METHODOLOGY

The study has been undertaken to understand the nature of ethnic relations prevailing among the Namdharis and the local population of Mandi town in Himachal Pradesh as well as to find out how these relations have facilitated or created hurdles in the process of assimilation. Such a micro level investigation may help us in arriving at some generalizations regarding assimilation process among various ethnic groups in the Indian sub-continent.

For the purpose of treating Namdharis as an ethnic group in Mandi township, we are required to trace out their historical background which makes them distinct and having a separate identity. This aspect has been discussed under "Social History".

The study was initiated with the following specific objectives:

1. To find out the nature and quality of interaction at the individual as well as group level between Namdharis and local population. The interaction can be facilitated if different groups communicate through a common language. Further the quality of interaction has been gauged with the help of tracing out neighbourhood ties, participation in the socio-
religious ceremonies of each other at the individual and group level, friendship relations, participation at the political level etc. It is through this interaction that the extent and degree of adaptation between the two groups has been seen.

2. To identify the irritants that exist between Namdhari and the host population as perceived by both the groups. It is implicit in this exercise that there is possibility of identification of different sets of irritants by both the groups. The very existence of irritants, if any, would create hurdles for the process of assimilation.

3. To explicate the factors which facilitate the process of assimilation. It is assumed that in addition to the removal of irritants there must be positive congenial conditions which would facilitate the process of assimilation. These congenial conditions are created by providing facilities for a common platform of interaction in the shape of dispersed neighbourhood, common language and common education for greater possibility of upward movement of immigrant group. Common social class and caste background are also likely to facilitate greater interaction at interpersonal and intergroup level and giving an impetus to the process of assimilation.
Universe and Sampling

Historians are of the view that Mandi town was founded by Raja (King) Ajber Sen in about 1527 A.D. It is popularly believed that town was founded with the construction of famous Shiva Temple known as Bhoonath. With the passage of time a large number of temples have been constructed. Most of them are Shiva or Kali temples, Bhoonath, Triloknath, Panchvaktra and Shyama Kali being the most famous among them. There is a historic gurudwara at Mandi which commemorates Guru Gobind Singh's visit to Mandi. The historical traditions of Mandi, ancient and medieval reveal the fact that religion has played a very important part in the history of Mandi.

The Beas river which enters Mandi from the north east and flows in a north westernly direction divides the town into two unequal parts. Mandi Town is the gateway to famous valleys of Kullu-Manali and Lahaul. It is one of the best connected points in the hill state with roads leading to Pathankot, Hoshiarpur, Chandigarh, and Shimla. The town is surrounded by hills but due to comparatively level terrain and better means of transport it has attracted business communities from different parts of the country and it has always been an important trading centre. Situated on the banks of the river Beas, Mandi was on the Indo-Tibetan trade
route. It became an important point of transit for traders between Hoshiarpur and Ladhak. According to one legend it got its name from the status of being a market (Mandi), others attribute the name to Mandavaya Rishi who performed penance here for long.

In the Mandi township the local population is predominantly of Hindus of Brahmin, Rajput, Khatri, Gupta castes and a small population of lower castes (scheduled castes and backward castes) and a few Muslim families. Khatris are both numerically and economically dominant followed by Brahmins, Rajputs and Guptas occupy the third position in that order. These caste groups are labelled as twice born and due to their socio-cultural homogeneity have greater interaction among themselves. Keeping in view the small number of lower castes and Muslims as well as their distinct way of life, they were excluded from the host population out of which the sample for the present study was to be drawn.

Municipal Committee has divided Mandi township into 13 wards. As per the Municipal records available, there were 2757 households at the time of preliminary survey conducted for the present study in 1988. As per the census of 1981 the total population of Mandi town was 18706 which includes local population, Government employees and immigrants. Due to lack
of any official data it became difficult to divide the population on the basis of caste, religion or immigrant status. In the absence of such information an attempt was made to trace out the number of households of the minority groups who were generally found to be concentrated in a few localities.

From the Namdhari Suba (territorial head) and Caste Panchayat (Council of elders) records, it was found that there were 125 households of the Namdharis. Further, the other immigrants e.g. Punjabi refugees, both Hindus and Sikhs were also enumerated and it was found that they had approximately 161 households. There was another group of Government employees who have come to Mandi due to the exigencies of jobs and they have about 309 households. Further, taking into account about 107 households of Scheduled castes and backward castes, we are left with approximately 2180 households of the host population which can be treated as socially and culturally homogeneous. So far as the residential pattern is concerned, Khatris, Brahmins, Rajputs and Guptas live in physical proximity and have a greater numerical strength.

At Mandi town each of the four main castes has formed an association which does not have up-to-date information regarding the number of households of their caste members.
However, depending upon rough estimates by the officials of these caste associations, the distribution of these castes comes to Khatris 980 Brahmins 700 Rajputs 260 and Guptas 240.

In different ethnic studies only the immigrant population has been interviewed and no representation has been given to the host population (Buchignani, 1989). Cautioned by Buchignani (1989) and to remove such a serious gap in different researches, it was decided to include the host population also to find out their reactions to the problem of ethnics as well as their assimilation.

Based on the castes, a stratified random sample of 5% of the host population was drawn. In this way we had 109 cases representing four castes for the host population.

As stated earlier the Suba (territorial head) and Caste Panchayat (Council of elders) of Namdharis informed us that there were 125 households of Namdharis living at Mandi township. Keeping in view its limited strength it was decided to take all the households of Namdharis. Out of 125 households, 6 respondents refused to give any information despite of repeated visits and the intervention of other Namdharis respondents. Another 7 cases could not be contacted because during the period of field survey they had gone out of Mandi township for different reasons. Hence we were left
with 112 households which were considered for the present study.

Following the above exercise, we had a sample of 109 households from the host population and 112 households from Namdharis. It is essential to point out here that in the case of host population we had a sample of 5% only whereas for Namdharis it was total population. Keeping in view the different criteria used for the selection of the respondents, both host and Namdharis, it is quite likely that during cross checking of their responses the answers may not tally. The host population which has developed close relations with Namdharis might have secured lesser representation in the sample thus selected.

Techniques of data Collection

As far as the data collection is concerned, it was decided to make use of both primary as well as secondary sources.

Primary Sources

In order to investigate the assimilation process, its nature and extent, the two types of interview schedules (one for the Namdhari respondents and another for the host population) have been structured and pre-tested. The interview schedule for the Namdhari respondents was
structured to find out the nature of interaction they had with the local community at neighbourhood level as well as participation in the social and religious activities of the local community. The questions were also asked to find out the extent to which they had accepted the local food habits and dialect. They were also asked to indicate the practices which they had discarded after coming to Mandi township, continuation of which might have made them conspicuous in the host community. Their perceptions were also noted with regard to the type of prejudices and discrimination the host population has against them and the steps which are being taken to remove such irritants. In the last section of the interview schedule they were asked to make suggestions, with the implementation of those the process of assimilation could be precipitated. To counter-check the responses of the immigrants the respondents of the host community were also asked questions on these issues.

After making necessary modifications in two interview schedules, structured, semi-structured and open ended questions were finalized in English. However, at the time of interview, Hindi, Punjabi and Mandiyali languages were used. Further non-participant observation technique was also used to understand the nature of daily interaction between Namdharis and locals. In addition to the structured
interview schedule it was decided to conduct indepth interviews with the leaders of both the groups. It was during these long sittings and discussions with the spokesmen of both the groups that a number of issues were made explicit and their inner feelings towards each other were known.

Secondary Sources

The process of assimilation is so complex that we just can not rely completely on primary sources. In order to study scientifically its nature and extent we had also used the available literature both official and non-official documents regarding socio-cultural and historical background of the two groups of population under study. This exercise had helped us to supplement our information collected through primary sources.

Unit of Study

- - Both in the case of Namdharis and locals, unit of study was normally the head of the household or any other elder member who could furnish the details. Before the formal interviewing was undertaken, an attempt was made to contact the leaders of both the groups so that the purpose of study could be explained to them. The present researcher through preliminary survey came to know that Namdharis gave due respect to their religious leaders and whatever he would
say they would religiously follow. Hence the researcher used to have long informal discussion with their leaders. This exercise not only helped in establishing rapport with the leaders of Namdharis but also facilitated interviews with other Namdhari household's respondents. Similar procedure was also followed in the case of local population. In short observation, group discussion and participation in daily activities of both Namdharis and locals were the other methods used for the purpose of understanding the complex nature of assimilation.

Data Analysis

The data collected through various primary and secondary sources was coded and tabulated. This was done by working out code design and transferring the qualitative information into quantity. The codes were then transferred on the cards and hand tabulation was done. The tables were cross tabulated to find out association between different variables.

In chapters that follow we have used "host" and "locals" synonymously. Similarly, "Namdhari immigrants" and "ethnic group" and "group" and "community", "homeland" and "home community" have been used synonymously.