terms used in the text have been presented,
and finally, bibliography has been presented at the end.
Note 1: The researcher in group discussions during data collection including President of Manipur Gorkha Welfare Union-2009